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Brief Post

UDAN scheme
New Delhi: The Union Government has unveiled an ambitious new phase of the Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) scheme, setting the stage for a major expansion of India's regional aviation network over the coming decade with a strong focus on improving air connectivity, strengthening airport infrastructure, supporting indigenous aviation capabilities and making air travel more accessible for millions of people across the country. Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu announced that the revamped phase of the flagship regional connectivity programme aims to connect 120 new destinations and enable nearly four crore passengers to travel by air over the next ten years, reflecting the government's continued commitment to making aviation affordable, inclusive and a catalyst for economic development. Speaking at a national workshop on the modified UDAN scheme in New Delhi, the Minister said the next phase represents a significant step forward in expanding the reach of civil aviation into underserved and unserved regions while ensuring sustainable operations for airlines and airports.

CEM directs immediate assistance for flood-affected people

Diphu, July 20: Chief Executive firmly with the affected people.



Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Dr. Tuliram Ronghang, has expressed deep concern over the prevailing flood situation in Karbi Anglong and assured that the Council stands

Expressing his solidarity with the flood-affected families, Dr. Ronghang said, "My thoughts are with everyone affected by the current floods. I have directed all 26 elected Members of the Autonomous

Council (MACs) to urgently assess the ground situation and deliver immediate assistance. We are fully committed to standing by our people and restoring normalcy as quickly as possible."

The CEM directed all 26 elected MACs to visit the flood-affected areas under their respective constituencies, assess the situation on the ground and coordinate with the local administration to ensure timely assistance

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Floodwaters Disrupt Guwahati-Dibrugarh Road Connectivity: Several Trains Cancelled

M Hashim Ali correspondent Dibrugarh July 20: The devastating flood situation continuing across Assam has brought normal life to a standstill and severely disrupted transportation services throughout the state. In particular, vehicular movement on the National Highway connecting Guwahati and Dibrugarh has been seriously affected after several stretches of the road became submerged under floodwaters. The flooding has inundated multiple sections of roads in the Sivasagar and Jorhat districts, resulting in the temporary suspension of traffic heading from Guwahati towards Dibrugarh. In



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Cachar begins Census 2027 field-level training

First batch of Enumerators and Supervisors starts at Cachar College

Silchar, July 20: Preparations for the Census of India 2027

ment of the first phase of training for Enumerators and Super-

Lakhipur, Udharbond, Katigorah and Sonai. Organised

by the Cachar District Census Cell, the programme marks the beginning of the district's field-level preparations for one of the country's largest statistical exercises.

The inaugural training programme for the Silchar Revenue Circle was held at Cachar College, where seven training halls have been arranged for the exercise. A total of 1,171 Enumerators and 187 Supervisors attached to the Silchar Revenue Circle will undergo training during the programme.

The district-level training programme has been planned in four phases to ensure systematic preparation of all field personnel. The first phase is being conducted from July 20 to July 22, followed by the second phase from July 24 to July 27. The third phase is scheduled from July 29 to July 31 while the fourth and final phase will be held from August 3 to August 5. Training sessions are conducted daily from 9.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., combining classroom instruction with practical demonstrations on census schedules, digital enumeration procedures, household listing, data verification, reporting formats and field protocols.

The training programme was formally inaugurated by District Census Officer and Additional District Commissioner, Cachar,

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Flood Situation Remains Unchanged in Sivasagar

Ministers Susanta Borgohain, Bimal Bora and Keshab Mahanta Review the Situation

Khairuddin Ahmed, Staff Reporter, Sivasagar, July 20: The severe flood situation in Assam's Sivasagar district, triggered by



cloudbursts in Nagaland and incessant rainfall, has remained unchanged since it began yesterday. The Brahmaputra, Dikhow, Disang, Dorika and Dihing rivers continue to flow above the danger level, causing widespread devastation across the district.

The Dikhow River, which flows through Sivasagar town, has assumed a dangerous form. The strong current has endangered the historic British-era iron bridge fitted with a lifting mechanism. If the floodwaters continue to rise, there is a high possibility that the old bridge may collapse into the river at any moment. Local residents also reported seeing a partially decomposed body floating beneath the bridge last night.

According to reports, three people, including Chinki Begum of Chontok Pachali, have lost their lives in the powerful flood currents. However, the Sivasagar

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gathered pace in Cachar on Monday with the commencement

Students, Citizens Stage Protest in Nagaon Demanding Education Minister's Resignation

Staff Reporter, Nagaon, July 20: Hundreds of students and members of civil society on Monday staged a protest in Nagaon demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the alleged NEET paper leak issue and urging the Central Government to accept all the demands of activist Sonam Wangchuk, who is on an indefinite hunger strike in Delhi.

Organised jointly by the Nagaon Students' Community and the Nagaon Citizens' Forum, the programme began with a sit-in demonstration at Motiram Bora Democratic Ground near Zubeen Tower. The protesters later marched through the town to the office of the District Commissioner, where they submitted a memorandum addressed to the Prime Minister seeking Pradhan's resignation.

The demonstration witnessed participation from students of several educational institutions, including

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Agriculture Minister Pijush Hazarika Distributes MMUA Cheques to 22,818 Women in Dhing, Land Pattas to 81 Families

Staff Reporter, Nagaon, July 20: Hazarika referred to the implementa-

The Minister said flood protection

Assam Agriculture, Irrigation and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika on Monday distributed Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan (MMUA) cheques to 22,818 women beneficiaries in Dhing, describing the flagship initiative as a powerful instrument for promoting women's entrepreneurship and economic self-reliance.

Addressing the gathering, the Minister said the Rs 10,000 seed grant is not merely financial assistance but an opportunity for women to establish sustainable livelihoods and become financially independent. He urged beneficiaries to invest the amount wisely in income-generating activities so they could qualify for the next phases of assistance Rs 25,000 and Rs 50,000—under the MMUA scheme.

Highlighting the government's welfare and development initiatives,

tion of PMAY housing, improved road connectivity, free ration distribution, and free admissions to educational institutions. He stated that the government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, has ensured inclusive development across the state without discrimination based on religion or language. He also announced that free ration distribution would resume from next month.

measures in the Dhing constituency have enabled farmers to cultivate multiple crops, boosting agricultural productivity. Stressing transparency in governance, he noted that meritorious youth have secured government jobs through a corruption-free recruitment process. He encouraged people, especially the younger generation, to take up farming and assured them of full support from

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Villagers cross on a boat to the flood affected area at Amguri, Sivasagar district of Assam, on Monday, July 20, 2026. Photo arrange by- Rupjyoti Sarmah

CPI (ML) holds 1 Day Symbolic Hunger Strike in Dibrugarh Supporting Student-Youth Movement in Delhi

Correspondent, Dibrugarh, July 20: In solidarity with the nation-



India CPI (ML) organized a one-day symbolic hunger strike today at Chowkidinghee, Dibrugarh. CPI (ML) alleged

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Assam revolutionizes healthcare with AYUSH Integration and Investments

Guwahati: Assam has emerged as a key player in India’s healthcare transformation, thanks to the National AYUSH Mission (NAM) and the Central Sector Schemes, including AYURGYAN and AYURSWATHYA Yojana. These initiatives have not only promoted the integration of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) with mainstream healthcare but also led to significant investments in infrastructure, education, and research, providing Assam with over ₹865 crores in the past five years. The funds have allowed the state to upgrade existing AYUSH dispensaries, set up new healthcare facilities, and strengthen its healthcare delivery system to cater to the growing needs of its population. With a population spread across both urban and rural areas, Assam has benefited immensely from the expansion of AYUSH services, which have played a crucial role in enhancing healthcare access, especially in remote and underserved areas. The establishment of AYUSH Health and Wellness Centres, Yoga Wellness Centres, and Ayush Grams has brought preventive and holistic health services to local communities, offering treatments such as yoga, naturopathy, and Ayurveda alongside modern allopathic care. The integration of these services into Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs) has ensured that patients receive a diverse range of treatment options, making healthcare both more accessible and culturally relevant. This approach also addresses the increasing demand for preventive healthcare, focusing on lifestyle management and early intervention, which is essential as the country faces a rise in chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. A major milestone in the implementation of NAM has been the establishment of integrated AYUSH hospitals in rural areas of Assam. These hospitals, with capacities ranging from 10 to 50 beds, provide comprehensive care based on traditional medicine, offering a sustainable solution to healthcare challenges in regions where allopathic medicine may be limited. By ensuring a steady supply of essential medicines, the government has guaranteed that these hospitals remain operational, enabling continuous care for underserved populations. The state’s focus on AYUSH education has also been transformative, with the establishment of numerous institutions that provide specialized training in Ayurveda, Yoga, Homeopathy, and other AYUSH fields. The government’s investment in education has been pivotal in addressing the shortage of qualified AYUSH professionals, equipping a new generation of practitioners to meet the growing demand for alternative and traditional therapies. As part of the educational framework, Assam has seen a growth in institutions offering courses in pharmacy, para-medicine, and postgraduate studies, which not only meet the rising demand for AYUSH professionals but also contribute to the overall improvement of healthcare services in the state. The success of these educational initiatives has been instrumental in ensuring that Assam can sustain the growing popularity of AYUSH and meet the increasing demand for practitioners. The research component of the NAM initiative has also had a significant impact, particularly in states like Assam, where research into indigenous herbs and local flora is actively encouraged. The state’s rich biodiversity has become a valuable asset in the development of new therapeutic options based on traditional medicine. Under the AYURGYAN and AYURSWATHYA Yojana, several research institutions in Assam have received funding to explore the medicinal properties of local plants, further enhancing the scientific credibility of AYUSH treatments and making them more appealing to mainstream healthcare providers. This research is crucial in validating traditional treatments and ensuring that they are based on scientific evidence, which is key to their acceptance in modern medical practice. The government has also focused on improving digital infrastructure in healthcare, which has been a game-changer for AYUSH practitioners in Assam. With the integration of digital health tools, healthcare facilities have been able to streamline patient management, monitor health trends, and even offer virtual consultations, especially in remote areas where access to healthcare professionals is limited. This has greatly improved the quality of service delivery, making healthcare more efficient and accessible to those who need it most. Additionally, the use of digital tools allows for better management of patient data, enabling healthcare providers to track progress, manage chronic conditions, and offer personalized treatment plans. The government’s focus on research and innovation is further reflected in the promotion of Ayushman Arogya Mandirs—community wellness centers that provide preventive healthcare services based on AYUSH principles. These centers have become hubs of knowledge and practice, offering services such as yoga therapy, naturopathy, and Ayurvedic treatments, along with education on lifestyle changes to improve overall well-being. By encouraging people to adopt healthier lifestyles and participate in wellness programs, these centers are helping reduce the incidence of lifestyle-related diseases, such as obesity, stress-related disorders, and chronic illnesses. The success of the National AYUSH Mission in Assam is a testament to the government’s commitment to integrating traditional medicine with modern healthcare practices. Minister of State for AYUSH, Shri Prataprao Jadhav, highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts between the central and state governments in implementing NAM, ensuring that resources are allocated based on the unique healthcare needs of each state. In Assam, this decentralized approach has allowed for a tailored allocation of resources that addresses the state’s specific healthcare challenges. As the initiative continues to roll out across In-

dia, Assam remains at the forefront of this transformation, benefiting from increasing infrastructure, financial support, and an expanding network of healthcare services. The integration of AYUSH systems with modern medicine offers a promising path for the future of healthcare in Assam and across India, providing a model for how traditional medicine can complement allopathic practices to improve overall public health. The government’s continued investment in AYUSH, along with the success of schemes like AYURGYAN and AYURSWATHYA Yojana, has laid the foundation for a more holistic, inclusive, and sustainable healthcare system. With these initiatives, Assam is not only enhancing its healthcare infrastructure but also ensuring that its rich cultural heritage is preserved and integrated into the modern healthcare system. By addressing the healthcare needs of underserved populations, promoting preventive care, and investing in education and research, Assam has become a key player in India’s broader healthcare transformation. The success of the National AYUSH Mission in Assam offers valuable lessons for other states and regions, showing how traditional medicine can play a vital role in improving healthcare access, particularly in rural and underserved areas. The integration of AYUSH into mainstream healthcare not only offers more treatment options but also fosters a healthcare system that is more inclusive, diverse, and better equipped to meet the evolving needs of India’s population. As the National AYUSH Mission continues to expand, Assam’s growing healthcare infrastructure serves as a model for other regions to follow, offering hope for a future where both traditional and modern medicine work hand in hand to provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare to all. As the government continues to focus on innovation, research, and infrastructure, the future of healthcare in Assam looks promising, with the state positioned to become a leader in the integration of AYUSH and modern medical practices. The transformation of Assam’s healthcare system under the National AYUSH Mission reflects the potential for traditional medicine to complement modern healthcare approaches, ensuring a healthier and more sustainable future for all citizens. The expansion of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) services across India, driven by the National AYUSH Mission (NAM) and Central Sector Schemes like AYURGYAN and AYURSWATHYA Yojana, is reshaping the country’s healthcare landscape, with Assam emerging as a key beneficiary of these initiatives. Over the past five years, Assam has received more than ₹865 crores in funding, which has been used to upgrade AYUSH dispensaries, establish new healthcare facilities, and integrate traditional medicine into mainstream healthcare. The state has also benefited from an extensive network of AYUSH dispensaries and sub-health centers co-located with Primary Health Centers (PHCs) and Community Health Centers (CHCs), facilitating the seamless integration of traditional medicine with allopathic treatments. The government’s commitment to preventive healthcare is evident through the establishment of Yoga Wellness Centres, Ayush Grams, and AYUSH Health and Wellness Centres, which focus on yoga, naturopathy, and lifestyle management. These initiatives, along with the development of over 3,883 Yoga Wellness Centres and 1,055 Ayush Grams nationwide, contribute to improving the community’s health and well-being. The AYURGYAN and AYURSWATHYA Yojana, launched in 2021, have provided critical financial support for research, innovation, and the strengthening of AYUSH practices across India. Unlike traditional funding models, these schemes provide merit-based assistance directly to institutions, allowing for more flexible and targeted resource allocation. Institutions across Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, and other states have received funding to enhance their healthcare capabilities, allowing for the introduction of new AYUSH-based treatment options. Over the past five years, ₹27,652 crores have been distributed under NAM, with substantial resources allocated to states like Assam, Uttar Pradesh, and Kerala, which face specific healthcare challenges or have large populations. This financial support has been instrumental in expanding the reach of AYUSH services in Assam, ensuring the availability of essential medicines in AYUSH hospitals and dispensaries. The establishment of integrated AYUSH hospitals in rural areas, with capacities ranging from 10 to 50 beds, has been particularly impactful, providing healthcare access to underserved populations. The government’s focus on recurring support for essential medicines ensures that these hospitals remain well-stocked, enabling continuous care. Additionally, the government’s emphasis on AYUSH education is helping to address the shortage of qualified AYUSH professionals in states like Assam. Through NAM, over 76 undergraduate and 36 postgraduate AYUSH institutions have received support for infrastructure upgrades and curriculum expansion, equipping students with specialized training in Ayurveda, Yoga, and Homeopathy. Assam benefits from this educational framework, with several institutions in the state receiving support to enhance their infrastructure and offerings. This investment in AYUSH education is crucial to meeting the increasing demand for traditional medicine practitioners as the sector continues to expand. Research centers dedicated to AYUSH practices are also playing a pivotal role in promoting evidence-based traditional medicine. The government has prioritized research to validate AYUSH treatments, making them more accepted among mainstream medical professionals. Additionally, the integration of digital health tools is transforming healthcare delivery in Assam, where the government is enhancing digital infrastructure in healthcare facili-

ties. These tools enable better management of patient data, monitor public health trends, and facilitate virtual consultations, improving access to healthcare in remote areas. Digital initiatives are particularly significant in Assam, where rural areas often face barriers to accessing healthcare services. The promotion of Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, community wellness centers offering preventive healthcare services based on AYUSH principles, is another example of how the government is fostering greater public participation in health and wellness activities. These centers offer yoga therapy, naturopathy, and Ayurvedic treatments while educating communities on preventive health measures. Minister of State for AYUSH, Shri Prataprao Jadhav, emphasized the importance of collaboration between the central and state governments in implementing NAM. The decentralized approach of the scheme ensures that resources are allocated where they are most needed, addressing each state’s unique healthcare challenges. Assam has benefited from this tailored approach, which ensures that the state’s healthcare needs are met. As a result, the state’s healthcare infrastructure has seen significant improvements, with increasing financial support driving advancements in healthcare delivery. The integration of AYUSH services with mainstream healthcare, alongside a focus on preventive health and wellness, is positioning Assam at the forefront of India’s healthcare transformation. The National AYUSH Mission provides a comprehensive solution to the country’s growing healthcare challenges, particularly in rural and underserved regions. Assam’s experience showcases how traditional medicine, when integrated into modern healthcare systems, can address a wide range of health issues, reduce dependency on allopathic treatments, and offer more inclusive, culturally relevant healthcare options. As the country’s population grows and ages, the demand for accessible, affordable, and sustainable healthcare solutions continues to rise. NAM addresses these needs by promoting preventive care and well-being through natural healing systems practiced in India for centuries. Assam’s investment in yoga and naturopathy reflects a growing recognition of the importance of mental and physical health, with these practices now integral to mainstream healthcare strategies. The government’s emphasis on AYUSH education has created a steady supply of trained professionals in the field, ensuring that Assam can meet the growing demand for qualified practitioners. The upgrading of educational institutions and the establishment of new ones, focused on research and development in AYUSH practices, will play a crucial role in strengthening the evidence base for traditional medicine and promoting its integration into modern healthcare systems. The inclusion of digital health initiatives is another crucial component of the NAM’s success. These initiatives are helping streamline patient management, monitor health trends, and improve service delivery, particularly in remote areas where access to healthcare can be limited. The government’s push for research and innovation in AYUSH, through schemes like AYURGYAN and AYURSWATHYA Yojana, has accelerated the exploration of new frontiers in traditional medicine. In Assam, research into the therapeutic benefits of local herbs and natural resources is gaining momentum, further integrating the state’s rich biodiversity into the broader AYUSH framework. These research efforts could position Assam as a leader in the development of traditional medical practices and the global promotion of its unique natural resources. The establishment of Yoga Wellness Centres and Ayush Health & Wellness Centres has also transformed healthcare delivery by promoting a preventive approach to health. These centers, which offer yoga, meditation, and holistic health practices, are helping reduce the burden of chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and obesity in Assam and other regions. These centers have encouraged greater public participation in health and wellness activities, fostering a culture of health-consciousness that supports long-term well-being. The government’s initiatives, such as NAM, reflect a shift in India’s approach to healthcare, recognizing the value of holistic, preventive care alongside modern medical treatments. By prioritizing research, education, and infrastructure development, NAM is creating a more inclusive and sustainable healthcare system that meets the diverse needs of India’s population. Assam, as a key player in this mission, is poised to benefit from continued investment in AYUSH services, with its healthcare system becoming increasingly integrated and accessible. As the mission progresses, the integration of AYUSH systems with mainstream healthcare will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of India’s healthcare system, offering diverse and effective healthcare options that cater to the unique needs of the population. The success of the National AYUSH Mission in Assam is a model for other regions of India and the world, demonstrating the potential of traditional medicine to complement modern medical practices and create a more balanced, sustainable healthcare system. The government’s ongoing investment in AYUSH infrastructure, education, and research is laying the foundation for a healthier future, with the promise of continued improvements in healthcare access and outcomes across India. The lessons learned in Assam offer valuable insights for the broader global healthcare movement, where traditional and modern medicine can coexist, creating a holistic approach to well-being. As NAM continues to expand, it is clear that the integration of AYUSH into the mainstream healthcare system will play a key role in shaping a healthier, more sustainable future for India and the world at large.

Northeast India's Cultural Heritage Takes Center Stage Nationally

Guwahati: Union Minister of Communications and Development of the Northeastern Region, Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, chaired the curtain-raiser event for the first-ever Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav, scheduled to take place at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. The Mahotsav, to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is designed to showcase the vibrant culture, arts, crafts, and economic potential of Northeast India. Minister Scindia emphasized that the Mahotsav would offer an unparalleled platform for promoting the region’s dynamic textile sector, tourism opportunities, traditional craftsmanship, and Geographical Indication (GI) tagged products, thus aligning with Prime Minister Modi’s vision of making the Northeast an engine of India’s growth. He highlighted the symbolism of the eight avatars of Lakshmi—Prosperity, Opulence, Purity, Wealth, Knowledge, Duty, Agriculture, and Animal Husbandry—as reflecting the essence of Northeast India. This event, organized by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) through its Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE), the North Eastern Handicrafts & Handlooms Development Corporation Limited (NEHHDC), is expected to be a milestone in fostering greater visibility and economic integration for the region. Dr. Sukanta Majumdar, Minister of State for Education and DoNER, Shri Chanchal Kumar, Secretary of MDoNER, and other senior officials were present at the event. The Mahotsav’s mascot, ‘Purvi,’ a young girl representing all eight states of Northeast India, was introduced, symbolizing the spirit of the region beyond the event’s duration. The festival is structured as a three-day cultural extravaganza that aims to promote the region’s traditional arts, crafts, and products while offering a platform for business opportunities and partnerships in sectors like handlooms, handicrafts, agriculture, horticulture, tourism, and gems and jewellery. The event will feature exhibitions with over 250 artisans and entrepreneurs from Northeast India, who will present a range of products including GI tagged items, organic agricultural produce, and indigenous fruits. State-specific pavilions will showcase the unique culture and products of each Northeast state, with a special focus on Eri and Muga silk, two iconic textiles of the region. The Mahotsav will also include technical sessions on women’s leadership, information technology, energy, healthcare, arts, and sports, with a key session titled “Towards Prosperity: Catalysing North East’s Progress Towards a Viksit Bharat” to underscore the strategic role of the Northeast in India’s development. An Investors Roundtable will provide a platform for stakeholders to explore business opportunities and strengthen partnerships, while Buyer-Seller Meets will focus on sectors such as handlooms, handi-

crafts, agriculture, and tourism. A Design Conclave and Fashion Show will further highlight the region’s rich handloom and handicraft traditions, offering a stage for local artisans to collaborate with national designers. Ashtalakshmi Grameen Haat will recreate the traditional rural markets of Northeast India, featuring over 300 artisans, organic producers, and farmers selling indigenous products. Cultural performances will be a major highlight of the Mahotsav, offering visitors a journey through the region’s diverse artistic heritage. On December 6, the festival will commence with the ‘Ashtalakshmi Symphony,’ followed by a performance by the Shillong Chamber Choir. The second day, December 7, will feature performances by PANGPARI from Mizoram and SOFIYUM from Sikkim, along with a Fashion Show by Prasad Bidapa showcasing collections by Northeast Indian designers. On December 8, the festival will be enriched with performances by BASAV from Manipur, FEATHERHEADS HAOKUI band, and the Tai Khamti Dance, alongside a guitar performance by Immanla Jamir. Through these performances, the Mahotsav will celebrate the vibrant cultural traditions of the Northeast while also fostering a deeper connection between the region’s cultural expressions and the broader Indian audience. This landmark event aims to make the Northeast a key player in India’s economic growth by promoting its industries, strengthening regional ties, and enhancing cultural understanding. The Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav is poised to become a significant calendar event, continuing to celebrate the diverse cultural wealth of Northeast India and acting as a catalyst for economic progress in the region. The Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav is a reflection of the Indian government’s dedication to advancing the Northeast’s cultural, social, and economic profile on the national and global stage. By creating an all-encompassing platform that not only celebrates the region’s rich history but also focuses on fostering opportunities for modern growth, this festival aims to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation. For the people of Northeast India, the event offers a chance to bring their rich heritage to the forefront, presenting a multitude of locally produced, authentic goods to wider markets. The inclusion of the eight avatars of Lakshmi symbolizes the multifaceted potential of the Northeast, recognizing its contributions to India’s agricultural, cultural, economic, and industrial landscape. With its combination of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary business opportunities, the Mahotsav also serves as a critical space for collaboration. The Investor Roundtable and Buyer-Seller Meets are designed to spark long-term partnerships and investment in various sectors that are key to the region’s prosperity. These initiatives aim to encourage

innovation, sustainable business practices, and the creation of jobs within the region, enhancing the economic resilience of Northeast India. The technical sessions planned during the Mahotsav, such as discussions on women’s leadership, IT, energy, healthcare, and sports, are a part of the broader vision to empower the region’s youth and women and to involve them in the region’s growth story. These sessions will offer new perspectives on how Northeast India can leverage technology and innovation to propel itself into the future, creating a more vibrant and diversified economy. A noteworthy aspect of the event is the focus on Geographical Indications (GI) tagged products, which are closely tied to the identity of the Northeast. GI products, such as the exquisite Muga silk and the famous Assam tea, have the potential to drive global recognition and tourism to the region, allowing it to carve out a unique niche in the international market. With over 34 GI tagged products on display, the Mahotsav is set to shine a spotlight on these items, celebrating the uniqueness of the region while encouraging fair trade and sustainable growth. The cultural performances scheduled for the Mahotsav are expected to captivate audiences with the diversity and energy of the Northeast’s traditional arts. From classical dances to folk music, and from indigenous instruments to modern performances, the event promises a sensory immersion into the soul of the region. Each performance will be a vivid testament to the perseverance and vibrancy of the people of Northeast India, highlighting their resilience and creativity despite the challenges posed by geography and history. Jyotiraditya Scindia’s assertion that the Northeast is central to India’s future underscores the region’s growing importance as a strategic partner in national development. As part of the overarching national development agenda, the Northeast is poised to become a critical contributor to India’s economy, culture, and future innovation. The festival aligns perfectly with this vision, as it creates an environment conducive to growth and sustainability, where both the old and the new come together in harmony. Looking beyond the immediate event, the Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav is designed to lay the groundwork for a long-term, sustained development of Northeast India. With a focus on fostering collaborations between local artisans, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and global investors, it aims to establish a model that can be replicated across different regions of India, ensuring that Northeast India continues to play a key role in the country’s progress for decades to come. The Mahotsav, through its events and initiatives, is expected to have far-reaching impacts, from stimulating tourism and investment to fostering cultural pride and economic self-sufficiency.

Shyam Steel Group breaks ground on Rs 10,000-crore, 2-MTPA integrated steel plant at Mejia

Guwahati: Suvendu Adhikari, Hon’ble Chief Minister of West Bengal, laid the foundation stone of Shyam Steel Group’s 2-MTPA Inte-

grated Steel Plant, as part of its Steel Division’s Expansion Programme on 17th July 2026. The proposed Plant comprising of, among others, the facilities of DRI Unit, Pellet & Beneficiation, Steel Melting Shop, High Speed Rolling Mill for TMT Bars and structural steel will add to the national capacity of steel manufacturing and significantly contribute to the reaching of the target of 300 MT Steel production by 2029-30 as envisaged in the National Steel Policy (NSP) 2017. Shyam Steel Group, headquartered in Kolkata, West Bengal, is one of India’s leading, trusted, and reputed industrial conglomerates in the steel sector. Established in the year 1953 by the renowned Beriwalla family, it carries over seven decades of rich industrial legacy and heritage. Today, with an annual steel production capacity of 1.5 million tonnes per annum (MTPA), it has emerged as the country’s one of the most prominent integrated steel manufacturers and the post expansion its finished steel production capacity will be shot up to 3.5 MTPA. Importantly, Shyam Steel Group is not merely a name in the steel industry but remains a strong and steadfast partner in India’s development trajectory spreading across infrastructure development, industrial growth, and nation-building. The Group has an annual turnover of over Rs.10,000 crore and directly employs more than 25,000 people, while supporting the livelihoods of over 1.25 lakh families. The expansion programme of its steel division will, apart from spurring a plethora of economic activities in the backward district of Bankura and other underdeveloped districts, will create additional employment opportunities of more than 15000 people directly and indirectly and livelihood support for thousands of families. In addition to investment of INR 10, 000 crores in expansion of its Steel division in terms of setting up of the Integrated Steel Plant(s), Shyam Steel Group also proposes to invest approxi-



mately Rs.5,000 crore across the strategic sectors of national importance like Defence Manufacturing, Aviation & Advanced Equipment, Real Estate & Industrial Townships, Fabrication, Paints & Industrial Coatings, Infrastructure, Construction Chemicals, Engineering and Other Emerging Industrial Sectors. It is worthwhile to mention that the combined investment of INR 15,000 crores in Shyam Steel Group’s Steel division’s expansion Project as well as other strategic sectors of national importance, the employment opportunities that the Shyam Steel Group is set to create will go up to more than 20,000 people directly and indirectly and provide for livelihood support for several thousand families in the backward districts of West Bengal. Mr. Lalit Beriwalla, Director of the Group said, “Shyam Steel Group’s proposed investment is not merely a financial commitment, it is essentially a visionary initiative aligned with the national aspirations of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) and "Viksit West Bengal" (Developed West Bengal). Backed by its technological expertise, financial strength, extensive industrial experience, and long-term vision, Shyam Steel Group is committed to being a trusted partner in West Bengal’s industrial renaissance. The proposed investment is not just about establishing industries; it is a commitment to creating a lasting foundation for prosperity, employment generation, innovation, and sustainable development for generations to come. Our initiatives are aligned with the vision of our Hon’ble Prime Minister and is fully propelled by the double engine Sarkar. It’s a defining moment for us as we reinforce our commitment to take the development trajectory of the State Government forward and herald a new dawn of progress in West Bengal that had suffered serious setback in terms of industrial development for many decades and is now set to begin afresh under the leadership of the State’s dynamic Hon’ble Chief Minister, Shri Suvendu Adhikari, under the visionary guidance of our Hon’ble Prime Min-

ister Narendra Modi ji and Hon’ble Home & Co-operation Minister Shri Amit Shah ji in sync with the national vision of the Central Government.” He also added, “with the enhanced steel production capacity in place, Shyam Steel Group will be in a more comfortable position to meet the rising demand of its country-wide institutional and retail clientele through its extensive business network with more than 5,000 enlisted dealer partners across the country. The high-quality steel products catering to the surging demand of multiple categories of clientele prominent among them being National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Airports Authority of India (AAI), Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), RAILWAYS, DEFENCE, BHEL, IOCL, NPCIL and host of other front-ranking government and infrastructure giants will have sustainable impact in the quality of their works. The choice of our products unmistakably bears testimony to the Group’s unwavering commitment to public interest driven by trust, quality, timely delivery, and technical excellence. Besides, it will substantially meet both the State’s and country’s high quality steel requirements in the Urban & Rural Housing, Public Health Engineering, Rural and State Road construction, Port, Jetties, Warehouses, Development of Smart Cities, and Urban Rejuvenation sectors etc. Additionally, the expansion of the Shyam Steel Group’s steel Division will go a long way in recalibrating the centuries-old industrial base of West Bengal, as well as its rapid economic transformation improving the quality of life of the people. This single step of Shyam Steel Group will lead many thousand steps to follow towards making West Bengal a vibrant manufacturing hub where skill development, advanced technological growth, qualitative excellence and innovations will confluence to the sustainable growth of State’s economy and act as the harbinger to India becoming the 3rd largest global economy in the years to come. Established in 1953, Shyam Steel Group is one of India’s leading integrated steel manufacturers and among the country’s leading TMT bar manufacturers and suppliers. Headquartered in New Town, Kolkata, West Bengal, the company offers a comprehensive range of steel products for infrastructure, industrial, and construction applications. Shyam Steel serves key sectors including NHAI, Defence, Railways, IOCL, AAI, Oil India Limited (OIL), various state government projects, and retail customers across India. Recognised for its commitment to quality, innovation, and sustainability, the company is GreenPro Certified, reflecting its environmentally responsible manufacturing practices. With over seven decades of expertise, Shyam Steel Group continues to contribute to India’s infrastructure through innovation, reliability, and world-class steel solutions.

from 23.71 percent a year earlier and 25.56 percent at the end of March 2026, while Risk Weighted Assets (RWA) increased to Rs.2,30,728 crore from Rs.1,92,965 crore a year earlier, reflecting business expansion supported by a solid capital base. During the quarter, IDBI Bank also achieved several significant milestones. The bank received the APY Annual Award of Ultimate Achiever from the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance, for successfully achieving its Atal Pension Yojana enrolment targets for FY 2025-26. The award, presented by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), recognised the bank’s contribution towards financial inclusion and social security. The bank also launched “IDBI Innovate 2026,” a nationwide hackathon inviting start-ups, fintech firms, developers and innovators to create technology-driven solutions for banking challenges, reinforcing its commitment to digital transformation and customer-centric innovation. In another recognition of its technological advancement, IDBI Bank was honoured at the Internal Audit Excellence Awards 2026 for its AI-enabled iNetra system, which has enhanced internal audit processes, strengthened risk oversight and demonstrated the bank’s leadership in adopting innovative technologies for governance and operational excellence.

Mumbai: ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund today announced the launch of ICICI Prudential BSE Insurance ETF, an open-ended Index Exchange Traded Fund tracking BSE Insurance Index. The BSE Insurance Index is designed to reflect the behavior and performance of insurance companies forming part of the sector. The insurance industry has evolved into a diverse ecosystem encompassing life, general and health insurance businesses, supported by expanding distribution channels, increasing digital adoption and a wider range of products catering to the changing needs of individuals and businesses. As the sector continues to deepen its reach across the country, listed insurance companies are playing an increasingly important role in India’s financial services landscape. Commenting on the launch, Chintan Haria, Principal - Investment Strategy, ICICI Prudential AMC said, “Rising incomes, greater financial awareness, increasing healthcare needs, supportive regulatory reforms and the government’s vision of ‘Insurance for All by 2047’ are collectively expanding the opportunity for the insurance industry. Yet, India’s insurance penetration remains below global levels, indicating substantial headroom for future growth. We believe these structural drivers can create sustained value over the long term. With the launch of ICICI Prudential BSE Insurance ETF, we are offering investors a simple, transparent and cost-efficient avenue to participate in the growth of some of India’s leading insurance companies.” Exchange traded funds have increasingly become a preferred investment vehicle for investors seeking transparent, low-

cost and efficient access to specific market segments. ICICI Prudential BSE Insurance ETF expands the fund house’s ETF offering by providing investors with an avenue to participate in a sector that has become an integral part of India’s financial services ecosystem.

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NE states face a hidden heat risk to pregnancy, study finds

Guwahati: A new national study has found that prolonged extreme heat during pregnancy raises the risk of adverse birth outcomes, and that mothers in India’s mountainous regions were among the most affected. The finding runs against the common view that heat is a problem for the plains alone. In hill states of the North-east, such as Meghalaya and Nagaland, and across the humid subtropical Brahmaputra valley of Assam, the same heat stress appears to land harder than in places long used to it. Across India’s climate zones, women living in mountainous regions were the most affected by prolonged heat extremes, probably because they are less acclimatised to such conditions, the authors suggest. The study, titled Effect of extreme heat stress on adverse pregnancy outcomes in India, analysed 209,266 births recorded between 2015 and 2020 and matched each one to local heat conditions across the mother’s pregnancy. Rather than relying on average or peak temperatures, the researchers counted the number of consecutive ‘sweltering’ days a woman experienced, defined as days when the India Heat Index exceeded the 90th percentile of the long-term local climate. It was published in the peer-reviewed journal Environmental Research Communications. For low birth weight, defined as a live baby weighing under 2,500 grams, each additional consecutive sweltering day during pregnancy increased the odds by about 1%

after accounting for other factors. The timing of exposure mattered. Heat in the first trimester was linked to a higher risk of preterm birth, and heat in the second trimester to lower birth weight. The study was led by researchers at the University of Queensland–IIT Delhi Academy of Research (UQIDAR), with IIT Delhi and the University of Queensland’s School of Public Health, and collaborators at UNSW Sydney, the University of Exeter and Korea University. “Heat is not a background condition during pregnancy. Our data show that each additional day of extreme heat a mother endures nudges up the risk to her baby, and that risk lands hardest on women who are already vulnerable. As heatwaves lengthen, protecting pregnant women has to be part of how India plans for a warmer climate,” said Vineetha Vincent, lead author of the study from UQIDAR. The authors argue that India should prepare for these risks as global warming makes extreme heat more frequent and prolonged, with a particular focus on communities that are less equipped to cope. “India already has heat action plans in several cities. The next step is to make sure pregnant women are named as a priority group within them, with practical measures, from cooling and hydration to antenatal advice, reaching the districts and households that bear the greatest risk,” said Nicholas J Osborne, co-author, School of Public Health, University of Queensland, Australia.

New Delhi: The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has raised objections to Truecaller’s display of a “frequently blocked” badge on calls originating from the dedicated 140 and 1600 number series, saying such labels could mislead telecom consumers and create unnecessary suspicion around legitimate commercial and government communications. A senior TRAI official said tagging regulated number series with labels such as “frequently blocked” is not advisable as it can confuse users and undermine confidence in calls that are made under the regulator’s prescribed framework. Instead, the official suggested that Truecaller should display a message informing users that they can exercise their choice to block unwanted promotional communications from the 140 series through TRAI’s official Do Not Disturb (DND) preference management application. According to the regulator, greater public awareness of the DND framework would be a more effective solution than labelling individual numbers, as it allows consumers to manage their communication preferences in a structured manner. TRAI has designated the 1600 series exclusively for service and transactional calls made by regulated banking, financial ser-

vices and insurance (BFSI) entities, including those supervised by the Reserve Bank of India, Securities and Exchange Board of India, Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India and Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. The series is also used for government-to-citizen communications. The 140 series, meanwhile, has been earmarked for promotional calls made by registered entities across sectors. The senior official cautioned that under no circumstances should 1600 series numbers be tagged in a manner that discourages consumers from answering them, as such calls could include critical fraud alerts, transaction verifications, banking notifications and government communications. The regulator’s remarks come amid an ongoing disagreement between TRAI and Truecaller over the display of labels on the dedicated 140 and 1600 number series. Truecaller has argued that spam calls have increased after TRAI mandated the use of dedicated number series while restricting caller identification apps from displaying community-reported spam information for those numbers. According to the company, many users have begun ignoring or blocking calls from these series, reducing trust in genuine business communications.

Sensex, Nifty end lower amid selling in financial stocks

Mumbai : Benchmark equity indices ended lower on Monday, weighed down by losses in banking and financial stocks as investors remained cautious amid rising geopolitical tensions between the United States and Iran. The Sensex declined 443 points, or 0.57 per cent, to settle at 77,708.52, while the Nifty fell 96 points, or 0.39 per cent, to close at 24,238.50. Commenting on Nifty technical outlook, experts said that the 24,300–24,400 zone continues to be the immediate resistance, with the upper end of this range aligning with the 200-day Exponential Moving Average (EMA). “A sustained breakout above this zone would strengthen bullish momentum and could pave the way for an advance towards the 24,500–24,600 region,” an analyst stated. “On the downside, 24,100 remains the immediate support level. A decisive breach below this mark may trigger fresh profit booking and expose the index to the 24,000 psychological support,” as per the market expert. Selling pressure was largely concen-

trated in heavyweight banking and financial stocks, with Axis Bank, HDFC Bank and Maruti Suzuki India emerging as the top losers on the Nifty index. Despite the weakness in the benchmark indices, the broader market outperformed. The Nifty MidCap index gained 0.6 per cent, while the Nifty SmallCap index ended 0.16 per cent higher. Among sectoral indices, the Nifty Private Bank and Nifty Financial Services recorded the sharpest declines, reflecting pressure on financial counters. On the other hand, the Nifty Pharma and Nifty PSU Bank indices ended with the strongest gains. Experts said that market participants remained cautious through the session as they monitored developments surrounding tensions between the US and Iran, with geopolitical uncertainties keeping investor sentiment subdued. “On the global front, the conflict between the US and Iran deepened further, with strikes now extending into a ninth day and tensions increasingly centred on the Strait of Hormuz,” a market expert noted.

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IDBI Bank reports 5% rise in profits on Y-o-Y basis

Guwahati: IDBI Bank reported a strong financial and operational performance for the first quarter of FY 2026-27, registering a net profit of Rs.2,115 crore compared to Rs.2,007 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 5 percent and a quarter-on-quarter increase of 9 percent. The bank posted an operating profit of Rs.2,168 crore, while continuing to improve its funding profile through lower borrowing costs. The cost of deposits declined to 4.59 percent in Q1 FY27 from 4.84 percent in Q1 FY26, marking a reduction of 25 basis points year-on-year and 1 basis point sequentially. Similarly, the cost of funds improved to 4.68 percent from 4.98 percent a year earlier, reflecting a reduction of 30 basis points year-on-year and 3 basis points quarter-on-quarter. Net Interest Income (NII), which represents the difference between interest earned and interest paid, rose by 10 percent year-on-year to Rs.3,486 crore from Rs.3,166 crore, while the Net Interest Margin (NIM) stood at a healthy 3.61 percent. Return on Assets (ROA), a key profitability indicator, improved to 1.89 percent, registering a quarter-on-quarter increase of 14 basis points. The bank also recorded robust business growth during the quarter, with total deposits rising 10 percent year-on-year to Rs.3,25,757 crore as of June 30, 2026, compared to Rs.2,96,782 crore a year

earlier. CASA deposits increased by 7 percent year-on-year to Rs.1,42,162 crore from Rs.1,32,467 crore, while the CASA ratio remained strong at 43.64 percent, reflecting a healthy low-cost deposit base. Net advances witnessed an impressive 22 percent year-on-year growth to Rs.2,58,968 crore from Rs.2,11,907 crore and also grew by 2 percent sequentially from Rs.2,53,626 crore as of March 31, 2026. The bank maintained a balanced lending portfolio, with the corporate and retail segments accounting for 30 percent and 70 percent respectively of the gross advances portfolio. Asset quality continued to improve, with the Gross Non-Performing Asset (GNPA) ratio declining to 2.30 percent as of June 30, 2026, from 2.93 percent a year earlier and 2.32 percent in the previous quarter. The Net NPA ratio further improved to 0.16 percent compared to 0.21 percent in the corresponding period last year. The Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR), including technical write-offs, remained exceptionally strong at 99.31 percent and has consistently stayed above 99 percent since September 2023, highlighting the bank’s prudent risk management practices. The bank also maintained a strong capital position, with the Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) improving to 26.92 percent from 25.39 percent a year ago and 26.65 percent in the previous quarter. Tier I Capital strengthened to 26.38 percent

from 23.71 percent a year earlier and 25.56 percent at the end of March 2026, while Risk Weighted Assets (RWA) increased to Rs.2,30,728 crore from Rs.1,92,965 crore a year earlier, reflecting business expansion supported by a solid capital base. During the quarter, IDBI Bank also achieved several significant milestones. The bank received the APY Annual Award of Ultimate Achiever from the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance, for successfully achieving its Atal Pension Yojana enrolment targets for FY 2025-26. The award, presented by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), recognised the bank’s contribution towards financial inclusion and social security. The bank also launched “IDBI Innovate 2026,” a nationwide hackathon inviting start-ups, fintech firms, developers and innovators to create technology-driven solutions for banking challenges, reinforcing its commitment to digital transformation and customer-centric innovation. In another recognition of its technological advancement, IDBI Bank was honoured at the Internal Audit Excellence Awards 2026 for its AI-enabled iNetra system, which has enhanced internal audit processes, strengthened risk oversight and demonstrated the bank’s leadership in adopting innovative technologies for governance and operational excellence.

IDFC FIRST Bank goes live on the EPFO platform

Mumbai: IDFC FIRST Bank has launched the Provident Fund (PF) payment services through its integration with the Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), under the Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India. This integration enables establishments to initiate PF payments directly through the EPFO portal and seamlessly complete

transactions via IDFC FIRST Bank’s Retail and Corporate Internet Banking platforms. The solution offers a secure and fully digital experience, with real-time transaction confirmations, an intuitive user interface, and instant challan downloads for easy record-keeping and reconciliation. Commenting on the launch, Mr. Ashish Singh, Head - Retail Liabili-

ties, IDFC FIRST Bank, said, “We understand that timely statutory compliance is a priority for every business, and we believe managing these payments should be simple and stress-free. With our EPFO integration, customers can now make provident fund payments quickly, securely, and with ease through IDFC FIRST Bank’s digital platforms.

ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund launches ICICI Prudential BSE Insurance ETF NFO Period: July 20- July 28

Mumbai: ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund today announced the launch of ICICI Prudential BSE Insurance ETF, an open-ended Index Exchange Traded Fund tracking BSE Insurance Index. The BSE Insurance Index is designed to reflect the behavior and performance of insurance companies forming part of the sector. The insurance industry has evolved into a diverse ecosystem encompassing life, general and health insurance businesses, supported by expanding distribution channels, increasing digital adoption and a wider range of products catering to the changing needs of individuals and businesses. As the sector continues to deepen its reach across the country, listed insurance companies are playing an increasingly important role in India’s financial services landscape. Commenting on the launch, Chintan Haria, Principal - Investment Strategy, ICICI Prudential AMC said, “Rising incomes, greater financial awareness, increasing healthcare needs, supportive regulatory reforms and the government’s vision of ‘Insurance for All by 2047’ are collectively expanding the opportunity for the insurance industry. Yet, India’s insurance penetration remains below global levels, indicating substantial headroom for future growth. We believe these structural drivers can create sustained value over the long term. With the launch of ICICI Prudential BSE Insurance ETF, we are offering investors a simple, transparent and cost-efficient avenue to participate in the growth of some of India’s leading insurance companies.” Exchange traded funds have increasingly become a preferred investment vehicle for investors seeking transparent, low-

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Editorial

PMAY-G

A major beneficiaries’ convention under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana (PMAY-G) along with the state-level award distribution ceremony of the Maha Awas Abhiyan is set to be held in Satara district of Maharashtra, marking another significant step in the Government’s continued push toward rural housing development, infrastructure expansion and welfare-oriented governance aimed at improving the lives of economically weaker sections across rural India. The large-scale programme is expected to witness the presence of several prominent leaders including Union Minister for Rural Development and Agriculture Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Sunetra Pawar, with the event being viewed as an important milestone in strengthening rural welfare delivery and accelerating the vision of providing pucca houses and modern infrastructure to every deserving family in villages. During the programme, five lakh newly constructed houses under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana will be formally handed over to beneficiaries across Maharashtra, symbolising the Government’s commitment to ensuring dignity, security and improved living standards for rural households. Keys of the newly built homes will also be symbolically handed over to six selected beneficiaries during the ceremony, reflecting the transformational impact of the scheme on families that previously lived in kutchra or inadequate housing conditions. The event is also expected to highlight the achievements of the Maha Awas Abhiyan, which has emerged as an important state-level initiative complementing the Centre’s rural housing mission by encouraging faster implementation, improved transparency and greater coordination among local administrative bodies. Officials associated with the programme said the convention would showcase the collective efforts of the Union and Maharashtra governments in strengthening rural development and ensuring that welfare benefits reach eligible citizens in a time-bound and transparent manner. The Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana has become one of the flagship rural welfare schemes of the Government, focusing on providing permanent housing equipped with basic amenities to economically disadvantaged families residing in villages and remote regions. Since its launch, the scheme has transformed the rural housing landscape by replacing temporary and unsafe dwellings with durable houses that provide beneficiaries with a sense of ownership, dignity and social empowerment. Government data indicate that nearly three crore houses have already been constructed across the country under the scheme, reflecting the scale and pace of implementation achieved over the years. The housing initiative has also generated employment opportunities in rural areas through construction activities, demand for local building materials and engagement of workers and self-help groups in associated development work. The scheme has further contributed to improving sanitation, access to electricity, drinking water connectivity and overall quality of life in villages, thereby supporting the broader vision of inclusive rural development. The Satara programme is expected to serve not only as a ceremonial distribution event but also as a platform to recognise the contribution of officials, local institutions and stakeholders who have played a role in successfully implementing rural housing and infrastructure projects across Maharashtra. Awards under the Maha Awas Abhiyan are likely to honour districts, local administrative units and officers who have demonstrated outstanding performance in achieving housing targets, maintaining transparency and ensuring timely completion of projects. The event assumes additional significance as Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is scheduled to announce approval of central assistance worth Rs 8,368 crore and 50 lakh for Maharashtra under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana for the financial year 2026-27, a move expected to further accelerate housing construction in rural areas of the state. The substantial financial assistance is likely to help Maharashtra expand the coverage of the scheme, clear pending targets and strengthen implementation capacity at the grassroots level. Rural development experts believe that sustained financial support from the Centre will play a critical role in ensuring that economically weaker households continue to benefit from secure housing and improved infrastructure facilities. The announcement is also expected to reinforce cooperative federalism by highlighting coordination between the Union and state governments in implementing welfare-oriented programmes aimed at social upliftment and economic empowerment of rural communities. Alongside housing initiatives, the programme will also witness approval for 35 road projects worth Rs 122 crore and 98 lakh under Phase Four of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, another flagship rural development programme focused on improving road connectivity in villages and remote habitations. These projects are expected to benefit 35 rural habitations in Maharashtra by improving access to transportation, healthcare services, educational institutions, agricultural markets and employment opportunities. Enhanced road connectivity has long been viewed as a key driver of rural economic growth because it strengthens mobility, facilitates trade and improves delivery of public services. Officials stated that the new projects under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana would help bridge infrastructure gaps in underserved areas while promoting balanced regional development. Better roads are also expected to support farmers by enabling smoother transportation of agricultural produce to markets and reducing logistical challenges faced by rural communities.

India’s Act East policy is now armed and operational: Decoding Rajnath Singh’s Vietnam visit

Two not-so-unrelated things are happening today. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is on a two-day visit to Hanoi. He just met his Vietnamese counterpart, General Phan Van Giang, to discuss, among other things, whether Vietnam would become the second country in Southeast Asia to acquire a BrahMos missile system. SoAnd in Umroi, a field training node on the outskirts of Shillong in Meghalaya, the Indian Army has just opened Exercise Pragati-I, a multinational military exercise. It involves 15 nations, all from the ASEAN region. The exposition running alongside it, organised by FICCI with Eastern Command and the Army Design Bureau, will showcase Indian defence hardware to the procurement heads and defence attachés of all those countries. India has spent 30 years talking about its Act East Policy. It is now living it.

Vietnam and Korea

Vietnam and South Korea are joined by two proximities. They are geographically proximate, almost neighbours in the broader sweep of East Asia, and the other, more consequential proximity is to a China that has become more powerful and more comfortable showing it. Both states have territorial disputes with Beijing that it pursues with persistent pressure, and both have concluded, with varying degrees of explicitness, that they need to diversify their security sources. Vietnam does not do alliances; its history has taught it well. A country occupied and ravaged by China, France, Japan and the United States in living memory tends to develop strong views on entanglement. Hanoi wants options and the ability to price them against each other. India is an option that makes a particular kind of sense. No colonial footprint in the region. No territorial ambitions. Its own unresolved disputes with Beijing lend it a certain bonhomie. When Vietnamese President To Lam flew to New Delhi earlier this month, the two countries upgraded their partnership and set a \$25 billion trade target for 2030. The leaders also confirmed that BrahMos missile talks had entered an advanced stage. Along with that, there is further engagement through Defence Lines of Credit and an Army Software Park being built at the Telecommunications University in Vietnam with Indian support. The whole of it has been part of the Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030, signed during Singh’s last visit to Hanoi in June 2022. South Korea wants something adjacent but distinct. Seoul’s anxieties run through the peninsula, not the sea, and what it seeks is industrial partnership and a reliable presence in a region where American commitment is subject to revision. Singh will chair a defence business roundtable in Seoul and meet the head of the Defence Acquisition Programme Administration. India’s Act East Policy and South Korea’s Indo-Pacific Strategy share overlapping values, and both countries have acknowledged the alignment.

The Missile That Started It All

The most persuasive argument in any negotiation is the one that travels at Mach 2.8.

The BrahMos has become India’s single most eloquent contribution to regional diplomacy. The Philippines understood this first. Manila signed a \$375 million deal in 2022 for three shore-based batteries, a decision driven, fairly explicitly, by what China has been doing in the South China Sea. The first battery arrived on an Indian Air Force C-17 in April 2024. The second was shipped by sea last year. When Philippine Army chief General Romeo Brawner came to Delhi earlier this year, he had one word for how the system had performed: exemplary. Then he asked about helicopters, fighter aircraft, and submarines. Manila wants more. They are negotiating for more, and they are telling their friends about it. And the friends are listening. Indonesia sent a formal letter to the Indian Embassy in Jakarta regarding a \$450 million deal. Vietnam, Malaysia, the UAE, Chile, and South Africa have all expressed interest. In Hanoi, this is one of the topics on the table. The Vietnamese President all but confirmed it during his visit to New Delhi. India’s defence exports rose from ₹686 crore in 2014 to over ₹21,000 crore in FY2024. There is a reason behind that. India has gone from being the world’s largest arms importer to a nation that has finally understood that selling weapons is not merely commerce, but also important to building relationships forged in steel and jet fuel.

Lines of Credit, Training Teams and A Real Partnership

But anyone can sell a weapon. The truly sophisticated operator sells the ecosystem that surrounds it: the training, the maintenance contracts. When you sell a weapon, you sell a way of thinking about war. Defence Lines of Credit to Vietnam have quietly contributed to strengthening Hanoi’s capabilities for years, and have been welcomed by both governments. They call it foundational to the broader relationship. Indian training teams operate at Vietnam’s Telecommunications University, Naval Academy, and Air Force College, and India has supported the establishment of an Army Software Park in Nha Trang. Twenty-one Philippine Navy officers received instruction in India in early 2023, trained specifically to operate and maintain the BrahMos. A Vietnamese admiral who trained at an Indian institution. A Philippine officer whose entire professional vocabulary around missile systems is Indian. A Memorandum on submarine rescue, a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement, and a joint hydrographic survey completed in May 2025 off the Vietnamese coast. They are the capillaries of influence, invisible until you need them, indispensable when you do.

India is building its own ecosystem, a structural dependency. Not an alliance, because the term demands too much.

Exercise Pragati and the Point It Makes

Which brings us back to Umroi.

Exercise Pragati-I is a joint military exercise, straightforwardly enough. Fifteen nations, almost all in ASEAN, are converging on a field training node in Meghalaya for a fortnight of joint operations. Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and a full

roster of countries. Fifteen flags in the hills of Meghalaya. Meghalaya sits at India’s north-eastern shoulder, its gateway to Southeast Asia, the hinge between the subcontinent and the ASEAN world. To host a fifteen-nation military exercise there is to announce that this is where India’s strategic attention lies. Running alongside the military exercise on 30-31 May is a defence industry exposition, organised by FICCI in collaboration with HQ Eastern Command and the Army Design Bureau, designed to allow Indian defence manufacturers to showcase their capabilities to the procurement heads and senior military leadership of the fifteen participating nations. The product range spans drones, counter-drone systems, surveillance equipment, communications hardware, autonomous maritime systems, precision ammunition, and more, with hands-on demonstration opportunities for foreign military personnel. The structure of this event tells you everything about how militaries build bonds. Not through brochures. The Philippines did not want more BrahMos batteries simply because the hardware is good. It wanted more because India proved it could deliver on time, with training and follow-through. That is what you build by sharing a command post, a meal, a map. The exposition is how you convert that trust into procurement. That Rajnath Singh is currently in Hanoi, negotiating the next BrahMos deal, is proof enough that the model works.

So, What Does It All Add Up To?

What New Delhi is constructing across Southeast Asia is more durable than, let’s say, an alliance, which comes with its own headaches and obligations. It is building a lattice of structural dependence, built from missile deliveries, training programmes, credit lines, shared exercises, hydrographic surveys, and software parks in Nha Trang. And once a nation’s officers have trained alongside yours, operated your equipment, maintained it with your spare parts, and shared your frequencies, the bond is made. It will persist through changes of government, shifts in alignment, and the ordinary turbulence of regional politics. China has understood and applied this logic for decades. India is now applying it in its own neighbourhood, with a clarity that has historically been absent. The difference is that India can offer something Beijing cannot: the credible appearance of a partner that wants nothing from you except the relationship itself. That is, of course, not entirely true. India wants influence, markets, and a regional order that constrains the country with which it shares a long and disputed border. But those are interests that align rather than conflict with what Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, and their neighbours actually need. And the best deals are the ones where everyone believes they got the better end. Rajnath Singh’s flights to Hanoi and Seoul are, in isolation, unremarkable. A minister travels. Meetings are held. Statements are issued. But context is everything. India is no longer positioning itself as a regional power. It is behaving like one.

Sohil Sinha

The rupee is falling into India’s development paradox

This morning, I woke up to a message from a friend: “What the hell is happening?” Attached was a screenshot of the rupee-dollar exchange rate, flashing at another all-time low. On Tuesday, the rupee had slipped to a record low of 96.60 against the dollar for the first time in history, as the West Asian conflict sent crude prices back above \$100 a barrel. For anyone paying foreign university fees, planning travel, or simply watching imported prices climb, the panic felt immediate and personal. The anger came quickly too. Social media filled with questions about economic management and anxieties about inflation and national decline. Speaking in Hyderabad on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Indians to reduce petrol and diesel use, take the metro, carpool, curb foreign travel, and work from home where possible — language that deliberately echoed the moral appeals of the Covid-19 years: collective discipline and sacrifice for a national good. But beneath the rupee’s fall lies a much larger story. India imports nearly 85 per cent of its crude oil requirements, which means an oil shock rapidly becomes a currency shock. When crude prices surge, India needs vastly more dollars to pay for energy imports, and the rupee takes the pressure. The country spent \$174.9 billion on crude and petroleum products in the financial year ended March 2026, some 22 per cent of its total import bill. That number doesn’t shrink when geopolitics turns difficult. The deeper paradox is this: the rupee’s vulnerability during a global energy crisis is also, in part, a consequence of India’s own development. A richer, more industrialised, more mobile India consumes far more energy than it did two decades ago. More freight moves across highways. More factories operate across industrial clusters. More homes run air-conditioners during increasingly brutal summers. More people fly, more people drive, and more infrastructure gets built. These aren’t signs of waste — they’re what development looks like on the ground. For decades, India’s low per capita energy consumption was treated as evidence of underdevelopment. Even today, the average Indian consumes roughly one-eighth the energy of the average American and about a third of the average Briton. But when hundreds of millions begin consuming more energy — which is precisely what development requires — import vulnerability rises too. India still suffers from enormous inefficiencies and deeply energy-intensive elite lifestyles, but a significant portion of its growing energy demand is structural: expanding freight networks, new factories, construction booms, electrified rail, data infrastructure, and a manufacturing push designed to position India as an alternative supply-chain hub to China. The transition away from fossil fuels is underway. In June 2025, India reached 50 per cent of installed power capacity from non-fossil sources, five years ahead of its Paris target. Railway electrification covered 99.6 per cent of the broad-gauge network by March 2026. Around 1.4 million electric two-wheelers were sold in FY2026, making them the largest part of the EV market (although issues with the grid still persist for wider adoption). This is where India’s energy transition may look different from the West: less about expensive electric cars in suburban driveways, more about scooters, trains, dense cities and public transport. The direction is clear. But installed capacity is not delivered energy. Non-fossil sources still accounted for only 29.2 per cent of actual power generation in 2025-26. And electricity transition is not the same as oil transition. Freight trucks run on diesel, aviation depends overwhelmingly on jet fuel, and industrial logistics remain tied to hydrocarbons. A country of continental scale cannot decarbonise overnight while simultaneously industrialising, urbanising, and expanding living standards for hundreds of millions of people. This is where simplistic climate debates tend to disconnect from the realities of developing countries. The question is not whether India should transition away from fossil fuels. It of course must. The question is how a country still climbing toward middle-income prosperity manages that transition without freezing the development it took generations to begin. Europe industrialised first and decarbonised later. America built its prosperity on more than a century of cheap fossil fuel consumption. India is attempting something without clear precedent: industrialising at the exact moment the world is trying to move beyond fossil fuels altogether. For years, Indians demanded the material markers of development that wealthier countries already enjoyed: mobility, infrastructure, manufacturing growth, reliable electricity, air-conditioning, logistics networks, and modern consumption. We are now living through the uncomfortable reality that these things require enormous amounts of energy — and that much of that energy, for now, still has to be bought in dollars. The falling rupee is not simply a story of policy failure or market panic. It is also the sound of a developing country colliding with the limits of the geopolitical world it inherited.

Nishad Sanzagiri

Dibrugarh Hosts District-Level Inter-Club Karate Championship:: Over 300 Players from 17 Academies Participate

M Hashim Ali, Correspondent, Dibrugarh, July 20: Following the guidelines of the All Assam Karate As-

sociation the Dibrugarh District Karate Association (DDKS) organized a day-long District-Level Inter-Club Karate Championship at the Indoor Stadium in Milan Nagar, Dibrugarh. The championship witnessed the participation of more than 300 young and talented karate players representing 17 leading karate academies from different parts of Dibrugarh District. The event was formally inaugurated with an enthusiastic opening ceremony, after which the competitions commenced. The championship holds special significance for the participants, as medal winners will earn the opportunity to compete in the upcoming Zonal Karate Championship, which is scheduled to be held in Dibrugarh. Furthermore, athletes who perform well at the zonal championship will qualify to represent Dibrugarh District in the State-Level Karate Championship, informed Anjan Chetia, Secretary of the DDKS. On the occasion, Samy Saikia, District Sports Officer of Dibrugarh, was felicitated by the Dibrugarh District Karate Association in recognition of his valuable contributions to the field of sports.



thereby encouraging greater participation and interest in sports among students. The association also expressed its gratitude to Adarsha Choudhury, General Secretary of the All Assam Karate Association for his visionary leadership and strong organizational abilities. Office-bearers of the association remarked that under his leadership, Assam's karate community has earned national recognition and established a distinguished reputation. Among those present at the event were Dr. Saikat Patra, Mayor of Dibrugarh; Dr. Santanu Lahkar of Lions Club; Dr. Paramananda Sonowal, Registrar of Dibrugarh University; Dr. Pankaj Borthakur, Registrar of Aniruddhadev Sports University; Professor Nami Baruah; Dr. Montu Boro, Sports Officer of Dibrugarh University; Dr. Dip Jyoti Gogoi; Niren Phukan, President of the Dibrugarh District Karate Association; office-bearers of the association at both the central and district levels, coaches from various academies, participating athletes, parents, and a large number of sports enthusiasts.

The association praised his role in successfully organizing various sporting events and activities across the district,

The Oscars don't reward cinema, they ratify the narrative of the moment

Cinema likes to pretend it is surprised by awards season. It performs astonishment at omissions, polite outrage at snubs, and solemn nods to “important conversations”. Yet nothing about awards is accidental—not the nominations, not the silences, and certainly not the reactions. When it comes to the Oscars, this choreography becomes most visible. Narrative does not merely set the mood for what follows; it scripts it. The hope is that awards will then harden that narrative into canon, regardless of whether the cinema itself earns such permanence. This year, with 16 nominations, Sinners, a film elevated far more than its capacity, is the chosen one to see the narrative. Positioned as an event, a moment, a cultural inevitability, it's this year's Black Panther – a comic book, amusement park kind of film being elevated to a milestone. Awards have never existed to identify what will endure. They exist to stabilise a moment—to affirm what an industry believes it needs to stand for right now. The pattern is familiar. In 1991, Dances with Wolves emerged as the great reconciliatory epic of its time—expansive, earnest, and morally legible. Its sweep and sentiment were rewarded as signs of maturity. That same year, Goodfellas, jagged and unrepentant, lost decisively. The awards did not misjudge craft; they documented preference. Today, Goodfellas is frequently revisited, quoted, studied, and argued with. The other is remembered largely as a historical outcome. The pattern repeats across decades. In the early 2000s, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon arrived alongside the West's growing fascination with China—its capital, its culture, and its promise. In the mid-2000s, Crash (2005) spoke to a period of acute moral anxiety, offering resolution where complexity might have unsettled. Later, towards the end of the decade, Slumdog Millionaire (2008) transformed deprivation into kinetic uplift at a moment when global optimism demanded such translation. Each was celebrated, but hardly any of them are worth remembering. Awards, in this sense, function less as arbiters of cinema than as archivists of institutional mood. They tell us what the industry wished to reward in a particular year—what anxieties it sought to soothe, what narratives it needed to elevate, and what discomforts it chose to avoid. Confusing that record with legacy has always been the critical error. There are, of course, exceptions. The Hurt Locker (2009) benefited from its political timing but refused sentimentality thanks to its psychological claustrophobia that captured a timeless zeit-

geist of modern warfare. Its restraint, its moral ambiguity, and its refusal to explain itself allowed it to outlive its moment. Make no mis-

film operates within the ‘system’ (read Old Hollywood) that mistakes alignment for greatness and consensus for legacy but still manages to



take—Sinners is being celebrated not because of what it did cinematically, but because of what it symbolises industrially. It feels less like a movie than a consensus. It will likely sweep the categories that matter, not because dissent is impossible, but because dissent is inconvenient. Cinema has always been a delivery system for power—soft power, emotional power, and ideological power. What changes is who controls the narrative and why it needs controlling at that moment. Hollywood's current anxiety—its heightened moral urgency, its aggressive signalling—has little to do with art and much to do with the erosion of authority. The ‘Trumpian’ political reality, the fragmentation of audiences, and the loss of cultural monopoly: all of it has made legacy media feel cornered. Remember how Ricky Gervais called it all out—awards become a way to reassert relevance, to announce, ‘We still decide what matters.’ The uncomfortable truth is this: unless you adhere to the preferred narrative of those underwriting the ecosystem, you do not make the cut. And those who do adhere—the dutiful soldiers of the moment—are often the first to be discarded once the utility expires. They push the agenda, gain symbolic proximity to power, and are then quietly replaced by the next necessary voice. No long-term protection. No lasting capital. Which brings us to One Battle After Another. In a saner ecosystem, its presence would dominate the conversation. Not because it flatters the moment, but because it wrestles with it. The

not dilute the narrative. Bob Ferguson (Leonardo DiCaprio), a washed-out revolutionary, becomes an unwilling single parent to his 16-year-old daughter Willa (Chase Infiniti) after his wife Perfidia (Teyana Taylor), who led the revolutionary group, walks out. Bob is in hiding, mostly smokes up and is forced back into action with the help of Willa's karate teacher Sergio (Benicio Del Toro) after his daughter is attacked. One Battle After Another is a timely piece that looks at themes that mostly inspire impassioned drawing room debates and shows how action often comes at the cost of lives of those close to you. If Paul Thomas Anderson finally receives Best Director recognition, it will serve two purposes. The obvious one: acknowledging a singular achievement in direction. The more important one: a belated doff of the hat to one of the most rigorous, uncompromising filmmaking careers of the modern era. It would be career recognition disguised as annual judgement—a quiet correction rather than a proclamation. This is not an indictment of politics in cinema. Cinema has always been political. It is, rather, an observation about fatigue. Awards will continue to certify the mood of their moment. What remains unspoken, yet persistent, is the fate of those who serve these narratives most faithfully. The artists who align closely with the moment are rarely protected by it. They advance the agenda, gain visibility, and are then quietly replaced when the mood shifts.

Gautam Chintamani

Look beyond FTA: A chastened, humbled, pragmatic Europe could be a great strategic partner for India

The penny has finally dropped for Europe. Slow to the take, it is finally dawning on Europe that if the United States can turn against one of its staunchest allies and try to annex its sovereign territory, then it implies the inversion of the very idea of NATO. The principal guarantor of European security is now violating the core tenet of the European project. The lesson for Europe, therefore, as Canada's Mark Carney said in his widely appreciated speech, “When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself.” The attempted Greenland grab was one abuse too many even for the collective docility of a self-pitying continent. After five stages of grief over Donald Trump's thuggish and coercive ways, his strategy of hemispheric supremacy, there's now a sense of resignation among European leaders that the transatlantic divorce is inevitable and an acceptance that the old world order won't return. There's even a hint of defiance as the old continent grapples with realities new and uncertain. Macron said Europe must reassess itself and reject the “new colonial approach”. For Poland's Tusk, “appeasement?means no results, only humiliation.” Bart De Wever, the Prime Minister of Belgium, said Europe being a happy American vassal is one thing, but “being a miserable slave is another. If you back down now, you are going to lose your dignity and that is probably the most valuable thing you can have in a democracy.” From George III to Caligula, history has no dearth of mad kings. Emperor Trump is the latest entrant in its annals. His most recent move is the decision to slap 100% tariff on Canada because Carney, in a bid to diversify Canadian economy, made the ‘mistake’ of signing a trade deal with China—a deal that Trump administration itself has been chasing for months. As Peter Wehner writes in The Atlantic, Trump is “a malignant narcissist, consumed by hate and driven by vengeance. His mind is warped, his sense of morality corrupted. And yet his mind and his morality are the only checks on his power that he recognizes. Trump believes he is free to do whatever he wills. And it's not at all clear who or what can stop him.” By adopting a blanket coercive strategy towards its partners and allies such as Canada, its closest neighbour, in no small measure of irony Trump proved the efficacy of Carney's comments at Davos where the Canadian PM said great powers are “using economic integration as weapons”, “tariffs as leverage”, “financial infrastructure as coercion” and “supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited.” In such a world, “integration becomes the source of subordination.” In this paradigm, norms are no longer predictable, signed agreements are subject to the whims and fancies of a rapacious American President and multilateral institutions have fallen prey to either China-centric or Trump-centric international order. The prescription for Europe, therefore, is simple. It must diversify. The transatlantic project was incumbent on an axiomatic belief that no longer holds true – that integration with America brings prosperity and security. The question, whether Europe was too naïve or opportunistic, is moot. The reality is that Trump has altered America and even the world order in fundamental ways. For a while, Europe tried the appeasement policy, settling for a lopsided trade deal, calling Trump ‘daddy’, driven by fears of a fundamental American pivot away from collective security commitments. But it quickly became clear that Trump's assault on alliance credibility extends beyond tariffs into the existential foundations of the post-1945 security and economic order. Something has flipped in Europe. It is now speaking India's language, talking of strategic autonomy – the capacity to act independently in defence, economic security and technology domains. As the 27-member bloc undergoes economic repositioning and strategic recalibration, India emerges as a natural partner in this endeavour. The significance of the EU-India strategic partnership – that may further strengthen collaboration across key policy areas such as trade, security and defence – goes much beyond the elusive free-trade agreement (FTA) that has dominated the headlines. Beyond tariffs, customs, or an expansive security and defence collaboration that are high on the agenda, it represents a deliberate architectural shift by two of the world's largest democratic polities to insulate themselves against the twin shocks of Chinese hegemonic ambition and the gunboat diplomacy of an aggressive, cynical and increasingly unhinged America. Stephen Miller, one of the most influential members of the Trump administration and a key adviser to Trump, laid bare the MAGA worldview in an interview with CNN.

“We live in a world in which you can talk all you want about international niceties and everything else, but we live in a world, in the real world... that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power. These are the iron laws of the world since the beginning of time.” This obsession with power projection might seem that the US is lashing out at the prospect of its inevitable decline. Janan Ganesh writes in FT that it is only to be expected. “The belligerent turn in American behaviour has in fact come during its relative decline... It is easier for a nation to be magnanimous from a great height. Paranoia and aggression set in when that position slips. As such, we should expect a volatile US until it gets used to the role of being a, not the, superpower.” Be that as it may, the redefinition of the global order in starkly Thucydidean terms, where might is always right, the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must, presents the backdrop where the relationship between Europe and India is undergoing a tectonic shift. For the European Union (EU), the Indo-Pacific strategy is existential. The bloc's economic prosperity is tethered to the stability of Asian markets, yet its security architecture has historically been dependent on the US. The return of unpredictable trade policies in Washington, exemplified by the tariff threats from the Trump administration, its coercive policies and savaging of the transatlantic alliance, has forced the EU to seek alternative economic engines. India, with its demographic dividend, its status as the world's fastest growing large economy, a huge and widening consumer market and trajectory to become the world's third-largest economy by 2030, offers the only scale comparable to China, making it an indispensable partner for European diversification. For India, the EU serves as a vital partner for high-technology, economic investment, and a partnership that lends stability without requiring a formal military alliance. New Delhi's strategic calculus involves reducing its legacy of over-dependence on Russian defence hardware and managing the security threat posed by China on its northern borders. A deepening partnership with the EU provides access to capital, advanced defence manufacturing and a stable partner. The trade agreement, in this context, acts as the economic anchor for this strategic convergence, ensuring that political goodwill is cemented by deep commercial interdependence. The FTA's strategic value extends beyond tariff reduction. For India, it provides diversification from US market dependence at a moment when access to American consumers faces unprecedented political risk. For the EU, the deal offers supply chain resilience and an alternative to Chinese manufacturing in sectors where European dependence has created deep and seemingly irreversible vulnerabilities. The description of the India-EU FTA as the ‘mother of all deals’ by India's commerce minister Piyush Goyal or European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, therefore, is not merely rhetorical. It reflects the opportunities and the sheer complexities and magnitude of the economies involved – a combined market of nearly two billion people and a trade relationship that exceeded €180 billion in 2024. As the Global Trade Research Initiative observes in a report, “the agreement would be India's biggest and most complex trade deal so far.” The security and defence partnership, to be signed concurrently with trade discussions, represents an equally consequential dimension. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas has said that the pact will deepen cooperation in maritime security, counterterrorism, cyber defence and maritime domain awareness, with particular focus on stability in the Indo-Pacific region. In a post Sunday after arriving in India, Von der Leyen wrote, “I'm so glad to be in India today. India and Europe have made a clear choice. The choice of strategic partnership, dialogue and openness. Leveraging our complementary strengths. And building mutual resilience. We are showing a fractured world that another way is possible. During her address at the World Economic Forum in Davos last Tuesday, the European Commission chief had said, “Right after Davos, I will travel to India. There is still work to do. But we are on the cusp of a historic trade agreement. Some call it the mother of all deals. One that would create a market of 2 billion people, accounting for almost a quarter of global GDP. And, crucially, that would provide a first-mover advantage for Europe with one of the world's fastest growing and most dynamic continents.” And yet, amid this euphoria, it is easy to forget that this strategic partnership took

an inordinately long time to mature and perhaps would never have had it not been for the rupture in the matrix caused by Trump. The negotiations for the trade deal, known originally as the Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), are a study on lost opportunities. Launched in 2007, the deal remained elusive for nearly two decades due to deep-seated structural and regulatory divergences. For 19 years, the talks were characterized by seemingly unbridgeable gaps and ‘clash of sensitivities’ where one side's trade interest was the other's nightmare. And there was another dimension. As Garima Mohan of German Marshall Fund points out in her essay, “India's role and importance was not always recognized in many European capitals, with few exceptions such as Paris. For most European governments, India came second to China and ranked below other partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, such as that with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.” She writes that India's “efforts started being reciprocated only after certain leadership changes in Europe. Germany, following the departure of former Chancellor Angela Merkel, is seen as one prominent example. But a shift in the European Commission is arguably the most important change. As an Indian official noted, ‘India had always reached out to the EU’, but the ground ‘only really shifted under von der Leyen’.” While Mohan posits that a turning point came in 2019 as Europe's relations with China took a turn for the worse, contrast the superciliousness of a virtue-signalling Europe and its institutions, replete with long lectures on democracy, civil rights and religious freedom – with the rhetoric now on display. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said at Davos, “In a few days’ time, the President of the European Commission will travel to India to establish the principles of a free trade agreement between the subcontinent and the EU. I was in India a week ago and I have no doubt whatsoever that the era of great powers presents an opportunity for all of us and for all countries that favour regulations above arbitrary rule and see greater benefit in free trade than in protectionism and isolationism.” While Kallas, the EU's highest-ranking diplomat, told European parliamentarians in Strasbourg that EU and India must become more ambitious partners. “Two major democracies cannot afford to hesitate.” She referred to India as “indispensable” to Europe's economic resilience. In an interview to Indian Express, Kallas pitched Europe as India's “reliable partner” and said, “at a time when free trade is under pressure and supply chains are being weaponised, deepening our economic partnership makes perfect sense. This agreement is a strategic choice.” For German economy minister Katherina Reiche, “when old partnerships weaken or break down, we need new partnerships around the world, and we should achieve this more quickly than before.” She told reporters in Davos on Wednesday: “I am optimistic that this can be achieved, particularly with regard to India.” This is a chastened, humbled, and a more pragmatic Europe. The stark change in its attitude is caused by two major churns. One, the emergence of India as a ‘stabilizing pole’ in a volatile global order that has elevated it from a peripheral partner into an ‘indispensable’ strategic ally for Europe. India's growing economic and military power offers Europe a democratic alternative to China for ‘de-risking’ critical supply chains and achieving diversification from the erratic trade policies of the US. India's leadership of the Global South, its role as a premier clean-tech manufacturing hub, and its growing power projection in the Indo-Pacific complement EU's own economic and security imperatives. These factors have created space for the dynamic to be expanded from just a ‘buyer-seller’ relationship. The Trumpian discord provided the final push. Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy, driven by Trump's hostility and imperial foreign policy but rooted in longer-term dependencies on US defence and Chinese manufacturing, requires diversification. India's multi-alignment doctrine, formulated to navigate great power rivalry while preserving autonomy, needs institutional anchors beyond transactional bilateral ties. The FTA plus security partnership provides exactly such an anchor. While the trade deal provides the economic logic, the strategic partnership provides the geopolitical glue. Countless hurdles remain to be confronted. India's red lines on dairy and agricultural sectors, Europe's uncompromising attitude on non-tariff trade barriers such as Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism will require creative diplomacy. But for their own sakes both parties need to make this work.

Sreemoy Talukdar

VP Radhakrishnan launches RSS Centenary Book hails service unity spirit

New Delhi: Vice President C. P. Radhakrishnan released the book RSS @100: A Century of Service, Unity & Sacrifice at



Uprashtapati Bhavan, describing the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as an organisation that has played a significant role in promoting the ideals of service, unity, discipline and national consciousness over the past hundred years. The book, authored by Shyam Jaju and Anupam Trivedi, traces the organisation's century-long journey, highlighting its evolution, activities, organisational philosophy and contribution to nation-building since its establishment in 1925. The release function was attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) President Ram Bahadur Rai, RSS Kshetra Sangchalak Pawan Jindal, the authors and several distinguished guests from public life, academia and social organisations. Addressing the gathering, the Vice President said it was a privilege to participate in an event commemorating the RSS centenary and noted that his association with the organisation spans several decades. He observed that the publication attempts to document not only the historical milestones of the RSS but also the values and principles that have guided its volunteers across generations. Referring to a Tamil poem dedicated to the organisation, he said the composition compares the RSS with the sacred river Ganga, symbolising an institution that continuously flows in service of society without seeking recognition or reward. According to him, the analogy reflects the spirit of selfless service that has remained central to the organisation's functioning since its inception. Radhakrishnan stated that the book presents the RSS as a movement committed to preserving India's civilisational ethos while adapting to the changing needs of society. He said the publication explores how the organisation has worked to revive, reinforce and preserve the country's cultural heritage, traditions, languages and values while encouraging citizens to contribute positively to national development. He noted that service, unity and sacrifice have been the three foundational ideals that continue to inspire lakhs of volunteers associated with the organisation. Explaining these values, he said service represents selfless commitment towards society, unity strengthens bonds among people despite differences of language, region and culture, while sacrifice reflects the will-

ingness to dedicate one's efforts for larger national interests. The Vice President emphasised that institutions capable of endur-

ing over a century do so because they cultivate values rather than merely expanding their organisational structures. He observed that the RSS has consistently focused on character-building through its daily shakhas, where volunteers gather for physical activities, discussions and community interaction. According to him, these regular gatherings seek to instil discipline, leadership qualities, teamwork and a sense of responsibility among participants. Quoting from the newly released book, he described the shakha as "a workshop of the soul where the raw energy of youth is chiselled into national character," adding that such initiatives have contributed to creating individuals committed to public service and community welfare. He further said that leadership is not created overnight but develops gradually through discipline, experience and sustained engagement with society. Highlighting the broader role of cultural continuity, Radhakrishnan observed that the RSS has consistently encouraged pride in India's civilisational heritage, spiritual traditions, indigenous knowledge systems and linguistic diversity. He said preserving cultural identity does not imply resisting progress but rather ensuring that development remains rooted in enduring values and historical consciousness. According to him, the organisation has attempted to strengthen national consciousness by encouraging people to recognise India's rich heritage while participating actively in modern nation-building. The Vice President remarked that the centenary offers an opportunity to acknowledge the dedication of countless volunteers who have contributed quietly across villages, towns and cities through educational initiatives, social service programmes, disaster relief work, environmental campaigns and community development efforts. He said many such contributions often remain outside public attention but collectively form an important part of the organisation's history. Referring to one of the chapters in the book titled A Swayamsevak as PM: The Modi Era, Radhakrishnan said it traces Prime Minister Narendra Modi's journey from being a swayamsevak to serving as the country's Prime Minister. He observed that the Prime Minister has consistently emphasised the ideals of public service, good governance and the principle of "Nation First" in his approach to adminis-

tration. According to the Vice President, these themes resonate with the RSS philosophy of placing service above self while encouraging citizens to contribute towards national development. He noted that leadership grounded in dedication and discipline has the capacity to inspire confidence among people and strengthen democratic institutions. Recalling his early years in public life, the Vice President referred to a conversation with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, noting that both had begun their political journeys as grassroots workers associated with the movement inspired by Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution. He said those formative experiences shaped their understanding of public service, democratic participation and organisational discipline. Drawing another analogy with the river Ganga, he observed that just as a small stream originating in the Himalayas eventually transforms into one of the world's great rivers, the RSS too has grown steadily from modest beginnings into one of the world's largest voluntary organisations through sustained dedication and organisational commitment. The Vice President said institutions become influential not merely because of their size but because of their ability to inspire confidence and voluntary participation among people over long periods. He added that the growth of the RSS reflects the commitment of generations of volunteers who have devoted their time and energy towards community welfare and national causes. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who was present at the ceremony, joined other dignitaries in congratulating the authors for documenting the organisation's century-long journey. The event also underscored the significance attached to the RSS centenary, with speakers reflecting on its historical evolution, organisational philosophy and role in social initiatives over the decades. The publication brings together historical accounts, archival references, organisational milestones and narratives relating to the RSS's development from a small volunteer-based movement into a nationwide organisation with activities across diverse sectors. The authors seek to present an account of the organisation's origins, ideological framework, social outreach programmes, leadership evolution and contribution to various fields of public life. Throughout the programme, speakers emphasised themes of service, discipline, cultural identity and national integration, describing them as enduring principles that have guided the organisation over the past hundred years. They observed that the centenary is not only an occasion to reflect on the organisation's history but also an opportunity to examine its continuing relevance in addressing contemporary social challenges through voluntary participation and community engagement. The event concluded with the formal release of the book and interactions among dignitaries, scholars and invited guests, marking another milestone in the year-long commemorative programmes being organised to celebrate the RSS's completion of one hundred years. The publication is expected to contribute to discussions on the organisation's historical journey, ideological evolution and role in India's socio-cultural landscape by presenting documented accounts of its activities, leadership and institutional development over the past century.

UDAN scheme

New Delhi: The Union Government has unveiled an ambitious new phase of the Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) scheme, setting the stage for a major expansion of India's regional aviation network over the coming decade with a strong focus on improving air connectivity, strengthening airport infrastructure, supporting indigenous aviation capabilities and making air travel more accessible for millions of people across the country. Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu announced that the revamped phase of the flagship regional connectivity programme aims to connect 120 new destinations and enable nearly four crore passengers to travel by air over the next ten years, reflecting the government's continued commitment to making aviation affordable, inclusive and a catalyst for economic development. Speaking at a national workshop on the modified UDAN scheme in New Delhi, the Minister said the next phase represents a significant step forward in expanding the reach of civil aviation into underserved and unserved regions while ensuring sustainable operations for airlines and airports. He explained that the revised framework has been designed after assessing the achievements and challenges of the earlier phases and incorporates several policy improvements intended to accelerate regional air connectivity. One of the major changes introduced under the modified scheme is the expansion of eligibility for viability gap funding, which provides financial support to airlines operating routes that may not initially be commercially viable. This broader eligibility is expected to encourage more airlines to participate in the programme and launch services to remote locations that previously remained beyond the reach of regular commercial flights. Another important reform is the extension of financial support to airlines from the earlier three-year period to five years, giving operators greater financial stability and confidence to build sustainable regional routes while allowing sufficient time to develop passenger demand. The government has also introduced operational and maintenance support for select Tier-2 and Tier-3 airports, recognising that infrastructure alone is not enough and that smaller airports require sustained assistance to maintain services, improve operational efficiency and deliver reliable connectivity. The Minister noted that the Centre has already earmarked an outlay of Rs 29,000 crore for the next phase of the UDAN programme, underlining the scale of the government's commitment to expanding India's aviation ecosystem. The investment will support the development of around 100 additional airports and nearly 200 heliports over the next decade, enabling improved transportation links across difficult terrains, remote districts, hilly regions, border areas and islands where air connectivity can significantly reduce travel time and improve access to essential services. The expansion is expected to play a transformative role in connecting smaller towns with major economic centres, thereby encouraging investment, tourism, healthcare access, educational opportunities and faster movement of

people and goods. The Minister highlighted that aviation is increasingly becoming an important pillar of India's economic growth strategy and that regional connectivity serves as a bridge between development and accessibility. He said that by bringing more regions into the national aviation network, the government intends to unlock fresh economic opportunities while ensuring that the benefits of growth are distributed more evenly across the country. The next phase of UDAN is also closely aligned with the broader vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, with renewed emphasis on strengthening domestic capabilities across the aviation value chain. The Minister stated that the scheme will support indigenous aircraft manufacturing by creating greater demand for regionally suitable aircraft, encourage innovation within the domestic aerospace industry and provide new opportunities for Indian manufacturers. He further pointed out that the initiative will contribute to the expansion of the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) ecosystem, an area that has gained strategic importance as India seeks to become a global aviation hub. A stronger domestic MRO sector can reduce dependence on overseas maintenance facilities, lower operating costs for airlines, create highly skilled employment opportunities and enhance the competitiveness of India's aviation industry. Employment generation remains another important objective of the modified UDAN scheme, with increased airport development, airline operations, aviation services and associated industries expected to create thousands of direct and indirect jobs across multiple sectors. Construction activities, airport management, engineering services, ground handling, hospitality, logistics and tourism are likely to benefit from the expansion of regional aviation infrastructure. The Minister observed that every new airport or air route generates economic activity in surrounding regions by improving accessibility for businesses, attracting investments and promoting local enterprises. During the workshop, Mr Naidu also delivered a detailed presentation to stakeholders explaining the provisions of the modified UDAN scheme and outlining the rationale behind the policy changes. The presentation included a comparative review between the existing scheme and the revised framework, highlighting how lessons learned from earlier implementation phases have shaped the new approach. Stakeholders from across the aviation ecosystem were briefed on the enhanced support mechanisms, revised operational guidelines and long-term objectives of the programme. The interactive workshop provided an opportunity for airlines, airport operators, industry representatives and government agencies to better understand the implementation strategy and contribute to discussions aimed at ensuring effective execution of the expanded scheme. A major highlight of the event was the formal launch of the UDAN Scheme Document, which lays out the vision, objectives and implementation framework for the next phase of the programme.

International Seminar Saushrutam 2026 successfully concludes

New Delhi: The three-day international seminar Saushrutam 2026 concluded on a high note in the national capital, reaffirming India's growing leadership in integrating the ancient science of Ayurveda with modern medical research and evidence-based healthcare practices. Organised by the All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA), the event brought together a distinguished gathering of academicians, surgeons, researchers, clinicians, policymakers and healthcare experts from India and several countries, creating a vibrant platform for exchanging scientific knowledge, clinical experiences and innovative ideas aimed at strengthening global healthcare systems through collaboration. Delegates from Thailand, Israel, Austria, the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal and Greece joined Indian experts to deliberate on a wide range of subjects related to surgery, traditional medicine, medical education, public health, research methodologies, innovation and the future of integrative healthcare. The seminar highlighted the timeless relevance of the principles of Acharya Sushruta, widely regarded as one of the pioneers of surgery, while demonstrating how his teachings continue to inspire contemporary scientific research and clinical applications. Throughout the three-day event, experts presented research findings, shared successful case studies and discussed emerging trends that could help bridge the gap between traditional systems of medicine and modern scientific approaches. The Ministry of Ayush said the seminar provided a valuable opportunity for participants from different parts of the world to exchange expertise, discuss challenges and identify collaborative pathways for improving healthcare delivery through evidence-based Ayurveda. Faculty members and researchers from premier institutions, including the All India Institute of Ayurveda, Banaras Hindu University, the National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, and the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda, Jamnagar, actively participated in technical sessions, panel discussions and academic interactions that focused on advancing research standards, improving clinical practices and encouraging multidisciplinary cooperation. One of the major highlights of the seminar was the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between AIIA and the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for another five years. The renewed agreement is expected to deepen collaboration in research, innovation, technology development and interdisciplinary studies by bringing together expertise from engineer-

ing, biomedical sciences and Ayurveda. The partnership aims to promote scientific validation of traditional medical practices, encourage innovation in healthcare technologies, develop advanced research tools and strengthen the evidence base required for wider acceptance of Ayurveda in national and international healthcare systems. Experts observed that collaborations between institutions specialising in modern science and traditional medicine are becoming increasingly important for developing effective, affordable and sustainable healthcare solutions capable of addressing contemporary medical challenges. During the seminar, discussions covered various dimensions of surgical sciences, regenerative medicine, integrative therapies, patient safety, quality standards, disease prevention, healthcare education and translational research. Participants also emphasised the need to preserve India's rich medical heritage while adopting modern scientific methods for documentation, validation and global dissemination. Several speakers highlighted that Ayurveda possesses enormous potential to contribute to preventive healthcare, lifestyle management, chronic disease care and holistic wellness when supported by robust clinical evidence and high-quality research. International delegates appreciated India's efforts to promote traditional medicine through structured academic programmes, institutional collaborations and scientific investigations. They noted that growing global interest in complementary and integrative medicine presents new opportunities for collaborative research, academic exchange and healthcare innovation involving institutions across different countries. The seminar also underscored the importance of strengthening international partnerships for capacity building, knowledge sharing and skill development among healthcare professionals. Experts stressed that future healthcare systems should focus not only on disease treatment but also on prevention, rehabilitation and overall well-being by combining the strengths of different medical disciplines in a scientifically sound manner. Researchers discussed the need for common research protocols, improved documentation, advanced laboratory facilities, digital technologies and multidisciplinary teams to enhance the credibility and global recognition of Ayurveda-based interventions. Participants agreed that evidence generation through clinical trials, laboratory investigations and technological innovations would play a crucial role in expanding the acceptance of traditional medicine within mainstream healthcare

frameworks. The event also highlighted the role of education in preparing future healthcare professionals capable of working across disciplines while respecting both traditional wisdom and modern scientific principles. Academic sessions encouraged young researchers and students to pursue innovative projects exploring new applications of Ayurvedic knowledge through advanced scientific methodologies. Delegates observed that integrating technology, artificial intelligence, biomedical engineering and digital health tools with traditional medicine could significantly improve diagnosis, treatment planning, patient monitoring and research outcomes. The Ministry of Ayush said Saushrutam 2026 represents another significant milestone in India's continuing efforts to build a holistic, evidence-based healthcare ecosystem that combines the strengths of traditional knowledge with modern scientific advancements. According to the ministry, such initiatives reinforce India's commitment to promoting research-driven healthcare, encouraging international academic cooperation and creating a stronger scientific foundation for Ayurveda at the global level. Participants expressed confidence that the outcomes of the seminar would inspire new research collaborations, strengthen institutional partnerships and contribute to the development of innovative healthcare solutions capable of addressing emerging global health challenges. They also acknowledged the growing role of India as a leading centre for education, research and policy development in traditional medicine, supported by expanding collaborations with international universities, research organisations and healthcare institutions. Experts concluded that continued investment in research, innovation, interdisciplinary partnerships and scientific validation would be essential for unlocking the full potential of Ayurveda in improving public health and achieving sustainable healthcare development. As the three-day seminar came to a close, delegates reaffirmed their shared commitment to advancing collaborative research, promoting academic excellence and strengthening global engagement in integrative medicine. The successful conclusion of Saushrutam 2026 reflected the increasing recognition that traditional systems of medicine, when supported by rigorous scientific inquiry and international cooperation, can make meaningful contributions to modern healthcare by offering patient-centred, holistic and sustainable approaches that complement contemporary medical practice while preserving centuries-old knowledge for future generations.

The appeal of travelling off-peak in Southeast Asia

For many travellers, the rainy months in South-east Asia – which can stretch from May through November – has long been a time to steer clear

leader, the wet season offers unexpected rewards. “I love Cambodia and Laos in the rainy season. It’s when all the rivers are flowing, and



of tropical destinations. Rainy skies, wet streets, and unpredictable weather patterns tend to push people towards drier, more temperate escapes. But that’s starting to change. According to Anthony Lu, regional director of South-east Asia and Greater China at Booking.com, a shift is underway. “Rather than avoiding the season entirely, travellers are becoming more intentional – prioritising convenience, value and cultural exposure over perfect weather.” Welcome to the era of purpose-driven off-peak travel. A growing number of travellers are embracing the rain-washed season as an opportunity to slow down, reconnect with nature, and enjoy a destination without the crowds. In fact, 37 per cent of Singapore-based travellers say avoiding tourist congestion is a priority when choosing where to go. This is an even more prominent sentiment in India (47 per cent), Thailand (46 per cent), and Vietnam (35 per cent), according to Booking.com’s 2025 Travel Trends research. Edmund Ong, general manager of Trip.com Singapore, noted that travel during Asia’s traditionally low season is steadily gaining traction. “Comparing 2024 with 2023, there’s been a noticeable increase in travel [during Asia’s off-peak rainy months]. Countries like Malaysia, Thailand and Laos, where the monsoon’s effects are less severe, remain popular, [with travellers appreciating the balance of lower rates and fewer crowds].” Rather than letting the weather forecast dictate their plans, today’s savvy explorers are leveraging technology and social media to uncover hidden gems. Think destinations with tea plantations shrouded in mist or cascading waterfalls at their fullest, or experiences such as spa retreats that feel extra hygge when the skies are grey. For Ellen Fraser, Scott Dunn’s tailor-made team

everything just seems to come alive: The smell of fresh grass and the sight of the rice paddies lush from the rain give both countries a whole new perspective.” To Lu, the rainy season is often misunderstood. “While there may be periods of heavy rain, it rarely rains continuously all day.” In the end, off-peak travel isn’t about dodging raindrops, but about embracing the rhythm of the season. It’s a time to reward yourself with a long lunch by the water, go on impromptu adventures when plans change, and enjoy having more of the world to yourself. With that, here are some recommendations on where to go and what to enjoy best at this time of the year. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Lie in the lap of Lanna luxury, or go dark sky stargazing Northern Thailand’s rainy season (May to October) brings short afternoon showers that leave behind crisp air, verdant mountains, and the scent of blooming champaca. In and around Chiang Mai, the lush countryside glows, the temples glisten, and the city’s soulful, bohemian rhythm becomes even more meditative. Halfway between the old city walls and the Ping River, InterContinental Chiang Mai The Mae Ping blends refined modernity with the timeless elegance of Lanna culture. The Club InterContinental Lounge offers afternoon teas, cocktail hours, and Lanna-inspired cuisine, all in a serene space with Neoclassical and Chinese influences. If the weather turns, find your bliss at the new The ii Spa, which invokes the best attributes of Hong Mor Muang healing – a centuries-old healing tradition that blends herbal remedies, massage and spiritual rituals to restore harmony between body, mind and spirit. Signature treatments like the Lanna Blessing Massage and Tok Sen therapy channel gen-

erations of wisdom into deeply restorative rituals. To round out your retreat, head to Doi Chiang Dao, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve about 90 minutes’ drive from Chiang Mai. This sacred mountain, the highest peak within the Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, is a rising star (pardon the pun) in dark sky stargazing. Trip.com’s Ong said, “Clear skies after rain provide perfect conditions for constellation viewing.” Hua Hin, Thailand: Practice your Pranayama Hua Hin’s wet months (typically from July to October) transform the coastal town – a favourite with Bangkok’s high society set – into a quietly radiant retreat. Rainfall arrives in graceful waves, but instead of being a deterrent, it adds a rhythmic, almost poetic backdrop to a wellness escape that’s all about slowing down and tuning in. At Chiva-Som, one of Asia’s most iconic wellness sanctuaries, the rainy season is embraced with open arms and open hearts. “We highlight the benefits: Fewer crowds, a more intimate atmosphere, and the serenity of nature in its most nourishing form,” said Chanyapak Suwankantha, the resort’s wellness director. Guests can immerse themselves in restorative therapies like acupuncture, chakra balancing and Pranayama breathing in open-air salas (pavilions) while the rain gently falls. Indoor fitness and physiotherapy sessions support both physical strength and mental clarity, while garden strolls among the dewy foliage provide quiet wonder. “The calming rhythm of rainfall enhances the sense of sanctuary,” said Suwankantha. “Our guests are embracing this quieter season, especially with the support of our off-peak wellness offers, making it an ideal time for immersive and uninterrupted self-care. It’s a beautiful reminder that wellness is not seasonal – it’s personal.” Phuket, Thailand: Indulge in mookata Phuket’s wet season typically spans from May to October, bringing with it warm tropical rains. While the beaches occasionally trade sun for showers, the atmosphere becomes decidedly more tranquil – perfect for travellers looking to slow down and soak up local culture. “We have noticed a growing interest from off-peak travellers attracted to the peaceful atmosphere of the monsoon,” said Paul Wilson, managing director of Laguna Phuket, a sprawling integrated resort destination nestled along Bang Tao Bay. “This quieter season allows travellers to immerse themselves in local culture and connect with nature on a deeper level.” Rainy days here don’t mean dull ones – with 35 restaurants and bars throughout the resort, you’ll be spoiled for choice. Foodies can dive into traditional Thai cuisine with Dusit Thani’s House of Flavours Cooking Class, where mortar-and-pestle magic meets delicious, locally sourced ingredients. Cassia Phuket’s Signature Mookata turns dinner into a sizzling, hands-on hotspot BBQ affair, while Angsana Laguna’s Seafood Hot Pot delivers cosy comfort on cooler evenings. If you’re craving caffeine with a side of culture, the Hock Hoe Lee Coffee Workshop offers a bean-to-brew journey into the island’s rich coffee heritage.

Constantly tired or having muscle spasms? It could be this hidden health issue in your blood

There are days when you feel more tired than usual. Daily activities like commuting to work or typing out a report for your boss feel like wading through a thick sludge – laborious and sometimes, with a slow-burning headache to further remind you of your misery. But when malaise plagues you for weeks or even months on end, and you can’t seem to pinpoint the cause, you might want to have your blood pH tested – especially if you’ve been taking a diuretic to manage your hypertension. That was the case for a patient seen at SingHealth Polyclinics, said associate consultant Dr Patricia Chia. When the 70-year-old retired teacher began feeling unusually tired and unmotivated, he chalked it up to the effects of ageing. But that was not what his routine check-up found. “A closer look at his blood work revealed elevated bicarbonate levels, a key marker of metabolic alkalosis, a condition where the blood becomes too alkaline,” said Dr Chia. The retiree’s blood pH had changed from the introduction of a common diuretic three months earlier to help manage his hypertension. This was in addition to his usual regimen of steroids for his eczema, which he has been on for two years without any issues. Now, before you jump to the conclusion that we should all dump our medications, find out what is a blood pH imbalance – and what you can do to restore balance and feel better. And no, it doesn’t involve investing in an alkaline water dispenser. WHAT IS YOUR BLOOD’S NORMAL PH ANYWAY? Your blood’s usual pH is slightly alkaline and falls narrowly between 7.35 and 7.45, according to Dr Chia. “This range stays consistent throughout the body and does not change in relation to your body part, gender, or time of the day.” In fact, it is important that your body keeps your blood pH within this range because the slightest deviation “can affect how our cells work and may lead to serious health issues if not corrected”, she said. Your blood pH is not to be confused with the pH of your body parts. “For example, the stomach is very acidic to help with digestion, while the vagina is slightly acidic to protect against harmful bacteria. These differences are normal and necessary for each organ to do its job effectively, but they do not reflect or affect the pH of the blood,” said Dr Chia. HOW DOES YOUR BODY MAINTAIN ITS BLOOD PH BALANCE? To prevent any change to the blood pH, you have your stomach, lungs and kidneys to thank. “The very acidic stomach acid will neutralise any alkaline substance you ingest before it even gets to your bloodstream,” explained Dr Jasmin Koh, a general practitioner with Doctor Anywhere. “The kidneys also play a major role in filtering and balancing the pH of anything you consume,” she added. Depending on your body’s needs, your kidneys can excrete acid or alkali (such as bicarbonate) into your urine, or they can reabsorb them into your bloodstream, she said. Your lungs, too, are another major pH regulator. “Your body produces carbon dioxide as a waste product, and in the blood, carbon dioxide can become an acid,” said Dr Koh. You may not notice it but “when your blood becomes a little too acidic, your brain will instruct your lungs to breathe faster and deeper to ‘blow off’ more carbon dioxide”, she said. “This reduces the acid in your blood and brings the pH back up.” ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BLOOD PH IMBALANCE? WHAT

ARE THE SIGNS? There are two main types of blood pH imbalances: Acidosis (too acidic) and alkalosis (too alkaline). Each category is further segmented into: ACIDOSIS

- Lactic acidosis: When intense exercise causes muscles to produce too much lactic acid.
- Diabetic ketoacidosis: A complication of Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes when there’s insulin resistance or insufficiency, and the body breaks down fat for energy instead. The resulting ketones are what acidifies the blood.
- Renal tubular acidosis: When the kidneys fail to secrete acid, resulting in an increase in blood acid level.
- Hyperchloremic acidosis: Typically caused by severe diarrhoea when the bicarbonate level in your blood becomes too low.
- Respiratory acidosis: Your lungs can’t expel enough carbon dioxide due to chronic lung diseases such as asthma or sleep apnoea. The buildup of carbon dioxide then lowers the blood’s pH.



ALKALOSIS

- Metabolic alkalosis: Usually a result of surplus bicarbonate in the blood caused by severe vomiting, dehydration or the use of diuretics.
- Respiratory alkalosis: Carbon dioxide dissolves in blood to form carbonic acid. But when its level drops due to rapid exhalations during hyperventilation (caused by anxiety, fever or high-altitude exposure), it can increase blood’s pH.

“The signs of a blood pH imbalance are often non-specific and can overlap with many other conditions. This is why a proper diagnosis by a doctor is crucial,” said Dr Koh. “For acidosis, the symptoms can include feeling very tired and lethargic, confusion, rapid breathing, or a headache,” said Dr Koh. “For alkalosis, you might experience muscle twitching or spasms, lightheadedness, numbness or

That strawberry matcha latte has more caffeine than you think – is it okay for your kid to enjoy it?

You’ve just received your order of strawberry matcha and your child is clamouring to have one, too. Other than the energy-spiking sugar, you reckon it’s basically green tea powder and fruit – all antioxidants and vitamins... and practically a dessert, right? Moreover, you grew up in a household where coffee or tea was as readily available to you as water. What could go wrong? You might want to put the strawberry matcha down and give your child something else instead. While caffeine may just keep you awake at night, in children, this stimulant can lead to negative effects. But does that mean lattes, matcha ice cream, chocolate and anything with a smidge of caffeine are off the table for kids? We find out how caffeine affects growing bodies and brains. OTHER THAN SLEEP DISRUPTION, HOW ELSE CAN CAFFEINE AFFECT CHILDREN? Sure, matcha has been credited to have anti-inflammatory effects, help lower blood pressure and bad cholesterol levels, as well as improve insulin sensitivity to some extent. The amino acid L-theanine, found in matcha, has also been associated with improved concentration and alertness. But if you’re a coffee or tea drinker, you’d be familiar with the side effects of caffeine: Irritability, anxiety, and increased heart rate and blood pressure, said dietitian Anthea Zee from KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital’s Nutrition and Dietetics Department. “Children have smaller bodies and rapidly developing brains, making them more susceptible to those negative effects,” she said. “Additionally, caffeine can interfere with the nutrient absorption of essential minerals and vitamins such as calcium, iron, magnesium and B-vitamins,” cautioned Zee. “All these can adversely affect the growth potential and immune function of a child.” Further stunting their growth and health is the fact that caffeine can also affect children’s sleep cycle and emotional wellbeing, said Rachel Cheang, a dietitian with National University Polyclinics. “Children who consume caffeinated drinks are more likely to have poor sleep quality, which indirectly affects the child’s mental and physical development,” said Cheang, citing a 2020 systemic review. “Higher degrees of anxiety and depression are seen with higher intakes of caffeine. Hyperactivity is also observed in children with excessive intake of caffeine.” And like you, your child’s prolonged intake of caffeinated drinks can result in a “vicious cycle of poor sleep and increased reliance on caffeine to beat fatigue”, Cheang warned. “Caffeine withdrawal often results in crankiness, constant headaches and migraines.”

HOW MUCH CAFFEINE IS THERE IN A STRAWBERRY MATCHA ANYWAY? “A typical iced matcha strawberry drink may contain up to 120mg of caffeine per serving, depending on the size and brand,” said Zee. Even a standard matcha drink uses approximately 2g of matcha powder, or has about 70mg of caffeine, she said. “The amount of matcha used affects the drink’s caffeine concentration – that is, more matcha powder equates to a higher caffeine content,” said Cheang, adding that better quality matcha also tends to have a higher level of caffeine. How does matcha compare to green tea, the beverage you’re often served in Japanese restaurants? Matcha is essentially ground green tea leaves, which means you’re consuming the entire leaf, and so, you’ll get a bigger hit of caffeine. Green tea, on the other hand, is made from steeping the loose leaves in hot water. “A longer steeping time and using hotter water can lead to a higher caffeine extraction,” said Cheang. As a gauge, said Zee, steeping one teaspoon of loose green tea leaves in 240ml of hot water for two to three minutes can yield about 30mg of caffeine. Other than caffeine, drinks du jour such as the trending strawberry matcha aren’t healthy choices for your little one. Starbucks’ Grande Strawberry Matcha Strato Frappuccino, for instance, has 340 calories, 15g fat and 44g sugar. “The calories from such a matcha latte usually come from the other ingredients added,” said Cheang, referring to the sugar-dense fruit purees, flavoured syrup and fruit jam used. WHAT ARE THE GUIDELINES ON CAFFEINE INTAKE FOR CHILDREN? There is none for children under age 12, both in Singapore and internationally, said Cheang. For adolescents aged 12 to 18 years, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than 100mg of caffeine daily – a strawberry matcha with 120mg of caffeine would have exceeded that limit. “While the occasional caffeine consumption might not pose harm, a regular intake could contribute to excessive caffeine exposure, especially when combined with other sources such as chocolates and caffeinated soft drinks,” said Zee. “Ultimately, it is best recommended for children to avoid any caffeine intake to support healthy growth and overall wellbeing.” If you don’t want your child to feel left out at the cafe, order her a grown-up-looking caffeine-free babyccino instead, suggested Zee, which is made of steamed, frothy milk with a dusting of cocoa or cinnamon powder. If she prefers tea, try a caffeine-free one such as chamomile, peppermint, rooibos or fruit tea.

tingling in the hands or face, or a feeling of being very agitated.” She emphasised that for either acidosis or alkalosis to cause symptoms, the condition has to be “pretty severe”. WHAT ELSE CAN CAUSE A BLOOD PH IMBALANCE? For the retiree patient, it was his diuretic medication. “Diuretics are very commonly used for lowering high blood pressure or to remove excess fluid from the body, especially in conditions like heart failure or kidney problems,” said Dr Chia. “They work by helping the body get rid of extra water and salt through urine.” However, diuretics also remove hydrogen ions, which can cause the blood to become too alkaline, leading to metabolic alkalosis, she explained. “In most people, their bodies can adjust and restore the pH balance on their own. But in some cases, especially if the diuretic dose is high, the body’s natural balancing systems may struggle to keep up. When that happens, metabolic alkalosis can develop,” said Dr Chia. What are your odds of developing a blood pH imbalance if you don’t have a chronic condition or on any medication? It is still possible, though less common, said Dr Koh. For instance, very strenuous exercise can cause temporary mild acidosis as the muscles produce lactic acid, she said. Reiterating the abovementioned examples, other real-life situations can include severe food poisoning, and in pregnant women, extreme and persistent nausea and vomiting, cited Dr Chia. In these scenarios, losing large amounts of fluids and stomach acid can lead to dehydration and disrupt the delicate balance of pH in the blood, she said. “Severe respiratory distress, such as from an asthma attack, can also lead to acidosis,” added Dr Koh. “These are usually acute and self-correcting once the underlying cause is resolved.” High altitude sickness is another possible trigger, said Dr Chia. This can happen when you ascend to high altitudes without allowing your body time to adjust. “The sudden drop in oxygen levels can affect breathing patterns, which may in turn, alter the body’s pH levels,” she said. CAN A BLOOD PH IMBALANCE BE DANGEROUS IF IGNORED? In acidosis, said Dr Koh, it “can affect the central nervous system, leading to stupor or even a coma”. Not only that, acidosis can also cause potential complications such as “heart rhythm abnormalities, which can be dangerous and may affect how well the heart pumps blood”, added Dr Chia. Your bone health may suffer, too. To correct acidosis, your body will pull minerals such as calcium from the bones, explained Dr Chia. As a result, you may end up with fragile bones over time. That’s not all the trouble the mineral leaching can cause. “Salt and mineral imbalances can lead to cramps, confusion, or even seizures,” she said. Conversely, if you have alkalosis, “it can lead to seizures and muscle spasms”, said Dr Koh. “Both acidosis and alkalosis, if severe and left untreated, can be life-threatening as they disrupt the function of multiple organ systems,” she warned. WHAT TEST AND TREATMENT ARE USUALLY USED? Typically, a blood test known as an arterial blood gas or ABG is used. “This test gives a precise measurement of the blood pH, and the levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood,” said Dr Koh.

US immigration agents involved in another fatal shooting

Biddeford: A United States immigration officer on Monday (Jul 13) fatally shot a man identified by rights groups as a 26-year-old Colombian, the second such killing by federal agents in less than a week. The shooting happened in Biddeford, a town of 22,000 people in the northern state of Maine, and is likely to fuel criticism of President Donald Trump's deportation drive and its handling by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Initially, Senator Angus King of Maine told reporters he understood, based on a conversation with Secretary of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin, that the victim was the subject of an ICE arrest warrant over his immigration status. But later on Monday, a spokesperson for King said the senator was told in a second conversation with Mullin that the victim was not the intended target of the warrant. "The person that was killed was not the person they were seeking," King told CNN. King demanded a "full, transparent and open investigation", but said the agents involved were apparently not wearing body cameras. ICE said the agent would be placed on leave in line with protocol after police-involved shootings. The FBI earlier said it was also investigating. Last week, a Mexican man was shot dead by an ICE agent during an attempted vehicle stop in Texas.

"I TRIED TO STOP"

Daniel Boucher, 71, was nearby when the incident occurred and told AFP he heard a "lot of pop, pop, pops" before seeing ICE agents pull a person from a white car with a bloodied head and face. "At that point I clearly heard the victim say 'I tried to stop,' something to that effect," he said. "Then he was on the ground. I could only see the legs and the stomach, and at one point, I could see that his stomach stopped going, and I knew that he had expired." Boucher said that when he confronted one of the agents at the scene, the man had tried to run him over. An ICE spokesperson said on Monday that of-

ficers had tried to stop a vehicle at around 7am on Monday (10pm, Singapore time) after conducting surveillance of the last known address of a person with a deportation order. "The vehicle attempted to flee the scene and fearing for public safety an officer discharged his weapon. The driver of the vehicle was struck, and emergency services were immediately contacted. He passed away from his injuries," they said. "TRAGEDY"

The Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition and Presente Maine, which jointly identified the victim but did not name him, said the man was authorised to work in the US. "We will not let this death be reduced to a footnote in this administration's enforcement statistics," said Crystal Cron, executive director of Presente Maine. Governor Janet Mills, citing an unconfirmed US news report that the man shot was not the intended target of the ICE operation, said she was "horrified by this tragedy". "This development makes this tragedy even more disturbing and infuriating, and it underscores the reckless and haphazard manner in which immigration enforcement operations are being conducted in Maine and across the country," she wrote on X. Images from the scene showed a police cordon in place on a residential street, with a forensics unit stationed next to a red tent. Some people placed candles and flowers on the street nearby. Protesters rallied in the area with signs reading "ICE Out!" and gathered at the office of Maine's other senator, Susan Collins, a member of Trump's Republican party. "A person has died, and their loved ones and the people of our community deserve clear answers about what happened," Biddeford Mayor Liam LaFountain said in a statement. Tasked with enforcing Trump's immigration crack-down, ICE's heavily armed agents have faced nationwide backlash for aggressive tactics, and for the shooting deaths of two US citizens this year in Minneapolis.

US strikes Iran for third day, will reimpose blockade

Tehran: The United States launched a fresh salvo of strikes lasting about five hours against Iran early Tuesday (Jul 14), marking a new escalation in the resumption of hostilities, even as US President Donald Trump said a deal with Tehran was still possible. "We're going to hit them very hard tonight, and we're going to hit them hard tomorrow," Trump told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt on Monday. Oil prices shot up more than 9 per cent over fears of renewed conflict. US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced strikes had begun at 8.45pm GMT (4.45am, Tuesday, Singapore time), the third consecutive night of attacks. "These strikes will continue imposing a heavy cost on

Iranian forces and degrade their ability to attack innocent civilians and commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz," CENTCOM said. "During the five-hour mission, US forces successfully struck military targets across Iran including Bushehr, Chah Bahar, Jask, Konarak, Abu Musa, and Bandar Abbas," the US Central Command said in a statement on X following the completion of the latest wave of strikes. After the strikes, Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced they had in turn



fired missiles and drones on Bahrain, targeting a residential building for US forces and other facilities. Early Tuesday, the United Arab Emirates said Iran had attacked two ships in the vital waterway, killing one crew member and wounding eight others. The oil-rich UAE is a top US ally in the region and has reported multiple missile and drone strikes from Iran. "The Ministry of Defence announces that the national tankers Mombasa and Al Bahiyah were targeted by two Iranian cruise missiles while transiting the southern shipping lane of the Strait of Hormuz, within Omani territorial waters," the Emirati defence ministry wrote on X. That reported attack came after Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Monday announced new strikes on Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and Oman.

US CONGRESS NOTIFIED

Trump formally notified Congress last week that the US had resumed military conflict against Iran, the White House confirmed to AFP, giving the Pentagon an additional 60 days to operate in the region without congressional approval. Trump also threatened to destroy Pickaxe Mountain, a deeply buried nuclear site near Natanz where Western intelligence suspects Iran is building an undeclared enrichment facility. "Tell the Iranians to be ready. Let them know we're coming (and) there's not a damn thing they can do about it," he told Hewitt. CENTCOM, following Trump's orders, announced it would reimpose a blockade on Iranian ports beginning at 8pm GMT on Tuesday.

law generally forbids. Trump's 20 per cent demand implies a US\$30 million fee per oil-carrying supertanker. In contrast, Iran's proposed US\$1 per barrel toll means up to US\$2 million for the same vessel. Analysts say Trump's levies could trigger a sharp increase in oil prices, with significant economic fallout. "The price of oil will really shoot up through the roof. The world economy once again is going to be taken hostage to high prices of oil," said Amin Saikal, emeritus professor of Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Islamic studies at the Australian National University. Asia would be particularly exposed. About 80 per cent of crude oil shipped through the Strait of Hormuz is destined for the region. China, in particular, relies heavily on Iranian crude. Last year, Iranian oil accounted for about 13.4 per cent of China's seaborne crude imports, meaning any blockade of Iran's oil exports could significantly affect supplies. However, analysts questioned whether Washington has the means to implement and enforce such a policy. "How is (Trump) going to enforce it? Does he have the necessary mechanism on the ground to charge that sort of fee?" asked Saikal, adding that policing one of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints would be extremely costly for the US.

"INCRISIS"

Despite all signs to the contrary, Trump said Monday that a deal with Tehran to end the Middle East war was still possible. "Yeah, I think a deal is possible. Sure, I do," Trump told re-

Hormuz closure, Gulf strikes: What we know about the latest Iran-US attacks

Singapore: Prospects of a lasting end to the Middle East conflict dimmed further over the weekend, as the United States and Iran exchanged another wave of strikes, catching several Gulf states and ships in the crossfire. Tensions between the two sides have been escalating since last week, with the latest round of attacks coming after Iran declared the Strait of Hormuz closed on Sunday (Jul 12). As oil prices hit a one-month high and tit-for-tat strikes continue, here's what we know about how the latest escalation unfolded.

HORMUZ CLOSURE

While Iran's nuclear programme initially underpinned US involvement in the conflict, control of the Strait of Hormuz has now emerged as the central flashpoint. Under an interim deal signed in June, Iran had committed to allowing commercial vessels to pass through the strait safely and without charge for 60 days. That arrangement began to unravel in early July, after Washington accused Tehran of hitting several tankers in the waterway - triggering an initial round of retaliatory strikes. The latest escalation followed Iran's declaration on Sunday that the strait was closed, after a vessel travelling on what it described as an unapproved route was struck. According to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the ship had "jeopardised maritime security" by switching off its systems. It also warned that any retaliation over the incident would be met with a "severe response". Iran did not provide details of the ship, but Oman said a Cyprus-flagged vessel carrying 24 crew members was hit off its eastern coast. The US military responded on the same day with a new wave of strikes on Iran's military sites, insisting that the strait remained open. "The Strait of Hormuz is a vital maritime corridor for global trade. Iran does not control it," the US Central Command said. US President Donald Trump said on Monday that Washington could reinstate its blockade of Iranian shipping in the Gulf, and proposed charging a 20 per cent fee on cargo passing through the strait as the US acts as its "guardian".

WHAT HAS BEEN HIT

As in previous exchanges, Iran's strikes have targeted countries hosting US military facilities.

Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain and Kuwait have all been affected in the latest wave of strikes. The IRGC said on Tuesday that it targeted several weapons support ware-



houses, a satellite communications centre and the residential building for US forces in Bahrain. Jordan said the same day that it shot down four missiles from Iran, while the UAE said that Iran also attacked two ships in the Strait of Hormuz with missiles, killing one crew member and wounding eight others. On the US side, its military has deployed fighter aircraft, naval vessels, one-way attack aerial drones and one-way attack sea drones. It completed a five-hour mission on Tuesday that targeted military sites across Iran, including Bushehr, Chah Bahar, Jask, Konarak, Abu Musa and Bandar Abbas. Over three consecutive nights of strikes, US forces said they hit a submarine, a ship maintenance facility, air defence systems, coastal radar sites, as well as missile and drone infrastructure and small boats.

IMPACT ON OIL AND MARKETS

The latest escalation has unsettled global markets, particularly energy prices. Oil prices rose to a one-month high on Tuesday, with Brent crude futures at US\$85.20 per barrel as of 6.30am GMT (2.30pm, Singapore time). This is still much lower than previous oil prices after

the war broke out. But investors are increasingly concerned about potential disruptions to supply, given that the Strait of Hormuz handles a significant share of global oil shipments. Asian

stocks were volatile on Tuesday. A rebound for South Korean shares helped offset declines in Taiwan. Chinese stocks led the gains after stronger-than-expected trade data.

TRUCE UNDER STRAIN

The US and Iran were meant to hold another round of indirect negotiations after the the burial of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. However, the renewed fighting has cast doubt on the already fragile diplomatic efforts. Trump said on Jul 8 that the interim peace deal with Iran was over, adding that he was uncertain any future agreement with the Islamic Republic would stick. Iran has also signalled that the arrangement is faltering. Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said on Monday that the ceasefire agreement was "in crisis", adding that Iran would ignore its obligations under the deal if Washington did the same. Still, both sides have left the door open to diplomacy. Trump has said a deal with Tehran was still possible, while Baqaei said Iran was continuing talks with mediators from Qatar, Pakistan and Oman to prevent further escalation.

Lebanon and Israel hold talks in Rome amid renewed Mideast fighting

Beirut: Lebanon and Israel are holding new negotiations under US auspices in Rome on Tuesday (Jul 14), against the backdrop of a regional escalation between Washington and Tehran. The two countries, officially at war for decades, reached a framework agreement on Jun 26, after five rounds of negotiations in Washington, aimed at ending the war between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah and paving the way for peace. But Hezbollah rejects the agreement, which calls for the group's disarmament and whose implementation is set to begin with Israeli withdrawal from two "pilot zones" in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese presidency announced on Monday that its delegation to Rome had been instructed "to demand the immediate start of Israeli forces' withdrawal from the two pilot zones before any further discussion". According to a Lebanese diplomatic source familiar with the content of the talks, "the Lebanese army is ready to gradually take control of the localities from which the Israeli army would withdraw". "Israel is willing to withdraw gradually," analyst Orna Mizrahi of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv told AFP's Jerusalem bureau, but on the condition "that there will be no presence of Hezbollah in the areas that Israel is withdrawing from". She added that Israel also seeks to ensure "that the Lebanese army will have the ability ... to keep it as a neutralised zone and a neutralised place that Hezbollah cannot come in again." A US military delegation began discussions with the Lebanese army in Beirut on Saturday on the process for Israeli withdrawal from one of these "pilot zones".

LIMITED PROSPECTS

The framework agreement was concluded after a fragile ceasefire came into effect in

the war between Hezbollah and Israel. The Israeli army has nonetheless continued limited strikes in the south and has been carrying out demolitions in villages it occupies, according to official Lebanese media. Israel's strikes and ground invasion have killed more than 4,300 people since the war started in early March, according to Lebanese authorities. "The chances of a breakthrough in Rome are quite limited," Karim Bitar, a lecturer at Sciences Po Paris, told AFP. "What we might see instead is a kind of opportunity to show that the process is still in place... that there are negotiations continuing despite the opposition and the obstacles that are beginning to emerge," he continued. Tehran had demanded the ceasefire in Lebanon in order to conclude a memorandum of understanding with Washington on June 17. But the region has seen a renewed escalation in recent days, with the US carrying out a third consecutive night of strikes against Iran ahead of the planned reimposition on Tuesday of its naval blockade of Iranian ports. Iran wants to establish a link between negotiations over the regional war and Lebanon, "but we have the wish to disconnect it", the INSS's Mizrahi said. She added that Tehran's priorities today are the Strait of Hormuz and the nuclear file. "The Iranians are using Lebanon as an excuse. They will always use it as an excuse." Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the regional war on Mar 2 by launching missiles as Israel in support of Iran. Bitar, for his part, said that the risk of major fighting returning to Lebanon as a result of the regional escalation "is, of course, not negligible". "But I think that Iran today will think twice before asking Hezbollah to launch new strikes against Israel," he said.

Oil hits four-week high as US-Iran conflict escalates

Oil prices rose on Tuesday (Jul 14) to their highest in four weeks, after the US reimposed a naval blockade of Iran and as renewed attacks between Washington and Tehran heightened concerns over energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz. Brent crude rose to its highest since Jun 12 and WTI to its highest since Jun 16 - before the United States and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding to end the conflict on Jun 17. Brent crude futures were up US\$2.89, or 3.47 per cent, at US\$86.19 per barrel at 11.58am GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude rose US\$1.53, or 1.96 per cent, to US\$79.67 a barrel. "Despite signing the memorandum of understanding and having a deal, this did not last for even a few weeks. So that's the concern the market is trying to price right now," said ANZ analyst Soni Kumari. "What we think is that the peak

of the escalation is behind us, but there are upside risks to oil prices if these disruptions continue and that will keep prices in the US\$85 to US\$90 range." Hostilities between the United States and Iran intensified this week, as US President Donald Trump reinstated a blockade of Iranian shipping and proposed charging a 20 per cent fee to guard the Strait of Hormuz. The waterway is a critical artery for global energy trade, carrying about a fifth of the world's daily oil and liquefied natural gas supplies before the conflict began. Amid the strikes, one Indian crew member was killed and eight others were wounded when two Emirati oil tankers were struck by Iranian cruise missiles in the Strait of Hormuz, the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Defence said. Shipping data on Monday also showed the number of tankers transiting the Strait of Hormuz fell in the past

day to the lowest level in two months. Citi said in a note that the possibility of the Iranian regime walking away from the memorandum of understating until after the US mid-term elections has also risen, a scenario which would most likely see higher for longer oil prices. However, Iran's oil exports are continuing as usual despite the cancellation last week of a 60-day waiver of US oil sanctions, oil minister Mohsen Paknejad said on his official Telegram account. Elsewhere, Yemen's Houthi movement fired missiles at Saudi Arabia after accusing the kingdom of bombing an airport under its control on Monday. "If the Houthis extend their attacks to Saudi's crude products in the Red Sea, it could put (further) uncertainties on crude flows from the region," Simon Wong, a portfolio manager at Gabelli Funds, said in a note.

Summer Literary Workshop Concludes at Shingia Kumar Gaon Primary School

SafiqurRahman, Staff Reporter, Nagaon, July 20: A month-long Summer Literary Workshop, organised by the Arnam Gosthi with support from the ASNK Foundation, Hojai, concluded at Shingia Kumar Gaon Primary School in Nagaon district on Sunday.

The closing ceremony began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp by Rupam Sharma, Principal of Guwahati CMA Institute, Phulkonwar Pujari, Senior Academic Officer of the Assam State School Education Board, and Rana Bose, former Finance Director of NEEPCO. The dignitaries praised the initiative for promoting reading habits, language skills and literary awareness among students while also conducting career counselling on Cost Accountancy.

During the valedictory function, several teachers, journalists, artists and social contributors were felicitated for their services. Josmita Bora was adjudged the best performer of the workshop and received a laptop and a trophy, while other outstanding participants were also honoured with cash awards, trophies and prizes.

Certificates were distributed to all trainees in the presence of a large gathering. The programme concluded with the unveiling of a 7-foot-high and 12-foot-wide portrait of renowned singer Zubeen Garg, painted by artist Pranjit Changmai, drawing appreciation from the audience.



GEG showcases India's expanding aerospace manufacturing strength at Farnborough International Airshow 2026

Guwahati: As global aerospace manufacturers increasingly seek resilient and diversified supply chains, the Aerospace business of Godrej Enterprises Group (GEG) is showcasing India's expanding role in high-value aerospace and aero-engine manufacturing at the Farnborough International Airshow 2026, one of the world's most influential aerospace industry events, being held from July 20–24. Bringing together leading aircraft manufacturers, aero-engine OEMs, suppliers, technology companies and policymakers from around the world, Farnborough serves as a platform for shaping the future of aviation. As aerospace companies continue to diversify sourcing and strengthen supply networks, India is increasingly emerging as a strategic destination for advanced manufacturing and engineering. With more than four decades of experience in aerospace manufacturing, the Aerospace business of Godrej has built deep expertise in advanced engineering, precision manufacturing and high-complexity aerospace production. Its capabilities span precision machining, advanced fabrication, hot forming, specialised brazing and welding, enabling the production of critical aero-engine and aircraft components that meet the

stringent requirements of global aviation programmes. Maneck Behramkamdin, Business Head, Aerospace Business, Godrej Enterprises Group, said, "As aerospace supply chains continue to evolve, India is moving beyond being a manufacturing destination to becoming an increasingly important engineering and technology partner for some of the world's most advanced aviation programmes. At Godrej Enterprises Group, we are supporting this transformation through sustained investments in advanced manufacturing, engineering excellence and design-led capabilities. Our long-standing partnerships with leading aerospace OEMs reflect the confidence placed in Indian expertise, and Farnborough provides an important opportunity to strengthen these relationships and explore new avenues for collaboration." The business is steadily progressing from Build-to-Print manufacturing towards higher-value Build-to-Spec engineering capabilities through continued investments in advanced manufacturing, research and development, and technology-led innovation. Its dedicated aerospace design office in Bengaluru, focused on aircraft actuation systems, marks an important mile-

stone in expanding design-led and engineering capabilities across the aerospace value



chain. Participation at Farnborough International Airshow 2026 provides an opportunity for Godrej Enterprises Group to engage with industry leaders, strengthen strategic partnerships and showcase India's capability to deliver world-class engineering and manufacturing solutions for the future of aviation. The Aerospace business of Godrej Enterprises Group will be exhibiting at Hall O, Booth 0030, at the Farnborough International Airshow 2026, United Kingdom.

Ministers review flood situation in upper districts as rescue operations intensify

Guwahati: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the state government is closely monitoring the flood situation in Upper Assam and is committed to ensuring that relief and rescue measures reach affected people without delay. The Chief Minister said rescue operations are in full swing across the flood-hit districts and are being supervised by a team of ministers deployed to oversee the ground situation and coordinate relief efforts with the local administration. "We are committed to provide all relief measures swiftly to the people affected by the floods. The situation is being closely monitored by Team Assam on the ground," Sarma said in a post on X. As part of the government's response, senior minister Keshab Mahanta visited the flood-affected districts of Jorhat and Sivasagar on Monday to assess the situation and review ongoing rescue and relief operations. Mahanta inspected flood-hit areas in Teok, took stock of the prevailing conditions and interacted with residents affected by the deluge. He also reviewed the progress of relief measures being undertaken by district authorities and disaster response agencies. Meanwhile, Minister Susanta Borgohain visited flood-affected areas under the Bokota-Lakuwa Mandal in the Demow Assembly constituency, where overflowing rivers have inundated Lonporiya and several nearby villages. Borgohain said the district administration has launched rescue operations to evacuate affected residents and shift them to safer locations. He added that rescue operations would continue in other inundated villages and that all necessary arrangements had been made to ensure the safety and well-being of affected families. The state government has deputed ministers to different flood-affected districts to monitor rescue operations, coordinate with local authorities and ensure timely distribution of relief materials. The flood situation in Assam has deteriorated over the past two days following heavy rainfall, affecting tens

of thousands of people across several districts. Rescue teams, including personnel from the Army, Assam Rifles and other disaster response agencies, remain engaged in evacuation and relief operations as authorities continue to monitor the evolving situation. According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), the flood situation deteriorated significantly, with one person reported dead in Sivasagar district. The latest casualty has taken the flood-related death toll in the state this year to five. ASDMA data showed that more than 57,100 people have been affected across Charaideo, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Tinsukia and Udalguri districts. The number of affected people has risen sharply from around 24,000 recorded a day earlier. Charaideo remains the worst-affected district, with nearly 24,000 people impacted, followed by Dhemaji, where over 22,000 residents are affected. Dibrugarh has reported more than 4,000 affected people, while floodwaters have also affected parts of Jorhat, Sivasagar, Tinsukia and Udalguri. Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, said the state government has adopted a "whole-of-government" approach to tackle the worsening flood situation in Upper Assam, where incessant rainfall has pushed several rivers above the danger mark, inundating vast areas across multiple districts. The Chief Minister said all government departments have been mobilised and senior officials have been instructed to remain on the ground until the flood situation returns to normal. In a statement posted on X, Sarma said unprecedented rainfall in the region has caused the Jaji, Dikhow and Dichang rivers to swell beyond the danger level, triggering extensive flooding in Jorhat, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Dibrugarh and adjoining districts. He said the administration, in coordination with various departments, has intensified efforts to protect vulnerable areas and minimise damage to life and

property. According to the Chief Minister, teams have been deployed at critical locations to strengthen embankments and carry out emergency flood protection measures. Authorities are reinforcing weak stretches of embankments, placing additional layers of sandbags and undertaking controlled piping operations to prevent breaches and reduce the impact of rising water levels. Sarma said safeguarding the lives and property of people remains the government's highest priority and assured that relief and rehabilitation measures are being implemented on a war footing. "The safety of people is our utmost priority. I am personally monitoring the situation to ensure that all required relief and rehabilitation efforts reach affected families without delay," the Chief Minister said. The state government has already deputed ministers and senior officials to flood-hit districts to supervise rescue operations, assess the ground situation and coordinate relief distribution with local administrations. The flood situation in Upper Assam has deteriorated significantly over the past two days following heavy rainfall in the region and upstream catchment areas. Rising river levels have inundated large tracts of agricultural land, disrupted road and rail connectivity and affected thousands of residents across several districts. Rescue and relief operations involving the district administration, the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the Army and other agencies are continuing in the affected areas as authorities closely monitor the evolving situation. Charaideo district remains the worst-affected district, with nearly 24,000 people impacted, followed by Dhemaji, where over 22,000 residents are affected. Dibrugarh has reported more than 4,000 affected people, while floodwaters have also affected parts of Jorhat, Sivasagar, Tinsukia and Udalguri.

Tripura wins Best National Costume at Miss Teen Diva 2026

Agartala/ Jaipur: Tripura brought home national honours as Chandamita Roy won the prestigious Best National Costume award at Miss Teen Diva 2026 in Jaipur, wearing an award-winning national costume conceptualised and designed by renowned fashion curator Yana Ngoba Chakpu, Founder & CEO of Northeast India Fashion Week – The Artisans Movement. The winning creation celebrated the timeless artistry of Tripura's indigenous communities while honouring the rich diversity of India's tribal heritage. At the heart of the costume was an authentic handwoven textile of the Debbarman (Tripuri) community, meticulously woven on the traditional loin loom, preserving an age-old weaving tradition passed down through generations. Inspired by the Nagkesar, the State Flower of Tripura, the dramatic floral wings symbolised the state's natural beauty, resilience, and cultural identity. The ensemble was further enhanced with Indian coin jewellery, vibrant red beads, and silver tribal adornments inspired by the artistic traditions of indigenous communities across India, creating a contemporary interpretation of the nation's living tribal legacy. The national costume presentation received the support of the Hon'ble Tourism Minister of Tripura, Shri Sushanta Chowdhury, reflecting the Government of Tripura's continued commitment to promoting the state's rich cultural heritage and tourism through creative platforms. Chandamita Roy said: "It was an honour to represent Tripura on a national stage through a costume that

celebrates our indigenous heritage. Receiving the Best National Costume award is a proud moment, and I hope it inspires greater appreciation for our weavers, artisans, and the rich cultural traditions they continue to preserve." Speaking on the achievement, Yana Ngoba Chakpu said: "This costume was created to tell a story—not just of Tripura, but of India's indigenous soul. Every thread, every ornament, and every detail honours our artisans, our weavers, and the cultural traditions that continue to inspire future generations. This



recognition belongs to every artisan whose craft keeps our heritage alive." The recognition marks another milestone in showcasing the cultural richness of Tripura and Northeast India on the national stage, reaffirming fashion as a powerful medium for cultural preservation, storytelling, and tourism promotion. From the heart of Tripura comes a tribute to India's indigenous spirit. At its heart lies

the authentic handwoven Debbarman (Tripuri) textile, crafted on the traditional loin loom, preserving generations of indigenous artistry. Inspired by the Nagkesar, Tripura's State Flower, and adorned with Indian coin jewellery, silver tribal ornaments, and vibrant red beads, this creation celebrates the beauty, resilience, and shared heritage of India's indigenous communities. This is not just a costume—it is a living tapestry of culture, craftsmanship, and identity. One Nation. Countless Tribes. One Timeless Legacy.

Marie Light drives Vitamin D awareness with ‘Surya Vardaan’ initiative at Puri Rath Yatra

Guwahati: Despite being blessed with abundant sunshine, Vitamin D deficiency continues to affect millions of Indians, often going unnoticed due to limited awareness. Continuing its meaningful association with Odisha's culture, Sunfeast Marie Light launched Sunfeast Surya Vardaan, a Vitamin D awareness initiative. The



initiative is built on Sunfeast Marie Light's long-standing association with the Sun and its opposition of 'Goodness of Vitamin D'. As one of Odisha's largest cultural congregations, Rath Yatra offered Sunfeast Marie Light a powerful platform to disseminate its message on Vitamin D at scale. With the thought "Har Kiran Mein Chhupa Hai Vitamin D Ka Vardaan", the brand encouraged devotees and families to become more aware of their Vitamin D requirement. The campaign came alive through a strong on-ground and online presence. At Puri Rath Yatra, Surya Sahayaks interacted with devotees, assisted them in taking a 2-minute Vitamin D requirement check and shared educational mate-

rial creating awareness about Vitamin D deficiency. Select participants were also offered free Vitamin D medical tests, enabling the initiative to translate awareness into meaningful action. The campaign was further amplified online, where consumers could take a WhatsApp-based test by answering simple behavioural questions around sunlight exposure, outdoor routines and Vitamin D awareness. Mr. Suraj Kathuria, VP and Head of Marketing - Biscuits, Foods Division ITC Ltd, said: "Odisha's enduring relationship with the Sun provided a meaningful starting point for us to spark conversations around Vitamin D. Through Surya Vardaan, our endeavour has been to make Vitamin D awareness simple and relevant for consumers. Combining technology, community engagement and the scale of Rath Yatra, we encouraged people to better understand their Vitamin D needs and take informed steps towards their well-being like spending time in the Sun and making Sunfeast Marie Light with Vitamin D a part of their everyday tea-time." Archita Sahu, renowned Odia film actress and the brand's ambassador in Odisha, said: "As an Odia, Rath Yatra is very close to my heart. I'm happy to be part of Sunfeast Marie Light's Surya Vardaan initiative, which encouraged people to understand their Vitamin D requirement. I urge everyone to take this 2-minute Vitamin D requirement check." With the second edition of Surya Vardaan, Sunfeast Marie Light continues to demonstrate how brands can transform cultural moments into meaningful platforms for consumer awareness, strengthening its association with Odisha while encouraging awareness around Vitamin D and everyday well-being.

Ravi Sarma, Suvrat Kakoti reunite for Oiii Police trailer release

Guwahati: The countdown to one of Assamese cinema's most anticipated releases this year officially began on Monday with the launch of the



trailer of Rootstock Entertainments' upcoming much awaited feature film Oiii Police!!!' in Guwahati. The event witnessed the presence of the film's cast and crew, members of the media and film fraternity, with the trailer receiving an enthusiastic response from those in attendance. The trailer offers a glimpse into a film that combines action, humour, emotion and family entertainment while hinting at a story that goes beyond the conventions of a typical police drama. Scheduled for a theatrical release on August 7, 'Oiii Police!!!' stars Superstar Ravi Sarma and Amrita Gogoi in the lead and marks the much-awaited reunion of Ravi Sarma and director Suvrat (Suv) Kakoti after the acclaimed Shri Raghupati. Addressing the gathering after the trailer launch, superstar Ravi

Sarma said, "Every film is special, but this one carries a different kind of excitement. The love we received today after the trailer launch is overwhelming. It tells us that people are ready to experience this story in theatres. I sincerely hope Oiii Police!!! entertains families and gives audiences another memorable cinematic experience on August 7." Speaking about the film, director Suvrat (Suv) Kakoti said, "From the very beginning, our intention was to make a complete entertainer; one that people would want to watch with their families on the big screen. We have worked extensively on the screenplay, performances, music and visual scale because audiences today expect much more from regional cinema. The trailer is only a glimpse; the film has many more surprises waiting."

Lead actor Amrita Gogoi said the response at the trailer launch reflected the affection audiences continue to have for Assamese cinema. She said, "The response to the trailer reassures us that good stories continue to find audiences. Working alongside Ravi da and under Suv's direction has been a wonderful learning experience, and I cannot wait for everyone to watch the complete film in theatres." Written and directed by Suvrat Kakoti, 'Oiii Police!!!' is backed by Rootstock Entertainments and brings together a strong creative team, including Pranoy Dutta as music director and Hridoy Gogoi (Gogo) as director of photography. With the successful Ravi Sarma-Suvrat Kakoti-Pranay Dutta collaboration returning after Shri Raghupati and the trailer generating considerable excitement at its launch, 'Oiii Police!!!' now heads towards its theatrical release on August 7, carrying the promise of a wholesome theatrical entertainer for Assamese audiences.

Rodri returns from 'hell' to drive Spain to World Cup glory

East rutherford : Spain's midfield rock Rodri hopes younger generations can learn from his experience in overcoming adversity after he won the World Cup on Sunday to complete his collection of the game's major prizes less than two years after rupturing his knee ligaments. The 30-year-old was named the

award, confusingly named the Golden Ball. "I'd love for the younger generations to see that a player who touches the heavens, then descends into hell, can come back. It's a lesson in overcoming adversity."

SPAIN COLLECTIVE

Rodri may be Spain's most influential player but La Furia Roja are all about the collective and Rodri heaped praise on his teammates for the way they kept at their task against a resilient Argentina side and finally secured a 1-0 victory with a Ferran Torres goal in the second period of extra time. "That's the secret of the national team," he said. "We're always going to go for you. In the end, God rewards you. We've been brave. "We're on cloud nine," he added. "This squad is sensational. We're two-time World Cup champions. It was the toughest tournament in World Cup history. We beat a great Argentina side, featuring (Lionel) Messi, the best player in history." Although it was a tough final, Rodri was in no doubt that his team deserved to join their Spanish 2010 predecessors by lifting the biggest prize in the game. "Argentina. World champions," he said. "They haven't created much, but they're hard to break down. Spain are simply very good, and in the end, the result was fair."



tournament's best player and joined greats Franz Beckenbauer, Gerd Muller and Zinedine Zidane as the only men to win the World Cup and European Championship at international level, the European Cup/Champions League with his club, and the Ballon d'Or. His achievement was all the more remarkable for the fact that he arrived at the tournament still looking for the dominant form that brought him football's most prestigious individual award in 2024 after helping Spain win the Euros and steering his club Manchester City to a record unbeaten streak of 74 matches with him in the side. "It feels like the perfect script. I certainly didn't expect this," he said after receiving FIFA's Player of the Tournament

Rennie wins over doubters as New Zealand embraces new era

July 20 : Dave Rennie's appointment as All Blacks coach was initially greeted with scepticism, but a flawless 3-0 start to the Nations Championship has swiftly reshaped perceptions of the man chosen to replace Scott Robertson. New Zealand signed off from the southern hemisphere leg of the new, global tournament with a thumping 40-21 win over Ireland on Saturday, having already crushed Italy 47-17 and edged an understrength France 34-32 in their opener. While there was quibbling from the nation's loudest rugby pundits after the France and Italy wins, the All Blacks' commitment to a fast and furious running game under Rennie generated rave reviews after the Ireland demolition. "The fog that sat over this team throughout 2024 and 2025 has lifted – and the All Blacks now have a universally understood vision of being a team that plays at a high-tempo with a multi-option attack plan," wrote the New Zealand Herald's Gregor Paul. Only months ago, fans were lamenting a lack of global interest and competition in the recruiting process for a new coach following Robertson's abrupt departure in the off-season. Rennie's only opponent for the role was another New Zealander in Jamie Joseph, the long-serving Japan coach. After Robertson's lack of experience at test level was exposed, New Zealand Rugby wanted a coach with international experience. Many in the nation backed Joseph to take the reins, having done great things with Japan, including taking them to a first World Cup quarter-final on home soil in 2019. Rennie arrived with a less compelling record and was sacked by Australia in 2023 to make way for Eddie Jones. His 38 per cent win rate stands as the worst among Wallabies coaches with over 30 tests in charge. Three weeks into his All Blacks reign, however, those doubts have

given way to growing optimism, with the 2027 World Cup in Australia now little more

win showed an All Blacks side that has re-discovered their traditional attacking DNA



than a year away. ATTACKING DNA Rennie has made decisive moves to break from the Robertson era, a period marked by player discontent and high staff turnover. Most of those moves have borne early fruit, including the decision to anoint Ardie Savea captain in place of the injury-prone Scott Barrett. Savea represents much of what Rennie appears to want from this All Blacks side: toughness, humility and an uncompromising commitment to the team. Rather than persisting with Robertson favourite, Beauden Barrett, Rennie has promoted Ruben Love as starting flyhalf and made tweaks to a backline that was often disappointed under Robertson. Deployed on the right wing rather than fullback, Will Jordan has racked up six tries, while Damian McKenzie has been a menace in the number 15 jersey. The Ireland

and married it seamlessly to set piece pressure and hard work at the breakdown. While the early signs under Rennie have been encouraging, a sterner test awaits next month when New Zealand travel to South Africa for a four-test tour against the world champions. Since the All Blacks lost the 2023 World Cup final 12-11 to the Springboks, the gap has only grown between the Southern Hemisphere powers. Under Robertson, New Zealand lost three out of four matches against South Africa, including a record 43-10 humiliation in their last meeting in Wellington last year. Robertson's failure to produce a team capable of challenging the Springboks' supremacy was viewed dimly by the nation's rugby powers and increasingly restless fans. Another emphatic South African victory could bring Rennie's honeymoon to an abrupt end.

'The last of Messi': Argentines mourn loss and end of an era

Buenos aires: Nervous excitement and rowdy cheers turned into anguished groans, nail-biting tension and tears, as Argentines' hope of yet another epic comeback led by Lionel Messi in the World Cup fizzled out against Spain. At the Cafe Relax bar in the historic centre of Buenos Aires, fans with tears in their eyes after the final whistle blew on the 1-0 defeat said that what saddened them most was that it was almost certainly 39-year-old Messi's last shot at a World Cup. "I feel empty. Empty because of Messi, because I won't see him in a World Cup again. This is the last one," said Camilo Cichero, a 22-year-old architecture student who was comforting his crying friend. "It's not how we expected it to go. At least it gives me peace of mind knowing he's already won everything there was to win." Composing himself, his friend Juan Saenz, 22, a law student said: "This was the last of Messi ... it was the very end, and it finished this way." "I was born while Messi was playing, and this was the end of that era." After a scrappy World Cup run built on a series of narrow victories, Argentines were confident they could pull off a second victory in a row in the final in New Jersey. Draped in their blue-and-white flag and donning the national football jersey, they braved an icy cold day to pack bars and public squares, fizzing with excitement at the start of the game.



THEY GAVE IT THEIR ALL

In Cafe Relax, which displays a flag saying it is "forbidden to forget" the Falkland Islands, which Argentina invaded in 1982 only to be ejected by a British task force, nervous energy and excited chants gave way to tension by half-time. In the second half angry shouts at the screen were interspersed with excited chants, and increasingly foul language, while some sat arms folded, feet tapping and chew-

ated. I don't know how it'll happen, but it's going to happen for us. We're Argentine. We're champions and we're going to win." It was not to be.

A dramatic extra-time goal by Ferran Torres cast a pall of silence over the bar for the last agonizing minutes. Applause still broke out for the team. Cichero said he was sad for Messi but dismayed at the game. "I didn't like how Argentina played. I didn't like the game plan, the substitutions, the players. I didn't like the referee." Abel Torres, a 62-year-old retiree wearing a blue-and-white jester hat and blowing a vuvuzela throughout the game, teared up as he described the "incredibly emotional" game. "Argentina gave it their all. Today was a true example of what Argentina is all about: that despite the hard times and the obstacles we face, we always rise again." "It wasn't our World Cup this time, but this team taught us a great deal about never giving up." Around the city fireworks went off, car horns honked, and thousands of fans still made their way to the iconic Obelisk, the traditional place for football celebrations. Many fans said that despite the defeat, they intend to take to the streets to welcome the team home. "Thank you so much, players!!! You fought until the very end. Argentina will always stand tall," President Javier Milei wrote on X.

ing their nails or burying their heads in the flag. "Oh no, it can't be, please, please!" wailed one woman when Enzo Fernandez was sent off for two yellow cards. Before extra time began, Teresa Dolores del Rio Varela, 87, watching with a friend of the same age, complained that "it drags on and on, and you start to get nervous. I'm happy, but I just want it to end because it's getting long." Joaquin Romero, 22, who works in sales said the game was "incredibly compli-

Emotional Scaloni says Argentina gave utmost, needs to think about what comes next

East rutherford : Argentina manager Lionel Scaloni said his team gave their utmost and he would need to think about what comes next for him in emotional remarks after his team lost 1-0 to Spain in Sunday's World Cup final. Spain needed an extra-time goal by substitute Ferran Torres to edge past 10-man defending champions Argentina. "It was a dream place for everyone and we tried up until the very last minute to give our utmost and I believe it is only fair to take this time to myself to think this through," Scaloni told reporters. "I will talk to the president - I have an idea of what I would like to do. I will see out my contract and I feel the need to think as I don't know if something as big can be done and maybe we need to speak this through." "I have never in my life - please bear with me - I would have never imagined, including my staff, that we would be in this place," Scaloni said, tearing up and wiping his eyes.

DULL GAME

The flagship match of the tournament was one of its

least exciting with the teams playing each other to a stalemate until Torres made the breakthrough to avoid penalties. But it came after a hard-fought campaign by Argentina, who had nail-biting matches against England, Egypt and Cape Verde in their run to the final. It was also a disappointing, possibly final, chapter for Lionel Messi, one of the greatest ever footballers, who will leave this tournament empty-handed. "It was crystal clear to me that he's going to play up until he decides (not to) do so and his team will support him... I hope that everyone feels proud of him, of what he's achieved because he's the best football player ever," Scaloni said. Messi was also moved to tears on the pitch after the match, facing the Argentine goal where the team's fanatical supporters serenaded him and the other Argentina players. "The fans, I'm sure, are struggling like us but these are moments to bounce back stronger," said Scaloni. "It's hard for people to enjoy being runners-up as much as being winners.... We have to go on."

Mbappe retains World Cup Golden Boot crown

East Rutherford : Kylian Mbappe became the first player to win the World Cup Golden Boot twice after Lionel Messi failed to add to his tally in Sunday's (Jul 19) final. The France captain scored 10 goals to top the charts ahead of Argentina great Messi, who finished with eight. England midfielder Jude Bellingham and Norway striker Erling Haaland each scored seven

times. Real Madrid forward Mbappe, 27, also won the prize with eight goals at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where France were beaten finalists. The Frenchman, who made his World Cup debut in 2018, scored twice in Saturday's third-place play-off, which England won 6-4. Mbappe is now the top scorer in World Cup history, with 22 goals across three World Cups, one ahead

of Messi, who failed to sparkle in Sunday's 1-0 defeat by Spain. "When you score that many goals in the World Cup, it certainly takes you to a whole new level," he said after the match against England. "But I would have preferred not to be the top scorer and to have played in the final. It's good for my legacy once I've retired, but right now, that's not what's on my mind."

Spain's ball worship delivers World Cup glory and a nation's shared embrace

East rutherford : Spain went all the way round the footballing wheel on Sunday, from silk to sludge, from purity to persistence, and still ended up exactly where they wanted to be - World Cup champions, with the ball at their feet and belief in their bones. Their 1-0 victory over Argentina was not a wild departure from their identity but a muddy reaffirmation of it. Spain passed, probed, protected and pampered the ball as if it were national treasure, refusing to panic as Argentina dug in and the clock ticked towards the end of extra time. In the end, fittingly for a side built on the idea that no player is bigger than the whole, the winner came from the bench. It was set up and scored by substitutes Nico Williams and Ferran Torres, the third time in the knockout rounds that a replacement had struck the decisive blow for Spain. That, more than any glossy tactical diagram, said plenty about Luis de la Fuente's side. This is not a team of soloists demanding the spotlight. It is an orchestra in which even the late arrivals know the tune by heart. Spain finished with more than 65 per cent possession, 12 shots on target and over twice as many completed passes as Argentina, who produced their first effort - off target - near the end of extra time. It was domination, but not destruction. Spain still had to sweat for it. Their familiar weakness, the absence of a classic centre forward, was exposed by the number of chances they created but failed to finish. Yet if the lack of a ruthless striker remains their Achilles' heel, it is about the only exposed part of a team otherwise wrapped in collective certainty. Spain swept the individual tournament awards, with Pau Cubarsi named Best Young Player, Unai Simon Best Goalkeeper and Rodri the

tournament's Most Valuable Player. Only the Golden Boot escaped them, going to France's Kylian Mbappe. GOALS SHARED OUT Even that felt appropriate. Spain's triumph was never about one hot boot. Their 14 goals in eight matches were shared by eight players, echoing their European Championship success in 2024, when they scored a tournament-record 16 goals through 10 different players. The win over Argentina also stretched their unbeaten run to 38 matches, moving them past Italy and underlining three years of dominance in international football. It was also a personal vindication for De la Fuente, once dismissed by Spanish media as Luis de la "Who" after spending much of his coaching career in the Spanish FA's youth ranks. Now he has turned that patient apprenticeship into the biggest prize in the game. This Spain is also a reflection of the country itself, stitched together from different regions, accents and identities. Players from the Basque Country like Mikel Oyarzabal, Simon and Mikel Merino share the stage with Borja Iglesias from Galicia, Torres from Valencia, Rodri from Madrid, Fabian Ruiz and Gavi from Andalucia and Pedri from the Canary Islands. Cubarsi and Marc Cucurella are two of the nine players born in Catalonia while Lamine Yamal and Williams represent the success of immigration and a newer Spain. The country's richness has always rested in being made up of smaller nations, each with its own history. On Sunday, those differences did not disappear. They simply stopped being obstacles. Football achieved, for one night at least, what politics so often cannot. It made Spain feel whole.

Monsoon Session of Parliament begins; 25-day session will hold 19 sittings

New Delhi, July 20: The Monsoon Session of Parliament opened with customary tributes, fresh oaths in the Rajya Sabha and renewed expectations of meaningful legislative business, but the proceedings in both Houses were repeatedly disrupted as opposition parties raised the issue of the alleged NEET examination paper leak, leading to a series of adjournments that prevented normal parliamentary work from progressing. The session, which began on Monday, marks the start of one of the most significant phases in India's annual legislative calendar and is scheduled to continue until August 13 with 19 sittings over 25 days. During this period, Parliament is expected to deliberate on several important Bills, review government policies, examine national issues and provide a platform for elected representatives to discuss matters affecting citizens across the country. However, the opening day's proceedings highlighted the continuing challenge of balancing political disagreements with legislative responsibilities, as repeated protests overshadowed the scheduled business in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The Lok Sabha assembled at 11 a.m. with Speaker Om Birla presiding over the first sitting of the session. The House began by paying homage to six former Members of Parliament who passed away recently, remembering their contributions to public life and democratic governance. Members observed tributes to Nadendra Bhaskara Rao, Omwati Devi, Sudhangshu Seal, Major General Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri (Retired), K. P. Dhanapalan and Pyare Lal Sankhwar. The House also paid tribute to Father Amir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, with the Speaker acknowledging his role in strengthening India-Qatar relations and laying the foundation for the modern development of Qatar during his years as the country's ruler. The solemn opening reflected Parliament's long-standing tradition of honouring distinguished personalities before commencing legislative business. Soon after the obituary references concluded, the Speaker attempted to begin the Question Hour, one of Parliament's most important accountability mechanisms through which Members seek answers from ministers regarding government policies, programmes and administrative decisions. However, opposition members, including representatives of the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, entered the Well of the House and began raising slogans over the alleged NEET examination paper leak, demanding discussion on the matter. Despite repeated appeals from Speaker Om Birla urging members to return to their seats, maintain decorum and allow the House to function, the protests continued, forcing the Chair to adjourn proceedings till noon. When the House reassembled after the first adjournment, the protests resumed immediately. Opposition members persisted with their demands, leaving little scope for the Chair to conduct business. Amid the continuing disruptions, the House was adjourned once again until 12:30 p.m. When members reconvened after the second adjournment, the atmosphere remained unchanged, with protesting members continuing to raise slogans over the NEET issue. Presiding Officer Dilip Saikia attempted to commence the Zero Hour, another important parliamentary mechanism that enables members to raise urgent matters of public importance without prior notice. Addressing the protesting members, he emphasised that Parliament exists for healthy debate and constructive discussion and reminded legislators that people had elected them to raise important public issues through democratic procedures rather than disruption. Despite his appeal, the protests continued unabated, leaving the Chair with little option but to adjourn the House once again until 1 p.m. The repeated interruptions prevented the Lok Sabha from taking up its scheduled legislative agenda on the opening day, illustrating the increasingly confrontational nature of parliamentary proceedings when contentious political issues dominate the national discourse. Similar scenes unfolded in the Rajya Sabha, where proceedings began with the oath-taking ceremony for newly elected and re-elected members. Dr Mukeshbhai Rathwa, Mahesh Kewat, Dr Satish Poonia, Prakash Chik Baraik, Sushmita Dev, Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Pawan Kherra, James Sangma and K. Lalitluangkima took the oath as members of the Upper House, marking an important constitutional process that formally inducted them into parliamentary responsibilities. The Rajya Sabha then observed obituary references to former members Balbir K. Punj, Swapan Sadhan Bose, Rangasayee Ramakrishna and H. Hanumanthappa, acknowledging their contributions to public life and the democratic process. However, shortly afterwards, the Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge sought to raise the issue of the alleged NEET examination paper leak, triggering uproar in the House. As protests intensified, Chairman C. P. Radhakrishnan adjourned the Rajya Sabha till noon. When the House resumed, opposition members again resorted to sloganeering on the same issue, prompting another adjournment until 12:30 p.m. The repeated disruptions in both Houses reflected the sharp political divide over the examination controversy and demonstrated how contentious issues can significantly influence the functioning of Parliament during the early days of a session. Despite the turbulent start, the Monsoon Session is expected to remain one of the most important legislative exercises of the year. The government has indicated that it intends to introduce and consider several key Bills covering judicial reforms, taxation, business development, public administration and institutional strengthening. Among the measures expected to receive parliamentary attention are the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026. These legislative proposals are aimed at improving judicial efficiency, strengthening governance, modernising public administration, refining tax systems and enhancing support for India's MSME sector, which plays a vital role in employment generation and economic growth. Ahead of the commencement of the session, the government convened an all-party meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to build consensus and encourage cooperation among political parties for the smooth functioning of Parliament. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju appealed to leaders across party lines to participate constructively in debates and assured them that the government was prepared to discuss every important national issue in accordance with parliamentary rules and procedures. Representatives from numerous political parties attended the meeting, where they presented their concerns and legislative priorities while expressing their commitment to democratic dialogue. The consultations reflected an effort to create a productive atmosphere for the session despite political differences. The Lok Sabha Business Advisory Committee, chaired by Speaker Om Birla before the session, also reviewed the legislative agenda and discussed the allocation of time for debates, underlining the importance of meaningful participation and adherence to parliamentary traditions. Parliament remains the cornerstone of India's democratic system, providing elected representatives with the opportunity to scrutinise government policies, debate legislation and articulate the concerns of citizens from every region of the country. Question Hour, Zero Hour, debates, committee proceedings and legislative scrutiny are integral to ensuring transparency, accountability and effective governance. Although the opening day witnessed repeated adjournments due to protests, the coming weeks are expected to feature detailed discussions on judicial reforms, taxation, digital governance, business development, public administration and other issues of national importance. The progress of major Bills will be closely watched by industry, legal experts, civil society organisations, state governments and citizens, as many of the proposed measures have the potential to influence governance, economic activity and institutional functioning. The opening day's developments underscore both the vibrancy and the challenges of parliamentary democracy, where political disagreements often compete with legislative priorities. As the Monsoon Session progresses, attention will remain focused on whether the government and opposition can find common ground to ensure productive debates while allowing Parliament to fulfil its constitutional responsibility of lawmaking, oversight and representation. The repeated appeals by the presiding officers for orderly conduct and healthy discussion serve as reminders that democratic institutions function most effectively when robust debate is accompanied by mutual respect, procedural discipline and a shared commitment to serving the public interest. The coming sittings will therefore be crucial in determining whether Parliament can move beyond disruption and deliver substantive legislative outcomes that address the nation's governance, economic and developmental priorities while upholding the dignity and traditions of India's highest democratic institution.

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Floodwaters Disrupt Guwahati...

view of the situation, vehicles are being diverted from Kaliabor to alternative routes. The Dibrugarh district administration has issued an advisory directing vehicles bound for Dibrugarh to travel via the Tezpur-Biswanath Chariali route and cross through the Bogibeel Bridge. The administration stated that traffic on the National Highway will resume as usual once the flood situation improves and the road conditions return to normal. The administration has also urged drivers to strictly follow all instructions issued by the traffic police and to avoid travelling through flooded roads unless absolutely necessary. Besides road transport, railway services have also been severely affected by the floods. Owing to the prevailing flood situation, a total of ten trains have been cancelled, including five up-bound and five down-bound services. Among the cancelled trains are the Siliguri-Dibrugarh Passenger, Rangiya-Tinsukia Intercity, and Lumding-Tinsukia Demo alongwith several other important train services.

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CEM directs immediate assistance...

to the affected people. He also directed all concerned departments and officers under the administrative control of the KAAC to remain on alert and extend all necessary support to the District Administration in relief and rehabilitation efforts. The related departments have been instructed to respond promptly to any requisition from the District Administration and provide all possible assistance for the welfare of the flood-affected people.

Cachar begins Census 2027...

Roktim Baruah, ACS in the presence of senior officials associated with the Census organisation. During the programme, District Commissioner, Cachar, Shri Rahul Kumar Gupta, IAS, also visited Cachar College and interacted with the Master Trainers, Field Trainers, Enumerators and Supervisors. He reviewed the ongoing training sessions, spoke to the trainees about the importance of maintaining accuracy and integrity in data collection, and appreciated the efforts being made by the Census Cell to ensure smooth implementation of India's first fully digital Census. Delivering the welcome address, Charge Officer, Silchar Sadar Revenue Circle, Arnab Kumar Baruah, ACS, welcomed the participants and said the success of the Census depends on the preparedness and commitment of field functionaries. He urged the trainees to participate actively in the sessions, gain a thorough understanding of the digital enumeration process and carry out their responsibilities with sincerity and precision during the field exercise. In his keynote address, District Census Officer, Roktim Baruah, ACS said Census 2027 marks a historic transition as it will be conducted through a digital platform for the first time in the country. He emphasised that the quality and reliability of Census data depend upon accurate field-level data collection and advised Enumerators and Supervisors to become thoroughly familiar with the digital applications and operational guidelines. He also appealed to the public to cooperate with Census officials to ensure the successful completion of the exercise. The technical sessions are being conducted by trained Field Trainers, who were themselves prepared through two batches of Master Trainer programmes organised in June. A total of 57 Field Trainers from Cachar received training from Master Trainers Dr. Gongesh Bhattacharjee and Shri Surajit Acharya, enabling them to impart uniform training to field personnel across the district.

For the first time, the Census will provide citizens with the facility of Self-Enumeration through the designated online Census portal. Residents will be able to upload their household information themselves from August 2 to August 16, 2026. Thereafter, from August 17, Enumerators will begin door-to-door House Listing Operations across the district to verify and collect the required information. To carry out the Census efficiently, the district administration has deployed 4,535 Enumerators and Supervisors. The Census will be conducted in two phases. The first phase, House Listing Operation will continue up to September 15, 2026 while the second phase, Population Enumeration, is scheduled for February 2027. Officials appealed to citizens to make use of the self-enumeration facility wherever possible and extend full cooperation to Enumerators during their household visits so that the Census can be completed smoothly, accurately and within the stipulated timeframe. Among those present at the inaugural programme were District Nodal Officer Noyanmoni Dutta, Charge Officer, Silchar Sadar, Arnab Kumar Baruah, ACS; Additional Charge Officer, Koustab Das; Principal of Cachar College, Dr. Apratim Nag; Master Trainer Dr. Gongesh Bhattacharjee; Resource Persons S. B. Dutta Choudhary and Sanjit Mondol; and the representative from the Directorate of Census Operations, Guwahati.

Students, Citizens Stage Protest...

Nagaon University, ADP College, GNDC Commerce College, Physics Wallah, and Kolong Kapili, along with members of the Nagaon Citizens' Forum. Addressing the gathering, Birinchi Bora, Secretary of the Nagaon Citizens' Forum, alleged irregularities in the conduct of the NEET examination and demanded accountability from the Union Education Minister. Teacher Afsana Begum also addressed the protesters, raising concerns over democratic rights and calling for greater transparency and responsibility in the education system. The organisers described the protest as one of the largest joint demonstrations by students and members of civil society in the district on issues relating to education and public accountability.

Flood Situation Remains Unchanged...

district administration has not yet officially confirmed or released details of the fatalities. The floods have severely affected 225 villages in Konwarpur, Joysagar, Hatikhok, Amguri and various parts of Nazira. Around 17,866 families have suffered extensive damage to their homes and property, while more than a hundred livestock have reportedly been swept away and killed. Over 8,900 hectares of agricultural land have also been damaged. The district administration, along with teams from the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), has continued rescue operations since last night. Rescue personnel have evacuated nearly 2,500 stranded people from flood-affected areas in the Sivasagar, Nazira and Demow Assembly constituencies and shifted them to relief camps. The Kaumudalaya residential home for specially-abled children in Joysagar was also inundated by floodwaters. The district administration successfully evacuated the children to a safer location. Four Indian Air Force helicopters deployed to Sivasagar are conducting aerial surveys of remote flood-affected areas in Sivasagar and Charaideo districts. If the situation worsens, the helicopters will be used for rescue operations and for delivering food and other essential supplies to inaccessible areas. State Ministers Bimal Bora, Susanta Borgohain and Keshab Mahanta are camping in Sivasagar and are continuously reviewing the flood situation with the district and police administrations. They also held discussions with Indian Army officers who have arrived in the district to assist in managing the flood crisis.

CPI (ML) holds 1 Day Symbolic...

that instead of responding to the democratic demands of students and youth, the Modi government has chosen to suppress the movement through police action. The party stated that obstructing the "Parliament March" detaining protesters and particularly the forcible removal of social activist Sonam Wangchuk constitute a blatant attack on democratic rights. CPI (ML) strongly condemned and denounced what it described as these authoritarian actions. The hunger strike, which began at 8:00 a.m., was observed by Balindra Saikia, member of the CPI (ML) Central Committee; Ghanshyam Munda and Meera Tati, members of the Assam State Committee; Kunti Tati, State President of the Revolutionary Youth Association and 75-year-old Annada Bora Gogoi, President of the Dibrugarh District Committee of the Progressive Women's Association. The participants demanded the immediate abolition of the NTA, the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on moral grounds an immediate end to police repression of the student-youth movement in Delhi and the prompt acceptance of the legitimate demands of protesting students and youth including Sonam Wangchuk, Neha, Amin, and Manish. Among those present at the programme were eminent Scientist and retired professor of Dibrugarh University Dr. Parmananda Mahanta; Sharat Neog, President of the Assam State Committee of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA); trade union activist Dhruvajyoti Bardhan; Suresh Deka, Secretary of the Dibrugarh District Committee of CPI(M); party members Prakash Rajkhowa and Jagannath Phukan; CPI leaders Jatim Saikia and Pranjit Sonowal; Ananta Kumar Gogoi, Central Committee member of the Assam Jatiya Parishad, members Prarthapratim Bhuyan, Dipankar Dev, Bhaskar Handique, Daisy Lahkar, Leela Kanta Dhekial, Bhupen Phukan, Debajit Bora; Uttam Chetia of RCPI and CPI (ML) Dibrugarh District members Binod Mura, Jitanu Garait, Maya Mura, and Dinesh Garait alongwith a large number of party members, activists of democratic organizations, and supporters. CPI (ML) Dibrugarh District Committee declared that police batons, arrests, and repression can never silence the people's just and democratic movements. It affirmed that the struggle to protect the country's education system, democracy, and constitutional rights would continue with even greater strength.

Agriculture Minister Pijush Hazarika...

the Agriculture and Irrigation Departments to strengthen Assam's rural economy. Later, at Bhomoraguri, Hazarika distributed land pattas to 81 families of the Nagaon-Batadrava constituency and handed over MMUA cheques to several beneficiaries. He said the land ownership documents would enable recipients to register as farmers and obtain a unique farmer ID, making them eligible for various government welfare schemes. He also urged farmers to make productive use of their land by adopting multiple cropping practices, including the cultivation of coconuts, areca nuts and black pepper, to enhance farm income. The programmes were attended by MLAs Mehub Mukhtar and Rupak Sarma, along with the District Commissioner of Nagaon and other senior officials.

CEM reviews revenue collection and development works, urges timely implementation of schemes

Diphu, July 20: CEM of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Dr. Tuliram Ronghang, today directed all revenue-earning departments under the administrative control of the Council to strengthen revenue collection and ensure systematic monitoring of receipts.

Chairing a high-level review meeting held at the Conference Hall of the Arbo-retum-cum-Craft Centre, Diphu, Dr. Ronghang reviewed the revenue collection performance of all the departments during the last three financial years and the first three months of the current financial year.

The CEM laid special emphasis on enhancing revenue collection in key sectors, including Forest Royalty, Land Revenue, Stamp and Registration, General Economic Services, Roads and Transport, Professional Tax, and Market sectors. He instructed all concerned departments to undertake regular reconciliation of revenue figures with the Treasury to identify any discrepancies and take timely corrective measures to plug revenue leakages and improve collections.



Dr. Ronghang also appealed to all Heads of Departments to initiate the implementation of developmental schemes immediately upon receipt of the budget communication, expected next month. Stressing the need for timely execution, he directed the departments to implement the schemes in an accelerated manner so that all projects are completed within the stipulated timeframe and the intended benefits reach the people without delay.

The meeting also reviewed the progress of the proposed Pumped Storage Projects, Jal Jeevan Mission, construction of roads under RIDF, and construction of boys' and girls' hostels under the PWD Building Wing. During the review of the Public Works Department (PWD) and Public Health Engineering (PHE), the concerned contractors were also present and apprised the meeting of the status of the ongoing works. The CEM directed the departments to closely monitor project implementation and expedite the clearance of contractors' liabilities in accordance with the prescribed procedures.

Deputy Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly Dr. Habbey Teron, MLA Surya Rongphar, Deputy Speaker of KAAC Abhijit Kro, Executive Members, MACs, and all Heads of Departments under the administrative control of the KAAC attended the review meeting.

Preparatory Meeting on Independence Day Celebration held at Morigaon

Achyut KR Nath, Morigaon, July 20: A preparatory meeting in connection with the celebration of the 80th Independence Day, the Conference Hall of the Office, Morigaon, under the trict Commissioner Smt.

The meeting was at-Commissioners Nitisha Bora, Sarma, Senior Superinten-Sonowal, Heads of Depart-ment offices, representatives eminent social activists.

The District Commis-prehensive review of the ar-pendence Day celebrations ments concerned to ensure assigned responsibilities through close inter-departmental coordination. Detailed discussions were held on parade arrangements, ceremonial proceedings, security measures, traffic regulation, sanitation, healthcare and emergency services, cultural programmes, public convenience, and other logisti-cal aspects related to the smooth conduct of the celebration.

Emphasising the significance of the national festival, the District Commissioner called upon all stakeholders to discharge their responsibilities with utmost sincerity and coordination to ensure that the Independence Day celebrations are conducted in a befitting, peaceful, and dignified manner, re-lecting the spirit of patriotism and national unity.

Varanasi Announces Winners of the Sustainable Cities Challenge to Scale Crowd Management and Sustainable Mobility Solutions in its historical core - Kashi

Varanasi, July 20: Varanasi is set to scale a portfolio of innovative mobility and crowd-management solutions designed to improve pedestrian movement, accessibility, and resident/ visitor experience across its historic core, Kashi, following the announcement of winners of the Sustainable Cities Challenge (SCC) Varanasi - an initiative led by Varanasi Nagar Nigam in collaboration with the Toyota Mobility Foundation (TMF), Challenge Works, and WRI India.

CityFlow by CITYDATA.AI and Nippon Koei and Janjatra by The Urbanizer were selected as winners and will receive financial and advisory support to scale their solutions across the old city. Behtarway by VOGIC AI and Nayichaal by Prameya Consulting were recognized as "Honorable Mentions" for their contributions towards more inclusive and efficient mobility in Varanasi.

The event was graced by Shri Arvind Kumar Sharma, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Urban Development, Government of Uttar Pradesh. He was hopeful and enthusiastic to scale the innova-tive solutions from the Challenge, and looked forward to their impact in Varanasi.



improve safety, and support proactive crowd management.

CityFlow, developed by CITYDATA.AI in partnership with Nippon Koei, uses big data, com-puter vision, and generative AI to analyze and manage crowd movement in real time, helping authorities identify and respond to congestion hotspots. Janjatra, developed by The Urbanizer, combines color-coded wayfinding, dynamic digital signage, and tactical urban interventions to improve navigation and ease pressure on heavily used pedestrian routes. The "Honorable Men-tions" complement these efforts through targeted mobility interventions. Behtarway, developed by VOGIC AI, is an AI-powered hyperlocal pedestrian navigation platform, while Nayichaal, de-veloped by Prameya Consulting, focuses on improving accessibility and navigability for vulnerable populations in the old city of Kashi.

Cachar Admin issues comprehensive flood advisory as Barak river continues to rise

DDMA urges residents to remain vigilant, avoid flood prone areas, keep emergency kits ready

Silchar, July 20: In view of the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) latest forecast predicting heavy rainfall across Assam over the next two to three days and the continuous rainfall recorded in Cachar over the past several hours, the District Ad-ministration has issued a comprehensive public advi-sory, urging residents to re-main vigilant and take all nec-essary precautions as the wa-ter level of the River Barak continues to rise steadily.

According to the advisory issued by the District Disas-ter Management Authority (DDMA), Cachar, the prevail-ing weather conditions have increased the possibility of flooding, flash floods and ur-ban waterlogging in vulner-able parts of the district. Of-ficials cautioned that if the current spell of rain contin-ues, several low-lying areas may experience a flood-like situation.

The District Administration stated that the situation is un-der constant watch and all concerned departments, emergency response agencies and field-level functionaries have been directed to remain on high alert. Necessary pre-paredness and response mea-sures have already been put in place to deal with any emerg-ing flood situation promptly.

Appealing to the public to exercise caution, the DDMA has advised residents to avoid unnecessary movement in low-lying, flood-prone and waterlogged areas, particu-

larly during periods of heavy rainfall. People have also been urged not to venture near riv-ers, streams, drains, culverts or inundated locations where water currents may become strong and unpredictable.

As a safety measure, resi-dents have been requested to immediately switch off electri-cal connections if floodwater enters their homes and shift electrical appliances, impor-tant documents and other valuables to higher places to minimise damage.

People residing in flood-prone localities have been asked to remain prepared for possible evacuation and to ex-tend full cooperation to the lo-cal administration and emer-gency response teams when-ever required.

The advisory also cautions against attempting to walk, ride or drive through flooded roads or submerged stretches, warning that hidden hazards beneath the water could pose serious risks to life and prop-erty.

Households have been en-couraged to keep emergency kits readily available contain-ing dry food, safe drinking wa-ter, essential medicines, flash-lights, batteries and important documents so that they are pre-pared in the event of any emer-gency.

The administration has further urged residents to remain up-dated through official advisories issued by the District Adminis-tration, DDMA, Cachar and other Government agencies. Citizens have also been advised to keep

their mobile phones fully charged and remain con-nected with the local admin-istration and emergency ser-vices for timely information and assistance.

In case of any emergency, the public has been requested to immediately contact the District Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC), the concerned Revenue Circle Office, Block Development Office, Silchar Municipal Corporation Con-trol Room or the nearest Po-lice Station.

The District Administra-tion has appealed to citizens to remain calm, avoid spread-ing rumours or unverified in-formation and rely only on of-ficial sources for authentic updates regarding the evol-ving weather situation.

For emergency assistance, residents may contact the Dis-trict Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC), DDMA, Cachar through the Landline number 03842-239249 / 03842-234005 , Mobile number 94016-24141 and Email ddma-cachar@assam.gov.in

However, The District Ad-ministration has reiterated that it will continue monitor-ing the situation round the clock and will issue further advisories as required, while taking all necessary measures to safeguard the lives and property of the people of Cachar.

This is stated in a press re-lease issued by Regional of-fice of Information & Public Relations Barak valley Zone Silchar Assam.

"Guwahati Pride Lions Club" Holds Grand Installation Ceremony & Charter Year Recognition

Guwahati, July 20: The Installation Ceremony and Charter Year Recognition Programme of the 'Li-ons Club of Guwahati Pride' was held with great enthusiasm on 19th July at Hotel Ornate,



Guwahati. The function was presided over by Anup Kumar Jajodia, Charter President of the club.

The Chief Guest was Manoj Bhajanka, District Governor, Lions International District 322-G, while Rtn. Prabhat Kedia, Past District Governor, Rotary District 3240, graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour. The installation of the new office bear-ers for the Lionistic Year 2026-2027 was con-ducted by Dr. M. L. Agarwalla, Past District Gov-ernor, Lions International District 322-G. Pankaj Poddar, Immediate Past District Governor, Lions International District 322-G, attended the programme as the Special Guest.

The programme commenced with a warm Wel-come Address by Mamta Bansal. Sunidhi Agarwal presented the Secretary's Report, highlighting the club's remarkable journey and achievements dur-ing its historic Charter Year. The Fourth and Final Issue of the club's official newsletter, PRIDE SAMVAD, documenting the club's year-long activi-ties and accomplishments, was also released on the occasion.

In his address, Chief Guest Manoj Bhajanka congratulated Charter President Anup Kumar Jajodia and the members of Guwahati Pride for their exemplary performance during the club's inaugural year. He especially appreciated the ex-cellent media coverage received by the club and the publication of four issues of PRIDE SAMVAD, describing it as an outstanding achievement for a newly chartered club. He praised the club's com-mitment to meaningful service, fellowship and disciplined administration.

Special Guest Pankaj Poddar expressed confi-dence that Guwahati Pride would soon be recognised as one of the finest clubs in the dis-trict. B. S. Rathore, Neelam Goswami and Sanjay Jain highly appreciated the remarkable service projects and innovative programmes undertaken under the leadership of Charter President Anup Kumar Jajodia. Sampat Mishra and Kanchan Kejriwal also extended their best wishes to the club for a bright and successful future.

During the Charter Year Recognition Ceremony, Shilpa Nahata, Sonia Agarwal, Mamta Bansal, Pushp Bansal, Bijay Bhimsaria, Sunidhi Agarwal, Jyoti Jajodia, Chitra Bhartia and Natawar Nagori were specially honoured for their exceptional co-operation, dedication and invaluable support

throughout the Charter Year.

Anil Agarwal was conferred with the prestigious "Pride of the Charter Year" Award for his exem-plary commitment and dedicated service. The re-maining Charter Members were honoured with the 'President's Appreciation Awards' in recognition of their contribution to the club's growth and service activities. The felicitation of senior Lions and presenta-tion of tokens of gratitude to supporters and well-wishers were among the highlights of the evening.

The installation ceremony culminated with Chitra Bhartia taking the oath as Presi-dent for the Lionistic Year 2026-2027 along with her team of office bearers and di-rectors. In a symbolic transfer of leadership, Charter President Anup Kumar Jajodia ceremonially handed over the President's Gavel to Chitra Bhartia in the presence of Sunidhi Agarwal, Secretary, and Pratibha Lunia, Vice President.

In his farewell address, Anup Kumar Jajodia expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all Pride Li-ons, district dignitaries, sponsors, supporters and well-wishers for their unwavering encouragement and co-operation in making the Charter Year a re-sounding success. He expressed confidence that the newly installed team would leave no stone unturned in taking the Lions Club of Guwahati Pride to greater heights.



Vote of Thanks was proposed by Anil Agarwal. Among those present to grace the occasion were Preety Bhajanka, Ajay Poddar, Prakash Sikaria, Madhu Khakholia, Pratibha Choudhary, Neha Agarwal, Mohit Dugger, Dr. Neelakshi Goswami, Payal Bhartia, Purushottam Agarwal, Babita Choudhary and Lekha Rathore, along with distinguished guests, family members, well-wish-ers and members of the Lions fraternity.

The function witnessed an impressive gather-ing and concluded with fellowship, celebrating the successful completion of a memorable Charter Year. During its inaugural year, the club organised numerous impactful service projects, community welfare initiatives and fellowship programmes, earning widespread appreciation across the dis-trict. The evening marked not only the installa-tion of a new leadership team but also reaffirmed the club's commitment to the Lions motto, "We Serve," while embarking on another promising year of humanitarian service.