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Three of family among four dead in Guwahati landslides



GUWAHATI, Sept 1: Four people, including three members of a family, died and one was injured in two landslides in Assam's Guwahati on Tuesday, officials said.

Incessant rain since early Tuesday is suspected to have triggered both the incidents, with several localities of the city inundated.

Three members of a family died, and another was injured in a landslide in the Mathgharia area of the city, Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) officials said.

The incident occurred when they were sleeping in their house.

"A couple and their daughter died in the landslide. The bodies were recovered and sent for post-mortem examinations," an official said.

The couple's son was rescued from beneath the debris and was taken to the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital, he added.

The deceased have been identified as Nagen Rajbongshi (50), his wife Sonu Rajbongshi (38) and their daughter Karabi Rajbongshi (11). Their 19-year-old son, Biplob, was injured in the incident, the ASDMA said.

Locals said Nagen worked as a daily wage labourer and the family was living in the area for

several years.

According to them, the incident occurred at around 8 am, with the house flattened by the mudslide.

"The son was saved because his head was stuck inside a drum. It saved him from the major impact of the landslide," a local said.

Biplob was working in a private company to help the family, while his sister, who was killed in the incident, was studying in class 5.

Local Dimoria MLA Tapan Das, who rushed to the spot after the incident, said the government will extend all assistance to the survivor.

"It is a very sad incident. We offer our condolences to the bereaved family. We will ensure that the survivor gets all due assistance," Das added.

A risk assessment of other houses in the area was being carried out, and if needed, the residents would be evacuated, the legislator said.

In another landslide in Satagaon area, a 65-year-old woman was killed, the ASDMA officials said.

A rock partially damaged the victim's house, they said, adding that several family members of the deceased had suffered minor injuries. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Assam govt transfers over ₹ 25 cr as interim relief to flood-hit families in 3 districts

New benchmark set for relief, rehab: CM

GUWAHATI, Sept 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said an interim relief of ₹ 25.12 crore was transferred to 16,746 families affected by this year's devastating floods.

He said each flood-hit family in Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat districts received ₹ 15,000.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma said that Assam faces floods every year, but this time the state government has set a new benchmark for helping the affected people, and asserted that such an initiative was never seen before.

"The state's revenue department has created a new benchmark for relief and rehabilitation of the affected people. Its effort has not only helped them but also ensured they return to their normal lives at the earliest," he said.

The state government is providing one-time interim assistance to 1,17,095 households, disbursing a

total of ₹ 175 crore for this purpose, the CM said.

Sarma said women beneficiaries under the 'Orundoi' scheme in Sivasagar and Charaideo districts will receive ₹ 2,000 this month.

"Each beneficiary (under the 'Orundoi' scheme) usually gets Rs 1,250 per month, but last month they received ₹ 2,500 each in the flood-affected districts of Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat," the chief minister said.

The government has so far released ₹ 15 crore for repair of schools, ₹ 11 crore for anganwadis and ₹ 16 crore for 'namghars' (Vaishnav monasteries), Sarma said.

The repair of 405 roads and 244 water supply projects have also been taken up in the four flood-affected districts, he said.

Altogether, ₹ 300 crore has been released so far for repair and restoration work, the CM said,



adding that after the damage assessment is completed, the government expects to spend more than ₹ 1,000 crore for relief and restoration work.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has assured us that there will be no problem of funds for the benefit of the affected people," he said.

On damage assessment, Sarma said that 1,182 teachers had conducted a digital survey and identified 95,545 families affected by the floods.

The second phase of the flood damage assessment will be conducted this month, he added.

The chief minister said that due

to the floods, banks were asked to extend a moratorium to those who had taken loans.

"A total of 14,227 flood-affected people had applied for a moratorium, and banks have extended the facility to 13,943 of them so far," Sarma said.

On insurance claims, Sarma said a total of 2,728 families have received the benefit so far in the four severely affected districts.

The CM also released funds under the Chief Minister's Foreign Language Initiative for Global Hunt (CM-FLIGHT) for the Japanese language training programme.

Each selected candidate will receive ₹ 1 lakh as training support in three instalments, along with ₹ 50,000 per candidate as post-placement assistance.

Sarma said the state government is committed to creating a skilled, globally competitive and employment-ready (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

NC Hills Autonomous Council changed to Dima Hasao Autonomous Council

HAFLONG, Sept 1: The name of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) in Assam has been changed to Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (DHAC), according to an official communique.

The order, issued on Monday, has directed all departments to strictly use the nomenclature 'Dima Hasao Autonomous Council' or DHAC in all official records.

The order was issued from the Office of the Principal Secretary at the Council Secretariat in Haflong.

The directive referred to a notification issued on May 18 this year, which changed the name of the council from North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council to Dima Hasao Autonomous Council.

All heads of departments have now been asked to use the new name (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

SC quashes all FIRs against CJP protesters; Sept 5 march called off

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: The Supreme Court on Tuesday quashed all FIRs registered against students who participated in the Cockerroach Janta Party-led protests across the country between July 20 and 25, prompting the group to call off its September 5 march in the national capital.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant also directed the Centre to provide within three months compensation to families of students who ended their lives over the NEET paper leak.

Closing the criminal proceedings against the protesters at the Centre's request, the bench said, "Keeping in view the future prospects of the young protesters, we invoke our powers under Article 142 of the Constitution to do complete justice."

Article 142 empowers the apex court to pass any orders to do complete justice.

The order came after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said that the Centre and the states of Maharashtra, Assam, Bihar and West Bengal sought quashing of the FIRs linked to the protests.

According to the Centre's request, the apex court, however, permitted Delhi Police to register fresh FIRs against 2,873 individuals with serious criminal antecedents who were present in the Jantar Mantar protest.

"Such an FIR can be registered without prejudice to the rights of the affected parties to seek remedies available to them in law, and strictly confined to the two

categories of allegations referred to in paragraph 4, namely, bodily harm and destruction of property," the bench said.

The bench, also comprising Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana, took note of the submissions of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and widened the ambit of its order. "If there is any other FIR registered with regard to same protest between July 20 to July 25 in any of the states or UTs, which are not before this court, they shall not be pursued and will be treated as closed," it said.

Dealing with the award of compensation to the families of those who committed suicide, the court directed the Centre to formulate a nationwide policy on the issue and pay the money within three months to the aggrieved families.

"The Union of India shall formulate a policy with respect to payment of compensation on a pan-India basis. Such policy shall be circulated to all the State Governments concerned and implementing authorities, so that it can be adopted as a regular mechanism for payment of compensation."

"As regards the students who committed suicide in connection with NEET 2026, compensation shall be paid to the affected families after formulation of the policy. The policy shall be formulated within a period of three months," the bench said.

CJP co-convenor Saurav Das appeared before the bench and read out a statement (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

TMC to contest Nagaon bypoll, launches new state HQ



GUWAHATI, Sept 1: The Assam unit of the Trinamool Congress on Tuesday inaugurated its new state headquarters in Guwahati and announced that the party would contest the by-election to the Nagaon Lok Sabha constituency.

The office was inaugurated by the party's Rajya Sabha MP from West Bengal, Nadimul Haque, and Assam Pradesh TMC in-charge

president and MLA Sherman Ali Ahmed.

An organisational meeting attended by nearly 300 party workers was held, and it was formally announced that the TMC would contest the Nagaon Lok Sabha bypoll, a party statement said.

Addressing reporters after the meeting, Ahmed said the party workers were always ready to serve

the people.

"We will contest the Lok Sabha by-election. The candidate will be decided through a specific procedure. The candidate should be highly educated, honest and dedicated, and should be able to speak clearly either in Hindi or English," he added.

Ahmed said distribution of application forms has started from the new office and interested aspirants have been requested to collect and submit the forms by September 5.

"At present, the country and the state are suffering from misgovernance of the BJP. People are looking for a strong alternative against both BJP and Congress, and this time that alternative will be Trinamool," he added.

The MLA said TMC's main plank in the election battle will be struggle for rights of indigenous people and their burning problems.

A bypoll in Nagaon Lok Sabha seat has been necessitated after former Congress leader Pradyut Bordoloi (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Enhanced landing safety system commissioned in Guwahati airport

GUWAHATI, Sept 1: A 570-metre precision approach lighting system (PALS) has been commissioned in Guwahati airport to provide pilots with improved visual references while landing in low visibility conditions, an official statement said on Tuesday.

The city experiences seasonal weather challenges, including heavy monsoon rainfall and periods of reduced visibility that can impact flight operations but the upgraded landing infrastructure extends the airport's approach lighting from the earlier 180 metres to 570 metres, providing approach support to arriving aircraft, it said.

The newly commissioned PALS offers several operational benefits, including enabling pilots to identify the runway environment sooner during approach, assisting in maintaining correct alignment with the runway centre-line, and supporting (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

'US portfolio holdings in Indian equity were valued at USD 380 billion at the end of 2025'

US investments in Indian securities rise threefold in 2025

WASHINGTON, Sept 1: The value of US investments in Indian securities has witnessed a three-fold rise from USD 130 billion in 2015 to USD 390 billion in 2025, according to the data released by the US Treasury Department here.

India ranked 12th in the list of 30 nations with significant exposure to US portfolio holdings. The maximum US investments were in the Cayman Islands, amounting to USD 3.073 trillion, followed by the UK (2.007 trillion), Canada (1.886 trillion), Japan (1.483 trillion) and Ireland (1.182 trillion).

The preliminary data from an annual survey of US portfolio holdings of foreign securities at year-end 2025 were released on Monday.

The annual survey of US portfolio holdings was undertaken jointly by the US Department of the Treasury, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, and the Board



of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

The survey measured the value of US holdings of foreign securities at year-end 2025 at approximately USD 19.3 trillion, with USD 15.3 trillion held in foreign equities, USD 3.6 trillion held in

foreign long-term debt securities (original term-to-maturity in excess of one year), and USD 0.4 trillion held in foreign short-term debt securities.

The previous survey, conducted as of year-end 2024, measured the value of US holdings at

USD 15.8 trillion, with USD 12.1 trillion held in foreign equities, USD 3.4 trillion held in foreign long-term debt securities, and USD 0.4 trillion held in foreign short-term debt securities.

According to the survey, US portfolio holdings in Indian equity were valued at USD 380 billion at the end of 2025, compared with USD 373 billion a year earlier.

Holdings of Indian long-term debt securities stood at USD 11 billion, up from USD 10 billion.

The figures measure the market value of Indian securities held by US investors. They do not include foreign direct investment in factories, infrastructure or other physical assets.

US portfolio holdings in China were valued at USD 318 billion with USD 300 billion in Chinese equities and USD 17 billion in long-term Chinese debt securities. (PTI)

BISHKEK, Sept 1: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday urged the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to confront countries using terrorism as an instrument of state policy and reject "double standards" in the collective fight against terror financing and recruitment, remarks widely viewed as a direct swipe at Pakistan.

In the presence of Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Chinese President Xi Jinping and many other global leaders, Modi said that "we cannot remain confined to an action-reaction approach" in the fight against terrorism as terrorist activities continued to pose a serious challenge to humanity.

Calling for decisive action within the SCO, the Prime Minister advocated for the comprehensive dismantling of terrorist ecosystems, including funding net-

works, recruitment pipelines, and territorial sanctuaries. He further affirmed that states utilising terrorism as a policy tool must be warned that terrorism can never be a "strategic asset for anyone."

Modi, expressing concerns over the West Asia crisis, said India has consistently called for all tensions and conflicts to be resolved not on the battlefield, but through dialogue and diplomacy.

The prime minister, in an apparent reference to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), said connectivity projects should respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries as it is the fundamental spirit of the SCO Charter.

India has been critical of BRI as part of it passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

However, the central theme of the prime minister's address appeared to be his call to the SCO to work unitedly to combat terrorism.

His remarks were largely seen as directed at Pakistan's support to various terror groups.

"Terrorism continues to pose a serious challenge to humanity as a whole. In the fight against terrorism, we cannot remain confined to an action-reaction approach," he said.

"We must dismantle the entire ecosystem of terrorist financing, recruitment, radicalisation, and safe havens. We must speak with one voice and make it clear that there can be no place for double standards on this serious issue," he said.

"We must send a strong message to countries that use terrorism as an instrument of policy and provide safe haven and support to terrorists that terrorism can never be a strategic asset for anyone," Modi added.

The prime minister, delving into the situation in West Asia, said it demonstrated (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Family alleges prolonged torture by in-laws; husband detained as police probe death

Crowd protests at Mailoo outpost over suspected murder of woman

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Sept 1: Tension prevailed at the Mailoo Police Outpost in West Karbi Anglong on Tuesday after an agitated crowd gathered demanding immediate action against those allegedly responsible for the suspected torture and murder of a local woman.

The deceased was identified as Mina Kumari Chauhan, daughter of Ramashankar Chauhan of No 2 Sera Pathar, Kheroni.

She had married Rabindra Chauhan, son of Lalchand Chauhan of No. 2 Nawaibil village, according to traditional religious customs on April 20 this year.

According to her family, Mina began facing physical and mental harassment at her marital home soon after the marriage. The alleged abuse reportedly continued and intensified over time.

Mina was reported missing early Sunday morning, following which



her family members rushed to Nawaibil and began searching for her.

Her body was subsequently recovered from the bank of the Doyang

River.

The family alleged that the body bore serious injuries.

They claimed that there were wounds on the head, allegedly

caused by a sharp weapon, besides burn marks suspected to have been caused by hot water or oil.

The family has alleged that Mina was tortured before being killed and that her body was dumped in the river in an attempt to conceal the crime.

An FIR was subsequently lodged by the family naming seven members of Mina's in-laws' family.

Those named are her husband Rabindra Chauhan, Lalchand Chauhan, Balin Chauhan, Satyanarayan Chauhan, Bigan Chauhan, Digiri Chauhan and Lilawati Devi.

Police have detained Rabindra Chauhan for questioning, while efforts are underway to trace the other accused named in the FIR.

Additional police personnel have also been deployed around the Mailoo Police Outpost in view of the heightened tension and gathering of protesters.

The investigation is underway.

Encroachment, tree felling reported inside Sikhna Jwhlwao National Park

Alleged clearing of forest land and construction of huts raise concerns over wildlife habitat and ecosystem



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Sept 1: Illegal activities are reportedly continuing inside Sikhna Jwhlwao National Park along the Indo-Bhutan border in Kokrajhar district, raising concerns over the protection of the forest and

its wildlife.

According to reports, valuable trees are being illegally felled and forest land is being cleared in parts of the protected area.

The use of weed-killing chemicals has also reportedly been observed,

while small huts are allegedly being constructed inside the forest.

The reported encroachment and other activities have raised concerns over the fragile ecosystem of the national park and the safety of its wildlife habitat.

Environmentalists and wildlife activists have expressed resentment over the alleged encroachment, tree felling and clearing of forest land in the national park under the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

They said maintaining the ecological balance of forests is essential for sustaining wildlife and ensuring the long-term health of forest ecosystems.

"We must protect forest ecosystems through effective conservation initiatives. The concerned authorities need to take immediate and stringent action to stop further encroachment, protect the forest and prevent the destruction of valuable natural resources," they said.

GCU faculty co-discovers new plant species with potential cancer-fighting properties



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 1: A new species of flowering plant discovered in Assam has drawn attention for its potential medicinal significance, with a faculty member of Girijananda Chowdhury University (GCU) among the researchers involved in identifying the species.

Dr Birina Bhuyan, Assistant Professor in the Department of Botany at GCU's Azara campus, collaborated with Guwahati-based botanist Dr Selim Mehmud in identifying the plant, which has been named *Ophiorrhiza assamen-*

sis.

The discovery was formally published in the international taxonomy journal *Phytotaxa*.

The plant was found in a moist and shaded habitat near Satargaon Road in Kamrup Metropolitan district.

It is a small perennial herb characterised by large, ribbed leaves and clusters of small white flowers. The species belongs to the Rubiaceae family, commonly known as the coffee family.

Researchers said its genus, *Ophiorrhiza*, is known as a natural

source of camptothecin, a compound used in medicines for treating colon and other cancers.

However, the discovery itself does not establish that *Ophiorrhiza assamenensis* has cancer-fighting properties, and further pharmacological research would be required to determine its medicinal potential.

The researchers have also raised concerns over the plant's survival. At present, the species is known only from a highly localised population, making it vulnerable to habitat loss caused by deforestation and rapid development in the region.

Dr Bhuyan and Dr Mehmud have called for immediate conservation measures to protect its habitat and recommended that the species be provisionally assessed as "Data Deficient" under IUCN guidelines.

The discovery has highlighted the botanical diversity of Assam and the need for greater conservation of habitats that may harbour rare and potentially valuable plant species.

NFR cancels four trains, reschedules two amid hill section restoration

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 1: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced further changes to train services in the Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section as restoration work continues near New Harangajao station. Train operations in the affected section are currently being maintained through Line-3 with enhanced safety measures following the settlement of railway tracks on Lines 1 and 2. As part of the latest changes, Train 15617 Guwahati-Dullabcherra Express, scheduled to commence its journey on September 2, and Train 15618 Dullabcherra-Guwahati Express, scheduled for September 3, have been cancelled. Similarly, Train 15615 Guwahati-Silchar Express scheduled for September 2 and Train No 15616 Silchar-Guwahati Express scheduled for September 3 have also been cancelled. NFR has also rescheduled two trains. Train 15650 Narangi-Agartala Express, scheduled to depart on September 2, will now leave Narangi at 6.30 pm. Train 15646 Silchar-Charapalli Express, also scheduled for September 2, has been rescheduled to depart from Silchar at 10.10 pm. The changes have been announced in view of the ongoing restoration work at New Harangajao.

Around 500 personnel are working round the clock at the site, with 22 PC excavators, 12 JCBs, 18 tractors and specialised equipment, including pneumatic drills and hydraulic piling rigs, deployed for the restoration work.

The New Harangajao yard has been facing continuous settlement and lateral shifting of the railway formation since July 20, disrupting normal train operations.

As a safety measure, train movement has been restricted to Line No 3, where operations are continuing under enhanced safety measures. According to NFR, the problem has been linked to a shift in the natu-

NFR expects Line No 2 at New Harangajao to reopen by Sept 5

Around 500 personnel and heavy machinery deployed as railway undertakes round-the-clock restoration of affected hill section

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 1: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) expects to restore Line No 2 at New Harangajao station by September 5 as work continues on a war footing to stabilise the affected railway formation in the Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section.

Around 500 personnel are working round the clock at the site, with 22 PC excavators, 12 JCBs, 18 tractors and specialised equipment, including pneumatic drills and hydraulic piling rigs, deployed for the restoration work.

The New Harangajao yard has been facing continuous settlement and lateral shifting of the railway formation since July 20, disrupting normal train operations.

As a safety measure, train movement has been restricted to Line No 3, where operations are continuing under enhanced safety measures.

According to NFR, the problem has been linked to a shift in the natu-

ral watercourse and changes in the local drainage pattern.

Heavy inflow of water from the upstream hillside has resulted in the accumulation of water beneath the ground, affecting the stability of the railway formation.

Restoration teams are undertaking drainage management, dewatering and other measures to strengthen and stabilise the affected section. NFR said passenger safety remains the foremost consideration during the ongoing work.

The restoration of Line No 2 is expected to allow more trains to operate through the section.

NFR has further set a target of restoring Line No 1 by the end of September.

The railway said all necessary manpower, machinery and other resources were being deployed to expedite the restoration and facilitate the return of normal train operations through the hill section.

Finger millet seeds distributed to 20 selected farmers

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Sept 1: Minister of State for Agriculture Piyush Hazarika on Tuesday ceremonially distributed finger millet seeds among 20 selected farmers at Palasing under the Jagrood constituency as part of efforts to promote cultivation of the nutrient-rich crop.

The seeds were distributed under the National Food Security and Nutrition Mission in the presence of District Agriculture Officer Dilip Kumar Bora, officials of the Agriculture Department and local farmers.

Highlighting the nutritional importance of finger millet, locally known as 'Marua paddy', Hazarika urged farmers to take greater interest in its cultivation. He said there was considerable potential for farmers to benefit economically from the crop if proper market linkages were developed. Hazarika also emphasised the nutritional value of finger millet and said better market opportunities could help improve the economic prospects of farmers engaged in its cultivation.

The minister further urged farmers to complete their registration at the earliest to avail themselves of the benefits available under various government schemes.

Kharupetia Police recover 18 stolen, lost mobile phones

HT Correspondent

MANGALDOI, Sept 1: Kharupetia Police have recovered 18 mobile phones reported stolen or lost and returned them to their rightful owners in a special initiative aimed at strengthening public confidence in the police. The phones were traced through sustained technical investigation and the use of the Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) portal. The recovered devices were formally handed over to their owners during a programme held at Kharupetia Police Station recently.

CDSP Chiranjit Bhattacharya, Officer-in-Charge of Kharupetia Police Station Hemanta Baruah, IC of the Traffic Branch Imdadul Haque Choudhury and other police personnel attended the programme and handed over the recovered phones.

Kharupetia Police had received several complaints concerning lost and stolen mobile phones over the past few months.

Acting on the complaints, police conducted a sustained recovery drive using technical surveillance and the CEIR portal, eventually tracing 18 devices from different locations. For several owners, the recovery came after they had given up hope of getting their phones back.

Their relief was evident as the devices were returned to them.

The initiative has been appreciated by local residents, who said such technology-driven efforts could help improve crime detection and strengthen public trust in the police.

Samajik Adhikarita Shivir held at Laharighat

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Sept 1: A Samajik Adhikarita Shivir was organised at the auditorium hall of Laharighat Development Block on Tuesday to promote the dignity, independence and well-being of senior citizens and Divyangjan through the distribution of aids and assistive devices under the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY) and the Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP) Scheme of the Government of India.

The programme was attended by the Block Development Officer (BDO), Laharighat Development Block, the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) of Laharighat ICDS and representatives of the Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO).

NH-39 at Lahorijan turns hazardous amid potholes, waterlogging

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Sept 1: The condition of National Highway 39 (NH-39) at Lahorijan has deteriorated considerably, causing serious inconvenience and posing safety hazards to commuters, motorists and two-wheeler riders.

Near the Lahorijan Line Hotel area, two large potholes have developed directly on the highway.

During rainfall, the potholes fill with water, making it difficult for motorists to judge their depth and navigate the stretch safely.

The situation has raised concerns over the possibility of accidents, particularly involving two-wheelers.

According to local sources, officials of PWD Golaghat have inspected the site on more than three occasions and undertaken temporary repairs using sand and gravel.

However, the repairs have repeatedly failed as rainwater continues to accumulate at the same spot due to

the absence of an adequate drainage outlet. Chitra Boruah, district president of the Anti-Corruption Youth Power of Assam, alleged that unmonitored concrete construction along the roadside has blocked the existing drainage system.

As a result, rainwater has no proper outlet and flows onto the highway, accumulating in the potholes and washing away the materials used for temporary repairs.

Boruah said that repeated patchwork by PWD Golaghat would not provide a lasting solution unless the drainage problem is addressed.

He urged the department to undertake permanent repairs by restoring a functional drainage system along with repairing the damaged road surface.

Local residents and regular commuters have also appealed to the concerned authorities to take immediate and long-term measures to address the recurring waterlogging and deterioration of the highway stretch.

CWRBC programme highlights threats to primates and need for habitat restoration and community participation

International Primate Day observed at Bodoland University

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Sept 1: The Centre for Wildlife Research & Biodiversity Conservation (CWRBC), Bodoland University, observed International Primate Day at the Department of Zoology on Tuesday, highlighting the need for greater awareness and community participation in primate conservation.

The programme featured a lecture by Dr Dilip Chetry, Director and Head of the Primate Research and Conservation Division at Aaranyak and Vice-Chairman of the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group, South Asia Section. He was invited as the resource person for the event.

International Primate Day, observed since 2005, seeks to raise awareness about threats faced by primates, including habitat loss, poaching, illegal wildlife trade and animal testing, while encouraging conservation efforts.



Prof Hiloljyoti Singha, Director, CWRBC, delivered the welcome address and spoke about the significance of the occasion.

The session was moderated by

primate species found worldwide. He highlighted the western hoolock gibbon, described as the only ape species found in India, and stressed the importance of protecting its habitat.

He also drew attention to the golden langur, an endemic and endangered primate regarded as an important species for the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

He said fragmented forests need to be reconnected to ensure the long-term survival of the species, noting that canopy bridges provide only temporary alternatives.

Dr Chetry further emphasised the role of local communities in wildlife conservation, particularly in protecting primate habitats.

He also interacted with the students and research scholars and shared experiences from his own life to motivate them towards conservation work.

Deep Smita Nath, a PhD scholar of the Department of Zoology, and was attended by students and research scholars of the university.

In his lecture, Dr Chetry said Assam is home to nine of the 535

MoU signed to establish Centre of Excellence in Robotic Surgery at GMCH

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 1: The Government of Assam and Global Health Limited (Medanta) on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish and develop a Centre of Excellence in Robotic Surgery at Gauhati Medical College & Hospital (GMCH), marking a significant step towards strengthening advanced surgical care in the State.

The initiative is part of the ongoing efforts to transform GMCH into a modern, state-of-the-art mega hospital equipped to provide advanced healthcare services to the people of Assam.

Under the partnership, GMCH will be strengthened through training, capacity building, knowledge sharing and clinical expertise.

Medanta will provide advisory support on new technologies and evidence-based practices.

As the first step, a detailed implementation plan is to be finalised within 30 days.

The initiative will also involve joint monitoring and quality assurance, with the objective of developing GMCH as a premier centre for robotic surgery and expanding access to advanced surgical procedures across multiple departments.



The initiative reflects the vision of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and is being carried forward by Medical Education & Research Minister Ashok Singhal. The MoU was signed on behalf of the Government of Assam by Dr Siddharth Singh, IAS, Commissioner and Secretary, Medical Education and Research Department, Global Health Limited (Medanta) was represented by Biswajeet Deka, DGM Marketing; Jayanta Kalita, AGM Marketing; and Rohan Abraham, Northeast India Strategy.

Two killed as car plunges into pond at Kusumtola

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARALI, Sept 1: Two persons were killed after a Swift car plunged into a deep pond beside the NH-15 four-lane road at Kusumtola in Jamugurihat on Monday night.

The car, bearing registration number ML-10-D-4928, was travelling from Majuli towards Guwahati when the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle.

There were three persons inside the car.

The deceased have been identified as Biky Barman, the driver, and Babul Kalita.

The third occupant, identified as Samik Shur of Meghalaya, was rescued from the water and narrowly escaped with his life.

A team from Jamuguri Police Station and personnel from Fire and Emergency Services reached the spot and recovered the submerged vehicle from the pond.

The bodies of the two deceased were also recovered and taken to the police station for necessary procedures and autopsy.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting - Sun Tzu

New visa system of US

The Trump administration aims to reform the immigration system and tighten immigration rules. As part of this, it plans to pause certain immigration visas and visa-processing. During its second term, the Trump administration has paused or rescheduled visa appointments at US embassies and consulates worldwide. This has affected individuals seeking to travel to the US for work, study, or family visits. The administration aims to cancel B1/B2 visas for 200,000 asylum seekers. Since taking office, it has cancelled over 175,000 visas for foreign citizens for a variety of reasons, according to the State Department. This visa-pause impacts 75 countries. The suspension of specific visa categories has created challenges and uncertainty for many foreign nationals, particularly those from India. This decision has raised concerns for families, workers, and students who rely on these visas for various opportunities in the United States. However, last week, the US resumed issuing immigrant visas to people from 75 countries after a long pause. This change followed a federal court ruling against the visa pause, which began in January to screen applicants who might require more public benefits in the US. This is part of a larger plan to train diplomatic staff globally to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of US diplomatic operations.

Currently, nearly one million Indians are stuck in the US employment-based green card backlog, representing about 79 percent of those awaiting approval in the first three categories. An analysis by the National Foundation for American Policy suggests that Indian nationals filing applications in January 2026 or later could face waits of 179 years for EB-2 and 38 years for EB-3 permanent residence. This is part of a larger plan to train diplomatic staff at posts worldwide. The goal is to make US diplomatic operations more efficient and effective. The administration is also cracking down on birth tourism, where foreign pregnant women travel to the US to give birth, thus gaining birthright citizenship for their children. Trump has tried to end this practice; however, the courts, including the Supreme Court, have consistently rejected his efforts. The State Department has announced modifications to visa appointment schedules to support consular officer training. This training aims to help officers better identify visa applicants who may rely on US public benefits and ensure a thorough, consistent evaluation of all visa applications.

The US visa system plays a crucial role in enabling international travel, work, study, and family reunification. The government has temporarily paused processing certain visa types, including Temporary Work Visas (H-1B), student visas (F-1), and family-sponsored visas, as part of efforts to improve visa management. This is a challenging time for many individuals from India and other countries, and these changes are expected to streamline the process moving forward.

India's economic light in a world passing through dark times

The world today is passing through a period of extraordinary economic and strategic challenges. The repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war, tensions in West Asia, growing rivalry between the United States and China, uncertainty in global trade, disruptions in supply chains, and fluctuations in crude oil prices have posed difficult questions for the world's major economies. At such a time, the resilience demonstrated by the Indian economy is not merely an economic statistic; it is a powerful testament to the strength of a changing India. India's 7.8 per cent real Gross Domestic Product growth in the first quarter of financial year 2026-27 has projected the country as a beacon of hope in the global economic landscape—one that the world is watching with both surprise and confidence. This growth rate has strengthened India's economic power and self-confidence and spread a new ray of optimism amid global uncertainties.

The achievement becomes even more significant because this growth has been recorded at a time when conditions have been far from normal. Despite inflationary pressures, energy challenges, geopolitical tensions and fluctuations in international trade, the Indian economy has maintained a strong growth trajectory. The growth rate stood at 6.9 per cent in the corresponding quarter of the previous year, indicating a significant improvement in the pace of economic expansion within a year. Strong domestic demand, government capital expenditure, manufacturing, construction and exports have all contributed substantially to this performance. The true significance of economic growth can be understood only when it is viewed in its global context. Today, economies are being shaped not merely by economic policies but also by wars, diplomatic tensions, energy security and international trade relations. The economic and strategic rivalry between the United States and China is affecting the entire world. Tensions in West Asia continue to raise concerns over energy markets and global supply networks. Against this backdrop, India's relatively rapid economic growth signals that the country has built strong domestic foundations capable of absorbing external shocks. This is the transformation that is taking India beyond being merely a large economy and moving it towards becoming a major global economic power.

India's greatest economic strength is its vast domestic market. The demand generated by hundreds of millions of consumers, the expanding middle class, the growth of the digital economy, investment in infrastructure and changing patterns of consumption have provided the economy with strong internal momentum. When global markets are uncertain, robust domestic demand acts as a protective shield for an economy. Therefore, the strength of domestic demand deserves special recognition in assessing India's current growth performance. Another important feature of India's economic performance is that growth is no longer dependent on a single sector. A 9.2 per cent expansion in the manufacturing sector indicates that India is gradually moving towards a more production-oriented economy. For a long time, India was primarily viewed as a services-driven economy. However, sustained efforts to expand domestic production, encourage indigenous industries and strengthen infrastructure are creating new opportunities for the industrial sector.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Lalit Gargg

The construction sector, too, is playing a vital role in generating employment and stimulating economic activity. Investments in roads, railways, ports, airports, housing, industrial corridors and digital infrastructure are not merely reflected in economic growth figures; they are also creating the foundations of India's future economic capacity. India's present economic journey cannot be discussed without acknowledging the role of the policies pursued under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Over the past several years, the government has consistently focused on infrastructure development, digital payments, financial inclusion, manufacturing, entrepreneurship, self-reliance, energy security and the formalisation of the economy. From Jan Dhan bank accounts to digital payments, and from highways to railway modernisation, a broad economic ecosystem has been steadily developed.

The Goods and Services Tax has contributed towards creating a more integrated national market, while the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code has sought to make the business environ-

ment more orderly and efficient. Production-linked incentive schemes have encouraged domestic manufacturing and investment across several sectors. The real value of these policies, however, must be assessed not merely through announcements but through their outcomes. The latest GDP figures certainly offer a positive indication in this direction. For the common citizen, economic growth becomes meaningful only when it translates into greater employment opportunities, rising incomes, controlled inflation, better education and healthcare, and an overall improvement in quality of life. GDP tells us about the pace of an economy, but it does not reveal how the benefits of growth are reaching different sections of society. Therefore, India's next challenge is to move beyond rapid growth and ensure that development is both high-quality and inclusive.

Employment remains one of the most important measures of economic development. The expansion of manufacturing and construction is encouraging because both sectors have the potential to generate employment on a large scale. India, however, will need industries capable of providing millions of young people with dignified, stable and sustainable livelihoods. India's youthful population is its greatest strength. If young Indians are equipped with quality education, skills, technology and meaningful employment opportunities, this demographic strength can become the most powerful source of energy for transforming India into a developed nation by 2047. India's ambition should not be limited to becoming self-reliant; it should aspire to play a leading role in the global economy. Self-reliance does not mean isolating oneself from the world. It means strengthening national capabilities to such an extent that India becomes an indispensable part of global supply chains. The world is increasingly looking for alternative production centres and seeking to diversify beyond dependence on China. India possesses distinctive advantages—a vast domestic market, a

young workforce, technological capabilities and a democratic system.

If India continues to strengthen its capabilities in manufacturing, semiconductors, electronics, defence production, renewable energy, artificial intelligence, space technology and high-value services, it can assume a far more influential position in the emerging global economic order. The vision of a developed India by 2047 is not merely a government resolution; it is a collective aspiration of the people of India. The 7.8 per cent growth rate is certainly an encouraging milestone on this journey, but it is not the destination. India will have to sustain a high growth trajectory, strengthen its financial system and maintain a stable economic environment while giving equal attention to education, healthcare, agricultural productivity, skill development, employment and social security.

India's economic story is no longer merely a story of numbers. It is becoming a story of confidence, self-reliance and global leadership. While the world searches for direction under the shadow of war and economic instability, India's strong economic performance is establishing it as a reliable and promising global power. A growth rate of 7.8 per cent is undoubtedly a matter of pride for India. More important, however, is the message it conveys: even amid global crises, India's economic foundations remain strong. The economic policies and initiatives pursued under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership must now enter their next phase—one focused more intensely on employment, investment, production and equal opportunity. The light rising on India's economic horizon will become a lasting illumination only when its radiance reaches the life of the last person in the country. That will be the true measure of a developed India in 2047—and the real pathway through which economic strength can ultimately be transformed into people's power.

INDIA AND THE UNITED NATIONS

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

India's relationship with the United Nations has developed over decades of diplomacy, peacekeeping, development cooperation and advocacy for a more representative international order. India participated in the creation of the United Nations Charter in 1945, even before gaining independence, and after 1947 it developed an independent foreign policy that gave considerable importance to multilateral cooperation. The United Nations became an important platform through which India could express its views on peace, security, decolonisation, development and international justice. Its approach has changed with global circumstances, but the central idea has remained consistent: International institutions should reflect the interests of a wider community of nations rather than the preferences of a few powerful states.

India's early engagement with the United Nations was closely connected with its larger foreign-policy outlook. During the Cold War, India's policy of non-alignment allowed it to maintain strategic independence while engaging with both major power blocs. This position gave India considerable diplomatic space at the United Nations, where it often spoke on behalf of newly independent countries in Asia and Africa. India strongly opposed colonialism and racial discrimination and supported the political independence of countries emerging from colonial rule. Its opposition to apartheid in South Africa became an important part of this diplomatic record. India also maintained a long-standing engagement with the Palestinian question and supported the principle that international disputes should be addressed through dialogue, international law and political processes. These positions helped India develop credibility among developing countries, particularly at a time when many newly independent states were searching for a collective voice in global affairs.

India's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping remains one of the strongest pillars of its international role. Indian personnel have served in numerous peacekeeping operations across different regions, often under difficult and dangerous circumstances. India's peacekeeping involvement goes beyond the deployment of military personnel because Indian contingents have also contributed to medical services, engineering, humanitarian assistance and community engagement. Over the decades, Indian peacekeepers have served in places such as Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Liberia, Lebanon and Haiti. Their work has helped strengthen India's reputation as a country willing to contribute personnel and resources to international peace and stability. Indian women have also made an important contribution to UN peacekeeping, including through all-women police units. Their participation has demonstrated how peacekeeping can support local communities while also encouraging greater participation of women in security institutions. India's peacekeeping record therefore represents not only a military contribution but also an expression of its wider commitment to international cooperation.

The United Nations Security Council remains the most important arena for examining India's growing global influence. India has served multiple times as an elected non-permanent member of the Council and most recently completed its 2021-22 term. During that period, India raised issues includ-



ing terrorism, maritime security, peacekeeping, technology and international security. Its presidency of the Council in August 2021 included a high-level discussion on maritime security, reflecting India's growing interest in protecting the rules governing the oceans. India has also consistently argued that the existing structure of the Security Council does not adequately represent contemporary global realities. The Council reflects the balance of power that existed at the end of the Second World War, while the political and economic structure of the world has changed significantly since then. India therefore supports comprehensive reform that would provide greater representation to Asia, Africa and Latin America.

India's claim for permanent membership of the Security Council rests on several arguments. It is the world's most populous country, one of the largest economies, a major contributor to UN peacekeeping and an important participant in international diplomacy. India also points to its democratic political system and its long record of engagement with developing countries. Its association with the G4 grouping, alongside Germany, Japan and Brazil, reflects a broader campaign for Security Council reform. The African Union's demand for greater representation of Africa has also strengthened the wider argument that the Council should become more representative. Yet reform remains difficult because it requires agreement among countries with different strategic interests. The existing permanent members possess significant institutional influence, and disagreements among major powers continue to complicate negotiations. India's challenge is therefore not simply to repeat its claim but to build sustained diplomatic support for a broader reform process.

India's role at the United Nations also extends beyond security and diplomacy. Development has remained an important part of its multilateral engagement. India has consistently raised concerns

about poverty, food security, healthcare, education, employment and unequal access to technology. Its position is that global development policies should recognise the different circumstances of developing countries. This approach has become particularly important in discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals. India's domestic programmes relating to sanitation, housing, healthcare, financial inclusion and poverty reduction are frequently discussed in the context of its development experience. At the international level, India has also used development partnerships to support projects in other developing countries. The India-UN Development Partnership Fund represents one such mechanism, supporting projects in areas including healthcare, education, renewable energy and community development.

South-South cooperation has strengthened India's relationship with countries across Africa, Asia, the Pacific and other developing regions. India has generally presented such cooperation as a partnership based on shared development experiences rather than a traditional donor-recipient model. Its approach focuses on capacity building, training, technology transfer and practical development projects. This has helped India expand its diplomatic engagement beyond traditional political alliances. The importance of such cooperation has increased as developing countries seek greater influence in international institutions and demand fairer access to finance, technology and global markets. India has increasingly positioned itself as a bridge between developing countries and major international institutions, although maintaining this role requires substantial economic resources and sustained diplomatic engagement.

Climate change has emerged as another major area of India's engagement with the United Nations. India's climate diplomacy has attempted to balance environmental responsibility with the developmental concerns of a large and growing population. India has argued that developed countries, which

historically produced a large share of global greenhouse-gas emissions, should provide greater financial and technological support to developing countries. At the same time, India has expanded its renewable-energy capacity and promoted international cooperation in solar energy. The International Solar Alliance, launched with Indian leadership, represents one of its most visible climate initiatives. The alliance seeks to encourage cooperation among countries with significant solar potential and promote wider access to clean energy. India has also promoted the idea of LiFE, or Lifestyle for Environment, which seeks to connect climate action with changes in individual and community consumption patterns.

India's climate position reflects a broader diplomatic challenge. The country must support global efforts to reduce emissions while also protecting its development priorities. Millions of people still depend on affordable energy for housing, transport, agriculture and industry, making a rapid transition difficult. India has therefore emphasised climate justice, equity and differentiated responsibilities in international climate negotiations. Its argument is that climate action should not impose disproportionate burdens on developing countries. This position has helped India maintain support among many developing nations, although it has also faced criticism from environmental groups and some developed countries over its continued dependence on fossil fuels. India's influence in climate diplomacy will increasingly depend on how effectively it combines economic growth with a credible transition towards cleaner energy.

Health cooperation has added another dimension to India's international role. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of global health cooperation and exposed major inequalities in access to vaccines and medical supplies. India's pharmaceutical industry became an important source of medicines and vaccines for many countries. Through its Vaccine Maitri initiative, India supplied COVID-19 vaccines to several countries, particularly developing nations. This effort strengthened India's image as a country capable of contributing to global health security. India has also advocated affordable medicines and greater access to healthcare technologies. Its experience as a major producer of generic medicines gives it a significant role in debates about global health, intellectual property and access to essential drugs.

The pandemic also highlighted the limitations of international institutions. Global health emergencies cannot be managed effectively if countries act only according to national priorities. The experience showed the importance of supply chains, transparent information sharing, scientific cooperation and equitable access to medical resources. India's role in these discussions will remain significant because of its large pharmaceutical and vaccine manufacturing capacity. Its challenge will be to combine national health interests with its wider commitment to international cooperation.

Human rights represent a more complex area of India's engagement with the United Nations. India has participated actively in the Human Rights Council and has supported issues such as women's empowerment, children's rights and social justice. At the same time, international organisations and foreign governments have raised concerns about certain domestic developments, including the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and questions relating

to civil liberties. India has responded by emphasising its constitutional framework, democratic institutions, judicial system and rule of law. This creates a complicated diplomatic balance. India seeks to present itself as a democratic voice in international affairs while also resisting external criticism of its domestic policies. Its long-term credibility will depend on how effectively it addresses legitimate concerns while maintaining its constitutional and democratic institutions.

India's engagement with the United Nations also includes its participation in specialised agencies and international institutions. Its cooperation with organisations dealing with health, agriculture, labour, food security and development has expanded the scope of its multilateral diplomacy. India's agricultural experience, particularly its achievements in food production, has relevance for countries facing food-security challenges. Its technological capabilities also provide opportunities for cooperation in digital governance, financial inclusion and public-service delivery. The expansion of digital public infrastructure has become an increasingly important part of India's international development narrative, particularly as developing countries search for affordable technological solutions.

India's growing global influence, however, does not mean that its role within the United Nations is without limitations. The organisation operates through complex negotiations, competing national interests and institutional constraints. India must therefore convert its economic strength, demographic importance and diplomatic reach into sustained multilateral influence. A larger international role also brings greater expectations. India will face increasing scrutiny of its domestic policies, foreign-policy decisions and development choices as its global importance grows. Its ability to manage these pressures will shape the credibility of its international leadership.

The future of India's relationship with the United Nations will depend on how effectively it combines national interests with wider global responsibilities. India cannot shape the international system alone, but it can contribute significantly to debates on security, development, climate change, technology and global governance. Its long experience in peacekeeping, its engagement with developing countries and its growing economic and technological capabilities provide a strong foundation for this role. The demand for Security Council reform will remain an important part of India's diplomacy, but institutional reform will require patient negotiation and broad international consensus.

India and the United Nations therefore represent a relationship that has moved from participation to increasingly active influence. India's contribution to peacekeeping, development cooperation, climate diplomacy, global health and multilateral negotiations has given it a substantial international presence. Its future influence will depend not only on its size and economic strength but also on the consistency, credibility and practical value of its diplomatic initiatives. A stronger and more representative United Nations would serve India's interests, but India also has a responsibility to contribute constructively to that transformation. Its international role will ultimately be judged by its capacity to combine national ambition with a broader commitment to peace, cooperation, development and a more balanced global order.

"The heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be." (*Courtesy: Writing Women*)

'We are paying the ultimate price for a global crisis we did not create' Nepal seeks climate compensation for deadly flood; says it is 'moral liability', 'not charity'

KATHMANDU, Sept 1: Nepal has launched a diplomatic push to seek climate-related compensation from greenhouse emitters for the devastation caused by the recent deadly flash floods, asserting that post-disaster assistance should be treated as a matter of "moral liability", "not charity".

Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal said Nepal, despite contributing "virtually negligible" greenhouse gas emissions, are bearing the disproportionate consequences of global warming, including rapid glacier melt and extreme mountain disasters.

"We are paying the ultimate price for a global crisis we did not create. The rapid melting of glaciers and these catastrophic mountain tsunamis are direct consequences of global climate change," he said in an interview with Kantipur TV, the excerpts of which were published by The Kathmandu Post newspaper on Tuesday.

Khanal said Nepal is shifting its diplomatic framework from "aid" to "justice and compensation".

"This is not a matter of charity; it is a matter of legal and moral liability," he said.

Khanal said Nepal would raise the issue "with absolute firmness and clarity" at international forums and seek compensation from major emitters for climate-related losses suffered by vulnerable countries.

"This is a matter of civilisational survival. If our Himalayan glaciers disappear, the water security of over two billion people in South Asia de-



pendent on rivers like the Ganges and the Trishuli will be permanently compromised. We are advocating not just for Nepal, but for the survival of South Asian civilisation," he said.

Khanal said the finance ministry has officially dispatched a formal climate compensation claim letter to its international partners.

The minister identified China, the US and India as the world's three largest greenhouse gas emitters and said they have a "historical responsibility to compensate vulnerable nations like Nepal".

India has repeatedly emphasised climate equity and highlighted its relatively low per-capita emissions. It has argued that climate obligations should take into account differences in countries' historical emissions, development needs and capacities.

India maintains that Western nations, which industrialised first, occupy the majority of the global carbon budget.

non-economic loss and damage has yet to be determined; however, preliminary information indicates that the consequences are extensive and exceed Nepal's immediate response capacity," the letter said.

Maheshwar Dhakal, joint secretary at the Ministry of Forests and a member of the Loss and Damage Fund's board, said this was the first time Nepal had sought assistance from the mechanism.

The scale of damage caused by the flood, and the search, rescue, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction required in its aftermath, has become a major challenge for Nepal, he said.

"Since we are genuinely suffering from the adverse effects of climate change, we have approached the board," Dhakal said, adding that Nepal wanted an immediate response rather than waiting for the board's next scheduled meeting in December.

The letter said the disaster had affected a fragile transboundary mountain river system and demonstrated how extreme events in the cryosphere could rapidly cascade from high mountains to densely populated downstream areas.

It highlighted impacts on water, food, energy, health, infrastructure, ecosystems and human security.

As a least developed and highly climate-vulnerable mountainous country, Nepal contributes negligibly to global greenhouse gas emissions yet continues to bear disproportionate and escalating climate impacts, the letter said. (PTI)

New Delhi has supported efforts to address loss and damage suffered by vulnerable developing countries, while maintaining that developed countries should provide the necessary financial resources to help such nations deal with climate impacts.

Nepal has formally approached the board of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, seeking urgent financial assistance following the catastrophic flash flood in the Bhotokoshi river basin on August 26, The Kathmandu Post newspaper reported.

The mechanism was established at COP27 in 2022 and operationalised at COP28.

A letter jointly signed by Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle and Forests and Agriculture Minister Geeta Chaudhary sought an urgent response to the catastrophic flash flood, which caused widespread loss of life, displacement and destruction of homes and critical infrastructure.

"The full scale of economic and

Millions at risk in Kolkata and Mumbai due to rising sea levels: UN



UNITED NATIONS, Sept 1: Millions of people in Kolkata and Mumbai are at "immediate risk" of losing their homes due to rising sea levels and permanent inundation, a report by the United Nations said.

"Rising seas are no longer a distant threat: they are happening now, faster than at any point in recorded history, and the pace is accelerating, making sea level rise one of the most profound threats to populations around the world in developed and developing States alike," the report of the UN Secretary-General titled 'Challenges related to sea level rise and ways and approaches to address it' said.

The report, released Monday, said that sea level rise is already damaging urban infrastructure, water systems, transport networks, energy grids, buildings and groundwater resources, creating far-reaching consequences that threaten the effective enjoyment of human rights, long-term development and financial stability.

It noted that the nature of these risks varies across regions.

In high-income cities such as Miami and New York in the United

States and Guangzhou in China, the primary impact is the staggering financial exposure of coastal infrastructure, with assets at risk estimated between USD 2 trillion and USD 3.5 trillion.

"In the low-lying deltas of South Asia, in cities such as Kolkata and Mumbai in India, and Dhaka, the defining impact is human displacement, with more than 14 million people at immediate risk of losing their homes to permanent inundation," the report said.

It added that this divergence underscores the need to strengthen and broaden the indicators used to assess coastal vulnerability and exposure, ensuring that social risks measured in human lives and displacement receive the same level of urgency as those quantified in financial terms.

It said sea level rise affects public health through damage to coastal health and sanitation infrastructure, increased exposure to water-borne diseases, disrupted sanitation, elevated risks of injury and mortality, and exposure to rising mental health stress.

The combined effects of sea

level rise and land subsidence are also intensifying flooding risks, degrading coastal ecosystems and increasing the loss of lives, livelihoods and critical aquatic ecosystem services and habitats.

As the freshwater-saltwater interface migrates inland, coastal aquifers experience the salinisation of freshwater wells and soils, while storm-driven overwash can cause the long-lasting contamination of surface and groundwater, affecting public health. The result has a direct impact on drinking water security, agricultural productivity, irrigation systems and groundwater-dependent ecosystems.

The report stressed that coherent, integrated policy approaches that link river basins, freshwater systems, coasts and the ocean remain insufficiently reflected in regulatory and land use planning frameworks, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups and sectors, such as artisanal fisheries, small-scale tourism and port-dependent local economies.

The acceleration in sea-level rise is driven primarily by melting glaciers and the thermal expansion of warming oceans as a direct consequence of human-induced global warming.

Between 2014 and 2023, global sea level rose by 4.7 mm per year. In 2024 alone, the sea level rose 5.9 mm, a new record, driven primarily by exceptional ocean warming – in some regions faster than at any time in the past 4,000 years – and this rate is expected to continue to increase through 2050 owing to warming already locked into the climate system. (PTI)

Pak FM Dar calls for 'sincere implementation' of Islamabad MoU for peace in West Asia

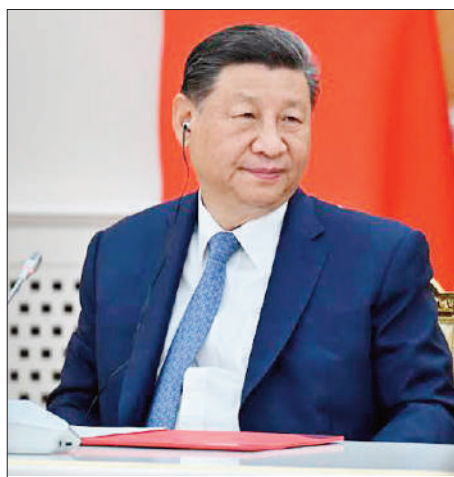
ISLAMABAD, Sept 1: Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Tuesday met Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi and said that the "sincere implementation" of the Islamabad MoU was the only way forward to resolve the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

The two leaders met on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, according to Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO).

"The DPM underscored that dialogue and diplomacy remain essential to promoting peace and stability in the region, and that sincere implementation by both parties to the conflict of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of June 2026 remains the only way forward," the FO said in a statement on X. In June, the US and Iran signed a MoU, aimed at bringing peace in West Asia. Pakistan also signed the document as a "guarantor".

The negotiations collapsed in early July with renewed military strikes amid mutual accusations of agreement violations and deadlocked demands over the Strait of Hormuz – the Gulf chokepoint through which about a fifth of the world's energy supplies passed in peacetime. (PTI)

President Xi urges SCO member states to make security a key priority



BISHKEK, Sept 1: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday called on the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to make security a key priority and crack down on terrorism, separatism and extremism, transnational organised crimes, drug trafficking and telecom fraud.

"We should stay committed to taking security as a key goal, and foster an environment of common security. We should pursue coordinated measures to tackle traditional and non-traditional security threats," Xi said while addressing the SCO summit in the Kyrgyz capital attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin and others.

"We should crack down on the three forces of terrorism, separatism and extremism, transnational organised crime, drug trafficking,

and telecom fraud," he added.

Xi also spoke about the need for multilateral partnership for nuclear safety and security.

"We believe in a sensible, coordinated, and balanced approach to nuclear security, and support a stronger multilateral partnership for nuclear safety and security," he said. He, however, did not elaborate.

The SCO member states should strengthen cooperation on information security, bio-security, and outer space security, Xi said.

In a veiled criticism of the US, he said, "We must prevent external forces from interfering in our internal affairs, endangering our political security, and undermining regional stability."

He said over the last 25 years, the SCO has travelled an extraordinary journey and emerged as an important pillar of south-south cooperation.

"Its biggest achievement is that it has steadily grown into a new type of regional cooperation organisation with the largest land area and population and enormous development potential," Xi said.

"Its most important experience for cooperation is that it has found the right way of coexistence featuring non-alliance, non-confrontation and not targeting any third party, enabling regional countries to build a common home together," he said.

SCO's most valuable spiritual asset is that it pioneered, and has since invariably followed, the Shanghai Spirit of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diversity of civilisations, and pursuit of common development, Xi said.

The SCO member states include China, Rus-

sia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus.

China, which founded the organisation along with Russia and the Central Asian states, hosts the SCO headquarters in Beijing.

Xi, who is also widely expected to attend the BRICS summit in New Delhi on September 12-13, said that China will continue to ensure the success of the SCO Digital Economy Forum, the SCO Agricultural Expo, and other events.

"We will develop an international AI application cooperation centre with fellow SCO countries, continue to work with fellow SCO countries to increase the installed capacity of photovoltaic and wind power each by 10 million kilowatts, implement 100 technological cooperation projects with other SCO countries in the next three years, and nurture more green industry talents through China-SCO cooperation," he said.

To facilitate trade and logistics in the region, China supports improving the performance and efficiency of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, and will establish a China-SCO port economic cooperation centre in Tianjin, Xi added.

Later addressing SCO Plus meeting 'Jointly Advocating an Equal and Orderly Multipolar World to Achieve More Just and Reasonable Global Governance', Xi said authority and vitality of the United Nations need to be reinvigorated.

Dominance by just one or several countries, or bloc politics are not true multilateralism, he said and called on major countries to lead in upholding rules and the rule of law, and jointly address global challenges. (PTI)

Norway's King Haakon pledges an oath of allegiance to constitution as his father lies in state

OSLO, Sept 1: Norway's King Haakon VII pledged an oath of allegiance to the country's constitution in parliament on Tuesday, an important symbolic step as he takes over at the helm of the Scandinavian country after his late father's 35-year reign.

Haakon became Norway's monarch when King Harald V died on Friday at 89. He has adopted the motto "All for Norway," which dates back to his great-grandfather.

He was driven the short distance from the royal palace to the Storting, or parliament, in an open car. There, speaker Masud Gharahkhani read the official announcement of Harald's death and Haakon's succession. Haakon, 53, then took the oath.

"I promise and swear that I will govern the Kingdom of Norway in accordance with its Constitution and Laws; so help me God, the Almighty and Omniscient," he said.

Norway's monarchy has old roots, tracing its origins to King Harald Fairhair in the ninth century. When Norway regained its independence from Sweden in 1905, three-quarters of voters in a national plebiscite approved restoring the monarchy.

Today, its role is largely symbolic as power lies with the elected government and parliament, but the country's royal family retains a role in promoting the wealthy nation around the world.

On Monday, Harald's coffin was taken to the chapel of the royal palace in downtown Oslo, where it will remain until his funeral on September 9.

From Tuesday afternoon until September 8, the chapel will be open every day for the public to pay their last respects by filing past the coffin. The royal palace said in a statement that visitors aren't allowed to take photos or film inside the chapel, and that they can't leave flowers or other items.

Haakon's wife, Queen Mette-Marit, joined Monday's coffin procession in her first official appearance since assuming the title. She has been largely absent from the public eye following her lung transplant in June.

Ahead of Haakon's pledge of allegiance, the palace said that Mette-Marit wasn't going to the ceremony. In a statement, it quoted Are Holm, a pulmonologist at Oslo's University Hospital, as saying that complications following a transplant aren't uncommon and that Mette-Marit has experienced them on several occasions, "including today." (AP)

UK leader Burnham faces lawmakers for first time since taking office

LONDON, Sept 1: Prime Minister Andy Burnham will face lawmakers in the House of Commons on Tuesday for the first time since becoming UK leader six weeks ago, with wars in Europe and the Middle East weighing on his promise to kick-start the economy and ease the cost of living.

Since taking office on July 20, Burnham has travelled around the country promising to deliver renewed national optimism after the downbeat two-year tenure of predecessor Keir Starmer.

Burnham has announced a series of modest money-saving measures aimed at giving "breathing space" to people and businesses, including a tax cut on domestic energy bills and a lowering of levies on pubs and nightclubs.

But neither opponents nor his own Labour Party legislators have been able to grill him on the details of pledges made against the tough backdrop of mounting security challenges and economic pressure from the Iran war.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch, who shook up her top team on Monday by appointing new economy and foreign affairs spokespeople, finally gets a chance to grill Burnham on Tuesday when Parliament returns from its summer break.

Burnham, a former lawmaker who was elected to Parliament in June after almost a decade away as mayor of Greater Manchester, is

set to make a statement in the House of Commons setting out his vision of a more active but less centralized state.

The prime minister's office said that Burnham will set out "a clear plan for how we turn things round." He is expected to say that greater public control over water, energy and transportation can drive economic growth and ease households' financial burden, though it's unclear how far he plans to reverse decades of privatization of key pillars of the economy.

Opponents have plenty of questions, including about No 10 North, a second prime minister's office in Manchester. Burnham says it will help drive plans to give local leaders more powers and spread economic growth around the country. Critics call it an expensive gimmick.

Burnham also faces pressure over Britain's overcrowded prisons, after being forced to water down plans to release some offenders early, following calls from the widow of a police officer who died in a hit-and-run to keep his killers in jail.

In his first foreign trip as UK leader, Burnham visited Kyiv last month to underscore Britain's support for Ukraine. Like other European countries, the United Kingdom is under pressure to spend more on the military in response to challenges from Russia and the Trump administration, whose priorities lie elsewhere. (AP)

At SCO Summit, Pakistan PM Sharif says water must never be weaponised

ISLAMABAD, Sept 1: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday said that water was the "lifeline" of the region and it must never be weaponised.

Addressing the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in the Kyrgyz capital, Sharif also said that the region cannot "realise its full potential without lasting peace," Dawn reported.

"Water is the lifeblood of our region. It sustains millions of lives, nourishes our land and secures the very future of our coming generations," he said, highlighting the issue of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).

Sharif stressed that it "must never be weaponised; it cannot be used as an instrument of coercion, nor can it ever be exploited for political leverage". India decided to put the IWT in abeyance as part of a series of punitive diplomatic and economic measures unveiled soon after the Pahalgam terror attack in April last year that killed 26 civilians.

"The treaties governing our shared waters are solemn, binding international commitments. They are not matters of political convenience to be cast aside at your will. They must be honoured unconditionally, in both letter and spirit," Sharif said.

His remarks comes a day after India rejected the Permanent Court of Arbitration's order setting aside its decision to suspend the IWT with Pakistan, saying the "illegally-constituted" body has no jurisdiction to comment on New Delhi's sovereign decisions.

Pakistan had approached the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in March this year to determine the status of the treaty virtually challenging India's action.

India has never recognised the "existence in law of this illegally-constituted and so-called Court of Arbitration", and has always said the "very establishment of this alleged



arbitral body constitutes a grave violation of the Indus Waters Treaty".

On the issue of terrorism, Sharif said it remained "one of the gravest threats that has affected our entire region in its various forms and manifestations". As chair of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, Pakistan has "worked actively to strengthen regional counter-terrorism cooperation," he said.

"In the past two and a half decades, we have sacrificed more than 90,000 lives and endured economic losses of over USD 150 billion in combating terrorism," he said.

Pakistan sought a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, he said, adding: "But let there be no ambiguity; so long as terrorists continue to use Afghan territory to shed the blood of innocent Pakistanis and other nations, lasting peace will remain beyond our reach."

Sharif also talked about Pakistan's media-

tion efforts in the US-Iran war and laid out the country's plan as it assumed the SCO CHS chair.

The SCO member states include China, Russia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus.

A video clip shared by the Prime Minister's Office showed Sharif speaking to Chinese President Xi Jinping. He could also be seen sitting together with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The premier also held informal meetings with the presidents of Iran, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Belarus.

Pakistan is set to assume the chairmanship of the SCO's Council of Heads of State for 2026-27, with next year's CHS summit to be hosted by Islamabad.

"As Pakistan assumes the chairmanship of the SCO, we are proposing an excellent plan that will prioritise key sectors, including IT and AI, energy development, poverty reduc-

tion, disaster management, health, culture and sports," Sharif said in his address.

As part of that plan, Pakistan proposed establishing an SCO framework for sovereign AI infrastructure and governance to "promote responsible and inclusive AI development and to also ensure that no member state is left behind". Sharif said Pakistan's SCO chairmanship will be pursued under the theme, "Turning vision into action, connectivity, innovation and shared prosperity".

He also said the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) continued to "serve as a gateway, linking the regional economies to the Arabian Sea". Sharif said Islamabad "staunchly advocated peace when the sovereignty and territorial integrity of an SCO member state was violated earlier this year, triggering a major regional crisis".

He noted that Pakistan and the international community have "borne a heavy economic cost" as the "closure of critical energy supply routes" disrupted the global economy, referring to the Strait of Hormuz.

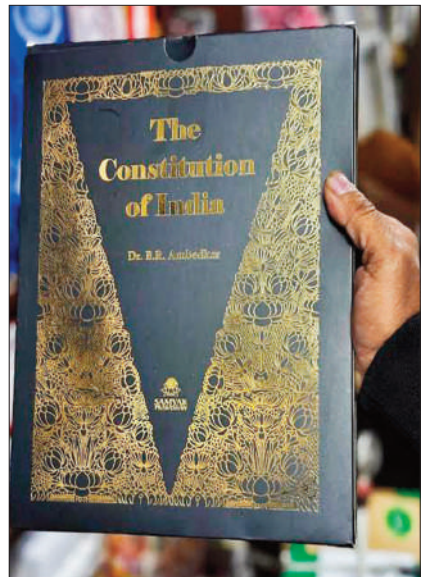
"In these challenging times, Pakistan has consistently acted as an honest and sincere mediator and facilitator," he said, recalling that Islamabad's "sustained diplomatic efforts culminated in the signing of the landmark Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding" in June between the US and Iran.

"We firmly believe that the Islamabad MoU offers the most viable and enduring pathway to lasting peace in the region," he added.

Talking about the trilateral defence agreement between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, named the "Makkah Defence Alliance", Sharif said the pact was "fundamentally defensive in nature and is neither directed against any state nor intended to create any confrontation or division whatsoever". (PTI)

'Comparing Sharia with the Constitution amounts to playing with the unity of the country'

No personal law can be above Constitution: VHP on AIMPLB movement



BJP hails ABVP for winning president's post in Panjab University polls

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: The BJP on Tuesday congratulated the ABVP for winning the Panjab University Campus Students Council president's post, calling it the "beginning of a change" in the poll-bound border state.

The RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) won the post for the second time in a row, with its candidate Ankit Bidhan registering a victory on Monday.

The ABVP's feat in the university polls assumes significance especially as the Students' Organisation of India, the student wing of Sukhbir Singh Badal-led Shiromani Akali Dal, had extended support to it. The ABVP had won the students' council president's post for the first time last year.

"It's a big victory," senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad told a press conference at the party headquarters here, when asked to comment.

"Panjab University is the nerve centre of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh," he said, adding, "It is the beginning of a change when an ABVP candidate wins the president's post there." (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: The VHP on Tuesday opposed the All India Muslim Personal Law Board's (AIMPLB) proposed "Constitution and Sharia Protection Movement", alleging that by placing the Constitution and Islamic law on an equal footing, the organisation is "playing with the unity of the country".

"Accept the Constitution, follow the law and respect the nation -- this is true protection," the outfit said.

The AIMPLB had last week announced the nationwide movement under which it will organise public meetings and protest programmes in major cities across the country. The organisation said it will also disseminate a comprehensive "white paper" documenting alleged incidents of discrimination against Muslims and constitutional violations.

In a statement, VHP central joint secretary Vijay Shankar Tiwari asserted that no personal law can be placed above the Con-

stitution. "The Muslim Personal Law Board has compared the Constitution of India with Sharia, which is completely unconstitutional," he said.

Under the Indian Constitution, people of all faiths are entitled to equal rights. "But comparing Sharia with the Constitution amounts to playing with the unity of the country," he said.

Tiwari said Muslims, as Indian citizens, are entitled to all rights guaranteed by the Constitution, but citizenship also entails duties, including accepting the country's laws, respecting national symbols and understanding the spirit of the Uniform Civil Code.

The RSS affiliate said AIMPLB campaign "is not acceptable to the country in any manner, and such freedom cannot be given in this country for carrying out such movements or activities."

"All kinds of such conspiracies are being carried out and will be carried out in the fu-

ture as well. The country will have to remain alert," he added.

Tiwari rejected what he described as a portrayal of Muslims as victims subjected to atrocities, calling it a "misleading picture". "Whenever there is talk of demolishing illegal constructions, whoever has illegal constructions, they are demolished. But if illegal constructions belonging to the Muslim community are demolished, they come forward portraying themselves as victims. This cannot continue," he said.

Tiwari said respecting Vande Mataram cannot amount to an attack on any religion. He appealed to the "aware section" of the Muslim community not to create an atmosphere of fear based on statements made by their leaders.

He also asked leaders advocating the movement to clarify what they would follow if the Constitution and Sharia came into conflict -- "the Constitution or Sharia?" (PTI)

NDA coalition will emerge unbeatable whenever polls are held in Andhra: CM Naidu

MOGALTURU (ANDHRA PRADESH), Sept 1: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday said recent surveys project the NDA coalition as unbeatable in the upcoming elections in the state.

Addressing a public meeting after distributing NTR Bharosa welfare pensions here, the Chief Minister said, "You (people) gave a phenomenal majority in the last elections. Again, all the surveys are saying now that whenever elections are held in Andhra Pradesh state, NDA is unbeatable."

To rebuild a "devastated" state, Naidu said people elected the alliance of TDP, BJP and Jana Sena a couple of years ago.

Addressing YSRCP's stance against Naidu's polls, Naidu wondered what the opposition party would do if "people favoured" unanimous elections.

He announced direct polls for municipalities and corporations this time to enable people to elect the mayor or the chairman they like.

Naidu criticised the previous



YSRCP government for reducing reservations for BCs in local bodies polls from 34 per cent, which was prevalent since 1996.

According to him, the YSRCP went to the court while reinstating those reservations, petitioning that polls should not be conducted until the electoral roll revision is completed.

YSRCP is making such attempts as it is afraid of defeat, he said noting that development is possible only through local bodies.

Recalling that he was first sworn-in as the chief minister 31 years ago today, Naidu said he had ushered in several reforms over the

years and implemented multiple people-oriented programmes.

With cooperation from the Centre, the CM said the state government was efficiently running a people's government.

According to the CM, the southern state has disbursed Rs 73,507 crore to the poor in the form of welfare pensions, with a total of Rs 1.5 lakh crore was spent on welfare in the past two years to empower poor people.

Naidu promised to stand by the backward classes, and said social backwardness continues to plague SC, ST, minorities and other sections.

To catapult women to the top in all realms, the CM said they were accorded 33 per cent reservation and highlighted that one lakh women rose up to run MSMEs last year.

Through a brand called Swayam, he said the products made by DWCRA women are offered better marketing facilities.

Accusing the YSRCP of "blocking development", Naidu said nobody can block the coalition government's goal.

He condemned the opposition's legal challenges against the 'Mega DSC (District Selection Committee)' examination, which recruited 16,000 teachers.

On Wednesday, Naidu said Godavari River water is set to be directed to the North Andhra region through Polavaram Project Left Main Canal.

He said the Godavari River will change its direction to reach Anakapalli, Visakhapatnam next year and later up to the Vamsadara River.

Naidu said water crises in the country will be resolved through river interlinking.

To safeguard local aquaculture from losses linked to effects of US-Iran war, Naidu said the government is supplying subsidized power at Rs 1.5 per unit.

He said the southern state's aquaculture products should compete with other countries in the international market.

Further, Naidu said the government is working towards incorporating technology in governance to bring facilities such as AI tutor and AI doctor. (PTI)

CBI should probe Delhi Food Minister Sirsa's role in rice scam: AAP



NEW DELHI, Sept 1: The AAP on Tuesday claimed that an FIR filed by the CBI into the alleged irregularities in subsidised rice allocation in the capital mentions Delhi Food and Supplies Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa, and demanded the agency investigate his role in the "scam".

AAP Delhi president Saurabh Bharadwaj claimed that according to the CBI FIR, officials in Sirsa's department acted after discussing with the minister.

"The CBI has now registered an FIR in what we were alleging for so many days. The FIR says that the NERAMAC clearly said that rice was supposed to be distributed among daily wage workers and the poor who don't have ration cards. Sirsa is the minister for food and supplies, and we want the CBI to investigate his role," Bharadwaj told a presser.

Last month, Sirsa had denied the allegations of AAP and threatened legal action against Bharadwaj. The minister gave the AAP leaders 24 hours to withdraw their allegations and issue a public apology, "or face legal proceedings".

On August 31, the CBI regis-

tered an FIR into the alleged irregularities by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) in allocating subsidised rice meant for poor labourers to the North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC), from where it was "diverted" to traders for a profit.

"In a letter written by the NERAMAC, it was specifically mentioned that the rice was meant for daily wage labourers. It also shows that the food and supplies department did not just forward a letter to the FCI, but issued a proper no-objection certificate for subsidised rice to be distributed among the poor, which was later given to a Haryana-based businessman against a commission," Bharadwaj alleged.

Bharadwaj also said that he, along with other party workers, will meet Delhi Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu to discuss the matter and other "scams". Naming senior officials of the FCI and NERAMAC, the CBI has alleged a series of irregularities, including allocation in violation of policy, pressure on officials, diversion of rice to traders and preparation of false records to show distribution to the public, resulting in losses of over Rs 28 crore to the FCI.

The CBI has alleged that an additional general manager of the NERAMAC, Guwahati, vide a letter dated January 7, requested the "Minister (Food and Supply), Government of NCT of Delhi" for allocation of 31,000 MT of rice per week under the category "sale of rice without participation in e-auction" under the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic) for 2025-26. (PTI)

MP: Cong urges Guv to act against minister Vijay Shah over remarks targeting Col Qureshi

BHOPAL, Sept 1: The opposition Congress on Tuesday urged Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai Patel to "reconsider a proposal" to prosecute minister Vijay Shah for his objectionable remarks about Indian Army officer Colonel Sofia Qureshi.

A delegation of party MLAs, led by Umang Singhar, the leader of opposition in the legislative assembly, met the governor and submitted a memorandum demanding action against Shah. On Monday, the Supreme Court was informed that sanction was awaited to prosecute Shah for his remarks targeting Col Qureshi after Operation Sindoor.

Speaking to reporters after their meeting with the governor, Singhar alleged that the ruling BJP, which "distributes certificates of patriotism to others", has never shied away from insulting the nation.

"The insult of Col Qureshi is not just an insult to an individual, but to the Army, women, and the country," he said.

Singhar claimed that the government was dragging the governor into this matter to avoid embarrassment. "If the government is at fault, why is the governor being brought into the picture?" he asked.

If the cabinet has the authority to approve prosecution against Tribal Welfare Minister Vijay Shah and remove him from his position, why the chief minister and the BJP government are yet to take the action, he asked.

The BJP government in Madhya Pradesh talks about schemes like 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' and 'Ladli Behna', but is silent despite "the insult to the nation's daughter", Singhar claimed.

He claimed there is a mismatch between the BJP's words and actions and demanded that the governor "reconsider the proposal" and direct the government to prosecute the minister.

Singhar said the governor assured the delegation that he would discuss the matter with the government.

The Supreme Court had earlier this year directed the Madhya Pradesh government to decide on the sanction for Shah's prosecution within two weeks. But no proposal in this regard was discussed during the cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, last week, state ministers had said.

Colonel Sofia Qureshi was part of the team of military officers who briefed the media during Operation Sindoor targeting terrorist bases in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the aftermath of the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack.

Shah's comments about Colonel Qureshi at a public function, which were interpreted as linking her religion to the community of the terrorists involved in the Pahalgam attack, evoked strong reactions. The Madhya Pradesh High Court took suo motu cognizance and ordered the registration of an FIR against the BJP minister.

Shah approached the Supreme Court which too condemned his statements and constituted an SIT. After its report was presented before the court, the judges directed the Madhya Pradesh government to decide within two weeks on the sanction for the minister's prosecution. (PTI)

BJP launches Raichur-Ballari 'Padayatra' against 'corruption' in Cong govt

RAICHUR (KARNATAKA), Sept 1: The opposition BJP in Karnataka on Tuesday kick-started a 10-day 'Padayatra' from Raichur to Ballari to protest against the alleged corruption under the Congress government in the state.

The BJP targeted Chief Minister D K Shivakumar for re-inducting Ballari Rural MLA B Nagendra in the cabinet, who they alleged was involved in the Rs 89 crore scam in Karnataka State Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation.

Nagendra had resigned as Tribal Development Minister in June 2024 when the scam came to light following the suicide of a corporation official P Chandrasekharan, who left behind a detailed suicide note. He was re-inducted on August 3.

The opposition party had disrupted the legislative session, demanding Nagendra's removal. The din compelled assembly speaker G S Patil and legislative council chairperson Saleem Ahmed to adjourn the proceedings of the Houses sine

die on August 24, cutting it short by three days. Senior party leaders, including three former Chief Ministers -- B S Yediyurappa, Basavaraj Bommai and Jagadish Shettar, led the agitation at Lingasugur in Raichur district.

Addressing the gathering, Yediyurappa termed the Padayatra a protest against the "power drunk" Congress government.

"This government, which is drunk on the power of its mandate, is anti-farmer, anti-people, anti-environment, anti-women and involved in corruption. Our struggle will continue until this government is removed," Yediyurappa said.

He asked Shivakumar whether he has any freedom at all because he has to run to Delhi for every issue.

"If you have to go and bow at Rahul Gandhi's feet for everything, are you really the Chief Minister? Are you doing anything that brings dignity to the office of Chief Minister? The people of the state are watching all this," the BJP stalwart in Karnataka said. (PTI)

JAIPUR, Sept 1: The Congress has accused the ruling BJP in Rajasthan of influencing the nomination process for urban local bodies polls, alleging that party nominees were not allowed to file nominations ahead of the deadline.

The deadline for filing nominations for the urban local body elections ended at 3 pm on Monday.

Leader of Opposition in Rajasthan Assembly Tikaram Jolly alleged that BJP candidates were allowed to submit party symbol authorisations even after the deadline at several places.

"Not accepting the forms of Congress candidates who reached with party symbols before the stipulated time is murder of democracy," Jolly said.

He alleged irregularities in Bhilwara, Alwar, Baseri and Mathania and demanded that the State Election Commission take immediate cognisance of the matter.

Jolly alleged that Congress candidates in Bhilwara were not allowed to submit their nominations

and symbol authorisations, even though they were there before the time. He also alleged violation of rules in Alwar and claimed that forms of BJP candidates were accepted in Baseri even after the deadline.

"These incidents raise serious questions over the impartiality of the election process. This double standard in election rules under pressure from those in power is an attack on democracy," he said.

The leader accused the BJP of stealing elections and said the Congress would challenge irregularities at every constitutional forum.

Jolly's allegations came as former Congress MLA Divya Maderna picketed the returning officer's office at Mathania in Jodhpur district, allegedly over discrimination during the nomination process.

Maderna, who began the protest on Monday and sat through the night outside the official's office, alleged that the local MLA and a BJP candidate were allowed to enter the

RO office after the 3 pm deadline on Monday.

According to Maderna, the local police station officer received the MLA at the gate and escorted him inside the RO's office, and a Congress candidate who was already inside was forced out.

"How can the same rule be different for two people?" she asked.

"If nobody is allowed to enter for the nomination process after 3 pm, how were the local MLA and his people allowed inside? If the gate was closed, how did a police officer take them inside?" Maderna asked.

She also wondered who ordered the police to remove the Congress candidate from the office.

Maderna said the issue went beyond treatment to one Congress candidate and questioned the fairness of the entire electoral process.

AICC general secretary and former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot raised similar allegations while speaking to reporters in Barmer. (PTI)

Him-Chandigarh City to be developed as modern, sustainable urban centre: Sukhu

'The state government would commence the development of the new city shortly'

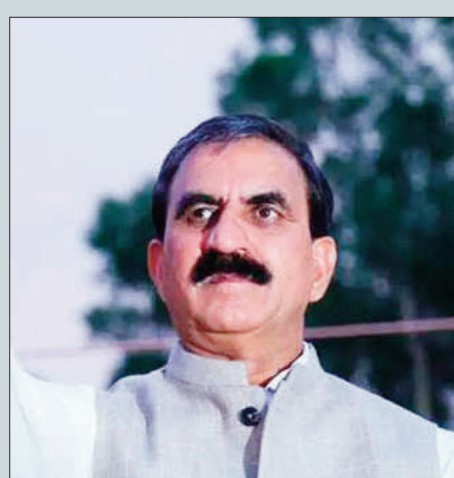
SHIMLA, Sept 1: Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Tuesday said Him-Chandigarh City in Solan district would be developed as a modern and sustainable urban centre with state-of-the-art infrastructure and essential civic amenities.

He made the remarks after reviewing the progress of the proposed city in the Baddi area of Solan district.

Sukhu said the state government would commence the development of the new city shortly and directed the concerned officers to expedite all necessary formalities to ensure timely execution of the project.

The proposed city will be located at Shitalpur in the Baddi-Barotiwala-Nalagarh industrial belt of Solan district, about 30 km from Chandigarh.

So far, 3,428 bighas of land have already been allotted for housing. In addition, officials had informed earlier that approximately



5,000 to 6,000 bighas of land from the common pool have also been identified.

The chief minister said that Him-Chandi-

garh City would be developed as a modern, well-planned and sustainable urban centre equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure and essential civic amenities.

He directed the officials to explore all possibilities for ensuring planned, sustainable and balanced development of the proposed city.

He also directed that a well-developed 9 km riverfront along the Sarsa River be incorporated into the project to enhance the city's aesthetic appeal and provide residents with a clean, attractive and recreational public space.

He further emphasised the need to ensure robust and efficient road connectivity to and from the proposed city for seamless movement and better accessibility.

Sukhu said the proposed city would not only cater to growing urban needs but also generate economic activity and contribute significantly to the state's revenue. (PTI)

GOVT. OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER P.W.D. NALBARI DISTRICT TERRITORIAL BUILDING DIVISION, NALBARI						
No.EE/(N)NT/NMCH/13/2026-27/867				Date: 25/08/2026		
SHORT TENDER NOTICE						
Tender affixing non-refundable Court fee of Rs.8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only eventually to be drawn in P.W.D. F-2 form with a validity period of 180 days are invited from the A.P.W.D (Bldg) Registered Contractor for the following work and will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00 p.m. on 16/09/2026 and will be opened on the same date and place at 3.00 p.m. in presence of intending tenderer or their authorized agent.						
SL No.	Name of work	Appx. value of work (Rs)	2% (Earnest money (Rs)	Cost of tender document Non refundable) (Rs)	Time of completion	Eligibility of contract
1	Repairing & Renovation of Workshop Building as Mortuary Block shifting from SMK Hospital to NMCH Campus at Nalbari District, Assam	16,69,527.00	33,391.00	1000.00	3 (three) months	APWD Bldg. Registered Contractor of Class-I (A, B, C), II & III
Detailed particulars of the work may be seen in the office of the undersigned during office hours in any working days. The tender papers & terms and condition may be obtained from the office of the undersigned up to 4 p.m. on 11/09/2026 by payment for cost of Tender documents as shown in the above table in the form of IPO/ Bank draft to be drawn in favour of the Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Nalbari District Territorial Building Division, Nalbari. If the date of receiving of the tender happens to be on unforeseen Bandh/Holidays the tender will be received /opened on the next working day at the same time and place. Note:- 1. Rates are to be quoted in figures and words legibly in flat percentage on the estimated rates based on CPWD DSR-2021. 2. Tenderer belonging to SC/ST/OBC/MOBC/UGE has to deposit 1% earnest money/Security deposit instead of 2% in the form of TDA/ FDR etc. 3. The competent authority reserves the right to accept/reject the tender without assigning any reason thereof. 4. Terms and conditions are as per printed F-2 form. 5. Payment will be made by the Hospital Management Society, NMCH as assured. 6. Tenderer should submit the copies of up-to-date Registration certificate, PAN Card, Labour License, EPF and GST Registration at the time of purchasing tender paper. Sd/- Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Nalbari District Territorial Building Division, Nalbari.						

Aryna Sabalenka also wins her first match Carlos Alcaraz returns to the US Open with a victory

NEW YORK, Sept 1: Carlos Alcaraz returned to the U.S. Open and looked healthy enough for a run at a repeat.

Alcaraz beat Roman Safiullin 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 on Monday, showing no problems with the right wrist injury that had sidelined the 23-year-old Spaniard since April.

Following fellow two-time U.S. Open champion Aryna Sabalenka onto Arthur Ashe Stadium, the No. 2-seeded Alcaraz appeared more comfortable as the match went on and delivered the all-around game that has made him a fan favorite in New York. He held his hand to his ear to encourage louder cheers and pumped his fist after a pretty volley winner in the final game of the match.

"I'm just really happy that I was able to compete again," Alcaraz said. "I think the level of tennis is going to be better for sure. I'm just really happy with the level that I played my first match."

If the seven-time Grand Slam champion stays healthy, he may quickly become a huge favorite with top-ranked Jannik Sinner sidelined by a knee injury and No. 4 Novak Djokovic losing in the U.S. Open's first round for the first time on Sunday. With the tournament thrown into shock by that result — Djokovic had been 19-0 in the first round at Flushing Meadows, where he won four of his men's-record 24 Grand



Slam titles — Sabalenka brought back some normalcy.

Sabalenka beat Camila Osorio 6-4, 6-4 to begin her bid to be the first player to win three straight U.S. Open championships since Serena Williams from 2012-14.

She has been to the last three U.S. Open finals, rebounding from a loss to Coco Gauff in 2023 by winning in 2024 and then topping Amanda Anisimova last year to repeat.

"I feel like this is one of my favorite stadiums," Sabalenka told the crowd afterward. "I really experienced the best emotions here in this stadium."

Sabalenka changed up her look from last time she played on Ashe. Her orange Nike outfit was covered by orange mesh, rather than the black mesh of last week in her

mixed doubles match with Djokovic that drew some criticism on social media. Sabalenka dismissed the comments, saying all that mattered was she loved it, and turns out the reason for the change was simple.

"To be honest, I didn't know that I have a day dress," she said. "I thought I have a black dress with orange underneath, I figured (out) when I went to Nike that I actually have day session and night session, which is just like black and orange for the day."

She must have certainly been happier with the level of tennis she delivered Monday, after a series of poor events coming into the U.S. Open. She was knocked out in the fourth round in both Toronto and Cincinnati, after being ousted at

the same point at Wimbledon.

That has left Sabalenka needing help to retain the No. 1 ranking, even if she wins again in New York. No. 2 Elena Rybakina will pass her if she reaches the semifinals, and won't even need to win any matches if Sabalenka fails to win the title.

Alcaraz also played in the mixed doubles event, looking rusty while partnering with Serena Williams to win one match before falling.

Other U.S. Open champions in action Monday included Naomi Osaka, Iga Swiatek and 2016 winner Stan Wawrinka, who was facing Matteo Berrettini to begin his final Grand Slam tournament before retiring.

Another top-10 seed followed Djokovic out when No. 10 Arthur Fils, coming off the title in Cincinnati, was ousted by Stefanos Tsitsipas 4-6, 7-6 (3), 6-1, 6-4. Tsitsipas, who is unseeded at the U.S. Open for the first time, was asked if he can regain the form that catapulted the Greek to the No. 3 ranking and two losses to Djokovic in Grand Slam finals.

"Why not?" Tsitsipas said.

No. 7 seed Karolina Muchova, the Wimbledon runner-up, rolled to a 6-3, 6-0 victory over Sinja Kraus. But fellow Czech Sara Bejlek, the No. 28 seed who stunned Sabalenka in Cincinnati, fell in three sets to Cristina Bucsa. (AP)

Lad replaces Shardul as Mumbai captain for Ranji Iyer or Suryakumar likely for white-ball captaincy



MUMBAI, Sept 1: Seasoned middle-order batter Siddhesh Lad has replaced Shardul Thakur as Mumbai captain for the upcoming Ranji Trophy season and either Shreyas Iyer or Suryakumar Yadav will lead the side in white-ball domestic tournaments depending on their availability.

Thakur, 34, has been replaced to manage his workload since the Mumbai think tank aims to maximise his value as the premier bowler in the red-ball team. He has also contributed heavily with the bat in crunch situations in the past.

It is for a second consecutive season that Mumbai will enter the Ranji Trophy with a new captain at the

helm. Ahead of the 2025-26 season, Thakur had replaced Ajinkya Rahane.

Rahane, who retired this year in July from all formats, had led Mumbai to their record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title win in 2023-24 with a compelling victory over Vidarbha in the summit clash.

Mumbai will also be looking to maximise their leadership options in white-ball cricket with the incumbent India T20I captain Shreyas and his predecessor Suryakumar both in fray for the captaincy role.

"We have both Shreyas Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav as the choice for white-ball captaincy, but it depends on their availability," a senior official from the MCA told PTI.

Iyer had earlier replaced Suryakumar as the captain of the Indian T20I team, a few months after the latter guided the national side to their second consecutive and overall third title win in T20 World Cup in February this year.

Iyer, meanwhile, had also led Mumbai to Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy victory in 2024-25.

Under Thakur, Mumbai had finished at the quarter-final stage of the Ranji Trophy 2025-26, losing to eventual runner-up Karnataka in the last eight clash at home.

The Ranji season will kick off on October 11. Mumbai will take on Chandigarh in their opening match of Elite Group D. The other teams in this group are Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Railways, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand.

The 34-year-old Lad has been heralded as the new leader for his qualities of being calm and composed under pressure while also being consistent. He had joined Goa for the 2022-23 season but returned to Mumbai after one-year stint. Having spent the mandatory one-year cool off in 2023-24, Lad joined Mumbai ranks again in 2024-25.

Lad had a stellar season with the bat last Ranji Trophy season, scoring 774 runs in eight matches at 77.40 with five centuries and one fifty. (PTI)

Gurnoor Brar's plan: Learning lengths from Bumrah, Siraj

BENGALURU, Sept 1: India pacer Gurnoor Brar says bowling alongside senior quicks Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj in the last three months has helped him find consistency in lengths and he is now aiming to become an all-format pacer capable of taking heavy workload.

Brar has made a reasonable beginning to his national career, taking 11 wickets across six ODIs with an economy that hovers around seven.

But the 26-year-old thinks that he would be able to better that with the newly-acquired know-how on lengths after his stints with the national team during ODI series against Afghanistan and England.

"I got selected to the India team because of the way I was performing in the Ranji Trophy and India A. But I was looking for more learnings as to how I can be more consistent on my lengths and which batsman I can bowl according to which wicket. That was my aim," Brar told select media on the sidelines of the ongoing Duleep Trophy where he is playing for North Zone.

"From the beginning, I have only one goal. I have to load my body so that no matter how many overs I bowl, or how many balls I bowl, it doesn't matter to my body. I enjoy bowling more," he said.

Interactions with India head coach Gautam Gambhir, bowling coach Morné Morkel and other senior colleagues like Bumrah helped him fine-tune his craft.

"I would say that there has been a lot of growth as a bowler after my interactions with Morné sir and Gambhir Sir. Obviously, after seeing and talking to Boom (Bumrah) Bhai, Siraj Bhai, Prasad (Krishna) Bhai...it's an experience.

"When you are watching them closely, how they prepare themselves and attack batters consistently, it's a lot of fun and learning. I am also trying to do that in my career and become an all-format bowler," he said.

So, did he get any specific advice from them?

"They said that the reason you came to this setup Centre...don't change it. But, obviously, you should know how to bowl in which conditions. Apart from that, stick to your pace and length and with experience and with playing more matches, it will get better," he said.

The improvement is already visible as Brar took 13 wickets across two multi-day matches against Sri Lanka A and SLC XI in Galle and Colombo.

Managing workload

In the two matches in Sri Lanka, the Punjab pacer bowled 54.3 overs, which left him a pleased man.

"I still feel that if I bowl in a match, I should stay in the game. Obviously, you need breaks and recovery. For that, we have to plan what we can do for recovery when the match is over. How can we sleep well?"

"But according to me, the more we push, the stronger our body will become. I have a mindset like the old fast bowlers — just keep bowling," he added.

The performance in Sri Lanka has left Brar a pleased man.

"...because that was a slow wicket and if you take a wicket on a pitch like that, then obviously, it's a very good feeling. After that performance, I have gained a lot of confidence that I can bowl on any wicket. (PTI)

Transfer deadline day for Europe's top soccer leagues with Balogun expected to among the movers

LONDON, Sept 1: It is transfer deadline day for Europe's top leagues on Tuesday and teams are trying to push through last minute deals before the window shuts, with U.S. striker Folarin Balogun set to be one of the big movers on what is expected to be a frantic day of action.

Balogun is closing in on a move to Everton from Monaco, according to reports, while Manchester City's spectacular spending spree goes on with Everton winger Iliman Ndiaye close to joining for a fee of 60 million pounds (\$81 million).

Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez has also been a reported target throughout the window, but time is running out if he is to head to the Etihad Stadium.

Jack Grealish is on his way out of City again and is expected to return to Everton for another season-long loan. It looks like being a record-breaking window for the Premier League with 2.82 billion pounds (\$3.8 billion) spent so far. The highest spend in one window was 3.14 billion pounds (\$4.25 billion) in 2025. The Premier League window closes at 2200 GMT.

It is also deadline day in Spain, Italy, Germany and France.

The deadline in Germany, France and Italy is 1800 GMT and in Spain it is 2159 GMT.

Premier League

It has been a summer of heavy change at Aston Villa, with a number of star players leaving and a slew of new arrivals. And the business continued with the deadline day signing of Ibrahim Mbeye from Paris Saint-Germain. The two-time Champions League-winning winger joins a new-look Villa attack, which has also seen the additions of Nicolas Jackson and Alejandro Garnacho. (AP)

Teams free to arrange hotels if they feel like: Japan Cricket CEO Naoki Alex Miyaji



NEW DELHI, Sept 1: Participating teams have been offered hotel stay but they are free to make their own arrangements during the upcoming Asian Games, Japan Cricket Association CEO Naoki Alex Miyaji said on Wednesday after concerns expressed by leading nations over the accommodation provided for the continental event.

At a recent Asian Cricket Council (ACC) meeting, top cricketing nations had expressed their apprehensions about logistical issues including accommodation which is 20kms from the Korogi Sports Park in Nishin City in Aichi Prefecture.

"The Asian Games is being organized by the organising committee Aichi-Nagoya Games Organizing Committee (AINAGOC) in collaboration with the ACC under the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)," Miyaji told PTI in an interview.

"The JCA has provided support in some areas but is not directly involved so I am not able to directly

answer all of your questions. What I can say is that all parties are working hard to ensure the success of Cricket in the Asian Games.

"I can also assure you that the ACC have been discussing accommodation options with AINAGOC for a long time. The participating teams in cricket are being offered hotel accommodation," Miyaji said.

The Asian Games begin on September 17. Miyaji also tried putting things in perspective.

"Many other sports are being accommodated in much more limited facilities such as a cruise ship or container hotels. The teams are free to arrange their own accommodation if they chose to do so," he said.

He also allayed fears about rumours that washrooms for teams is located at least half a kilometer from the playing arena.

"Please note that toilets will be available within the player area. There are both temporary and permanent facilities at the venue. The facilities on the ground are tempo-

rary, but AINAGOC have worked very closely with the ACC for over a year now to ensure that the best facilities are provided within the limited timeline and facility restrictions," Miyaji informed.

He also informed about the makeshift dressing rooms that has been created for the games.

"Despite being temporary, the facilities will provide as comfortable a space as possible for the players and officials. There are also permanent facilities around the ground which will be available to the players," he said.

Miyaji also provided the timelines of how they got the Korogi Sports Park ready in 17 months.

"They only had 17 months to prepare and had to start from scratch as there were no Cricket venues of any standard in Aichi Prefecture. Considering the limited time and resources available, AINAGOC and ACC have worked together to ensure that the playing facilities are suitable," he said.

Sri Lanka Cricket provided its curators to work on creation of turf as well as installation of hybrid pitches, Miyaji said.

"It will be a full size ground with turf and hybrid pitches prepared by the best curators which Sri Lanka Cricket should be credited for providing," Miyaji said reminding that there is only as much that they can do considering cricket isn't one of the top sports in Japan.

"There are limits on what they can do within these tight limits, but from what I have seen, the playing surface and field will be the best seen in Cricket's inclusion in the Asian Games." (PTI)

Marsh, Head return for ODIs against Zimbabwe, SA as Labuschagne misses out

SYDNEY, Sept 1: Top-order batter Marnus Labuschagne was a notable omission while skipper Mitchell Marsh and fellow opener Travis Head returned to the 17-member Australia squad for the ODI series against Zimbabwe and South Africa beginning later this month.

Marsh and prolific run-getter Head had missed the 50-over series in Pakistan and Bangladesh earlier this year.

The twin series, starting on September 15, assumes added significance for Australia as they begin preparations for next year's ODI World Cup, to be co-hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Australia have named the squad without an official captain, with Marsh set to lead the side in the three-match ODI series in Zimbabwe before regular ODI and Test captain Pat Cummins returns to take charge in South Africa along with fellow pacer Mitchell Starc.

Cummins has also indicated that he will not feature in all three ODIs in South Africa, meaning Marsh is likely to deputise once again, according to cricket.com.au.

Marsh has stepped in for Cummins 15 times since the fast bowler was appointed Australia's ODI captain.

Youngsters Joel Davies and Ollie Peake have retained their places in the squad following decent performances during Australia's recent series in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The three ODIs against Zimbabwe will be played in Harare on September 15, 18 and 20, followed by a three-match series against South Africa in Durban (September 24), Johannesburg (September 27) and Potchefstroom (September 30).

Cummins and Starc have been named for the South Africa leg of the ODI series as Australia are scheduled to immediately follow it with three Tests against the Proteas in October.

"This six-game series is an important lead-in to next year's World Cup, being played in the same countries, for the group," selection chief George Bailey said in a statement.

"As such it's great to have Mitch (Marsh), Travis and Josh returning, then Pat and Mitch (Starc) for the SA leg. This gives us our core of players mixed with some we think will continue to make an impression.

"For Ollie and Joel, who we rate very highly, it's another fantastic opportunity and a further chance for them to continue their exposure and growth in the Australian team," he added. (PTI)

Messi Retirement: Kolkata not yet ready to say 'Goodbye'

KOLKATA, Sept 1: There have been good days, there have been bad days, and then there was that one ugly day which Kolkata would perhaps like to forget. Through it all, Lionel Messi has somehow remained close to the city's footballing heart.

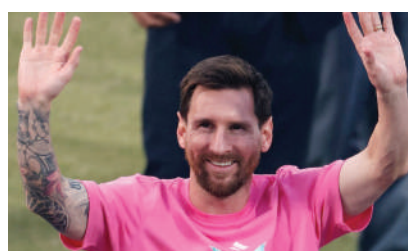
Now, less than 24 hours after the Argentine superstar announced his international retirement, there is a sense of something slipping away in Kolkata.

Messi was never just another superstar who came, played and left. Not in a city that has always embraced football and its larger-than-life heroes with an intensity of its own.

And it has been exactly 15 years since he first walked into Salt Lake Stadium on a September 2 evening. What began with 90 minutes of magic grew into deep devotion, survived years of distance and, finally, turned ugly last year.

Before Messi, there was Diego Maradona. Before Maradona, there was Pele, who played for New York Cosmos in Kolkata in 1977.

But Messi created a frenzy of his own. From 53-year-old Biplab Poddar, the assistant referee who stood on the Salt Lake Stadium pitch when Messi debuted as captain in 2011, to young fan Soumindra Ghosh, who left civil engineering to open a Messi-themed cafe and finally met him last year during his second visit, there is a common feeling: Kolkata has simply not seen enough of Messi.



The Good: 90 minutes that Kolkata will never forget

It was a rainy August evening 15 years ago in Guwahati when Biplab Poddar received what he still describes as the best letter of his life.

The All India Football Federation appointed him assistant referee for the Argentina-Venezuela friendly at Salt Lake Stadium.

For Poddar, who began refereeing in 1998, it was his first international match, with Messi, Javier Mascherano, Angel Di Maria and Sergio Aguero.

"It was like getting a golden ball," Poddar told PTI.

"My phone kept buzzing. People in my neighbourhood started garlanding me and kept sending requests to get autographs and what not. I couldn't believe those three-four days of my life," he said.

Poddar was star-struck. Match commissioner Col Gautam Kar reminded them they had a job to do.

"Don't get star-struck. At the end of the day, you're the referee. They may be Li-

onel Messi, Angel Di Maria, but you're the boss on the ground. Act as you act in other domestic matches," Poddar recalled.

The big moment came on September 2. "I was nervous for the first four-five minutes when Messi came for the toss, wearing the captain's armband for Argentina for the first time. But he was humble. He shook hands with us and also posed for photographs. The initial pangs went away gradually."

Poddar has since officiated hundreds of matches and 40-plus international games. None stayed with him like those 90 minutes.

"Life has changed for good for me after that match. Things are no more the same. I've got a lot of recognition and people everywhere know me as someone who officiated that match. I'm so grateful," he said.

"I lived my dream in those 90 minutes. I hope Messi comes back again after his retirement," he said.

The Bad: When Messi became more than a footballer

For Kolkata fans, the "bad" part of Messi's retirement is the feeling that a generation's attachment is ending.

Soumindra Ghosh, owner of the Messi-themed 'Dum Dum Leo Cafe', has spent years turning his admiration for the Argentine into a way of life. He has followed Messi since 2008. His cafe is covered with moments from the superstar's career with matches screened and the menu reference-

ing his heroics.

Ghosh met Messi during last year's "GOAT Tour", presenting him with a portrait and receiving a thumbs-up. Messi also posed for a group photograph at a fan event.

"Even my staff members are more depressed than me. I told them 'Look, this is a part of life. Everything comes to an end,'" Ghosh said.

"I knew this time would come one day. And I've spent many years watching Messi play... being with Messi in sorrow, being with Messi in joy, it was a really good journey. Obviously, it feels bad to see him retired from the Argentine jersey."

"I've thought about recording a video with everyone who visits, plus giving out the 'La Pulga' dish for free to everyone."

For his friend Surajit Saha, the attachment has become permanent.

On retirement day, Saha got a Messi tattoo on his hand.

"He said, 'Messi finished his journey on the pitch, but now Messi will stay with me forever. And this tattoo will go with me to my funeral pyre. As long as my body remains, Messi will remain with me,'" Ghosh said.

The Ugly: December 13 that turned sour

But Kolkata's Messi story has a chapter the city would rather forget.

On December 13 last year, Messi returned to Salt Lake Stadium. Anticipation was enormous: a 70-foot statue on VIP

Road, celebrity matches, packed stands and Shah Rukh Khan in attendance.

Thousands travelled from Kolkata and across India, many paying up to Rs 14,000 for a glimpse of Messi.

What should have been a once-in-a-lifetime celebration instead became one of the darkest days in Indian sport.

Messi arrived around 11:30 am, accompanied by Luis Suarez and Rodrigo De Paul. But his brief appearance, surrounded by dignitaries and politicians, meant thousands of ticket-holders could barely see him before he left in a hurry over safety concerns.

Anger quickly turned into chaos. Fans broke gates and chairs and threw objects onto the pitch, leaving Salt Lake Stadium resembling a warfield.

For Kolkata, the embarrassment was greater because Messi's other GOAT Tour events in Hyderabad, Mumbai and New Delhi passed off smoothly.

But much water has since flowed past the Hooghly. With Messi's international retirement, an old hope has returned: a prospective Inter Miami pre-season tour in South Asia.

"Who knows Messi will show up one more time. For us Messi fans, it would mean something more. Maybe there is still one more time," another diehard fan, who hails from Ichapur in Kolkata's northern suburb, summed up the mood that "Kolkata is not yet ready to say goodbye." (PTI)

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