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## Two more Myanmar soldiers enter Mizoram, tally reaches 45

AIZAWL, Nov 15: Two more Myanmar soldiers entered Mizoram after militia group People's Defence Force (PDF) overran their camp in the neighbouring country's Chin state, a police officer said on Wednesday. The two Myanmar soldiers entered Mizoram and came to the Zokhawthar police station on Tuesday evening, the officer said.

"The Myanmar soldiers were handed over to the Assam Rifles as per the Centre's directive and all of them have been airlifted to a safer place by Indian defence authorities," he told PTI on condition of anonymity.

With these, a total of 45 Myanmar soldiers have fled to Mizoram, the police officer said.

He said that in the first place, 39 soldiers crossed the international border and came to Zokhawthar police station along with their arms on Monday evening. Three more came

to Zokhawthar police station on Tuesday noon and two others in the evening, he said.

The officer said that 39 soldiers were airlifted to a safer place by Assam Rifles on Tuesday and the remaining 6 have also been evacuated to a safer place on Wednesday.

An official of the state Home department said that the Myanmar soldiers were airlifted from Champhai district to Moreh, a border town in Manipur, from where they were sent to Tamu, the nearest Myanmar town from Moreh. The police officer said that the situation along the Indo-Myanmar border now is calm as there are no more clashes between the Myanmar army and the People's Defence Force (PDF).

"The situation as of now is calm and we expect normalcy to return along the Indo-Myanmar border in the next two to three days. At the same time (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## JP Nadda ridicules Congress for turning 'Ram Bhakt' for votes

### Campaigning for final phase of Chhattisgarh assembly polls ends

RAIPUR, Nov 15: BJP president JP Nadda on Wednesday attacked the Congress and said the Grand Old Party had once called Lord Ram a "fictional character", but was now seeking votes in his name.

The Congress is synonymous with "scams, embezzlement, loot and cheating", while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stands for development, empowerment of women, farmer welfare and protection of rights of deprived classes, said Nadda.

He was addressing a rally in the Arang constituency of Raipur district on the last day of campaigning for the second and final phase of Chhattisgarh assembly elections on November 17.

"The Congress changes its face from time to time. Now-a-days they have become fond of Lord Ram. Some people have become 'janeu-dhari' (one who wears Brahminical thread). They don't



even know how it is worn. Who are these people who used to say Lord Ram in Valmiki's Ramayan is a fictional (character). The Congress-led UPA government had given an affidavit in the court, saying Ram is fictional and there is no scientific and historical basis of his existence," the BJP leader asserted.

The same party is now seeking votes in the name of the Hindu

deity, he said.

"Nowadays they are going from temple to temple as they have understood that this country is of Ram Bhakts and to seek votes they have to take the name of Ram. They are new Ram Bhakts, but don't even know Ram went to exile for how many years, 13 or 14," Nadda said.

The national party used to taunt

the BJP, asking it to reveal the date for the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, he said.

"Now we say to them 'Mandir wahi banayenge, 22 tarikh ko aap bhi ayenge' (referring to the date of consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22, 2024)," he said.

Further hitting out at the country's oldest political party, Nadda said, "Congress means corruption, scams, atrocity, snatching rights, loot and cheating, while BJP means development, growth, supporter of women empowerment, farmer welfare and protection of rights."

Citing alleged scams during the Congress-led UPA government (2004-2014), the BJP president asked "Whether or not they had committed submarine scam, helicopter scam, coal scam?"

To this, people attending the gathering replied in the affirmative. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Minister Atul Bora gets life threat, CID asked to probe

GUWAHATI, Nov 15: Minister Atul Bora has received a threat to his life on social media, and the CID has been asked to investigate it, Director-General of Police GP Singh said.

Bora, the Agriculture and Assam Accord Implementation Minister, is also the chief of Asom Gana Parishad, which is a part of the ruling BJP-led coalition in the state.

"Reference threat to Hon Minister Sri Atul Bora on a Facebook post, Assam CID has been directed to register a criminal case and take lawful action," the DGP posted on X on Tuesday.

The purported threat of a bomb in his quarter was made in the comment section of the Facebook page of a local news portal.

A man named Pranash Sandhilya made the comment, claiming he is part of the ULFA. The police are trying to confirm his identity. "No such threat would be acceptable against elected representatives as it threatens the democratic polity," the DGP said. (PTI)

### HT BRIEFS

#### Witch hunting

DIPHU: An Awareness programme against witch hunting/daini was organised by Diphu Police Station at Borsing Timung village playground under Diphu police station. Additional Superintendent of Police (crime), Nayan Moni Barman and O/c of Diphu Sadar Thana, JS Khobung explained to the villagers the superstitious belief of witch hunt or witchcraft that is prevalent in some societies and the need to stop falsely accusing someone of practising witchcraft. Such social issues can be eradicated through a collective effort from social bodies and the general public. Members of Nagarik Committee and legal experts, Karbi Students Association, Sarkari Goanbura, village headmen, members of Village Defense Party and women were present in the awareness programme.

#### Morphine recovered

BOKAJAN: Morphine worth Rs 6 crore were recovered by the police in Karbi Anglong and two persons were arrested in this connection. On a tip-off, the Golaghat and Karbi Anglong police launched an operation at Khakrajan checkpoint under the Barpathar police station in Karbi Anglong. The police intercepted a Mahindra XUV 500 SUV bearing registration number AS 01 BD 2314. On a thorough search, morphine weighing 1.850 kg was found hidden in the spare wheel of the vehicle. In this connection the following two persons were arrested - Akum Chang (59), son of late Thongbong, resident of Rommei Colony, under East Police Station, Dimapur and Ongbou Chang (45), son of Cholen Chang, resident of Borlengri, Block 1, under Khatkhathi police station, Karbi Anglong district. In another success of the police in Karbi Anglong, on November 14 at about 4:46 pm during a routine naka checking on NH 36 at Dillai Timali under Dillai police station brown sugar was recovered from a car.

## Viksit Bharat Yatra begins in Assam for transformative impact

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 15: In a bid to ensure the comprehensive implementation of key government initiatives, the "Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra" has been launched, with the primary goal of achieving saturation of flagship schemes, said an official statement on Wednesday.

As per the statement, the focus of the Yatra will be on reaching out to people and create awareness and providing benefits of welfare schemes like sanitation facilities, essential financial services, electricity connections, access to LPG cylinders, housing for the poor, food security, proper nutrition, reliable healthcare, clean drinking water, etc.

"Enrolment of potential



beneficiaries will be done through details ascertained during the Yatra," the statement added.

It is worth mentioning that in Assam, the Viksit Bharat Yatra has been inaugurated in three districts—Baksa, Kokrajhar, and Karbi Anglong. State ministers led the inauguration of programs, emphasising the state's commitment to the nationwide Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra. This Yatra marks a significant step towards a more inclusive and developed India, with a shared commitment to the growth and prosperity of the nation. Chandra Mohan Patowary, minister for (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Over 12 cr adivasis have benefitted from govt schemes in 10 years: Sonowal

GUWAHATI, Nov 15: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Wednesday said that over 12 crore adivasi people have benefitted from various government schemes in the last ten years under the BJP-led NDA dispensation at the Centre.

Joining the 'Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas' celebration at the tribal village of Barbakra near Rani, on the outskirts of Guwahati, Sonowal said the rich heritage of tribals and their contribution towards nation-building are being recognised now, according to an official release.

"Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, more than 12 crore adivasi people of India benefitted from multiple government welfare schemes since 2014," he said.

Referring to the 'Vikshit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' that was launched earlier in the day

by the prime minister, Sonowal said the programme is targeted to create awareness about various welfare schemes.

"People will be made aware of the benefits of welfare schemes like sanitation facilities, essential financial services, electricity connections, access to LPG cylinders, housing for the poor, food security, proper nutrition, reliable healthcare, clean drinking water, etc," he said.

Sonowal, the Union minister for ports, shipping and waterways, said the government has been working on ensuring equal opportunity for all, irrespective of social, political, cultural or economic background.

"This will enable an ecosystem that is self-sustaining and will propel us to achieve the goal of becoming an Atmanirbhar Bharat by 2047," he said. He paid floral tributes to (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## NHRC to hear over 40 pending cases of human rights violations in NE states

GUWAHATI, Nov 15: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) will hold a camp sitting here on Friday to hear cases of alleged human rights violations in the North Eastern states, an official statement said.

A national-level conference on sensitising local self-governments on various aspects of human rights will also be organised by the Commission, it said.

The Commission will also meet members of civil society and NGOs as well as the press during its two-day visit, beginning from Thursday.

NHRC chairperson Justice Arun Mishra, members Dnyaneshwar M Mulay and Rajiv Jain, secretary general Bharat Lal and other senior officers, will attend the conference and camp sitting.

The conference on 'Advancing Human

Rights through Local Self Governments' will be held on November 16, in which chairpersons of the state human rights commissions of Assam, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Sikkim will participate. The main objective of the conference is to create awareness regarding the role of local self-government in advancing human rights and related facets of it, the release said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

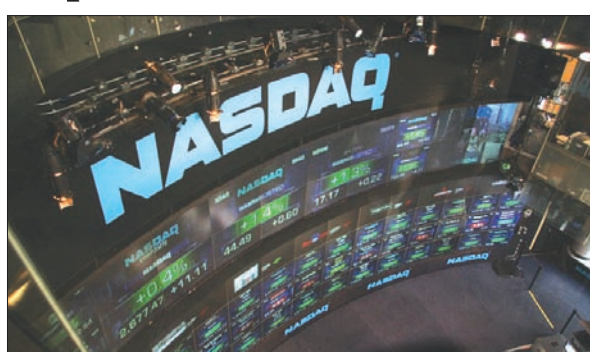
'You need capital and the capital needs of India have continued to grow with its success'

## NASDAQ can play key role in enhancing global investor participation in Indian economy: Official

SAN FRANCISCO, Nov 15: NASDAQ can play a key role in bringing much-needed investment into India from global investors, according to a top official of the American stock exchange.

India has right now "over 200 very large startup companies that could go public in future" and that's unheard of anywhere else in the world, NASDAQ executive vice chairman Edward Knight told PTI in an interview on Tuesday.

National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations (NASDAQ) is a stock exchange that lists some of the world's largest



technology companies, such as Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon. It is one of the world's oldest and second-largest stock exchanges by market capitalisation, after the New York Stock Ex-

change (NYSE).

Knight noted that India has "a very strong legal system...very strong universities" and "all the ingredients that have produced and could continue to produce great early-stage companies, innovation and technological innovation".

"But," he said, "you need capital and the capital needs of India have continued to grow with its success." As India grows from a demographic perspective and the country needs better infrastructure and that will require capital to be built, Knight said. "You need capital for startup companies. So from NASDAQ's perspective, we feel we could bring the global investor more directly involved in the Indian economy and bring more capital to India," Knight said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



অসম চৰকাৰ



### ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় প্ৰেছ দিৱস ২০২৩

ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় প্ৰেছ দিৱস উপলক্ষে মুখ্যমন্ত্ৰীৰ শুভেচ্ছাবাণী

ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় প্ৰেছ দিৱস উপলক্ষে ৰাজ্যৰ সাংবাদিকসকলৰ লগতে সংবাদ সেৱাৰ সৈতে জড়িত প্ৰতিগৰাকী ব্যক্তিলৈ মই আন্তৰিক শুভেচ্ছা জনাইছোঁ।

সংবাদ মাধ্যম হৈছে গণতন্ত্ৰৰ চতুৰ্থ স্তম্ভ। মুক্ত, নিৰপেক্ষ আৰু এক দায়িত্বশীল মাধ্যম হিচাপে সংবাদ সেৱাই যাতে গণতন্ত্ৰৰ মূল ভেটি শক্তিশালী কৰিব পাৰে সেই উদ্দেশ্যেৰে ভাৰতবৰ্ষত প্ৰতি বছৰে ১৬ নৱেম্বৰ দিনটো ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় প্ৰেছ দিৱস হিচাপে পালন কৰা হয়। সাংবাদিকতাত পেছাদাৰী নৈতিকতা বজাই ৰখাৰ সৰ্বোত্তম বিধিগত কৰ্ত্তৃত্ব থকা অৰ্ধ-ন্যাযিক প্ৰতিষ্ঠান হিচাপে প্ৰেছ কাউন্সিল অৱ ইণ্ডিয়াই এই দিনটোত নিজৰ কাম-কাজ আৰম্ভ কৰিছিল। এক স্বতন্ত্ৰ আৰু দায়বদ্ধ সংবাদ মাধ্যমৰ অৱস্থিতিৰ প্ৰতি শ্ৰদ্ধা জনোৱাৰ উদ্দেশ্যে প্ৰতি বছৰে আমাৰ দেশত এই দিৱস পালন কৰি অহা হৈছে। চলিত বৰ্ষত ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় প্ৰেছ দিৱসৰ আলোচনাৰ মূল বিষয়বস্তু হৈছে, 'কৃত্ৰিম বুদ্ধিমত্তাৰ যুগত সংবাদ মাধ্যম'।

ভাৰতীয় সভ্যতা-সংস্কৃতি, দেশীয় ঐতিহ্যক নৱপ্ৰজন্মৰ সন্মুখত তুলি ধৰা আৰু আধুনিক পৰিৱৰ্তনমুখী চেতনা জাগ্ৰত কৰাৰ দিশত আমাৰ দেশৰ সংবাদ মাধ্যমে গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা লৈ আহিছে। অসমত 'অৰুণোদই' বাৰ্তালোচনীৰ জৰিয়তে সূচনা হোৱা সংবাদ সেৱাৰ যাত্ৰাই পৰৱৰ্তী পৰ্যায়ত ৰাজনৈতিক, সামাজিক, ভাষা-সাহিত্য তথা জ্ঞান-বিজ্ঞানৰ পৃথিৱীখনৰ সৈতে পৰিচয় কৰোৱাই দিয়াৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত অসমীয়া সংবাদ মাধ্যমে লোৱা গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকাই সকলোকে অনুপ্ৰাণিত কৰি আহিছে।

একবিংশ শতিকাত বিজ্ঞান আৰু প্ৰযুক্তিয়ে সংবাদ মাধ্যমৰ ৰূপান্তৰত গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা গ্ৰহণ কৰিছে। কৃত্ৰিম বুদ্ধিমত্তাই সংবাদ সংগ্ৰহ, পৰিৱেশন আৰু ইয়াক অধিক স্বয়ংক্ৰিয়কৰণত লোৱা ভূমিকাই এক নতুন স্তৰত উপনীত কৰিছে। আজি বহু মিডিয়া কোম্পানীয়ে অতি প্ৰয়োজনীয় সময়ত লাইভ সম্প্ৰচাৰকে ধৰি বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্ৰত এই প্ৰযুক্তি ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিছে। আধুনিকতাৰ সৈতে খোজ পেলাবলৈ হ'লে আমাৰ সংবাদ মাধ্যমেও কৃত্ৰিম বুদ্ধিমত্তাৰ প্ৰয়োগৰ ওপৰত গুৰুত্ব আৰোপ কৰিব লাগিব।

আগন্তুক ২৫ বছৰৰ দেশৰ উন্নয়নৰ যি ৰূপৰেখা প্ৰস্তুত কৰা হৈছে সেই ক্ষেত্ৰত সংবাদ মাধ্যমে গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা ল'ব লাগিব। এই অগ্ৰগামী যাত্ৰাৰ সম্পৰ্কত জনসাধাৰণক অৱগত কৰা আৰু তেওঁলোকক এই প্ৰক্ৰিয়াৰ সক্ৰিয় অংশীদাৰী কৰি তোলাত সংবাদ মাধ্যমে আহিবলগীয়া দিনবোৰত দৃষ্টান্তমূলক ভূমিকা গ্ৰহণ কৰিব বুলি আশা কৰিলোঁ।

ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় প্ৰেছ দিৱসৰ শুভ দিনটোত মই পুনৰবাৰ সাংবাদিকসকলকে ধৰি সংবাদ সেৱাৰ সৈতে জড়িত প্ৰতিগৰাকী ব্যক্তিলৈ আন্তৰিক শুভেচ্ছা আৰু অভিনন্দন জনাই শক্তিশালী ৰাষ্ট্ৰ নিৰ্মাণত তেওঁলোকক অধিক দায়বদ্ধতাৰে সেৱা আগবঢ়াই যাবলৈ আহ্বান জনালোঁ।

জয় হিন্দ।

দিছপুৰ  
২৯ কাতি ১৪৩০ ভাস্কৰাব্দ  
১৬ নৱেম্বৰ ২০২৩

  
ড° হিমন্ত বিশ্ব শৰ্মা  
মুখ্যমন্ত্ৰী, অসম

# India to emerge as 3<sup>rd</sup> largest global economy by 2027: FM

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday said India is expected to overtake Japan and Germany to emerge as the third largest economy in the world by 2027.

Addressing the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue here, Sitharaman said India's economic growth is estimated to be just under 7 per cent during the year, the highest among major economies, despite global headwinds.

The Indian economy is therefore on the right track and is heading towards a bright future, she said.

Amidst supply-chain disruptions and economic turbulence due to contemporary conflicts that impact the Indo-Pacific, irrespective of whether they are occurring in relatively distant Ukraine or in relatively proximate Israel or Yemen, and despite the palpable tensions prevalent in the South- and East China Sea, the Indian economy stands out as a bright spot, she said.

"Even according to the usually conservative estimates of the IMF, the Indian economy is set to emerge as the world's third largest economy by 2027, hopping over Japan and Germany, as its GDP crosses the USD 5 trillion level. By

2047, India aspires to be a developed economy," she said.

Talking about India's 'Blue economy', she said, it accounts for roughly 4 per cent of the GDP and represents a sea of opportunities.

India has 9 states and 4 Union Territories situated on the coast, 12 major and 200+ non-major ports situated along its coastline, and a vast network of navigable waterways for international and domestic trade, she said.

According to the UNCTAD, India was the 2nd largest exporter of ocean-based goods and services among developing countries in 2020.

Observing that Indo-Pacific is undoubtedly the world's most economically dynamic region, Sitharaman said it encompasses 60 per cent of global GDP, and almost 50 per cent of global merchandise trade.

On the other hand, the Indo-Pacific is also a geopolitically contested space that is being roiled by great power competition, she said.

"One draws its legitimacy from an internationally accepted and consensually derived rules-based order. India stands firmly and proudly in the vanguard of this system," she said.

While the other seeks to discredit and disrupt this consensually derived rules-based order and supplant it with an international order whose rules are generated in an exclusive State, she said.

As India accelerates its economic growth and uplifts its teeming masses, moving them from poverty to prosperity, she said it is registering impressive gains in its comprehensive national power as well as in terms of its international stature.

"Today, Indians 'whether at home or abroad' stand, walk, talk, and act with their heads held high... even as the world appreciates India's achievements and successes and lauds it for its demonstrated resilience amidst multiple crises, we are very clear that we cannot afford to be an inward-leaning power," she said.

"Our focus on transitioning from a 'brown' economic model to a 'blue' one and thereafter extrapolating this blue transition across the length and breadth of the Indo-Pacific demands that we shoulder greater and heavier regional responsibilities, and this is precisely what we are doing," she said.

India has significantly improved its position as a well-governed and



innovative country with a conducive environment for business, as reflected in several global indices. Noting that the country's comprehensive national power is going to remain inextricably linked to the ocean, she said India is seized of the pressing need to grow the maritime sector as a whole and the government is determined to provide the requisite support by way of fiscal policy and financial outlay.

"We seek to position India as a hub in new and diversified supply chains and value chains across the Indo-Pacific and, indeed, across the world.

"Towards this end, I am happy to inform you that all sectors of the government are responding exceedingly positively to our new financial policies," she said.

In terms of international shipments, she said India's global ranking has risen from 44th place in 2014, to the 22nd rank in 2023.

Similarly, as per the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index report 2023, she said, the 'turn-around time' of Indian ports is now just 0.9 days, which is lower than ports in established maritime centres such as Singapore, the UAE, Germany, the USA, Australia, Russia, and South Africa.

"Our experience of the maritime manifestations of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to shipping insurance, too, becoming a particular area of policy focus," she said.

On the one hand, a 'Marine Cargo Pool' has now been created with the full support of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India and domestic insurance companies, to support maritime trade on the other hand the country is improving its strength in shipping arbitration, and in order to reduce India's vulnerability to international sanctions.

To provide greater strategic flexibility in shipping operations, she said "we are setting up a full-fledged Indian-owned and India-based Protection and Indemnity (P&I) entity that will additionally provide protection to coastal and inland shipping."

On the capacity building front, she said, as many as 31 projects have been identified in 9 major ports for monetisation under the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) launched in 2022, with a total estimated CAPEX of 14,483 crore rupees (1.74 billion US dollars) for FY 2022-25.

Terming India-Middle East-Eu-

rope Connectivity Corridor (IMEC) as one of the most promising connectivity projects, Sitharaman said it will be a win-win situation for all states involved, as it enhances transportation efficiency, reduces logistic costs, increases economic unity, generates employment, and lowers Greenhouse Gas emissions, contributing to a cleaner, safer, better world.

"However, it is not without its geopolitical challenges and the ongoing conflict in Israel and Gaza is a worrying manifestation of these," she said.

The IMEC was signed at the 18th G-20 Summit held in New Delhi in September.

It is a multimodal economic corridor that incorporates multiple networks of shipping, railways, and roadways and will also include electricity cables, high-speed data cables, and a hydrogen pipeline.

The corridor is expected to create a reliable and cost-effective cross-border, ship-to-rail transit network to supplement existing maritime and road transport, and facilitate trade and connectivity, leading to the economic integration of South Asia, West Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. (PTI)

## NBFC-MFIs largest provider of microfinance: Report

**KOLKATA, Nov 15:** Microfinance Industry Network (MFIN), an umbrella body of microfinance institutions (MFIs) of the country, in its report said that NBFC-MFIs are the largest provider of micro-credit amongst other regulated entities. In a report of the MFI sector prepared by MFIN for the year 2022-23, it said that in the microfinance space, NBFC-MFIs provided finance with loan outstanding of ₹ 1,38,310 crore as on March 31, 2023, accounting for 39.7 per cent of total industry portfolio.

Banks, on the other hand, hold the second largest share of portfolio of micro-credit with total outstanding of ₹ 1,19,133 crore, comprising 34.2 per cent of the total in the microfinance space. Small finance banks (SFBs) have a total outstanding of ₹ 57,828 crore with a total share of 16.6 per cent, the report said. At the end of the last financial year, the total MFI portfolio stood at ₹ 3,48,339 crore.

According to the report, the MFI sector has immense growth potential with the market size estimated by MFIN to be around ₹ 13 lakh crore during the current fiscal 2023-24. MFIN said that the new regulations have guided the strengthening of governance in microfinance operations.

MFIN said that the sector has rebounded post-Covid in terms of funding, portfolio quality and client addition by the individual MFIs. The sector has seen post-Covid that centre meeting attendance have come down significantly due to focus on digital interventions. MFIN said that the sector needs to devise a strategy to ensure that while digital processes go on, client connect through centre meetings is not diluted, which is important to maintain collection efficiency ratio at higher levels. (PTI)

## Imports from Russia up 64 pc to USD 36.27 bn in Apr-Oct

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** India's imports from Russia rose 64 per cent to USD 36.27 billion during the April-October period this fiscal on higher shipments of crude oil and fertiliser, according to the commerce ministry data.

With this, Russia has become India's second-largest import source during the first seven months of this fiscal.

The imports were USD 22.13 billion during April-October 2022.

From a market share of less than 1 per cent in India's import basket before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia's share of India's oil imports rose to over 40 per cent.

India, the world's third-largest crude importer after China and the United States, has been buying Russian oil after some countries in the West shunned it as a means of punishing Moscow for invading Ukraine.

The ministry's data showed that imports from China dipped marginally to USD 60.02 billion during the period against USD 60.26 billion in the year-ago period.

Similarly, imports from the US declined 16 per cent to USD 24.89 billion during the period under review from USD 29.56 billion last year. Imports from the UAE contracted 21 per cent to USD 24.91 billion during the period under review.

During the first seven months of this fiscal, imports also dipped from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Indonesia, Singapore, and Korea. (PTI)

## Exports rise 6.21 pc to USD 33.57 bn in Oct; trade deficit widens to USD 31.36 bn



**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** India's merchandise exports rose 6.21 per cent to USD 33.57 billion in October this year, even as the trade deficit touched a record high of USD 31.46 billion during the month, government data showed on Wednesday.

Imports increased by 12.3 per cent to USD 65.03 billion in the month under consideration due to a jump in gold imports.

Inbound shipments of gold rose by 95.5 per cent to USD 7.23 billion. Oil imports also increased by 8 per cent to USD 17.66 billion during the month.

The country's trade deficit in goods in October last year stood at USD 26.31 billion.

The deficit (difference between imports and exports) during October is the "highest" because of the largest import figures, Additional Secretary in the Commerce Ministry L Satya Srinivas told reporters here.

Cumulatively, exports during the April-October period this fiscal contracted by 7 per cent to USD 244.89 billion, while imports fell 8.95 per cent to USD 391.96 billion.

The trade deficit during the seven-month period was USD 147.07 billion against USD 167.14 billion in the corresponding period last year.

Gold imports during the period rose 23 per cent to USD 29.5 billion, while crude oil imports dipped by 18.72 per cent to about USD 100 billion during April-October this fiscal.

Briefing reporters on the data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said the trade numbers in October reflect 'green shoots' of recovery in outbound shipments.

"I am hopeful that we will be crossing the last year's figures," he said, adding the positive growth is there despite a fall in commodity prices, "but we are waiting and

watching" the global situation.

Exports are impacted due to the geopolitical situation and other risks like high inflation and economic slowdown in advanced economies; the Russia-Ukraine war; China-Taiwan and China US issues; and the Israel-Palestine war. De-globalisation and waning appetite for international trade are leading to tariff and non-tariff barriers, which also affect exports.

The country's exports were in a negative zone during February-July. After a revision of numbers by the ministry, the shipments showed 3.88 per cent positive growth in August, but in September it contracted by 2.6 per cent.

Imports have turned positive after ten months of negative growth between December 2022 and September 2023.

According to the data, 22 of the 30 key sectors exhibited positive growth in October, and that includes iron ore, meat, dairy and poultry products, pharma, electronic goods, carpet, plastic, marine and engineering goods.

On the other hand, import sectors that recorded high growth in October include pulses (112.2 per cent), fruits and vegetables (53.4 per cent), non-ferrous metals (21.24 per cent) and electronics goods (26 per cent). The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has forecasted that global trade will grow only by 0.8 per cent in 2023.

Further, as per the data, services exports in October are estimated at USD 28.7 billion compared to USD 25.3 billion a year ago. Imports stood at USD 14.32 billion against USD 13.51 billion.

The estimated value of services exported in April-October 2023 was USD 192.65 billion against USD 181.37 billion in April-October 2022. Barthwal expressed hope that the growth in goods export would be sustained in the coming months. (PTI)

## European Commission lowers growth outlook and says economy has lost momentum during difficult year

**FRANKFURT, Nov 15:** The European Union's executive commission lowered its growth forecast for this year and next, saying the economy "has lost momentum" in 2023 as inflation weighs on consumer spending and higher central bank interest rates deter borrowing for purchases and investment.

The outlook for this year was lowered to 0.6% from 0.8% for the 20 countries that use the euro currency, and to 1.2% from 1.3% for next year, the commission said Wednesday in its autumn economic forecast, which revised figures from its previous forecast in September.

Even that modest growth outlook is exposed to risk from Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas

war in Gaza. So far, the conflict has not interfered with oil supplies from Mideast producers such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, "but there is a risk of disruptions to energy supplies that could potentially have a significant impact" on prices and global growth.

While growth remains weak, unemployment remains near record lows and growth should improve as inflation falls and leaves people with more spending more, the commission said. Meanwhile, government deficits and debt have declined after a burst of stimulus spending during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are approaching the end of a challenging year for the EU economy," said Paolo Gentiloni,

## Undistributed funds worth over ₹ 25,000 cr with Sebi in focus after death of Subrata Roy

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** The undistributed funds totalling over ₹ 25,000 crore lying with the capital markets regulator Sebi's account have come back into focus after the demise of Sahara Group's chief Subrata Roy.

Roy passed away in Mumbai on Tuesday night at the age of 75 after battling a prolonged illness.

He faced multiple regulatory and legal battles in connection with his group firms that were accused of circumventing regulations with Ponzi schemes, allegations his group always denied.

In 2011, capital markets regulator Sebi ordered two Sahara Group firms -- Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Ltd (SIREL) and Sahara Housing Investment Corporation Ltd (SHCIL) -- to refund the money raised from nearly 3 crore investors through certain bonds known as Optionally Fully Convertible Bonds (OFCBs).

This order came after the regulator ruled that the funds were raised by the two firms in violation of its rules and regulations.

After a long process of appeals and cross-appeals, the Supreme Court on August 31, 2012 upheld Sebi's directions asking the two firms to refund the money collected from investors with 15 per cent interest.

Sahara was eventually asked to deposit an estimated ₹ 24,000 crore with Sebi for further refund to investors, though the group has been maintaining that it had already refunded more than 95 per cent of investors directly.

According to the capital markets regulator's latest annual report, the Securities and Ex-



change Board of India (Sebi) issued ₹ 138.07 crore in refunds over 11 years to investors of two Sahara Group firms.

Meanwhile, the amount deposited in specially-opened bank accounts for the repayment has risen to more than ₹ 25,000 crore.

In the absence of claims from a majority of the bondholders of the two Sahara companies, the total amount refunded by Sebi inched up by just about ₹ 7 lakh during the last fiscal 2022-23, while the balance in Sebi-Sahara refund accounts rose by ₹ 1,087 crore during the year.

Going by the annual report, Sebi received 19,650 applications involving 53,687 accounts as of March 31, 2023. Of these, "refunds have been made concerning 17,526 applications involving 48,326 accounts for an aggregate amount of ₹ 138.07 crore, including the interest amount of ₹ 67.98 crore."

The remaining applications were closed due to their records not being traceable in the data provided by two Sahara Group firms.

In its previous update, Sebi had put the total

amount refunded by it as of March 31, 2022, at ₹ 138 crore concerning 17,526 applications.

Further, Sebi said under various orders passed by the Supreme Court and the attachment orders passed by the regulator, an aggregate amount of ₹ 15,646.68 crore has been recovered by it as of March 31, 2023.

This amount along with the accrued interest after due refunds to the eligible bondholders was deposited in nationalised banks in terms of the judgment dated August 31, 2012, of the Supreme Court.

As of March 31, 2023, the total amount deposited in nationalised banks is around ₹ 25,163 crore," Sebi stated. This amount stood at ₹ 24,076 crore, ₹ 23,191 crore, and ₹ 21,770.70 crore as of March 31, 2022, March 31, 2021, and March 31, 2020, respectively.

Meanwhile, the Centre in August started the process to refund ₹ 5,000 crore of depositors whose funds are struck in four cooperative societies of Sahara Group.

Before this, Cooperation Minister Amit Shah launched the 'CRCS-Sahara Refund Portal' in July to facilitate the return of the money to investors. Around 18 lakh depositors have been registered on the portal. In March, the government announced that the money would be returned to 10 crore investors of the four cooperative societies within 9 months.

The announcement followed a Supreme Court order directing the transfer of ₹ 5,000 crore from the Sahara-Sebi refund account to the Central Registrar of Cooperative Societies (CRCS). (PTI)

## Sensex, Nifty rally more than 1 pc as investors cheer softer US inflation number

**MUMBAI, Nov 15:** Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty jumped more than 1 per cent on Wednesday following heavy buying in IT, banking and oil & gas shares amid a global stocks rally on softer US inflation data. An encouraging US inflation data has raised hopes for an end to interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 742.06 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at nearly a four week high of 65,675.93. During the day, it zoomed 813.78 points or 1.25 per cent to 65,747.65. As many as 27 Sensex shares closed in the green while three in the red.

The Nifty50 of National Stock Exchange climbed 231.90 points or 1.19 per cent to 19,675.45.

Among the Sensex firms, Tech Mahindra rose the most by 3.77 per cent. Tata Motors, Infosys, Wipro, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries and Axis Bank were the major gainers.

"The market's strong gap-up jump in response to positive global cues on account of the softer than anticipated US and UK's inflation data, highlights the optimism for an end to the interest rate cycle, as evidenced by the ease in bond yields."

"This is likely to draw FII flows into emerging markets, which is good for India considering the current better earnings season and the festive demand pickup. The drop in the CPI for India also improved the

mood. The rebound was broad based with IT, realty, oil & gas, metal, and auto leading the way," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.13 per cent and midcap index climbed 0.91 per cent.

All indices ended in the green, with realty zooming 2.97 per cent, IT rallying 2.29 per cent, tech jumping 2.12 per cent, auto climbing 1.65 per cent, oil & gas (1.55 per cent) and energy (1.41 per cent).

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

European markets were trading in the green. The US markets ended with significant gains on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.78 per cent to USD 81.83 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,244.44 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Equity markets were closed on Tuesday on account of Diwali Balipratipada. The BSE benchmark fell 325.58 points or 0.50 per cent to settle at 64,933.87 on Monday. The Nifty declined 82 points or 0.42 per cent to 19,443.55. Continuing the downward trend, retail inflation slipped to a four-month low of 4.87 per cent in October, mainly due to easing food prices and inched towards the Reserve Bank's target of 4 per cent, according to govt data released on Monday. (PTI)

## Rupee jumps 21 paise to settle at 83.12 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, Nov 15:** The rupee appreciated 21 paise to close at 83.12 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday as the American currency retreated from its elevated levels after the US inflation came lower than expected. A firm trend in domestic equity markets and risk-on sentiment also supported the local unit, forex traders said. The rupee gained as the American currency weakened after US Inflation eased to its lowest level since September 2021, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 83.03 and finally settled at 83.12 against the greenback, registering a gain of 21 paise from its previous close.

During the day, the local unit witnessed an intraday high of 83.01 and a low of 83.19. On Monday, the rupee declined by 5 paise to settle at its all-time low of 83.33 against the American currency. The forex markets were closed on Tuesday on account of Diwali-Balipratipada.

The US CPI coming lower than expected and prior data weighed heavily on the US Dollar Index that crashed nearly 1.50 per cent on Tuesday, as the ten-year US yields slumped 4 per cent to below 4.50 per cent mark, said Praveen Singh Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

"Markets don't see any rate hikes in December now, while even January rate hike odds have fallen to merely 7 per cent now," Singh added. Risk-on sentiments, Goldilocks US data and soft yields are supportive for the rupee, though upside looks limited as the core US CPI year-on-year still stands at 4 per cent, which is double the Fed's target, Singh said, adding that the pair may trade between ₹ 82.80 and ₹ 83.30 in the near-term. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.20 per cent at 104.25. On Monday, the dollar index was at 105.77. (PTI)



EU commissioner for economy. "Strong price pressures and the monetary tightening needed to

contain them, as well as weak global demand, have taken their toll on households and busi-

nesses." "Looking ahead to 2024, we expect a modest uptick in growth as inflation eases further and the labour market remains resilient."

The economy has barely grown this year, recording zero increase in the first quarter, 0.2% growth in the third, and a fall of 0.1% in output in the third quarter.

Inflation declined to 2.9% in October from its peak of 10.6% a year earlier as the European Central Bank swiftly raised its key interest rate benchmark. Higher interest rates are the typical central bank tool against inflation. But they can also weigh on growth by making credit more expensive for consumer purchases or for business investment in new offices or production facilities. (AP)

## FIR against Ajmal for insulting Assamese Selang Sador

**HT Correspondent**  
MORIGAON, Nov 15: The Asom Satra Mahasabha on Wednesday lodged an FIR against Ajmal for allegedly insulting the revered Assamese 'selang sador' and hurting the sentiments of Assamese people.

According to sources, AIUFD's supreme and Dhubri MP, Badaruddin Ajmal had gone to attend a public rally at Laharighat in Morigaon on Wednesday. He was wearing a selang sador around his shoulders, which he threw away while on stage in front of the public. The selang sador is a revered piece of cloth that is a symbol of deep respect in the state.

This did not go down well

with the Assamese community and the situation turned tense. Soon president of the Asom Satra Mahasabha, Bimal Chandra Barkakati lodged the FIR today against Ajmal.

"Being a public representative, he has thrown away the very revered piece of cloth which we use in our religious activities. With this, he has sought to insult our religion and the Assamese Hindu society. This will lead to communal tensions and create problems in society. To stop such kind of communal tensions, today we have lodged an FIR at the Morigaon Sadar police station. Action should be taken so that such activities are not repeated in future," said Bimal Chandra Barkakati.

## Youth Jodo Yatra in Tinsukia



**HT Correspondent**  
MARGHERITA, Nov 15: The Assam Pradesh Youth Congress in collaboration with the Tinsukia district youth Congress took out a Youth Jodo Yatra in Tinsukia on Wednesday.

More than 5000 youths participated in the yatra, which began at the Borguri Bihutoli court Tinali and concluded at the Congress Bhawan in Tinsukia.

Led by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, the Bharat Jodo Yatra has gained much across the country. The yatra was organized to get in touch with youths of our country.

The programme was attended by Krishna Allabaru, secretary of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and observer of Indian Youth Congress (IYC), secretary of Indian Youth Congress (IYC) and observer of APYC S R Lenka, Debabrata Saikia leader of Congress Legislature Party (CLP), Durga Bhumi former Doomsday MLA, former Chabua MLA Raju Sahu, APCC joint secretary Sibanath Chetia, Assam Pradesh Youth Congress president Zubair Anam Mazumdar, vice president Devid Phukan, Tinsukia district youth Congress president Porag Konwar, Nabajeet Bailing, general secretary and all Congress leaders and workers of Tinsukia district also joined in the Youth Jodo Yatra.

Krishna Allabaru in his speech said, "The BJP government both at the state and the Centre avoids addressing vital issues such as unemployment, inflation, border issues, women safety, etc, which is very unfortunate."

After that various Congress leaders and workers felicitated Krishna Allabaru with the traditional Assamese phoolam gamosha and Japi.

## 26,774 people benefitted under Pradhan Mantri Krishak Sanman Nidhi in Sonitpur

**HT Correspondent**  
TEZPUR, Nov 15: Along with rest of the country Prime Minister Narendra Modi distributed the 15th installment of Pradhan Mantri Krishak Sanman Nidhi to eligible beneficiaries of Sonitpur district through a live webcast function held at Khunti in Jharkhand on Wednesday.

In Sonitpur a total of 26774 eligible beneficiaries of the PM Krishak Sanman Nidhi scheme received the installment through direct benefit transfer mode in their respective accounts. The scheme aims to support farmers in meeting their agricultural and other incidental needs. The live webcast was broadcast centrally at a function held at the auditorium of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Sonitpur.

On the other hand, the inauguration of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra and the Pradhan Mantri Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups Development Mission (PM-PVTG) by the Prime Minister was also webcast on the occasion. PM-PVTG is a scheme meant for the overall development of around 28 lakh people from vulnerable tribal groups.



More than 100 farmers attended the programme that was organized by the Sonitpur district agriculture department in collaboration with the Krishi Vigyan Kendra. An interactive session between scientists and farmers was also conducted during which scientists discussed in detail on the scientific cultivation of the upcoming Rabi crops in the district.

The PM Krishak Sanman Nidhi of the Union government is one of the world's largest direct benefit

transfer scheme. It exemplifies the continued commitment of the Centre to initiate policy actions for an inclusive and productive agricultural sector in which, financial benefit of ₹ 6,000 per year in three equal installments, is transferred into the bank accounts of farmers' families across the country through direct benefit transfer mode.

The live web cast broadcasted in Sonitpur was attended by district development commissioner Gaya Prasad Agar-

wala, assistant director of the agriculture department Mizanur Rahman Choudhury, senior agriculture development officer Asim Pathak, agriculture development officers Sanjib Saikia, Dipankar Barik, Kamal Krishna Das and Panchamika Dutta, district media specialist Bitopan Saikia, scheme officer Ranjita Goswami, scientists of Krishi Vigyan Kendra and other officers and employees of the district agriculture department and Krishi Vigyan Kendra.

## 4 injured in Rajmai

**HT Correspondent**  
DEMOW, Nov 15: Four persons were seriously injured during a road accident that occurred at the national highway-37 in Rajmai near Demow in Sivasagar district on Wednesday.

According to sources, a car bearing the registration number 'AS 04 BC 3952' was coming from Demow towards Sivasagar collided head on with a mini truck bearing the registration number 'AS 01 NC 4578'. The mini truck was reportedly on its way from Guwahati to Dibrugarh when the collision occurred, injuring the passengers inside the vehicles.

The injured persons were identified as Sajid Hussain (25), driver of the car, Akbar Ali (22), Pran Ali (29) and Mirajul Haque (29), who were also travelling in the vehicle. The locals rushed them to the Demow Model Hospital. After administering providing primary treatment doctors referred all the four to the Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) in Dibrugarh for further treatment.

## Assam Rifles distributes sports kits, study materials

**HT Correspondent**  
TEZPUR, Nov 15: Assam Rifles on Wednesday distributed sports kits and study materials to the local youths as part of the pre-recruitment training under the Assam Rifles Civic Action Project at its battalion headquarter in Lokra in Sonitpur district on Wednesday.

During the event the battalion distributed essential study material and clothing items to local youths undergoing pre-recruitment training at the Lokra Garrison. Besides, physical exercises and regular classes on subjects, the training also included various recruitments to help interested youths in joining any of the armed forces. Screening tests including physical efficiency tests. Written tests are also conducted to check the improvement in the performance of the trainees and to give them a realistic picture of the recruitment rally.

These items were distributed



among 30 trainees, including 16 boys and 14 girls, who are currently undergoing the training for a pe-

riod of 12 weeks, thus motivating other local youths of the area to join the armed forces.

## APCC yet to decide on Lok Sabha candidate

**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, Nov 15: President of West Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (WKADCC) and former Executive Member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Sing Teron clarified that the candidate for the forthcoming Lok Sabha election has not been decided by the APCC and WKADCC.

Teron was responding to the claim of president of All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), JI Kathar that he will get the MP ticket from I.N.D.I.A Block for No. 3 Diphu Autonomous (ST) parliamentary constituency in the forthcoming parliamentary election.

Meanwhile, the APHLC and Lurin Jyoti Gogoi who leads the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) had met here in Karbi Anglong and agreed to work together with regional partners. AJP is already an ally of I.N.D.I.A Block.

In a press conference held at WKADCC office in West Karbi Anglong, president of WKADCC, Teron said, "Who will get a ticket for the forthcoming parliamentary election is yet to be discussed by the APCC. How can Kathar claim that he will be getting a ticket from I.N.D.I.A Block? It is to fool the people." Teron urged party workers not to be misguided by the false proclamation of Kathar, rather they should stick to the party's principles.

## NFR operates special trains for festive season

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Nov 15: The North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has decided to operate few more special trains to ease the rush of passengers during this festive rush.

These special trains will connect major destinations of importance without compromising with its punctuality. Operations of these trains will also help in clearing the extra rush of passengers in the waiting list in regular trains and thus, enhancing their convenience during the scheduled journeys.

Accordingly, special train no. 04640 (Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra- Katihar) will run for one trip on November 15 from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra. In return direction, train no. 04639 (Katihar - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra) will run on November 17 from Katihar for one trip to reach its destination at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra.

## Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra launched in Karbi Anglong

**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, Nov 15: In line with the nationwide launch of Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Khunti in Jharkhand, HAD minister, Jogen Mohan in the presence of Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Tuliram Ronghang and others was also launched the yatra in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong on Wednesday.

Launching the campaign at Manja, Lumbajong block development premises in Karbi Anglong, HAD minister said Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is an initiative by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to raise awareness about the central government's flagship schemes implemented in rural and urban areas through outreach activities to achieve saturation of schemes.

Mohan said, "The central government has introduced several flagship schemes, which provide basic amenities like sanitation facilities, essential financial services, access to LPG connections, housing for the poor, food security,



proper nutrition, reliable healthcare, clean drinking water, quality education and many more. This campaign will reach every nook and corner of the country to access information to the people about the welfare schemes of the central government."

The Minister also flagged off an information, education and communication (IEC) van to tour Karbi Anglong and inform the people about the welfare schemes of the central government. The campaign to reach out to beneficiaries of the Centre's flagship programmes will culminate on January 25 next year,

the minister informed.

Earlier, the CEM in his speech highlighted the various central government schemes implemented in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. Safe drinking water facilities under Jal Jiban Mission, issuing of health cards, providing subsidised food grains to BPL families, education facilities, financial support to women and SHGs and many more are being implemented.

Principal secretary to the state government, Manish Thakur in his introductory speech mentioned the aim and purpose of Viksit Bharat

Sankalp Yatra targeting eligible citizens, who have not yet benefited from various central schemes. He asked the line department to work collectively for the maximum reach of government schemes to the masses.

MLAs, Darsing Ronghang and Bidyasing Englang; District Commissioner, Karbi Anglong, Madhumita Bagawati were also present.

**Our Kokrajhar correspondent adds:**

Along with rest of the state, the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra was organised at the South Kashi Bari playground under Haloadal VCDC in Kokrajhar district on Wednesday.

The day-long event was organised in connection with the observance of the birth anniversary of the valiant freedom fighter, Bhagwan Birsa Munda. The Kokrajhar district administration organized the programme to highlight the need for sustainable development of all vulnerable tribal communities across the country.

Chief executive member (CEM) of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro inaugurated

the yatra amidst the presence of Assam cabinet minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma and MLA Lawrence Islay.

Remarkably, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has given the clarion call of a "Viksit Bharat"-a developed India mission across the nation, and accordingly the NDA government at the centre is rendering services for all round development of the citizens.

CEM Pramod Boro said, "The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra has been organised today to recall the contributions and dedication of freedom fighter Bhagwan Birsa Munda. The day is being celebrated across the country."

"Adarniya PM Shri Narendra Modi Ji has given the clarion call of a "Viksit Bharat", a developed India. Our nation's progress is intertwined with the growth of our tribal communities, and on the birth anniversary of the valiant freedom fighter, Bhagwan Birsa Munda, we reaffirm our resolute commitment towards ensuring a holistic and sustainable development for all our tribal brethren," Boro said.

## Silt mining poses threat for Dibrugarh town

**HT Correspondent**  
DIBRUGARH, Nov 15: Illegal silt mining from the Brahmaputra riverbed in posing a serious threat to the Dibrugarh town.

Due to unabated illegal silt mining from Poolbagan area to Panchali, the historic Dibrugarh is facing a severe threat of erosion.

Sources said the 'sand mafia' is illegally extracting silt from the Brahmaputra riverbed from near Poolbagan to Panchali posing a serious threat to the entire area.

Sand mafias are allegedly running the illegal business in nexus with some forest officials and the illegal extraction of sand is most rampant in these areas.

"The forest department has failed to act against these sand mafias. Due to continuous silt mining in these areas the Dibrug-

garh town protection dyke is facing a serious threat," said a source.

It has been learned that in silt mining has been going on in the middle of the river and about 15-20 boats were being used to carry the silt.

"During mid-November the practice starts every year and the sand mafias collect the silts illegally from river beds. It is a continuous practice but the district administration has failed to check these illegal activities," said a local resident.

However, following a series of orders by the National Green Tribunal in 2018, the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change has for the first time released guidelines to monitor and check illegal sand mining in the country.

## Training academy for unemployed youths inaugurated

**HT Correspondent**  
GOSSAIGAON, Nov 15: Reo Reoa Narzihary, executive member of the Bodo Territorial Region's (BTR) department of industry, legal metrology, skill development and entrepreneurship ceremonially inaugurated the Connection Point Academy under the Union ministry of corporate affairs in Srirampur, Chowpati on Wednesday.

The Connection Point Academy was inaugurated in the presence of Munmun Singha Choudhury, director of the academy, Sajal Kumar Singha, MCLA, 3 No. Srirampur BTC Constituency, Abdul Aziz Khan, retired principal of the Bhawraguri-Binyakhata Higher Secondary School and other intellectuals.

Speaking on the occasion, Munmun Singha Choudhury said, "The main purpose of the Connection Point Academy is to train the educated unemployed youth in various subjects such as aviation, tourism, hotel management, etc. We will be offering diploma courses in aviation, hospitality and travel and

tourism management."

The Academy has already enrolled 42 students in various subjects, Choudhury further said.

Choudhury acclaimed fame as a bestselling author, human resource consultant and a cabin crew trainer. 'Let's Fly High Together' is her latest book to be released. She possesses much experience in the aviation sector with national and international airlines and is dedicated to spreading awareness among youths in society about the aviation industry and its employment opportunities.

She further asserted that Connection Point Academy and MCLA cum Chief Advisor Sajal Kumar Singha stepped together to achieve the highest standard of excellence, taking new initiatives in the world of aviation and hotel education in the region. Whether it's serving the nation and its people or helping aspiring youths to achieve their dreams of flying in the sky, the academy aspires to offer proper guidance and opportunities to its students.

## Noted artiste honoured with Sahityarathi Rasaraj Lakshminath Bezbaruah Award

**HT Correspondent**  
SIVASAGAR, Nov 15: Renowned folk artist, writer and former principal of Moran College, Anil Saikia was honoured with the 2nd Sahityarathi Rasaraj Lakshminath Bezbaruah Award on Wednesday.

Sankarjyoti Baruah, general secretary the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) handed over the award to Saikia at a function held in the Hindu Dharma Namghar Samaj Auditorium in Sivasagar. The first recipient of the award was Padmashri Imran Shah.

The award, instituted by the Sivasagar unit of AASU, carries a citation, Rs 10,000 in cash and a memento.

Speaking on the occasion, Sankarjyoti Baruah lauded the Sivasagar district unit of AASU for instituting the award.

"Lakshminath Bezbaruah, the founder of Asomiya Satra Unnati Sabha, was a towering personality of the age known to us as Romantic era (1864-1950) after the Vaishnavite literary era. Bezbaruah fought valiantly with his pen to dismiss the false narrative that Assamese language was an offshoot of the Bengali language. He was, as said by Banikanta Kakoty, the 'mukut behin



samrat' (the emperor without a crown)," said Sankarjyoti Baruah.

Baruah urged his fellow student activists to read the works of Lakshminath Bezbaruah and other literary luminaries to understand the state's socio-cultural roots.

Lauding Anil Saikia, Baruah said that he is a leading literary figure where folk culture

and folk literary tradition are concerned.

Receiving the award, Anil Saikia said, "Lakshminath Bezbaruah was a multifaceted genius and undoubtedly rediscovered the enticing beauty of Assamese language. He was the first to write short stories like Seuti and Bhadri. His two collections of poems Kadamkoli and Padumkoli, dramas and

short stories are all replete in humour of high calibre. Bezbaruah, a 24 year old young man in Kolkata, thought of reviving the Assamese language."

Saikia also urged AASU to stick to their stand in support of the mother tongue in school education against the government circular for English medium from class VI.

"Bezbaruah was also endowed with extraordinary memory, based on whose story the first Assamese film 'Jaymoti' was made by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala.

Arundhati Bezbaruah, great granddaughter of the Rasaraj, lit the ceremonial light to inaugurate the function. The programme was also attended by Manosh Hazarika, president of Sivasagar district unit of AASU, Sarat Hazarika, general secretary of Asom Unnati Sabha, Samiran Phukan, assistant secretary of AASU's central committee, Naten Chetia, secretary of the Asom Unnati Sabha, Prema Gogoi, former president of the Asom Kobi Sammilan, educationist Bhupen Bora, Manoj Bhagawati, secretary of the Sivasagar Sports Association, educationist Monica Saikia and a host of other citizens were also present on the occasion.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*The greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse.*  
- Edmund Burke

## Unprecedented crisis in Gaza

The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has reached unprecedented levels in the 21st century. With almost 11,000 lives lost, a staggering 70% of which are women and children, the region faces an overwhelming onslaught. Disturbingly, a child dies every 10 minutes. The aggressive bombardment has left hospitals and refugee camps in ruins, creating a dire situation. The recent threat by Israel's Heritage Minister, Amichai Eliyahu, to use nuclear weapons adds a new layer of concern. While Prime Minister Netanyahu's removal of the minister seems more like a political move to deflect criticism, the international community's response remains troublingly muted. The United States, a vocal advocate for action in other geopolitical situations, stays silent on Israel's nuclear capability and aggression. The International Criminal Court (ICC), entrusted to address genocide and crimes against humanity, also remains eerily silent, despite the explicit support of the US for the Netanyahu government's actions. The recent vote against Jordan's resolution for an immediate ceasefire in the United Nations General Assembly raises questions about the priorities of some nations. India's abstention from voting aligns with Israel's stance, drawing praise from Prime Minister Netanyahu. However, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres rightly points out that the attacks by Hamas did not occur in isolation. The historical context of Israel's occupation and displacement of Palestinians must be acknowledged.

False narratives have long been used to justify atrocities, reminiscent of historical events like Hitler's scapegoating of Jews. The parallels with Churchill's controversial views on indigenous populations underline the dangers of such ideologies. Today, demonization of minorities, particularly Muslims, is a cause for concern in various parts of the world, including India. Drawing a crucial distinction between ideologies and communities, it's essential to recognize that Zionism doesn't equate to all Jews, Nazism to all Germans, or Hindutva to all Hindus. Blanket assumptions about any group can lead to disastrous consequences. Amid these crises, the international community faces challenges. The US, seemingly focused on building its Military-Industrial Complex, engages in conflicts worldwide. The expansion of NATO and the emergence of groups like QUAD and AUKUS heighten tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. However, the global public demands peace, as evidenced by widespread protests. South Africa's proposed peace plans for an immediate ceasefire deserve serious consideration. Moreover, the anti-nuclear movement must amplify its voice during these critical times. In a world facing multiple crises, the need for diplomatic solutions and international cooperation cannot be overstated.

The consequences of inaction are dire, and the responsibility to avert further tragedy lies with the global community. As the world grapples with the unfolding tragedy in Gaza, the urgency for diplomatic intervention cannot be overstated. The continued silence of influential nations and international bodies on Israel's actions and nuclear threats raises serious ethical questions. The principles of justice and human rights should not be sacrificed for political expediency. The United Nations, International Criminal Court, and individual nations must rise above geopolitical considerations to address the blatant violations of international law. A unified, concerted effort is needed to push for an immediate ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and a long-term resolution that respects the rights and dignity of all affected populations. The deafening silence of major powers in response to the Gaza crisis echoes a disconcerting trend. It is imperative for the global community to prioritize humanitarian values over political alliances and act swiftly to prevent further devastation in the region.

## Blue flame from BJP's communal stove appears in Rajasthan

BJP has raised the flame of its communal stove in Rajasthan, right from the last date for withdrawal of nomination on November 9. Within three days it started spewing blue flames causing a considerable rise in politico-communal temperature in the state, and the ruling Congress has started feeling the heat. Electoral battle has just turned ugly occupying the front pushing the issues of peace and development in the state into the rear.

By November 12, the situation turned worse to such an extent that the Congress leader and the chief minister Ashok Gehlot not only alleged that the BJP was attempting to fuel communal tensions as the state reaching closer to the Assembly election scheduled for November 25, but also asserted that the perpetrators of the Udaipur killing of a tailor Kanhaiya Lal Teli had links with BJP.

The full import of CM Ashok Gehlot's assertion would be possible to comprehend to some extent only if we recall the incident of June 28, 2022, when two assailants in disguise of customers went to the tailor's shop. When the tailor was taking measurement for one of them, he was attacked with butcher's knives, dragged out of the shop, and slit his throat. A shop assistant was also severely injured while trying to save him.

Other shopkeepers did not make attempts to rescue him. The assailants fled on foot and then drove away on motorcycle. The recording of the attack made by assailants was posted on social media. A second video was posted in the social media in which two men

identified themselves as Muhammad Riyaz Attari and Muhammad Ghaus. The assailants boasted that they had avenged the insult to Islam.

The horrific and shocking incident has a background. BJP's spokesperson Nupur Sharma had made a controversial remark on May 27 about the prophet Muhammad during a Times Now debate on the Gyanvapi Mosque dispute of Varanasi. Times Now has been allegedly known for whipping up politico-communal passion in favour of the BJP. Varanasi is represented in Lok Sabha by PM Narendra Modi. Even after the demolition of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, BJP rank and file has been raising the slogan – "Ayodhya to Jhankihai, Kashi Mathura Baki Hai" (What happened in Ayodhya is just a tableau, Kashi and Mathura is in waiting). The victim tailor was carried away by communal frenzy created in this background and shared a social media post in support of Nupur Sharma, who was then suspended by the BJP. On June 11, the tailor's neighbour Nazim had got an FIR registered against him. On June 15, the tailor has sought protection from police for he had received death threat.

Now come back to the CM Ashok Gehlot's assertion that the assailants were linked to BJP. It makes the whole affair serious since this has come from the chief minister who was in power in Rajasthan at the time of the incident. He said that just after the incident Special Operations Group (SOG) had taken charge of the case, however, next day on June 29, National Investigation Agency (NIA) took over the case, and the



state did not object. "No one knows what action the NIA has taken. If our SOG had pursued the case, the culprits would have been brought to justice by now," CM Gehlot said.

Matter does not end here, since CM Gehlot has said, "The culprits have links to the BJP. Days before the incident, when the police had arrested these accused in some other case and some BJP leaders visited the police station to get them released."

He added further, "The thing is that BJP has sensed defeat in the elections and are, hence, coming up with bizarre claims. They are not speaking a word about the schemes that we launched and the laws we brought. They just want to stir up trouble ahead of the elections ... and ... the people will give them a befitting reply."

On November 9 in Udaipur, PM Modi had said that the murder was a blot on the Gehlot led Rajasthan government, and had occurred as a result of the Congress sympathising with terror, and their policy of appeasement.

It must be noted that the case is not with the state government under CM

Ashok Gehlot but with NIA under PM Modi. Additionally, the victim's son has said that CM Ashok

Gehlot has assured him that culprits would be hanged within three months, but we are yet to get justice. CM saying that nothing is known about NIA's action so far is serious.

CM Gehlot's statement should not be brushed aside since it calls for further investigations if there was any communal conspiracy for vote bank politics in which common people are becoming victims of violence? What measures are Centre and the states taking against Communal violence?

There are also political concerns, since all these means that the ruling Congress and CM Ashok Gehlot has increasingly been feeling the communal heat during the election campaign. Why the BJP is up to it and how far the ruling Congress is threatened? The answer to such questions will be only revealed in the election results on December 3 after counting of votes.

However, few things are to be taken note of. Communal violence in Manipur since May 8 under

the double engine government of the BJP has just pushed the party into margin in Mizoram in the first phase of election. BJP's good governance and development claim were just ineffective in Mizoram in the light of the situation in Manipur violence that has fully halted all the development in the state. In the first phase of election in Chhattisgarh, BJP added allegation of corruption against the ruling Congress, apart from linking Congress to Naxals, however, with little perceivable benefit. For the second phase of election in Madhya Pradesh, the jinn of communalism have also been brought out amidst severe infighting in BJP. However, and at the far end of the election campaign, the BJP is standing on slippery ground.

No wonder, in Rajasthan, the BJP has come out with their time-tested communalism as if catching a straw right from the beginning of the election campaign after withdrawal of candidature on November 9 in the third phase of election campaign, since the party has little to gain in the fourth and the last phase of election in Telangana.

Hindu-Muslim communalisation can be seen in

the act of BJP when it dropped the Masuda candidate just over rumours that he was a Muslim. Ugliness is seen in Pokharan poll battle where Hindu seer is contesting a Muslim religious leader's son. BJP leaders, including PM Narendra Modi and Union Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah has been repeatedly mentioning Ayodhya Ram Temple and Sanatana Dharma, and portraying Congress as anti-Hindus and pro-anti-minority appeasement. BJP leaders go on referring to Israel-Hamas war is a way that communalises the voters.

Congress has committed caste census to the electorate to facilitate social justice to OBCs. However, Union Minister for Jal Shakti Gajendra Singh Shekhawat has said, "This election is not about caste; it is about Sanatan. This election is being contested for the respect of Sanatan. There is no caste greater than religion. Caste can never be bigger than religion."

Only time will tell what impact such communal politics would spell in Rajasthan in particular in the current state election, and in the forthcoming Lok Sabha election 2024 in the country, when BJP and PM Narendra Modi would seek for the third term, and the opposition INDIA alliance would try to defeat them. Whatever, be the outcome, but one thing is clear, electorate need to prevent politico-communal violence in the country to avoid a mass scale violence across the country in near future. Politics of Hate must stop. Since the Election Commission of India has become ineffective, responsibility falls back on citizens. (IPA Service)

## Navigating geopolitical challenges: India and Russia's innovative partnership



The stalemate on the currency of payment for the delivery of the S-400 surface-to-air missiles has caused a significant delay, and now Russia has ordered 24 cargo ships from an Indian shipyard to help spend some of the Rupees in its coffers. This announcement of collaboration between the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) and the Russian Export Center came during discussions about the delivery schedule of the remaining missiles. It is projected that by 2027, GSL will have completed the construction of the 24 cargo ships that will traverse the Caspian Sea. The deal is seen as a win-win situation for both India and Russia, as they seek to trade despite the sanctions from the West.

In fiscal year 2022, India exported various items to Russia, including machinery, chemicals, marine products, and pharmaceuticals, valued at US\$3.14 billion. On the import side, India imported items from Russia valued at US\$46.21 billion. However, the two countries are facing problems due to the sanctions. Russia's foreign-currency reserves were frozen, and it was shut out of the SWIFT network, effectively closing it off from the global financial system. India has refused to pay Russia in US dollars over concerns about secondary sanctions and won't pay in Rubles because of worries about obtaining Russia's currency on global markets at a fair rate.

This standoff has resulted in over US\$2 billion in payments from India being held up for over a year. In turn, Russia has halted credit needed to purchase US \$10 billion in spare parts and two S-400 air-defense systems. Both countries had initially decided to pay for the S-400s in Indian Rupees to reduce dependency on the US Dollar, but the Russia-Ukraine war has financially isolated Moscow.

As a result, an estimated US\$1 billion worth of rupees is landing in Moscow's coffers each month. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov acknowledged the dilemma, stating that they have accumulated many billions of rupees that they haven't yet found a use for.

The biggest impediment for India to pay in its currency is that it is only partly convertible, and for significant transactions, the nod needs to come from New

Delhi itself.

To address this issue, India has come up with an out-of-the-box solution – to reinvest rupees in the Indian economy. It is a lucrative deal for war-embroiled Russia, seeking long-term investments and a return on its money to keep its war machine going. This solution not only addresses the currency stalemate, but it also provides a boost to the Indian economy, providing employment and investment opportunities in the construction and shipping industries.

The collaboration between GSL and the Russian Export Center is not only a strategic move to bypass the currency stalemate, but it also opens up avenues for future cooperation and investment between the two countries. By building the 24 cargo ships and utilizing them for transporting goods across the Caspian Sea, it creates a mutually beneficial relationship that not only resolves the immediate problem at hand but also sets the stage for long-term economic ties between India and Russia.

It is essential for both countries to find innovative solutions to overcome the challenges posed by geopolitical tensions and sanctions. The decision to invest rupees in the Indian economy not only provides a way to utilize the surplus currency, but it also strengthens economic ties between the two nations. It showcases the potential for partnerships that go beyond mere trade and currency transactions, creating opportunities for collaborative projects and investments that will benefit both India and Russia in the long run.

This move signifies a shift in the traditional approach to resolving currency and trade disputes, setting a precedent for innovative solutions in the face of geopolitical challenges. It is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of both countries in finding ways to overcome obstacles and build stronger economic relations despite external pressures.

The collaboration between GSL and the Russian Export Center is not just a response to a currency stalemate, but a strategic step towards a more robust and mutually beneficial partnership between India and Russia. (The author can be reached at shashankadas0007@gmail.com)

## Governors sitting on bills is a dangerous scribbling of the 'grammar of anarchy'

By: S N Sahu

A Supreme Court Bench comprising the Chief Justice of India Dr DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, in its Order of November 9, 2023, disapproved Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit's stand not to give assent to some Bills passed by the state assembly.

Purohit has earlier questioned the validity of the assembly session, a move which the Supreme Court described as "playing with fire". It also categorically indicted Purohit by observing that "any attempt to cast doubt on the session of the legislature would be fraught with great perils to democracy".

While reiterating the Constituent Assembly's intent embodied in the constitutionally enshrined provisions that "in a parliamentary form of democracy, real power rests with the elected representatives of the people" and the "governor, as an appointee of the President, is the titular head of the state", the Bench made it crystal clear in its Order that "casting doubt on the validity of the session of the House is not a constitutional option open to the governor".

It then stated, "We are of the view that the governor of Punjab must now proceed to take decision on Bills submitted for assent on the basis that the sitting of the House conducted on June 19-20 2023 was constitutionally valid."

While adjudicating the matter in the State of Punjab versus Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab, the Supreme Court Bench took note of the stand of Purohit that the Bills passed during a session of the Punjab assembly were unconstitutional as the session of June 2023, convened by the speaker when the assembly has been adjourned sine die lacked legal and constitutional validity.

The Bench dismissed the governor's completely erroneous and illegal interpretation of the rule concerning the speaker's power to convene the session and observed, "[I]t was within the powers of the speaker to adjourn the budget session convened in March 2023, instead of proroguing it, and calling back the session again in June."

The Bench, flagging the well settled proposition within the framework of the Constitution and parliamentary rules, practice and procedure that the speaker is recognised as the guardian of the privileges of House, made it amply clear that he "was acting in his jurisdiction in adjourning the house sine die".

It is instructive to note that in this Order, the Supreme Court, while indicting the action of the governor, as mentioned above, by describing it as "playing with fire" and "fraught with great perils to democracy", held the speaker's decision for convening the assembly session, when its adjournment was confuting sine die, as constitutionally valid.

It is worthwhile to recall that unlike the speaker, the governor takes oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution. So any action of the governor, be it their decision to give assent to the Bills or an assessment concerning the convening of the assembly, must be in conformity with the oath taken to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution.

It is clear that Governor Purohit, by refusing to give assent to the Bills passed by the Punjab assembly, was taking a stand against the very Constitution which he is oath-bound to defend.

Therefore, the Supreme Court's observations that he is playing with fire and his actions constitutes a peril to democracy are applicable to all governors of almost all non-Bharatiya Janata Party



(BJP)-ruled states where governors are acting in a manner that paralyses the functioning of the duly elected governments and subverts the Constitution itself.

Previously, the Punjab governor did not convene the budget session of the state assembly in spite of the Aam Aadmi Party government sending a proposal duly passed by the cabinet for doing so as per the Constitution.

Only after the state government knocked the doors of the Supreme Court did the governor give his approval.

Earlier in July 2020, the governor of Rajasthan did not convene the session of the state assembly in spite of the cabinet recommendation to that effect and Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot had to sit on dharna for the governor's nod.

For instance, a few months ago, the governor of Tamil Nadu took a strange decision in dismissing a minister of the state. In doing so, he was acting against the very Constitution, constitutional scheme of governance and the intent of the Constituent Assembly that a governor would discharge their functions on the aid and advice of the duly elected council of ministers of the concerned state.

The way in which governors of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are keeping the Bills passed by their respective state assemblies pending for several years without taking a decision on giving assent to them is baffling.

Even the 12 Bills passed by

the state assembly two years ago are pending with the governor who, apart from not taking any decision on disposing of them, made an unconstitutional claim that those Bills have lapsed.

The Tamil Nadu government filed a petition in the Supreme Court on the issue with a prayer to declare the "inaction, omission, delay and failure to comply with the constitutional mandate by the Governor of Tamil Nadu" as illegal and arbitrary.

The Bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice of India, while dealing with the petition, issued notice to the concerned respondents including the Union government and observed that the inexplicable delay on the part of the governor in disposing of those Bills is a matter of "serious concern".

The court, in its short order, flagged the provisions of Article 200 of the Constitution mandating the governor to act "as soon as possible" when Bills, passed by the state legislature are presented to him for his assent.

It is the essential spirit of Article 200 that once a Bill has been passed by a state assembly, a governor shall take a decision to give their assent, return it for reconsideration of the assembly or, if required, send it to the President of India for consideration expeditiously.

Let us recall the sharp observations of Supreme Court on the role played by the then governor of Maharashtra Bhagat Singh Koshyari in calling

Uddhav Thackeray government for the floor test based on disputes within the Shiv Sena, which witnessed one faction consisting of some of its members claiming to be the original party.

The Chief Justice of India observed at that time that the governor had acted in a manner which clearly established the point that he had called for a floor test without any material basis except the disputes within the party.

Clearly, such observation of the Supreme Court that the governor got actuated by party issues rather than constitutional provisions is a sad reflection on the conduct of the governors in non-BJP ruled states.

The fact that several non-BJP ruled state governments are coming to the Supreme Court for making the governors of those states function in accordance with the Constitution shows that those governors, instead of acting in accordance with the Constitution, are waiting for directions to discharge their duties.

They should pay attention to the indicting observations of the Supreme Court on the role played by the Punjab governor and avoid, in the words of the Supreme Court, "playing with fire" and causing "perils to our democracy".

These remarks of the Supreme Court capture the words of Dr B.R. Ambedkar who said in his last speech in the Constituent Assembly that if constitutional methods would not be followed to pursue objectives enshrined in the Constitution, then the grammar of anarchy would prevail.

Those observations of the Supreme Court must be categorical imperatives for all the governors, more so in the non-BJP ruled states, for upholding the Constitution and democracy of our country which very sadly has been described as "partially free" and an "elected autocracy". (IPA Service)

# Toxic air: Get serious on avoiding death by breath

By: Dipak Kurni

In cities with clean air, cycling is great for your health. But, if the air is polluted, like in Delhi right now, it's not a good idea. Cyclists breathe in more air, and in seriously polluted areas, that means breathing in more toxins. Right now, Delhi's air is making headlines for being unhealthy, even with all the other news happening around, like elections and international events. So, it's better to avoid cycling or doing intense outdoor activities in such places.

Right now, the pollution in Delhi is a bit better. It was really bad for five days in a row, labeled as "severe," but now it's in the "very poor" category. Strangely enough, on November 6, Facebook reminded me of a photo I took last year on the same date. The picture was of the sunset, smog, and the city.

Some wealthier folks are trying to escape the pollution by putting air purifiers in their homes, using air-conditioned cars, and staying indoors as much as they can. However, only a small number of people have all these choices available to them.

## What about the rest?

In Delhi, they've told all schools to stay closed until November 10. Construction and non-essential trucks are not allowed right now. They're using water sprinklers to control the dust. Doctors are advising everyone to wear masks and stay inside as much as they can. Also, after Diwali, they're bringing back the "odd-even" car rules.

Year after year, it is the same story.

How does one talk about



India's terrifying air pollution when the discourse around it seems repetitive and bordering on hopelessness?

## What are we missing in the conversation about air pollution? How do we overcome hopelessness?

First off, we need to distinguish between what the officials are saying and what people across the country are discussing about the polluted air. The official stance in India doesn't align much with global standards, and they're not quick to link air pollution with health issues or deaths. However, the national discussion shouldn't just rely on official statements. It should also consider the insights from scientists, experts, and the voices of the citizens.

Even though there's a growing amount of scientific evidence, we're not taking the serious health impacts of polluted air seriously. According to a scientific paper from the India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative in December 2020, published in *Lancet Planetary Health*, about 1.7 million deaths in India in 2019 were linked to air pollution.

That's around 18 % of all deaths in the country.

The paper pointed out that while household air pollution in India has gone down, leading to a 64 % decrease in related deaths from 1990 to 2019, deaths from outdoor air pollution have actually increased by 115 % during the same period.

We need to focus on health when dealing with air pollution. The current official strategies don't give enough importance to the health impacts. According to many experts, Indian governments usually go for easy solutions, quick fixes like smog towers and water spraying. While these might help a bit in the short run, they won't really solve India's smog issue.

According to Bhargav Krishna, an environmental health and policy researcher, the issue with how we talk about air pollution nationally is that we're too focused on certain times of the year and extreme situations.

The official plan to tackle air pollution mainly revolves around winter, overlooking the situation throughout the

rest of the year. The conversation is also too centered on Delhi, but now, air pollution is a problem across India, even in smaller cities.

As Sunil Dahiya, an analyst from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), mentioned on X (formerly Twitter), Fatehabad in Haryana took the lead as the "most polluted city" in India on November 5. The concentration of PM 2.5, a type of air pollutant, was at 338 µg/m3 (micrograms per cubic meter). Delhi followed closely in second place with a PM2.5 concentration of 334 µg/m3. Mumbai's air is also a cause for concern, although it's not as bad as Delhi.

Winter is probably the toughest time when pollution just hangs in the air. However, according to Krishna, we can't tackle India's air pollution issue if we only focus on what happens during winter. We need to consider the situation throughout the entire year.

Many parts of India have polluted air due to various reasons like construction, vehicle emissions, burning crop residue, and industrial discharges. It's crucial to discuss all the factors that add up to toxic air, not just a few. Asking questions is important. For instance, why aren't we talking much about how power plants contribute to bad air?

A recent study by the environmental think tank Centre for Science and Environment found that only five percent of India's coal-fired power stations have installed systems to control sulphur dioxide emissions, which are called flue gas desulphurization systems.

We should discuss regulations. According to Krishna,

although there are guidelines for emissions, they aren't really enforced. The ability and determination to regulate effectively seem to be lacking.

We require detailed local data on the health effects of air pollution. Right now, there's a lack of information on respiratory infections from primary health centers or at the block level.

The data from outpatient visits could be useful, but currently, there's no centralized database for it. A statewide overview won't provide the specific details we need at a micro level, according to Krishna.

In January 2019, India started the National Clean Air Programme with a goal to decrease PM2.5 levels by 20-30% by 2024 in 132 cities compared to 2017 levels. A recent report by CREA indicates slow progress - only 37 cities have finished the initial studies they were supposed to complete by 2020. This was just the first step, and most of these reports are still not available to the public.

Moreover, no city action plan has been updated with the new findings as planned in the NCAP. The National Emission Inventory, expected to be finished by 2020, is also pending formalization according to CREA. To meet its 2024 goals, India needs more air quality monitoring stations.

It might sound challenging, but it's doable if we're genuinely committed to preventing health issues due to air pollution. We need to tackle the toxic air issue nationwide throughout the year, not just during winter. (The writer can be reached at [dpaknewsline@gmail.com](mailto:dpaknewsline@gmail.com))

# The perilous cycle of disability, climate change, and poverty

By: Puneet Singhal

In the backstreets of a slum in Delhi, where I grew up, dreams are both a luxury and a necessity. We dream of better days, of more tolerant climates, of fulfilling jobs. However, for many, like my friend Laxman, those dreams quickly dissolve into a hazy mist of despair, caught in the triple snare of disability, climate change, and economic hardship.

## Laxman's broken dreams: A tale of lost opportunities

Laxman was an electrical engineer by qualification. He was optimistic, hard-working, and a person living with a physical disability. Just when we thought life was starting to respect his struggles, a climate-induced disaster struck—unseasonal flooding destroyed the small factory where he worked. The economic downturn that followed led to layoffs, and Laxman was among those whose contracts were terminated.

In a desperate bid to sustain himself, he accepted a job that neither matched his qualifications nor respected his capabilities—a data entry job that paid him barely enough to scrape through. His years of education and aspirations seemed to be sucked away by this cruel vortex of circumstances.

## The unseen burden: Climate change and economic resilience

Climate change doesn't just alter weather patterns; it disrupts livelihoods. The impact of such environmental shifts is magnified manifold for individuals with disabilities, particularly in low-income areas. After the factory's shutdown, Laxman's job options were severely limited due to a lack of disability-friendly work environments.

The flood washed away more than just walls and machines; it washed away opportunities for many like Laxman, sending them spiraling into a vicious cycle of underemployment and poverty. This is not mere economic downturn; this is a form of systemic disempowerment that feeds on both climate vulnerabilities and societal inequalities.

## Food scarcity: When every meal is a battle

In an unstable climate, even food be-

comes a privilege. Unpredictable weather patterns often result in crop failures, leading to skyrocketing food prices. For low-income families already struggling to provide for members with special needs, this additional financial burden can be crippling.

## The poverty loop: A vicious cycle

In this scenario, disability and climate change become gears in a grinding machine that churns out more poverty. Climate-induced job losses lead to financial instability. Financial instability leads to compromised healthcare and nutrition, which further exacerbates the disability. The disability, in turn, limits economic opportunities, feeding back into the loop of poverty and making escape an increasingly distant dream.

## Shattering the cycle: Where do we start?

For many of us caught in this relentless cycle, the first step to breaking free is acknowledgment - acknowledgment from governments, societies, and global organizations that the economic challenges faced by disabled individuals in the context of climate change are neither small nor isolated.

Concrete policies that focus on climate-resilient livelihoods are crucial. Education and vocational training programs must be designed keeping in mind the unique challenges faced by disabled individuals so that they can adapt to new forms of employment that are not threatened by environmental changes.

## We are more than our circumstances

Laxman's story, like many others, is not just a narrative of loss and despair. It is a testament to the indomitable human spirit, to the courage to keep dreaming even when the skies are grey. By addressing the complex web of disability, climate change, and economic instability, we don't just give people like Laxman a fighting chance; we affirm their right to dignity, to dream, and to live a life unbounded by their circumstances. We must act, not tomorrow, but in some distant future, but now. Lives are at stake, dreams are at risk, and time is running out. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

# Globally, 21 mn tonnes of plastics leaked into environment last year: OECD

By: Zumbish

In 2022, 21 million tonnes (MT) of plastics leaked into the environment globally, a new interim report has found. The report by the Intergovernmental Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was released on November 11, 2023, two days before the third session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution (INC3). The INC3 will be held in Nairobi, Kenya from November 13-19, 2023 for an international binding agreement on plastic pollution.

The interim report, *Towards Eliminating Plastic Pollution by 2040: A Policy Scenario Analysis*, included preliminary findings on the benefits of thorough actions as well as on the costs of delayed or limited action. The full report, containing a more in-depth analysis and more detailed policy guidance, will be published in the first half of 2024.

It provided a clear roadmap for governments and policymakers to tackle the full lifecycle by curbing production and demand, increasing circularity, closing leakage pathways and bolstering recycling rates.

Carrying on business as usual would be untenable, the report stated. Under the baseline scenario, plastics use would continue to grow, leading to a 50 per cent increase in leakage of macroplastics into the environment by 2040 — meaning about 30 MT of plastic would leak into the environment, of which 9 MT would enter aquatic environments, it said.

Burgeoning plastic use and waste volumes would amplify adverse consequences for the environment, climate and health, the report added.

Outcomes can be improved even with moderate international alignment of policy approaches that focus on downstream interventions in non-OECD countries and ambitious action across the lifecycle of plastics for OECD countries, the report suggested. Primary plastics use would stabilise at 2020 levels by 2040, said the report. However, in this scenario, plastic leakage would still be significant at 12 MT in 2040, it said.

The document also highlighted that global ambition with early, stringent and co-ordinated policy action could cut plastic waste generation in 2040 by a quarter below baseline.

It could virtually eliminate mismanaged waste by 2040 (from 119 to 4 MT), it suggested. As a result, plastic leakage would also be nearly eliminated (1.2 MT in 2040). Stocks of plastics in rivers and oceans, however, would still rise from 152 MT in 2020 to 226 MT in 2040 (74 MT less than in the baseline).

Such ambitious policy action would cost 0.5 per cent of global GDP in 2040, according to the report. However, these costs exclude the avoided costs of inaction and must be viewed in the context of vastly improved environmental out-

comes.

"A comprehensive approach including both upstream and downstream measures would limit the costs of the transition. Delayed action may have short-term economic benefits but would bear longer-term societal and environmental repercussions," the report said.

The report went on to suggest that the largest costs (as a share of GDP) of ambitious global action are projected for fast-growing countries with less advanced management systems. It hints at investment needs for waste collection, sorting and treatment amounting to over \$1 trillion between 2020 and 2040. This is for non-OECD countries combined. Meanwhile, it also recommended reducing waste generation to limit these costs, indicating that the costs of collection, sorting and treatment are contained. It further asserted that large financial needs and uneven distribution of costs imply a need for international co-operation.

"Significant technical and economic barriers must be overcome to eliminate leakage of plastics by 2040. This, including recycling breakthroughs and scaling up well-functioning international markets for scrap and secondary plastics," the interim report stated.

OECD Environment Director Jo Tyn-dall stated in the report:

Plastic pollution poses an increasing threat to the environment, impacting habitats and natural ecosystems, with consequences for sustainable economic growth and human wellbeing. As the negotiations for an international, legally binding treaty on plastic pollution unfold, there is a need for further evidence to inform decision-making.

The document raised concerns that despite increasing urgency to lower plastic pollution, current policies to stem plastic flows have proven to be insufficient. Therefore, the report presented four policy scenarios to tackle current challenges to reduce plastic pollution. These, it suggested, first include the most wide-ranging policy scenario that identifies a package of actions tackling the full lifecycle of plastics.

The package of actions, according to it, could nearly end plastic pollution by 2040, eliminating 115 MT in mismanaged waste by 2040. The given figure here refers to over 95 per cent of the current total waste.

The aforementioned scenario, as per the report, requires increased investments, international co-operation and support for less advanced economies in their transition to a plastic pollution-free environment. "Improved waste management systems alone would require an additional 1 trillion USD in investments over a 20-year period in non-OECD countries. The more moderate scenarios show that lower levels of ambition and international co-ordination on plastic pollution would allow plastics to continue to leak into the environment beyond 2040," the report said. (Courtesy: *Down To Earth*)

By: Deepa Padmanaban

Every morning, 47-year-old Naveen K walks along a 35-km stretch of the Kaveri River near his home in Amangala town, in the Kodagu district of Karnataka. He checks for illegal nets, as this part of the river is protected against fishing by the Coorg Wildlife Society, a non-profit organisation working to conserve wildlife in the region. Naveen is a small, independent farmer, who grows coffee and paddy on his one-and-a-half acre farm and depends on the rain for a good harvest. But over the last several years, changing rain patterns have affected the produce.

"In a good rain year, I get 30 quintals of paddy per acre," Naveen says. "But when there is not enough rain or too much rain, the yield drops by half." As a result, the income is not enough for his family of four. He has two daughters, one in Class 8 and the other in Class 11. To support his family, he also works as a guard with the Coorg Wildlife Society.

Kodagu district spans 4,102 km2. It is also known as Coorg, and lies in the Western Ghats at an elevation of 900m to 1,750 m. The region is an important biodiversity site, home to rare flora such as the endangered Myristicaceae swamps, and a variety of wildlife including elephants, tigers, rare amphibians, insects and the iconic Mahseer fish. The district is known for its cool climate (mean temperatures range from 20 degrees Celsius to 24 degrees Celsius), misty hills, lush green valleys, cascading waterfalls, and vast swaths of coffee plantations and paddy fields.

The district receives an average rainfall of 4,000 mm. But in the last three decades, the district has witnessed erratic rainfall. A study published in the *International Journal of Environment, Agriculture and Biotechnology* analysed recorded climatic data over 33 years from 1980 to 2014, and found that total rainfall in the district has decreased by 7.5%. The average rainfall from 1980-'85 was 2,599.6 mm, which decreased to 2,402.5 mm during the 2009-'14 period. There was a high variability of rain from month to month, a rise in temperature, and declining humidity levels.

Robusta, Arabica coffee hit

hardest

Chengappa PG, the author of the study and ex-vice chancellor at the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru, said, "This kind of variability in weather, especially the rise in temperature, affects crop production, especially Arabica coffee as it requires cool climate and is grown under shade. Robusta coffee is susceptible to both high rainfall and low rainfall as it needs an optimum water level." Karnataka state accounts for 60% of India's coffee production, of which 80% comes from Kodagu district, he pointed out.

In the 1980s, the proportion of Arabica to Robusta production in the district used to be 60:40. But now the proportion of Arabica production, considered to be more superior than Robusta, has fallen to 40%, Chengappa said. "The decline in rainfall is the major reason as it also mitigates the temperature changes. When there is not enough moisture in the soil, the nutrition won't be absorbed and the yield decreases." He added that the changing climate has caused an estimated decline of 8%-10% in overall coffee yield.

CP Aiyappa, secretary of the Coorg Wildlife Society, owns 30 acres of coffee plantation in Amangala. He said that rising temperatures due to climate change have made the coffee plant more vulnerable to pest attacks. The biggest threat to Arabica coffee is white stem borer, a beetle that eats up the main stems, while Robusta is susceptible to short hole borer and berry borer which eat into the shoot of the crop.

Kodagu district normally receives the southwest monsoon rains from June to August. "We don't have proper monsoons anymore, where the weather is cloudy, moist and raining from June to August, which the coffee plant requires," Aiyappa said. "The rains have been failing in June, so the coffee berry matures faster and there is more shoot growth, and so the pests have more food to grow on."

On the other hand, coffee needs a dry period from December to February, when the crop is harvested and set to dry. "Now, we don't have that gap of two months without rain that was the general pattern when people converted the land to coffee."

Deforestation raises tem-

perature

Large-scale land-cover changes in the Western Ghats leading to deforestation has contributed to an increase in mean temperatures by 0.5 degrees Celsius and decline in rainy days, according to a study by TV Ramachandran, Professor at the Center for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. Kodagu district has lost 66,892 ha of pristine forest cover, mainly due to infrastructure development driven by tourism and the expansion of plantations. The region had 32% of forest cover in 1973, whereas in 2018 the forest cover declined to 19%, which mainly came under protected areas.

"Large scale land cover changes involving native species forests to monoculture plantations, and land degradation leading to deforestation in the ecologically fragile Western Ghats is the prime factor responsible for micro-climate alterations threatening the sustenance of horticulture crops," Ramachandran said.

"We used to get more rain in June/July, but now there is a shift to August/September," Chengappa pointed out. "If one considers the long-term effect, the total rainfall amount has not changed much, but the pattern and intensity of rainfall has changed, so that affects the crop cycle."

Kushi Bheemaiah grows coffee, pepper and paddy on her 25-acre farm in the town of Siddapur in Kodagu district. She said that as the rains don't come in time in June, there's no waterlogging in the fields, which is essential to start work on paddy crops. "Because of the emotional connect to the land and what we do, we even pumped water for a few years from an irrigation tank where rain water collects," Bheemaiah said. But it was too much of an effort in doing it, both physically and emotionally, as the yield was less and whatever little they got was eaten by elephants. "So we have stopped growing paddy, partly because of the changing rain pattern and partly because of elephants."

## Floods, droughts, landslides

A 2022 study published in the *Indian Journal of Ecology* noted that this erratic pattern of rainfall in the district may also lead to flash floods or drought situations. Bharath AL, the au-

thor of the study by the National Institute of Hydrology, Belagavi, said, "The analysis showed that rainfall events which are more than 50 mm/day are set to increase in a few stations of the districts. This shows that the intensity of rainfall is increasing and thereby a chance of flood. On the other hand, the number of rainy days is decreasing after 2005." Bharath pointed out that lower intensity rainfall that allows the soil to retain water and contribute to groundwater is decreasing, thereby reducing the amount of water in streams with smaller catchment areas for irrigation.

Ganapathy, a farmer in Kushalnagar, uses borewell water to irrigate his three-acre farm where he grows coffee, pepper and arecanut. When there isn't enough rainfall and the groundwater runs low, he uses irrigation pump to pump water from the nearby stream. But often, even the stream water runs low. With not enough water to irrigate his farm, his yield drops from 30 quintals to 25 quintals per acre.

With changes in the land cover, the catchment loses its ability to retain water, and the water scarcity in turn affects small farmers, said Ramachandran. "Our study in the Western Ghats shows that when the catchment has native species vegetation of over 60% spatial extent, the rivers and streams are perennial and the earning of farmers is about ₹ 1.54 lakh per acre per year with multiple crops, as the water is available throughout the year." In contrast to this, farmers in the degraded catchment or in catchments dominated by monoculture plantations earn ₹ 32,000 per acre per year, as water is available in the streams for only four-six months.

Aiyappa said that many streams don't have enough water during the cultivation months. Earlier, by July-end, farmers would be done with sowing and transplanting of paddy. "But now, we have extremely dry spells followed by extremely wet spells after August, which is not helpful. The amount of rain we should get in a month falls in just two days, there are cloudbursts." When there is excess rainfall, the soil can't hold the moisture, and this not only affects the crops but also causes landslides and floods. In 2018, be-

tween August 15-17, Kodagu received 768 mm of rainfall.

As a result of the intense rain that fell over a period of 72 hours, Kodagu district witnessed severe landslides and flooding. The landslides damaged 48 villages of two taluks, Madikeri and Somwarpet. Twenty deaths were reported and nearly 130,000 ha of agriculture crops, coffee and other horticulture crops worth an estimated ₹ 506 crore were damaged. Four thousand houses were damaged and 800 homes were washed away.

## Unplanned development, catastrophic change

Rampant forest degradation due to unplanned developmental activities during the past three decades have resulted in severe calamity in Kodagu, an ecologically fragile region, Ramachandran's 2019 study, following the floods, said.

Back in 2012 the Gadgil committee, also known as The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, had recommended that 67% of the Western Ghats including the Kodagu region should be classified as Ecologically Sensitive Zones, and that all developmental activities in the area should be stopped. Later in 2014, the Kasturirangan report whittled down the area to be declared as Ecologically Sensitive to 37%, of which 20,668 sq km falls in Karnataka.

"The developmental activities and proposals are not in tune with either the Kasturirangan or the Madhav Gadgil committee reports," TV Ramachandran pointed out. "Large scale land cover changes are happening, with mushrooming of resorts even in the ecologically fragile valleys resulting in disrupting of stream networks, unscientific developmental activities evident from vertical cuts in the linear projects, and too many rail and road-widening projects beyond the carrying capacity of the region." As a result of all of this, escalating greenhouse gases will cause further changes in the climate. "Local people will lose their livelihood, life and property," he warned, "while decision makers, consultants and contractors will loot natural resources under the banner of 'developmental activities', and the state economy would lose the contribution of ecosystem services—climate moderation, water retention, etc." (Courtesy: *Scroll.in*)

More than 11,200 people, two-thirds of them women and minors, have been killed in Gaza

## Israeli forces raid Gaza's largest hospital, where hundreds of patients are stranded by fighting

**KHAN YOUNIS, Nov 15:** Israeli forces raided Gaza's largest hospital on early Wednesday, where hundreds of patients, including newborns, have been stranded with dwindling supplies and no electricity, as the army extended its control across Gaza City and the north.

Shifa Hospital has become a symbol of the widespread suffering of Palestinian civilians during the war between Israel and Hamas, which erupted after the militant group killed some 1,200 people and seized around 240 captives in a surprise Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel.

The hospital is also at the heart of clashing narratives over who is to blame for the thousands of deaths and widespread destruction in the besieged territory. Israel accuses Hamas of using Palestinians as human shields, while Palestinians and rights groups say Israel has recklessly endangered civilians as it seeks to eradicate the group.

Mohammed Zaqout, the director of hospitals in Gaza, said Israeli tanks were inside the medical compound and that soldiers had entered build-

ings, including the emergency and surgery departments, which house intensive care units. It was not clear if he was speaking from inside the compound.

"The occupation forces stormed the buildings," he said angrily over the phone. He said the patients, including children, are terrified. "They are screaming. It's a very terrifying situation ... we can do nothing for the patients but pray."

The Israeli military said it was carrying out a "precise and targeted operation against Hamas in a specified area in the Shifa Hospital." It said the soldiers were accompanied by medical teams and had brought medical supplies and baby food as well as incubators and other equipment.

Israel says Hamas has a massive command center inside and beneath Shifa, but has not provided visual evidence, while Hamas and the hospital staff have repeatedly denied the allegations. Hours before the raid, the United States said it had its own intelligence suggesting Hamas used Shifa and other hospitals — and tunnels beneath them — to support



military operations and hold hostages.

The military said that the forces raiding Shifa are also searching for hostages. The plight of the captives, who include men, women and children, has galvanized Israeli support for the war, and families and supporters of the hostages are holding a protest march from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Two and a half weeks after sending tanks and ground troops into northern Gaza, Israeli forces also claimed control of several key buildings and a downtown neighborhood in Gaza City.

Most of the hundreds of thousands of people living in Gaza City and surrounding areas have fled after weeks of

Israeli bombardments. Hardly any aid has been delivered to the north, which has been without power or running water for weeks.

More than 11,200 people, two-thirds of them women and minors, have been killed in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry in Ramallah, and two thirds of the territory's 2.3 million people have fled their homes. About 2,700 people have been reported missing, with most believed to be buried under the rubble. The ministry's count does not differentiate between civilian and militant deaths.

Almost the entire population of Gaza has squeezed into the southern two-thirds of the tiny territory, where conditions

have been deteriorating as bombardment there continues.

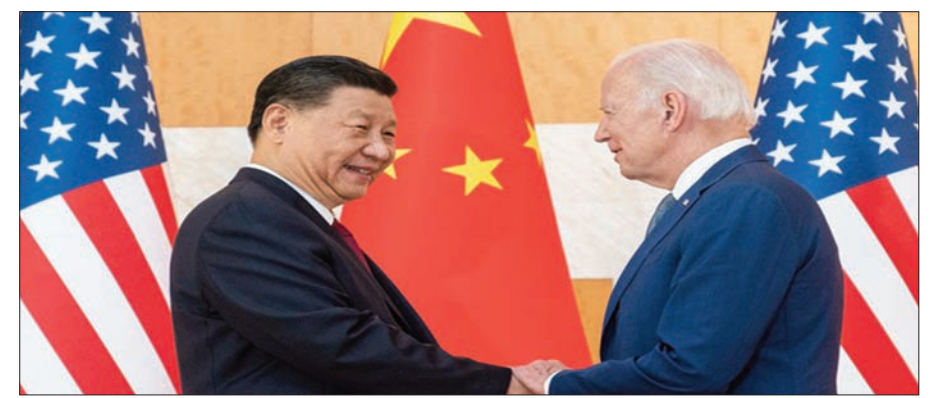
The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees said on Tuesday that its fuel depot in Gaza was empty and that it would soon cease relief operations, including bringing limited supplies of food and medicine in from Egypt for the more than 600,000 people sheltering in severely overcrowded U.N.-run schools and other facilities in the south.

"Without fuel, the humanitarian operation in Gaza is coming to an end. Many more people will suffer and will likely die," said Philippe Lazzarini, the commissioner-general of UNRWA.

Israeli defense officials changed course early Wednesday to allow some 24,000 liters (6,340 gallons) of fuel in for humanitarian efforts, officials said. Earlier, they repeatedly rejected allowing fuel into Gaza, saying Hamas would divert it for military use.

COGAT, the Israeli defense body responsible for Palestinian affairs, said it would allow U.N. trucks to refill at the Rafah crossing on the Egyptian border later Wednesday. (AP)

## China, US pledge to step up climate efforts ahead of Biden-Xi summit and UN meeting



**BEIJING, Nov 15:** China and the U.S. have pledged to accelerate their efforts to address climate change ahead of a major U.N. meeting on the issue, making a commitment to take steps to reduce emissions of methane and other greenhouse gases besides carbon dioxide.

The joint announcement came on the eve of a summit between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping that is aimed at stabilizing the rocky U.S.-China relationship.

Cooperation between the world's two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases is considered vital to the success of the U.N. climate talks opening in two weeks in Dubai.

It wasn't clear earlier this year whether the two governments would cooperate, given a sharp deterioration in ties over other issues including technology, Taiwan and Russia's war in Ukraine. Both countries "are aware of the important role they play" and "will work together ... to rise up to one of the greatest challenges of our time," they said in a statement released Wednesday in Beijing and Tuesday evening in Washington.

They reiterated a pledge made by the Group of 20 nations, of which both are members, to pursue efforts to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030. The two countries agreed to restart talks on energy

policies and launch a working group on enhancing climate action in what they called "the critical decade of the 2020s." Experts say the world needs to act now to have even a chance of achieving the agreed-upon goal of limiting the average increase in global temperatures to well below 2 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit).

A climate expert described the agreement by both countries to include methane in their next climate action plans as "a major step." The U.S. and China also said that they and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) would host a meeting on methane and other greenhouse gases during the upcoming talks in Dubai.

"Methane has been notably absent from China's previous commitment," David Waskow, the international climate director at the World Resources Institute, said in a statement. He noted that China is the world's largest emitter of methane and that "serious actions to curb this gas is essential for slowing global warming in the near-term."

The Chinese government issued an action plan last week to control methane emissions, including the development of an accounting and reporting system for emissions. Major emitters include coal mines, oil and gas fields, farms, landfills and sewage treatment plants. (AP)

## Putin approves new restrictions on media coverage ahead of Russia's presidential elections



**MOSCOW, Nov 15:** Russian President Vladimir Putin has approved changes to the law that governs presidential elections putting new restrictions on media coverage, local news agencies reported on Tuesday.

The changes come ahead of the election to be held in March in which Putin, who has ruled Russia for the last 24 years, is expected to seek a new six-year term.

Putin, 71, has not declared whether he will run, saying he will announce that only after the parliament formally sets the election date.

Under the amendments that he approved, only journalists contractually employed by registered media outlets will be allowed to cover election commission meetings, potentially barring freelancers and independent journalists.

The changes also include barring any coverage of the commission's actions on military bases or in areas under martial law without prior permission of regional and military authorities.

In addition, the changes prohibit campaign activity on "blocked resources." Under an intensifying crackdown on opposition and information flow, Russia has banned an array of websites and services including Facebook and Instagram, although many people use VPNs to circumvent the blockage. (AP)

## North Korea says it tested new solid-fuel engines for intermediate-range ballistic missiles

**SEOUL, Nov 15:** North Korea on Wednesday said it successfully tested new solid-fuel engines designed for intermediate-range ballistic missiles as it continues to work on developing nuclear-capable weapons targeting its rivals in the region.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said the country's military scientists tested the first-stage and second-stage missile engines on Saturday and Tuesday. The report did not say when the new missile system was expected to be completed.

The North's existing intermediate-range missiles, including the Hwasong-12 that may be able to reach the US Pacific territory of Guam, are powered by liquid-fuel engines, which need to be fuelled before launch and cannot stay fuelled for long periods of time.

Missiles with built-in solid propellants can be made ready to launch faster and are easier to move and conceal, which theoretically makes it harder for adversaries to detect and pre-empt the launch in advance.

The recent tests were an "essential process for further enhancing the strategic offensive capabilities of (North Korea's) armed forces in the light of the grave and unstable security environment facing the country and the future military situation in the region, in which the enemies will get more vicious in their military collusion and nexus," KCNA said. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ramped up his weapons demonstrations, including events he described as simulated nuclear attacks on the South.

He also authorised his military to launch pre-emptive nuclear strikes against enemies if it perceived Pyongyang's top leadership to be under threat. South Korea has responded by expanding its combined military exercises with the United States, which Kim has condemned as invasion rehearsals, and enhancing trilateral security cooperation with Japan.

Seoul is also seeking stronger public assurances from Washington that it would swiftly and decisively use US nuclear weapons to protect the South in case of a North

Korean nuclear attack.

During their annual security talks this week, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and South Korean Defence Minister Shin Won-sik signed an updated bilateral security agreement with the aim of more effectively countering North Korea's evolving nuclear and missile threats.

Shin said the new document spells out that the United States would mobilise its full range of military capabilities, including nuclear, to defend the South in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack.

He also said the document would be a template for the allies to strategize how South Korea could assist US nuclear operations in such events with its conventional capabilities but didn't elaborate further.

North Korea earlier this year revealed its first solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile, the Hwasong-18, which has the potential ability to reach deep into the US mainland. Analysts say the North has to clear further technological hurdles to have a viable nuclear arsenal that could threaten the United States.

All of North Korea's ICBM tests so far were done at high angles to avoid the territory of neighbours, so it's not yet clear whether the country has mastered the technology to ensure its warheads would survive atmospheric re-entry well enough to precisely hit their targets.

North Korea's claims that the engine tests were successful suggest the country will flight-test the new missile in the coming weeks, said Cheong Seong-Chang, an analyst at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea.

The missile could pose a potential threat to Guam, a major US military hub, and to American military bases in Japan, which may add to Japan's urgency to upgrade its military and further expand three-way security cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo, Cheong said.

The latest steps in North Korea's weapons development follow concerns about a potential arms alignment with Russia, in which North Korea provides munitions for Russia's war in Ukraine in exchange for Russian technology transfers that would upgrade Kim's military nuclear programme. (AP)



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## ASEAN defence chiefs call for the fighting in Gaza to cease, but they struggle to address Myanmar



**JAKARTA, Nov 15:** Southeast Asian defence ministers called on Wednesday for the fighting in Gaza to cease immediately and for the world to collaborate on setting up humanitarian aid corridors in Gaza, but they struggled on how to address the prolonged civil strife in Myanmar.

The Myanmar crisis was high on the agenda when defence chiefs from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations met in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. The 10-nation bloc includes Myanmar, but its defense ministers were again barred from attending this week's meetings due to the military government's failure to comply with a five-point emergency plan drafted to ease the violence.

"We are saddened by a deteriorating situation in Myanmar," Indonesia's Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto said in an opening speech. "Indonesia encourages other ASEAN member states to support Myanmar to find a peaceful and durable solution to the current situation."

ASEAN has been trying to enforce the plan it forged with Myanmar's top general in 2021, which calls for an immediate end to the violence, the start of talks brokered by a special envoy among contending parties, and the delivery of aid to displaced peo-

ple. But Myanmar's military government has done little to enforce the plan.

The defense ministers on Thursday will be meeting with ASEAN's eight dialog partners, with the territorial disputes over the South China Sea expected to be raised. Subianto in his speech also touched on Israel's war with Hamas. "Indonesia is deeply saddened by the deteriorating situation in Gaza, particularly the horrid humanitarian conditions," he said, adding violence against civilians "must stop."

"Conversely, efforts to achieve a cease-fire must continue and the safe passage of humanitarian aid must be wide and accelerated," he said.

ASEAN has not made a formal statement about the Israel-Hamas war, which is not surprising given each member of the bloc sees the conflict differently.

Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei — the three ASEAN members with Muslim-majority populations where religion is significant in domestic politics — have long been strong supporters of the Palestinians' struggles. None of them has diplomatic relations with Israel. Malaysia's Defense Minister Mohammad Hasan in his speech on Wednesday condemned the bombings of civilians, homes and hospitals in Gaza and "the consequential massacre of innocent lives, children, women and men."

Conversely, Singapore took a firm position against Hamas and strongly condemned the attacks the militant group launched inside Israel on Oct. 7, starting the war. Singapore has close defense relations with Israel, and its strong stance against Hamas leaves it out of step with its larger Muslim-majority neighbors.

"The more important lesson for us is that peace can be stolen or lost very quickly," said Ng Eng Hen, Singapore's defense minister.

"While we are now a relative area of peace and security, we can lose it if we as leaders in our nations do not pay attention to the deteriorating situation in the Middle East and Asia." (AP)

## NY State Governor Hochul signs legislation making Diwali a holiday in NYC public schools

**NEW YORK, Nov 15:** In a historic move, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul has signed legislation making Diwali a holiday for public schools in the major American city.

"New York City is rich in different religions and cultures, and we're taking an important step to recognise and celebrate this diversity in the school calendar," Hochul said on Tuesday.

The legislation requires that all public schools in New York City be closed on the "15th day of the eighth month of the Indian calendar in each year, which is known as Diwali," a press release issued by Hochul's office said.

Hochul said that the legislation to designate Diwali as a New York City school holiday is "an opportunity for our children to learn about and celebrate traditions from across the world."

Hochul signed the legislation during a special reception at the Hindu Temple Society of North America in Flushing here to commemorate Diwali.

In a post on X, Hochul said that she believes a celebration of light should not be commemorated in the dark. "That's why tonight, we took action to bring people together. As we gathered to celebrate Diwali, I was proud to sign historic legislation making Diwali a New York City public school holiday!"

According to the New York City Department of Education, there were 1,047,895 students in the NYC school system, the largest school district in the United States, in 2022-23.

Of those students, 16.5 per cent were Asians. There are 1,867 schools within the Department of Education as of Fall 2022, including 275 charter schools. The press release said that the legislation amends the education law to declare Diwali a holiday for New York City public schools.

"Many people of the Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist faiths in New York City and throughout the state observe the festival of Diwali and more than 1 billion people around the world celebrate this holiday," the release added.



New York State Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar, who is the first Indian-American and first Hindu elected to New York State Office and led efforts to make Diwali a school holiday in New York City, said generations of New Yorkers to come will now observe Diwali, the Festival of Lights.

"By signing my bill, we say to over 600,000 Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist New Yorkers, 'We see you, we recognise you, and Diwali is an American holiday'," Rajkumar said. Rajkumar said she was proud to lead and win the fight for the Diwali School Holiday this year.

"Today, my historic Diwali bill is officially signed into law," she said as she thanked Hochul for signing "my momentous bill." Rajkumar noted that for over two decades, the South Asian community has lobbied for the Diwali holiday. "With the signing of my bill, we have lit an everlasting lamp in the hearts and minds of all New Yorkers. This is an achievement that will outlive me," she said.

New York State Senator Joseph Addabbo said that in this time of "local and global racism and anger," Diwali's message is critically important and needed. "Diwali is a joyous occasion that holds immense significance for millions of people around the world and in our state. As we come together to commemorate this festival, we are reminded of the

Diwali holiday's message - the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil," Addabbo said.

"The Diwali celebration not only represents the rich cultural heritage of our diverse community but also serves as a reminder of the values that bind us together. It reminds us of the importance of compassion, kindness, and understanding in our interactions with one another," he said.

Addabbo voiced appreciation for Hochul's approval to acknowledge Diwali as a school holiday and commended Rajkumar for her initiative in passing the legislation in the Assembly and working with his legislative team in passing the bill in the Senate. New American Voter Association President Dr Dilip Nath said in the release he is proud to see Hochul finally fulfilling a long past Diwali recognition holiday into law. "On the day of the Diwali so no student will have to choose between celebrating with their family or their school obligations."

Indian Diaspora Council International President Ashook Ramasaran termed the signing of the legislation as a "significant achievement following decades of grassroots efforts" in New York.

Ramasaran said in the press release that Diwali is the "triumph of light over darkness, of good over evil" and its lessons are more relevant as turmoil, inhumanity and divisiveness impact many people worldwide.

Bangladesh Puja Ujjapan Parishad New York President Bhajan Sarker said the 300,000 New Yorkers who celebrate Diwali will now be able to celebrate it with their entire families without being forced to forgo sending their children to school."

Nepali Community Leader and Executive Member of the Hani Nepali NabarajKC said, "On behalf of the Nepali Community we are profoundly grateful to our beloved Governor Kathy Hochul for recognising the Hindu community and Diwali festival of lights." (PTI)

## Zeliang flags off tribal march in Kohima

Marks importance of remembering tribal leaders who may have been overlooked in the broader context of India's independence struggle



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIMAPUR, Nov 15:** Nagaland deputy chief minister flagged off the Tribal March of Jan Jatiya Gaurav Divas 2023 in Kohima on Wednesday.

Speaking at the flag-off ceremony, Zeliang highlighted the significance of November 15 as a

day dedicated to honouring the contributions of tribal freedom fighters. He noted that this date coincides with the birth anniversary of Birsu Munda, a prominent tribal freedom fighter.

He emphasised the importance of remembering tribal leaders who may have been

overlooked in the broader context of India's independence struggle. Zeliang urged the Naga community to trace and document the lives and contributions of such personalities from the community.

Wishing success of the Tribal March, he hoped that the event

would foster unity and a sense of brotherhood among the tribes. He also encouraged the defeat of tribalism and the promotion of unity among the Naga people.

In the keynote address, secretary of tribal affairs department Angelina Tajen acknowledged the significant contributions of tribals in nation-building, culture, heritage, freedom struggle, values, national pride, and hospitality. She highlighted the government's recognition of tribal contributions, leading to the implementation of various welfare schemes for tribal communities.

Tajen said the Jan Jatiya Gaurav Divas 2023 would be a 15-day celebration, featuring various activities and showcasing the unique culture, traditions, foods, arts, and crafts of the tribal communities. She expressed hope that the celebration would inspire and acknowledge the sacrifices and legacy of the tribals.

## Nagaland getting ready to welcome visitors to Hornbill Festival

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Nov 15:** The Nagaland government has pulled up its socks for the ensuing Hornbill Festival in December. Accordingly, 26 hotels in Kohima, 71 in Dimapur, and 10 in Chümoukedima, along with 75 homestays, have been registered with state department of tourism.

Additionally, two registered campsite facilities along with 42 tour operators have been approved by the government for the festival which will commence from December 1 and continue till December 10.

Official sources stated that some individuals registered with the department are under the mistaken belief that benefits would automatically follow registration, which he said was an incorrect assumption on their part.

As homestays had evolved beyond mere accommodations for guests and had become platforms to showcase local cuisines, art, culture, and traditions, the official stated that the department was actively promoting the establishment of more homestays.

Sources further said that rural tourism and farm stays, which highlighted the traditional agriculture and way of life, were gaining popularity among tourists and researchers.

Dr Keneilhoulie Medom, owner of Medom's BnB homestay situated in the heart of Kohima town that has an amazing view of the state capital and has avid travellers frequenting traveling, and stays booked the whole year, claimed that he was among the few people who had initiated the concept of homestay in Nagaland a decade back.

Describing the concept of homestay, he said he had passion both



for cooking and engaging with new individuals, coupled with a keen interest in exploring diverse cultures. Stating that there was surplus of rooms in his house, he mentioned that he shared these and embarked on renovating the house into a homestay.

Over time, he said he learned that tourists increasingly favoured homestays over hotels, and observed a rising demand for this accommodation option. He stressed introducing more homestays in the future to meet the growing demand of visitors.

He recalled that in the early stages he relied on word-of-mouth to promote his homestay. However, a friend introduced him to Airbnb, and he said subsequently registered his homestay on the platform.

Referring to the challenges encountered, he mentioned that numerous tourists, primarily from mainland India, often struggled to grasp the homestay concept and anticipated a level of service comparable to a 5-star hotel. He emphasised educating guests about the homestay experience and highlighted the necessity for hospitality training for both hosts and guests.

Medom claimed that he had even proposed simplifying the pro-

cedure and suggested the establishment of a separate LDA or UDA to aid people in homestay registration.

The 10-day festival at Kisama's Heritage Village brings together all tribes of Nagaland to exhibit their cultural richness, significantly boosting the state's tourism.

In 2022, 1,40,299 visitors graced the mega festival held from December 1 to 10. Of these, 90,860 were local visitors, 48,413 domestic tourists, and 1,026 were international tourists.

The final day witnessed the highest single-day attendance — 22,546 visitors, comprising 7,894 domestic tourists and 67 international visitors. In 2018, the number of domestic tourists was 1,01,588, while foreign visitors numbered 5,010. This figure rose to 1,25,949 in 2019, with foreign tourists numbering 5,568.

In 2020, domestic tourism dropped to 5,285, with only 68 foreign tourists. However, a significant increase was observed in 2021, reaching 23,968 domestic tourists and 325 foreign tourists.

In 2022, the number of domestic tourists surged to 97,421, and foreign tourists increased to 2,923, as per the data provided by the department of tourism.

## VBSY launched for tribal districts of Nagaland

**KOHIKA, Nov 15:** The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra (VBSY) for tribal districts of Nagaland was launched on Wednesday. State Prabhari and Secretary cum COE, National Recruitment Agency, Sanjeeb Kumar Mishra formally launched it from Indisen village in Dimapur district. Dimapur deputy commissioner Dr Tinojongshi Chang, DDG Shipping Dr Raut Pandurang, who is also the district Prabhari and a host of officials from both Central and state government departments, beneficiaries of Central welfare schemes, local leaders, villagers and students attended the programme. In his speech, Mishra said the pan India VBSY is an ambitious programme of the Central government which aims to propel India to a developed country status by the year 2047, a hundred years after independence. The first phase of the tribal campaign will be carried out in three districts of Nagaland - Dimapur, Tuensang and Mokokchung. Four VBSY outreach vans, two for Dimapur district and one each for Tuensang and Mokokchung will cover the three districts in the tribal areas campaign. (PTI)

## Third Shillong Literary Festival gets underway

The festival promises a dynamic lineup of over 60 literary intellectuals

**SHILLONG, Nov 15:** The third Shillong Literary Festival has been inaugurated, transforming the serene backdrop of Wards Lake or the Nan Polok, into a vibrant hub of intellectual discourse.

Running until November 16, 2023, the festival promises a dynamic lineup of over 60 literary intellectuals, featuring more than 30 sessions encompassing author conversations, storytelling, interactive sessions, book launches, open mic performances, and captivating photography exhibitions.

Delivering a speech on the occasion, Tourism Minister Paul Lyngdoh emphasized that the government is seriously endeavouring to create more opportunities, more outlets, more platforms.

He said, "Let us ensure that we can reverse what a famous poet once said - the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. It is time that the educated and the enlightened do not shy away from public discourses on matters of real importance."

For a society to be progressive, I would urge upon all of you who are thought leaders, who are people with substance, people who



can add and contribute to the growth trajectory of our very beautiful state, to let us join hands and ensure that our efforts do bear fruit. I am so inspired; I will certainly come back on one of these sessions not as a politician but as a writer and a poet."

Dr Vijay Kumar D, commissioner & secretary, government of Meghalaya, expressed hope that festivals and tourism to become a huge growth engine for the state and to keep

the youth engaged wherein such festivals are opportunities to provide platforms for creative talents.

He said, "Tourism and the creative economy emerge as crucial drivers for Meghalaya's growth, given the state's well-known natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and overall richness. Deliberations within the tourism department and state government have long revolved around building Megha-

## Former Manipur CM raises concern on children affected in violence

**IMPHAL, Nov 15:** Former Manipur chief minister and senior Congress leader Okram Ibobi Singh stressed the urgent need for taking up a special measure for children affected by ongoing violence in Manipur.

Ibobi Singh was talking to the media on the sideline of the celebration of the 134th birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India which the country, celebrated as Children's Day at Imphal Congress Bhavan recently.

As per a government report, over 12,694 children affected by the ongoing violence erupted on May 3 last are lodging at different relief camps across the violent affected districts.

The former chief minister said that being unable to resolve the crisis even after more than six months is a very unfortunate one.

"If there is a problem, to find ways to resolve the problems is very much a must and it is an indispensable task of the government to find the ways," he said.

"However, even after more than six months, both the Centre and the state government are not taking up any step to resolve the crisis," he lamented.

"In such a situation, there is the need for a concerted effort to resolve the crisis with the notion that there is no room for violence in a democratic country," he added.

The violence erupted on May 3 last and rendered homeless to thousands of people after their houses were torched. Thousands of people are currently taking shelter at various relief camps.

Hundreds of children are among



the displaced people taking shelter in the relief camps. Most of the children suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder owing to their exposure to the violence coupled with prolonged confinement to the relief camp made the children, he observed.

The former chief minister drew the attention of the state government to take up special measures for these children affected by the violence to address their emotional toll.

He said that there is the urgent need for taking up certain steps to address the plights of the children affected by the violence as they are prone to suffering from mental health problems.

He observed that many children staying in the relief camps are suffering from mental trauma. In such a situation, the government needs to give special emphasis to ensure the children have a normal life.

The government must take this condition of the children seriously as they are the future pillars of the nation, Ibobi also said.

Reiterating that a concerted ef-

fort is the need of the hour, the former chief minister said that all should support the efforts to resettle the displaced people.

The Congress supported various programmes initiated by the government for the welfare of the displaced people staying in the relief camps, he said.

"However, the Congress would like to suggest that instead of constructing temporary shelter houses for the displaced people, it would be better on the part of the government to take up a long lasting arrangement," he suggested.

Earlier, prominent leaders of the Congress including MPCC president K Meghachandra, CLP leader and former chief minister O Ibobi, CWC member Gaikhangam and other led the party members and workers in paying floral tribute to former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on his birth anniversary at Congress Bhawan, Imphal. To mark the celebration of Children's Day, party leaders and members also visited some relief camps and offered Children's Day gifts to the children staying there. (NNN)

## Tripura govt working on mission mode to implement welfare schemes: CM



**AGARTALA, Nov 15:** Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Wednesday said his government is working on a 'mission mode' to implement the welfare schemes of the central and state for the benefit of the people.

Apart from the centrally sponsored flagship schemes, the BJP-led government in the northeastern state has introduced 33 programmes for the overall development of the people.

"... We are working on 'mission mode' to reach to the last mile men with the flagship schemes of the central and state," he said during a programme of Janajati Gourav Diwas at Rabindra Bhavan.

Janajati Gaurav Diwas is observed to mark the birth anniversary of Birsu Munda, a tribal freedom fighter who fought against British rule.

"The main objective of observing the programme is to highlight the contribution of tribal people in the country's freedom struggle and their lifestyle, tradition, rich heritage and educational value",

he said.

On the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, the chief minister said the state will carry out the programme with full force to make people aware of the welfare activities of the Centre and the state government.

"From district to sub-division and block, the officers will visit people at their homes to find out if there is any one left out. The officials will also identify the beneficiaries, record their experiences and list benefits they have got in regard to quality education, drinking water, forest dwellers right act and many more", he said.

Saha also rolled out 'Prati Ghare Sushan' phase II to reach to the people to ensure no household is left out of government benefits be it state or the Centre.

The month-long outreach programme which was implemented across the state was successful. "During the programme, the officials will conduct health and administrative camps at the people's doorsteps to provide various services to the residents", he said. (PTI)

## Community level activities held in Meghalaya

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Nov 15:** The Meghalaya Early Childhood Development Mission (MECDM), in collaboration with the departments of social welfare and the Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society (NRLM), organised a series of community-level activities dedicated to raising awareness about the rights, education, and welfare of children across the State.

Aligned with the United Nations Children's Day theme for this year, 'For every child, every right,' the Mission underscored its commitment to achieving holistic development for all children in Meghalaya. The event featured a range of engaging activities designed to celebrate Children's Day and promote Early Childhood Development.

Activities included dance and music sessions, drawing competitions, musical chairs, spoon and marble races, jumping frog, breaking the balloons, and prize distribution. These initiatives were led by Village Organizations (VOs) in collaboration with Anganwadi workers, all centered around the theme of Early Childhood Development.

In some areas, special attention was given to educating children on essential topics such as proper handwashing, understanding the rights of children, and distinguishing between good touch and bad touch. Notably, the mothers of children in Thaiem Village, Mawshynrat, West Khasi Hills took a pledge to ensure nutritious food and quality education for their children. Going above and beyond, Phudmuri-1,2,3 demonstrated exceptional community support by providing refreshments, a gesture made possible through the contributions of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs).

laya into a distinguished tourist destination. The focus lies in strategically positioning the state and its cities

as hosts for high-value events, interactions, and engagements. The goal is to attract a specific target audience, niche tourists, and individuals capable of amplifying Meghalaya's image, fostering its reputation as a premier high-value tourist destination."

Among the distinguished personalities gracing the event are celebrated authors Janice Pariat, Rohan Chakravarty, Arghya Sengupta, Ambarish Satwik, Clemens Xavier, Parimita Singh, Naveen Kishore, Ankush Saikia, Jeyamohan, Sam Miller, Sanjoy Mukherjee, Nandini Oberoi, Desmond Khar-mawphlang, Bijoya Savian, Patricia Mukhim, Ian Lyngdoh, and Kyntiewbor War.

The Shillong Literary Festival 2023 is a literary odyssey that transcends boundaries, inviting participants to explore new dimensions of creativity, thought, and cultural exchange. As the festival unfolds, it promises to redefine the very essence of the literary experience, making it a must-attend event for enthusiasts and influencers alike. (NNN)

## M'laya govt to continue peace talks with HNLC



**SHILLONG, Nov 15:** Meghalaya deputy chief minister in-charge home (police) Prestone Tynsong recently said the government is waiting for the decision of the proscribed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) on the request for its top leaders to be present in the next round of peace talks.

Speaking to reporters, Tynsong said, "I will again reiterate that the state government and the central government are very firm and are very determined to continue the talk with the HNLC."

"We are still waiting now the communication from their (HNLC) side because since the top leaders still could not participate in the meeting so we have sent them (members of the HNLC) back with a request and our request is when they are ready to please let us know as the state government and central government are open and are waiting for the next talk," he added.

Tynsong then said, "Right now the talk has officially started only once and you knew it and that also with the second-rank leadership. Therefore, we requested in the second or the third meeting the top ranking people should be present for the talk and whatever issues you have to sit down across the table then we will come out with any kind of solution whatever issues are there." (NNN)

# Curtains down on MP poll campaign

## 2,533 candidates in race for 230 assembly seats

**BHOPAL, Nov 15:** High-decibel campaigning came to an end on Wednesday evening for the November 17 assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, where top leaders of contesting parties criss-crossed the state addressing rallies, holding roadshows, trading charges and making a slew of promises to seek votes for their candidates.

Electioneering ended in Madhya Pradesh at 6 pm except in Naxalites-hit districts of Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori, where campaigning drew to a close early at 3 pm.

A total of 2,533 candidates are in the fray for the 230 assembly seats in Madhya Pradesh, where the main battle for power is between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition Congress.

As many as 5,60,60,925 voters – 2,88,25,607 males, 2,72,33,945 females and 1,373 third gender persons – are eligible to exercise their franchise on Friday when single phase voting opens from 7 am to 6 pm at 2,049 polling stations in the state.

On the last day of campaigning, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, his party's general secretary Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Union minister Smriti Irani and Maharashtra Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis (all three from BJP) made last minute efforts to woo voters for their respective candidates.

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav also addressed

rallies on the last day.

On the penultimate day of electioneering, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed three election rallies and held a roadshow in Indore. Union Home Minister and BJP's chief strategist Amit Shah also addressed a similar number of gatherings and held a roadshow in Jabalpur on Tuesday.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and others, too, campaigned for their candidates on Tuesday.

Electioneering saw PM Modi, Shah, BJP president JP Nadda, Union minister Rajnath Singh, MP Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, among others, touring the state and addressing election meetings to drum up support for saffron party nominees in all the 230 seats.

Congress president Kharge, his predecessor Rahul Gandhi, party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra, MPCC chief Kamal Nath, former chief minister Digvijaya Singh, among others, addressed public rallies to garner support for their 230 candidates.

The campaigning saw a crack in the opposition INDIA alliance with its constituents Congress, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) fielding candidates against each other after failing to arrive at a pre-poll tie-up. Their leaders also engaged in a war of words.

Modi, the BJP's top campaigner, paid nine visits to MP and addressed 14 public meetings after election schedule was an-



nounced. The BJP is banking heavily on the Prime Minister's charisma and popularity to retain power.

The saffron party campaign was woven around slogans and chants of "MP Ke Mann Mein Modi" and "Modi Ke Mann Mein MP".

Modi, Shah and other BJP leaders accused the previous Congress governments in the state and at the Centre for allegedly indulging in corruption and loot of public money, and also spoke about the upcoming Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The BJP did not miss a chance to emphasise that it has pulled MP out of 'BIMARU' (laggard) category when power cuts, pathetic road conditions and water scarcity were the order of the day and cautioned people that if the Congress returns to power it will ruin the state again.

The Congress electioneering focused on promise of a caste sur-

vey and welfare of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) who constitute around 48 per cent of the state's population.

Priyanka Gandhi opened her party's campaign for MP on June 12 by launching a blistering attack on Bthe JP saying that 225 "scams" had taken place in the 220 months of BJP rule in the MP. She claimed only 21 government jobs were provided in the state by the BJP government in the last three years. The Congress campaign targeted the BJP government over unemployment, price rise and alleged that 50 per cent "commission raj" was prevailing in the state.

Electioneering brought to fore the fissures in the INDIA bloc ahead of next year's general elections with SP chief Akhilesh Yadav accusing the Congress of betraying him by not conceding six seats to his party as promised. The SP has fielded 71 candidates in MP. Similarly, an ally of the INDIA

grouping, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Singh Mann addressed more than 12 rallies and carried out roadshows to muster support for their 66 candidates.

Another constituent of the opposition grouping, Janata Dal (U), is contesting polls in 10 constituencies.

The Mayawati-led BSP has fielded 183 candidates, while its ally Gondwana Gantantran Party, a tribal outfit, has given tickets to more than 45 nominees. BSP president Mayawati addressed 10 rallies and attacked the Congress for not acting on the Mandal Commission report while in power at the Centre.

She and Akhilesh Yadav, at separate election meetings, blasted the Congress for seeking a caste-based survey now, saying the party did nothing on the issue when it was in power after independence.

The Congress, with 114 seats, emerged as the single largest party after the 2018 polls and formed the government with the help of BSP, SP and independent MLAs under the leadership of Kamal Nath.

However, the Nath regime collapsed in March 2020 after a rebellion by now Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and Congress MLAs loyal to him, paving the way for the return of the BJP government headed by Shivraj Singh Chouhan. (PTI)

Once OBCs, Dalits and tribals learn about their actual population, country will change: Rahul



**BEMETARA, Nov 15:** Reiterating his party's demand for a caste census, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said the day the Other Backward Classes, Dalits and tribals learn about their actual population, the "country will change forever."

Speaking at a rally in Chhattisgarh's Bemetara district ahead of the second phase of assembly elections on November 17, he accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of not taking a clear stand on the issue.

"Modi ji flies in an aircraft worth Rs 12,000 crore and wears new clothes every day. He was elected using the word OBC (on the promise of acting in their interest), and when the time comes to give rights to the OBCs, he says there is no OBC and the poor are the only caste in India."

"We will find out how many OBCs are there. Whether Narendra Modi carries out a caste census or not, the day the Congress comes to power again in Chhattisgarh, a caste survey will start here...the day our government comes to power in Delhi, the first signature will be on the (order directing) caste census," he added. It will be a historic decision, the Congress leader said.

"The day the OBCs, Dalits and

tribals of this country come to know about their actual population and true strength, this country will change forever. This will be the biggest revolutionary decision after Independence," he added.

While Congress governments waive the loans of farmers, the BJP-Union government waives the loans of "big industrialists like Adani", Gandhi alleged.

"Wherever we have a government, be it Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan or Himachal Pradesh, I told all the chief ministers that the Congress government will put into the bank accounts of farmers, labourers, mothers and sisters the same amount of money that the BJP gives to billionaires and big contractors," he said.

The economy is run by farmers, labourers, small shopkeepers and the youth, Gandhi said, adding that if the "money goes into Adani ji's pocket, Adani ji spends it in America" but if it goes to a farmer, it is spent within the village, and thus strengthens the rural economy."

Wednesday is the last day of campaigning for the second phase of elections for 70 assembly seats in Chhattisgarh. The first phase covering 20 seats was held on November 7. (PTI)

## Uttarkashi tunnel collapse: Heavy drilling equipment airlifted to aid rescue efforts on day 4, workers safe

**UTTARKASHI (U'khand), Nov 15:** A heavy drilling machine was airlifted from Delhi Wednesday to replace the "failed" equipment which was being used earlier to create a passage for 40 workers trapped in an under-construction tunnel that collapsed three days back, officials said.

The new machine, that landed at the Chinyalisaur helipad, over 30 kilometres from the tunnel on the Chardham route, is being put into service, amid apprehension by workers at the site on the progress of the multi-agency rescue operations.

Workers chanted slogans at the mouth of the tunnel on the Brahmakhal-Yamunotri National Highway, protesting over the "slow" pace of the operation to rescue their colleagues trapped inside for over 72 hours now.

The plan was to use an 'auger machine' to drill through the rubble of the tunnel's collapsed portion and insert 800-mm and 900-mm diameter sections of mild steel pipes – one after the other. Once this happens, the workers trapped

on the other side of the rubble can crawl out to safety.

But the first drilling machine turned out to be too slow and technical issues developed, the officials said. Also, falling debris inside the tunnel damaged the equipment and injured two rescue workers on Tuesday.

The replacement machine came in two parts on an Indian Air Force Hercules aircraft to Chinyalisaur on Wednesday afternoon and was being transported by road to the tunnel, about two hours away, Uttarkashi Superintendent of Police Arpan Yaduvanshi said.

"We will start installing it as soon as it arrives and in four-hours hours it will begin the drilling operation. With a capacity to penetrate 4-5 metres of rubble per hour, we can expect it to penetrate 50 metres through the rubble in 10 hours," NHIDCL Director Anshu Manish Khalkho said here.

A portion of the tunnel, part of the ambitious Chardham All-Weather Road project, collapsed on Sunday. The 30-metre collapsed section is 270 metres

from the mouth of the tunnel from the Silkyara side. Officials said the labourers were safe, and oxygen, electricity, medicines, food items and water were being supplied to them through pipes.

Khalkho, however, said it was not possible to specify a definite time-frame for the evacuation of the trapped labourers but effort was on to make a headway at the earliest and rescue them all safely. Constant communication is being maintained, he added.

According to a list of the trapped workers issued by the emergency operation centre, 15 are from Jharkhand, eight from Uttar Pradesh, five from Odisha, four from Bihar, three from West Bengal, two each from Uttarakhand and Assam, and one from Himachal Pradesh.

Tuesday's landslide and slow performance of the drilling machine deployed earlier hampered efforts to insert steel pipes through the tunnel's debris to create the passage, the NHIDCL director added. (PTI)

## 36 killed, 19 hurt as bus falls into gorge in J&K's Doda: Officials

**DODA (J&K), Nov 15:** At least 36 people were killed and 19 injured when a bus carrying passengers skidded off the road and rolled down into a 300-foot gorge in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district on Wednesday, officials said.

The bus bearing registration number JK02CN-6555 was reportedly carrying around 40 passengers, the officials said, adding that it skidded off the road near Trungal-Assar on the Batote-Kishtwar national highway and fell 300 feet downhill. A rescue operation has been launched and some bodies have been retrieved, they said.

"Saddened to share the update from DC #Doda Sh Harvinder Singh from the spot of the accident. Unfortunately 36 persons have died and 19 injured, out of whom 6 injured are serious. The injured are being shifted to GMC Doda and GMC #Jammu as per requirement. All possible help being provided. Sincere condolences to the bereaved families," Union minister Jitendra Singh, who is the member of Parliament from

Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag, said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah expressed grief over the incident.

"The bus accident in Doda, Jammu and Kashmir is distressing. My condolences to the families who have lost their near and dear ones. I pray that the injured recover at the earliest," Modi said on X.

He announced that an ex-gratia amount of ₹ 2 lakh each would be given to the next of kin of the deceased and ₹ 50,000 each would be given to the injured from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF).

"Deeply anguished to learn about the loss of precious lives due to a tragic bus accident at Doda, Jammu and Kashmir. The local administration is conducting the rescue operation in the gorge where the bus had the accident. My heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased and prayers for the speedy recovery of the injured," Shah said on X. (PTI)

## AAP says it will file complaint with EC on BJP's 'derogatory' social media campaign

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** The Aam Aadmi Party on Wednesday accused the BJP of running a "derogatory and misleading" campaign on social media against its national convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and said it will submit a complaint to the Election Commission.

Addressing a press conference, AAP leader Raghav Chadha said they have written to the EC seeking a meeting so that a party delegation can submit the complaint.

The development comes a day after the Election Commission issued a show-cause notice to Kejriwal for alleged disparaging remarks made by the party against the prime minister on AAP's social media handle and asked him to respond to the charge of poll code violation by November 16.

Chadha on Wednesday alleged, "The BJP has been running a misleading, defamatory campaign against Kejriwal. The Delhi BJP's handle on X shared a post on November 5 and it was also posted by the party's official handles in the election-bound states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh."

This is a violation of the model code of conduct, he alleged. (PTI)

## You cannot enforce peace from position of weakness: Dhankhar

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday said one cannot enforce and negotiate peace from a position of weakness and asserted that ideals such as 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' get meaning in physical terms only when they are elucidated from a position of strength.

He also said that India as a nation can be singled out as a consistent proponent of peace.

"This country has never engaged in expansion," he said.

Addressing the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue here, the vice president said India's firm commitment to 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (world is one family) is our way of life and dictates the country's global outlook.

"These great ideals that are wholesome

for the entire humanity get meaning in physical terms only when you elucidate them from a position of strength.

"Your strength will define global order, your strength will define peace," Dhankhar said.

He stressed that one cannot enforce or negotiate or aspire for peace from a "position of weakness".

He said India has a serious stake in peace, prosperity and stability in the Indo-Pacific region to ensure maritime trade and security.

By 2030, he said, India is poised to be the third-largest economy, this time overtaking Japan and Germany.

"As India's economic prowess grows, dotted with phenomenal growth and technical penetration, so do our stakes in global and regional affairs, and also the

challenges that come with it," Dhankhar said.

He said an expected outcome of such dialogues would be forging a convergence of all stakeholders to secure a stable and prosperous future in the vibrant landscape of the Indo-Pacific by ensuring peace.

"This landscape has enormous potential to enhance economies of the world," he said, adding that such a scenario "makes our lives better".

The conception of an ideation forum to dissect contemporary challenges to maritime trade and connectivity in the Indo-Pacific is thoughtful, particularly given the explosive global scenario with many cliff-hanging situations that potentially can derail the smooth sailing of trade and maintenance of connectivity in the region, he said. (PTI)

## Earth sciences minister Rijiju to represent India at oath-taking of Maldivian president-elect Muizzu

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** India on Wednesday announced that Union minister Kiren Rijiju will represent it at the oath-taking of Maldivian president-elect Mohamed Muizzu on Friday. The Maldives had invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the oath-taking of Muizzu.

Modi had attended the swearing-in ceremony of incumbent President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in September 2018. His visit to the Maldives had laid the foundation for strong ties between the two countries.

Widely seen as a pro-China leader, Muizzu defeated incumbent President Solih in the presidential runoff in September. After winning the election, Muizzu has maintained that he will keep his election promise of evicting Indian military personnel from his country. While Modi was the only head of a government to attend Solih's swearing-in ceremony, it is learnt that several foreign leaders including Chinese President Xi Jinping have been invited to Muizzu's oath-taking.

"At the invitation of the President-elect of Maldives Mohamed Muizzu, Kiren Rijiju, Minister of Earth Sciences will

visit Maldives from 16-18 November to represent India at the inaugural ceremony of the presidency," the MEA said.

It said the high-level ministerial representation from India at the inaugural ceremony underscores India's commitment to further deepen the substantive cooperation and robust people-to-people ties between the two countries.

"Maldives is India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region and occupies a special place in the prime minister's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the 'Neighbourhood First Policy'," the MEA said in a statement.

The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security have been on an upward trajectory in the last few years. Solih had been consistently focusing on boosting ties with India and was pursuing an "India First" policy. In May, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited the Maldives during which he handed over a fast patrol vessel and a landing craft to the island nation. (PTI)

## PM Modi releases ₹18,000-crore PM-Kisan installment

**KHUNTI/NEW DELHI, Nov 15:**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday released ₹18,000 crore as the 15th installment of the PM-Kisan scheme to more than 8 crore farmers across the country.

From a function celebrating the Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas in Jharkhand's Khunti district, the PM transferred the money digitally to the bank accounts of the farmers by clicking a button.

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) aims to support farmers in meeting their agricultural and other incidental needs. Under the scheme, financial assistance of ₹6,000 per year is transferred to the bank accounts of farmers in three equal installments. Before this installment, more than ₹2.62 lakh crore was transferred.

The Congress, meanwhile, questioned the release of the money just two days ahead of assembly elections in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, and wondered if it was "intentional". (PTI)

## India should spend US \$ 1 billion annually to train school teachers, says software icon Narayana Murthy

**BENGALURU, Nov 15:** Software icon NR Narayana Murthy on Wednesday called for spending USD one billion a year to train school teachers by 10,000 retired highly accomplished teachers from the developed world and from India in STEM areas (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). This course alone is not sufficient, Murthy said.

"We must show much respect and pay better salaries to our teachers and researchers. We must also provide better facilities to our researchers. We must honour them. They are role models for our youngsters. That is why we instituted the Infosys Prize in 2009. It is our small contribution to further the cause of research in India," he added.

One possible way of accelerating NEP's (National Education Policy) outcome is to invite 10,000 retired highly accomplished teachers from the developed world and from India in STEM areas to create 2,500 "Train the Teacher" colleges in the country's 28 states and eight union territories, Murthy said. This training programme should be year-long, he said in his remarks at a press conference here, where the Infosys Science Foundation announced the Infosys Prize 2023 in six categories.

"Experts tell me that each set of four trainers can

train 100 primary school teachers and 100 secondary school teachers a year. We will be able to train 250,000 primary school teachers and 250,000 secondary school teachers every year by this method," the founder of Infosys said. These trained Indian teachers can themselves become trainers over a period of five years.

"We should pay about USD 100,000 a year for each of these retired teachers. This twenty-year programme will cost us USD one billion a year and USD 20 billion for twenty years. Our nation, targeting a GDP of USD five trillion soon, will not find it a big financial burden," Murthy, who is the trustee of Infosys Science Foundation said.

If you think this is expensive, you may recall the words of Derek Bok, a former President of Harvard University, who said, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance," he noted.

On whether the Infosys Science Foundation will be making a strong recommendation on teachers' training and spending towards it, amid increased allocations on freebies by some governments and cut in budget on sci-

ence and R&D, Murthy said, he has made the suggestion with the spirit of betterment of the country, and there are experts who will evaluate it and decide.

"In an environment like India's there are always suggestions by various people, and I'm sure we have a set of experts who will evaluate those suggestions. And if it is found to be worthwhile, they may take it forward. Otherwise, it won't, that's natural. And therefore, I think all these suggestions should be welcomed, as long as it is given with the spirit of betterment of the country," he said.

Another Infosys co-founder and President, Board of Trustees of the foundation S Gopalakrishnan said, "as our GDP grows, we need to do something different and we can't continue the same way that we are progressing."

Pointing at the National Education Policy 2020, he said, "we would like to see faster implementation of that policy. It is not enough that we make a recommendation, its implementation is equally important. And it is in that spirit that Mr. Murthy, I believe, has made this recommendation."



Murthy, in his remarks highlighted that there are four stages in the invention and innovation lifecycle of a nation and said countries progress from stage one to stage four using education and research.

India's success in atomic energy, space exploration, vaccine production and distribution, green revolution, electric cars, and generic medicines puts us in stage two in most areas and in stage three in a few areas, he said. "We are still in stage one in some important areas like design of livable cities, pollution management, traffic management, and providing clean and safe water."

India must aspire to move to stage four in every area that affects the lives of our poorest citizens in the remotest part of the country, Murthy said, adding, improving the quality of research and education in our institutions of higher learning to generate good ideas and focusing on quick and high-quality implementation of those ideas form the solution to this aspiration.

Excellence in speed in idea generation and in execution of those ideas comes from a culture of high aspiration, curious and inquiring minds, a desire to achieve the best global standard of work productivity, the most stringent discipline and hard work, and the mindset of a nation that respects better-performing cultures and is ready to learn from them, he said. (PTI)

# PM launches ₹ 24,000-cr scheme for vulnerable tribal groups' welfare

**KHUNTI (JHARKHAND), Nov 15:** PM Narendra Modi on Wednesday promised to work on a 'mission mode' to deliver justice to deprived tribals and said he will repay the debt he owed to them while launching Rs 24,000-crore project for vulnerable tribal groups on the birth anniversary of tribal icon Birs Munda.

Apart from 'PM Janati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan', Modi also launched several schemes including 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra', a nationwide programme aimed at reaching out to citizens who are eligible for various central schemes but have not benefited so far.

He also emphasised the need to strengthen four pillars — women, farmers, youth and middle class and poor — for the development of the nation.

"I have come to the land of Birs Munda to repay the debt that I owe to the deprived," the prime minister said while addressing a public rally at Khunti Football Ground in Jharkhand after paying homage to the tribal icon at his birthplace Uli-hatu.

The PM reiterated, "True secularism comes only when all possibilities of discrimination against any citizen of the country is eliminated," adding that social justice is ensured only when the benefit of all the government schemes reaches everyone in the same measure.

Jharkhand was formed on Munda's birth anniversary in 2000.

The visit holds political significance too as the BJP aims to woo tribal voters in Jharkhand ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and assembly elections in other states having sizeable tribal population.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, Governor CP Radhakrishnan and Union Ministers Arjun Munda and Annapurna Devi were present on the occasion.

The prime minister underlined that a major foundation of the resolve for a developed India is 'PM Janman' or 'PM Janati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan' and noted that the budget for tribal welfare has been increased by six times.

He said under 'PM Janman', the government will reach out to tribal groups and primitive tribes most of whom still dwell in the forests.



"The government has identified 75 such tribal communities and primitive tribes who reside in more than 22,000 villages in the country. Earlier, governments did the work of connecting the figures, but I want to connect the lives, not the figures. With this goal, 'PM Janman' has started today," the prime minister said.

He said the Centre will spend ₹ 24,000 crore on this mega scheme.

About 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra', he said it will continue till January 26 next year starting today.

"In this journey, the government will go to every village of the country on mission mode and will make every poor and deprived person a beneficiary of government schemes," the prime minister added.

Modi recalled organising the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan in 2018 where 1,000 government officers were sent to villages to create awareness about seven prime government schemes and expressed confidence that the yatra will become equally successful.

"I look forward to the day when every poor will have a ration card for free ration, gas connection from Ujjwala scheme, electricity supplied to homes, tapped water connection, Ayushman card and a pucca house," he said.

He elaborated on his vision of every farmer and labourer joining the pension schemes and the youth availing the Mudra Yojna to realise their dreams.

"Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is

Modi's guarantee to the poor, deprived, women, youth and farmers of India," he said.

The prime minister conveyed his affinity for the deprived people and said they have become the priority for the government.

The PM emphasized the need to focus on the four 'Amrit Stambhs of Viksit Bharat' or pillars of a developed India — women power or 'nari shakti', food producers of India, youth of the country and India's middle-class and the poor.

He said during his regime, 13 crore people were taken out of poverty.

"Our 'seva kaal' began when our government came to power in 2014," he said pointing out that a large population of the country was deprived of basic amenities.

He said the poor had lost all hope due to the careless approach of previous governments.

"The present government began work with a spirit of service," he said adding that before 2014, the scope of cleanliness in villages was merely 40 per cent whereas today, the nation is aiming for saturation. Modi said LPG connections in villages rose from 50-55 per cent to 100 per cent, administration of live-saving vaccines reached 100 per cent children from 55 per cent, tap water connections reached 70 per cent of households from 17 per cent.

He said the government resisted the temptation of reaching for low-hanging fruits and attended to long-pending issues while citing the example of electrification of

18,000 villages.

Key parameters of education, health and ease of living were raised in 110 districts which were branded as backward, he added.

Referring to the inspiring struggle of Bhagwan Birsa Munda for tribal pride, the prime minister mentioned the association of the land of Jharkhand with innumerable tribal heroes.

He mentioned that many heroes such as Tilka Manjhi, Sidhu Kanhu, Chand Bhairav, Phulo Jhano, Nilambar, Pitambar, Jatra Tana Bhagat and Albert Ekka have made this land proud.

He said Adivasi warriors took part in the freedom struggle in every nook and cranny of the country and mentioned the contribution of Govind Guru of Mangarh Dham, Tantiya Bhil of Madhya Pradesh, Bhima Nayak, Martyr Veer Narayan Singh of Chhattisgarh, Veer Gundadhar, Rani Gaidinliu of Manipur, Veer Ramji Gond of Telangana, Alluri Sitaram Raju of Andhra Pradesh, Rani Durgavati of Gond Pradesh.

Lamenting the neglect of such personalities, the prime minister expressed satisfaction on remembering the heroes during the Amrit Mahotsava. Prime Minister expressed gratitude towards President Droupadi Murmu for her steadfast commitment to the development of tribal communities.

Modi also released ₹ 18,000 crore as the 15th installment of PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and said government is spending ₹ 15,000 crore on free vaccination of livestock. He added ₹ 13,000 crore was spent on the Vishwakarma Scheme.

He expressed delight that Jharkhand now has 100 per cent electrified rail routes and laid foundation stones for projects worth around ₹ 7,200 crore in the state.

Modi said in the last nine years, more than 300 universities and 5,500 new colleges have been established across the country.

He also touched upon the Digital India campaign and the country becoming the third-largest ecosystem in the world with more than one lakh startups. Modi also mentioned the inauguration of new hostels on IIM campus in Ranchi and IIT-ISM, Dhanbad. (PTI)

## CPI(M) expresses grief over death of veteran communist leader, freedom fighter N Sankaraiah

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** The CPI(M) expressed grief on Wednesday over the death of freedom fighter and veteran Marxist N Sankaraiah, one of the oldest communist leaders in the country. Sankaraiah was 101 years old.

In a statement, the politburo of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said Sankaraiah joined the freedom struggle when he was a student of the American College in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. He was arrested just before his final examinations and thus, could not get his degree. Altogether, Sankaraiah spent eight years in jail till the eve of independence.

He joined the Communist Party in 1940 and became one of the key organisers of the undivided party in Tamil Nadu.

Sankaraiah was one of the 32 National Council members who walked out of the party to form the CPI(M) subsequently. He made a major contribution to building the communist movement in Tamil Nadu and served as the secretary of the party's state committee from 1995 to 2002.

Sankaraiah was elected thrice to the Tamil Nadu Assembly in 1967, 1977 and 1980. He was the leader of the CPI(M) group in the Assembly in 1977 and 1980.

Sankaraiah was also involved in the development of a farmers' movement and became the general secretary and president of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS).

"Sankaraiah was a powerful speaker who could

communicate communist politics and policies effectively amongst the people. He was a dedicated Marxist who was devoted to the party and set high standards of integrity and simplicity in public life," the CPI(M) said.

"In his death, the communist movement has lost a leader with a glorious record, but his legacy lives on. The politburo pays homage to his memory and conveys its heartfelt condolences to his two sons and family members," it added.

The AIKS, the farmers' wing of the CPI(M), also condoled his death.

"Sankaraiah was a freedom fighter who had spent eight years in jail during the anti-imperialist independence movement and also after the country became free. His first prison term when he was a student had extended up to 18 months under the colonial Defence of India Act. He joined the Communist Party in 1940," it said in a statement.

"Sankaraiah till his last breath continued to guide and follow the latest developments in the country's democratic and progressive movements. With his passing away, the AIKS and the Left democratic movement have lost a towering leader for whom personal difficulties were always secondary and the cause 'Liberation of the working class, peasantry and all the oppressed' remained supreme. The AIKS will always remember him with love, respect and pride, and shall strive to fulfill his ideals of a democratic, secular and socialist society," it added. (PTI)

## Rahul attacks govt on Cyprus 'golden passport' scheme

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday questioned why the brothers of the 'param mitra' left India during 'Amrit Kaal' after reports that some businessmen, including Gautam Adani's elder brother Vinod Adani, were among the 66 Indians who got the "golden passport" in Cyprus.

"Why did the brothers of the 'param mitra' leave India during 'Amrit Kaal'? 'Golden passport' means a golden opportunity for theft — steal public money, form a shell company and spend abroad," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X.

He said this following media reports that Vinod Adani and Pankaj Oswal were among the 66 Indians who got the "golden passport". The "golden passport" scheme was also called the "Cyprus Investment Programme" after it was introduced in 2007 and it facilitated the grant of Cypriot citizenship to financially prominent individuals, thereby bringing in foreign direct investments (FDI) into the country.

Ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) IT cell in-charge Amit Malviya hit back at Gandhi, saying

it was under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government that the India-Cyprus tax treaty created a haven for tax evaders.

"You practically rolled out the red carpet for investors to bypass Capital Gains tax, with Cyprus not imposing such taxes either. Add to that the low withholding tax rate, and you have got yourself a perfect recipe for creating a tax haven, luring businesses and individuals to funnel money into Cyprus."

"But when the BJP led NDA came into power, we saw through this charade and took immediate, decisive action. In 2016, we didn't just tweak the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with Cyprus; we overhauled it. Our revision, effective retrospectively from Nov 2013, was a game-changer. It shifted the taxation of capital gains right back to where the income is made — the source country — rather than letting investors hide behind the veil of their country of residence. This wasn't just a policy shift; it was a direct challenge to the tax avoidance circus you had running," Malviya claimed in a post on X. (PTI)

## Arrested to silence my voice: AAP's Sanjay Singh

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Sanjay Singh has written a letter from jail addressed to the countryman, saying he was arrested to silence his voice. He was arrested on October 5 in a money laundering case related to the alleged excise scam in the city. He has been lodged in Tihar Jail. Singh, a vocal critic of the BJP and the government led by it, said he was arrested to silence his voice. With each passing day in jail, he said, his "determination and strength to fight authoritarian power" are increasing.

"Born out of the womb of struggle, the AAP has created hope and trust in Indian politics. Under Arvind Kejriwal's leadership, in just 10 years, the AAP became a national party. We formed the government in Delhi thrice, achieved a significant majority in Punjab, and succeeded in penetrating Gujarat. Since independence, numerous governments were formed across the country, but the commendable work in education and healthcare by the Kejriwal government became an example in the country and the world," he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## NHRC to hear over 40

The visiting panel will hear more than 40 pending cases of human rights violations during the camp sitting on Friday. The state authorities and the complainants concerned have also been asked to remain present during the hearing of the cases. The camp sitting aims to sensitise the state officials about human rights and also interact with the representatives of the NGOs and human right defenders.

The Commission will also hold a meeting with chief secretaries, DGPs and senior officers of the eight North Eastern states to review the action taken on its advisories and recommendations. It will also be meeting representatives of the NGOs and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).

The Commission will also brief the media about the outcome of the camp sitting to have a wider dissemination of information on the human rights issues of the states and the actions taken by the NHRC, the statement added. (PTI)

## Viksit Bharat Yatra begins

environment and forest department, along with Kati Ram Boro, speaker, Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) attended the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra programme at Barama Higher Secondary school playground in Baksa district. Likewise U G Brahma, minister for handloom and textiles, along with Pramod Boro, chief executive member, BTR attends the programme at South Kashibari playground in Kokrajhar district.

In Karbi Anglong, Jogen Mohan, minister for Revenue and Disaster Management and Hill Areas Development, Tuliram Ronghang, chief executive member, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and other senior government officials were present during the inaugural ceremony at Manja. The Yatra aims to bring essential services to all eligible beneficiaries and the focus is on creating awareness and facilitating the last mile delivery of benefits to citizens.

## Over 12 cr adivasis have

Birs Munda, the tribal icon whose birth anniversary is celebrated as the 'Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas', at the village. Sonowal also relished a sumptuous meal, with many dishes from adivasi cuisine, during his visit to the village, the release added. (PTI)

## NASDAQ can play key

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, he said, has already talked about putting rules in place that would allow Indian companies to list in the United States. "We have over a hundred Israeli companies that are listed in the United States. That's done with complete cooperation with the Israeli government and also with the Tel Aviv stock exchange. Their view is that capital from the United States through IPOs at NASDAQ goes back to their country and helps grow their economy. It makes the pie bigger for everyone. And I think we could have a similar dynamic in India if the rules allow it," Knight said in response to a question.

The NASDAQ official said there is a fairly obvious focus on India now as it becomes more difficult to invest in China. "So it's a natural progression and what we see in our own company and in the companies who list on NASDAQ is an increased interest in having a more secure supply chain and investing more in India," he said. The US and India, Knight said, are making a major effort to engage through cooperation to create opportunities for the people of both countries.

"Growth and jobs are important to both the countries. And those are a product often of early stage high growth companies. The conditions to create those companies and for those companies to be successful are sometimes hard to duplicate. We have them here in Silicon Valley in the United States. India has it in certain parts of its country, but we want to broaden that opportunity, learn from each other," he said. (PTI)

## Two more Myanmar soldiers

it is difficult to predict the future," he said. Officials said around 5,000 people from Khawimaw, Rihkhawdar and neighbouring villages in Myanmar's Chin state have fled and sought shelter in Zokhawthar following gunfight between the Myanmar army and PDF.

Champhai Deputy Commissioner James Lalrinchhana said that the gunfight began on Sunday evening and continued till Monday evening after the PDF attacked two military camps at Khawmaw and Rihkhawdar in Chin state close to the Indian border. Mizoram shares a 510-km-long porous international border with Myanmar. The north-eastern state has hosted more than 31,000 refugees from the neighbouring country, who fled after the military coup in February 2021, before the recent clashes. The Myanmar nationals, who took shelter in Mizoram, are of the Chin community. The Chins and Mizos belong to the same Zo ethnic group. (PTI)

## JP Nadda ridicules Congress

"The Congress neither spared the sky nor sea or land (referring to alleged scams during its rule). There is no corruption which it has not committed," he added. The BJP president attacked the Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government over the Mahadev betting app row, liquor scam and alleged irregularities in state public service commission recruitments and cow dung procurement.

Of the 90 assembly constituencies in the state, the second phase of voting on Friday will be held in 70 of them spread across 22 districts. The first phase of voting on November 7 had covered 20 seats, most of them located in Naxalite-affected areas. (PTI)

## Kedarnath shrine closes for winter

**RUDRAPRAYAG, Nov 15:** The portals of Kedarnath were on Wednesday closed for the winter season on the occasion of Bhaitai Dooj. The doors of the Himalayan temple, dedicated to lord Shiva, were closed at 8.30 am amid worship and traditional rituals.

More than 2,500 pilgrims attended the closing ceremony braving the severe early morning cold. Badrinath-Kedarnath temple committee chairman Ajendra Ajay said.

The temple remains entirely snowbound during winter.

Due to snowfall over the past few days, Kedarnath and surrounding areas are covered with fresh snow and swept by cold winds.

After the doors were closed, the Panchmukhi Doli of Lord Kedarnath, on the shoulders of priests, left in a procession for the Omkareshwar temple Ukhimath where the lord will be worshipped during winter. More than 19.5 lakh pilgrims visited the temple this season, Ajay said. (PTI)

## Record-breaking rise in greenhouse gases threatens climate goals: WMO

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** The concentration of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere once again hit a new record last year and there appears to be no halt to this escalating trend, according to a new report by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

The global averaged concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO2), considered the most critical greenhouse gas, were a staggering 50 per cent above the pre-industrial era (1850-1900) in 2022 for the first time. These levels have continued to escalate in 2023, it said.

The WMO's Greenhouse Gas Bulletin noted that although the growth rate in CO2 concentrations was slightly lower than the preceding year and the decade's average, this decline was likely due to short-term variations in the carbon cycle. The report highlighted that new emissions from industrial activities continued to rise.

Methane concentrations also grew, and levels of nitrous oxide, the third main gas, saw the highest year-on-year increase on record from 2021 to 2022, according to the Greenhouse Bulletin, which is published to inform the United Nations Climate Change negotiations, or COP28, in Dubai.

WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas expressed concern, stating, "Despite decades of warnings from the scientific community, thousands of pages of reports, and dozens of climate conferences, we are still heading in the wrong direction."

"The current level of greenhouse gas concentrations puts us on the pathway of an increase in temperatures well above the Paris Agreement targets by the end of this century. This will be accompanied by more extreme weather, including intense heat and rainfall, ice melt, sea-level rise and ocean heat and acidification. The socioeconomic and environmental costs will soar. We must reduce the consumption of fossil fuels as a matter of urgency," Taalas said.

Nearly half of CO2 emissions remain in the atmosphere, with just over one-quarter absorbed by the ocean and just under 30 per cent by land ecosystems like forests, although significant variability exists year-to-year.

As long as emissions continue, CO2 will continue accumulating in the

atmosphere leading to global temperature rise. Given the long life of CO2, the temperature level already observed will persist for several decades even if emissions are rapidly reduced to net zero.

The last time the Earth experienced a comparable concentration of CO2 was 3-5 million years ago, when the temperature was 2-3 degrees Celsius warmer and sea level was 10-20 metres higher than now.

"There is no magic wand to remove the excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. But we have the tools to strengthen our understanding of the drivers of climate change through WMO's new Global Greenhouse Gas Watch. This will greatly improve sustained observations and monitoring to support more ambitious climate goals," Taalas said.

The (NOAA) Annual Greenhouse Gas Index (AGGI) shows that from 1990 to 2022, the warming effect on our climate — called radiative forcing — by long-lived greenhouse gases increased by 49 per cent, with carbon dioxide accounting for about 78 per cent of this increase.

Carbon dioxide is the single most important greenhouse gas in the atmosphere, accounting for around 64 per cent of the warming effect on the climate, mainly because of fossil fuel combustion and cement production.

The slight decrease in the 2.2 parts per million (ppm) increase in the annual average from 2021 to 2022 was possibly due to increased absorption of atmospheric CO2 by terrestrial ecosystems and the ocean following several years with a La Nina event. The emergence of an El Nino event in 2023 could thus impact greenhouse gas concentrations.

Methane, a potent greenhouse gas, remains in the atmosphere for around a decade, accounting for about 16 per cent of the warming effect of long-lived greenhouse gases. Around 40 per cent of methane emissions originate from natural sources like wetlands and termites, while about 60 per cent come from anthropogenic sources such as ruminants, rice agriculture, fossil fuel exploitation, landfills, and biomass burning.

The increase in methane levels from 2021 to 2022 was slightly lower than the record observed from 2020 to 2021 but significantly higher than the average annual growth rate over the last decade. (PTI)

# 'WE'RE IN AN OPEN RELATIONSHIP'

## Taika Waititi says he won't be 'involved' with MCU's 'Thor 5'

**LOS ANGELES, Nov 15:** Filmmaker Taika Waititi says he will not direct the fifth chapter in "Thor" series.

In an interview with Business Insider, the New Zealand-born filmmaker said he has given his blessings to Marvel Studios to "see other people" for the potential project.

"I would never feel like they are cheating on me. We're in an open relationship, and it's like if they want to see other people, I'm happy for that. I'd still get back into bed with them one day," said Waititi.

Responding to social media chatter that the studio was going ahead with the fifth chapter without him at the helm, the 48-year-old filmmaker said, "I wouldn't know if that's accurate."

Waititi, known for movies such as "What We Do in the Shadows", "Hunt for the Wilderpeople" and "Jojo Rabbit", was credited for infusing a new energy into the Chris Hemsworth-led superhero series with "Thor: Ragnarok", which followed its damp-squib predecessors -- "Thor" and "Thor: The Dark World".

However, his sophomore at-



tempt at directing a superhero film (2022's "Thor: Love and Thunder") didn't aland well with fans and critics.

"I know that I won't be involved... I'm going to concentrate on these other films that I've signed on for," he added, referring to his upcoming movie "The Next Goal Wins".

The story follows Dutch coach Thomas Rongen who attempts the nearly impossible task of turning the American Samoan soccer team from perennial losers into winners.

Waititi also gave an update about his forthcom-

ing projects, including an untitled "Star Wars" film.

"It's still marinating. I've been writing it," the filmmaker said about the project.

Waititi revealed that he is also developing a big-screen adaptation of Alejandro Jodorowsky's graphic novel "The Incal" as well as an adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel "Klara and the Sun".

"So that's six, seven years gone. I'd imagine another 'Thor' would be a lot sooner than that... But I love Marvel, I love working with them. I love Chris," he said. (PTI)

## Rusha & Blizza transcend traditional boundaries with 'Heera Ranjha'

**GUWAHATI, Nov 15:** The dynamic duo Rusha & Blizza, renowned for setting dance floors ablaze, invites music enthusiasts on a captivating journey with their latest masterpiece, "Heera Ranjha" in collaboration with Shefali Alvarez's enthralling vocals.

This track quintessentially blends the rich tapestry of classical Indian folk music with contemporary elements, promising an enriching experience to the listeners. "Heera Ranjha" serves as a bridge between tradition and modernity, offering a harmonious synergy that creates a profound and soul-stirring auditory experience. The track encapsulates the essence of spiritual transcendence, taking audiences beyond the ordinary with every note and beat. Rusha & Blizza alongside Shefali Alvarez have skillfully crafted an unforgettable musical gem that is poised to make waves in the



music scene.

Speaking passionately about the release, Rusha (Paurush Kumar) shared, "With 'Heera Ranjha', Blizza and I aimed to curate an immersive experience. The explosive beats and captivating rhythm of this song create an exhilarating journey for our listeners. I can't wait to see the response this track receives. It holds a special place in my heart, and I hope audiences love it too."

Blizza (Aman Khare) added, "'Heera Ranjha' is an immersive adventure. It compels listeners to close their eyes, let go, and embark on a musical journey that Rusha and I have carefully crafted for them. Curating this track

with Rusha was an exciting experience, and I thoroughly enjoyed it." The release promises to be a testament to Rusha & Blizza's innovative approach to music, offering a unique and unforgettable musical encounter for all.

## 'Tiger 3' earns ₹ 240 crore at global box office in opening weekend

**MUMBAI, Nov 15:** "Tiger 3", fronted by Salman Khan, has amassed ₹ 240 crore in its gross box office collection in the first three days of its release, production banner Yash Raj Films said on Wednesday.

In a press note, the production house said the Maneesh Sharma directorial collected ₹ 180.50 crore (gross) in India and ₹ 59.50 (gross) overseas in the opening weekend, bringing the total box office collection of the film to ₹ 240 crore gross.

The film's nett collection in India stands at ₹ 148.50 crore. Salman Khan on Wednesday thanked his fans for giving a brilliant start to his latest release "Tiger 3", which has become a runaway success at the worldwide box office with ₹ 240 crore in the first three days.



"I'm delighted with the response from audience and fans for 'Tiger 3'. They have given the film a brilliant start and I'm happy that the third part of this franchise is also scripting a success story."

"Tiger" is a franchise that is close to my heart. So, to see it get more and more love film after film is really special. I hope the film continues to entertain audiences worldwide," Salman said in a statement.

According to the YRF, the film had the "biggest opening weekend" for the "Tiger" franchise as well as lead stars Salman and Katrina.

Set after the events of Shah Rukh Khan-starrer "Pathaan", "Tiger 3" sees Salman's titular spy race against time to save both his family and country. It is the fifth film in the YRF Spy Universe. (PTI)

## Arcis Saxophon Quartett to perform at Amarrass Nights on November 17

**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** Munich's Arcis Saxophon Quartett are set to enthrall audiences with their performance at Amarrass Nights, a platform to promote and nurture folk artists, at Sunder Nursery here on Friday. Renowned Rajasthani folk band Barmer Boys and contemporary Jazz band Syncopation will also perform at the November chapter of Amarrass Nights, organised by Gurgaon-based label Amarrass Records and Amarrass Society for Performing Arts.

"Amarrass Nights, held at iconic locations across Delhi, is a well-recognised platform where living legends, well-known and upcoming musicians are showcased. The gorgeous, relaxed Sunder Nursery is the perfect setting to celebrate music and musicians."

"And the concert we have organised this month -- 'Sax, Jazz and the sound of Dunes' -- will be one of a kind. It will transport

Delhi's music aficionados to enchanting European cities and the dunes of Rajasthan," Ashutosh, co-founder of Amarrass Records, said in a statement.

Munich-based Arcis Saxophon Quartett is one of the most vibrant classical ensembles globally. The quartet specialises in Broadway show tunes, works by composers from the 20th century as well as contempo-



rary and classical chamber music. "This season we celebrate 15 years of Arcis - and our first time in India. We can't wait to play at Amarrass Nights to share our music and our vision, that the saxophone conquers the classical stages of the world."

Just like its inventor Adolphe Sax intended, "Claus Hierluksch of Arcis Saxophon Quartett said. Founded in 2009, Syncopation is led by guitarist and composer Rishsi S Sachdeva, and plays an eclectic mix of modern jazz blended with elements of funk, swing and bebop. (PTI)

## European Union Film Fest to return in Delhi



**NEW DELHI, Nov 15:** The European Union Film Festival (EUFF) will return with its 28th edition in the national capital on December 1.

The 10-day film gala, which aims to celebrate the cultural connect between India and the European Union through the world of cinema, will take place across three locations -- the Indian Habitat Center, The Instituto Cervantes (Spanish Cultural Center), and The Goethe-Institut /Max Mueller Bhavan.

The 'free for all' festival is organised by the Delegation of the European Union to India, Embassies of EU Member States, and regional partners.

It will screen 28 films in 25 different languages from 28 European countries.

This also includes movies from 18 women directors as the festival seeks to honour women in cinema

and the art of storytelling from the woman's perspective.

The lineup of films features Martin McDonagh's dark comedy "The Banshees of Inisherin", starring Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson; Belgium movie "Tori and Lokita", which won an award at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival; and "Luxembourg, Luxembourg" from Ukraine.

The other titles are -- "Breaking the Ice" (Austria); "Mother" (Bulgaria); "Murina" (Croatia); "The Man with the Answers" (Cyprus); "Ordinary Failures" (Czech Republic); "The Quiet Migration" (Denmark); "Walker on Water" (Estonia); "Saint Omer" (France), among others.

The European Union Film Festival (EUFF) will conclude on December 10. Post its Delhi edition, the festival will travel to Chennai from January 19 to 28, 2024. (PTI)

## Scarlett says it would be 'a real miracle' if Marvel Studios brings back Black Widow

**LOS ANGELES, Nov 15:** Actor Scarlett Johansson believes her popular superhero character Black Widow died during the events of 2019's 'Avengers: Endgame' and it would be a 'miracle' should production house Marvel Studios choose to resurrect her.

In a recent appearance on the 'Today' show to promote her skincare line The Outset, Johansson addressed speculation she might return to the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) as Black Widow/ Natasha Romanoff.

"I think it was the end, right? ... She passed," the 38-year-old actor said, referencing the scene in

'Avengers: Endgame' when Natasha sacrifices herself to obtain the Soul Stone from Thanos, sparing the life of Jeremy Renner's Clint Barton/Hawkeye.

"It would be a miracle. It would be a real Marvel miracle. It would be a miracle. But who knows?" she quipped.

In a previous interaction, Johansson had said she has no plans to return as 'the assassin-turned-Avenger'.

The actor made her MCU debut with 'Iron Man 2' in 2010 and reprised the character in 'The Avengers', 'Captain America: The Winter Soldier', 'Avengers: Age of Ultron', 'Captain Amer-

ica: Civil War', 'Avengers: Infinity War', 'Avengers: Endgame', and 2021's 'Black Widow', a prequel, her last appearance.

In 2021, Johansson had sued Disney, Marvel Studios' parent company, for breach of contract over its decision to release her stand-alone film 'Black Widow' on streamer Disney Plus and in theatres simultaneously. The parties settled the lawsuit two months later.

Through its timeline altering plots and prequels, the MCU always has an option to bring fan-favourite characters back from the dead. (PTI)



# Son called in for S Korea as Asia's leading teams enter qualifying for the 2026 WC

**SEOUL, Nov 15:** Son Heung-min will join South Korea for its opening game in World Cup qualifying, with head coach Jürgen Klinsmann aiming to start the second stage of Asian competition with a statement win.

The Koreans and Asia's five other 2022 World Cup participants start their qualification campaigns to appear at the 2026 tournament on Thursday.

None of the continental heavyweights are taking this stage lightly, with European-based stars such as Son, Kaoru Mitoma and Mehdi Taremi picked for their national teams to take on some of the continent's lower-ranked rivals.

South Korea kicks off against Singapore in Seoul with Tottenham star Son and Wolves forward Hwang Hee-chan leading the attack. Both have been in excellent form in the Premier League. Klinsmann is ready to play his strongest team, despite the fact Singapore is ranked No. 155, as he begins a bid for South Korea to qualify for an 11th successive World Cup.

"You have to take them very seriously," Klinsmann, who was appointed in February, told a news conference in Seoul. "Your mind has to be in the right place. We have to be very sharp from the first moment."

That's an approach that the



likes of Japan, Australia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are also taking. The top two from each of the nine four-team groups will progress to the next stage of

Asian qualifying, where they'll compete for one of the eight automatic spots at the World Cup - double the continental quota available in 2022.

Klinsmann dismissed the idea that this makes the road to the 2026 World Cup in the U.S., Mexico and Canada any easier.

"All the teams that fight for a spot in the World Cup will fight even harder now," the former U.S. coach said. "It will still be very difficult." Japan has appeared at every World Cup since 1998 and, now ranked No. 18, is Asia's form team with six wins from its last six games, a run that includes a 4-1 win in Germany and a 4-2 win over Turkey.

Head coach Hajime Moriyasu wants to use that momentum to get off to a perfect start in Osaka against Myanmar, ranked 140 places below at 158th, and then

against Syria five days later on neutral turf in Jeddah.

"We want to take six points from these two games," Moriyasu, voted Asia's men's coach of the year, said. "We want to win and we want to give a performance that will allow us to build for the future."

Australia also reached the knockout stage at the 2022 World Cup, pushing eventual champion Argentina all the way in the second round. In the last two months, the Socceroos drew 2-2 with Mexico, lost 1-0 to England in London and beat New Zealand 2-0. "We've had the opportunity to test ourselves against some of world football's best in the last

six months, and our performances have shown just how effective we can be, learning a lot along the way," coach Graham Arnold said.

Arnold will lead the Socceroos for a record 59th time as coach against Bangladesh in Melbourne. "It'll be a fantastic honor," he said, "but three points is all I care about."

Qatar is still recovering from losing all three games as World Cup host in 2022, and takes on Afghanistan in its first game. Carlos Queiroz, who led Portugal, Iran and South Africa successfully through World Cup qualification, was appointed in February. (AP)

## AUSSIIES HAVE WON FIVE OF THE 12 TITLES SO FAR

# Eternal Champions vs Perennial Chokers: Proteas, Aussies have task cut out

**KOLKATA, Nov 15:** Lance Klusener on his haunches at Edgbaston and a completely shattered AB de Villiers in Auckland are some of the most poignant pictures of South Africa's World Cup semi-final heartbreaks but come Thursday, Temba Bavuma's warriors would be determined to shed their eternal chokers tag against five-time champions Australia.

Any South African cricketer worth his salt hates the 'C' word while Australia as legacy champions of the ODI global meet would like to rub it in, in the best possible manner they can.

When it comes to the 50-over World Cup, Australia evoke a sense of fear and anxiety among their rivals, having won five of the 12 titles so far - of which four have come in the last six editions - as they are known for thriving in big moments. It's been the opposite story for South Africa who have reached the semi-finals four times from nine editions, but it's always been a tale of being so near-yet-so-far. Be it the rain-rule mis-calculation on their debut World Cup in 1992 semifinal against England, or the tied result in 1999 that helped Australia made the final on better



run-rate, the Proteas for one reason or another have never able to progress beyond the last-four stage. In 2015, Grant Elliott played the only significant innings of his international career at Eden Park.

"As a South African team, we know we're going to have that chip on our back, or that narrative that

we have to get over," South Africa skipper Bavuma said, often being asked of the narrative.

But such has been the fury shown by South Africa this time in the course of making the semi-final that the Proteas look set to overcome it. "That's always going to be there until we win a trophy... But

yeah, I haven't heard that word come up as of yet in the training," he adds, throwing a word of caution. Barring their batting collapse against India at the same venue here where they folded for 83 in the group phase and the capitulation against the Netherlands, South Africa have looked ominous in the

batting department.

Four of their top-six batters have scored centuries with wicket-keeper-batter Quinton De Kock leading the way in the opening slot with four to his name in his swansong tournament. He is the tournament's leading run-getter with 591 runs. It only starts to get more destructive as the batting order goes down. Rassie van der Dussen has been able to provide the solidity at No 3, averaging 55.25 -- their second-highest in this tournament behind De Kock's 65.66.

On spin-friendly conditions, Heinrich Klaasen has been at his ruthless best, while Aiden Markram has been able to give the strong finishes, as South Africa have managed to go past 300 six times and posted the World Cup's highest total of 428/5 against Sri Lanka. It's only David Miller who has got limited opportunities and is due for a big knock, while Bavuma is the only weak link in their power-packed batting.

Struggling with a wretched form, Bavuma has 145 runs from seven innings with his highest being 35 against Australia as he is also racing against time to recover from a hamstring strain. (PTI)



**TURIN (ITALY), Nov 15:** Janik Sinner recorded his first win over top-ranked Novak Djokovic at the ATP Finals, delighting a raucous home crowd.

Sinner triumphed 7-5, 6-7 (5), 7-6 (2) in a match spanning more than three hours on Tuesday night and into Wednesday morning.

It was the 22-year-old Sinner's first win in their four head-to-head meetings. It also ended Djokovic's 19-match winning streak that stretched back to his five-set loss to Carlos Alcaraz in the Wimbledon final.

Sinner sealed the result with a smash at the net to send the Turin arena into a frenzy.

"There doesn't exist a better place to beat the World No. 1. After Wimbledon I said I felt a bit closer but I didn't even win a set," Sinner said on his on-court interview, which was interrupted by the crowd serenading him with "Olé, Olé, Olé, Olé, Sin-ner, Sin-ner."

"Here I managed to play the most important points in the best way. There was a bit of tension when I lost the second set, it was very hard, but together with you (the crowd) we won together."

The umpire had to tell the fans to be quiet several times during the enthralling encounter as they fervently cheered the Italian player on and also booed Djokovic several times. The 36-year-old Djokovic, who normally enjoys huge support in Italy, lapped up the boos and even encouraged the fans to up their hostility toward him.

Sinner, who beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4, 6-4 in Sunday's opener, is now on the verge of reaching Saturday's semifinals. He next plays Holger Rune, who has one win after Tsitsipas retired early in their green group match and withdrew from the tournament.

Djokovic, who is bidding to break a tie with Federer and capture a record seventh title at the tour finals, will play first alternate Hubert Hurkacz. Sinner didn't make it out of the group stage in his only other appearance at the ATP Finals, as an alternate in 2021. But the crowd sensed a huge win was on the cards when Sinner won nine straight points to finish the first set — rallying from 40-0 down to break Djokovic's serve and then holding to love. Sinner also broke again in the third to lead 4-2 but Djokovic immediately managed to get his only service break in a match that mainly went with serve and saw 35 aces. Sinner is finishing up a year in which he has claimed four titles, including his first Masters 1000 trophy, and moved to a career-high No. 4 — the first Italian that high since Adriano Panatta nearly a half-century ago.

Tsitsipas withdrew with a back injury after playing only three games of his second match in Turin. Tsitsipas, the 2019 champion, was trailing 2-1 in the opening set when he had a lengthy conversation with his trainer before slowly getting to his feet, shaking his head and walking over to shake Rune's hand.

That was after only 17 minutes of play and led to boos from the crowd in Turin, which instead had to settle for an exhibition match between alternates Taylor Fritz and Hurkacz.

"My apologies to all the fans and the crowd that came to support me today and watch the match. I'm really gutted that I wasn't able to finish the match," Tsitsipas said. "My doctors and the countless visits that I had in the last few days suggested that I play, they gave me the green light to go and try. (AP)

## Rory McIlroy abruptly resigns from PGA Tour policy board

**NEW YORK, Nov 15:** Rory McIlroy resigned from the PGA Tour board on Tuesday, an abrupt move that comes as the tour is trying to finalize an agreement to create a new commercial enterprise involving Saudi Arabia's national wealth fund.

McIlroy did not mention his decision earlier in the day at the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai, though one comment was telling about his three years on the board during some of the tour's most turbulent times.

Asked if he liked having a seat at the table, McIlroy said, "Not particularly, no. Not what I signed for whenever I went on the board. But yeah, the game of professional golf has been in flux for the last two years." In a statement, PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan and board chairman Ed Herlihy thanked McIlroy for his dedication and commitment the last five years — two years on the Player Advisory Council, one as PAC chairman who sat in on board

meetings, and the last two years as the first international player to serve on the board.

"Rory's insight has been instrumental in helping shape the success of the tour, and his willingness to thoughtfully voice his opinions has been especially impactful," they said. "Given the extraordinary time and effort that Rory and all of his fellow player directors have invested in the tour during this unprecedented, transformational period in our history, we certainly understand and respect his decision to step down in order to focus on his game and his family."

The New York Times first reported McIlroy's resignation.

Monahan said in a memo to players earlier Tuesday the tour was working toward finalizing an agreement with the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia and trying to narrow bids from a handful of private equity firms wanting to invest in the for-profit PGA Tour Enterprises. (AP)

## I think, I got it too late: Sehwal on his induction in ICC's 'Hall of Fame'

**MUMBAI, Nov 15:** Known for his straight-faced humour, former India opener Virender Sehwal on Tuesday said that his induction into the ICC's 'Hall of Fame' has happened "too late".

Sehwal along with former Indian women's team skipper Diana Edulji and Sri Lankan legend Aravinda de Silva were made members of ICC Hall of Fame for their stellar achievements during their playing career. "I think, I am too late," quipped Sehwal when former West Indies bowler Ian Bishop asked him about his thoughts to be part of the ICC Hall Of Fame.

One of the most destructive batters of the modern era, Sehwal donned India colours between 1999 and 2013. He scored a total of 23 Test centuries during his illustrious career — the fifth most by an Indian men's player.

His highest score of 319 against South Africa in Chennai in 2008 the best of any Indian player ever. During his conver-



sation with Bishop, Sehwal touched upon a number of milestones of his career, including his first ODI match, his first Test match, his promotion from middle-order to opening the innings in both ODIs and Test cricket. Sehwal, who accumulated 8,586 runs from 104 Tests at an average of 49.34 and also took 40 wickets during his Test career which spanned from 2001-2013, revealed the role of Zaheer Khan in his promotion as an opener.

"Everybody thinks it was

Sourav Ganguly that thought of making him open the innings but it was Zaheer (Khan), who came up with that suggestion first. He told Ganguly to make me open the innings," said Sehwal. The 45-year-old totalled 8,273 runs for India in 50-over cricket at an average of 35.05 and his 219 against the West Indies in Indore in 2011 remains the third-highest score achieved by a male cricketer in ODI.

Sehwal said he always believed in the philosophy of "see the ball, hit the ball". (PTI)

## AUSTRALIA NOT WEIGHED DOWN BY HISTORY: PAT CUMMINS

**KOLKATA, Nov 15:** They know what it takes to win the 50-over World Cup, having won five of them in 12 editions, but Australia skipper Pat Cummins said they are never "weighed down" by history and will stick to basics against South Africa in the semi-final here on Thursday.

The Proteas, on the other hand, are known as the 'perennial chokers' in the cricket fraternity.

"Yeah, I don't think it counts for too much. You know, obviously you start from scratch every time you play," Cummins said on the eve of their match.

"They're a team we've played quite a lot and know quite well. But as you said, this week it's probably going to be quite different to say the South African series that we just played against them a couple of months ago.

"We've got a lot of guys that have been in this situation before that have won one day World Cup, T20 World Cup, various other tournaments in big moments. So, I think that really helps," he said.

Having started off with two losses, Australia are peaking at the right time, winning seven matches in a row to brace up for the knockout stage.

"Again, we feel lucky that we've been in these situations quite a bit, a lot of our players. So, you know what it takes, but also, you're not really weighed down by history. You get more excited about the challenge and just get stuck into what needs to be done. We've obviously played a lot of cricket over the last month and it just feels like everyone knows their role and it's starting to click," he said.

Cummins said Glenn Maxwell, whose thunderous knock against Afghanistan acquired the status of an epic, is on the mend and is available for the semifinal.

Showing incredible will power, Maxwell had battled severe cramps in his body to conjure up a magical unbeaten double century to take Australia past the finish line against Afghanistan. Maxwell needed time to recover and had missed Australia's last match against Bangladesh on November 11 in Pune. "Glenn Maxwell is all clear. He is all good. He was a little bit sore yesterday. We get scans a lot of the time just to make sure that if there is something, we know what we're dealing with and fortunately it came back all okay. So he's fine," Cummins said. Cummins said that Australia will announce their

playing XI at the time of toss on Thursday but it is likely that they would prefer Marnus Labuschagne over Marcus Stoinis in the spin friendly conditions at Eden Gardens.

"We will announce our XI at the toss tomorrow," said Cummins when asked if Australia would go into the match with an extra all-rounder or a batter.

It does look like it's probably going to spin a bit more than some of the other wickets — which is the same for both teams," Cummins said.

"It might just be a slightly different paced game, but I think it's still pretty evenly matched."

With South Africa indicating to go ahead with two spinners, Australia may favour playing Labuschagne who was originally left out of the preliminary 18-man

squad for this tournament, but surged back into contention with strong performances in the lead-in. He has since played every game of the tournament, turning in a number of important innings and standing out as one of the World Cup's best fielders.

Stoinis on the other hand has been in and out of the team due to fitness concerns.

His strike rate at this World Cup (112.98) has been down, but he provides a stronger finishing option than Labuschagne (strike rate of 77.08) and the Australians value the versatility of his bowling.

"With the all-rounders, someone like Stoinis at number seven, that's giving you valuable overs, but then also is a really aggressive finisher to the innings," said Cummins. (PTI)

## Union Berlin parts ways with coach Urs Fischer after 14 games without a win

**BERLIN, Nov 15:** Union Berlin parted ways with coach Urs Fischer on Wednesday after a 14-game winless run in all competitions. In his five years in charge, Fischer led Union from the second division to the Bundesliga for the first time and then into European competition. He took the club into the Champions League after placing fourth last season to continue its impressive rise. However, results this season have been poor and Union has just one draw and 13 losses from its last 14 games in all competitions. Its last win was Aug. 26. A 4-0 loss to Bayer Leverkusen on Sunday left Union last in the Bundesliga and without a goal in any of its last four games in the German top division. Its four Champions League games have brought

one point. "This is a very sad moment not only for me personally, but certainly for the entire Union family," Union president Dirk Ziegler said in a statement. "It hurts that we have not managed to break the negative run of recent weeks. I am grateful and proud when looking back on the time we have spent and the successes we have celebrated together. As painful as this separation is, Urs Fischer is leaving as a friend who will always be welcomed by us with open arms." Ziegler said he and Fischer jointly decided it was time for the Swiss coach to depart. Fischer said he hoped a change of coach could turn the team around. "I am very grateful for the confidence I have always felt here. Nevertheless, it feels right to make a change now." (AP)

## INDIA HAMMER NEW ZEALAND TO POST 397/4

Kohli reaches ODI batting pinnacle with record 50<sup>th</sup> ton

**MUMBAI, Nov 15:** Virat Kohli's larger than life persona grew even more when he chose the big occasion to conjure up a historic 50th ODI century, propelling India to a massive 397 for four in the World Cup semifinal against New Zealand after it had been subdued by Rohit Sharma's opening onslaught on Wednesday.

While India's two super stars in their own inimitable style flattened the New Zealand attack, Shreyas Iyer too rose to the occasion with a ruthless century in the big game, leaving the Kiwis gasping.

The New Zealand bowlers surprisingly looked at sea against the home batters, who scored boundaries with consummate ease.

Kohli scaled the highest peak in ODI batting and was the centerpiece of India's domination with his third century of this World Cup, scoring 117 off 113 balls with nine fours and two sixes.

He also became the highest run-getter in a single edition of World Cup, again surpassing the legendary Tendulkar (623 run in 2003).

"The great man just congratulated me. It feels like a dream. Too good to be true. Big game for us and I played the role so that the guys around me can come and express themselves," Kohli said.

Kohli's feat was witnessed not only by the legendary Sachin Tendulkar, whose record the modern-day great broke but also by batting legends Sunil Gavaskar, Viv Richards and football legend David Beckham.

Complementing Kohli's sustained brilliance was Iyer's 70-ball 105 laced with eight sixes and four fours — a knock that pummelled New Zealand into submission.

If both Kohli and Gill could play their games it was because Rohit's ultra aggressive approach yet again had provided a rollicking start that blew away the pressure of the big game.

It was not a huge score but the way the India captain went about his business in his 29-ball 47-run knock that



punctured New Zealand resistance and they could not recover from that.

Gill, who was forced to retire hurt due to severe cramps, did well to come

out at the fag end and finished at 80 not out off 66 balls, hammering eight fours and three sixes in the process.

India's score is now a record total

for any team in history of 50-overs World Cup semifinals.

Kohli's strokes pierced the field with utmost precision, the running between the wickets was impeccable as ever and the ball seemed to have hit the meatiest part of his bat most of the times after he survived a close leg-before appeal at the start of his innings.

The ball was set rolling by 'captain fearless' Rohit, who went hammer and tongs from the word go to rip apart New Zealand pacers Trent Boult and Tim Southee.

Having stroked his way to 47 with four sixes and as many boundaries, Rohit got beaten by an off-cutter from Southee that ended his assault.

For Rohit had left New Zealand gasping for breath — the usually composed Kiwis appeared to be scrambling for answers to stop the Indian skipper until Tim Southee found one.

The senior Kiwi bowler produced a smart slower delivery — an off cutter — which lured Rohit to go for another big hit. But this time, he could not connect

as well as he had done earlier.

The ball went high in the air but not the distance.

But the credit for the dismissal went to the fielder — Kane Williamson — as much as it did to the bowler. Williamson, stationed at mid off, went behind and sideways to take a stunning catch over his head.

It was, however, the only success that New Zealand enjoyed for the majority of the innings as they kept chasing leather.

In fact, New Zealand made desperate moves early on that showed they were panicking.

Mitchell Santner came on as early as in the sixth over and by the 13th, New Zealand had the rookie Rachin Ravindra tasked with the job to stop the Indians. Glenn Phillips too was tried, but without any success.

A little tentative to start but compelling to watch when he found his groove, Gill's strokes on both the sides of the pitch were simply fabulous to watch. (PTI)

## Maxwell is available for semifinal vs SA; haven't seen any issues with pitches: Cummins



**KOLKATA, Nov 15:** Australia skipper Pat Cummins on Wednesday said Glenn Maxwell is available for the World Cup semifinal against South Africa as the all-rounder "is all clear" for Thursday's knock-out game.

Five-time world champions Australia play the Proteas at the Eden Gardens here on Thursday. Maxwell battled cramps and severe pain to score a scintillating double century in a three-wicket win over Afghanistan at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on November 7.

"Glenn Maxwell is all clear. He is all good. He was a little bit sore yesterday (Tuesday). Yeah, we get scans a lot of the time just to make sure that if there is something, we know what we're dealing with and fortunately it

came back all okay. So he's fine," Cummins said during the pre-match press conference.

The skipper also said that Australia will announce their playing XI during the toss on Thursday. It remains to be seen whether Cummins goes with Marnus Labuschagne or Marcus Stoinis in the vital match against the Proteas.

"We will announce our XI at the toss tomorrow," said Cummins when asked if Australia will go into the match with an extra all-rounder or a batter.

The pitch of the Wankhede Stadium has come into focus in the lead-up to the first semifinal between India and New Zealand on Wednesday, with foreign media indicating that the hosts could be micro-managing the pitch conditions for their World

Cup campaign.

However, Cummins said he has not encountered such an issue during their campaign here.

"Obviously the ICC has an independent pitch curator who manages that. I'm sure they are all over making sure it's fair to both teams. So far in this tournament that we've played on, I haven't seen any issues," said Cummins.

Cummins said he wants to savour the World Cup-winning moment in the ongoing showpiece, as he was not part of the playing XI in the final of the 2015 edition despite being a member of the squad. He featured in just two league stage matches then.

Australia had defeated New Zealand by seven wickets in the 2015 World Cup final at the MCG with Mitchell Johnson and James Faulkner taking three wickets each.

"I'd still say that 2015 World Cup was my career highlight, and I wasn't playing," said Cummins.

"But it was just the most magic moment. MCG, packed house, the whole of Australia behind us, winning a World Cup, which is rare. You only get a chance every four years, so if I'm in the playing XI (on Thursday) and we win, that might be that 2015 World Cup," he said. (PTI)

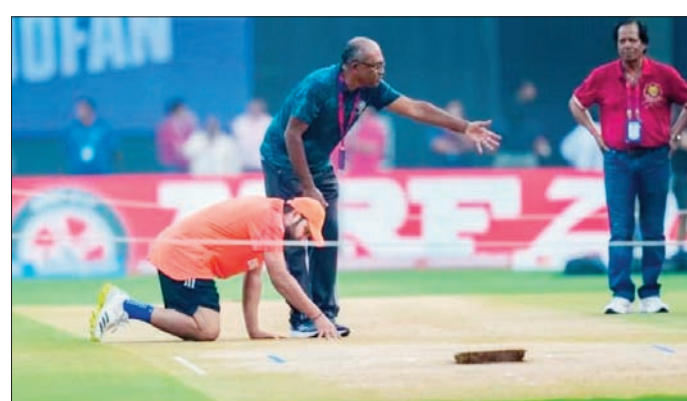
## Pitch consultant was apprised of the change: ICC

**MUMBAI, Nov 15:** After a pitch controversy sullied the atmosphere ahead of the World Cup semifinal between India and New Zealand, the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday clarified that the independent pitch consultant Andy Atkinson was taken into confidence on the change of surface.

A few reports suggested that while a fresh pitch was originally prepared for the last-four match at the Wankhede Stadium, later it was decided to play the game on a "used" deck in order to help Indian spinners.

However, the global governing body stated that the decision to change the pitch has nothing uncommon to it.

"Changes to planned pitch rotations are common towards the end of an event of this length, and have already happened a



couple of times.

"This change was made on the recommendation of the venue curator in conjunction with our host," the ICC said in a statement.

The ICC also said Atkinson, its independent pitch consultant, was aware of the change.

"The ICC independent pitch

consultant was apprised of the change and has no reason to believe the pitch won't play well," said the ICC.

As per the ICC's Playing Conditions for the World Cup, the host association is "responsible for the selection and preparation of the pitch" and there is no requirement that a knockout match

must be played on fresh pitches. Australian captain Pat Cummins also did not read too much into the pitch episode.

"Yeah, I saw that (the report)... obviously ICC have an independent pitch curator who manages that. So I'm sure they are making sure it's fair for both teams," Cummins said ahead of Australia's semifinal against South Africa at Eden Gardens.

"So far this tournament that we've played on, I've not seen any issue," added Cummins.

In the first semifinal of this tournament, India opted to bat first after winning the toss against New Zealand and made a strong start reaching 150 for 1 in 20 overs.

The winners of this match will face either five-time champions Australia or South Africa in the title clash at Ahmedabad on Sunday. (PTI)

## Warner won't take central contract but looks to play white-ball cricket till 2025 Champions Trophy

**KOLKATA, Nov 15:** Veteran opener David Warner will continue to play white-ball cricket for Australia but said he won't take up a central contract if Cricket Australia offers one next year. Warner has already announced that he will end his Test career in January next year after the home series against Pakistan.

The 37-year-old, who will play in his third World Cup semifinal on Thursday against South Africa, however, reiterated he is open to playing white-ball cricket for Australia until the ICC T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies next year, and possibly till the 2025 ICC

Champions Trophy in Pakistan. He cited the examples of former Australia all-rounder Brad Hogg, West Indies' Chris Gayle and Pakistan's Shoaib Malik, limited-overs specialists who continued playing beyond 40.

"Everyone wants to set themselves a realistic goal. My goal is still to set my sights on playing the Twenty20 World Cup in the Caribbean first (in June next year), and I think from there I'll probably decide what I'm going to do with white-ball cricket," Warner told Australian media here on Tuesday.

"I'm still feeling fit. I'm very comfortable

with what I'm doing. So I've got to sit down and look at what there is, and what I can play."

Warner, however, made it clear that he won't take up a central contract as it would affect his participation in franchise T20 leagues across the globe and sponsorship opportunities, which is vital at this juncture of his career.

"I won't be taking a contract, definitely not. How the system works in Australia is that if you play five (T20) games or ODIs, or three Tests, you get upgraded and then you're legally bound by contracting system with sponsors and stuff," he said. (PTI)

## Next year's PSL could be moved to UAE or SA due to elections in Pakistan

**LAHORE, Nov 15:** The Pakistan Super League (PSL) next year could be moved to the UAE or South Africa if the PCB doesn't get the government's clearance to host the event in February-March due to general elections in the country.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed on Tuesday, after a meeting of the PSL general council here, that it would seek formal advice from the government on finalising the PSL-9 dates because of the general elections slated on February 8.

The PSL is generally held annually between Feb 19-20 and March 20-21.

There has been talk in the PCB that some officials and franchise owners are in favour of the PSL to be held in UAE or South Africa next year to avoid any interruption in the schedule of matches.

The argument being given is that even the BCCI had organised the IPL in South Africa and UAE in emergency situations, such as the elections in India.

The early editions of the PSL were held in the UAE because no teams were willing to play in Pakistan due to security concerns.

But since 2021, the PSL has been held entirely in Pakistan, even during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A reliable source said that opinion was divided on whether the PSL should be held in Pakistan or abroad, with some franchises and board officials keen on having it in the UAE while some others were resisting the move as it would impact the PCB's profits.

The PCB said that the franchises had also asked the board to complete the process of selling the media and other rights of the PSL as soon as possible. (PTI)



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