

11 killed in J&K as heavy rain triggers flash floods

Nine deaths were reported from Poonch and two from Rajouri; initial assessment suggests that more than 100 houses and around two dozen school structures were damaged in the floods

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Eleven people were killed and 10 went missing in flash floods triggered by heavy rain in Poonch and Rajouri districts of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, officials said.

Nine deaths were reported from Poonch and two from Rajouri. Initial assessment suggested that more than 100 houses and around two dozen school structures were damaged in the floods.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah chaired a high-level review meeting at the Civil Secretariat in Jammu in the evening. He instructed all Deputy Commissioners and field agencies to closely monitor vulnerable areas, particularly those



Traces of ruin: Residents inspect vehicles damaged by flash floods and a landslide in Rajouri district of J&K on Sunday. AFP

prone to landslides, flash floods, and inundation, and ensure that rescue teams, machinery and essential services remain fully prepared to respond at short notice.

"Every possible effort should be made to trace and retrieve missing persons so that affected fami-

lies receive timely support... Besides, there should be expeditious restoration of roads, power supply, drinking water supply and communication links disrupted by heavy rain," said Mr. Abdullah.

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Landslides in Nagaland town kill 8

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Landslides in at least 11 locations, triggered by heavy, incessant rainfall, killed eight people and injured 15 in Mon town in Nagaland on Sunday morning.

The town, which is the headquarters of Mon district bordering Myanmar, is about 300 km northeast of the State's capital, Kohima. Mon Deputy Commissioner Wennyei Konyak said the landslides occurred around 6 a.m.

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Ahead of Monsoon Session, MPs seek debate on NEET, delimitation

Opposition parties stage a brief walkout from all-party meet in protest against invitation to breakaway Trinamool faction; seek talks on police action at Jantar Mantar, E20; Rijiju tells parties to participate constructively in parliamentary debates

Sobhana K. Nair

NEW DELHI

An invitation extended by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju to a breakaway Trinamool Congress group prompted Opposition parties to stage a walkout from the all-party meeting held on Saturday, ahead of the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

The protest brought together parties that have often been at odds, including the DMK; the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which skipped the INDIA bloc meeting on June 8; and the Left parties, which are ideologically opposed to the Trinamool. They objected to the government's decision to invite the rebel Trinamool MPs, stating that Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had not yet recognised the group's claim that it had merged with the Tripura-based Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI).

The Opposition's walkout lasted for a brief while before leaders returned to the meeting and pressed for discussions on a range of issues, including the alleged theft of Ram temple donations, the NEET paper



Setting the stage: Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju chairs a meeting with floor leaders of political parties at Parliament House on Sunday. ANI

leak controversy, ethanol-blended petrol (E20), the Delhi Police's action at Jantar Mantar to shift activist Sonam Wangchuk, the continuing hunger strike by students, and the situation in Manipur.

Mr. Rijiju later said that the walkout "should not be viewed as a boycott of the entire day's proceedings; it was symbolic".

In his opening remarks, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who chaired the meeting, lauded the BJP government for its han-

dling of the ongoing crisis triggered by the U.S.-Iran stand-off.

Delimitation Bill

Several Opposition leaders sought clarity on reports that the government could revive the Delimitation Bill in view of changes in the Lok Sabha's composition following split in the Trinamool and Shiv Sena (UBT).

DMK leader Tiruchi Siva said that his party favoured implementing the 33% reservation for women within the existing strength of

the Lok Sabha, and maintained that any delimitation exercise should not adversely affect southern States.

Mr. Rijiju did not clearly say if the government would bring back the Delimitation Bill during the session, but said the matter would be discussed at the Business Advisory Committee meeting. He urged all parties to participate constructively in parliamentary discussions and support legislative business. Smooth functioning

of Parliament, he said, was in the national interest, while disruptions and sloganeering ultimately harmed both Parliament and the Opposition.

Trinamool MP Mahua Moitra questioned the basis for inviting the 20 rebel MPs. Stating that the disqualification petitions were pending, she said there was no constitutional basis for a separate bloc. Defending the invite, Mr. Rijiju said the breakaway group had sought recognition from the Speaker and could not be ignored by the government.

Among other demands, Samajwadi Party MP Dharmendra Yadav sought discussion on the alleged theft of Ram temple donations. CPI(M) leader John Brittas criticised the "BJP-engineered split" in Opposition parties, arguing that they weakened democratic representation. CPI leader P. Sandosh Kumar sought a discussion on "large-scale deletions" of voters' names during the SIR.

A total of 58 leaders from 40 political parties attended the meeting. The Monsoon Session begins on Monday and will conclude on August 13.

HC rejects plea to transfer Wangchuk from Safdarjung

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

A day after activist Sonam Wangchuk was moved from the site of his hunger strike to Safdarjung Hospital in New Delhi by the police, the Delhi High Court on Sunday refused any interim order in a petition seeking to transfer Mr. Wangchuk to a hospital of his choice. The petition filed by Gitanjali J. Angmo, wife of Mr. Wangchuk, who is on a hunger strike demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, alleged that the activist was confined to Safdarjung Hospital without his or his family's consent.

Appearing for the petitioner in a special hearing, senior advocate Kapil Sibal submitted that Mr. Wangchuk was neither under detention nor accused of any offence and was therefore entitled to be treated at a hospital of his choice.



Gitanjali J. Angmo and CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Sunday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

He submitted that the family of Mr. Wangchuk wished to shift him to Medanta Hospital in Gurugram, alleging that his own doctors had no access to him.

Justice Mini Pushkarna, hearing the petition, held that the decision to shift Mr. Wangchuk from Jantar Mantar to Safdarjung Hospital was taken in view of his deteriorating medical condition and could not be termed “arbitrary”.

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‘Wangchuk will end the strike if leaders meet him’

NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk will end his indefinite hunger strike if “political leaders meet him and provide an assurance that education accountability” will be the focus of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, his wife, Gitanjali J. Angmo, said on Sunday. “If there is no accountability, he will continue his fast,” she said. » **PAGE 12**

HC rejects plea to transfer Wangchuk

Justice Pushkarna also issued notices to the Centre, Safdarjung Hospital, and the police on the petition and asked them to file their responses within three days. The petition would be heard next on July 24.

Additional Solicitor-General Chetan Sharma, appearing for the Centre, relied on the High Court's July 16 order directing that necessary medical intervention be undertaken in view of Mr. Wangchuk's deteriorating health and submitted that the decision to shift the activist to Safdarjung Hospital was taken after his condition became "perilous" following weeks of fasting.

Mr. Sharma informed the court that Mr. Wangchuk's potassium level had fallen to 2.8, which required close medical supervision. He submitted that medicines had been administered with Mr. Wangchuk's consent, while IV fluids had not been given as he had declined the procedure. He also stated that his wife and close family members had been given unrestricted access to him.

Mr. Sibal argued that the state could not compel Mr. Wangchuk to remain at a government hospital. The court noted that "since doctors at Safdarjung Hospital are closely monitoring Mr. Wangchuk, it cannot be said that any force is being used against him or that his bodily autonomy is being violated."

'Wangchuk to end fast if focus of Parliament is on education'

Activist's wife says political leaders must provide assurance that 'education accountability' will be focus of Monsoon Session beginning today; thousands gather at Jantar Mantar, night vigil held; police issue prohibitory order ahead of CJP march

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk will end his indefinite hunger strike if "political leaders meet him and provide an assurance that education accountability" will be the focus of the Monsoon Session of Parliament beginning on Monday, his wife Gitanjali J. Angmo said on Sunday.

Mr. Wangchuk, who had started the strike with the demand of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over exam irregularities on June 28, is currently at Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi.

"If political leaders meet Sonam at the hospital and assure him that they will raise the issue of education accountability during the Monsoon Session, he will end his hunger strike tomorrow. If there is no assurance or accountability, he will continue his fast," Ms. Angmo said, adding, "He has not broken his fast even after being in the hospital for two days."

Earlier, thousands gathered at the Jantar Mantar on Sunday ahead of the Cockroach Janta Party



People throng the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Sunday ahead of the CJP's planned march to Parliament. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

(CJP)'s planned march to the Parliament, demanding resignation of Mr. Pradhan, even as the Delhi Police issued a prohibitory order against marches, demonstrations, and assemblies of five or more people except at the designated protest site with prior permission. Senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia along with many others joined the CJP's protest on Sunday, incidentally the 22nd day since Mr. Wangchuk began his protest.

No permission

The unprecedented turnout spilled over to the streets surrounding Jantar Mantar. However, no permission has been granted

for the march planned by the CJP to the Parliament on Monday, when both Houses will convene for the Monsoon Session, potentially setting up a showdown between the massive crowd and the heavy security arrangements expected to meet them in the morning. Security personnel with riot guns have been deployed in the national capital, prompting the CJP to issue a call for more people to arrive at the site.

"In view of reports of a proposed march to Parliament by CJP on 20.07.2026 (Monday), Delhi Police hereby categorically clarifies that no permission has been sought or granted for

any such protest march or procession," said Sachin Sharma, Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi).

"Accordingly, protest marches, processions, demonstrations and assemblies of five or more persons are strictly prohibited, except at the designated protest site at Jantar Mantar with prior permission."

The CJP's 1.5-kilometre march is planned to start from the Jantar Mantar protest site at 9 a.m., before moving through the Patel Chowk roundabout and terminating at the new Parliament building.

Security has been strengthened around Jantar Mantar, Parliament Street, Central Vista, Connaught Place, Shankar Chowk and other key installations, while rapid response teams have been positioned to respond to any contingency. Several police vans, buses and ambulances could be seen at the protest site.

Vigil continues

Meanwhile, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke's call for a night vigil drew a huge response. Addressing activists

in a video message, Mr. Dipke said they must remain at Jantar Mantar throughout the night and that their presence was important to ensure the march to Parliament proceeded peacefully.

Support marches

Large rallies with hundreds of people also took place in several parts of the country including Mumbai, Nagpur, Bengaluru, Nashik, Guwahati, and Jammu. The march in Mumbai was led by Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray.

Over a dozen students and others continued their own hunger strikes on Sunday. Earlier in the morning, protesters formed a human chain to prevent fasting members of the AI-SSA from being transferred to a hospital. Several high-profile Opposition figures and celebrities too arrived at Jantar Mantar. Mr. Sisodia, Trinamool Congress MP Kirti Azad, and Trinamool leader Mahua Moitra were among those who showed up.

(With inputs from Shrimansi Kaushik)

At least 50 Malian soldiers killed in rebel-jihadist attack

Agence France-Presse

BAMAKO

At least 50 Malian soldiers were killed in an attack by Tuareg separatists and jihadists as they left the strategic northern town of Anefis, officials said on Sunday.

The attack on the army convoy leaving Anefis occurred on Saturday, following weeks of fighting with both sides attempting to take control.

In early July, fighters from the Tuareg separatist FLA and the al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) briefly captured the town and encircled a military base used the Malian army and Russian paramilitaries from Africa Corps.

JNIM and the FLA claimed responsibility for the attack.



Critical loss: The reported aftermath of an attack by FLA separatist and jihadist militants in Gao, northern Mali on Saturday. AP

“The provisional toll of the attack is extremely heavy – more than 50 soldiers killed and at least 24 prisoners,” said a local elected official close to the ruling junta.

The official, who asked to remain anonymous, said it was the deadliest attack suffered by the Malian army in years.

“Some of our men were

simply executed,” said a source within the Malian army, adding that an investigation was under way to determine any tactical failures.

The Russian paramilitaries supporting the army had already arrived in Gao, their destination, when the attack happened and did not suffer any losses, sources said.

Aoun to meet Trump, push for pressure on Israel deal

First visit by Lebanese president to White House in nearly 20 years

Reuters

Beirut, July 19

LEBANESE PRESIDENT Joseph Aoun will make his first trip to the White House this week to present a plan to US President Donald Trump on how to disarm Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah and secure Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon.

Aoun, who served as commander of Lebanon's US-backed army before being elected president last year, is the first Lebanese head of state in nearly 20 years to visit White House, where he will meet Trump face-to-face for the first time.

Tuesday's meeting comes at a crucial moment for Lebanon: Israeli troops are occupying a swathe of the country's south, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese remain displaced following Israeli strikes and Hezbollah has firmly rejected the government's direct talks with Israel -- and efforts by the state to strip it of its arms.

In comments published by his office last week, Aoun said he would ask Trump to "exert the necessary pressure on Israel" to implement a US-brokered June 26 agreement between Lebanon and Israel.

That deal aims to disarm Hezbollah, see a progressive Israeli troop withdrawal and set the stage for peaceful ties between the two countries.

A Lebanese official said Aoun would present Trump with a written proposal on how to decommission Hezbollah's massive arsenal.

The official said Aoun believes only Trump possesses the leverage needed to pressure Israel to withdraw its troops and help Lebanon restore its sovereignty.

Aoun, 62, became president last year just before Trump began his second term in the White House. The US welcomed Aoun's election.

Aoun is a Maronite Christian, as required by Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system which stipulates the prime minister must be Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament must be Shi'ite Muslim.

A career soldier, Aoun was wounded twice and still carries a shrapnel wound. His rise reflected a major shift in the power balance in Lebanon, following a devastating Israeli offensive against Hezbollah in 2024 and the ousting of Hezbollah's Syrian ally President Bashar al-Assad — seismic events that weakened the group and its long-decisive hold over the state.

At his swearing-in ceremony, Aoun vowed to affirm "the state's right to a monopoly on arms". His presidency's first year was defined by a government bid to secure the disarmament of Hezbollah.

Russian attacks on Ukrainian cities kill six, expose gaps in air defences

Moscow fires 41 missiles and 125 drones overnight; strikes in Kyiv spark fires in five districts, damage residential buildings; attacks highlight Ukraine's shortage of Patriot defence systems, considered most effective in intercepting ballistic missiles

Associated Press

KYIV

Russia attacked Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities with ballistic missiles, drones and guided bombs on Sunday, killing at least six persons and wounding dozens, authorities said, again highlighting Ukraine's shortage of U.S.-made Patriot air defence systems.

Moscow has in recent weeks stepped up its use of ballistic missiles as it seeks to choke off Ukrainian strikes on oil facilities deep inside Russia that have caused fuel shortages affecting both the military and civilian population.



Strategic hit: An explosion in the city during a Russian missile and drone strike, in Kyiv, Ukraine on Sunday. REUTERS

U.S. President Donald Trump has said he is prepared to grant Ukraine licenses to produce Patriots, the most effective means of intercepting Russian ballistic missiles, potentially bol-

stering Kyiv's defences. However, the details and timeline remain unclear, and full production could take years.

The latest attack on Kyiv began at around 1.30 a.m.

and continued for several hours, with explosions echoing across the city.

Russia launched 41 missiles and 125 drones across Ukraine overnight, according to the Ukrainian air force. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said most of the missiles had targeted the capital.

Later on Sunday, a Russian attack on a postal facility near Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv killed three persons and wounded at least 20, according to the regional administration.

Russian guided bombs also hit the cities of Kherson and Sumy, local authorities and Ukraine's emergency service reported,

with each of the strikes leaving at least one person dead.

The strikes on Kyiv sparked fires in five districts, damaging residential buildings, office and industrial sites, a dormitory and vehicles, according to Ukraine's State Emergency Service.

Russia's Defence Ministry claimed the attack on Kyiv targeted sites linked to the Ukrainian military – including plants producing Flamingo drones and parts for Neptune guided missiles, as well as a postal terminal used for storing dual-use goods and assembling drones, robotic systems and electronic warfare equipment.

In China's creation of new global AI body, a push for lead role in governance

Amitabh Sinha

New Delhi, July 19

SINCE 2018, the World AI Conference (WAIC) has been held annually in Shanghai to showcase Chinese advancements in artificial intelligence (AI). What has largely been an industry event has attracted global attention this year, thanks to the participation of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Several heads of state and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres were also present upon his invitation.

Xi's presence led to the event doubling as a platform for presenting an alternative thought process and framework for global AI governance — an evolving subject that will be central to how the technology grows and who benefits from it.

What China is offering

At the core of this alternative perspective is the creation of a new international institution called World AI Cooperation Organisation, or WAICO. It is meant to ensure that

developments in (and benefits of) AI are accessible to everyone, even developing countries that lack the resources or capability to build their own AI systems from scratch. It also commits to "extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit".

WAICO was proposed at last year's conference and has now been made operational. Along with China, 29 countries (including Pakistan and Russia) signed an agreement for its creation. It is being projected as a more "inclusive" alternative to the AI governance frameworks proposed by Western countries, which heavily emphasise ethics, values, safety and responsibility.

In this context, Xi's keynote speech on the opening day of the conference about the need to guard against "overstretching" of national security concerns is being widely quoted.

"AI development should not be a solo performance by a single country, but a symphony of international cooperation... we should jointly oppose overstretching the national security concept in the field of

AI and placing one country's security over that of others," he said.

Cornering technology

It is undeniable that AI, like other powerful technologies with wide-ranging impacts, has a very high risk of potential misuse. Nuclear technology, for instance, produces clean electricity, has applications in healthcare, agriculture and research, and is also behind the most devastating weapons known to the world.

The misuse of AI is seen to have even more profound consequences for humanity. It is no surprise, therefore, that in conversations on governance or regulatory frameworks, issues of safety, ethics and responsibility are often emphasised.

But there is also a growing concern that these legitimate issues might become a cloak for technology denial or exclusion of

countries. Such concerns are not unfounded. Historically, issues concerning environmental standards, child labour, or intellectual property protection have been used to deny certain technologies, or impose trade restrictions and other sanctions.

Case in point, the sudden shutdown of the US-based Anthropic's new Mythos 5 and Fable 5 AI models last month, following a US government directive to suspend its access to all non-US nationals.

Since a bulk of AI development is happening in the United States, it is also spearheading public debates on governance and regulation, alongside like-minded countries in Europe and elsewhere. Globally, a disparate set of conversations on governance frameworks is ongoing. There is the UN-initiated Global Dialogue, and the recent AI Summit in New Delhi, which saw a group of countries facilitating these discussions.



A weekly column decoding AI's new frontiers, how they shape the world and our place in it

These debates have resulted in several declarations, task forces, frameworks, documents on principles and even the creation of institutions that are moving the dialogue forward. They point to a world that is in the process of writing the rules of AI governance. Who gets to write these rules is a fundamental question that will decide who will benefit from and dominate the sector in the coming years. It is not just about access to a revolutionary technology, but also access to the entire ecosystem and the supply chains.

Early mover advantage

The governance model that WAICO represents is the latest addition to this conversation. Despite the number of nations involved, the initiative will undoubtedly carry the stamp of China — the only country in this group with notable capabilities and presence in the AI space.

Seen in geopolitical terms, China is also attempting to seize the opportunity to project itself as a champion of the Global

South, which found a mention in Xi's speech. In the post-Second World War global order, Western countries have decided the rules for all kinds of international engagement, from trade to finance to nuclear matters. It is only in recent years that China has begun to challenge this arrangement.

For example, the creation of multilateral financial institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank or the BRICS Bank was meant to break the dominance of the IMF, World Bank and related institutions in matters of international finance. But it has had limited success.

AI, however, is a newer field. This is the first time that China is making an intervention at the rule-making stage itself. Its capabilities are probably second only to those of the US. China's emphasis on universal access and inclusivity is likely to find immense appeal among developing countries, which have often been disadvantaged by West-led institutions. WAICO could thus have a formidable influence on how AI technology is deployed and distributed.