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Cong policy to oppose anything patriotic: BJP

'The Cong has not only insulted the freedom fighters but also the Constitution of this country'

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: The BJP on Sunday alleged that opposing anything patriotic is the Congress' policy and asked if anyone believing in the sovereignty and integrity of India would get "angry" over the invocation of Vande Mataram on Independence Day.

The ruling party demanded that the Congress publicly apologise within 24 hours for the "insult" to the national song if it has even an "iota" of patriotism.

The remarks came in the wake of the BJP's allegations that Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge showed "utter disrespect" towards Vande Mataram when it was sung at the party's Independence Day event on Friday.



The Congress denied the allegation, asserting that there was no attempt to stop the singing of the full version of the national song and that

Sonia Gandhi was only asking for a chair for party chief Mallikarjun Kharge as he had been standing for some time.

Addressing a press conference here, BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari said the opposition to Vande Mataram by Rahul and Sonia Gandhi on Independence Day points towards a mindset of a "dimagi Naxal ecosystem".

"Can any patriot, can any Indian who believes in the Constitution of India, respects the Tricolour of India, respects India's freedom fighters and believes in India's sovereignty and integrity, ever get angry at the invocation of Vande Mataram on Independence Day?" he said. "The Congress has not only insulted the freedom fighters but also the Constitution of this country, its sovereignty and integrity, and the 140 crore people of this country," Bhandari said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Australian regional leader to visit India; trade, investment ties in focus



SYDNEY, Aug 16: Australian regional leader Chris Minns will lead an official delegation to India later this month seeking to strengthen his state's economic, education and cultural ties with one of its key international partners, according to an official statement on Sunday. New South Wales Premier Minns will undertake an of-

ficial visit to New Delhi and Mumbai from August 31 to September 3, his office said.

New South Wales (NSW) is Australia's most populous state and is home to Sydney, the country's largest city and a major financial, business and education hub.

In 2024-25, NSW and India traded goods worth AUD 6.87 billion (USD 4.86 billion), making India one of the state's "most important trading partners", the statement said.

"I'm proud that my first overseas visit as Premier will be to India. It reflects the importance of the relationship and the enormous contribution the Indian community makes to NSW," Minns said.

The visit was announced by Minns at an event in Sydney marking India's 80th Independence Day.

Minns' four-day trip to India will focus on government and business engagements aimed at boosting trade, attracting investment and creating new opportunities for businesses, the statement said.

The delegation will explore opportunities in sectors including education, research and innovation, agri-food, clean energy, critical minerals, technology, tourism and advanced industries, it said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

One arrested, 3 detained over alleged death threat to Assam CM

MORIGAON, Aug 16: One person has been arrested and three others detained for questioning in Assam's Morigaon district over alleged death threat to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on social media, police said on Sunday.

Morigaon SSP Nishant Sourav said the threat was posted in the comments section during a Facebook Live broadcast of Sarma's Independence Day speech on Saturday.

"Following the comment coming to light, the person in whose name the purported Facebook profile was has been arrested from Baralimari in the Lahorighat area," Sourav said.

The three persons detained included the accused's father and brother, besides another person from the same area, the SSP said.

They are being questioned in the case, but they haven't been arrested, Sourav said. (PTI)

B'desh seeks 'propitious environment' for PM Rahman's India visit



DHAKA, Aug 16: Bangladesh on Sunday said a "propitious environment needs to be created" by India for Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to visit New Delhi, linking it to Dhaka's pending extradition requests regarding deposed premier Sheikh Hasina, according to a media report.

The development comes amid uncertainties over Rahman's visit to New Delhi for the BRICS sum-

mit on September 12-13.

Rahman met Indian High Commissioner Dinesh Trivedi on August 10. During the meeting, he sought the extradition of Hasina, following up on formal requests sent to New Delhi so far. But there was no clarity on whether he would visit New Delhi.

"Officials of Bangladesh and India have been in touch with each other for several weeks on the possibility of a bilateral visit by Hon'ble Prime Minister Mr Tarique Rahman to India," Bangladesh's foreign ministry spokesperson Shahidul Karim was quoted as saying by the state-run Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) news portal on Sunday.

However, he told the media, the process was adversely affected by a press conference addressed virtually by Hasina in New Delhi on August 5. "We have made our position clear on this matter," he said. "To this end, we have requested the Indian authorities to expeditiously (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

One student killed, two injured as auto collides with car in Assam's KA

DIPHU, Aug 16: One student was killed and two others seriously injured when the auto in which they were travelling collided with a car in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, police said on Sunday.

The accident occurred on the Dhansiri-Diphu road on Saturday when the three students were going to attend the Independence Day celebration, the police said. The three students were rushed to the Diphu Medical College and Hospital, from where the male student was referred to a hospital in Dimapur.

However, he succumbed to the injuries later.

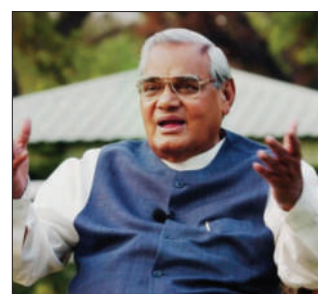
The other two students, both girls, are undergoing treatment at Diphu. All three were residents of Daldali Mesebdaiyah village in Dhansiri and were on their way to participate in the Independence Day celebration in the area. (PTI)

Himanta remembers Vajpayee on his death anniversary

GUWAHATI, Aug 16: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday paid homage to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his death anniversary. In a post on X, Sarma said that Vajpayee had embodied a "rare union" of compassion, conviction and statesmanship.

"From strengthening India's strategic resolve to laying the foundations of modern infrastructure and inclusive development, his legacy continues to shape our nation's journey."

"On his Punyathithi, I offer my humble tributes to this great son of Maa Bharati," he added.



Vajpayee was prime minister for three terms between 1996 and 2004. He was born on December 25, 1924, in Gwalior and passed away in New Delhi on August 16, 2018. (PTI)

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Assam

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17th August to 15th September

What will you be asked?

Information of house:

- Building number
- Materials of the floor, walls & ceiling
- Ascertain use of the house- (Residential/Non-residential)
- Condition of the house

Others:

- Main cereal consumed
- Mobile number (Only for Census communication)

Basic information about the family:

- Number of family members
- Name, sex and caste of the head of the family (SC/ST or others)
- Ownership status of the house
- Number of rooms
- Number of married couples living in the house

Amenities:

- Source of drinking water
- Availability of drinking water source
- Main source of lighting
- Access to latrine
- Type of latrine
- Waste water outlet
- Bathroom facilities
- Kitchen and LPG/PNG connection
- Main fuel used for cooking

Assets:

- Radio/Transistor
- Television
- Access to internet
- Computer/Laptop
- Mobile phone /Telephone
- Two-wheeler/ Four-wheeler

» This stage lays the foundation for population enumeration

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Govt sets LPG production targets for refiners; Reliance gets largest quota

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: The government has for the first time fixed maximum cooking gas LPG production targets for individual public- and private-sector refineries and upstream companies, as it seeks to build a domestic supply buffer after the West Asia conflict exposed the country's vulnerability to disruptions in imported cooking gas.

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, in an order issued on August 13, has specified maximum LPG production levels for 21 refineries and upstream companies, with combined production potential set at 63,810 tonnes a day -- more than double the domestic LPG output in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2026 and about 70 per cent of the country's daily consumption.

The production limits will kick in whenever there is a supply constraint.

The lion's share of the planned output has been set from Reliance Industries Ltd's older refinery, which would have to produce up to 18,000 tonnes a day of LPG, according to the order.

India consumed 33.2 million tonnes of LPG in the 2025-26 fiscal year (about 91,000 tonnes per day). Of this, 13.1 million tonnes a year was produced locally (about 35,900 tonnes a day) while the remaining 21.3 million tonnes per annum (about 58,400 tonnes a day) was imported.

This high import dependence of over 64 per cent left the country exposed when the start of the Iran war effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sealane through which India got 90 per cent of its imports from nations like Saudi Arabia.

With supplies impacted, the government in March ordered refineries to divert streams used for petrochemicals production to maximise LPG output.

It also initially stopped sales to industrial and commercial users and thereafter gradually scaled it up. For domestic households, periodicity of booking a refill was increased, and they were encouraged to shift to piped natural gas, whose supplies were not so severely impacted due to the war.



Domestic production was ramped up to about 55,000 tonnes a day at the height of the crisis, but the emergency orders asking refiners to maximise output were gradually withdrawn after supplies eased from mid-June.

The new order goes further than the emergency one issued during the West Asia crisis by creating facility-wise production benchmarks and requiring refiners and upstream companies to maintain adequate infrastructure for LPG storage, evacuation and transportation. Companies must also pursue technically and economically feasible upgrades to maximise output.

The government has empowered itself to order refiners, oil marketing companies and upstream producers to ramp up LPG production for specified quantities and periods whenever it considers such action necessary to ensure adequate domestic availability, equitable distribution and supply at fair prices.

The production schedule will be reviewed every six months, allowing the government to add output from new refineries and upstream fields and account for additional capacity created through technology and infrastructure upgrades.

The order also requires refiners to consider measures such as converting naphtha into LPG and upgrading fluid catalytic cracking units where technically and economically viable, underscoring the government's push to extract more LPG from existing refining infrastructure.

The government had introduced several emergency measures during the West Asia crisis, including prioritising household LPG supplies and restricting supplies to some commercial and industrial users as imports were disrupted.

The new production framework is aimed at ensuring that a future disruption to overseas LPG supplies does not translate into the shortages and rationing seen during the recent crisis.

Taking lessons from the crisis, the government has now put the country's refineries and upstream producers under a standing framework to maintain and, when necessary, increase LPG output.

Eighteen refineries owned and operated by public sector oil companies have been ordered to produce a total of 31,470 tonnes a day.

In the private sector, Reliance's 33 million tonnes a year domestic-tariff area (DTA) refinery at Jamnagar in Gujarat, products from which are sold locally, has been ordered to produce 18,000 tonnes. No target has been set for Reliance's 35.2 million tonnes a year only-for-exports refinery at the same site.

Russia's Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy's 20 million tonnes a year Vadinar refinery has been asked to produce 4,480 tonnes a day, according to the order.

Upstream gas producers and processors like ONGC and GAIL, who make LPG from natural gas, have been given a target of 6,460 tonnes a day.

"It is hereby ordered that all public sector, joint venture and private sector oil refining companies, and upstream oil companies shall develop, augment and at all times maintain adequate infrastructure for storage, evacuation and transport of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) either by itself or through other entities viz railways or road tankers adequate for the specified quantities," the order said.

They were also ordered to "implement all technically and economically feasible measures and technologies such as naphtha-to-LPG conversion, gasoline-based fluid catalytic cracking unit to petro-fluid catalytic cracking unit, or other upgrades, to maximise LPG production beyond current minimum producible quantities as specified in the Schedule, with intimation to Centre for High Technology or any other authorised agency, whenever such an upgrade is undertaken."

The ministry further said "if Central Government is of the opinion that it is necessary in public interest to ensure adequate availability, equitable distribution and availability at fair prices of domestic LPG, it may by itself or through Centre for High Technology or any other authorised agency, by order in writing, issue direction to oil refining companies, oil marketing companies and upstream oil companies to ramp up the LPG production levels for such quantity and period specified therein, including compliance with any restrictions on alternative uses of input streams required to produce the LPG."

Whenever directions are issued, the companies will have to ramp-up LPG production levels within the stipulated time frame.

The central government, the order said, shall update the production Schedule on 1st January and 1st July of every year, including updates to LPG production from new refineries and upstream oil companies or additional LPG quantities from existing refineries and upstream companies due to changes to associated infrastructure and production technology, evacuation, supply, transport or distribution of LPG. (PTI)

Workers flag poor implementation of well-being policy at workplaces: Report

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: A large number of employees across sectors see poor implementation of well-being policies at the workplace as key to rising stress level, pointing to a widespread gap between having a formal policy and real-life experiences, said a report released on Sunday. The report, 'Beyond the Policy: Lived Experience and Micro-Rituals in Employee Wellbeing', said that 42 per cent of employees find their employers, despite having a policy for workers' well-being, fail in effective execution.

The report by workforce solutions and HR services provider Genius HRTech and market research firm DigiPoll is based on inputs from 1,884 employees across sectors, including information technology, manufacturing, finance and BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance), hospitality, FMCG, among others, in an online survey during July 1 and August 3, 2026. While 21 per cent of respondents said well-being is embedded in their everyday work culture, 42 per cent felt good policies exist, but execution varies, indicating that implementation remains a key challenge for organisations, the report said. It also found that pressure created by always-on-work culture is a major stressor, with 42 per cent of respondents identifying constant availability demands as their biggest source of workplace stress. This is followed by unrealistic deadlines and



expectations, cited by 21 per cent, it stated. At the same time, 52 per cent said feeling trusted and empowered contributes most to their sense of well-being at work, suggesting that while intrusive culture, micro-management and demeaning behaviour from managerial levels create problems, autonomy and trust can play a significant role in countering workplace stress, said the report. Managerial behaviour has emerged as one of the strongest influences on employees' well-being, with 47 per cent of respondents saying more empathetic managers would make them more comfortable discussing burnout or stress at work, highlighting the importance of leadership behaviour in creating psychologically supportive workplaces, the finding said.

Recognition has also emerged as a powerful workplace well-being driver, with 37 per cent identifying recognition of contributions and employee feedback as the manage-

rial action with the strongest positive impact. "Employee well-being cannot be treated as just a policy document or an annual initiative. It is experienced through everyday interactions, how managers communicate, whether employees feel trusted, how contributions are recognised and whether people feel safe speaking about challenges. The findings reinforce that organisations need to move from having well-being policies to creating workplace cultures where those policies are lived," Genius HRTech chairman R P Yadav told PTI.

Further, the report found that 36 per cent of respondents considered fair workload distribution the most important aspect of a healthy workplace culture, followed by mutual trust and respect at 24 per cent. Well-being has also emerged as a key consideration for employees when evaluating their jobs, with 42 per cent identifying it as a top priority, added the report. (PTI)

HMPL wins ₹ 28.47-cr NHAI project in Jharkhand

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: Infra-to-energy player Hazoor Multi Projects has secured an order worth ₹ 28.47 crore from the state-owned National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).

The project has been secured through the e-tender process. "Letter of Award (LOA) has been received from NHAI for engaging as user fee agency at Madan-

gundi Fee Plaza at 12.3 km on NH-31... in Jharkhand," the company said in a regulatory filing on Saturday.

The value of the awarded project is ₹ 28.47 crore, while the tenure is 12 months. Hazoor Multi Projects (HMPL) is into renewable energy and building road projects on an engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) basis. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Cong policy to oppose anything

The "dimagi Naxal" reference came from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day address to the nation, in which he warned against "dimagi Naxals" who have entrenched themselves in the system and urged people to identify and isolate them.

He alleged that Sonia Gandhi gestured to stop the singing of Vande Mataram at the Congress headquarters and later expressed her anger when it continued.

"If you look carefully at the video, when Vande Mataram is being invoked at the Congress Party headquarters, Sonia Gandhi indicates with her hand that they should stop. She gestures that Vande Mataram should be stopped at the Congress Party headquarters."

"When she is not listened to, she again gestures for the second time and says that it must be stopped."

Bhandari claimed Rahul Gandhi could be heard saying, "We don't need to sing Vande Mataram" after its rendition was completed and played a purported audio clip before the media.

The BJP spokesperson said Sonia and Rahul Gandhi should apologise within 24 hours to every patriotic Indian who is "deeply angry and enraged" by the Congress' conduct.

He alleged that the Congress' opposition to Vande Mataram is part of its policy of opposing anything patriotic and questioned whether Rahul Gandhi is fit to be the leader of opposition.

"Any leader of opposition who considers the Parliament of this country supreme can never insult the national song," Bhandari said.

He also alleged that the Congress government in Kerala skipped Vande Mataram at an official event, saying this shows that the party's conduct at its headquarters is not an isolated incident.

Bhandari also attacked senior Congress leader P Chidambaram over his response to Modi's "dimagi Naxal" remark. Chidambaram on Sunday said he is proud to be a "dimagi Naxal".

"And this country's Gen Z and youth are Gen P -- Gen Patriotic, Gen Nationalist. They know that on Independence Day, when 140 crore Indians are holding the tricolour, celebrating with happiness and pride and taking the resolve of Viksit Bharat 2047 under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, only the Gandhi-Vadra family, only Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi in the Congress ecosystem, have a problem," he added. (PTI)

Australian regional leader

The relationship between India and NSW also extends to tourism and education. Between April 2024 and March 2026, about 174,000 Indian visitors travelled to NSW, spending around AUD 600 million (USD 424 million), while more than 28,000 Indian students study in the state, according to the statement.

The visit will also build on NSW's "sister-state relationship" with Maharashtra, home to Mumbai and one of India's largest economic centres, it said.

NSW and Maharashtra established a formal "sister-state relationship" in 2012, encompassing "collaboration on vocational skills training, agriculture, water management and waste treatment technology," according to Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

NSW Treasurer Daniel Mookhey, who will accompany the Premier, said India was "one of the most important" economies to the people of NSW and highlighted education, trade and innovation as areas where the relationship could be strengthened.

Following the India visit, Minns will travel to Kathmandu on September 4-5 to strengthen ties with Nepal, while Mookhey will undertake engagements in Bengaluru focused on trade, investment and technology, the statement said. (PTI)

B'desh seeks 'propitious

act on our request to extradite Sheikh Hasina." Relations between India and Bangladesh have witnessed strain after Hasina's virtual media address, where she said she is determined to return home in December to put the country on the "right track" by restoring democracy, notwithstanding the risk of facing the threat of imprisonment or a death sentence.

Bangladesh expressed outrage over the media interaction, saying the event had hurt the sentiments of its people and could adversely affect efforts to improve bilateral ties with India. They described Hasina as an "absconding, convicted genocider".

However, India's Ministry of External Affairs on August 7 said that it had no role in the media event concerning Hasina and it does not endorse anything said at the forum about the Bangladesh government.

Hasina was ousted in August 2024 following violent student-led protests, and fled to India. In November 2025, she was sentenced to death in absentia by a special tribunal in Bangladesh over alleged "crimes against humanity" during the crackdown on protesters.

Dhaka has since been seeking Hasina's extradition from India, while New Delhi maintains that the extradition request is under examination in accordance with applicable law and established legal procedures.

The Bangladesh government maintains that Hasina shall have to surrender and face the law if she returns.

On Sunday, Bangladesh's foreign ministry spokesperson Karim further said: "We reiterate that we will continue to pursue our 'Bangladesh First' policy to promote friendly bilateral relations with other countries, including our neighbours, on the basis of sovereign equality, national dignity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs and mutual benefit."

He also reiterated Bangladesh's request to expedite the extradition of the "fugitives" linked to the killing of student-leader Osman Hadi.

Hadi, a prominent activist during the student-led movement that ousted Hasina in 2024, was killed in an attack in December 2025 that triggered renewed political tensions in Bangladesh.

The issue assumed significance as three suspects in the case were arrested in India in March and are currently in judicial custody in West Bengal. India has agreed to extradite the suspects back to Bangladesh following the due process.

The matter concerning the extradition of Hadi's alleged killers was also taken up by Prime Minister Rahman in his meeting with Indian envoy Trivedi last week.

After that meeting, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman said the BRICS invitation was not extended to the prime minister personally, but rather "addressed to the chairperson of BIMSTEC."

BIMSTEC is an international group of seven countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Bangladesh holds the official state chairmanship of the regional group.

However, the Ministry of External Affairs said on August 14: "We have extended an invitation to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for a bilateral visit. We've also extended an invitation to the prime minister of Bangladesh for a visit to India for the outreach session of the BRICS Summit."

These developments come against the backdrop of an uneasy reset in India-Bangladesh ties after Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party came to power in February, following a period of strained relations under the interim government over issues that include Hasina's extradition, security of Hindu minorities, border-related matters and Dhaka's foreign policy tilt towards China. (PTI)

2,000 Jawa, Yezdi and BSA riders celebrate Independence Day across India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 16: More than 2,000 Jawa, Yezdi and BSA riders participated in Independence Day rides across the country under the Nomads banner, celebrating the spirit of freedom and camaraderie that connects the motorcycling community.

The rides, organised through 150 dealerships, brought together riders from different backgrounds, age groups and riding styles.

Nomads serves as a shared identity for Jawa, Yezdi and BSA riders, cutting across brands, regions and generations.

The initiative also reflected the spirit of national pride and paid tribute to the values of freedom and sacrifice.

It follows Classic Legends' recent partnership with the Indian Armed Forces for the Shaurya Vijay Yatra, which honoured the courage and service of Indian soldiers.

Anupam Thareja, Co-founder, Classic Legends, said Independence Day was a reminder of the values that make freedom possible and the sacrifices that protect it.

He said the Nomads initiative brought riders from different regions and generations together to celebrate the spirit of freedom.

The company said such rides and initiatives would continue to strengthen the bonds among Jawa, Yezdi and BSA riders across the country through their shared passion for motorcycling.

NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Abdul Mannan to Mohammed Abdul Mannan by swearing a Notarial Affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam) Mohammed Abdul Mannan Vill-Ruhini Pather, PO-Murajhar, PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Mohammad Tahir Uddin to Tahir Uddin by swearing a Executive magistrate Affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam) Tahir Uddin Vill-Tarapur, PO-Kapashbari, PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

RCM celebrates women's achievements and self-reliance

Special Women's Academy 2026 promotes health, leadership, confidence and empowerment

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 16: RCM Consumer Products Private Limited's Special Women's Academy 2026 concluded at RCM World, Bihlwar, on Saturday after a two-day programme celebrating women's achievements and self-reliance.

Held on the theme "Har Naari Samman Ki Adhikari", the event brought together women associate buyers and leaders from across the country.

The celebrations, organised to mark Independence Day, began with a march-past and flag hoisting, followed by performances by schoolgirls and cultural presentations showcasing India's diversity.

A felicitation ceremony was held to honour women achievers, with RCM Founder TC Chhabra and Managing Director Priyancka Agarwal addressing the participants.

Chhabra said the company's focus on women's empowerment extended beyond economic independence

to health, confidence, leadership and participation in family and society.

Agarwal said the initiative aimed to help women recognise and develop their abilities while balancing responsibilities at home and outside.

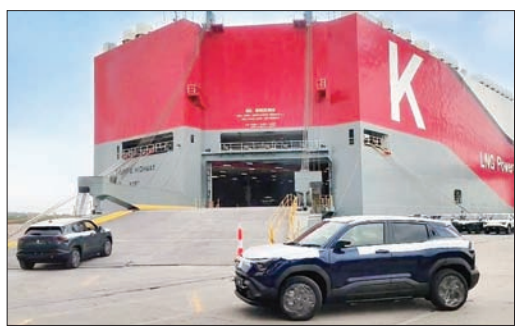
She described the programme as part of RCM's continuing effort to promote women's confidence and self-reliance.

The second day featured an Inter-state Sports League, with national and state-level karate and grappling player and black belt Kiran Sharma and Rajasthan Kesari wrestling champion Ankita Vaishnav attending as chief guests and sharing their experiences.

The programme also included sessions on preparing protein-rich food, home kitchen gardening and makeup skills.

Women participants from different states presented traditional dances and took part in a cultural walk highlighting India's cultural diversity.

Europe emerges top destination for India's electric car shipments in Q1



NEW DELHI, Aug 16: Europe emerged as the top destination for Indian electric motor car shipments in the first quarter of 2026-27, with the United Kingdom ranking as the second-largest market and recording imports worth USD 78.7 million, compared with negligible shipments in the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

India's exports of electric motor cars surged in the first quarter of 2026-27, with export earnings rising sharply to USD 369 million from USD 22.2 million a year earlier, while shipments jumped to 10,802 vehicles from 1,309 units, reflecting growing global competitiveness of India's electric mobility industry.

The growth reflects the growing international acceptance of India-manufactured electric vehicles (EVs) and the country's emergence as an important production hub for sustainable mobility solutions, an official said.

The export story was driven by Europe, which emerged as the principal destination for Indian electric cars.

Spain became the largest market, with exports rising to USD 146.4 million, accounting for nearly 40 per cent of India's total exports under this category.

A total of 4,007 electric vehicles were shipped to Spain during the quarter, making it the single largest destination by both value and volume, the data showed.

It added that the UK emerged as the second-largest

market, recording imports worth USD 78.7 million compared with almost negligible shipments in the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

"Export volumes climbed from just one vehicle to 2,646 vehicles, indicating growing penetration of Indian-made electric cars into one of Europe's most developed EV markets," it said.

Several other European economies also witnessed strong growth in imports of Indian electric vehicles.

Exports to Germany reached USD 25.1 million, followed by Norway (USD 21.1 million) and Denmark (USD 21.1 million).

Additional demand came from Belgium (USD 12.9 million), the Netherlands (USD 12 million), Greece (USD 3.8 million), Italy (USD 2.7 million), Sweden (USD 2.1 million), and Poland (USD 1.6 million).

"The broad European footprint reflects the growing relevance of Indian manufacturers in global EV supply chains and the increasing demand for affordable electric mobility solutions," the official said.

Beyond Europe, India also expanded exports across Asia-Pacific markets.

Japan imported USD 13.4 million worth of electric cars, while shipments were recorded to Israel (USD 2.8 million), Australia (USD 2.7 million), Singapore (USD 1.7 million), Taiwan (USD 1.3 million), and South Korea.

Exports to these technologically advanced markets underscore the improving quality, safety standards and global competitiveness of Indian electric vehicle manufacturing.

While traditional neighbouring markets such as Nepal continued to remain important destinations with imports worth USD 8.1 million, the diversification towards advanced European markets represents a notable shift in India's EV export profile, the data showed.

New opportunities also emerged in Latin America, where exports reached Brazil (USD 2.4 million), Colombia (USD 1 million), Chile (USD 0.4 million), and Costa Rica (USD 0.5 million). (PTI)

Assam celebrates 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour

Flag hoisting, tributes to freedom fighters, cultural programmes and development pledges mark celebrations across the State

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI/DIPHU, Aug 16: Assam joined the nation in celebrating the 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour and enthusiasm, with elaborate programmes organised across the State. Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya hoisted the National Flag at Lok Bhavan in Guwahati and urged citizens, particularly the youth, to draw inspiration from the sacrifices of freedom fighters and work towards building a strong, Atmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat. He also felicitated five armed forces veterans for their exemplary service and continued contribution to society. Students of Army Public School, Narengi, presented a dance drama titled 'Yuva Shakti—Power of Youth'.

Meanwhile in Diphu, KAAC Chief Executive Member Dr Tuliram Ronghang paid floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and Karbi freedom-movement martyr Nongjirong Lekthe before inspecting the Guard of Honour at the main venue on the occasion of 80th Independence day on Friday last. For the first time during the celebration, Vande Mataram was sung before the hoisting of the National Flag, followed by the National Anthem.

Addressing the gathering, Ronghang highlighted the recent KAAC

delegation's visit to New Delhi to seek greater Central assistance for Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. He said the delegation sought a Rs 300-crore special package for promoting indigenous languages and cultures, an early greenfield airport in Karbi Anglong and tripartite talks on the long-standing demand for an Autonomous State. The delegation also sought implementation of the 2011 and 2021 Memorandums of Settlement with Karbi armed groups, expedited consideration of the Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019, faster execution of road connectivity projects and continued Central support for education and healthcare in tribal areas. It also sought another 66 Eklavya Model Residential Schools for tribal students.

Ronghang announced the proposed National Highway 627 between Howrah and Umrangso and stressed the importance of improving connectivity along the Nellie-Amtereng-Baithalango-Dongkamukam-Jengkhia economic corridor.

He called for continued public support and collective efforts to accelerate development and create greater opportunities for the people of Karbi Anglong. The daylong programme also featured cultural performances showcasing the region's



heritage, while prizes were distributed among winners of the march-past competition involving schools from Diphu town.

Our correspondent adds from Maibang: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated at Dishru Field with cultural performances and tributes to freedom fighters. DHAC Executive Member Projith Hojai highlighted developments in digital technology, roads, agriculture, education, healthcare and tourism and called upon citizens to ensure that welfare schemes reach all sections of society. Top-performing students were felicitated, while the Maibang Degree College marching contingent received the first prize.

Our correspondent adds from

Sribhumi Medical College and Hospital: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated at Dishru Field with cultural performances and tributes to freedom fighters. DHAC Executive Member Projith Hojai highlighted developments in digital technology, roads, agriculture, education, healthcare and tourism and called upon citizens to ensure that welfare schemes reach all sections of society. Top-performing students were felicitated, while the Maibang Degree College marching contingent received the first prize.

Our correspondent adds from

Tezpur: The main Sonitpur district celebration was held at the historic Church Field, where Minister for Sports and Youth Welfare Biswajit Daimary hoisted the National Flag after taking the Guard of Honour.

Contingents of the Armed Forces, NCC and other organisations participated in the march past, while cultural performances and departmental exhibitions added colour to the celebrations. Tezpur University and Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya also observed the day with flag hoisting, patriotic songs, dance and other programmes.

Our correspondent adds from

Hafong: The main district-level celebration in Dima Hasao was held at

the NL Daulagupi Sports Complex, where NCHAC CEM Debolal Goro-loa hoisted the National Tricolour.

He highlighted achievements in education, youth development, employment and cultural preservation, including recognition of the traditional Dimas language for administrative and educational activities.

He also referred to the Super 30 coaching programme and the achievements of local youths and sports persons. Independence Day was celebrated across Maibang, Mahur, Umrangso and Harangajao as well.

Our correspondent adds from Gossaigaon: BTC Executive Member Mrityunjay Narzary hoisted the National Flag at the Gossaigaon Boys' Higher Secondary School playground. He paid tribute to freedom fighters and urged the younger generation to contribute to national development. Cultural performances were organised and individuals who had made outstanding contributions in journalism, police administration, literature and public service were felicitated.

Our correspondent adds from Kokrajhar: BTC districts also celebrated Independence Day with programmes at their respective headquarters. In Kokrajhar, BTC CEM Hagrama Mohilary hoisted the National Flag at the Kokrajhar Gov-

ernment HS & MP School playground in the presence of around 2,000 people and called for collective efforts to build a peaceful and prosperous society. Rihan Daimary hoisted the flag in Udalguri, while BTC Executive Member James Basumatary hoisted it at Kajalgaon in Chirang.

Our correspondent adds from Demow: The Independence Day was celebrated at the Demow Public Playground under the patronage of the Demow Co-District Commissioner's Office. Co-District Commissioner Lukumoni Borah hoisted the Tricolour after a Swahid Tapan. Police, paramilitary forces, Home Guards and school students participated in the parade, while freedom fighters were felicitated and prizes distributed among winners of various competitions. The Marwari Yuva Mancha also distributed fruits among patients at Demow Model Hospital.

Our correspondent adds from Hojai: The district celebrated Independence Day at Kachari Ground in Srimanta Sankardev Nagar, where DC Sanjay Dutta hoisted the National Flag and took the salute at the parade. Cultural performances, including Bihu and Bengali folk dances, were held, while students, outstanding government employees and parade contingents were felicitated.

Akhil Gogoi stages demonstration on I-Day



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Aug 16: Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi staged a demonstration in front of the Sivasagar District Commissioner's Office on Saturday, demanding compensation and long-term measures to address the recurring flood situation in the State.

Gogoi demanded ₹10 lakh each for the flood-affected families, besides action against those responsible for allegedly destroying the ecosystem, which he said contributed to the recent devastation.

He also demanded the adoption of scientific flood-control measures to find a permanent solution to the problem and urged the government to declare the Assam floods a national disaster.

The demonstration was aimed at drawing the government's attention to the hardships faced by flood-affected people and the need for immediate relief as well as long-term measures to prevent recurring flood-related devastation.

Laisong hit-and-run: Police outpost in-charge killed, two arrested



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 16: Sub-Inspector Nabajit Das, In-Charge of the Laisong Police Outpost in Dima Hasao district, was killed in a hit-and-run incident recently, while conducting naka checking, with police arresting two persons in connection with the case.

According to police, Das was conducting naka checking along with other personnel when he was allegedly struck by a vehicle bearing registration number AS-02-AJ-4335.

The vehicle was later recovered from the Laisong area, while the driver and other occupants reportedly fled the spot.

Police subsequently launched an extensive search operation at various locations in and around Laisong.

During a late-night operation, two persons were apprehended from separate locations, while two others allegedly linked to the incident are still absconding.

Police have intensified efforts to trace the remaining suspects. Investigators are also examin-

ing a possible connection between the vehicle and a drug-trafficking case.

The vehicle is reportedly owned by Abdul Quddus of Juria in Nagaon district.

However, the exact nature of the alleged connection has not yet been established and remains under investigation.

Meanwhile, the Dima Hasao Police fraternity paid its final tribute to SI Nabajit Das, who lost his life while performing official duty.

Dima Hasao SSP Ripunjoy Kakoti, Commanding Officer of 26 Assam Rifles Colonel Rakesh Krishnan, Additional SP Faruque Ahmed, Additional SP Luit Talukdar and other police personnel and officials attended the tribute ceremony.

The police department expressed deep grief over the officer's untimely death and remembered him for his service, dedication and commitment to duty.

Further investigation is underway to establish the complete sequence of events and determine the circumstances surrounding the fatal incident.

Assam plans to distribute 25 crore high-value fruit saplings over five years

Agriculture Minister Pijush Hazarika asks AAU scientists to identify high-yielding varieties, calls for greater youth participation in farming

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Aug 16: Assam Minister for Agriculture, Irrigation and Parliamentary Affairs Pijush Hazarika on Sunday announced a large-scale plan to promote horticulture in the State by distributing 25 crore high-value fruit saplings among farmers over the next five years.

Addressing the 79th Foundation Day celebration of the College of Agriculture, Assam Agricultural University (AAU), as the Chief Guest at the university campus in Jorhat, Hazarika said the government plans to distribute at least five crore saplings annually to boost the horticulture sector.

He asked scientists of AAU to recommend 20 to 25 high-value and high-yielding varieties of fruit saplings that could be distributed among farmers and submit the recommendations within a month.

Seeking to attract more young people towards agriculture, the Minister urged AAU Vice-Chancellor Dr Dipjyoti Rajkhowa and faculty members to organise workshops in colleges across the State to create

awareness about high-yielding crop cultivation in line with the government's vision of an agriculturally prosperous Assam.

Hazarika asked AAU to organise 50 such workshops in colleges and assured financial support for the initiative.

He said a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Education Department would also be signed in this regard.

The Minister also encouraged farmers and youths to take up foxnut (makhana) cultivation, citing its profitability and suitability for wetlands.

He said he had recently visited a farm in Darrang district where a youth-led NGO was cultivating the crop.

According to Hazarika, makhana cultivation could help overcome certain challenges posed by monkeys, elephants, cattle, pests and floods, as the crop grows in wetlands.

He added that the Vice-Chancellor had informed him that around 2 lakh hectares of wetlands in Assam were suitable for makhana cultivation. Urging students to consider farm-

ing and entrepreneurship instead of depending solely on government jobs, Hazarika said agriculture could provide significant income opportunities.

He pointed out that government employment opportunities were limited and cited horticulture as a potentially lucrative avenue, stating that a five-bigha horticultural garden could generate around ₹20 lakh annually.

The Minister also released a coffee table book on the occasion.

The Foundation Day lecture was delivered by Professor Arup Jyoti Choudhury, Vice-Chancellor of Madhavdev University, Narayanpur, Lakhimpur.

Earlier, AAU Vice-Chancellor Dr Dipjyoti Rajkhowa presented an overview of the university's activities and achievements.

Dean, Faculty of Agriculture, Dr PK Pathak, delivered the welcome address.

Kaziranga MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, MLAs of Jorhat, Mariani and Titabor, and AAU Registrar Damodar Barman, among others, attended the programme.

BTC I&PR staff contribute ₹50,000 to Chief Relief Fund

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Aug 16: Officers and staff of the Information and Public Relations (I&PR) Department, BTC, on Saturday contributed ₹50,000 to the Chief Relief Fund, BTC, as a gesture of solidarity with people affected by natural calamities and other emergencies.

The cheque was formally handed over to the Chief Relief Fund, BTC, by officers and staff of the department at the BTC Assembly House, Bodofa Nwngw, Kokrajhar.

The contribution, made through the collective support of the department's officers and staff, reflects their sense of social responsibility and commitment to standing with people during times of need.

The initiative underscores the



spirit of compassion, solidarity and collective responsibility among the employees towards relief and humanitarian efforts.

The Chief Relief Fund, BTC, provides assistance to poor and needy people, supports medical assistance and education, undertakes disaster relief measures and promotes the overall welfare of people in the BTC area.

Goalpara observes Mourning Day in memory of Dhemaji blast victims

HT Correspondent
GOALPARA, Aug 16: A solemn atmosphere prevailed across government offices in Goalpara district on Sunday as Mourning Day was observed in memory of the innocent students and civilians killed in the bomb blast during Independence Day celebrations at Dhemaji on August 15, 2004.

The district administration organised a commemorative programme at the conference hall of the Goalpara District Commissioner's Office under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Prodig Timung.

Officials and employees observed a one-minute silence to pay homage to the victims of the tragic incident.

The gathering also took a pledge to oppose terrorism and other destructive

forces and work collectively towards maintaining peace, communal harmony and social order.

District Development Commissioner Pranab Kumar Bora, Additional Deputy Commissioners, the Election Officer, Assistant Commissioners and other officials and employees of the district administration attended the programme.

Mourning Day was also observed at the offices of the Sub-Divisional Commissioners of Dhubdhara and Goalpara West, as well as Revenue Circle Offices and Block Development Offices across the district.

Officials and employees paid tribute to the victims by observing silence and reaffirmed their commitment to combating terrorism and promoting peace.

Assamese student in Canada extends flood relief to 100 families in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Aug 16: Thousands of kilometres away from her homeland, a young Assamese student in Canada has extended a helping hand to flood-affected families in Assam, reflecting a strong sense of compassion and solidarity with people facing hardship in the State. Flood relief materials collected through contributions from Assamese residents in Vancouver, British Columbia, were distributed among 100 flood-affected families in the Betbari area of Sivasagar district recently.

The relief initiative was organised under the banner of Saptaranga at the initiative of Kasturi Kandarpa, a young woman from Guwahati who is currently pursuing her studies in Canada.

Funds were raised among the Assamese diaspora in the Vancouver area and used to purchase essential household items for flood-affected families.

Kasturi's parents, Kandarpa Barua and Rashmirekha Barua, brought the relief materials to Jorhat for distribution.

Under the supervision of Pranab Milan Gogoi, an entrepreneur from Chandan Nagar in Jorhat, the relief supplies were distributed among 100 families in Betbari, Kaivarta Chetia Gaon and other flood-affected areas of Sivasagar.

The relief packages included mattresses, plates and bowls, cooking utensils, ladles, buckets, mugs and other essential household items required for daily use.

Pranab Milan Gogoi has been continuously distributing relief materials among flood-affected people in Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat since the floods caused widespread devastation across Assam.

After learning about his humanitarian efforts, Kasturi's father contacted him, following which arrangements were made to distribute the funds raised by Assamese residents in Canada among flood-hit families. The initiative by an Assamese student living abroad, supported by the Assamese diaspora in Canada, has emerged as an example of compassion and solidarity with people affected by natural disasters in their homeland.

NFR announces further changes to train services amid restoration work

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 16: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced further changes to train services in view of the ongoing restoration work near New Harangajao station following the settlement of railway tracks on Line-1 and Line-2.

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

According to NFR, Train No 15617 (Guwahati-Dullabcherra) Express commencing its journey on August 17 and Train No 15618 (Dullabcherra-Guwahati) Express commencing its journey on August 18 have been cancelled.

Train No 15615 (Guwahati-Silchar) Express commencing its journey on August 17 and Train No 15616 (Silchar-Guwahati) Express commencing its journey on August 18 have also been cancelled.



Several trains have been rescheduled. Train No 15650 (Narangi-Agartala) Express will depart from Narangi at 10.30 pm on August 17, while Train No 15649 (Agartala-Narangi) Express will depart from Agartala at 11.30 pm the same day. Train No 15609 (Guwahati-Sairang) Express has been rescheduled to depart from Guwahati at 11.30 pm on August 17, while Train No 15610 (Sairang-Guwahati) Express will depart from Sairang at 9.30 pm.

Train No 15611 (Rangiya-

Silchar) Express will depart from Rangiya at 11.30 pm on August 17, while Train No 15612 (Silchar-Rangiya) Express will depart from Silchar at 5 am on August 18.

Train No 20501 (Agartala-Anand Vihar Terminal) Tejas Express has been rescheduled to depart from Agartala at 11 pm on August 17.

Train No 14037 (Silchar-New Delhi) Poorvottar Sampark Kranti Express will depart from Silchar at 4.10 am on August 18.

Meanwhile, Train No 15645 (Charlappalli-Silchar) Express, commencing its journey on August 15, and Train No 12501 (Kolkata-Agartala) Express, commencing its journey on August 16, will be regulated suitably en route.

NFR said the changes have been necessitated by the ongoing restoration work and the need to maintain safe train operations in the affected section.

Three-storey cultural building inaugurated at Srimanta Gopaldev Temple

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Aug 16: A three-storey cultural building for the Satriya Kala Sanskriti Charcha Aru Bikash Kendra was inaugurated on Sunday at the premises of Srimanta Gopaldev Temple on GRB Road, Fauzdaripatti.

The ground floor of the building was dedicated to the memory of late Dharmakanta Mahanta and late Dharmeshwari Mahanta of Sri Sri Shrawani Satra by their family members.

The first floor was dedicated in memory of late Dr Jayashree Goswami of Sri Sri Kalakata Satra by her husband, Dr Premananda Goswami, and their children.

The second floor was dedicated by Dr Goswami in memory of his parents, late Jagadananda Goswami and late Prabha alias



Chikuni Goswami of Sri Sri Kalakata Satra.

The donors were felicitated by Srimanta Gopaldev Temple with

citations, symbolic Guru Asans, phulam gamosas and seleng chadars.

Vivekananda Goswami Mahanta

of Shrawani Satra, who donated the ground floor, and Dr Premananda Goswami of Kalakata Satra, donor of the first and second floors, were specially honoured.

Senior members of the Namghar, including Sarbananda Mahanta, Keshabananda Dev Goswami, Dev Goswami, Harikanta Mahanta, Shuvani Goswami and Kunjolata Goswami, were also felicitated.

Local MLA Rupak Sarma, Srimanta Gopaldev Temple president Sarbananda Mahanta, secretary Diganta Prakash Mahanta, along with Nava Kumar Mahanta, Prakash Mahanta, Runtu Mahanta, Amrit Mahanta, Devananda Mahanta and several members of the Satra Mahasabha, attended the inaugural function. The new cultural building aims to promote and preserve Satriya art and culture in the region.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The best way to make your dreams come true is to wake up.- Paul Valery

Youth unemployment scenario

There is rocky road ahead for Youth to decent work. Youth unemployment and NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rates are on the rise. The progress seen in youth employment since the COVID-19 pandemic has come to an abrupt halt. This reversal of fortunes is taking place at a time of great uncertainty and fragility in the global economy. Growth remains subdued, uncertainty is elevated, inflationary pressures persist, and new risks associated with artificial intelligence (AI) are emerging. None of these bodes well for young people. The latest ILO report "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2025: Back to the future" has highlighted the grim situation, and highlighted the recent deterioration in youth employment in terms of both the quantity and quality of jobs. After reaching its lowest level in more than two decades in 2023, the global unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 24 edged up to 12.4 per cent in 2025, equalling 67 million unemployed young people worldwide. The global share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is also again on the rise, reaching 20 per cent in 2025 from 19.7 per cent in 2023. This translated into an increase of 9 million more young people in NEET status since 2023, bringing the total to 257 million in 2025. With many more young people implicated and with youth disengagement harder to redress, the increasing trend in the youth NEET rate is especially worrisome.

The youth unemployment rate rose between 2023 and 2025 in 8 of the 11 subregions, as well as in high-income, lower-middle-income and low-income countries. The largest increases were in Northern Africa, Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe. In Central and Western Asia and Eastern Europe, and in upper-middle-income countries, the "good news" of declining youth unemployment rate was muted by the rise in youth in NEET status. And while Latin America and the Caribbean stood out as the only region to show a decline in both the youth unemployment rate and youth NEET rate, further analysis showed that results were driven in part by declining youth population sizes and that most countries in the subregion showed worsening trends in youth labour market engagement.

The NEET challenge has a female face in almost all subregions of the world. Still in 2025, more than two out of every three youth in NEET status were women and, at 27.4 per cent, the NEET rate of young women was more than double that of young men (at 13.1 per cent). Globally, the increase in the NEET rate since 2023 was slightly steeper for young women than young men (rising by 0.5 percentage points and 0.2 percentage points, respectively), thus expanding the gender gap even further.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Leadership with Grace

Atal Bihari Vajpayee stands as one of the most compelling and deeply human figures in the political tapestry of modern India. Born on a freezing Christmas day in nineteen twenty four in the ancient city of Gwalior, he grew up in a traditional middle class family that valued learning and culture above material wealth. His father Krishna Bihari Vajpayee was a schoolteacher and a poet, an influence that profoundly shaped young Atal's soul. The rhythm of verses, the beauty of language, and the power of the spoken word became his constant companions from early childhood. He did not merely enter politics to seek power; he stepped into public life because he had a vision of India that was deeply rooted in its ancient heritage while being fearless about stepping into the future.

His journey began during the turbulent years of the Indian independence movement. As a young student, he was drawn to the freedom struggle and was briefly arrested during the Quit India movement of nineteen forty two. Around the same time, his association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh deepened, providing him with a strong ideological foundation and a sense of selfless service to the nation. He went on to study political science and law, sharing a classroom with his own father in Kanpur, a rare and heartwarming detail that reflected their shared thirst for knowledge. Though he completed his education, he chose not to practice law or pursue a comfortable profession. Instead, he chose the precarious path of journalism and public service, editing journals and writing passionate essays that articulated the hopes and struggles of a newly independent nation.

When Syama Prasad Mookerjee founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in nineteen fifty one, he recognized the exceptional talent in young Atal and took him under his wing. The tragic and untimely death of Mookerjee was a devastating blow, but it forced Vajpayee to step up and carry the torch of a fledgling political movement. Entering the Indian Parliament for the first time in nineteen fifty seven from Balrampur, he immediately caught the attention of political friends and foes alike. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, a giant of Indian politics at the time, listened to the young opposition leader with deep respect and famously remarked that this eloquent young man would one day become the Prime Minister of India. It was a testament to his extraordinary voice, which was never bitter or venomous, but always measured, poetic, and grounded in profound empathy.

For four long decades, he served as a beacon in the opposition, walking through the halls of

Parliament with unmatched grace. When democracy faced its darkest hour during the Emergency in nineteen seventy five, he was imprisoned alongside many of his colleagues. The period of incarceration strengthened his resolve to protect democratic values at all costs. When the Emergency was lifted and the Janata Party came to power in nineteen seventy seven, he was appointed as the Minister of External Affairs. In that role, he won hearts across the globe. He made history by delivering his address at the United Nations General Assembly in Hindi, showcasing national pride while extending a hand of friendship to the world. He worked tirelessly to mend relations with neighboring countries, demonstrating that a strong leader could also be a champion of peace.

The birth of the Bharatiya Janata Party in nineteen eighty was a pivotal moment in his political journey. As its founding President, he strove to build a party that championed cultural nationalism while remaining open, inclusive, and committed to democratic consensus. The political road was long and filled with crushing setbacks, including a devastating electoral defeat in nineteen eighty four when the party was reduced to just two seats in Parliament. Many thought the movement was dead, but Vajpayee remained calm, patient, and optimistic.

He traveled to every corner of the country, connecting with ordinary citizens through his captivating speeches that could move thousands to tears or bring them to their feet with applause. His famous pauses between sentences were not just rhetorical devices; they were moments of deep reflection where a leader truly communicated with his people. His crowning moments came in the late nineties when he finally assumed the office of the Prime Minister of India. His first tenure in nineteen ninety six lasted a mere thirteen days, ending when he fell short of a majority. Rather than engaging in unethical political maneuvering, he delivered a masterclass in parliamentary democracy, stepping down with unmatched dignity after a speech that remains legendary.

He returned to power in nineteen ninety eight and again in nineteen ninety nine, leading the National Democratic Alliance, a complex coalition of over twenty diverse political parties. Managing such a vast coalition required immense patience, humility, and statesmanship. He proved that coalition governance did not mean weakness or stagnation; it could be a vehicle for bold, transformative action.

May nineteen ninety eight marked a dramatic turning point in India's geopolitical standing. Under his direct leadership, India conducted a series of underground nuclear tests

at Pokhran. The decision was taken with absolute secrecy and courage, defying immense international pressure and the threat of severe economic sanctions. He declared India a responsible nuclear weapons state, asserting that the tests were not an act of aggression but a necessary step for self defense and national security. The world initially reacted with shock and anger, but through his sophisticated diplomacy and moral authority, he successfully articulated India's stance, eventually leading to a fundamental transformation of India's relations with global superpowers.

Even while standing firm on national security, his heart always yearned for peace. In February nineteen ninety nine, he took a historic leap of faith by taking the inaugural Delhi to Lahore bus service to Pakistan. He visited the Minar e Pakistan in Lahore, a gesture of immense symbolic importance that signaled India's genuine acceptance of Pakistan's sovereignty and a sincere desire for lasting peace. His famous words that one can change friends but not neighbors resonated deeply across the subcontinent. The betrayal that followed in the form of the Kargil intrusion by Pakistani forces was a bitter blow, but he handled the crisis with extraordinary resolve. He gave the Indian armed forces complete freedom to reclaim Indian territory while ensuring that the conflict remained localized, earning global admiration for India's restraint and tactical victory.

On the domestic front, he unleashed an economic and infrastructural revolution that transformed the daily lives of millions of Indians. He understood that a vast nation could not progress without world class connectivity. He launched the ambitious Golden Quadrilateral project, connecting the four major metropolitan cities with high quality highways, and the North South and East West corridors. He also initiated the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, bringing paved roads to remote villages for the first time and connecting isolated rural communities to the economic mainstream. These projects breathed new life into the national economy, creating jobs, boosting trade, and instilling a sense of pride in Indian engineering and ambition.

He was equally passionate about empowering the next generation. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a flagship program launched during his tenure, aimed to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of six and fourteen. It led to a massive increase in school enrollment and helped lay the foundation for India's modern knowledge economy. In the realm of economic policy, he carried forward bold structural reforms, privatizing inefficient public sector enterprises, pushing for telecommunication reforms that made mobile phones accessible to the common man, and

maintaining fiscal discipline while fostering an environment of innovation and entrepreneurship.

What truly elevated him above ordinary politicians was his unifying philosophy of Raj Dharma, the duty of a ruler to be fair, just, and unbiased toward every citizen regardless of caste, creed, or religion. During times of internal strife or communal tension, he was a soothing voice of reason, calling for healing, reconciliation, and adherence to the constitutional spirit. His approach to complex regional issues, such as the Kashmir problem, was guided by his famous framework of Insaniyat, Jamhooriyat, and Kashmiriyat, representing humanity, democracy, and the unique cultural identity of the Kashmiri people. It was a vision that earned him deep respect even from those who strongly disagreed with his political party.

As a human being, he remained remarkably humble and accessible throughout his life. He lived simply, enjoyed good food, loved classical music, and found solace in poetry. His poems were a mirror to his soul, reflecting his inner struggles, his profound sensitivity to human suffering, his love for his homeland, and his unwavering faith in the resilience of the human spirit. He was never afraid to express vulnerability in his verses, admitting his fears while reaffirming his commitment to duty. This rare combination of a tough political leader and a sensitive poet made him universally loved across the political spectrum.

When he voluntarily retired from active politics after the nineteen ninety four general elections, he left behind a legacy that transcended party lines. His health gradually declined in his later years, leading to a quiet life away from the public glare. In twenty fifteen, the nation conferred upon him its highest civilian honor, the Bharat Ratna, a recognition that was celebrated by citizens of all political persuasions. When he passed away in August twenty eight, the entire nation mourned not just the loss of a former Prime Minister, but the departure of a beloved elder statesman, a father figure who had guided the country through storms with a steady hand and a warm heart.

The life of Atal Bihari Vajpayee offers timeless lessons for leadership and governance. He demonstrated that conviction does not require hostility, that strength can coexist with gentleness, and that political opposition does not mean personal enmity. He walked through the corridors of power without letting power corrupt his essential humanity. His footprint on Indian history is deep and permanent, visible in the highways that crisscross the nation, the schools filled with eager children, the heightened global stature of the country, and the enduring memory of a voice that could calm a nation and inspire it to dream bigger dreams.

Special features of Census 2027

Census 2027 is a landmark step in the administrative and statistical data collection system of India. Bringing an end to the long-standing traditional method, this year's enumeration process has been made entirely dependent on modern technology. As the country's first fully digital census, this process will make extensive use of mobile applications and computers instead of pen and paper. In a large democracy and a country with a vast population, managing such a large-scale and complex process through digital means is an extremely challenging task for the government and administration. Nevertheless, this digital system will help in collecting the personal and family information of every citizen of the country with utmost accuracy and security. In previous censuses, from the collection of information to its classification and the release of the final results to the public, several years were spent. As a result, by the time the information was used for government activities, the situation had changed considerably. But through the new digital method, the collected information will be immediately deposited on the central server, and the data can be analysed and the results published within a very short period. As a result, the government will be able to use the latest and accurate statistics while preparing various development schemes, poverty alleviation programmes and infrastructure development plans. For building a welfare state, it is essential to have accurate information on population, literacy rate, employment status and standard of living. The future framework of important sectors such as education, healthcare, transportation, drinking water supply and employment generation will be drawn on the basis of the information obtained from this census. Therefore, the process of 2027 must be recognised as a strong and reliable foundation for the country's future planning.

The extensive preparations being undertaken by the administrative machinery to conduct this massive exercise properly and smoothly reflect a real picture of the country's overall technological advancement. The data from this year's census will serve as a powerful tool to ensure the proper utilisation of government funds and to ensure that the benefits of every welfare scheme reach people belonging to the lower sections of society without any hindrance.

As a preparatory measure for the main Census 2027, a well-planned and organised programme has already been initiated in Assam. In the context of Assam, the most important aspect of this year's census is the process of self-enumeration of citizens through digital means. The online self-enumeration system, officially launched in the state from 2 August to 16 August, has provided the public with a rare opportunity to enter their own information into the government database themselves. Through this system, without waiting for enumerators to visit their homes and collect information, any person can access the designated portal through their smartphone or computer and register the necessary details of themselves and their family. On the one hand, this method has prevented wastage of time, while on the other, it has ensured the confidentiality and accuracy of information. Since a person provides details such as occupation, educational qualification, age and other important particulars themselves, the possibility of errors that could occur when information was previously collected through a third person

has been almost eliminated. In a diverse state like Assam, where geographical remoteness and adverse weather conditions often create obstacles to government activities, this online self-enumeration system has emerged as a highly effective alternative. Alongside urban areas, educated young men and women in rural areas have also taken the lead in this process, helping their families and neighbours register their information and thereby fulfilling their responsibilities as responsible citizens. The government, too, has undertaken various awareness programmes at different levels to make this process simpler and more understandable. Through this latest use of information technology, Assam has been able to set an example for the entire country. Along with popularising the use of technology among the public, the programme that began on 2 August will have a far-reaching impact in bringing transparency to government activities. There is a strong belief in administrative circles that the preliminary information collected through self-enumeration will make the work of the subsequent main census considerably easier and faster. Moreover, the process of uploading one's own information has generated among ordinary citizens a sense of responsibility as participants in the government system.

Alongside the self-enumeration process, another highly essential stage of the census is the preparation of the house-list and housing census. This important process began in Assam on 17 August. Before conducting the main population enumeration, it is absolutely necessary to prepare an accurate and detailed picture of the actual geographical location of every village, town and city and the residential buildings located there. At this stage, every residential house, commercial establishment, educational institution and other government and private buildings are enumerated. Various infrastructural aspects such as the construction style of houses, whether they are pucca or kutcha, source of water, electricity connection and toilet facilities are examined very carefully and information is collected. In this process, government employees are visiting houses and using digital devices to map the location of every house. Through the preparation of the house-list, it becomes possible to obtain a clear understanding of the standard of living of the people of the state. An impartial assessment of how far government-provided drinking water schemes, rural electrification and sanitation systems have actually succeeded can be obtained from the data of this housing census. In the future, these data will serve as the main basis for advance planning regarding where and to what extent new housing schemes, expansion of road transport systems and municipal facilities such as waste disposal will be required. Particularly in a flood-affected and erosion-prone state like Assam, the importance of the housing census data is immense for analysing the condition of residential houses and their geographical safety. During floods, it is necessary for the government to have an accurate map showing the location of houses in every area in order to conduct rapid rescue operations or properly plan the distribution of relief materials. Therefore, the house-list preparation programme that began on 17 August should not be considered merely an ordinary government exercise; rather, it can be regarded as a blueprint for the overall development of society. The information collected digitally by every enumerator will help make every future government scheme more realistic and

people-oriented.

An analysis of the significance of the first digital census shows that its impact is not confined merely to changing the method of data collection; rather, it has brought about a radical transformation in the working methods of the entire administrative system. Under the traditional method, thousands of tonnes of paper were used, which had an adverse impact on the environment, while huge spaces were required to preserve such enormous quantities of paper. With the introduction of the digital method, a permanent solution to these problems has emerged. As soon as enumerators enter information directly into an application through smartphones or tablets, the data become securely stored in the central database. This system has completely eliminated the possibility of information being lost or damaged. The digital system incorporates several automatic security and verification mechanisms, due to which errors that may occur inadvertently are immediately detected and can be corrected. The software can itself point out inconsistencies between age and educational qualification. The use of such precise technology will improve the quality of statistics many times over compared with the past. Through GPS technology, the location of every residential house and family can be determined, thereby greatly reducing the possibility of any person or family being left out of the enumeration. This digital method will help overcome the geographical limitations of every part of the country and build a coordinated and integrated information system. This integrated digital database will also become a powerful medium for maintaining coordination among various departments of the government. Collecting and processing such a huge volume of information within such a short period for a vast country is also a major milestone for the information technology sector. This census provides a clear indication of how strong and far-reaching the country's information technology infrastructure has become. In the coming days, various government services, beginning with health cards, ration cards and voter identity cards, can be integrated on this digital foundation to provide seamless citizen services. Therefore, this digital transformation is truly a strong and timely step towards establishing good governance.

Many important decisions regarding the political, economic and social future of the country will be taken on the basis of the information obtained from Census 2027. Among these, the most sensitive and important issue is the process of delimitation. The population data from this census will serve as the final benchmark for determining the boundaries of Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly constituencies and the number of representatives. In a democratic system, the latest and accurate population data are essential to ensure that the people of every region receive political representation proportionate to their population. The census data will also play a decisive role in determining the number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. From the perspective of economic planning as well, Census 2027 is extremely important. At present, rapid changes are taking place in the demographic structure of the country. Along with an increase in the number of the working-age youth population, the number of elderly people is also changing. The government needs to know the actual age structure of society in order to create employment opportunities for the younger generation and provide pensions and health insurance for the elderly. Decisions to establish new schools, colleges or technical institutions in

the education sector have to depend on statistics concerning children and young people in specific areas. Similarly, accurate information on the distribution of the population is essential for deciding where new hospitals should be constructed in the health sector or for determining the quantity of vaccines required for disease prevention. Census data will also be used to identify people below the poverty line and provide them with food security and other assistance. The Finance Commission will use these census data as the basis for the distribution of central government revenue among the states. Therefore, comprehensive and sustainable development of a country is impossible without accurate and timely statistics. Census 2027 is not merely a statistical record; rather, it is a powerful indicator that will determine the direction of the country's economic and social development. The policies and strategies for the country's overall development for the next decade will be determined on the basis of these data.

For the administrative machinery, the data from this census will be like a powerful tool. If administrative officials at every level, from the district level to the village panchayat, obtain accurate demographic and infrastructural details of their respective areas, it becomes extremely easy to manage development activities. A clear and precise understanding of how many new primary health centres are required in a district or in how many villages access to pure drinking water has still not been ensured can be obtained from this process. Since the entire process is being conducted through digital means, it will not only bring transparency and speed to administrative activities but also help prevent corruption. These accurate statistics will act as a protective shield in eliminating the names of fake beneficiaries and connecting genuinely poor people with government schemes. These data will also be considered an invaluable resource for various educational institutions and research organisations. Researchers in sociology, economics and population studies will be able to scientifically analyse the changes taking place at different levels of society on the basis of these data. Such analyses will provide the government with new directions for formulating future education policies, health policies and employment policies. Therefore,

Census 2027 can undoubtedly be called a decisive milestone in the overall progress of the country. Planned preparation, successful use of advanced technology and spontaneous participation of the public will transform this entire process into a meaningful and successful programme. Every piece of information collected through this process will serve as a strong foundation for building the country's future and will usher in a new chapter in the journey towards building a strong and self-reliant nation.

The success of this entire process will largely depend on the active and conscious participation of the general public. No matter how advanced the technology used by the government may be, if people do not provide correct and accurate information, the entire objective will fail. Particularly in a state like Assam, where there is immense diversity in language, religion and culture, ensuring that people from every community participate openly in the census without any apprehension is a major responsibility of the administration. There is a need for extensive awareness campaigns at government and non-government levels to remove any unnecessary fear or misconceptions that may exist among a section of society regarding the census. Every citizen must be made to understand that census information is kept completely confidential and is used subsequently only for the developmental activities of the country. Legal protection has been provided to ensure that this information is never used to initiate any legal action or harass anyone. Due to a lack of digital literacy, some people in rural areas may face difficulties with online self-enumeration or the digital process. To assist such people, local administrations, panchayat representatives and voluntary organisations will have to come forward. Special attention must be paid to ensuring that the information of the most marginalised sections of society is also included in the main census. The exclusion of even one person may mean that the person could be deprived of many government benefits in the future. Overall, the first digital Census 2027 is a vast and historic event that will determine the course of India for several decades to come. With proper preparation, effective use of technology and public cooperation, this massive exercise is certain to achieve success. The successful completion of this census will take the country many steps forward on its journey towards building a strong, data-rich and technology-driven New India. It can certainly be said that future plans built on the foundation of accurate data will help eradicate poverty, unemployment and economic inequality in the country.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan



First mRNA flu shot approved by FDA bodes well for improving drugs of the future

By: Li Li

Vaccines have been reliably and affordably protecting people from diseases worldwide for centuries. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, however, vaccine development was still a long and idiosyncratic process. Traditionally, researchers had to tailor manufacturing processes and facilities for each vaccine candidate, and the scientific knowledge gained from one vaccine was often not directly transferable to another.

But the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines brought a new approach to vaccine development. And on Aug. 5, 2026, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved another mRNA vaccine — a seasonal flu vaccine for adults age 50 or older — that offers more protection against influenza compared to standard vaccines. These advances

focus on developing better ways to use mRNA as a drug. Better understanding how mRNA-based drugs interact with the immune system and how they are degraded in human cells can help lead to safe, durable and effective treatments for a wide range of diseases.

Some basics of mRNA drugs Messenger RNA, or mRNA, is made of four building blocks denoted by the letters A, C, G and U. The sequence of letters in an mRNA molecule conveys genetic information that directs how a protein is made.

An mRNA drug comprises two essential components: mRNA molecules, which code for desired proteins, and the lipid molecules — such as phospholipids and cholesterol — that encapsulate them. These mRNA-lipid nanoparticles, or LNPs, are tiny spheres about 100 nanometers in diameter that

the virus' spike protein that trains the immune system to recognize and better prepare for potential infection.

From a drug development perspective, mRNA drugs offer significant advantages over traditional drugs because they are easily programmable. Hundreds of pounds of mRNA can be made from readily available DNA templates, such that producing a different mRNA drug is as simple as changing the corresponding DNA templates.

More importantly, different mRNA drugs produced by the same set of methods will have similar properties. They will be delivered to the same tissues, trigger similar levels of immune responses and degrade in similar ways. This predictability significantly reduces the development risks and financial costs of developing mRNA drugs.

candidates for mRNA technology: They provide long-term protection against disease after brief exposure to the drug with few side effects.

Self vs. nonself Another critical feature of mRNA drugs is their intrinsic ability to stimulate the immune system. This may sound paradoxical — after all, your cells already contain large amounts of mRNAs. Why would other mRNAs activate your immune system? How does your immune system distinguish between self and nonself mRNAs?

The first reason involves location. Therapeutic mRNAs enter cells using endosomes — sacs made of the cell's membrane that take in materials from the cell's environment. Your immune system can detect mRNA in endosomes because this is usually a sign of an RNA virus infection — cellular mRNAs normally don't enter endosomes. When your immune system labels therapeutic mRNAs as viral material, it triggers a strong inflammatory response that can lead to severe side effects.

One solution to this problem is to modify mRNA's building blocks — specifically, changing the U, or uridine, to its chemical cousins, pseudouridine and N1-methylpseudouridine. This subtle chemical change prevents the unwanted immune response while allowing the therapeutic mRNA to direct the cell to make the protein it encodes. The 2023 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine was awarded to the scientists who made this breakthrough discovery. Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 mRNA vaccines use this technique.

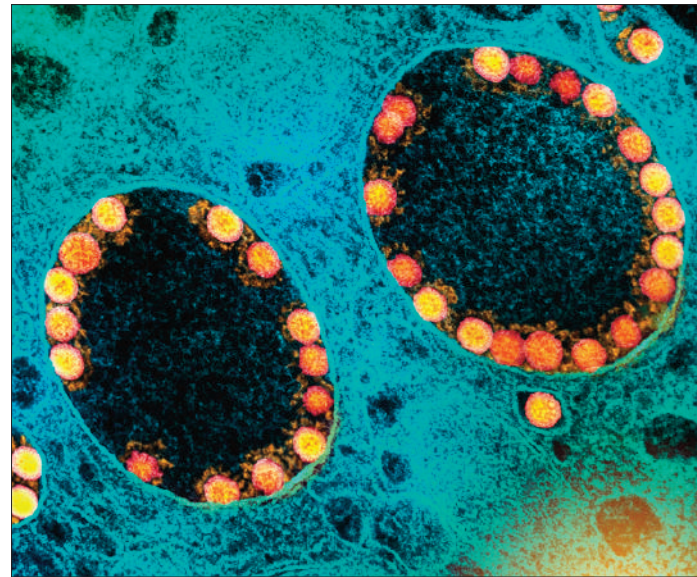
The second source of unwanted immune response is impurities from mRNA production. To prepare mRNA from a DNA template, scientists use a protein called RNA polymerase that tends to make a small amount of side product called double-stranded RNA. Unlike mRNA, which is single-stranded, double-stranded RNA has two chains that form a double helix. RNA viruses also form double-stranded RNA when they repli-



cate, and exposing cells to double-stranded RNA can lead to a strong immune response.

Removing double-stranded RNA is challenging, especially at the industrial scale. Fortunately, for mRNA vaccines, the residual amount of double-stranded RNA can stimulate the immune system to enhance antibody responses. However, for applications other than vaccines, a cleaner RNA product is necessary to reduce side effects.

Moving beyond vaccines



Although mRNA has the poten- knock out genes that cause specific

demonstrate the momentum of mRNA technology, and they have far-reaching implications for how researchers make drugs to treat many other diseases.

Although there are many possibilities for what researchers can use mRNA to treat, some important limitations remain. My work as a biochemist and my lab at UMass Chan Medical School

protect mRNA from degradation and facilitate its delivery into target cells.

Once inside cells, mRNA molecules instruct the cell's machinery to produce the target protein required for a desired therapeutic effect. For example, the mRNA in the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines directs cells to produce a harmless version of

In addition to being easy to program, mRNA drugs have several other unique properties. For example, just like the mRNAs your body naturally produces, therapeutic mRNAs have a short half-life in cells: about one day. As a result, current mRNA technology is ideal for treatments that aren't meant to last long in the body.

This is why vaccines are popular

The DRC's Ebola Outbreak and the Limits of Preparedness

By: Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

The number of confirmed Ebola cases in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has surpassed 4,000, including 1,887 deaths. The epidemic has primarily affected Ituri and North Kivu provinces and is characterized by delayed detection, the absence of a specific vaccine or treatment, a fatality rate of 30–50 per cent, and an outbreak response hindered by prolonged conflict. This is the third known outbreak of Bundibugyo virus (BDBV), highlighting a gap in Ebola preparedness, even as significant progress has been made in developing medical countermeasures for Zaire Ebolavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern on 17 May, although it is likely to have started as early as mid-January this year. Presently, ongoing transmission is confined to the DRC, with Uganda having reported no new cases since 21 June. The speed at which transmission is occurring, coupled with difficulties in contact tracing and containment, highlights challenges to epidemic preparedness.

The WHO is exploring the possible effectiveness of MSD's (Merck) Ervebo vaccine — an Ebola vaccine used to prevent Zaire Ebolavirus — to address BDBV. Until last week, however, the organisation had advised against the use of Ervebo for the current outbreak, highlighting that studies had not indicated whether sufficient cross-protective immunity could be provided to offset a BDBV infection. Following pre-clinical trials on Ervebo and BDBV infection, a WHO Technical Advisory Group on candidate vaccine prioritisation recommended on 7 August that clinical trials commence as a priority. Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, currently has stockpiles of 500,000 Ervebo doses that can be utilised in a Phase III clinical trial set to commence shortly.

Research and Development as an Outbreak Response

Nevertheless, preference still lies with developing a specific vaccine against BDBV. A vaccine candidate, ChAdOx1 BDBV, being developed by a team at the Oxford Vaccine Group (University of Oxford), has entered Phase I clinical trials. It uses the same platform as the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine. If clinical trials find the candidate to be both safe and efficacious, the global foundation Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) will work alongside the University of Oxford and the Serum Institute



of India (SII) in conducting additional studies to support eventual licensure or emergency use authorisation. SII has provided 4,000 doses of this investigational vaccine for the ongoing studies and has stockpiled 620,000 doses for future ones. Under its current agreement with CEPI, SII will produce master seed stock and clinical-grade doses.

CEPI has also backed an mRNA vaccine candidate. Moderna began its first in-human testing of mRNA-1469, against BDBV, at three sites in Canada. In addition, CEPI is supporting two other vaccine developers — the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) and Public Health Vaccines. They are using a recombinant vesicular stomatitis virus (rVSV) engineered platform, similar to MSD's (Merck) Ervebo vaccine. Pre-clinical studies with a single rVSV dose have been observed to induce protective immunity, with plans underway to prepare pre-master virus seed stock ahead of future clinical trials. Gavi is prepared to supply doses with a fund of approximately US\$40 million and is developing incentive structures for long-term investment in emergency outbreak responses.

As treatments are being developed, the DRC plans to use the antiviral remdesivir — which nearby Uganda claims to have used during its outbreak — to manage symptoms. The WHO has recommended its use on its own as well as in combination with monoclonal antibodies in a scientific trial. PARTNERS (Platform Adaptive Randomised Trial

for New and Repurposed Filovirus Treatment), a WHO-sponsored clinical trial examining the combinatorial effect of remdesivir and the monoclonal antibody MBP134, is investigating its therapeutic effect on those diagnosed with BDBV. It is coordinated by the Institut National de Recherche Biomédicale in the DRC, the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Belgium, and the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, and is currently recruiting patients in the DRC. MBP134 is used as a treatment for Sudan Ebolavirus in primate studies, while another monoclonal antibody, maffivimab, is used to treat Zaire Ebolavirus. The US Department of Health and Human Services has made MBP134 available for Americans with high-risk exposure to BDBV.

Reports indicate that more than 80 percent of cases are not on patients' contact lists, indicating that chains of transmission are being missed. The same applies to vaccine strategies for Ebola, which typically follow a ring vaccination strategy that relies on strong contact tracing. When contact tracing weakens, promising vaccines and therapeutics may not be effective.

Finally, the antiviral obeldesivir is also being prioritised for development as a post-exposure prophylaxis for high-risk (exposed) contacts, following encouraging pre-clinical studies. However, such interventions depend on identifying high-risk contacts early in the disease course, highlighting the importance of contact tracing. Reports in-

dicate that more than 80 percent of cases are not on patients' contact lists, indicating that chains of transmission are being missed. The same applies to vaccine strategies for Ebola, which typically follow a ring vaccination strategy that relies on strong contact tracing. When contact tracing weakens, promising vaccines and therapeutics may not be effective.

Trust Alongside Innovation

The ongoing conflict in the DRC adds another layer of complexity to the epidemic. With a highly mobile population, contact tracing is difficult, creating a persistent strain on healthcare systems attempting to keep containment measures ahead of the pace of transmission. Further, healthcare workers, who face considerable risk, have gone on strike in many regions over pay issues, weakening response capacity.

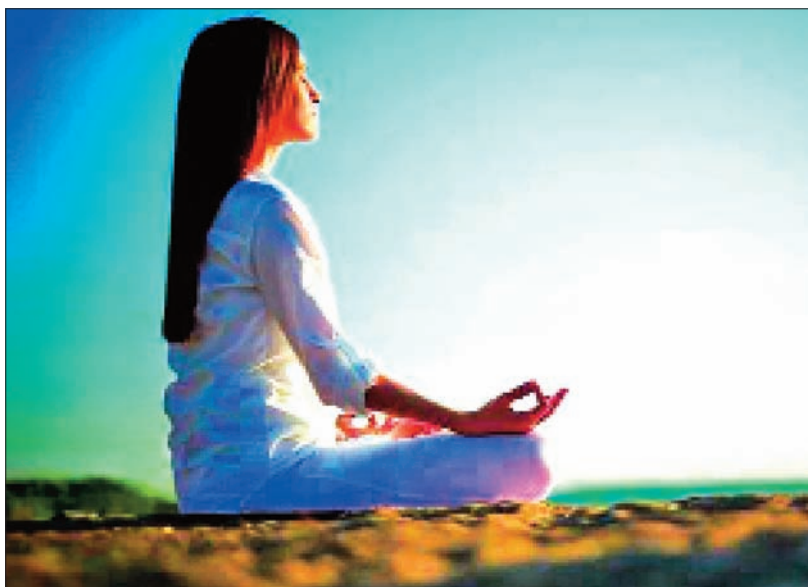
Militarised responses during the 2018 Ebola outbreak, combined with colonial legacies surrounding biomedicine, have contributed to mistrust in global health response mechanisms. Continuous community engagement is essential to building trust alongside healthcare innovations.

A major factor contributing to the challenges in contact tracing stems from fear of the humanitarian response rather than the disease itself. Militarised responses during the 2018 Ebola outbreak, combined with colonial legacies surrounding biomedicine, have contributed to mistrust in global health response mechanisms. Continuous community engagement is essential to building trust alongside healthcare innovations.

Conclusion

The current Ebola outbreak highlights how far R&D on vaccines and therapeutics has progressed, while showing how much work remains. Vaccine platforms, monoclonal antibodies, and antivirals demonstrate significant progress since the 2014 outbreak. However, this BDBV outbreak shows the limitations of preparing for one kind of virus while others go unaccounted for. Epidemic preparedness involves not only developing a single vaccine, but planning for outbreaks of genetically similar viruses, multiple vaccine platforms, and financial mechanisms to support production. Technology, however, cannot substitute for strong surveillance and trust in healthcare systems. An enduring lesson from Ebola is that while science can provide the necessary tools to contain an outbreak, trust in it is essential to putting these tools to work. (Courtesy: ORF)

Why science alone cannot keep us healthy



By Rajyogi Brahma Kumar Nikunj

Recently, many Indian metro cities witnessed a worst outbreak of dengue, chikungunya and malaria with death toll rising to hundred's even as the number of cases of the vector-borne disease had crossed a thousand numbers in most of these cities. These figures have once again posed a serious question for our society: why is it so that despite the advancement in science and technology, there is an upsurge in diseases everywhere? Who is to be blamed for this?

There are various factors responsible for it. Firstly, let us have a look at the physical environment, which has degraded over the decades. Today, the quality of natural elements like air, water, soil - and everything around us has been deteriorating, which can be attributed largely to unchecked man-made activities that exploit nature for development. Similarly, the quality of raw materials, the five elements that constitute our bodies, is also becoming poorer. Our bones, spine, teeth, delicate organs like eyes, heart, kidney, liver and others are impacted right at the time of their formation.

Synthetic fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides that sustain the crop production seep into our food, as a result of which our resistance power against diseases has lowered and we contract various infections than before for physical reasons alone. Secondly, we need to examine the psyche of the 21st-century modern man who faces high levels of worry, fear, anxiety at work as well as at home due to lack of values like tolerance, respect, patience and value-based co-existence.

Today, negativity of all kinds has increased and ethical and moral values have taken a nosedive. As a result, the moral stamina of the society has been affected. Lastly, the third reason, which is the root cause, for the present scenario, is the huge accumulated stock of past negative karma that is the biggest link between disease, environment & lifestyle.

We live in an impure world because of the devastation we have inflicted on our external nature, which in turn has deteriorated under the influence of the vicious internal nature of human beings. We receive pain and suffering from people and situations in return for having created negative energy in the form of negative thoughts, words or actions in the past.

This process is a continuous vicious circle and despite the knowledge of the right and the wrong, humans are unable to change the course of their present action. This is where meditation comes to our rescue, as it helps us to connect to the Supreme Source and helps us to burn our past sins. It helps us to use HIS unlimited powers to absolve the burden of past negative actions so that we may regain and sustain our physical, mental, social and spiritual health.

In other words, regaining health and peace is a process possible only through spiritual elevation of human beings. So, let us get rid of our sick mentality to move into the age of enlightenment where our thoughts will be constantly loving, pure and harmonious. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

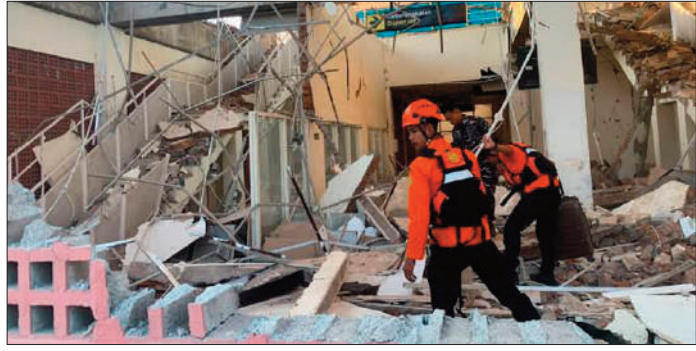
Rescuers dig through rubble, landslides after Indonesia quake kills 51

More than 900 homes were destroyed and 450 more damaged

RUTENG (INDONESIA), Aug 16: Rescue teams in eastern Indonesia recovered four more bodies Sunday after a magnitude-7.7 earthquake struck the day before, bringing the death toll to 51, authorities said. Thousands have been displaced.

The US Geological Survey said the powerful earthquake hit eastern Indonesia's Flores region at a depth of 10 kilometres (6 miles) at 5:58 am local time. Residents fled in panic as tsunami warnings were issued and later lifted. At least 235 aftershocks followed, according to Indonesia's meteorological agency.

Rescuers on Sunday dug through debris looking for people feared buried beneath landslides triggered by the quake across six regencies on Flores, a predominantly Catholic island in Muslim-majority Indonesia. They focused on three regencies that remained



inaccessible after the earthquake: the hardest-hit Manggarai, East Manggarai and Nagekeo.

"We have cleared most landslides and reopened roads to previously isolated villages, although communication disruptions and power outages continue to hamper search efforts," said Fathur Rahman, head of the Search and Rescue Office in Maumere, the capital of Sikka re-

gency. The National Search and Rescue Agency said 101 people were injured. More than 900 homes were destroyed and 450 more damaged, forcing about 5,000 people into temporary shelters.

Thousands at Labuan Bajo, the gateway to Komodo National Park, one of Indonesia's best-known tourist destinations, spent the night outdoors, fearing strong

aftershocks.

"The shaking was terrifying, so intense that my house nearly collapsed," said Anastasia Imda, a farmer, speaking from a makeshift green tent beside her damaged home. "We feared the aftershocks would bring it down on us while we slept."

Landslides blocked sections of the Trans-Flores Highway, a roughly 700-kilometre (435-mile) road linking communities across the mountainous island.

Meanwhile, relief workers distributed rice, ready-to-eat meals, drinking water, blankets and medicine, while emergency shelters were being set up for displaced residents. Authorities said restoring electricity and communication, as well as delivering aid to remote villages isolated by landslides, remained among the biggest challenges. (AP)

UK PM Burnham steps up farmer funds amid extreme heat, drought conditions

LONDON, Aug 16: Farmers across England will receive a 65 million pounds funding boost to help manage the impact of prolonged heatwave conditions and dry weather, British Prime Minister Andy Burnham has said.

The UK government has been struggling to cope with an extended period of high temperatures and ongoing drought conditions across large parts of the country.

Burnham chaired an emergency ministerial Cabinet Office Briefing Room A (COBRA) on extreme heat, wildfires and drought earlier this week. After meeting farmers impacted by low yields and even lost harvests, he pledged additional support on Saturday.

"This is the third drought in five years. Farmers are at the sharp end of a changing climate, and they should not be carrying that risk alone," said Burnham.

"Lower income, higher costs, and no rain in the forecast. I understand the worry that comes with that. The ability to grow our own food is national security, and I will



treat it that way," he said.

"So we are acting now: more money into farm support, help to get reservoirs built, and easier access to water when it is scarce," said the prime minister.

As wildfires raged across the West Midlands region of England, Burnham authorised emergency text alerts on mobile phones to caution against using disposable barbecues and other fire hazards.

He was forced to defend the use of a nationwide alert system designed for extreme risk to life situations by warning that "Britain was a tinderbox" with multiple fires "smouldering the country".

Plans were drawn up for the use of firefighting planes to help douse flames and combat the spread of wildfires, as used across Europe and the US.

"I am acutely aware of the pressures exceptionally dry weather is placing on farm businesses," said UK Environment Secretary Angela Eagle.

"Our farmers are facing some of the toughest conditions in decades, which is why we're stepping in with practical support to help them through these challenging conditions and build resilience for the future," she said. The package of measures unveiled this weekend includes an extra 50 million pounds for the Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026, taking the total budget to 290 million pounds, and up to 15 million pounds for on-farm reservoirs to help farmers store water.

An updated National Planning Policy Framework to be published on Monday will set out action to make it easier to build reservoirs and improve access to water during persistent drought conditions. (AP)

Bus crash in Hungary kills 12 people, injures at least 10 others



BUDAPEST, Aug 16: A passenger bus travelling on a highway in Hungary early Sunday went off the road and into a ditch where it overturned, killing 12 and injuring others, police said.

The bus, which was carrying a group of Polish tourists, was travelling on eastbound lanes near the town of Mezokeresztes when it overturned on the M3 motorway around 140 kilometres east of Hungary's capital, Budapest, at around 1 am on Sunday.

In a statement, police said it was likely that the driver fell asleep, causing the accident, and that the driver had been taken into custody.

Hungary's National Directorate for Disaster Management said in a statement that 57 passengers and

two drivers were travelling on the bus at the time of the accident, and that several of the passengers had been trapped under the vehicle when it overturned.

Polish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maciej Wewior told Polish news agency PAP on Sunday that all of the people on the bus were Polish citizens.

The bus was carrying people from Poland's southeastern Podkarpacie region who were returning from a pilgrimage in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the regional government in Rzeszow, Poland, said in a Facebook post.

Hungarian Prime Minister Peter Magyar wrote in a statement on Facebook that at least 10 people were seriously injured in the crash. He offered his condolences to the families of the victims and thanked rescue workers who were dispatched to the scene.

Polish President Karol Nawrocki expressed his "deep sorrow" over the accident, writing in a post on X: "I join the families and loved ones of the victims in prayer and deep sympathy." (AP)

Ukraine launches one of its largest aerial attacks of war, killing at least 6 people in Russia

MOSCOW, Aug 16: Ukraine launched hundreds of drones across Russia on Sunday, killing at least six people in one of Kyiv's largest aerial attacks of the war.

Kyiv has stepped up its attacks on Russia this year, with long-range missiles and swarms of drones targeting military industries and energy facilities. It has also increasingly pummeled giant Wildberries depots, burning billions of dollars' worth of merchandise belonging to the Russian online retail giant. Those attacks have brought the war home to the Russian public nearly 4½ years into Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Ukraine also came under Russian attack, with drone strikes destroying homes and torching Kyiv's landmark book market.

Russia's Ministry of Defence said it had destroyed 822 Ukrainian drones overnight. Some 600 drones were detected headed toward the Russian capital, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyannin said, with a third of those destroyed over the

Moscow region itself.

An 83-year-old man was killed after a Ukrainian drone hit a private home in the Moscow region, local Gov. Andrey Vorobyov said. He also confirmed that a Ukrainian attack had sparked a blaze at a Wildberries warehouse in the town of Podolsk.

A drone attack targeted three towns in Russia's southwestern Rostov region, killing five people, local Gov. Yuriy Slyusar said. The attack, with more than 150 drones, damaged several homes and a railway station and sparked a forest fire. A Russian missile attack on Ukraine's Kryvyi Rih killed two people and wounded 14 others, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote on social media Sunday. He also said that one more rescue had been killed in the city of Sumy.

ArcelorMittal Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine's largest steel producer, confirmed that one of its sites had been hit in a missile attack and that operations had been partially suspended.

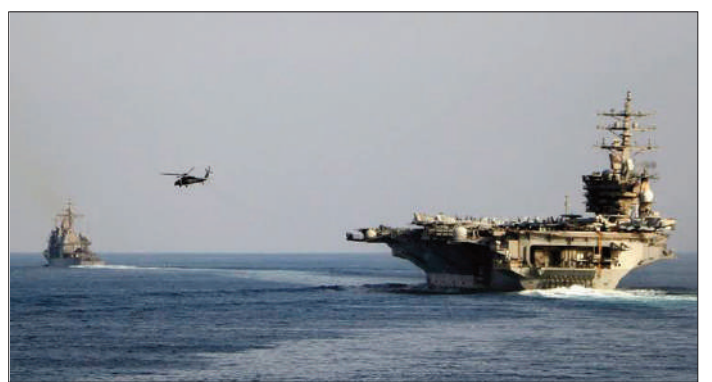
Elsewhere, a man and a woman died when their home was hit by a Russian strike in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region, said Ivan Fedorov, the head of the local military administration.

Russian attacks also sparked fires throughout the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, wounding six people. A blaze took hold at one of the city's largest book markets, tearing through kiosks huddled close to the Pochaina metro station. Firefighters fought back the flames, which sent plumes of black smoke across the capital, and picked their way through rubble where the market's crowded pavilions once stood.

"Wherever the Russians can reach with their ballistic missiles, they strike civilian infrastructure," Zelenskyy said.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said Sunday that it had targeted a metallurgical plant in Kryvyi Rih and several military-industrial sites in Kyiv, including a manufacturing facility for Ukraine's Flamingo missiles. (AP)

US top Middle East commander visits deployed aircraft carrier



DUBAI, Aug 16: Admiral Brad Cooper, the top US military commander in the Middle East, visited the USS Lincoln in the Arabian Sea during a 10-day tour in the region that concluded on Saturday, US Central Command said.

Israel said its strikes in southern Lebanon, which killed at least 11 people, targeted two Hezbollah commanders. And a Hamas delegation is in Cairo on Sunday for Gaza ceasefire-related talks with Egyptian officials.

Here's a look at the latest developments on Sunday in the Iran war and the wider Middle East.

Admiral Cooper visited the USS Lincoln in the Arabian Sea as reports have emerged of mental health and supply issues aboard the long-deployed aircraft carrier. The Lincoln arrived in the Middle East in January and has been supporting the US war against Iran, including the blockade on Iranian ports. Its deployment has included a record-setting uninterrupted time at sea of more than 240 days.

Extended deployments of carriers, which can have more than 5,000 sailors and Marines on board, have raised concerns about the impact not only on the ships but on service members.

"History will record this deployment as one of the most operationally intense and consequential of the modern era," Cooper said of the Lincoln strike group in a statement released Saturday.

Cooper also went to Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to meet with civilian and military leaders, according to the Central Command statement.

The US Navy's blockade was in response to Iran's asserting control over the Strait of Hormuz after the war started on February 28 with US and Israeli strikes. About one-fifth of the world's traded oil and natural gas passed through the waterway at the mouth of the Persian Gulf before then.

Talks between the US and Iran have stalled while Iran is in discussions with Oman about how to manage the strait that runs between them and had been considered an international waterway.

Israel's military said it targeted two Hezbollah commanders in strikes in southern Lebanon on Saturday, in the deadliest attacks since a truce between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah went into effect in June.

Lebanon's Health Ministry and state news agency said at least 11 people were killed in two strikes.

Israel's military said early Sunday morning that the latter strike killed Abu Hassan Alaa, whom it described as a "senior commander" for Hezbollah who had taken part in attacks against Israel's soldiers in southern Lebanon as well as led militants who targeted Israeli soldiers and civilians over several years.

Earlier, Israel's military had said the strike on Ansar killed Ali Samir Al-Haj Hassan, also described as a Hezbollah commander, adding that his family was with him, but was not targeted.

Israel and the Lebanese government announced a "framework agreement" in late June, laying out a plan for Israeli forces to withdraw from southern Lebanon in exchange for Hezbollah's disarmament. It envisions steps toward an eventual peace agreement between the countries, which remain technically at war nearly 80 years after Israel's establishment.

Hezbollah has refused direct talks and was not party to the US-mediated deal.

A Hamas delegation, chaired by the group's leader Khalil al-Hayya, is in Cairo on Sunday for Gaza ceasefire-related talks, the group said. Al-Hayya met with Major General Hassan Rashad, head of Egypt's intelligence service, Egyptian state-run media reported.

Al-Hayya reiterated Hamas' commitment to implement US President Donald Trump's peace plan in Gaza "end the suffering of the residents of the Gaza Strip and to begin the reconstruction process," al-Qahera News television reported.

The talks come as mediators push for the implementation of a roadmap that calls for the disarmament of Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the area, as well as handing over power to Palestinian technocrats.

Israel's Netanyahu has rejected Trump's latest plan to advance the stalled ceasefire in Gaza, saying Israel will not withdraw from any of the roughly 60% of the territory it controls until Hamas has been completely disarmed -- something the militant group controlling the other 40% has long resisted.

It was not immediately clear whether Al-Hayya would meet with Trump's son-in-law and negotiator Jared Kushner, the Board of Peace's high representative Nickolay Mladenov, or executive board member and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who are scheduled to travel to Israel and Egypt this week.

Qatar's armed forces captured and are holding three Iranian pilots who went missing in March when their jets were downed, the Missing Persons Committee of Iran's Armed Forces General Staff said. Qatar, however, denied it. Iran's state TV reported on Sunday that the committee's commander responded by urging Qatar to allow Iranian Air Force experts to conduct a field investigation.

Saturday's statement alleged that Qatar had not allowed the pilots to meet or communicate with families or Iranian officials handling their cases. A spokesperson with Qatar's foreign ministry, Majed Al Ansari, denied the claims and indicated on X that the pilots had been shot down and that Qatar's search and rescue teams found the remains of one. This is the first known case in the war where Iran has said a regional country is holding its fighters. Tehran has repeatedly targeted countries in the region with missiles and drones that are hosting US military bases. (AP)

Israel President Herzog, PM Netanyahu greet India on Independence Day



HERZLIYA (ISRAEL), Aug 16: Israeli President Isaac Herzog congratulated India and its people on the 80th Independence Day, calling for strengthening the "beautiful friendship" between the two countries.

"On behalf of the State of Israel, I warmly congratulate President @rashtrapatibhvn, Prime Minister @narendramodi, and the wonderful people of India on your 80th Independence Day!" Herzog posted on X.

"I hope that we will continue to strengthen this beautiful friendship between Israel and India," he said.

Congratulating India, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that the two countries' innovation and

friendship are "boundless", but the "best is yet to come".

"Congratulations to India and to my dear friend @PMOIndia @narendramodi on your 80th Independence Day", Netanyahu posted on X shortly after the end of Sabbath on Saturday evening.

"India and Israel achieved independence one year apart. We are two ancient nations that seize the future together to bring a better life for our people", the Israeli Premier noted.

"Our innovation and friendship are boundless. The best is yet to come!", he said.

Official communiques are generally put on hold in Israel during Sabbath, so the message came out only on Saturday

evening. The Israeli Foreign Ministry also extended its greetings.

More than 400 Indians from all over Israel descended on this northern coastal city in Tel Aviv district to celebrate Independence Day.

The enthusiastic crowd made it to the venue in the morning despite the early start in view of the "historic journey of the Suryapath Tiranga" with the Indian mission in Israel passing the baton to the one in Egypt.

Ambassador J P Singh hoisted the Tricolour amid patriotic slogans from the crowd.

The ceremony started with the singing of Vande Mataram, marking the 150th anniversary of the national song.

Singh also felicitated the winners of "Know India Quiz" and of the photography competition "India Through My Lens".

Meanwhile, the Indian community in Israel has planned several events across the country to celebrate Independence Day.

The Bhartiya Gorkha Association of Israel has organised a special function at Rothschild Street in Tel Aviv, inviting members of the community. (AP)

26 more bodies recovered in Zimbabwe ferry disaster; death toll at 72

HARARE (ZIMBABWE), Aug 16: Eighteen children were among more than 70 killed when an overloaded ferry capsized on Lake Kariba in Zimbabwe this week, police said Saturday after rescuers recovered more bodies.

The ferry capsized in strong waves on Tuesday. Police said 26 more bodies have been recovered since then, bringing the death toll to 72.

The aging ferry was traveling from the town of Kariba to rural and fishing communities in the country's northwest, where roads are damaged and public transportation is scarce. Authorities have not said how many people were aboard or how many remain missing.

Estimates have put the number of passengers as high as 153, while authorities say the ferry's capacity is 90. Zimbabwe's disaster management agency has said 77 people were rescued.

Authorities initially said the number of children aboard was unknown because those below ticketing age were not included in passenger estimates. A police list released later showed that 16 of the child victims were aged 10 or younger, with the youngest just one.

Kariba is the world's largest human-made lake by volume, created by damming the mighty Zambezi River in the late 1950s and is up to 40 km wide in places.

Zimbabwe and Zambia share the lake, with their border running through its middle. (AP)

Firefighters battle massive Belgian wildfire, forcing hundreds to evacuate



BAELEN (BELGIUM), Aug 16: Firefighters battled a massive wildfire in Belgium on Sunday that has burned over 27 square kilometres in the High Fens, the country's largest reserve, forcing nearby residents to evacuate in what media describe as one of the worst-ever wildfires in the country's recent history.

About 600 residents in nearby municipalities in Waimes and Butgenbach, in Liege province near the German border, were told to evacuate on August 15 as winds shifted and smoke spread through the area. Authorities also advised tourists to leave, while a nearby gymnasium was opened to receive evacuees.

Liege provincial Governor Herve Jamar, in a statement, said that more than 250 emergency personnel have been deployed, including over 100 Belgian and German firefighters, police and military officers and civil protection staff, helped by firefighting helicopters. (AP)

Indian diaspora in Houston celebrates 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour

HOUSTON (US), Aug 16: The Indian diaspora here celebrated India's 80th Independence Day with immense enthusiasm and patriotic fervour, joining the Consulate General of India for a flag-hoisting ceremony at the Chancery premises -- its staircase and railings adorned with marigold garlands and tricolour bunting.

Despite the Houston heat, the diaspora thronged the Consulate early morning as proceedings began with the national song Vande Mataram, sung in unison by the gathered crowd, followed by the hoisting of the national flag amid a shower of flower petals and a mass rendition of the national anthem Jana Gana Mana.

Hoisting the Tricolour, Consul General D C Manjunath read out the address of President Draupadi Murmu, delivered on the eve of the historic milestone. He thanked attendees for their steadfast commitment to India and urged active engagement in the nation's journey toward 'Viksit Bharat'.

The commemorative event featured



renditions of patriotic songs, an exhibition of specially-commissioned paintings on the 'Viksit Bharat' theme, and the felicitation of winners of the 'Bharat Ko Janiye' Quiz. Attendees beamed with pride and excitement throughout, many saying the ceremony deepened their bond with India, even thousands of miles from home.

A prominent delegation of elected officials and civic leaders attended the event to present proclamations and extend greetings, including University of

Houston Chancellor Renu Khator, Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong, Harris County Commissioner Lesley Briones, Fort Bend Commissioner Dexter McCoy, Sugar Land City Council Member Sanjay Singhal, Regional Director for US Senator John Cornyn Jay Guerrero, and judges Juli Mathew and Surendran Patel, alongside representatives for Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, Fort Bend Commissioner Andy Myers, and Houston Mayor John Whitmire. (AP)

Leaders across districts highlight development, youth empowerment, cultural heritage and the sacrifices of local heroes

Arunachal celebrate 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervor



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 16: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated with patriotic fervour across several districts and constituencies of Arunachal Pradesh, with public representatives, district administrations, students, community leaders and citizens joining the celebrations and reaffirming their commitment to development, social responsibility and nation-building.

At Liromoba, MLA Pesi Jilen of the 27-Liromoba (ST) Assembly Constituency unfurled the National Flag in the presence of officials, PRI representatives, teachers, students and members of the public.

Paying tribute to freedom fighters, Jilen also remembered the pioneers of Liromoba Circle and their contributions to the development of the area.

He highlighted ongoing developmental initiatives and reiterated his commitment

to accelerating progress in all sectors under the vision of "Viksit Liromoba, Viksit Arunachal and Viksit Bharat."

Jilen also urged the youth to stay away from drugs, alcoholism and other social evils and channelise their energy towards education, entrepreneurship, sports and other constructive pursuits.

Meritorious students who excelled in CBSE and Board examinations were felicitated with cash incentives and certificates by the Liromoba ZPM.

In Dibang Valley, the celebrations were held at the Mini Stadium in Anini, where MLA and Advisor to the Ministers for Tourism, Geology & Mining, Mopi Mihu, unfurled the National Flag in the presence of Zilla Parishad Chairperson Sadhu Mihu, Deputy Commissioner Bekir Nyorak and Superintendent of Police Pankaj Kumar.

Students, officials, community members and the public participated in the cel-

ebrations, which reflected the spirit of unity and patriotism.

Mihu appreciated the Krishi Vigyan Kendra team for its contribution to the district and lauded the DDSE and teaching community for their efforts in achieving encouraging results during the year.

He also highlighted various schemes, projects and proposals aimed at strengthening infrastructure, improving public services and ensuring the overall development of Dibang Valley.

At Ziro, the 80th Independence Day was celebrated at the Padi Yubbe Outdoor Stadium, with residents from across Lower Subansiri participating in the programme.

The celebrations were led by Deputy Commissioner Oli Perme and Superintendent of Police Keni Bagra, while MLA Hage Yanku inaugurated exhibition stalls.

Ziro-Hapoli MLA Hage Appa unfurled the National Flag following the rendition of Vande Mataram and inspected the parade contingents.

The Ziro celebrations featured the unveiling of Miji Migung Yarko, along with Yoga and school band performances by students of Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya.

The administration also presented the MLA Academic Excellence Award 2026, Ziro Gaurav Puraskar Award 2026 and Commendation Certificates to outstanding individuals.

Traditional cultural performances and prize distribution added to the celebrations, which concluded with the evening retreat ceremony.

In Keyi Panyor, the celebrations at the Yachuli General Ground were attended by MLA Toko Tatung, Deputy Commissioner Ankita Mishra, PRI representatives, officials, ex-servicemen, teachers,

students and members of the public.

Tatung unfurled the National Flag and inspected the parade before inaugurating exhibition stalls.

A major highlight was the launch of the Keyi Panyor Mission Plan 2040, outlining 20 development priorities for the long-term transformation of the district.

In her first Independence Day address in the district, Deputy Commissioner Mishra stressed the importance of responsible and accessible governance.

She also paid tribute to those who lost their lives in the Possa flash flood on June 24 and appreciated the efforts of local residents, volunteers, officials and rescue teams during the disaster.

She urged the people to "dream big", emphasising the district's potential for growth and development.

Tatung called for collective efforts to build a prosperous Keyi Panyor and said the district should aspire to become one of the best in India and South Asia.

He described Mission Plan 2040 as a reflection of the aspirations of the people and highlighted plans for a new District Secretariat building, which he said was being designed by Padma Bhushan awardee Rajeev Sethi.

He envisioned the building as a "temple of democracy" where public grievances could be addressed efficiently.

The MLA also highlighted soil mapping across the district to help farmers identify suitable crops and improve agricultural and horticultural production.

He thanked those who contributed to the MLA Relief Fund following the Possa flash flood and acknowledged the support extended by the State and Central Governments. Referring to the development of Arunachal Pradesh and the Northeast, he said, "If Arunachal Pradesh has to develop, then Keyi Panyor has to



develop," and called for unity beyond political and religious differences.

The Keyi Panyor celebrations also included cultural performances and the felicitation of meritorious students, competitive-examination achievers, Gaon Buras and Gaon Buris, ex-servicemen and sportspersons.

Workers and volunteers involved in relief and rescue operations during the Possa flash flood were also honoured.

Sports competitions among district administration officials were organised to promote team spirit and camaraderie.

Meanwhile, the Bogong Panchayat observed Independence Day in a solemn manner by paying tribute to three unsung heroes of the Anglo-Abor War of 1859—Lt Jorin Perme, Lt Seltum Yomso and Lt Basing Moyong—at a memorial pillar erected in their memory.

The three had laid down their lives while discharging responsibilities en-

trusted to them by the Romkang Village Council.

Gram Panchayat representatives, village leaders and community members attended the programme, with Bogong Banggo Kebang president Basalung Jamoh as Chief Guest and the ZPM of Bogong-II as Guest of Honour.

Floral tributes were offered to the three heroes, with participants recalling their courage and sacrifice.

The observance also highlighted the importance of preserving local history and passing the stories of such unsung heroes on to future generations.

Across the different celebrations, the common message was one of patriotism, unity, development, youth empowerment and community participation, with public representatives and citizens reaffirming their resolve to build a progressive, resilient and prosperous Arunachal Pradesh.

Central, Arunachal teams intensify measures to contain FMD outbreak

ITANAGAR, Aug 16: Joint teams of the Centre and the state are trying to contain the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) affecting livestock in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang valley, officials said on Sunday.

The joint containment operations involve the State Animal Husbandry and Veterinary department, Rapid Response Teams (RRTs), the district administration, and a visiting central team, focusing on intensive treatment, surveillance, and disease control, an official report said.

According to District Veterinary Officer (DVO) Dr D Riba, an RRT from Itanagar arrived in Anini on August 8 equipped with necessary medicines, following which three dedicated RRTs were constituted and deployed on the ground.

Subsequently, the District Informatics Officer from Tezu in Lohit district arrived on August 11 to spearhead field visits, epidemiological assessments, and sample collection.

A high-level Central team led by Joint Commissioner Dr V K Teotia, arrived in the district on August

13. The central team undertook extensive field assessments on August 14 and 15, covering Acheso, Angrim Valley, Aropo up to Chegu Camp, Mipi Circle, Maro, 9 Kilo, and Matu Camp.

During the visits, the team interacted with Mithun owners, Gaon Buras (village headman), and Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) leaders.

Officials treated infected animals, distributed medicines, collected diagnostic samples from Mithuns, pigs, and goats, and conducted post-mortem examinations.

The central team also visited the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) camp at Acheso, collecting blood samples from goats while briefing personnel on disease epidemiology, biosecurity protocols, and public health safeguards.

Inspections were also carried out at the District Veterinary Office, the Veterinary Dispensary, and the Cattle Breeding Farm (CBF) in Anini.

Local representatives extended strong backing to the operations.

Anini MLA Mopi Mihu provided vital medicines and logis-

tical support, assuring full administrative assistance to protect the livelihoods of farmers and Mithun owners. Dibang Valley Zilla Parishad Chairperson Sadhu Mihu and Acheso' Angrim Valley Zilla Parishad Member Eta Mihu accompanied the visiting experts during field surveys to facilitate community engagement.

The central team departed Anini on Sunday carrying collected samples and specimens for advanced laboratory examination.

Dr Riba confirmed that the RRTs will remain stationed in the district until the outbreak subsides completely, with provisions to deploy fresh relays if necessary.

Reiterating that FMD vaccination is administered biannually, the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department stressed that immunisation remains the primary line of defence. Livestock and Mithun owners have been strongly urged to cooperate with upcoming vaccination drives, report suspected infections promptly, and adhere strictly to recommended biosecurity and animal-waste disposal guidelines. (PTI)

Biren Singh, BJP MLA leave for Delhi



IMPHAL, Aug 16: Former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh and a BJP MLA on Sunday left for New Delhi on Sunday, where they are likely to meet senior party leaders to discuss about a possible cabinet expansion, among other issues.

Singh told reporters at the Imphal airport that he was heading to the national capital.

BJP MLA from Thangmeiband, K Joykishan Singh, also departed for New Delhi around 1 pm.

"The legislators are likely to discuss a possible expansion of the state cabinet and the prevailing situation in Manipur," a senior BJP functionary said.

State Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam was also seen at the airport, though he did not specify to mediapersons where he was headed to. (PTI)

Tapi Darang calls for collective effort to build developed, drug-free East Siang

HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Aug 16: 38th Pasighat East Assembly Constituency MLA Tapi Darang called upon the people of East Siang to work collectively towards building a developed, peaceful and prosperous district while highlighting major developmental achievements during the 80th Independence Day celebrations at Pasighat recently.

Addressing the gathering as Chief Guest, Darang said development was not the achievement of any individual or department but the result of collective efforts by the administration, elected representatives, government employees and the people. Highlighting key achievements, he said 42 of the 43 Pasighat Smart City projects, worth 511.50 crore, had been completed, with the Sewage Treatment Plant nearing completion.

He also highlighted the strengthening of educational infrastructure at Jawaharlal Nehru College and Arunachal Pradesh University, improvement of



school facilities and the functioning of four Girls' Residential Schools benefiting around 300 girl students. Darang said rural development programmes, including MGNREGA, had generated thousands of person-days of employment, while agricultural and horticultural initiatives were promoting mechanisation, irrigation, organic farming and improved livelihoods.

Under the AP Mushroom Development Mission, all 200 tar-

geted beneficiaries had been covered.

On healthcare, he described East Siang's achievement of recording zero indigenous malaria cases for four consecutive years as remarkable and credited doctors, nurses, ASHAs and frontline health workers for the achievement. Calling for continued collective action against drugs and crimes against children, Darang said a safe and peaceful society was the foundation of sustainable development.

He stressed the need to focus on education and healthcare, connectivity, employment, agriculture, tourism, transparent governance and a clean, green and drug-free East Siang.

"Let development reach the last village, the last household and the last person," he said, calling upon people to contribute towards the vision of Viksit Arunachal and Viksit Bharat.

He concluded by calling for unity, service and a shared vision for a brighter and more prosperous East Siang.

BJP-TMP talks on alliance for Tripura village polls continue: CM Saha



AGARTALA, Aug 16: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday said talks between the BJP and the Tipra Motha Party (TMP) are still on for an alliance in the upcoming village committee elections of the tribal council.

His remark came a day before the TMP is scheduled to hold a crucial organisational meeting to decide its future course on the alliance.

Elections to 587 village committees of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACDC) are scheduled in the first half of September.

"Our doors are still open for an alliance for the village committee elections, and talks between the two parties are still on. A final announcement could be made only after stitching the electoral deal with the TMP," Saha told reporters.

In the last TTAADC elections, the TMP won 24 of the 28 seats, despite sharing power with the BJP at the state level.

Saha said the BJP has a tradition of not leaving its alliance partners and expressed optimism about a tie-up with the TMP for the elections.

TMP supremo Pradyot Kishore Debbarma has called an organisational meeting here on Monday to decide the party's strategy for the polls.

"Bubagra has called an important meeting on Monday to decide the future course of action for the village committee elections. Around 300 party leaders are expected to join the brainstorming session to make a final call on the alliance issue," TMP MLA Ranjit Debbarma said.

He said Debbarma has received a call from Delhi to hold further talks on the alliance and is likely to visit the national capital after getting feedback from party leaders.

Earlier, Debbarma and other TMP leaders met BJP national president Nitin Nabin in Delhi but failed to reach an agreement on an electoral understanding. (PTI)

Student protesters stage demonstration, demand NRC before Census in Manipur

IMPHAL, Aug 16: Student protesters demanding implementation of the NRC in Manipur before going ahead with the Census staged a demonstration outside the Directorate of Census Operations here on Sunday, prompting police to fire tear gas shells to disperse them, officials said.

Members of the Campaign for Just and Fair Delimitation (JFD) Students' Wing gathered outside the directorate at Porompat in Imphal East district and raised slogans demanding that no Census activity be undertaken before the NRC is

implemented in the state.

The protesters, who were stopped by security personnel from entering the office premises, also attempted to lock the main gate, following which police fired tear gas shells to disperse them.

One protester sustained minor injuries in the ensuing action, police said.

The protest came a day before the house-listing phase of Census 2027 is scheduled to begin with self-enumeration

from August 17.

The main house-listing exercise is scheduled from September 1 to 30.

On Friday, the student protesters had disrupted a training programme for enumerators and supervisors at Moirang College in Bishnupur district, officials said.

Carrying placards that read "No NRC, No Census", the protesters forced the trainees to leave the premises before the training could begin, they said. (PTI)

District-level development meeting reviews progress in Upper Subansiri

MLA Taniya Soki stresses timely execution and grassroots monitoring of development projects

HT Correspondent

DAPORIJO, Aug 16: A district-level development meeting was held at Daporijo on Sunday to review ongoing developmental activities, implementation of government schemes and key infrastructure and public service-related issues across Upper Subansiri district.

Senior district officers and representatives of various line departments participated in the meeting, which featured department-wise presentations on the status of ongoing works, implementation of schemes, physical progress, pending issues and challenges at the field level.

Departments including UD & Housing, PHED, WRD, PWD, RWD, Power (Electrical), Hydropower, Horticulture, Agriculture, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Industries, Education and Health made presentations during the meeting.

The discussions focused on identifying bottlenecks affecting the timely execution of development works and strengthening inter-departmental coordination.

Officers were urged to ensure proper field-level monitoring, timely completion of sanctioned works and effective delivery of government schemes to intended beneficiaries.

Sector-specific priorities, including road connectivity, water supply, power, rural development, agriculture and allied activities, education, healthcare and industrial development, were also reviewed.

Suggestions from Panchayati Raj representatives and other stakeholders were considered



during the deliberations, with emphasis on incorporating grassroots-level concerns into district development planning.

Speaking at the meeting, Daporijo MLA Taniya Soki appreciated the initiative and stressed the need for close coordination among elected representatives, the District Administration and line departments.

He said development works should translate into tangible benefits for people at the grassroots and called for timely execution, regular field-level monitoring and effective resolution of bottlenecks.

Soki also assured his continued support and cooperation towards strengthening develop-

ment and public service delivery in the constituency and the district.

The Deputy Commissioner stressed that sustained development of Upper Subansiri would require collective ownership, coordinated action and regular monitoring by all concerned departments. The departments were directed to address implementation-related bottlenecks proactively and ensure timely execution of development programmes and projects.

The meeting concluded with a commitment to strengthen inter-departmental coordination and pursue the identified priorities in a time-bound manner in the interest of the people of Upper Subansiri.

East Siang releases DDMP 2026-27

HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Aug 16: The District Disaster Management Plan (DDMP) 2026-27 of East Siang district was formally released recently during the 80th Independence Day celebrations at the Outdoor Stadium in Pasighat.

The DDMP was released by Chief Guest and MLA Tapi Darang during the inauguration of the Disaster Management Exhibition Stall. Deputy Commissioner, East Siang; Superintendent of Police, East Siang; Padma Shri awardee Yanong Jamoh Lego; Heads of Departments and Offices; public leaders; PRI members and other dignitaries were present on the occasion. The release of the DDMP 2026-27 marks an important step towards strengthening disaster preparedness and institutional capacity in the district.

The plan provides a framework for disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery, with emphasis on coordinated action among departments and other stakeholders during emergencies.

The plan is expected to further strengthen the district's capacity to deal with natural and other disasters while promoting a coordinated and resilient approach to disaster management. The occasion reaffirmed the collective commitment of the district administration and stakeholders towards building a safer, stronger and more disaster-resilient East Siang.

'If there is any shame left, you should fold your hands and apologise' Cong should apologise for insulting Vande Mataram on Independence Day: Amit Shah

JAIPUR, Aug 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday accused the Congress of insulting the national song 'Vande Mataram' and demanded that the party apologise to the people and to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who wrote the song.

Addressing a public meeting in Chittorgarh, Shah alleged that during the Independence Day programme at the Congress headquarters, party leader Sonia Gandhi asked Vande Mataram to be stopped midway through the song.

Referring to the Independence Day celebrations held on Saturday, Shah said after 80 years of Independence, 'Vande Mataram' was sung at the Red Fort and all other places where flag hoisting was held.

"Thousands of people faced bullets and lathis and were jailed for singing 'Vande Mataram,'" Shah said, referring to the use of the rev-



olutionary slogan during the freedom struggle.

He alleged that during the Independence Day programme at the Congress headquarters, Sonia Gandhi had asked the party president to stop the song midway.

"We all saw it on television," Shah said, adding that Sonia Gandhi should apologise to the people and to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's immortal soul.

"If there is any shame left, you should fold your hands and apologise to Bankim Babu's immortal spirit and the people," he said.

The home minister alleged that the Congress had forgotten 'Vande Mataram' due to vote-bank politics.

The BJP hit out at the Congress, alleging that its top leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge showed "utter

disrespect" towards 'Vande Mataram' when it was being sung at the party's Independence Day event, and demanded an apology from them.

Several leaders of the ruling BJP also accused Sonia Gandhi of objecting to the singing of the full version of 'Vande Mataram' at the event, a charge that the Congress denied, asserting that there was no attempt to stop the singing of the full version of the national song and she was only asking for a chair for party chief Mallikarjun Kharge as he was standing for a while.

Addressing the gathering at 'Atal Gaurav Smriti Samaroh' held on the death anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Shah highlighted the contributions of the former prime minister.

Vajpayee took several major decisions, including making India a nuclear power despite international pressure after the Pokhran tests, Shah said. (PTI)

Vajpayee stood by govt on national security issues, strengthened country's security: Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Aug 16: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said that former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, instead of putting the government in the dock, stood by it as a responsible MP and contributed to strengthening the nation's security.

Paying homage to Vajpayee at his statue at the Lok Bhavan in Lucknow, Adityanath said, "Be it the issue of national security, whether during the 1965 war, the preceding 1962 war, or the 1971 war, instead of putting the government in the dock, he stood by it as a responsible Member of Parliament and contributed to strengthening the nation's security."

Emphasising that Vajpayee's six-decade-long public life remained without blemish, Adityanath said he worked continuously as an 'Ajatashatru' (one without enemies), guided by the principle that the nation comes first. He began his public life with the 'satyagraha' led by Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee against Article 370 in Kashmir, Adityanath said.



"Whenever the situation demanded, he rose above the party line and gave importance to the country," Adityanath said.

"The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), whose formation was initiated by Atal ji through political co-ordination in 1996 and 1998, remains relevant in Indian politics to this day. Led by the BJP and working in unison with its allies, the NDA has continuously run governments at both the national and state levels over a long period, successfully achieving the goals of good governance," the chief min-

ister said. Referring to the 1999 Kargil conflict, Adityanath said, "Atal ji was as unassuming and simple as he was 'atal' (unwavering) in his resolve. The world acknowledged his determination during the Kargil conflict. At that time, he declared that war had been thrust upon India and that a befitting response would be given. He demonstrated exactly what steps needed to be taken for India's security, ultimately establishing the nation as an atomic power without bowing to any global power." (PTI)

Raut defends Rahul over his remarks against Amit Shah

MUMBAI, Aug 16: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday invoked the title of a popular Bollywood movie to defend Lok Sabha opposition leader Rahul Gandhi's remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah, saying they can't be construed as "unparliamentary".

The Lok Sabha secretariat has sought a response from Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi to two separate complaints of "breach of privilege" filed by BJP MPs Anurag Thakur and Sanjay Jaiswal for his remarks against Shah during a debate on the anti-paper leak bill. The secretariat has asked Gandhi to submit his response to the allegations against him by August 28.

"Idiot is not an unparliamentary word. Calling anyone silly is not unparliamentary. The usage of the word hurts those who are silly. It's government silliness if Gandhi has been issued any notice," Raut told reporters.

Recalling Bollywood blockbuster "3 Idiots", which had received a national award, the Rajya Sabha member argued that if "idiot" is an unparliamentary word, then the Censor Board should be banned. Raut alleged the Union Home Minister does not come to Parliament and answer questions.

"All idiots are being brought together, and the governments are being run in Maharashtra and the country," he alleged.

On Yoga guru Ramdev reportedly warning of a potential new protest over alleged corruption in education and recruitment examinations, Raut said the former seems to have realised the changing direction of political winds in the country.

"Ramdev seems to have realised that the current government will change. He knows about possible raids by Central agencies after the government is changed and is exercising caution," Raut claimed. (PTI)

Kumari Selja demands probe into Hansi murder, police action



CHANDIGARH, Aug 16: Sirsa Member of Parliament Kumari Selja on Sunday called the murder of dairy operator Jeevan Kundu in Hansi tragic, and demanded a high-level, impartial probe into Saturday's police action, including an alleged lathi-charge against protesters marching in solidarity with Jeevan.

The Congress general secretary said the delay in arresting the alleged prime accused raised serious

questions about the state's law and order situation. "In a democracy, the use of force against people peacefully demanding justice cannot be justified," Selja said.

On Saturday, protesters clashed with police as they were prevented from marching to an Independence Day function in Hansi, attended by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, to demand the arrest of the main accused in the murder of Jeevan.

Several people from both sides

were injured, including Superintendent of Police (SP) Hansi Vinod Kumar and a DSP, officials said, adding a case has been registered against 150-200 protesters, including women, under various sections, including attempted murder, following the clashes.

Police said farmers, who arrived on tractors and other vehicles, clashed with police at two to three locations at around 8 am when authorities prevented them from heading towards the event at the Government College ground in Hansi. Police resorted to a lathi-charge to disperse protesters, who also allegedly pelted stones.

In a statement on Saturday, Samyukt Kisan Morcha spokesperson Shradhdhanand Raji alleged that police manhandled and lathi-charged protesters at several locations and arrested many of their associates.

"Unfortunately, people demanding justice through democratic means are being arrested and subjected to lathi-charge," he said. (PTI)

J-K: PDP workers detained for protesting against govt's 'failure' to implement crop insurance scheme

SRINAGAR, Aug 16: Police on Sunday detained several PDP workers who were protesting along with farmers against the Jammu and Kashmir government's alleged failure to implement crop insurance scheme at Shopian district, officials said.

PDP workers and some farmers assembled at Shopian town and raised slogans against the Omar Abdullah led government for failing to implement the scheme, the officials said.

The protestors claimed that weather vagaries like heavy rainfall and hailstorms have severely damaged the horticulture and agriculture crops in Shopian district this year, they said.

Police asked the protestors to disperse peacefully as they did not have the permission for the event, the officials added.

However, the demonstrators refused to disperse following which police detained several protestors, they said.

Former PDP MLA Aijaz Ahmad Mir claimed that he was placed



under house arrest ahead of the planned protest.

"Despite being placed under house detention today, the voice of our farmers could not be silenced. Hundreds of fruit growers gathered at Ghanta Ghar, Shopian, and peacefully protested in support of our genuine demands," Mir posted on X. He said the overwhelming participation of farmers has once again demonstrated that the demand for a crop insurance scheme for apples and cherries is not an individual's issue but the collective voice of thousands of growers across the region.

"The protestors also demanded full compensation for farmers affected by recent hailstorms and other natural calamities," he added. (PTI)

Demanding apology to divert attention from his and his Sahib's colossal failures: Cong



NEW DELHI, Aug 16: The Congress on Sunday hit back at Home Minister Amit Shah after he demanded the opposition party's apology for allegedly insulting "Vande Mataram", saying he is doing this to divert attention away from "the colossal failures of his and his Sahib's".

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh slammed Shah as someone who insulted B R Ambedkar on the floor of the Rajya Sabha on December 17, 2024, and who belongs to an ideology that did not see fit to unfurl the tricolour at its organisation's headquarters till January 2002. "A man who insulted Dr Ambedkar on the floor of the Rajya Sabha on Dec 17, 2024. A man who belongs to an ideology that did not see fit to unfurl the tiranga at its headquarters till Jan 2002. A man who orchestrated the Delhi Police's brutalities on peacefully protesting youth.

"Such a man is now demanding an apology from the Congress to divert attention away from the real issues of the day and away from the colossal failures of his and his Sahib's," Ramesh said in a post on X.

His remarks came after Shah accused the Congress of insulting the national song, "Vande Mataram", and demanded that the party apologise to people and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, who wrote the song. Congress's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said when lathis rained down for chanting "Vande Mataram", it was the Congress that had sounded the bugle of freedom through this song.

"At that time, people associated with the Sangh either fled with their tails tucked between their legs or wagged their tails to please their

British masters," Khera said.

Several Congress leaders also shared on social media Ramesh's speech in the Rajya Sabha on December 10, 2025, during a debate marking 150 years of "Vande Mataram".

Participating in the debate, Ramesh had accused the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of distorting history and insulting freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country.

"Those who have spoken from the other side have proved.... They wanted to be historians, but they have become 'distortions'," Ramesh had said in the Rajya Sabha.

He had given details of letters exchanged between people, such as Subhas Chandra Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru, over "Vande Mataram".

"Rajendra Prasad wrote to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on September 28, 1937, raising concerns and worries prevalent in large sections of our political system on Vande Mataram, and requesting Patel that the Congress Working Committee (CWC) take a stand. Was it appeasement? Are you accusing Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel of appeasement?" Ramesh had asked the ruling party members.

"On October 28, 1937, the CWC passed a resolution on Vande Mataram.... Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Acharya Kripalani, G B Pant.... They were all present," he had said.

Ramesh had pointed out that Tagore had advised the CWC in October 1937 that it pass a resolution to adopt the first two stanzas of "Vande Mataram", which were later adopted as the national song.

AAP's Sanjeev Jha seeks meeting with Delhi LG over 'bicycle, medicine, rice scams'

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: AAP MLA and Delhi Assembly Chief Whip (Opposition) Sanjeev Jha wrote to Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu seeking a meeting to present information and documents regarding alleged irregularities in bicycle, medicine and rice-related matters.

In his letter, Jha said he wanted to place the available information and documents before the lieutenant governor so that the matters could be examined and reviewed in a fair and detailed manner.

"I have written a letter to LG Taranjit Singh Sandhu providing detailed information, documents, and other important facts related to the serious cases of the bicycle scam, medicine scam, and rice scam, and have urged him to ensure a fair and thorough investigation into these matters," he stated. Jha also requested a meeting with Sandhu, along with all opposition MLAs and AAP Delhi president Saurabh Bhargava, to present the material connected to the issues. (PTI)

Bihar: Pappu Yadav joins student protesters, stages hunger strike

PATNA, Aug 16: Independent MP Pappu Yadav, who supports the INDIA bloc, on Sunday sat on a hunger strike at a protest site in Patna over alleged irregularities in the 70th Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) exams, and other issues.

Research scholars, along with BPSC and Bihar Staff Selection Commission (BSSC) aspirants, are protesting in Patna's Gardanibagh area over a multitude of issues, ranging from new rules regarding recruitment of assistant professor to inconsistencies in the state civil services exam.

Yadav said the 70th BPSC exam should be scrapped and re-conducted afresh.

"Research scholars have been on hunger strike for the last 13 days, but there is nobody to listen to them. Neither the chief minister nor Bihar's education minister is paying heed to their grievances. The education minister talks about introducing the UPSC mains pattern in BPSC exams, which is bereft of any logic. The entire system is in a mess," he told reporters.



He alleged there were marking inconsistencies in the 70th BPSC exam, frequent question paper leaks, police brutality against protesting students in the state, and disproportionate weightage to the English language in government exams.

"The government itself accepted that the question paper of the 70th BPSC examination had leaked. Such incidents have happened even before. However, when students protest against such inconsistencies, they are beaten up and sent to jail," the MP said.

He charged the government with "continuously committing injustice" against students and "refus-

ing to listen to them".

"Students are seriously concerned about TRE-4 exam notification. Additionally, the government accords disproportionate weightage to English-medium candidates vis-a-vis those opting Hindi, which is contrary to UGC and NET rules," Yadav said.

He accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of labelling all educated youth of the country as 'intellectual Naxals'.

Modi had, during his Independence Day speech on Saturday, said that "while armed Naxals are eliminated in the country, we will have to identify and isolate intellectual Naxals". (PTI)

Girl child welfare: Maharashtra's Lek Laadki scheme process simplified, says minister

The scheme provides financial assistance at different stages of a girl's life

MUMBAI, Aug 16: The Maharashtra government has simplified the Lek Laadki scheme to empower girls, enabling eligible beneficiaries to apply online and receive financial assistance directly in their linked bank accounts, state Women and Child Development Minister Aditi Tatkare said on Sunday.

Parents of eligible girls can now submit applications directly through the 'Aaple Sarkar' portal, while the number of documents required for the application has been reduced, Tatkare said in a statement.

To ensure that previously excluded beneficiaries get an opportunity to avail the scheme, girls eligible from April 1, 2023, will be allowed to apply until August 15, 2027. For new cases, applications will have to be submitted within a year of the girl's birth, the state-



ment said.

Under the revised system, beneficiary details will be automatically fetched using the Aadhar number, and the E-KYC of the beneficiary girl, her mother and father will also be carried out.

The scheme provides financial assistance at different stages of a girl's life. Beneficiaries will no longer have to submit separate applications to receive benefits at subsequent stages, the minister

said.

The assistance will be transferred directly to the linked bank account through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

Tatkare expressed confidence that the simplified process would make the application procedure faster, transparent and beneficiary-centric and help more eligible girls avail themselves of the scheme.

The scheme is being implemented by the Women and Child

Development Department to encourage girls' education, empower them and promote a positive attitude towards girls.

Under the scheme, girls born on or after April 1, 2023, are eligible for financial assistance of Rs 5,000 after birth, Rs 6,000 on admission to Class 1, Rs 7,000 on admission to Class 6, Rs 8,000 on admission to Class 11 and Rs 75,000 after attaining the age of 18 years.

The total financial assistance under the scheme is Rs 1.01 lakh, as per the minister.

For eligibility, the family must be a resident of Maharashtra, possess a yellow or orange ration card and meet the income and other conditions prescribed by the government.

So far, 2,98,695 beneficiaries have received the first instalment under the Lek Laadki scheme, Tatkare said. (PTI)

Dahi Handi festival is celebrated after Krishna Janmashtami Maharashtra govt will try to get UNESCO heritage tag for Dahi Handi festival: Minister

MUMBAI, Aug 16: The Maharashtra government will undertake efforts to get UNESCO heritage recognition for the Dahi Handi festival and send 'Govindas', or participants who form tall human pyramids, to Spain to showcase the traditional celebration, Cultural Affairs Minister Ashish Shelar said on Sunday.

He appealed to Dahi Handi groups to strictly follow safety regulations, traffic rules and other precautions during the celebrations. The organisers should ensure that pedestrians and citizens do not face inconvenience, he said. Shelar was speaking at the 'Krishnanand Sohala' organised by the Maharashtra State Dahi Handi Govinda Association in Parel, Mumbai. The event was attended by representatives of women's and men's Dahi Handi teams, Govindas, and various organisations associated with the

festival.

Dahi Handi festival is celebrated after Krishna Janmashtami, marking the birth of Lord Krishna. Participants, or Govindas, form tall human pyramids to reach and break an earthen pot filled with curd, butter, and milk.

He said the state government would ensure that Maharashtra's traditional festivals are protected with due importance to safety and public concerns.

"We are making efforts to take the Dahi Handi festival to UNESCO's heritage list and will also send our Govindas to Spain," Shelar told reporters.

The traditional practice of building human pyramids and towers is the common link between the Dahi Handi festival and Spain, where communities practice building human towers called castells. Spanish teams regularly visit Mumbai and



Thane to participate in the Dahi Handi festival. (PTI)

3 held with ₹ 4.72-cr smuggled gold in Indore; two DRI officials attacked during seizure



INDORE, Aug 16: The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) arrested three men carrying 3 kg of smuggled foreign gold worth ₹ 4.72 crore following a violent confrontation that left two officials injured in Madhya Pradesh's Indore, an official said on Sunday.

Acting on specific intelligence, DRI officers on Friday intercepted two persons who had arrived from Akola in Maharashtra by car to deliver the smuggled gold in Indore, he said.

Smugglers in the car allegedly attempted to escape even as DRI officers asked them to stop the

vehicle. They also tried to run over the officers, and one of them allegedly picked up a large stone and struck an officer on the head, the DRI statement said.

Both officers were taken to the nearest hospital for treatment, it said. The team searched the vehicle and found 3 kg of foreign-origin gold, and intercepted the receiver, the official said.

According to the DRI, the smugglers allegedly melted foreign-origin gold, imprinting it with an Indian brand to conceal its origin, and in this case, fake 'Agnis' markings were im-

printed on two gold bars. (PTI)

Mumbai Police rescue endangered Loggerhead sea turtle

MUMBAI, Aug 16: Mumbai Police personnel rescued a distressed 100-kg Loggerhead sea turtle after finding it struggling to swim and floating on the surface of the Arabian Sea, an official said on Sunday.

The turtle was brought ashore on the patrolling boat and subsequently handed over to RAWV (Resqink Association for Wildlife Welfare) for treatment and rehabilitation, he said.

A team from the Yellow Gate police station, while patrolling the territorial waters, noticed the turtle in distress and rescued it.

The turtle was examined, treated and stabilised. On the instructions of the Mangrove Cell, it is being shifted to the Sea Turtle Transit Treatment Centre in Dahau, managed by WCAWA (Wildlife Conservation and Animal Welfare Association), by a team of Forest Department officials and RAWV members.

There is no dedicated facility for treating sea turtles in Mumbai, the official added. (PTI)

Jharkhand exam stir enters 23rd day, students to burn effigies of CM, Rahul Gandhi

RANCHI, Aug 16: Students protesting alleged irregularities in Jharkhand recruitment examinations announced they would burn effigies of Chief Minister Hemant Soren and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in all 24 districts of the state on Sunday, alleging that the ruling JMM-Congress alliance "failed to take concrete action" on their demands.

The protest under JPSC-JSSC Reforms Manch entered its 23rd day on Sunday.

The agitators accused the ruling JMM and the Congress of playing politics over their issues, and announced that they would gherao Soren's residence here on August 20, demanding his resignation.

On Saturday, they demanded that Gandhi withdraw support from the JMM-led coalition if the "CM was not listening to him".

They took out a 'Tiranga Yatra' in Ranchi on Saturday to mark the country's 80th Inde-



pendence Day and to press their demand for greater transparency and reforms in the recruitment examination system.

Thousands of students and job aspirants, including two wheelchair-borne demonstrators who were on fast, participated in the 'Tiranga Yatra' from Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium, the site of the ongoing agitation, to Albert Ekka Chowk in Ranchi on Saturday.

Carrying the national flag, the protesters raised slogans such as 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' and 'Vande Mataram'.



"We will gherao the chief minister's residence on August 20. We seek his resignation as both the JMM and the Congress are playing politics with us. We also demand that Rahul Gandhi withdraw support from the JMM-led coalition if the CM is not listening to him," JPSC-JSSC Reforms Manch leader Ravindra Paswan said.

The protesters said they would not withdraw the demonstration until the government addresses their demands, including cancellation of examinations in which

alleged irregularities were found, and ordering of an independent probe into the recruitment process.

The platform of the protesting students has sought a CBI investigation or an inquiry by a panel of retired judges from outside Jharkhand into the alleged exam irregularities.

The JPSC-JSSC Reforms Manch has also demanded cancellation of the JSSC-CGL test and certain Jharkhand PSC examinations that it considers suspicious.

The protesters appealed to students across Jharkhand to assemble in Ranchi for the proposed gherao of the CM's residence on August 20.

They also targeted Gandhi, saying he had expressed support for students but that "no concrete action" had followed.

The students' platform demanded that Congress withdraw support from the JMM-led government if it is unwilling to act on their concerns. (PTI)

15-year-old boy drowns, two friends missing while bathing in Ganga in Patna

PATNA, Aug 16: A 15-year-old boy drowned while two of his friends went missing while taking a bath in the Ganga in Patna's Khusrupur locality on Sunday morning, police said.

The incident took place at Aadilpur Ghat within Khusrupur police station area.

The deceased has been identified as Ankush Kumar, while the two missing boys have been identified as Sundaram Kumar and Raunak Kumar.

All three are residents of Jagmal Bigha village in Khusrupur. Confirming the incident, Khusrupur SHO Sanjeev Kumar Singh said, "Around 9.30 am, three children, all aged around 15-16 years, went to the river to take a bath and started drowning."

"Upon receiving information about the incident, police reached the spot and, with the help of an SDRF team, recovered the body of Ankush Kumar," he said.

The search for Sundaram and Raunak is underway, the SHO added. (PTI)

MCD sanitation worker stabbed to death in Kalyanpuri, accused absconding



NEW DELHI, Aug 16: A 27-year-old MCD sanitation worker was allegedly stabbed to death in east Delhi's Kalyanpuri area, following which several of his colleagues staged a protest demanding the immediate arrest of the accused and compensation for his family.

The deceased has been identified as Anil.

According to police, Anil was attacked with a knife and sustained serious injuries. He was rushed to a hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Police have sent the body for post-mortem and launched an in-

vestigation into the incident. CCTV footage from the area is being examined to identify the attacker.

Anil's family members alleged that they initially received a call from the police informing them that he had met with an accident. When they reached the spot, they came to know that he had actually been stabbed.

The family claimed that Anil was called from behind before being attacked. They said he had no enmity with anyone and could not understand why he was targeted.

Following the incident, several

MCD sanitation workers reached the spot and staged a dharna, demanding the immediate arrest of the accused. They also sought a government job for one member of Anil's family and proper compensation for the bereaved family. "The motive behind the killing is yet to be ascertained, and all possible angles are being examined. We are also trying to establish whether a single person or more than one person was involved in the attack," a senior police officer said.

Police teams are scanning CCTV footage and collecting other evidence from the scene to establish the sequence of events and identify the accused.

The incident triggered tension in the area, with the sanitation workers demanding swift action against the accused and launching a dharna.

Police said efforts are underway to identify and apprehend the accused, and further action will be taken based on the evidence collected during the investigation. (PTI)

Ahead of Amit Shah's visit to Alwar, students detained before proposed protest

JAIPUR, Aug 16: Ahead of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's programme in Alwar on Sunday, police detained some students, saying they were allegedly planning to hold a protest and show black flags over a range of issues, including the demand for restoration of student union elections.

Shah, accompanied by Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, is scheduled to address a public meeting at Vijay Nagar Ground in Alwar later in the day and launch several projects.

Police sources said the students were taken into custody before a proposed protest at RR College. The protesters had planned to raise the issues of lathicharge on students at Jantar Mantar, poor condition of roads, the alleged Matsya scam and demand the restoration of student union elections, they said.

They had also planned to show black flags to register their protest against the government, the sources said. (PTI)

Delhi: 550-km interstate manhunt ends in arrest of 2 in Lal Bagh murder case

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: A 550-km interstate hunt led to the arrest of two men from Uttarakhanda in connection with the killing of a 27-year-old man in northwest Delhi's Lal Bagh area, police said on Sunday.

Accused Aman alias Mulla (26) and Anuj alias Moni (20) were apprehended from a spot near Chapar Toll Naka while they were travelling in a rented car.

Officials said Anuj was also wanted in another murder case registered at the Jahangirpuri police station. The rented car and two mobile phones were seized from their possession.

"The incident took place on August 12 in the Lal Bagh jhuggi area of Azadpur, where police received PCR calls regarding a stabbing and firing. The injured man was rushed to the Babu Jagjivan Ram Memorial (BJRM) Hospital, where doctors declared him dead," a senior police officer said.

According to police, the victim had suffered firearm injuries, with entry and exit wounds in the abdomen and

back, besides a stab injury on his back.

An eyewitness told police that he and the victim were near his house that night. Around 11:30 pm, they went to a shop where they encountered Aman and another person.

An altercation broke out between the victim and the accused, following which Aman and his associate allegedly threatened the two men before leaving the spot.

The accused allegedly returned when the victim and the eyewitness were heading back to their locality and opened fire. While the eyewitness managed to escape, the victim sustained gunshot as well as stab injuries, the officer said.

A case was registered at the Adarsh Nagar police station, a team formed and an investigation launched.

Police said intelligence inputs indicated that the accused had moved towards Haridwar in Uttarakhanda. A team that was subsequently sent to the hill state tracked their movements across locations. (PTI)

'It is our responsibility to honour their sacrifice' Names of 106 Samyukta Maharashtra 'martyrs' to be displayed at AI building: Minister



MUMBAI, Aug 16: The 106 activists who sacrificed their lives during the movement for the creation of Maharashtra are set to receive a permanent place of honour at Air India's new administrative building taken over by the Maharashtra government, state minister Ashish Shelar said on Sunday.

Chief Minister Devendra Fad-

navis has directed that their names be prominently displayed at the building, Shelar said in a statement. The 106 activists were killed during the historic Samyukta Maharashtra movement. Their sacrifice played a key role in the formation of the state.

Cultural Affairs Minister Shelar had written to Fadnavis seeking that their names be displayed

prominently on the facade of the new building. The chief minister has now directed the state chief secretary to take necessary action on the proposal, Shelar said.

"The martyrs whose sacrifice gave us Maharashtra must be remembered by future generations. It is our responsibility to honour their sacrifice on behalf of the government. Displaying the names of all 106 martyrs on the administrative building will be a true tribute to them," he said.

The Maharashtra government recently acquired the iconic Air India building, a defining feature of the south Mumbai skyline known for its prime sea-facing location, for Rs 1,601 crore.

The building is set to become an important centre for the state government's administrative work. (PTI)

Sawan Jhoola Mela draws lakhs to Ayodhya; special Ram Lalla swing arrangements made

AYODHYA (UP), Aug 16: The Sawan Jhoola Mela festivities, considered the Mahakumbh of devotees in Ayodhya, are expected to fill the temple town with a spirit of devotion. The event began on Saturday and will continue until August 28.

According to administrative sources, around 10 lakh devotees are present in Ayodhya. For the first time during the Sawan Jhoola Mela, special arrangements have been made by the Ram temple trust to allow common devotees to swing Ram Lalla, as stated by Mithilesh Nandini Sharan, a member of the religious committee of the trust.

Acharya Indradev Mishra, the ritual in-charge of the Ram temple and manager of the festival, mentioned that for security reasons, Ram Lalla's swing will be taken to Kubera Teela during the Sawan festival, where the 'Jhoolan Vihar' ceremony will be held.

During this time, daily processions of deities from various temples in Ayodhya will take place, culminating in a cultural celebration at Maniparvat, he added.

The Sawan Jhoola has been decorated in more than 5,000 temples of Ayodhya, Mishra informed. Though there are more than 5,000

small and big temples in Ayodhya, the splendour of this festival will especially be worth seeing in prominent temples such as Shri Ram Janmabhoomi, Kanak Bhawan, Raja Dashrath Ji ka Mahal, Asharfi Bhawan, Ram Vallabha Kunj, Divya Kala Kunj, Rang Mahal, Janaki Mahal, Raj Sadan, Roop Kala Kunj and Maniram Das Ji ki Chhavani.

According to local seers, the tradition of celebrating the Sawan Jhoola Mela is very ancient. It is believed that after Ram Lalla's birth, when he was four months old, his mother, Kaushalya, along with the other wives of King Dashratha, swung Ram Lalla and his brothers on a swing while singing Kajri songs. This beautiful tradition has continued for centuries in various temples throughout Ayodhya, including Ram Janmabhoomi, where Ram Lalla is dressed in beautiful attire and swung daily during the month of Sawan.

Additionally, Monday will witness Ayodhya's famous Naag Panchami festival, which coincides with the first Monday of the month of Sawan. Lakhs of devotees are expected to gather at the renowned Nageshwar Nath Temple on this occasion.

Security has been tightened in Ayodhya for the Sawan Jhoola Mela festival; surveillance has been carried out through drones. The entire area has been divided into six zones and 29 sectors. Duties have been assigned in two shifts. SP City Ayodhya Chakrapani Tripathi stated that the deployment of police is being organised based on requirements.

A sufficient number of personnel, ranging from Additional Superintendents of Police to constables, including female officers, have been assigned. PAC, RAF, ATS commandos, and SDRF teams will also be available, along with drone monitoring. Special attention will be directed to Maniparvat.

"We have clearly assigned work and fixed responsibilities among officers so that there are no shortcomings," he noted.

According to administrative officials, special attention will be given to traffic management, crowd control, and emergency services during the festival. An adequate police presence will be maintained from Maniparvat throughout Ayodhya to facilitate smooth movement for devotees. All necessary preparations have been completed at the district level. (PTI)

NICOLE KIDMAN OPENS UP ABOUT DIVORCES FROM KEITH URBAN AND TOM CRUISE

Actor Nicole Kidman has opened up about her divorces from musician Keith Urban and Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise, recalling how she was warned that marrying one of Hollywood's biggest stars could overshadow her own career.

In a new interview with Vogue, the 59-year-old actor reflected on navigating two divorces under intense media scrutiny, saying her split from Urban had been a particularly difficult period but also forced her to confront an uncertain future.

"There was a point where I was very fearful and deeply vulnerable, which is exposing. And then at the same time (I'm) going, 'Well, I can either really not confront it and just curl up, or I can just go forward with an enormous amount of hope,'" Kidman said.

Kidman married Urban in 2006. She filed for divorce in September 2025, citing marital difficulties and irreconcilable differences, with the separation finalised out of court by January, according to the report.

"But at the same time I'm like, 'OK, I didn't expect this. I had a different view of what my life was going to be, but this is what it is now,'" she said.

"You make all these plans and you have all these ideas of what it's all going to be like and then it's... not. You have to adjust. You adapt. The future, it's completely unknown to me right now," she added.

Asked whether her first divorce had helped her prepare for the scrutiny surrounding her split from Urban, Kidman said each experience felt different.

"It's all new. Every time!" she said.

Kidman was 23 when she married Cruise in 1990, while the actor was 28. The couple divorced in 2001.

Recalling the beginning of their relationship, Kidman said she had been deeply in love and did not want her career to influence her decision to marry Cruise.

"Suddenly I was 22, 23 years old and I had this huge movie star husband. But it just seemed completely natural. We just fell madly



in love and it was that simple," she said.

Kidman recalled people warning her that the marriage could have an impact on her career. "I remember people saying to me, 'OK, well

this is really going to affect your career'. I'm like, 'I don't care. I'm in love. I want to be married,'" she said.

"And then I was his wife and they were like,

'See, we told you.' I'm like, 'So what? I wasn't meant to marry the man I love? Of course I'll throw my career away. I don't care,'" she added. (PTI)



INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL OF MELBOURNE OPENS WITH RISHAB SHETTY, DULQUER SALMAAN

The 17th edition of the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM) kicked off in Melbourne on Thursday, with stars including Rishab Shetty, Dulquer Salmaan and Vijay Varma, along with several other artists and filmmakers from across the Indian film industry, in attendance.

The festival, billed as the largest celebration of Indian cinema outside India, will run from August 13 to 23 this year.

The opening event, which set the tone for a festival celebrating the diversity, scale and global impact of Indian storytelling, was also attended by actor Manushi Chhillar, singer Nikhita Gandhi, and acclaimed filmmakers Nikkhil Advani, R S Prasanna.

Kaizad Gustad came with the cast of his Hindi film "Lala and Poppy," Tamil director R. Gowtham, and fashion designer and film director Vikram Phadnis.

Shetty, who shot to worldwide fame with his Kannada-language action thriller, "Kantara", talked about the growing global recognition of Indian cinema and the significance of platforms such as IFFM in taking Indian stories and regional voices to audiences across the world.

"They invited me to represent Kannada cinema, and I'm very proud of it. To see Kannada cinema get such recognition on an international stage is simply marvelous," the actor-filmmaker, who will be honoured with the Leadership in Cinema Award at the festival, said in a statement.

Salmaan shared his thoughts on the changing landscape of Indian cinema and the growing appreciation for Indian films and artists among international audiences.

"It's my first time in Australia. I'm glad that it starts with the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne. I'm happy to be at the festival with my film 'Lokah', celebrating Kerala's folklore mixed with a superhero story. I'm the glad it (film) has traveled so much, more than we could have ever imagined," the Malayalam movie star-producer said.

The 17th Indian Film Festival of Melbourne continued its tradition of celebrating Indian cinema on an interna-



tional platform. The opening press conference marked the beginning of an edition that showcased the richness and diversity of Indian storytelling while creating a space for meaningful conversations around cinema, culture and representation.

Veteran Hindi cinema star Rekha will receive the Excellence in Cinema Award at IFFM. The festival will screen her 1981 cult classic movie, "Umrao Jaan" to celebrate the actor's unparalleled body of work and extraordinary contribution to Indian cinema.

Directed by Muzaffar Ali, "Umrao Jaan" is one of the most defining films in Rekha's career and celebrated 45 years of its release this year.



The festival will have movie premieres, panel discussions, masterclasses and its annual awards ceremony. (PTI)



Mandakini celebrates 41 years of 'Ram Teri Ganga Maili'

Actor Mandakini went down memory lane and shared a picture of her film "Ram Teri Ganga Maili" as it completed 41 years of release.

The film was directed by Raj Kapoor and featured the actor in the role of Ganga Singh. It was released in 1985 and revolved around an innocent hill girl and Narendra (Rajiv Kapoor), a wealthy Calcutta boy. Mandakini, who made her acting debut with the film, celebrated the 41st anniversary by sharing the poster on her Instagram handle on Sunday and called it a "timeless classic".

"Years of memories, love and a timeless classic," she wrote in the caption. The actor said she will conduct a live session on her Facebook to celebrate the film's legacy. It was followed by another post, which featured a picture of the actor's character in the film. "Aaj 'Ram Teri Ganga Maili' ko release hue 41 saal pure ho gaye hain. This film has given me so much but the greatest gift has been the support of the fans. You all have always given love and I want to thank you all for it from the heart," she wrote in the caption. The film emerged as a hit at the box office and was the highest grosser when it was released. (PTI)

Samantha Ruth Prabhu to host Celebrity MasterChef Tamil

Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu is set to host the Sony Pictures Networks show "Celebrity MasterChef Tamil". The show will have Tamil entertainment's most recognisable faces step away from the sets and into the kitchen, as they take on demanding culinary challenges, unexpected twists and the pressure of creating dishes that win both the challenge and the audience, according to a press release.

Sony Pictures Networks India shared the announcement with a post on the Instagram handle on Saturday, which featured the promo clip of the show. "The ultimate culinary face-off begins here, with @samantharuthprabhu leading the way. Celebrity MasterChef Tamil — Coming soon on Sony and Sony LIV," read the caption. Prabhu

said she is excited about the show. "I'm incredibly excited to finally share this with everyone. Celebrity MasterChef Tamil is unlike anything I've done before, and that's exactly what made it impossible to say no. Food has a way of bringing people together, creating memories, and revealing a side of you that the cameras don't usually get to see," she said in a statement.

"What I'm most excited about is watching some of our favourite Tamil celebrities' step into the kitchen, take risks, make mistakes, surprise themselves, and compete with a lot more passion than you'd expect! I wish I could tell you who's cooking, but where's the fun in that? I can't wait for everyone to experience what we're cooking up with Sony Vizha," she added. It is produced by Banijay Asia. (PTI)

Shruti Haasan shares excitement for sequel to Romy and Michele's High School Reunion

Mira Sorvino and Lisa Kudrow are coming back together for a sequel to their 1997 film Romy and Michele's High School Reunion. The second part was confirmed to be in development in June, with 20th Century Studios sharing photographs of Sorvino and Kudrow returning to the set for the film. It has hogged the spotlight again to the spotlight as the two lead actors appeared at the Disney fan event D23 on Friday.

At the event, clad in matching outfits, the actors revealed that fashion is very much a part of their characters, they are still owners of a Beverly Hills-based boutique store, and they are seeking love in the Romy and

Michele's High School Reunion sequel. "We're officially Disney princesses," said Kudrow as she appeared to be in character. Meanwhile, her co-star Sorvino shared, "I always knew we had princess energy."

Mira Sorvino and Lisa Kudrow's reunion for the upcoming sequel has caused much excitement among film buffs on the internet, including celebrities. One of the public figures to share their excitement about the sequel is singer-actor Shruti Haasan. Taking to her Instagram Stories space, Shruti shared Sorvino and Kudrow's image from the Disney event and wrote, "I cannot wait."

Shruti Haasan also shared a news about the actors coming

back for the sequel and added, "Let's gooooo!!! Practical Magic 2 and then this???" For the unversed, Nicole Kidman and Sandra Bullock are also coming back as siblings Gillian and Sally Owens for a second part to the 1998 film Practical Magic.

Coming back to Romy and Michele's High School Reunion, the upcoming sequel also has role reprisals from actors Janeane Garofalo, Alan Cumming, Julia Campbell, and Camryn Manheim. The cast includes Keegan-Michael Key, Breckin Meyer, Rob Huebel, Nathan Lee Graham, and Patrick Warburton. The makers plan a direct-to-streaming release for the film. (Agencies)



Bengali filmmaker Raja Sen dies at 71 after prolonged illness



Veteran Bengali filmmaker Raja Sen, best known for his National Award-winning film 'Damu', died at a state-run hospital here on Sunday following prolonged illness, sources at the medical establishment said.

He was 71.

Sen was undergoing treatment at SSKM Hospital for multiple health complications and was on ventilator support, they said.

A senior doctor at the hospital said Sen's condition had deteriorated considerably in the last few days after he developed complications involving his lungs, heart and kidneys.

"He had multiple complications and his condition remained critical despite treatment. He was on ventilator support," the doctor said.

Sen had initially been admitted to a private hospital following an injury to his lower back. His condition deteriorated during treatment, and he subsequently developed lung and cardiac complications.

He was shifted to SSKM Hospital on Monday, where he later developed kidney-related complications, the sources said.

The filmmaker's death has cast a pall of gloom over the Bengali film and television industry, in which he had worked for several decades.

Sen made his feature film debut with 'Damu' in 1996. The film went on to win the National Film Award for Best Children's Film.

During his long career, Sen directed several feature films, television serials and documentaries.

His films included 'Atmियो Swajan', 'Desh', 'Debi-paksha', 'Krishnakant er will', 'Laboratory' and 'Maya Mridanga'. His 2002 film 'Desh' featured Jaya Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan.

Sen also made documentaries on several prominent personalities and cultural figures, including Rabindra Sangeet exponent Suchitra Mitra. Sen's death marks the end of a long career spanning Bengali cinema, television and documentary filmmaking. (PTI)

India face acid test against England, eyeing end to their 32-year World Cup jinx

AMSTELVEEN, Aug 16: India will face their toughest challenge in the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup pool stage when they take on world No.3-ranked England on Monday. The 32-year wait for a World Cup win over their European rivals adds an extra edge to the crucial Pool D clash.

India began their campaign with a 3-1 win over lower-ranked Wales on Saturday, with captain Harmanpreet Singh converting two penalty corners and Sanjay also finding the net from a set piece.

England will present a significantly tougher examination after opening their campaign with an impressive 4-1 win over Pakistan.

The result has made Monday's contest particularly important under the new World Cup format. The top two teams from each pool will advance to the second stage, regrouped as Pools E and F.

The result against the team they have already played in the first round is carried forward, which could prove decisive in the race for the semifinals.

With both India and England eyeing the top two positions in Pool D, the outcome could have a major bearing on their route to the knockout stages.

India will also look to improve on an otherwise satisfactory opening performance against Wales. The forward line, especially Abhishek and Sukhjeet, created chances but could not finish from open play, leaving the team heavily reliant on set pieces. India started well against Wales, scoring two goals in the first quarter itself, but after that, there was a visible drop in intensity, which could prove costly in the matches ahead.

India will need to address these weaker links against England, who



are likely to offer far fewer opportunities and punish defensive lapses.

Harmanpreet was influential at both ends of the pitch against Wales, but India will expect greater coordination and sharper finishing from its forwards.

The two teams had a closely-fought encounter in the London leg of the Pro League before the World Cup, with both sides winning a penalty shootout and earning bonus points.

England, however, come into the tournament with strong recent form. They lost only two of their 16 matches in the 2025-26 Pro League and finished runners-up behind Belgium, while India finished eighth among nine teams.

Asked about India's Pro League struggles, Harmanpreet had said the team was focused on the World Cup.

"There are ups and downs in the

game, but our focus is currently on the World Cup. We have come well prepared and the team is in form. We will focus on taking it match by match and creating as many scoring opportunities as possible," he said.

India will also hope that the three-day training camp in Switzerland before the tournament helps them handle the pressure of high-stakes matches. England have been among the consistent contenders at the World Cup, reaching at least the final five in each of the last five editions since 2006.

They also made a strong start to their qualifying campaign, defeating Japan 5-0, hosts Egypt 3-0 and the USA 5-0 before beating Malaysia 7-1 and Pakistan 4-1.

History, meanwhile, is firmly against India.

Their last World Cup victory over England came in the fifth-sixth-place match in Sydney in

1994, when India won by a solitary goal.

The teams did not meet in Utrecht in 1998, after which England defeated India 3-2 in three successive World Cups — 2002, 2006 and 2010 and 2-1 in 2014. They did not meet in the 2018 edition in Bhubaneswar, while their most recent World Cup encounter in 2023 ended in a goalless draw.

India will therefore be keen to break a 32-year-old World Cup jinx while also strengthening their position at the top of Pool D. With Pakistan awaiting India on August 19, Monday's match could prove to be the defining contest of the opening stage.

For Harmanpreet and his team, the equation is simple — another win would put them in a strong position heading into the second half of the tournament, while a defeat could make the battle for the top two considerably tighter. (PTI)

Rankings, past performances don't matter in Ind-Pak match: Pak hockey captain Abu Bakar

AMSTELVEEN, Aug 16: The Pakistan hockey team has failed to beat India for more than a decade, but captain Abu Bakar Mahmood is confident of ending that streak at the FIH World Cup, insisting that when arch-rivals meet, rankings matter little and it is the team that performs better on the day that prevails.

India will face Pakistan in the FIH World Cup on August 19. India defeated Wales 3-1 in the opening match, while England thrashed Pakistan 4-1 in another pool D match.

"I have no hesitation in accepting that the Indian team is much better than us in rankings, but in the India-Pakistan match, rankings don't matter. The performance on that day is important... It will only be decided on the day of the match which team is playing well and will win," Mahmood told PTI ahead of the marquee clash.

The Pakistan senior men's hockey team last defeated India 4-3 in the Champions Trophy in London in June 2016. India recently defeated Pakistan 4-3 and 7-1 in the London leg of the FIH Pro League.

"India is the only Asian team to have won medals in two consecutive Olympics. This is a good thing for Asian hockey, and we wish them all the best for the World Cup, but we have also come fully prepared this time," said Mahmood, who was given the reins of the team after a disappointing Pro League performance.

Pakistan is returning to the World Cup after eight years, but prior to that, it had lost all its matches in the Pro League, finishing ninth and last. The Pakistani captain said that their goal in the Pro League was not to win the title, but to learn, and the World Cup will reflect what they have learned.



Just before the team's departure for the World Cup, Pakistan's Dutch head coach Herman Kruis returned home, with goalkeeping coach Bob-Johan Veldhof taking charge of the team.

Asked about the impact it has had on the team, Mahmood said: "Coach Adnan Zakir, Bob, and the support staff have worked very hard over the past month. This has had a positive impact on the team, and the results are showing. We have to surprise and perform well every day. Our goal is the Asian Games, but we would like to reach the last eight in the World Cup," he said. "The World Cup and Olympics are the biggest tournaments in hockey, and if you don't play these two tournaments, you're not participating in world hockey. It's either our good fortune or hard work that we're playing in the World Cup again after eight years," said the 28-year-old, who idolises legendary drag-flicker Sohail Abbas.

"Before the Pro League, we were ranked 14th in the world, and now we're 12th. We played against the world's top teams in the Pro League and learned a lot. After the first two stages of the Pro League, we played the World Cup Quali-

fiers and by reaching the final qualified for the World Cup," said the captain.

"We also tried a few new things in the last two stages. We went to the Pro League to learn, not to win the title, as we hadn't played good matches against big teams in a while. Now, our performance in the World Cup will reflect how much we have learned," he added.

Pakistan were defeated 1-4 by England in the final of the World Cup Qualifiers.

Mahmood and former captain Ammad Butt are the only two players in the Pakistani team who have played in the 2018 World Cup, but the captain said he is ready to face the challenge of managing this young side.

"The core group of this Pakistan team has remained the same for the last two or three years, with one or two players coming in and out. There are four or five players who are on the verge of 100th cap. There's no lack of experience. Two boys will be playing in the World Cup for the first time, but their talent has led to their selection by foreign coaches," he added. He takes captaincy as a challenge and is eager to share his experience with the young players. (PTI)

Sophia Schubert, Arpichaya Yubol share LPGA Tour lead in Portland



PORTLAND (USA), Aug 16: Sophia Schubert birdied two of the final three holes for a 5-under 67 and a share of the lead with Arpichaya Yubol on Saturday in The Standard Portland Classic.

Yubol, the second-round leader, had a 68 to match Schubert at 16-under 200 with a round left on the tree-lined Columbia Edgewater Country Club layout.

The leaders are winless on the LPGA Tour, with the 30-year-old Schubert back on the big tour after finishing 10th in the Epson Tour standings last year. The American — the 2017 U.S. Women's Amateur winner — is ranked 295th in the world and is 125th in the tour's points race.

"I love the Epson Tour. It's great. I loved playing out there," Schubert said. "I think it was a great boost for my confidence. Competition is great and you get the sense of winning."

The 24-year-old Yubol, from Thailand, is ranked 112th in the world and is 28th in the tour's season standings. She finished second this year at Mayakoba and the ShopRite LPGA.

"I try to be relaxed because like be leader group and also the leader score, you cannot stay on your score," Yubol said. "You have to be moving up."

Fellow Thai player Jeeno Thitikul was third, two strokes back after a 67, to take final spot in the last group Sunday. She's chasing her 10th LPGA Tour victory. "We're playing golf because we love to be in contention," Thitikul said. "We love to chasing the trophy."

Narin An shot 66 to get to 13 under.

Schubert rebounded from a bogey on the par-4 14th with birdies on the par-3 16th and the par-4 18th. Playing partner Yubol birdied the first two holes on the back nine to get to 17 under, then had six pars and a bogey — on the par-4 15th — on the final seven. (AP)

Scottie Scheffler with a 68 builds a two-shot lead over Sam Burns and Sungjae Im in Memphis

MEMPHIS (USA), Aug 16: Scottie Scheffler settled in after a rough start Saturday for a 2-under 68, giving him a two-shot lead over Sam Burns and Sungjae Im in the FedEx St. Jude Championship going into a final round where so much is at stake from the top to the bottom of the leaderboard.

Scheffler is trying to break a streak of five runner-up finishes and five other top 4s since his lone victory this year in his first tournament of 2026.

He was at 13-under 197 and will be in the final group with Burns, his closest friend in golf, who got back into the mix with a 62. His year has been marked by close calls in the U.S. Open and British Open, but Burns has no victories to show for it.

This will be the first time they are paired together in the final group.

"It's always a little weird just because I want him to have success so much and I think he wants the same for me," Scheffler said. "Tomorrow we'll go out there and play our game and see where things finish up at the end of the day. It will be competition like normal."

"It will be fun being out there with your friend but it's also a bit weird at the same time."

And it's not just the two of them. Im shot 67 and was tied with Burns at 11-under 199. The next closest to Scheffler was FedEx Cup champion Tommy Fleetwood (68) and Jake Knapp (67), both five shots behind.

Jordan Spieth took another step back and gave himself another Sunday at the TPC Southwind filled with high stress. Spieth is at No. 54 in the FedEx Cup, and only the top 50 advance to the BMW Championship next week in the FedEx Cup playoffs.

The top 50 is the magic number this week because those players are assured to getting into all the \$20 million signature events next year. Spieth, who opened with a 65, didn't make a birdie until the 11th



hole in his round of 72 that dropped him from a tie for fifth to a tie for 19th, which is projected to leave him out of the top 50. He's not alone. Brian Harman came in at No. 65 and shot 69. He was in a tie for sixth, needing to move up a few spots to advance.

"That signature series, it's where you want to be," Harman said. "It's where the best golf is played. I'd love to have a chance." He at least is in all the majors next year from his 2023 British Open victory at Hoylake.

Going into the final day, Im is the only player projected to move into the top 50 — he started at No. 53 and held his own in the final group Saturday with Scheffler.

"I just want to focus on each shot," Im said. "Every shot matters."

Scheffler only hit one green in regulation through the opening five holes. He was in the right rough on the par-5 third and had a clean enough lie to try to reach the green or at least advance it close. But it hit a tree right above him and dropped straight down. He pulled his short iron out of mangled rough to the side of a bunker and still had 111 yards. He hit that to 12 feet and made the par putt.

He bogeyed the next from behind the green, didn't get a birdie until the par-3 eighth and then ran off consecutive

birdies early on the back nine that restored his lead. He also made a 12-foot par save on the 15th hole.

"Any time you're holding those 10- to 15-footers, it's really nice to keep the round going," Scheffler said. "I holed a few of those today. It was definitely important to keep the momentum in the round." The heat index topped 100 degrees, and towels soaked in ice water were available on every tee. Keith Mitchell looked utterly exhausted walking out of scoring, from the heat and from the stress of projections that keep him right at No. 49 with one round remaining.

He was tied for 22nd, along with Maverick McNealy, who was projected at No. 50. Burns is thinking only about winning, and that starts with making up a two-shot deficit on the No. 1 player in the world. The only other time they've played together on a Sunday was the 2021 Tour Championship — both out of contention — though Burns did beat Scheffler with a long birdie putt in a playoff at Colonial in 2022.

"Scottie is obviously playing great, as he always does. He's not going to lay down," Burns said. "He's going to play great tomorrow. So you're going to have to go out there and put a really good round together and see if you can catch him." (AP)

Bengal's U-11 paddlers stand out with top performance in National Ranking TT C'ships

KANPUR, Aug 16: West Bengal emerged as the standout state in the Under-11 section, as the qualifying rounds of the UTT National Ranking Table Tennis Championships showcased a strong display of young talent at The Sports Hub indoor stadium here on Sunday.

West Bengal led the overall U-11 qualification chart with 11 players — five boys and six girls — earning places in main draw singles. Maharashtra followed with nine qualifiers, comprising five boys and four girls, while Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Delhi each produced seven qualifiers each.

In the U-11 boys' singles, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu led the way with five qualifiers each. Haryana and Delhi each had three, while Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh each produced two qualifiers.

Maharashtra's successful players were Rajvardhan Tiwari, Naksh Mahajan, Adhiraj Chauhan, Nirmitt Kute and Aarav Bapat. West Bengal's five qualifiers were Debanshu Chakraborty, Arjun Sen, Mayukh Sarkar, Arik Dutta and Deepam Sardar.

Tamil Nadu's qualifiers were A R Sundaramurthy, M Nibhish, Akhil Vinodh, T K Akshath and M Muhammad Rehan. Among the more closely contested encounters, Pondicherry's M. Tasvanth and Tamil Nadu's M. Nibhish engaged in a five-game battle, with Tasvanth winning 8-11, 13-15, 11-9, 11-6, 11-3. Tamil Nadu's Akhil Vinodh also survived a thrilling contest against West Bengal's Sarbajeer Sarkar, prevailing 11-7, 7-11, 11-9, 5-11, 17-15 to advance.

Odisha's Mohan Sahoo missed qualification despite defeating West Bengal's Avishek Bag 7-11,



7-11, 11-5, 13-11, 11-5. The remaining qualifiers largely progressed without major difficulty.

The U-11 girls' section was dominated by West Bengal, which sent six players into the main draw. Haryana, Delhi and Maharashtra each had four qualifiers, while Karnataka had three. Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Gujarat each had two qualifiers.

West Bengal's six qualifiers were Kritika Saiboo, Shivangi Mishra, Ayushika Deb, Arrietti Pal, Asmita Paul and Varenaya Sarkar.

Three matches of the girls' category in the third round went down to the wire. Karnataka's Nithila Rakshit overcame West Bengal's Riyanshi Das 9-11, 11-7, 11-6, 6-11, 11-7 after the Bengal player fought back to level the match.

Assam's Srijanee Pathak defeated Kerala's Eva Mariya 6-11, 11-6, 8-11, 11-4, 11-9, while Gujarat's Prisha Parekh beat Madhya Pradesh's Tavishka Sunder 10-12, 8-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-8. However, neither could make the main draw.

With 32 players qualifying for each U-11 singles main draw, the results highlight the depth of competition among the country's youngest ranking aspirants.

The U-11 main draw begins on Monday, while the U-13 boys' and girls' qualifying rounds have also begun. (PTI)

Paris Saint-Germain strengthens its attack further by signing winger Mika Godts from Ajax

PARIS, Aug 16: Champions League titleholder Paris Saint-Germain strengthened its attack even further by signing left winger Mika Godts from Dutch club Ajax on a five-year deal.

PSG announced the transfer late on Saturday without giving any financial details. Sports daily L'Equipe estimated the fee to be 55 million euros (\$64 million) including bonuses.

It was the second signing of the day after Spain's World Cup-winning forward Ferran Torres joined from Barcelona for a reported fee of 50 million euros.

The 21-year-old Godts came through the youth ranks at Anderlecht before joining Genk and then Ajax. He played for the Amsterdam-based club's highly rated youth team, Jong Ajax, before breaking into the senior side.

In his first full season, the right-footer scored eight goals in 47



matches overall and made an impression in the Europa League. Last season, he stepped up a level with 17 goals and 15 assists in 44 matches and broke into the Belgian side.

"I can't wait to pull on this (PSG) shirt and experience the Parc des Princes and its supporters," Godts said. "I'll give my all on the pitch to repay the faith

placed in me."

How much playing time he gets remains to be seen, however, given how strong PSG's attack is.

The arrival of Torres followed the summer signing of France winger Maghnes Aklouch from Monaco.

The three new recruits join an attack already featuring Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembélé, France forwards Désiré Doué and Bradley Barcola — who is linked with a move to Liverpool — and Georgia star Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. Dembélé set up Doué for PSG's winner against Aston Villa in the UEFA Super Cup on Wednesday.

It was the first of a possible six trophies this season for PSG, which faced French Cup winner Lens later on Sunday in the Trophée des Champions — a match between last season's league and cup winners. (AP)

British Indian Amit Bhatia-led consortium agrees to acquire minority stake in Liverpool FC

LIVERPOOL, Aug 16: Premier League side Liverpool FC has entered into a "definitive agreement" to sell a minority equity stake to a consortium led and managed by British-Indian businessman Amit Bhatia, with Amazon founder Jeff Bezos among the prominent investors. The 46-year-old Bhatia, son-in-law of Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal, leads and manages 1892 Holdings, which also includes K5 Sports, a K5 Global Fund with Bezos as its lead investor, and EE Capital, the family office of Elaine and Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin.

"Fenway Sports Group (FSG), a global sports, media, entertainment and real estate company, today announced that it has entered into a definitive agreement for the sale of a minority equity stake in Liverpool FC to 1892 Holdings," a club statement read.

Existing owners Fenway Sports



Group, however, will retain majority ownership and operational control of Liverpool, with the strategic investment aimed at supporting the club's long-term growth ambitions. "We are incredibly proud to be investing in Liverpool Football Club and to be doing so alongside FSG. We have the utmost respect and admiration for FSG as owners

and for everything they have achieved at Anfield," Bhatia said in a statement. "To be welcomed as a partner in a club of this stature is a huge privilege. We are making this investment because we believe deeply in Liverpool and its leadership, and we look forward to supporting the club's continued success for years to come," he added. FSG

president Mike Gordon said the consortium shared the group's long-term philosophy and appreciation of Liverpool's identity.

"As we considered this opportunity, it became clear that Amit and the consortium shared our long-term philosophy and appreciation for what makes Liverpool special," FSG president Mike Gordon said. "Their experience and perspective will complement the strong foundation already in place, and we look forward to working together." The investment also brings together prominent figures from the global business and technology sectors, including Bezos, Saverin along with the Mittal family.

Boston-based FSG had acquired Liverpool in 2010 for 300 million pounds and has overseen a period of significant success, including the club's Premier League title in 2020 and its sixth Champions League triumph in 2019. (PTI)

KL Rahul, who had to retire on 77 because of cramps the previous day Padikkal 167, Jurel's fifty carry India to 460/9 on day two

GALLE, Aug 16: Devdutt Padikkal's sophisticated 167 was the centrepiece in India's strong 460 for nine at stumps despite the Sri Lankan spinners growing fangs on a truncated second day of the first Test here on Sunday.

Kuldeep Yadav (12) and Prasidh Krishna (1) were batting at close. Rains of varying intensity and the resultant wet outfield delayed the start of the day's play until 2.35 pm, and the long break seemed to have rejuvenated the Lankans more.

The home bowlers produced better lines and lengths than day one, cutting down the scoring areas of Indian batters, who resumed from a far stronger 288 for two.

It was the perfect launching pad to be in a far healthier position, but the tourists lost seven wickets — some to the Lankan spinners' guile and some to their own indiscretions — for 172 runs.

Padikkal, who started from 131, brought up his maiden 150 in 215 balls when he pulled pacer Asitha Fernando for a boundary.

However, before the left-hander

reached his landmark, India had lost the other overnight batter Rishabh Pant for 39.

Pant seemed impatient to stamp his authority over the bowlers, but the overzealousness ended his stint, as a feeble loft off off-spinner Keshara Nuwantha was snaffled by a running-in Sonal Dinusha.

KL Rahul, who had to retire on 77 because of cramps the previous day, walked in next but could only add four more runs to his overnight score. Rahul failed to negotiate the turn and bounce from Nuwantha, giving a simple catch to Nishan Madhuska at short leg.

Capturing two big wickets by giving away just 12 runs put a spring on Lankan bowlers' steps and the hosts added the big wicket of Padikkal at the stroke of tea to further boost their standing.

The left-hander was deceived on flight by left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya and stumper Niroshan Dickwella did the rest. However, the bigwigs will be delighted to see the way Padikkal responded to the task of occupying a crucial slot like No. 3. It has given them an-



other option even when original resident Sai Sudharsan returns from his toe injury.

India went to tea at 364 for five, and needed a few more runs to really pull away from Sri Lanka.

Ravindra Jadeja was trapped leg

before by Nuwantha immediately after the break, leaving India at 377 for six. But Jurel, who was struggling for runs of late, rose to the occasion to play a nifty innings. There was a huge slice of fortune as Lankan skipper Dhanan-

jaya de Silva grassed Jurel's healthy edge off Jayasuriya at the first slip.

The right-hander was on 29 then, and went past fifty soon for the first time in eight innings.

It was a fluent innings as well,

lifting Nuwantha for a six over mid-wicket and then pulling an expensive Lahiru Kumara for a boundary.

However, Jurel, who added 55 runs for the seventh wicket with Manav Suthar (24), did not stay back to convert his fifty into something bigger.

De Silva took a flying catch at slip off Jayasuriya to atone for his earlier slip-up. But by then India, despite losing wickets, have reached firm grounds with Mohammad Siraj and Suthar producing some heavy blows.

From a Sri Lankan perspective, the home think-tank would have been massively disappointed with two pacers — Kumara and Fernando — who neither were very effective in taking wickets nor contained runs when it was needed.

The knock by Suthar will also please the team management as skipper Shubman Gill had underscored the need for late order batters to chip in with some runs in the absence of injured all-rounders like Washington Sundar. (PTI)

Novak Djokovic ousted from Cincinnati Open

MASON (USA), Aug 16: Novak Djokovic's stay at the Cincinnati Open was a short one. It also might be his last.

The 24-time major champion fell to Thiago Agustín Tirante 2-6, 6-4, 6-4 on Saturday in a match that took 2 hours, 44 minutes in hot and humid conditions.

A 25-year-old from Argentina, Tirante is ranked No. 50 in the world. Djokovic — a three-time Cincinnati champion and No. 5 in the rankings — was playing for the first time since his loss to top-ranked Jannik Sinner in the semi-finals at Wimbledon.

Up next for Djokovic is the U.S. Open, which starts Aug. 30 in New York.

Djokovic appeared to struggle physically in the heat and had his 10-match winning streak in Cincinnati snapped. The 39-year-old told reporters that an unspecified health condition made it difficult for him to play in hot and humid weather.

"It's just a condition that I have, health-wise, that has been bothering me for the past couple of years," Djokovic said. "A lot of issues, especially when it is humid and it is hot. I did anticipate it (would be humid), but there are all these things, like nerves and everything involved that make it worse, and that's what happened."

Djokovic has had plenty of success in Cincinnati, with a 45-13 record and titles in 2018, 2020 and 2023. But he wasn't sure he would return.

"I certainly hope so, but it looks more likely not, unfortunately," Djokovic said. "But let's see what the future brings."

Djokovic saved 13 of the 15 break points he faced. Tirante broke Djokovic's serve in the ninth game of the final set and then served it out.

"I think this is the best win of my career," Tirante said. "I think I really did a good job inside the court. I managed very well the nerves of playing against a legend like Novak."

Eala and Pegula win in women's draw

On the women's side, Alexandra Eala of the Philippines continued her run of strong play with a victory over Elena-Gabriela Ruse, who lost the first set and stopped playing in the second with an ankle injury. Eala — who is No. 20 in the rankings — won her first WTA singles title in Washington earlier this month and has won eight of her last nine matches. (AP)

Confident Sindhu eyes historic sixth World C'ships medal

NEW DELHI, Aug 16: Her confidence renewed, two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu will chase history as India's established stars and emerging talents look to capitalise on home advantage when the BWF World Championships return to the country after 17 years, with the prestigious tournament beginning here on Monday.

Sindhu, already a five-time World Championships medalist, is chasing an unprecedented sixth medal at the global showpiece, having won two bronze as many silver and a gold in 2019.

Only two other players have won five World Championships medals — China's Lin Dan, who collected five men's singles golds, and compatriot Zhao Yunlei, who won three mixed doubles and two women's doubles titles.

A semifinal appearance would assure Sindhu of at least a bronze and take her past the five-medal mark, making her the first player in the history of the championships to win six medals.

The ninth seed has been handed a favourable opening round draw against Ireland's 141st-ranked Sophia Nobel and has a realistic route to the last four. Sindhu could face third seed Wang Zhi Yi of China in the pre-quarterfinals and Indonesia's Putri Kusuma Wardani in the quarterfinals, with top seed and Olympic champion An Se Young potentially standing between her and another final.

Sindhu is high on confidence coming into the tournament after winning the Japan Open Super 750 last month to become the first Indian to win the prestigious title.

"I'm looking forward to the World Championships and since it's happening in India, I'm really excited. Hoping I keep my confidence going from winning the Japan Open and do well here. Looking ahead to get lot of support from the Indian crowd and hope I get a medal here," a confident Sindhu said.

India's women's singles campaign will also feature a debutant in Unnati Hooda, who will open against Myanmar's Thet Htar Thuazar.

The youngster represents the next generation of Indian women's singles players and will be keen to use the event to announce her arrival on the biggest stage.

For fifth seed Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, the target will be another podium finish. The pair is already a two-time World Championships bronze medalists, having finished third in 2022 and 2025.

They have received a first-round bye and will begin their campaign in the second round, with a potential route that could take them towards a quarterfinal against China's Liang Weikeng and Wang Chang and a semifinal against Indonesian duo of Muhammad Fikri and Fajar Alfian.

But the biggest worry will be Satwik's recurring shoulder problem. He has been away from competitive action for about a month after pulling out of tournaments because of the injury, and coach Tan Kim Her has acknowledged that it remains a concern.

Their Singapore Open Super 750 triumph on their return will give them confidence.

India's second men's doubles pair, MR Arjun and Hariharan Amarakumar, will also be looking to make an impression. They will



open their campaign against Ireland's Scott Guilden and Paul Reynolds.

In men's singles, Ayush Shetty has been handed the toughest possible opening assignment.

The 21-year-old will open against defending champion and world No. 1 Shi Yu Qi. Ayush has lost all three of his previous meetings to the Chinese, including the Asian Championships final earlier this year, but he has shown that he can trouble the world's best on his day.

Ayush will need perhaps the biggest performance of his young career to produce an upset.

Lakshya Sen, the 14th seed, has a more manageable start against Austria's Collins Valentine Filimon. But the 2021 World Championships bronze medalist will be eager to rediscover his form that carried him to the All England final earlier this year.

His results since then have been underwhelming, and a deep run in front of the home crowd could provide a much-needed boost. A potential pre-quarterfinal against second seed Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand represents the first major hurdle in his projected route.

The women's doubles challenge will be led by Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who open against Spain's Paula Lopez and Lucia Rodriguez.

They will be joined by World Championships debutants Simran Singh and Kavipriya Selvam, who face Spain's Nikol Carulla and Carmen Maria Jimenez in their opening round.

In mixed doubles, 15th seeds Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto have received a first-round bye and could face sixth-seeded Chinese pair Guo Xinwa and Chen Fanghui in the pre-quarterfinals.

Rohan Kapoor and Rutvik Shivani Gadde, meanwhile, open against Canada's Jonathan Lai and Crystal Lai, with top seeds Feng Yanzhe and Huang Dongping potentially awaiting them in the second round.

But the spotlight inevitably will remain on Sindhu, Satwik-Chirag and Lakshya, all of whom have already experienced the pressure of major championships, while Ayush and Unnati represent a younger generation looking to make their mark. The tournament is also important for India away from the courts.

The Worlds are returning to the country for the first time since Hyderabad hosted the event in 2009. The New Delhi edition is under spotlight after a difficult India Open earlier this year, when concerns over air quality, venue hygiene, bird droppings and incidents involving stray animals attracted considerable attention.

The Sports Authority of India, Badminton Association of India and other agencies have since worked on the venue upgrades and operational arrangements to ensure that the mega-event runs without the disruptions. (PTI)

Bangladesh claims historic first win in Australia

DARWIN (AUSTRALIA), Aug 16: Bangladesh completed a stunning nine-wicket victory over Australia in the first test on Sunday, securing its first win on Australian soil and only its second victory over top-ranked Australia.

After making a vital half-century with the bat, Mehidy Hasan Miraz took five wickets for Bangladesh in the second innings to restrict Australia to a lead of just 56 runs, as the hosts were bowled out for 284 midway through the afternoon session at Darwin's Marrara Oval.

Bangladesh suffered some early nerves in its chase when Josh Hazlewood (1-5) dismissed first-innings centurion Tanzid Hasan for a duck, but Shadman Islam (25 not out) and Mominul Haque (30 not out) held their composure to reach the target in 14.2 overs sparking wild celebrations within the contingent of Bangladesh fans seated behind the team's dugout on the boundary. "This is the biggest win so far for Bangladesh in any format," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said. "We will do something special in the future."

The victory was celebrated back home, too, with Shanto taking a congratulatory video call from Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in the dressing room.

"These are special moments for us, as I believe everyone back home is enjoying our success," Shanto said in comments on the espnricinfo website. "We get these moments very few times in our life, so we should spend the whole day in celebrating this win."

Cameron Green scored his third test century, and his first in Australia, making a composed 104 from 201 balls to lead Australia's resist-



ance. It was a thoroughly deserved result for Bangladesh, which had outplayed Australia for much of the test after home captain Pat Cummins won the toss and elected to bat.

Australia managed just 198 in its first innings, with man-of-the-match Hasan Mahmud taking 6-55, before Bangladesh capitalized as the pitch flattened to post 426 and take a commanding 228-run lead. That advantage ultimately proved too much for Australia to overcome, despite Green's breakthrough century, as Bangladesh secured a historic victory, and only its second against Australia after its maiden win in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2017.

For Australia, the defeat will rank as one of its most humiliating home reverses in its 149-year test history with considerable pressure now on the team's selectors to make changes ahead of the second test in Mackay, Queensland state, starting Aug. 22.

"I think every time there's a game like this, you always look at your match-ups and your make-up with the team for the next one," Cum-

mins said. "We're pretty good at bouncing back, so no doubt the batters and every group will get together and have a good think about this one and where we can improve."

Mehidy takes five

With the door still ajar for Australia at 161-4 at the start of Day 4 with Green and Alex Carey at the crease, Mehidy (5-66) firmly closed it with a superb spell either side of lunch to claim four more wickets, to accompany the huge wicket of Steve Smith late on Day 3 to turn the match decisively for Bangladesh.

The off-spinner picked up Alex Carey (30) with the wicketkeeper batter expertly caught behind by his counterpart Litton Das. Mehidy then produced a superb delivery that straightened past the bat of Beau Webster (5) and clipped the top of off stump to have Australia at 193-6, still trailing by 35 runs and with the tail exposed.

Pat Cummins' (8) stay was brief as he offered a catch to Hasan Miraz at short leg to give Mehidy his third wicket of the morning.

Mehidy's deserved fifth was Nathan Lyon leg before wicket to end Australia's innings.

Green's defiance Green was the only constant across Australia's innings and combined with the tail to help the hosts avoid the ignominy of a home innings defeat and frustrate Bangladesh.

The allrounder brought up a deserved century after lunch from 192 balls, with four boundaries and a six. His celebration was understated given the circumstances for his team, but should not detract from what was his finest innings for Australia in his 37 matches, many of which have been accompanied by questions as to the merits of his selection in the team. (AP)

Carlsen embraces Mourinho-style pragmatism to defend EWC chess title

PARIS, Aug 16: Magnus Carlsen said he swapped his trademark appetite for complex positions for a more pragmatic, Mourinho-inspired approach at the Esports World Cup, and the strategy paid off as the Norwegian world No. 1 successfully defended his chess title here.

Carlsen secured back-to-back EWC chess title on Saturday, defeating Belarusian grandmaster Denis Lazavik 2-0 in the best-of-three grand final. He won both sets 3-1 and finished the tournament without losing a single match.

The 35-year-old revealed that his conservative approach was a deliberate strategy, shaped partly by the demanding 10-minute, no-increment format and partly by concerns over his physical condition during the tournament.

"I started watching the Mourinho documentary on Netflix the other day and they were talking about the first season that they were just winning 1-0 every match and I was thinking, well, that sounds pretty nice, doesn't it?" Carlsen told reporters.

"In this tournament I stayed very, very true to not trying to do much and obviously I wanted to save energy



when I could and there were some boring games because of that, but that's how it is. I don't know if it's a general change but for this tournament it was a very conscious choice."

The reference was to Portuguese football manager Jose Mourinho, whose teams have long been associated with pragmatic, result-oriented football. Carlsen, who had been battling illness during the tournament, said he initially felt he was in "survival mode" before gradually recovering.

"I really needed the day off. On Thursday, that's kind of the day where I felt the worst as well. And then throughout Friday, I started feeling a

bit better," he said.

"And then I started thinking, you know what, I could maybe actually do this. Started to see light at the end of the tunnel. Today, again, I felt a little bit better and I was able to kind of make it fun and execute it very well."

Carlsen said he had consciously decided before the tournament to reduce the amount of risk in his play.

"My main thought leading into this tournament was that I was going to be a lot more conservative with my choices, especially considering the match format here," he said.

"Obviously with feeling under the weather as well, following that path became a more obvious choice as well."

The result was particularly satisfying given the circumstances, although Carlsen said his first EWC title last year would probably always occupy a special place. "I think the first one is always going to feel a little bit more special in a way, because it was the first year at the EWC," he said.

"But this is certainly a very big title for me, it's something I've been thinking about for a long time, and I really, really wanted to get this one." (PTI)

Hunt wins 3rd gold as British relay teams dominate

BIRMINGHAM, Aug 16: Amy Hunt earned her third gold medal as Britain extended its sprint dominance at the European championships by winning both the men's and women's 4x100 relay at Alexander Stadium on Saturday. Hunt, the 100 and 200 champion who on Sunday will bid for a fourth gold this week, ran the second leg for the women's team that blew away the competition to finish in 42.05 seconds — more than 1 second faster than second-place Switzerland (43.12).

Romell Glave, the men's 100-meter champion, ran the anchor leg to clinch victory for the men's quartet in 38.45 seconds. "We've won nearly all the medals, I think," Hunt told the BBC.

Dina Asher-Smith, who earned her seventh career gold at the European championships, ran the first leg. Hunt handed off to Success Eduan, who brought a big lead to Imani Lansiquot. "These girls are so phenomenal," Lansiquot told the broadcaster. "They put me in the best possible position where I could just be free and enjoy it. That will be a memory for life."

Three-peat for Ukraine's Mahuchikh

Olympic champion and world record holder Yaroslava Mahuchikh cleared 1.97 meters to win her third consecutive high jump title at the European championships. It's the first gold for Ukraine this week.

Mahuchikh is from Dnipro, a city located not far from the front lines of the ongoing war with Russia.

O'Connor golden for Ireland

Ireland's Kate O'Connor clinched gold in the women's heptathlon after finishing the final event — 800 meters — in third place. She ran it in 2 minutes, 11.74 seconds. (AP)

Formula E keen to return but India need to have the will to host: Longo

LONDON, Aug 16: Formula E is keen to return to India but is waiting for an Indian city to make the first move, championship co-founder Alberto Longo said, three years after the all-electric series made a promising Hyderabad debut but was dropped from the calendar amid contractual and political issues.

The all-electric world championship made its India debut with the Hyderabad E-Prix in February 2023, but the race was dropped from the calendar after a change of government in Telangana, with the new administration deciding not to fulfil the Host City Agreement signed by the previous dispensation. Promoter Greenko also withdrew as the multi-year arrangement got complicated.

Longo said Formula E remains

eager to return to what he considers one of the world's most important markets for electric mobility.

"We would love to go back to India. Unfortunately, I have to tell you that we don't have any live conversation at the moment, but it's such an important market for Formula E that we would absolutely love to be back there," Longo told PTI in an interview during the London season finale.

Asked what needed to happen for India to return to the calendar, Longo said Formula E was ready to engage but wanted an invitation from an Indian city or authorities.

"There needs to be a will to host a Formula E event. Trust me, we are really ready to come back to India. We are discussing with more than 80 cities worldwide today simultaneously. Unfortunately, we



don't have anyone from India knocking at our door, and that is what needs to change, the willingness of the Indian cities to host a Formula E event."

Formula E CEO Jeff Dadds

echoed the same sentiment and hopes the country could return to the calendar in the coming seasons.

"We have a number of very, very high profile Indian partners. Obviously Mahindra up there, In-

focys is a big partner of ours, Tata obviously own the Jaguar racing team, Tata and TCS Jaguar. So we have a number of very important Indian partners," Dadds said.

"And the growth coming out of India and the EV potential in India is absolutely enormous. So India remains a priority market for us. Our ambition is to return to race in India. We have to find the right opportunity between the street circuit," he said.

"Now traditionally we've raced on street circuits. The Gen 4 car makes that much more complicated because we need surfaces and circuits that allow the car to stretch its legs."

Dadds added: "I would be very, very optimistic over the coming seasons that you'll see us return to India. Not exactly sure where." (PTI)