

6 WORLD

- North Korea conducts first long-range missile test in months
- Israel approves appointment of Reuven Azar as new Ambassador to India

8 NATION

- Govt wants to bulldoze key bills without Oppn, dissent: Cong
- INDIA alliance will drive PM Modi out of power: Lalu

Parl security breach: Police ask Meta to share details of accused's accounts

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Delhi police has written to Meta to access social media accounts of the six accused arrested in the Parliament security breach case and details of the now-deleted Facebook page 'Bhagat Singh Fan Club', where they met each other, according to sources. Police will also check the e-mail accounts attached with WhatsApp numbers of the accused to get chat backup to know with who else they were in contact just before their alleged involvement in the case, they said on Monday.

Police have collected bank account details of all the accused to see if they received money from someone for executing the December 13 incident, the police sources said.

Various Delhi police teams approached family members of the

accused on Sunday and collected details of their bank accounts. Bank passbooks of accused Neelam Devi and Sagar Sharma were seized from their residences in Haryana's Jind and Uttar Pradesh's Lucknow, respectively, the sources said. Delhi Police Counter Intelligence unit has written to Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, to access social media accounts of the accused persons and sought details of Facebook page 'Bhagat Singh Fan Page' like the number of members, etc.

The page was created by the accused and later deleted. Meta has also been requested to share WhatsApp chats of the accused as their mobile phones have been damaged, the sources said. "WhatsApp users need to attach an application with



33 MPs suspended from LS, 45 from RS for demanding statement from Shah over Parl security breach

78 oppn MPs suspended from Parl in unprecedented action

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: In an unprecedented move, 78 opposition MPs were suspended from Parliament on Monday, in the highest number of suspensions in a day, triggering a strong reaction from the Congress and other parties that accused the BJP government of trying to bulldoze key legislations in an 'opposition-less' Parliament.

As many as 33 members were suspended from Lok Sabha followed by Rajya Sabha where 45 leaders were suspended after the opposition refused to budge on their demand for a statement from Union home minister Amit Shah over the breach in Parliament security on December 13, when two protesters jumped into the lower house chamber and opened smoke cans.

Monday's action has taken the total number of opposition MPs suspended from both houses to 92 since last Thursday on the issue. AAP member Sanjay Singh has



been suspended as a Rajya Sabha member from July 24.

On Thursday, the Lok Sabha suspended 13 members for the remaining part of the Winter Session for waving placards and disrupting proceedings over the Parliament security breach issue. Trinamool

member Derek O'Brien was suspended from the Rajya Sabha for the remainder of the Winter Session for unruly behaviour.

In the Lok Sabha, 33 members, including floor leaders of the Congress and DMK - the two large parties in the opposition, were sus-

ended on Monday for unruly behaviour. While 30 members were suspended for the remainder of the Winter Session in Lok Sabha, three members were suspended, pending the report of the Privileges Committee. The three - K Jayakumar, Vijay Vasanth and Abdul Khaleque - had climbed on the Speaker's podium to raise slogans.

Speaker Om Birla told the House about the steps taken by the Lok Sabha secretariat following the security breach incident on December 13 and sought cooperation from all members to run the House smoothly.

However, the opposition members were on their feet demanding a statement from Shah and his resignation. Some opposition MPs were also carrying placards with their demands written on them. Birla objected to the placards being brought into the Lok Sabha, saying it lowers the

EM Taro blames bad connectivity for poor literacy in West KA

HT Correspondent DONGKAMUKA, Dec 18: Executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Prabhat Chandra Taro said that the reason behind poor literacy in West Karbi Anglong is lack of connectivity.

The EM said this while attending the two-day 34th All Assam Primary Teachers Association (AAPTA) biennial conference December 17 and 18 at Jenghka Higher Secondary School playground in West Karbi Anglong.

Terming teachers as the foundation builders of the society, EM Taro appreciated their role.

"West Karbi Anglong district remains remote to this day due to poor road connectivity and the villages are often serviced by unpaved roads that are not even motorable

3 dead in road mishap in Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent BOKAJAN, Dec 18: Three persons were killed and another five seriously injured in a road mishap that occurred on national highway 39 at Holokhuwa in Karbi Anglong on Monday.

According to sources, the accident occurred when two speeding cars coming from opposite directions collided head-on on NH 39 at Holokhuwa at around 4 am on Monday. The two vehicles involved in the accident were a Maruti Gypsy bearing the registration number 'NL 04 C 3801' and a Mahendra Thar bearing the registration number 'AS 01 FJ 4114'. The deceased have been identified as Nzalya

Drug mafia, illegal immigrants behind Manipur ethnic violence: Biren Singh

IMPHAL, Dec 18: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Monday blamed drug mafia and illegal immigrants for the ethnic strife that has rocked the northeastern state for months. Singh also attributed the current crisis to the "failure" of the previous government in guarding the state's borders.

Nearly 200 people have died and over 60,000 were rendered home-

less due to the ethnic conflict between the Kuki and Meitei communities since May.

"The present conflict is engineered by drug mafia groups and illegal immigrants who have suppressed the voice of the original tribes. The war is not between Meiteis and Kukis, but between the government and the illegal immigrants," Singh told a gathering at

Lilong in Thoubal district.

"Everyday, I keep contact and communicate with my old Kuki friends through phone. They are helpless and unable to speak the truth as they are being intimidated by guns," the CM said.

Singh said, "More than 6,000 immigrants have entered Kamjong district from Myanmar due to fighting

Arms, ammunition recovered in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 18: Police on Monday found a huge cache of arms and ammunition during a joint search operation with central security forces in Kakching district of Manipur.

The recovered items include six single bomb marks as W/P, five tube launching pipes, nine different type empty magazines of INSAS LMG, eight walkie-talkie chargers, eight.303 rifle empty cases, five live rounds of.303 rifles, one breech block, one .303 rifle bolt, seven detonators, six camouflage dress, 18 khaki shirt along with 13 long pants, three green dangri shirt along with one long pants, one .303 LMG barrel, three BP vest black in colour and 10 magazine pouches.

The items were recovered during an operation at

Wairi Panjao Panlum area on the outskirts of Kakching district on Monday morning by a joint team of district police and BSF, the police said.

The recovered items were handed over to Kakching police station, where a case was registered.

The police along with the state and the central security forces have been conducting joint operations in the fringe and vulnerable areas across the violence affected districts of the state to recover illegal weapons in the possessions of the miscreants and weapons, ammunition and explosives looted from the armouries of the police and security forces during the initial stage of the outbreak of the violence on May 3 last. A total of 5,669 different types



CELEBRATING PEACE





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◆ ২০২০-২৩ ◆

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প্ৰমোদ বড়া চৰকাৰৰ গেৰাণ্টি



बिटीआर सरकारनि गोष्गाथाव बोसोर

गोजोन, जोगानाय आरौ मौजां खुथाइनि मोनसे हान्थिनाय

◆ 2020-23 ◆

बिटीआरआव दासो गोजोन आरौ जौगानाय
बेनो जादौं डो हिमन्त बिस्व शर्मा आरौ
पम्द बर' सरकारनि होनाय रादाय



Chief Guest
Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam



Shri Pramod Boro
Chief Executive Member, BTR

11 AM ONWARDS | 20TH OF DECEMBER 2023

BDSA GROUND, BIJNI (CHIRANG), BTR

Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam

◆ **PEACEFUL, SMART AND GREEN BODOLAND** ◆

Govt to take possession of communication network in case of public emergency

The bill proposes to stop transmission and intercept messages in case of public emergency

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: A new telecom bill, introduced in Lok Sabha on Monday, allows the government to temporarily take control of telecom services in the interest of national security, drops OTT in definition of telecom services and provides for non-auction route for allocation of satellite spectrum.

The Centre will take temporary possession of telecom network in case of any public emergency or in the interest of public safety, as per the Telecommunications Bill, 2023.

The bill proposes to stop transmission and intercept messages in case of public emergency, in the interest of public, to prevent incitement for committing offence etc. "On the occurrence of any public emergency, including disaster management, or in the interest of public safety, the central government or a state government or any officer specially authorised in this behalf by the central government or a state government, if satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do, by notification—take temporary possession of any telecommunication service or telecommunication network from an authorised entity," the bill said.

The bill was introduced in the lower house by Communications Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw amid din over Opposition demanding statement by Home Minister Amit



Shah on the Parliament security breach issue.

When Vaishnaw initiated the process of introducing the bill, BSP member Ritesh Pandey opposed its introduction as it was being brought in as a Money Bill and would not require approval of the Rajya Sabha. Pandey also sought that the bill be sent to a parliamentary committee since there are concerns relating to privacy.

According to the bill, the press messages meant for publication in India of correspondents accredited to the Centre or state governments shall not be intercepted or detained unless their transmission has been prohibited under rules applicable for public emergency, public order etc.

The bill proposes allocation of spectrum to satellite communica-

tioned by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai), sources clarified.

"The central government shall assign spectrum for telecommunication through auction except for entries listed in the First Schedule for which assignment shall be done by administrative process," the bill said.

The first schedule has 19 cases for which spectrum will be assigned through administrative process including global mobile personal communication by satellites, national long distance and international long distance services, mobile satellite services, VSAT, In-Flight and maritime connectivity, BSNL and MTNL.

The bill defines cases when spectrum will be assigned through administrative method. "Auction will be the preferred mode of spectrum allocation. However, in cases where auction of spectrum is not the preferred mode of assignment due to technical or economic reasons or to serve public interest or to perform government function, the spectrum will be assigned administratively," an official citing the bill said.

According to sources, the price for administrative allocation of spectrum for satellite service will be decided based on reference sought from Trai while BSNL and MTNL will need to match the auction determined price. (PTI)

With this move, the ongoing consultation process around over-the-top apps can no longer be con-

tinued by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai), sources clarified.

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SENSEX DROPS 168 PTS

Stock markets snap record-breaking run on profit-taking

MUMBAI, Dec 18: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined on Monday due to profit-taking by investors after a three-day record-breaking rally and a largely weak trend in Asian markets.

Snapping its three-day rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 168.66 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at 71,315.09. During the day, it fell 341.46 points or 0.47 per cent to 71,142.29.

The Nifty fell by 38 points or 0.18 per cent to 21,418.65.

Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid, ITC, JSW Steel, ICICI Bank, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, IndusInd Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were the major laggards.

Sun Pharma, Reliance Industries, HCL Tech, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finance and Maruti were among the gainers.

Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services, said, "The market started on a subdued note as concerns over oil supply disruptions through the Red Sea and elevated valuations dented investor sentiment."

"Markets started the week on a muted note and ended marginally lower, taking a breather after the recent surge. After the initial downturn, the Nifty oscillated in a narrow range and finally settled at 21,418.65 levels," said Ajit



Mishra, SVP- Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.48 per cent and midcap index gained 0.28 per cent.

Among the indices, realty declined 0.98 per cent, financial services fell by 0.32 per cent, FMCG by 0.28 per cent, IT by 0.27 per cent, tech by 0.26 per cent and oil & gas by 0.16 per cent.

Services index jumped 1.50 per cent, telecommunication by 0.81 per cent, capital goods by 0.75 per cent and consumer durables by 0.60 per cent.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower while Seoul ended in the green.

European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets ended mostly with gains on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.29 per cent to USD 76.33 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) continued their buying momentum as they bought equities worth ₹ 9,239.42 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Rising for the third day running, the BSE benchmark jumped 969.55 points or 1.37 per cent to settle at its record closing high of 71,483.75 on Friday. During the day, it surged 1,091.56 points or 1.54 per cent to 71,605.76, its all-time intraday high level.

The Nifty climbed 273.95 points or 1.29 per cent to settle at its new closing high of 21,456.65. During the day, it zoomed 309.6 points or 1.46 per cent to hit its record intraday peak of 21,492.30. (PTI)

Jai Balaji Industries raises ₹ 559 cr from Tata Capital Financial Services

KOLKATA, Dec 18: Steel maker Jai Balaji Industries Ltd on Monday said it has signed a ₹ 559-crore debt agreement with Tata Capital Financial Services to retire the remaining legacy non-performing assets (NPAs) held by two asset reconstruction companies.

In 2018-19, Jai Balaji had an outstanding NPA of about ₹ 3,000 crore, and banks subsequently sold this debt to two ARCs.

"With the agreement with Tata Capital, we have now completely cleared the legacy NPA book held by the ARCs," chairman & managing director Aditya Jajodia told PTI.

"Our current debt stands at only ₹ 559 crore secured from Tata Capital. Given our positive turnaround and strong cash flow, we aim to be debt-free within the next 12 months," he said.

Retiring the debt held by the ARCs demonstrates the company's proactive approach to strengthening its financial position and paving the way for sustained growth and success, Jajodia said.



"The agreement with the Tata Group NBFC has a three-year term, but the company intends to repay the loan within the next 12 months. Our half-year (H1) EBITDA stands at ₹ 450 crore on a revenue of approximately ₹ 3,000 crore," he said.

With this new debt structure, Jai Balaji Industries is now positioned to move forward with its expansion plans for ductile iron pipes and special grade ferro alloys, the company said. It also plans to implement debottlenecking of facilities and introduce various cost-cutting measures to further optimise value addition. (PTI)

RBI board discusses prevailing economic, financial scenario

MUMBAI, Dec 18: The Reserve Bank of India's board on Monday reviewed the prevailing economic and financial scenario, including the challenges posed by geopolitical developments. The 605th meeting of the Central Board of Directors of Reserve Bank of India was held today in Ekta Nagar (Kevadia) under the chairmanship of Governor Shaktikanta Das.

"The board reviewed the economic and financial scenario, both domestic and global, including the challenges posed by global geopolitical developments," the central bank said in a statement.

It also discussed the activities of select central office departments and the draft report on trend and progress of banking in India, 2022-23. Directors on the central board Satish K Marathe, Revathy Iyer, Anand Gopal Mahindra and Ravindra H Dhokalia attended the meeting. RBI Deputy Governors Michael Debarbrata Patra, M Rajeshwar Rao, T Rabi Sankar, and Swaminathan J as well as Department of Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth also participated in the meeting, the statement said. (PTI)

Rupee falls 2 paise to close at 83.05 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Dec 18: The rupee surrendered all its initial gains to settle 2 paise lower at 83.05 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, in line with a lacklustre trend in domestic equity markets.

However, a weak greenback against major currencies overseas and sustained buying by foreign investors supported the local currency, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 82.97 against the greenback and traded in a range of 82.90-83.06. It finally settled at 83.05 (provisional), a decline of 2 paise over its previous close. On Friday, the domestic currency settled at 83.03 against the dollar.

"The minor weakness observed in capital markets and profit booking after a rapid rally from 83.30 to 82.90 contributed to this downward movement.

"Despite this, the short-term trend for the rupee looks positive, with the dollar index showing broad weakness and a positive money flow into Indian capital markets. The anticipated rupee range is between 82.75 and 83.25," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst at LKP Securities, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.10 per cent lower at 102.07.



Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.57 per cent to USD 76.121 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 168.66 points or 0.24 per cent lower at 71,315.09. The broader NSE Nifty fell 38 points or 0.18 per cent at 21,418.65.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Friday as they purchased shares worth ₹ 9,239.42 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Gold rises ₹ 100; silver jumps ₹ 350 Google has removed 2,500 fraudulent loan apps from its Play Store, says FM

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Gold prices rose ₹ 100 to ₹ 62,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid strong cues in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal had ended at ₹ 62,650 per 10 grams.

Silver also jumped ₹ 350 to ₹ 77,950 per kilogram.

"Gold prices edged higher on Monday, in the Delhi markets trading at ₹ 62,750/10 gram, up by ₹ 100 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the futures trade, February contract of gold declined ₹ 162 to ₹ 62,030 per 10 grams on the MCX. However, March contract of

silver climbed ₹ 153 to ₹ 74,678 per kg on the bourse.

In the global markets, gold and silver were trading higher at USD 2,024 per ounce and USD 24 per ounce, respectively.

Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,024 per ounce, up USD 5 from its previous close in the international markets.

Navneet Damani, senior VP of commodity research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said, "Gold price continue to trade higher, extending a push above key levels on the back of US Fed's stance they were done with raising interest rates, and will consider rate cuts in 2024, which sparked steep losses in the dollar and Treasury yields." (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: The government on Monday informed Parliament that Google has suspended or removed over 2,500 fraudulent loan apps from its Play Store between April 2021 and July 2022. The government is constantly engaged with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other regulators and stakeholders concerned to control fraudulent loan apps, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

The matter is also regularly discussed and monitored in the meetings of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), an inter-regulatory forum under the chairpersonship of the Finance Minister.

The objective is to remain proactive, maintain cyber security preparedness with constant vigilance, and take appropriate and timely action to mitigate any such vulnerabilities in the Indian financial system, she said.

As part of steps taken to control fraudulent loan apps, she said, the RBI has shared a

'whitelist' of legal apps with the government of India, and this list was shared by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) with Google, whose app store is the primary source of distribution of digital lending apps. Google has updated its policy regarding enforcement of loan lending apps on the Play Store and has also deployed additional policy requirements with strict enforcement actions for lending apps in India, she added.

As per their revised policy, only those apps are allowed on the Play Store which are published by Regulated Entities (REs) or those working in partnership with REs.

"Between April 2021 and July 2022, Google also reviewed approximately 3,500 to 4,000 loan lending apps and suspended or removed over 2,500 fraudulent loan apps from its Play Store," she said.

The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), has been regularly analysing the digital lending

apps proactively.

Based on its analysis and complaints reported on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, the I4C team analyses apps on various parameters and reports to MeitY apps found suspicious for blocking, she said. To spread awareness against cybercrimes and to safeguard interests of citizens, several steps have been taken by the government, the RBI, and banks, she said.

The RBI has formulated conducting of electronic-Banking Awareness And Training (e-BAAT) which has largely focussed on awareness about fraud and risk mitigation, while a Nation-wide Intensive Awareness Programme (NIAP) was carried out in collaboration with the REs.

In a separate response, Sitharaman said more than 44.46 crore loans amounting to ₹ 26.12 lakh crore (as of November 24, 2023) have been sanctioned to the borrowers under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) since its inception. (PTI)

Govt, WB to work on project to promote mfg, supply of affordable cooling devices

Super-efficient ACs are 30-40 per cent better than the 5-star ACs available in the market

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: The government and the World Bank will work on a "comprehensive" project, entailing "significant" investments to promote manufacturing and availability of affordable cooling devices in the domestic market, a top official said on Monday.

Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that the objective of the proposed project would be to cater to both the demand and supply side of the sector.

The project will cover areas such as capacity building, introducing or disseminating better technologies for super efficient air-conditioners, he said.

Demand for these products is going to increase multi-fold in the country in the coming years on account of the increasing intensity and frequency of severe heat waves in India.

"We will upload the DPR (detailed project report) very soon for a project with the World Bank, with significant investments both from the World Bank side as concessional lending and an equal amount from the Government of India," Singh said here

at a workshop on alleviating heat stress by enhancing production of affordable cooling devices here.

He asked the industry to give feedback on the kinds of interventions required, both from the demand and supply side, for the sector.

"We are about to start work on a project which will hopefully come with some of those supply and demand side measures ... in bringing about tangible investments and interventions in this area, not only in the private sector manufacturing but also in areas like R&D, capacity building etc. This will be a comprehensive project that we will start working on," Singh added.

He said that the super-efficient ACs are 30-40 per cent better than the 5-star ACs available in the market.

Heat waves are going to be a big problem for the world and there is a need to start addressing it right away, Singh said adding AC penetration in India is 5 per cent and going forward if it reaches the global average of 30-per cent, the demand for cooling devices will explode.

"Because of that, the global warming issue will be there...carbon footprint will



increase. So we need to work in this area with the ministries of environment, science and technology, and the World Bank-like institutions so that we can have at least cutting edge, super-efficient, cooling technologies," he said.

Initially, super-efficient cooling devices may be costlier, so there is a need to bring in scale on the production side and for that "we may" have to do some kind of intervention, the secretary said.

From the supply side, the government may consider providing viability gap funding to the industry. The focus of the project

would be to bring in more energy efficiency as cooling demand will increase in India.

"We have to work on both supply and demand interventions... we have to analyze and after that if we need resources, we will have to work on that," Singh added.

The government has already rolled out a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to boost manufacturing of AC and LED light components, with an outlay of Rs 6,238 crore.

Besides PLI, the government has to look at other supply-side measures going forward for providing some kind of viability gap funding to the industry for bringing about this transition through new technologies that are available.

Citing the example of airconditioner maker Daikin, he said there is a need to see how energy-efficient products can be brought into the domestic market in large numbers and how consumers can be attracted towards that.

Singh emphasised the importance of these cooling devices in the market as it would help promote sustainable and environmentally friendly habitation.

Speaking at the conference, joint secretary of the DPIIT Sanjay said that climate-friendly cooling devices are the need of the hour.

He also asked the PLI beneficiary firms to file their claims and get fiscal incentives.

The workshop aims to bring together key stakeholders, including companies providing cooling solutions, industry experts, start-ups, innovators, government representatives, academics, researchers, and civil society participants.

It will encompass discussions on retail space cooling (efficient fans and air conditioners), centralized space cooling (chillers and district cooling systems), and cold chains.

It is being organised by the DPIIT in collaboration with the World Bank with the objectives to identify constraints for domestic manufacturing of cooling technologies and components for both-cooling solution providers and their respective supply chain manufacturers; and determine necessary policy initiatives to address these constraints and accelerate domestic manufacturing. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR
KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT
E-BID NOTICE
 Bid reference No. KA/EX-338/2023-24
 E-Bids are invited for grant of India Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) Retail 'OFF'licences in the specified locations of Karbi Anglong district.
 For more details, please visit the e-tendering portal: <https://assam-tenders.gov.in> from 18/12/2023 (date) 10.00 A.M., (time) onwards.
 Sd/
 District Collector, Karbi Anglong district

ENGINEERING WORKS AT LUMDING DIVISION
 Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/126 of 2023, dttd. 14-12-2023. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:
 Brief Description of Item: Protection of track by cutting of steep slope of Hill at KM 54/5-4 in between Mupa & Malibang for smooth running of traffic under DEN/III Lunding. Tender Value: ₹ 5,29,33,759.50. Earnest Money: ₹ 4,14,700/- Date & time of Closing of above tender at 15:00 hrs. on 08-01-2024 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 08-01-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 08-01-2024 in website <http://www.treps.gov.in>.
 DRM (W), Lunding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers With A Smile

MoU signed for regional branch of NCDC in state



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 18: A significant step towards enhancing disease surveillance and monitoring in Assam was taken on Monday as the Health and Family Welfare Department, government of Assam, and the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, government of India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The agreement, signed at the NHM Conference Hall, State HQ, outlines the establishment of a regional branch of NCDC at Rani, Kamrup, Assam.

The NCDC branches in the states will collaborate with the state government to ensure timely disease surveillance, monitoring, and early intervention based on evidence gathered from the field. The state branch will coordinate with the NCDC HQ in New Delhi, facilitating real-time data and information sharing with the help of cutting-edge technology. These branches are crucial for ensuring the timely availability of updated guidelines, enabling the dissemination of accurate, scientifically backed information.

Addressing the meeting, Keshav Mahanta, minister for health and family welfare, emphasised the crucial role of disease surveillance in prevention, control, and

management. He stated, "The regional branch of NCDC will provide a boost to public health infrastructure with prompt surveillance, rapid detection, and monitoring of diseases, enabling early interventions in this NE region of the Country."

Avinash Joshi, IAS, additional chief secretary, health & family welfare department, highlighted the mission to build an IT-enabled disease surveillance system. This involves developing a network of surveillance laboratories at various levels, including block, district, regional, and national, in metropolitan areas. The objective is to effectively detect, investigate, prevent, and combat public health emergencies and disease outbreaks.

The meeting was attended by key officials, including Dr Atul Goel (virtually), director general of Health Services, GOI, Dr M S Lakshmi Priya, IAS, MD NHM, Assam, Barnali Sarma, secretary health, Dr L S Singh, regional director, MoH&FW, Dr Arti Bahl, additional director, NCDC, Dr Sikha Vardhan, joint director, NCDC, Kamaljit Talukdar, ACS, DHS (FW), Dr Kareng Rongpipi (i/c) director of health services, Dr Manoj Kumar Choudhury, ED, NHM, Assam, Pankaj Chamuah, OSD, NHM Assam, SSO, IDSP, and team, along with other NHM state officials and concerned development partners.

Ministers Pijush Hazarika, Jayanta Malla Baruah promote government welfare schemes in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Dec 18: Assam water resources minister Pijush Hazarika and public health minister Jayanta Malla Baruah participated in the 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' at Ikoratoli village in Dibrugarh on Monday. The event aimed to create awareness about government welfare schemes.

During the public meeting, Pijush Hazarika emphasised the continuous efforts of both the Central government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the state government, led by Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in enhancing the welfare of people across all segments of society through various schemes. Hazarika highlighted the government's focus on improving education, healthcare, agriculture, industrial sectors, and state-wide connectivity.

The 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' program's main objective is



to raise awareness about various welfare schemes offered by both the Central and state governments. It also aims to facilitate the registration and application process for deserving individuals who have not yet availed themselves of government benefits. The goal is to enable people to

benefit from government schemes immediately.

Hazarika outlined several welfare schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, e-Shram, PM Kisan, Jal Jeevan Mission, Ayushman Bharat, etc. He urged the public to take advantage

of these government initiatives and encouraged officials and employees of relevant departments to inform the public about the welfare schemes. The event serves as a platform to bridge the gap between deserving individuals and the benefits available under various government schemes.

Assam Rifles provides amenities to Mercy Home Orphanage

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Dec 18: In a compassionate gesture, Assam Rifles distributed essential amenities, including a television, refrigerator, metal almirah, furnishings, and track suits for children, to Mercy Home Orphanage at the Battalion headquarters located at Lokra in Sonitpur district. This initiative is part of the AR CAP Project for the Financial Year 2023-24.

The battalion's altruistic effort aims to support Mercy Home Children, an orphanage in Sotai, Sonitpur, by ensuring the provision of essential amenities. The act reflects a commitment to the well-being of the children at Mercy Home, showcasing the positive impact that collaborative community engagement can have on those in need.

This initiative not only addresses the immediate necessities of the children but also exemplifies the spirit of solidarity and social responsibility within the broader community. Such efforts contribute significantly to fostering a sense of care, security, and hope for the children in Mercy Home.

Major fire engulfs rented houses in Margherita

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Dec 18: A devastating fire broke out on Monday afternoon in Margherita, consuming more than 15 rented houses owned by Boban Rai, reducing them to ashes. The incident occurred in front of Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma's office located at Segunbari under the jurisdiction of Margherita police station in Tinsukia.

The cause of the fire is yet to be determined, but according to locals, four cylinders have already exploded, adding to the intensity of the blaze. The massive fire triggered a sense of panic in the area, creating a challenging situation for residents.

Efforts were made to control the fire, with two fire tenders attempting to douse the flames. Unfortunately, despite their efforts, the fire completely ravaged the 15 rented houses owned by Baban Rai of Margherita.

Green Leaf Foundation honours late prof Samsul Hoque with Jeevan Sangram Award

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGON, Dec 18: The Green Leaf Foundation, a prominent NGO in Gossaigaon, organised the Late Prof Samsul Hoque Jeevan Sangram Award ceremony at the Gossaigaon Press Club, Kokrajhar District. The daylong program included a commemorative meeting presided over by Azhar Ali, retired superintendent of Nabajyati High Madrasa, and an award ceremony introduced by Mijanur Rahman, president of Green Leaf Foundation.

During the event, senior journalist Khanindra Nath Das, president of Gossaigaon Shakha Sahitya Sabha, Abdul Wahab Ahmed, Dr Taranai Kanta Kalita, veterinary officer cum secretary of Gossaigaon Shakha Sahitya Sabha, and Jahangir Hussain, DPO, SSA, Kokrajhar, along with Mafida



Hasan, wife of late prof Samsul Hoque, spoke about the remarkable contributions of the late professor in the fields of education, social work, politics, and religious functions.

The speakers highlighted Prof. Samsul Hoque's pivotal role in restoring peace during the Adivasi-Bodo and Bodo-Muslim riots in 1996-98 and 2012 in Kokrajhar

district. The event also commemorated his efforts in establishing institutions, fostering relationships with the government, and displaying strong leadership during the NRC updation and awareness meetings.

Jahangir Hossain, district program officer, SSA, Kokrajhar, was honoured with the Late "Shamsul Haque Jeevan Sangram Award".

Additionally, litterateur Biswanath Narzary, Sanjay Kumar Rai (i/c, Simultapu police station) in the field of sports, and Abdul Wahab Ahmed, a senior journalist of Gossaigaon, received the Green Leaf Icon Award for their significant contributions to literature, sports, and journalism, respectively. The awardees were presented with a phulam gamosa, a set of books, saplings, and certificates.

The program witnessed a large turnout, including retired head master Baidyanath Saha, head master Nurul Huda Miah, Prof Pradip Kr. Das of Gossaigaon College, principal Rohom Ali of Rabi Haji Sr. Secondary School, local intellectuals, and family members of Late Prof Samsul Hoque. The presence of dignitaries like Hafizur Rahman and Mafizur Rahman added grandeur to the ceremony, making it a resounding success.

Shyamkanu Mahanta assumes role of professor of practice at Nowgong College

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Dec 18: Nowgong College (Autonomous) announced the appointment of Shyamkanu Mahanta as professor of practice, highlighting the institution's dedication to combining academic excellence with practical expertise.

Mahanta, a renowned entrepreneur in Infrastructure advisory and the visionary behind the North East Festival and Rongali, has been nominated by the esteemed governing body of Nowgong College (Autonomous) for his outstanding contributions and extensive experience. In his new role, he will play a crucial part in guiding undergraduate and postgraduate students, along with research scholars, fostering academic excellence and a deeper understanding of their chosen fields.

Nowgong College expresses genuine admiration for Mahanta's accomplishments, anticipating the enriching impact his presence will bring to the educational environment. The college looks forward to benefiting from his profound knowledge, recognising the appointment as a significant step in aligning the practical knowledge with practical application.

This appointment represents a strategic move by Nowgong College (Autonomous) to integrate industry leaders into academia, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

People of Assam fed up with unfulfilled promises of BJP: Jitendra Singh

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Senior Congress leader Jitendra Singh on Monday claimed that the people of Assam are fed up with the "unfulfilled promises" of the BJP-led state government. The people are ready to side with the grand old party as it has been able to raise the public's problems at all forums, the Congress general secretary claimed. Addressing a meeting at Sipajhar in Darrang district, Singh said, "In Assam, the Congress party has been able to win the confidence of the people. The party has been persistently taking up the issues and problems of the people."

"The BJP had promised jobs, development, but nothing has happened in the last 7-8 years during which it has been in power here," the Congress in-charge of this North Eastern state

said. As the people of Assam are fed up with the "unfulfilled promises" of the government, they reposed their faith in the Congress.

On the Congress's poor performance in the recently held polls in five states, Singh said, "We are working on how to strengthen the party. There are some gaps still and we are working on it."

The Congress fought alone and lost the assembly elections in Hindi heartland states - Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan - to the BJP recently. Singh is on a three-day trip to the state, during which he will attend a party meet at Bilasipara in Dhubri district on Tuesday and an office-bearers and legislative party meeting in Guwahati on Wednesday, a party source said. (PTI)

Promod Boro meets DoNER minister; discusses development issues

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Chief of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Pramod Boro on Monday called on Union Minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) G Kishan Reddy here and briefed him about the present scenario of peace and development in the Bodo dominated areas in Assam following the signing of a peace accord in 2020.

The status of various multi-sectoral projects under the special development package of the BTR accord of 2020 was also discussed in the meeting, according to a press release.

The minister assured Boro that the development package will be approved on receipt of necessary clarifications from the Assam government as well as the BTR administration.

Secretary of the Ministry of DoNER, who was present in the meeting, assured the support of the ministry in speedy implementation of development projects.

Deputy chief of the BTR Gobinda Chandra Basumatary and Rajya Sabha member Rwngrwa Narzary accompanied Boro along with a five-member cultural delegation from the BTR. (PTI)

New executive committee of Shri Marwari Panchayati Hojai formed

HT Correspondent
HOJAI, Dec 18: The Shri Marwari Panchayati, Hojai, announced its new executive committee for the session 2023-25 during a general meeting at Shri Laxminarayan Temple in Hojai on Sunday. The meeting, chaired by Rajendra Bhimsaria, ex-president of Marwari Panchayati, concluded after three hours of discussions, resulting in the unanimous selection of Lawanya Agarwal as president and Ramesh Munda as general secretary for the upcoming term.

The newly formed executive committee includes Niranjan Sarawagi as vice-president, Manish Berwal as treasurer, and several outgoing members, such as Mohan More (outgoing vice-president), Pratap Kayal, Sunil Bhimsaria, Pramod More, Rajesh Kejriwal, Manoj Sharma, Praveen Sarawagi, Dinesh Dixit, Rajesh Bajaj, Manoj Kejriwal, Lalit Bora, Mahesh Chananai, Pawan Pansari, Manoj Tolawat, and Ashish Agarwal (president, Marwari Yuva Manch).

During the meeting, the outgoing committee presented their books of accounts and highlighted the developmental works carried out during their tenure, which were duly accepted by the forum. A moment of silence was observed to pay homage to Sushila Devi Kayal, an active worker of All India Marwari Mahila Sammelan, Hojai branch, during the proceedings.

Governor attends 22nd convocation of Assam Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria graced the 22nd convocation of Assam Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti (ARPS) at Rupnagar in the city on Sunday.

During his address at the function, Kataria emphasised the significance of language as the foundation for exchanging ideas and thoughts. He highlighted linguistic unity as a crucial factor in keeping a diverse country like India united, noting that languages and dialects are not only mediums of communication but also assert their identity, customs, and culture.

Expressing his satisfaction, the Governor commended Assam Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti for its continuous efforts in promoting Hindi for the past eight decades. He paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi and Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi for establishing the organisation on November 3, 1938, with the goal of promoting Hindi in the entire North-East.

Governor Kataria underscored that Hindi, being the most spoken and understood language in India, symbolises the country's culture and civilisation. He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for enhancing the respect and honour of Hindi, citing the Prime Minister's frequent use of Hindi in international forums.

Addressing the students, the Governor highlighted the uniqueness of obtaining a Hindi degree through hard work and dedication, making them educated citizens contributing to the development of society and the country. He expressed hope that Assam Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti would continue striving to elevate Gandhi ji's philosophy and teachings, promoting research and innovations in line with the National Education Policy, 2020.

The convocation was attended by dignitaries including Prof Sunil Baburao Kulkarni, director of Central Hindi Directorate, Ministry of Education, government of India, Prof Mohan, former chairman of the Hindi Department and former Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Delhi University, Dr Khirada Kumar Saikia, secretary of ARPS, and Bharat Bhushan Mahanta, working president of ARPS.

Aaranyak's anti-poaching dogs hog limelight at International Agri-Horti Show

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Two elite anti-poaching dogs from Aaranyak's K9 squad, K9 Nova and K9 Rosy, took center stage at the dog show held as part of the 8th International Agri-Horti Show at the College of Veterinary Science Playground in Khanapara on Sunday.

Accompanied by their handlers Jayanta Kalita and Goura Baidya, the Aaranyak K9 duo showcased their exceptional skills in the agility competition, demonstrating their proficiency in basic obedience training and tracking.

K9 Nova displayed mastery in basic obedience, while K9 Rosy's tracking skills garnered praise from the audience. These K9 members play a pivotal role in supporting law enforcement efforts, aiding in tracking, apprehending suspects, and retrieving vital



evidence, particularly in regions facing challenges related to wildlife poaching.

The event, attended by dignitaries including Assam's minister for agriculture and animal husbandry Atul Bora, highlighted the importance of the human-canine partnership. The dignitaries recognised the expertise and

dedication of Aaranyak's K9 units and their handlers.

In addition to showcasing various dog breeds, the show shed light on the activities and contributions of different breeds trained by forces such as BSF, NDRF, and SSB in ensuring safety and security. The Aaranyak K9 team learned valuable lessons from the utility demonstrated by dog units from SSB and NDRF.

The participation of these highly trained dogs emphasised their multifaceted roles, ranging from obedience training to specialised tracking, showcasing their vital role in law enforcement and conservation efforts.

The event celebrated the significant contributions of these remarkable canines and their handlers in protecting communities and preserving wildlife through their expertise, dedication, and tenacity.

The 8th International Agri-Horti Show, organised by the government of Assam from December 16-18, aimed to showcase the rich diversity of agri-horti products and explore opportunities for agri-business and trade with other countries and states.

Focusing on 'Great People's Forest 2030' Balipara Foundation launches 11th Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum in Guwahati

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 18: The 11th edition of the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum was successfully inaugurated in Guwahati by the Balipara Foundation. With a central theme of 'Great People's Forest 2030', this year's forum brought together 60 participants from over 15 countries. The primary objective is to formulate a restoration agenda for the region in alignment with the UN Decade of Restoration.

The theme derives from the ambitious Great People's Forest initiative, a collaborative effort launched earlier this year by Balipara Foundation and Conservation International at the G20. The initiative aims to restore 1 million hectares of forests and farmlands by 2030, with support from partners like ATREE and TERI. Set to commence operations in spring 2024 through its first rapid-scaling portfolio at COP28, the Forum provides a platform to unite the coalition and strategise on achieving this ambitious goal.

The Forum opened with a keynote address by Chanakya Chaudhary, director of Tata Steel Foundation & vice presi-



dent of Corporate Services at Tata Steel, highlighting the crucial role businesses play in translating global climate and biodiversity pledges into action.

A subsequent discussion, moderated by Nicholas Claxton, co-founder & partner of WOW Media Communications Group, delved into the implications of COP28 for the Eastern Himalayan region. Another session, moderated by Jason Knauf (Global Fellow, Conservation International), explored the potential for the Eastern Himalayan region to become a global showcase by investing in its rich biocultural heritage of forests and people, featuring Dr Vandana Shiva, Sourav Roy, and Dr Sonali Ghosh.

Dr Vandana Shiva emphasised, "There's no inferior and superior in the

forest. It's a place of democracy. With such initiatives, we tend to erase the separation of humans and the forest. The colonial setup gave us the idea of separation, either trees or humans. But what we need is harmony."

The Forum also featured panels addressing restoration agendas for 2030 for Bhutan, Bangladesh, and North East India, discussing key themes and challenges facing forest ecosystems and pathways for collaborative restoration efforts.

Ranjit Barthaur, founder of Balipara Foundation, highlighted during the Bhutan's Vision 2030 panel, "Valuation is the key for Naturenomics. Leadership based on value is going to be the factor for any success."

A crucial agenda of this year's Forum was to explore regional levers necessary to amplify individual restoration efforts at an unprecedented scale. Sessions on policy and economy, youth power and technology, and land, energy, waste, water, air, and carbon (LEWWAC) will continue tomorrow, discussing their role in shaping a regenerative future for the Eastern Himalaya.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Vanity working on a weak head, produces every sort of mischief.- Jane Austen

J&K's path to prosperity

In a significant development, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) stands poised to reclaim its statehood, excluding Ladakh, with an anticipated elected government by September next year. This comes at a time when J&K has emerged as one of India's top-performing provinces, showcasing an impressive annual GDP growth rate of 10 percent over the last two years. A critical task for the forthcoming elected government will be to accelerate this growth momentum, fostering employment and revenue generation. While sectors like agriculture, horticulture, tourism, handicrafts, and limited-scale manufacturing and services have been pivotal contributors to the state's economy, the untapped potential of its abundant mineral resources could further propel the manufacturing sector. Achieving this may necessitate a re-evaluation of the state's land acquisition policy. The abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 marked a turning point, eliminating the special status of J&K and leading to its bifurcation into Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. With the Supreme Court validating this move, the restoration of J&K's statehood is on the horizon. The upcoming elected government faces multifaceted challenges, including the imperative to improve law and order, create a conducive environment for social, educational, and economic growth, and address the pressing issue of youth unemployment.

Crucially, the state harbours vast untapped resources, including India's sole borax production unit, extensive sapphire deposits, and a considerable lithium reserve of 5.9 million tonnes, with more potential lithium reserves identified by the union government. Collaboration between the state government, the union government, and private sector entrepreneurs is essential to harness these resources and position J&K as a leading economic force. Notably, J&K has already exhibited commendable economic resilience, surpassing states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Manipur, and Meghalaya in per capita income. The state's per capita income has experienced a consistent upward trajectory since 2011-12, reaching Rs 1,36,771 compared to Rs 1,20,790 the previous year. While it still trails behind leaders like Telangana, Karnataka, and Haryana, J&K's gross GDP is projected to exceed 2.30 lakh crore by the end of the current financial year. However, the province has not been immune to historical challenges stemming from the prolonged presence of Article 370 since 1949. Overcoming these hurdles requires addressing issues such as political stability, future security concerns, inadequate physical infrastructure, land ownership disputes, limited market access, and the complex Hindu-Muslim divide. With the majority being Muslim, representing 68.32 percent of the total population, social cohesion and inclusive policies are paramount for sustained progress.

The recent passage of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Second Amendment) Bill, 2023, mandating 33 percent reservation for women in the state assembly, adds a progressive dimension to the political landscape. This legislation is poised to influence the future political leadership of the state, fostering a more inclusive governance structure. In conclusion, while J&K's economic potential is evident, the path to prosperity hinges on addressing longstanding challenges and leveraging its abundant resources. The state's journey toward becoming one of India's economic powerhouses requires strategic collaboration between the government and private sector, coupled with inclusive policies that bridge divides and foster sustained growth. As the countdown to the elections begins, the elected government's commitment to resolving pending issues will be instrumental in securing long-term prosperity for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. All in all it seems that full makeover of J&K is on the cards.

BJP high command opted for a long term planning in deciding on new chief ministers

By: Harihar Swarup

BJP's top leadership seems to act in unconventional ways. That relates to its unexpected choice of chief ministers in three states, Vishnu Deo Sai in Chattisgarh, Mohan Yadav in Madhya Pradesh and Bhajan Lal Sharma in Rajasthan. To the public at large, and often the know-it-all media, these names could have been randomly picked up...

There is, however, some method (or pattern) to the apparent madness. Did anyone know that in 2001, when many names were being touted as possible successors to Keshubhai Patel, a backroom Sangh talent like Narendra Modi would be chosen as CM of Gujarat? We now cannot imagine BJP without him. The same goes for the choice of two-term Manohar Lal Khattar in Haryana, or Shivraj Singh Chouhan (after the experiment with Uma Bharti and Babulal Gaur in 2003-05) in Madhya Pradesh.

The induction of Sai in Chattisgarh, Yadav in MP and Sharma in Rajasthan, the last two by overcoming tried-and-tested popular claimants to the job, should be seen in this light. The media is going to town saying it is about looking for the next generation of leaders. But Chouhan is hardly old at 64. His replacement, Yadav, elected three times from south Ujjain, is 58, nearly 12 years older than what Chouhan was when he was selected to lead MP in 2005. Khattar was 60 when he took as CM of Haryana in 2014.

Vasundhara Raje whose claim in Rajasthan was over looked this time, is, however, 70, but her replacement must have been the hardest for the party to arrive at since BJP does not have a large majority in the state. So, the assumption that BJP is looking for the next generation is only partly true. There are actually four reasons why BJP makes the kind of choices it does.

Big national leaders: First, whenever there is a strong central leadership, leaders in the state have to be in alignment with them, and not rival centres of

power.

Experimenting: The next reason is about experimenting with new talents -- where success is not guaranteed. To succeed, any new leader must be able to govern, have good ties to the organisation, and have political savvy - a difficult combo to find in one human being.

Bench strength: Unlike Congress, which has had many years in power and hence has the bench strength for heading governments of ministries, BJP did not have this depth when Modi took over in 2014. Hence the need to create a long-term bench for future leadership and government positions.

Vote arithmetic: BJP is seeking to build a lasting electoral coalition of Hindu castes and communities. And, this can happen only if dominant interests in various states see the party as the right ladder to advance their own political careers.

Social engineering: Chhattisgarh's Sai is a tribal, and his two deputies are from OBC (Arun Sao) and Brahmin (Vijay Sharma) communities. In MP deputies Rajendra Shukla and Jadhav Deva are Brahmins and scheduled caste respectively while CM Yadav is an OBC. MP CM Yadav could also be a signalling device for neighbouring UP, where Yadavs are mostly not with, BJP.

Narendra Singh Tomar, a Rajput and till recently in the central cabinet, will be speaker in MP. Sharma in Rajasthan is a Brahmin, and his two deputies are Rajput and Dalit.

While this pattern of balancing community faces is not unique to BJP, the party was one of the earliest to experiment with social engineering after the country was Mandalised.

Overlooked talent pool: there is, however, one strength special to BJP; it has an additional pool of talent to tap for positions in government and the party. Most parties have three sources of potential leaders; core insiders, external inductees, and previously apolitical talent from bureaucracy or the corporate sector: BJP has one more source and that is the Sangh Parivar. (IPA Service)

Hamas manoeuvring complicates efforts to secure prisoner swaps with Israel

Israel wasn't slamming the door on renewed indirect prisoner swap negotiations with Hamas when it this week barred David Barnea, the head of Mossad, the country's foreign intelligence agency, from travelling to Qatar to explore possibilities for renewed exchanges. Instead, it was manoeuvring for greater leverage in potential talks and expressing doubts about whether Hamas could deliver a second temporary truce in the Gaza war that would make further prisoner swaps possible.

Israeli media reports suggested that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant opposed the trip in the belief that Hamas' Qatar-based leaders had lost contact with the group's Gaza leadership after it failed to respond to Qatari proposals. Exiled Hamas leaders, Khaled Mishal and Ismail Haniyeh, served as conduits to their Gaza counterparts in talks in November that produced a week-long truce during which Hamas released 84 Israeli and 24 foreign hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

Some Israeli sources suggested that Israel, despite pressure from relatives of the 138 hostages kidnapped by Hamas in its October 7 attack on Israel to prioritize the release of the captives, may not want to negotiate at a time that the United States is pressing it to adapt its military strategy to ensure fewer Gazan civilian casualties.

Barnea was stopped from travelling a day after US President Joe Biden met in the White House with relatives of American nationals held hostage by Hamas. Israel's negotiating position was weakened by a US intelligence assessment concluding that half of the air-to-ground or-

dinance Israel has dropped on Gaza since October 7 consisted of unguided rather than precision-guided munitions. The report challenged Israeli assertions that its military sought to spare or minimise civilian casualties. Israel was quick to counter the assertion.

The Hamas-controlled Gaza health ministry puts casualties at close to 19,000. The ministry classifies all casualties as civilian. It is unclear whether that number includes Hamas fighters or whether the ministry simply does not publish that figure. Even if fighters were included, the vast majority of casualties, including 7,700 children, are civilians. Israel puts the number of fighters killed at about 7,000, including ten battalion and brigade commanders. Hamas is estimated to have 30,000 fighters.

Qatar appears to see a second round of prisoner swaps as a possible way of turning a limited and temporary deal into something that could lead to an end in the fighting and create the basis for negotiations to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This week, Israeli President Isaac Herzog poured cold water on peace talks and the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel any time soon.

In wanting to negotiate a second round of prisoner exchanges, Qatar reportedly proposes it involve not only women and children but also men. Last month's swaps exclusively involved Israeli women and children and foreign nationals held by Hamas in exchange for Palestinian women and children incarcerated by Israel.

In a move that could influence strained relations between Hamas and the Western-backed, West Bank-based Palestine Au-



thority, Qatar reportedly suggested that Marwan Barghouti, a popular member of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Al Fatah group be included in a potential exchange.

Widely seen as a potential successor to 87-year-old Abbas if Israel releases him, Barghouti was convicted to five cumulative life sentences in prison on murder charges. Israel accuses Barghouti of founding the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, a coalition of Palestinian armed groups in the West Bank.

In 2006, Barghouti authored from prison a National Conciliation Document of the Prisoners that was co-signed by Hamas. The document endorsed Palestinians' right to resist Israeli occupation, implicitly including armed resistance, while appearing to envision a two-state solution.

Exiled Hamas leaders' apparent willingness to re-engage in prisoner swap negotiations reverses their earlier refusal to further discuss exchanges until Israel halts its assault on Gaza. The turnaround fits a pattern of convoluted and contradictory statements by Hamas leaders as

well as Iranians suggesting that militants and their backers are manoeuvring for the day the guns fall silent in Gaza.

The manoeuvring started when Iran signed on to a statement by

leaders of Arab and Muslim-majority countries gathered in Riyadh last month endorsing the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. A month later, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian appeared to roll back the Iranian endorsement. He told the Doha Forum this week that rejection of a two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was Iran and Israel's only agreement.

Iranian political scientist Nasser Hadrian noted that "there are three views in Iran, which are reconcilable. One is a referendum. They argue that Palestinians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims should decide the future of that country. Number two is whatever Palestinians decide is fine for Iran... And there are people in Iran who think a two-state solution is the best solution.

Making a point of condemning Hamas' targeting of civilians in its October 7 attacks alongside tackling Israel for its conduct of

the war, Hadrian argued that in the end Iran would accept realities on the ground. He was referring to a 1982 Arab peace plan that proposes recognition of Israel in exchange for a Palestinian state and various Muslim countries that have maintained diplomatic relations with Israel, or in the case of Saudi Arabia, are considering recognising the Jewish state.

Iran's manoeuvres occurred against the backdrop of contrasting Palestinian and Iranian responses to Iranian support for Hamas. Iran's rising popularity among Palestinians is in stark contrast to sympathy for Israel among ordinary Iranians, according to Hadrian. A recent survey concluded that 41 per cent of Gazans and 30 per cent of West Bankers were satisfied with Iran's role in the Gaza war. Yemen's Houthi rebels, who have fired missiles towards Israel and attacked Israel-related shipping in the Gulf scored double those numbers.

Iranians' response is diametrically opposite. Iranian manoeuvring also constitutes an attempt to facilitate efforts to ease harsh US sanctions imposed in response to Iran's nuclear program. The United States has effectively frozen billions of dollars it had promised to release as part of a prisoner exchange deal because of Iranian support for Hamas.

Much like Iran, exile Hamas officials, in an exercise of one step forward, two steps backward, signalled that recognition of Israel was not beyond the pale. The PLO, a coalition of Palestinian factions other than Hamas, recognized Israel's right to exist and renounced terrorism in 1988. In exchange, Israel acknowledged the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. (IPA Service)

Cricket's in Olympic: A game-changer for India's sporting glory

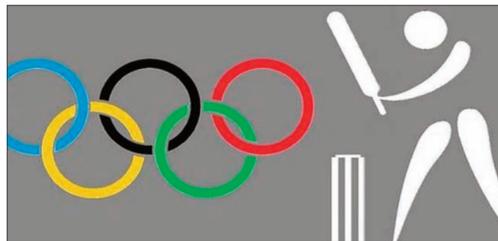
By: Dipak Kurmi

The 1896 Athens Summer Olympics marked cricket as the sole team sport in the lineup, yet its inclusion was abruptly abandoned due to insufficient entries. Fast forward to 1990, where the hosts, France and Great Britain, took center stage in a two-day match. Involving 12 men per side and two innings, the latter emerged victorious in a predictably competitive showdown. The lack of enthusiasm from major sporting nations, seemingly giving cricket the cold shoulder, may well be the reason behind its exclusion from subsequent Olympic events.

The 2028 Los Angeles Olympics mark the anticipated return of cricket, with a resounding thumbs-up from the International Olympics Committee (IOC). In a pivotal decision during the IOC's 141st session on October 16, 2023, LA28's proposal gained approval, adding five sports - baseball/softball, cricket (T20), flag football, lacrosse (sixes), and squash - to the program for the Olympic Games Los Angeles 2028 (LA28). The choice of the blistering T20 format aligns with contemporary trends, revealing a departure from the more relaxed two-innings format that is gradually fading into history. While traditionalists lament its decline, the market, represented by spectators and viewers, ultimately determines whether the pristine version of a game endures or the more exhilarating iteration steals the thunder. This shift echoes the transformation of the once pristine 35-minute hockey game succumbing to the pressures of TV advertisers, now played in four quarters of seven and a half minutes each.

What does this signify for India? Cricket, initially a Commonwealth sport, maintained by the International Cricket Conference until changing winds ushered in interest from diverse nations. Presently, boasting 12 full and 96 associate members, the allure of Olympic gold is poised to captivate nations, encouraging them to step into the cricketing arena. Notably, at the Olympics, the International Cricket Council is anticipated to step aside, making way for the IOC to extend an open invitation to any nation eager to participate in this arguably colonial game. However, such inclusion would likely come with reasonable criteria to navigate logistical and time-related concerns for the organizers. Regardless, the unfolding narrative promises intrigue.

India cannot afford complacency at its own peril; it's time to



pull up its socks. In the 50-over version against Australia, India has faced defeat 83 times in 150 matches, indicating a need for serious reconsideration. However, in the T20 format, India holds a 15:10 advantage over Australia. Australia remains a consistent force in cricket, consistently nurturing fresh talent to replace the aging players. On the other hand, India's cricketing gravity lies in the IPL, attracting players globally and ambitious youngsters from the Indian hinterlands. Looking ahead to the 2028 LA Olympics, the emerging players, both aspirants and those already in the limelight, are unlikely to let opportunities slip away. Anticipate major sporting nations like China, Russia, the USA, and Germany earnestly grooming their players for the competitive stage. The cricketing landscape is set for an intriguing shift.

In entering the Olympics fervently later than many, China, for various reasons, embraced the sporting arena with zeal, echoing the call of its paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. Since its return to the Olympic stage in 1984, after a 32-year hiatus, China has consistently taken the sporting world by storm. The crux lies in the fact that competition is poised to intensify with a growing number of aspirants joining the fray. Amidst this, there's a sotto voce criticism, deemed uncharitable by cricket aficionados, suggesting that cricket, compared to disciplines like hockey and soccer, may not be as physically demanding. This observation highlights the influx of Indian and Pakistani enthusiasts, who, admittedly, do not fall under the category of major sporting nations. The well-known fact that young Indians are more drawn to cricket and cinema than to other esoteric arenas adds an interesting layer to the narrative.

India has an apocryphal tale woven around its cricketing legend Kapil Dev, who once openly confessed that his initial passion lay in sprinting. However, guided by the wisdom of his elder brother, he made a pivotal shift to cricket. The rationale? While an Olympic

medal would gleam momentarily, cricket held the promise of enduring enrichment. The allure of wealth plays a significant role, and it's understandable that our youth gravitates towards financial prospects. Setting polemics aside, the undeniable truth is that increased participation, especially from naturally athletic nations, is set to challenge established cricketing powers in the long, if not medium, run. Contrary to some enthusiastic commentators, a cricket gold medal in the Olympics is not a given; it demands more than mere wishful thinking.

The pursuit of Olympic inclusion is a universal endeavor, with each nation advocating for the incorporation of sports it excels in. Since 2016, watersports in the Olympics have taken a glamorous turn, introducing captivating beauty contests on the pool under the moniker of artistic swimming. The landscape of hockey has undergone rule adjustments over the years, favoring Western nations and adversely affecting India and Pakistan. These two nations were renowned for their artistic gameplay, featuring skillful stickwork that enthralled spectators. Fundamentally, there's nothing amiss in cricketing nations successfully securing the game's place in the Olympics and, perhaps, eventually adapting the rules to align with their strengths.

Why not Kabaddi? This indigenous game, often considered the unofficial national sport of Indians and revered by the Gods, as depicted in the epic Mahabharata, has found a place in the Asian Games. While there is a Kabaddi World Cup, the coveted status of being an Olympic sport remains elusive. A similar fate befalls kho-kho, another rustic Indian sport with roots stretching back centuries. It's essential to recognize that while the elevation of a sport to the Olympic stage is undoubtedly uplifting for the country of origin, it also demands acknowledgment that heightened competition might unsettle the status quo. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Country may change but not their motives

By: Er. Rajesh Pathak

Where Muslims are 8% of the population in that France last year the Anti-separatism law has come to force. And now the appropriate cause has come to fore to enforce it, too. Government is in its way to take an action against a Muslim school in Paris. For the organisation running it is adamant on violating the law of the land. As an initial step Government has put its funding to it on hold. Notably, the interior minister, Gerald Dermanin, had put 24 mosques to closure in last 2 years. And the leader of opposition Marine Le Pen of Ressemblant party is not yet satisfied. She wants all the mosques nursing Jihad must be shut down unconditionally; and whatever be the amount of Jihadist elements they must be deported back to the country of their origin. Le Pen has demanded that the Muslims using headscarves in the public place should be fined.

Jihadist incidents seem to have gradually gained foothold in the life in Germany, France, Sweden and other European countries. In what a well-planned way how all that happened is what essential needed to be understood. Jihadist elements first bring into execution an incident, and then ran away into their locality on the arrival of the police-force on the scene.

Where already trained in dealing with such kind of exigencies well organized residents force the chasing policemen to backtrack through stone pelting and such other combative tricks. Then comes the turn of so-called human right activists among them who mobilize shouting that being minorities there people are being categorically criminalized by the police and administration. On the other side journalists, writers, advocates and other intellectuals engaged in art and cultures set upon painting the story that Jihad is the brainchild of handful of misguided lots, which has nothing to do with the common 'Peace-loving' Muslims.

But the facts have different story to tell. Denmark had to put the ban on the funding of mosques. And behind this step all the political parties came stood united. The cause behind what Denmark did is said to be Turkey having given away the

fund for the construction of 25 mosques in 6 cities of the country. Yet this is not an isolated case. Taliba mosque alone received whopping 57crores from Saudi Arabia! The display of solo music by an individual on a corner of the street is the rare charm of the Denmark culture. As the Muslims grew in influence population wise this music has now begun to irritate fanatics among them due to their 'Sharia' forbidding that.

Once refugees displaced due to 'Jihad' in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq were warmly received in Germany. This gesture of 'humanity' fetched immense appreciation to Chancellor, Angela Merkel, worldwide. But later world also got to see the slogans inside the country demanding her to step down from the post of Head of the State because of her same step. As in the frenzy of 'Salafi' doctrine this has got to be common thing to see refugees shouting objectionable religious slogans; teasing women; making assault on Police, and in case of Police action putting children and ladies on the front as a counter tactic. And then spreading fabricated story and morphed videos to tell the world that how their children and women being treated brutally. But last of all this came with infamous Colon incident of sexual assault on the girls. The justification that Jihadists gave in response to this incident is far more notable. They told that the clothes girls wore were too short, which were in contravention of 'Sharia'. And that how could they tolerate it!

Britain's condition is more alarming. It's because Jihadists have their open sympathizers in Labor party backed by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). British Prime Minister even referred BBC the Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation due to its Marxist's leaning, and even called that she had fought three elections not against Labor party, but BBC. Increasing Muslim population in the country is obviously favorable to these two. BBC's broadcast on Lester riots had openly been a bias in favor of Muslims that entire world saw. Former foreign minister, Jack Straw, who leveled allegation on Narendra Modi regarding Gujarat riot in BBC documentary, himself relied on that Muslims of his constituency that is 30% of the population.

Sex education in India: Analyzing the taboos, myths and benefits

By: Naisha Sabnani

While sex education is so conveniently eliminated by our current education system to avoid right wing extremism and social backlash due to stigmas and stereotypes, it is the students that pay the price of it. This grave predicament demands interest remedy. Read on to find out the origins of the shame attached to it, previous attempts to inculcate sex education that have failed and why, struggles faced by teenagers that are denied the knowledge they are entitled to and solutions that can finally solve this issue.

In a modernist human society where education claims to be that beacon of knowledge that obliterates preposterous stigmas and taboos and fosters cognizant and well-rounded individuals that are almost devoid of stereotype and prejudice; it stands to be the greatest and the most dichotomously puzzling predicament that humankind's current system of 'education' so wantonly obscures the very genesis of life and the most pleasurable activity of human beings in this world.

In the past, sex education has been considered a taboo topic by those withholding power, ignorantly making scientifically false and inane claims like 'Sex education leads to more sex in teenagers, thus increasing the risks of STDs and unwanted pregnancies.'

Contrastingly, however, research shows that sex education evidently does not lead to a rise in sexual activity; for instance the findings of the Youth Risk Behavioural Surveillance Survey (YRBSS), show that a substantial chunk (almost 40%) of high schoolers already engage in intercourse, and sex education, or rather the lack thereof, possess no influence over this figure. Another ludicrous claim often made by right-wing extremists to justify the absence of sex education in schools is that it leads to adolescents making a 'precocious sexual debut'. Once again, this conveniently oblivious assertion has been disproved by the numerous reiterations of researchers and biologists alike.

In the most unfortunate absence of the provision of that knowledge that is and must be considered indispensable for our youth, students today find themselves in a myriad of dilemmas.

Firstly, they often lack the comprehensive skills to fully acknowledge and appreciate the plethora of changes in their bodies, thus finding them 'strange' and 'bizarre'. Furthermore, conditioned by society to not discuss these changes with anyone, they find themselves alone in a battle they do not possess the armour to fight. Moreover, the current and unfortunate state of affairs holds a far more adverse effect on young menstruators who stand to be even more befuddled about the changes in their bodies and remain oblivious to menstrual hygiene practices. This often leads to mental health problems and self-harm and in the most extreme cases, students resort to suicide.

It is rather noteworthy that a study conducted by The John Hopkins University in the United States shows that LGBTQIA+ suicides are reduced by 14% in grades 9-12, in states where same-sex marriage has been legalised and a more accommodating ecosystem can be cultivated.

Secondly, students also lack the understanding of safe-sex practices, hence exposing themselves to deadly sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV-AIDS. Moreover, numerous studies have shown that unwanted teenage pregnancies have only been on the rise in the past few decades, owing to the absence of knowledge that can help teens either avoid intercourse or engage in safe intercourse. The YRBSS study also shows that efficient sex education leads to an increased contraceptive use.

Thirdly, when students are denied basic education about their bodies, which all humans are entitled to; out of sheer desperation, they end up resorting to illegal sites, specifically pornography to learn more, which often leads them helplessly astray and down a self-destructing path.

Provided such harsh and grave struggles that teenagers find themselves in, the concerned authorities must be galvanised to take immediate action. Nevertheless, in order to truly remedy these most unfortunate circumstances of our education system that we find ourselves in, one must possess a thorough comprehension of their origins and why attempts to inculcate sex education into school curriculum have never garnered the degree of success that they ought to.

Historically, India boasts a rich heritage of liberated sexual perspective as found in evidence in the works of literature and the sculptures of hindu temples. The ancient Hindu text Kamasutra, a piece of literature that dwells exhaustively on topics including but not limited to sexual enlightenment, fulfilment and procreation stands as a testament to ancient Indian society's acknowledgment of the vitality of sex education. However, modern India finds itself to have progressed backwards in this context.

While few initiatives have been taken to encourage sex education, most of them have failed. For instance, in Jharkhand, a programme called Udaan was launched to equip students with sexual health related knowledge. However the size and scale of this programme proved too minuscule to hold any tangible impact or to claim any ability to amend the educational curriculum at large.

Furthermore, state boards like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka have eliminated sex education from schools in its entirety, citing absurd right wing ideologies.

Another noteworthy attempt was made by The Government of India under The Ministry of Human Resource Development and Health and Family welfare to address sexual education

in young adults in 2020. The officials were cautious not to use the terms 'sex' or 'sexual' in the programme to avoid public backlash. In spite of their precautionary measures, large segments of society boycotted the programme due to pre-existing taboos. Furthermore, in 2020, NCERT had released a teacher training manual for the sensitisation and enrichment of teachers educating transgender children, which had to be retracted, owing to societal backlash.

Evidently, our nation lacks a uniform policy for planning, articulation, culmination and execution of sexual education. Solutions pertinent to the issue (bearing in mind the 17 SDGs) include:

Firstly, while educational curriculums are decentralised and each state board possesses the power to censor and edit textbooks as they see fit in accordance with the local beliefs and culture on the region, a well-rounded sexual education curriculum must be formed at the central level and all states must be legally obligated to adopt it. This must be done to ensure that state bans do not act as barriers to the students of those regions from access to sexual education.

Secondly, the curriculum design must be founded upon the inputs of a special committee that would comprise researchers of human sexual anatomy, biologists, teen psychologists, doctors and experienced and voracious educators.

Thirdly, schools must hire professional and trained faculty that specialise particularly in providing sexual education. The benefit of this would be two fold as it would not just promote sexual education but also increase employment.

Fourthly, the parents of the students must be gently sensitised to the imperativeness of sexual education and the vast shortcomings of the lack thereof. This can be done through parent-teacher programmes, government schemes and other illuminative resources. However, this matter must be handled delicately and extra care must be taken to not hurt the sentiments of parents that have been conditioned sociologically and psychologically for decades to think a certain way and possess stigmas that are deeply ingrained in their mindsets.

Fifthly, it must be ensured that the curriculum does not dwell solely on heterosexual norms and practices but also brings forth the social evils of homophobia, transphobia and other phenomena that oppress the LGBTQIA+ population and the need to do away with them. It should also talk of domestic violence, sexual abuse and violence.

Furthermore, it should also discuss the critical and intertwined relationship between sexual health and mental health. It must help students regulate their emotions as they explore the changes taking place in their bodies and equip them with skills to improve decision making.

Lastly, it must provide students with the ability to take efficient legal action in times of crisis. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Nirbhaya case: What does 'rarest of the rare' actually mean?

By: Aarushi Punia

The gruesome gang rape of a 23-year-old woman on 16 December 2012 – or the Nirbhaya case – stirred India's collective conscience. But 11 years on, the battle for women's safety in the country is far from won. As we remember Nirbhaya's struggle – and that of any woman who has been a victim of gender-based violence, The Quint is reposting articles and videos from our coverage of the case over the years.

The Nirbhaya case constitutes a crime that fits into the category of the 'rarest of the rare' cases because it violated the collective conscience. The death penalty, as an exceptional punishment, follows from the judgment that the case fit the criteria of the 'rarest of the rare'. Ideally, an exception should be unknown until it occurs: it is exceptional because it is not documented under the rule. Conversely, once an exception has been codified through the law, it loses its exceptional character. Hence, ideally, there can be no pre-existing category of the 'rarest of the rare'.

However, the fact that such a category exists proves otherwise. Judges already know what these 'exceptions' are going to be because they understand exceptions for a category like 'murder'. The 'rarest of the rare' proves to be an empty, floating category, which seems to stand at once inside and outside the law, due to its ability to accommodate exceptionality. In the Nirbhaya judgment, the Supreme Court said that the 'rarest of the rare' case is one in which "the crime is committed... may result in intense and extreme indignation of the community and shock the collective conscience of the society".

Rarest of the rare: An ever-evolving category
The category of the 'rarest of the rare' is always evolving. It is the evaluation of certain cases that makes them fit into the category of the 'rarest of the rare', and not the nature of the crimes as such. In such cases, the legal judgment says that the judicial power is obligated to the collective to repair the moral fabric of society which the crime has torn. The social anthropologist Max Gluckman observed that in primitive societies, conflict does not lead to the breakdown of society but rather acts as its glue.

He viewed rebellions against authority as a sign of persistent faith in the authority. In some sense, public pressure can be viewed as forcing the authority to reform itself.

In modern societies, public pressure is exerted through the idea of 'collective conscience'. It is the crime that brought the society together in the form of protests, and impressed upon the judiciary (without featuring in the judgment as evidence such as newspaper reports or social media outrage) that this crime is unique – not just because of the way it was committed, but the impact it had on society. In the Nirbhaya case, the interest of 'collective conscience' became an admissible legal tool against which the severity of crimes could be judged by the judiciary.

The 'rarest of the rare' case lacks a definition per se, and can only be described by a collective sense of violation felt in the society. The sociologist Emile Durkheim says that there are certain rules prescribed upon everyone's consciousness, and hence it is possible for a collective to simultaneously feel outraged.

Where evaluation of a crime goes beyond the act of the crime itself
We see this dilemma arise in the Nirbhaya judgment as well. Being a case of murder, should the accused have been punished with life imprisonment or death penalty? What form of punishment would be more befitting of the crime committed? This is where the evaluation of the crime goes beyond the act of crime itself: it assesses the rarity of the crime based on its impact on the collective consciousness.

The judiciary does not intend merely to provide just punishment, but also restore the balance of society and maintain this illusory collective conscience.

It thus emerges that both crime and collective conscience are mutually constitutive, and that the collective conscience has criminal roots. It was in the larger interest of society and not in the name of providing just punishment for a crime, that the Nirbhaya judgment supported the death penalty for the accused.

The 'fiction' of a collective conscience
In the Nirbhaya judgment, we find the judiciary breaking its own law: despite saying that the death penalty must only be an exception, it creates the category of 'rarest of the rare'. This acts as a zone of exceptionality in which cases can enter in order to attain the death penalty as the judgement. By giving the death penalty for an exceptional case which fits the 'rarest of the rare' category, the judgement actually sets a precedent by making death penalty a rule for exceptional cases.

What emerges is that collective conscience is a fiction that allows us to conceive of the idea of society. There can be no pre-existing law for a fictive society. Hence, the Nirbhaya judgment not only invokes but creates the collective conscience through the crime whose rarity was itself created through the collective conscience. Punishment then is not an eye for an eye, but a mechanism for maintaining the illusion of public and social order; by making the collective conscience feel satisfied that the judiciary has attempted to repair its violation. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Consumerism or building human relationships: Why do we give gifts to each other?

By: Chip Colwell

Have you planned out your holiday gift giving yet? If you're anything like me, you might be waiting until the last minute. But whether every single present is already wrapped and ready, or you'll hit the shops on Christmas Eve, giving gifts is a curious but central part of being human.

While researching my new book, *So Much Stuff*, on how humanity has come to depend on tools and technology over the last three million years, I became fascinated by the purpose of giving things away. Why would people simply hand over something precious or valuable when they could use it themselves?

To me as an anthropologist, this is an especially powerful question because giving gifts likely has ancient roots. And gifts can be found in every known culture around the world.

So, what explains the power of the present?
Undoubtedly, gifts serve lots of purposes. Some psychologists have observed a "warm glow" – an intrinsic delight – that's associated with giving presents. Theologians have noted how gifting is a way to express moral values, such as love, kindness and gratitude, in Catholicism, Buddhism and Islam.

Philosophers ranging from Seneca to Friedrich Nietzsche regarded gifting as the best demonstration of selflessness. It's little wonder that gifts are a central part of Hannukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and other winter holidays – and that some people may even be tempted to regard Black Friday, the opening of the year-end shopping season, as a holiday in itself.

But of all the explanations for why people give gifts, the one I find most convincing was offered in 1925 by a French anthropologist named Marcel Mauss.

Giving, receiving, reciprocating

Like many anthropologists, Mauss was puzzled by societies in which gifts were extravagantly given away. For example, along the northwest coast of Canada and the United States, Indigenous peoples conduct potlatch ceremonies. In these dayslong feasts, hosts give away immense amounts of property. Consider a famous potlatch in 1921, held by a clan leader of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation in Canada who gave community members 400 sacks of flour, heaps of blankets, sewing machines, furniture, canoes, gas-powered boats and even pool tables. In a now-famous essay titled "The Gift," originally published almost a century ago, Mauss sees potlatches as an extreme form of gifting. Yet, he suggests this behavior is totally recognisable in most every human society: We give things away even when keeping them for ourselves would seem to make much more economic and evolutionary sense.

Mauss observed that gifts create three separate but inextricably related actions. Gifts are given, received and reciprocated.

The first act of giving establishes the virtues of the gift giver. They express their generosity,

kindness and honour.

The act of receiving the gift, in turn, shows a person's willingness to be honored. This is a way for the receiver to show their own generosity, that they are willing to accept what was offered to them. The third component of gift giving is reciprocity, returning in kind what was first given. Essentially, the person who received the gift is now expected – implicitly or explicitly – to give a gift back to the original giver.

But then, of course, once the first person gets something back, they must return yet another gift to the person who received the original gift. In this way, gifting becomes an endless loop of giving and receiving, giving and receiving.

This last step – reciprocity – is what makes gifts unique. Unlike buying something at a store, in which the exchange ends when money is traded for goods, giving gifts builds and sustains relationships. This relationship between the gift giver and receiver is bound up with morality. Gifting is an expression of fairness because each present is generally of equal or greater value than what was last given. Gifting is an expression of respect because it shows a willingness to honor the other person. In these ways, gifting tethers people together. It keeps people connected in an infinite cycle of mutual obligations.

Giving better gifts
Are modern-day consumers unknowingly embodying Mauss' theory a little too well? After all, many people today suffer not from the lack of gifts, but from an overabundance.

Gallup reports that the average American holiday shopper estimates they'll spend US\$975 on presents in 2023, the highest amount since this survey began in 1999.

Many gifts are simply thrown out. In the 2019 holiday season, it was estimated that more than \$15 billion of gifts purchased by Americans were unwanted, with 4% going directly to the landfill. This year, holiday spending is expected to increase in the UK, Canada, Japan and elsewhere. Modern-day gifting practices may be the source of both awe and anger. On the one hand, by giving presents you are engaging in an ancient behavior that makes us human by growing and sustaining our relationships. On the other hand, it seems as if some societies might be using the holiday season as an excuse to simply consume more and more.

Mauss' ideas do not promote runaway consumerism. On the contrary, his explanations of gifts suggest that the more meaningful and personal the present, the greater the respect and honor being shown. A truly thoughtful gift is far less likely to end up in a dump. Vintage, upcycled, handmade goods – or a personalised experience such as a food tour or hot air balloon ride – might even be more valued than an expensive item mass-produced on the other side of the world, shipped across oceans and packaged in plastic.

Quality gifts can speak to your values and more meaningfully sustain your relationships. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

An escapist outlet: The rise of hyper-masculinity in Indian cinema

By: Eshan Sharma

“Madness is the most disgraceful thing that can overtake a wild creature.” — *Rudyard Kipling, The Jungle Book*
It is often said that cinema acts as a mirror to the society we live in. At times, it depicts issues faced by society, and sometimes, it chooses to escape from reality, taking the viewer to an imagined territory. It is difficult to identify when society is influenced by cinema or vice versa.

Films depict a complex society with numerous cultures, identities, and issues in various ways. Sometimes, these representations raise important questions. In recent times, films like *Kabir Singh* (2019) or *Animal* (2023) attracted the public as well as scholarly scrutiny regarding the depiction and politics of gender in Indian cinema.

In a recent interview, actor Naseeruddin Shah said, “Mardon ki insecurity badh rahi hai, isiliye ab aur zyada zor diya jaa raha hai hyper masculinity ko...” (The insecurities of men are increasing and that is why there is a push for hyper-masculinity.)

Indian society is patriarchal, and the Hindi film industry, in particular, is a male-dominated industry, where the majority of the technical crew, including filmmakers and producers, are male. The 'male gaze' dictates how the interplay and politics of gender are represented in our cinema. As a student of history, my work allows me to go back in time to see how the conception and representation of masculinity has evolved over the years. When I think of films like *Animal* or *Kabir Singh*, I often compare them with the image of the 'angry young man' that emerged in the 1970s.

Expressions of anger
The angry young man was violent but, like Robin Hood, a friend of the poor and an enemy of the rich. The figure of the angry young man was essentially anti-establishment and stood for the welfare of the poor.

Similar to Amitabh Bachchan, Naseeruddin Shah is depicted in art house films such as *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai* (1980) by Saeed Akhtar Mirza as a young man frustrated with the system but non-violent. Prakash Mehra's *Zanjeer* (1973) created the image of the angry young man played by Amitabh Bachchan.

The 1970s were more turbulent and testing than any other in India's history, characterised by increasing unemployment, poverty, and political violence. It was the time when, on one side, the Indian armed forces had just emerged

victorious in the Bangladesh Liberation War against Pakistan, and on the other side, the daughter of independent India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, was voted in. The evocative slogan of the decade was, 'Indira Lao, Garibi Hatao' (Elect Indira, Eradicate Poverty).

The terrible drought in East India in the mid-1960s impeded India's development and aggravated poverty, resulting in the country's increased reliance on western powers for aid. The 1970s witnessed the hollowness of the government's 'Garibi Hatao (Eradicate Poverty)' slogan, juxtaposed against the harsh realities of daily life, marked by inflation, escalating unemployment, and pervasive political and financial corruption. Indifference towards the burgeoning student movements nationwide further fueled a sense of helplessness.

The common man was disillusioned and angry with the system, and at that time, emerged the figure of Inspector Vijay Khanna (played by Bachchan). This film paved the way for a new kind of hero – a brooding, angry, despondent Bachchan, as opposed to the romantic, charming Rajesh Khanna or Dev Anand. The 'angry man' persona consciously reshaped notions of masculinity, stardom, and political discourse on the screen, leaving an indelible impact on subsequent developments in cinema.

What Bachchan's Vijay Khanna was to commercial cinema, Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri were to art house cinema. Both of them were considered to be the best of their time. They immortalized characters like Albert Pinto from Saeed Akhtar Mirza's *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai?* or Bhiku Lahanya from Govind Nihalani's *Aakrosh* during the 1980s.

The 80s were arguably a lost decade, with Indira Gandhi pursuing her gambits of nationalising banks and loan melas when she should have been ushering in economic reforms and deregulation. In the movie *Albert Pinto ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai?*, the central themes of the narrative revolve around Pinto's struggle to determine his life's purpose beyond repairing expensive cars for affluent clients at the garage.

Pinto's lack of awareness regarding the social and political dimensions affecting his family leads to the imprisonment of his unemployed younger brother, exploited by local criminal elements. Initially,

Pinto's anger seems rooted in selfishness, but it transforms, symbolising a broader discontent. This discontent is reflective of the im-

minent expression by real Mumbai textile workers, embodied in the politically active yet defiant figure of his father.

As the film unfolds, witnessing his brother's incarceration, his father's loss of dignity, and the company's malicious attempts to discredit the workers' union and their right to strike, Pinto redirects his anger toward a more fitting target – the political and economic elite. This pivotal moment is captured in a cinema setting, with Pinto challenging the political address of the company management. Shouting at the cinema screen, Pinto faces opposition from a disgruntled audience, and Mirza subverts the concept of political acquiescence by implicating the broader society and empowering Pinto.

Characters like Albert Pinto and Vijay Khanna emerged as compelling figures, raising thought-provoking questions through their expressions of anger, which symbolically represented a more profound discontent. Their narratives served as a lens through which the audience could analyse and comment on the intricate social and political landscapes prevalent during the tumultuous decades of the 1970s and 80s.

The present cinematic landscape
Fast-forward to the present cinematic landscape, and a disconcerting pattern reemerges – women are once again relegated to peripheral roles, their significance measured solely by their contributions to the male character's storyline.

Film critic Anna M.M. Vetticad delves into this issue, particularly in the context of Pushpa, elucidating how, in a contemporary India marked by religious bigotry, language chauvinism, and caste divisions, potential unifying factors encompass misogyny, patriarchy, class female objectification, and a pervasive desire to control or own women.

A historical examination of commercial cinema reveals a recurrent portrayal of women as objects of desire – depicted as helpless, conservative, and confined to stereotypical 'domestic' roles. Their primary function has often been to bolster the male protagonist's narrative and personify an idealised femininity. In some instances, the female body becomes a tool for attracting male audiences, exploited through item songs and dances adorned with elaborate costumes.

Examining recent films such as *RRR*, *Pushpa*, *Kabir Singh*, or *Animal*, a common thematic thread emerges – the portrayal of an exaggerated form of masculinity that markedly deviates from reality. The violence and anger depicted in these films seem to function as an escapist outlet, prompting contemplation on the underlying reasons for the increasing appeal of such violently toxic masculine representations in contemporary Indian cinema.

This phenomenon invites a broader conversation about societal norms, expectations, and the evolving dynamics of gender portrayal on the big screen. (Courtesy: The Wire)



A gloomy mood hangs over Ukraine's soldiers as war with Russia grinds on

KYIV, Dec 18: A gloomy mood hangs over Ukraine's soldiers nearly two years after Russia invaded their country.

Despite a disappointing counteroffensive this summer and signs of wavering financial support from allies, Ukrainian soldiers say they remain fiercely determined to win. But as winter approaches, they worry that Russia is better equipped for battle and are frustrated about being on the defensive again in a grueling war. Some doubt the judgment of their leaders.

Discontent among Ukrainian soldiers — once extremely rare and expressed only in private — is now more common and out in the open.

In the southern city of Kherson, where Ukraine is staging attacks against well-armed Russian troops on the other side of the Dnieper River, soldiers are asking why these difficult amphibious operations were not launched months ago in warmer weather.



"I don't understand," said a commander of the 11th National Guard Brigade's anti-drone unit who is known on the battlefield as Boxer. "Now it's harder and colder."

"It's not just my feeling, many units share it," said Boxer, who spoke on condition that only his battlefield name would be used.

Russia, which illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, controls about one-fifth of

Ukraine. After 22 months of war the two countries are essentially in a stalemate along the 1,000-kilometer-long (620-mile-long) front line.

Russian forces aim to push deeper into eastern Ukraine this winter, analysts say, so that Russian President Vladimir Putin can cite this momentum as he campaigns for reelection, an outcome that is all but certain. Emboldened by recent gains on the battlefield, Putin said last week that he remains fully committed to the war and criticized Ukraine for "sacrificing" troops to demonstrate success to Western sponsors. In the United States, which has already spent some \$111 billion defending Ukraine, President Joe Biden is advocating for an additional \$50 billion in aid. But Republican lawmakers are balking at more support — just as some lawmakers in Europe are on the fence about providing another \$50 billion to Ukraine, after failing to deliver on promised ammunition.

"The reason the Ukrainians are gloomy is that,

they now sense, not only have they not done well this year ... they know that the Russians' game is improving," said Richard Barrons, a former British army general. "They see what's happening in Congress, and they see what happened in the EU."

Ukraine may be on the defensive this winter, but its military leaders say they have no intention of letting up the fight. "If we won't have a single bullet, we will kill them with shovels," said Serhii, a commander in the 59th Brigade that is active in the eastern city of Avdiivka and who spoke on condition that only his first name be used. "Surely, everyone is tired of war, physically and mentally. But imagine if we stop — what happens next?"

The fatigue and frustration on the battlefield are mirrored in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, where disagreements among leaders have recently spilled out into the open.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last month publicly disputed the assessment by Ukraine's military

chief, Valery Zaluzhny, that the war had reached a stalemate. And the mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, has repeatedly lashed out at Zelenskyy, saying he holds too much power.

Disquiet in the halls of power appears to have filtered down to the military's rank and file, who increasingly have misgivings about inefficiency and faulty decision-making within the bureaucracy they depend on to keep them well-armed for the fight.

In the southern Ukrainian region of Zaporizhzhia, where momentum has slowed since the summertime counteroffensive, drones have become a crucial tool of war. They enable soldiers to keep an eye on - and hold back - Russian forces while they conduct dangerous and painstaking operations to clear minefields and consolidate territorial gains. But fighters there complain that the military has been too slow in training drone operators. (AP)

Austin heads to Israel as US urges transition to a more targeted approach in Gaza

JERUSALEM, Dec 18: Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was expected to press Israel to wind down major combat operations in Gaza on a visit on Monday, in the latest test of whether the U.S. can leverage its unwavering support for the offensive to blunt its devastating impact on Palestinian civilians.

France, the U.K. and Germany, some of Israel's closest allies, joined global calls for a cease-fire over the weekend, and Israeli protesters have demanded the government relaunch talks with the militant group on releasing more hostages after three were mistakenly killed by Israeli troops while waving a white flag.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted that Israel will keep fighting until it removes Hamas from power, crushes its still-formidable military capabilities and returns the roughly 129 hostages still held by the group after its Oct. 7 attack, which ignited the war.

The U.S. has vetoed international calls for a cease-fire and rushed munitions to its close ally while pressing it to take greater steps to avoid harming civilians. The 10-week-old war against Hamas has killed over 18,700 Palestinians and transformed much of northern Gaza into a moonscape.

Some 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85% of Gaza's population — have fled their homes, with most packing into U.N.-run shelters and tent camps in the southern part of the besieged territory.

Austin, who is traveling with Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. CQ Brown, is expected to press Israeli leaders to transition to a more precise phase, with targeted operations aimed at killing Hamas leaders, destroying tunnels and rescuing hostages.

Under U.S. pressure, Israel provided more precise evacuation instructions as troops moved into the southern city of Khan Younis earlier this month, though Palestinians say nowhere in Gaza is safe as Israel continues to carry out strikes in all parts of the territory.

Israel also reopened its main cargo crossing with Gaza to allow more aid into the territory — an

other U.S. request. But the amount entering is still less than half of prewar imports, even as needs have soared, and U.N. agencies say the fighting in the south hinders delivery in many areas.

The war began with an unprecedented surprise attack by Hamas that overwhelmed Israel's border defenses. Thousands of militants rampaged across southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 240 men, women and children.

Hamas and other militants are still holding an estimated 129 captives after most of the rest were freed in return for Israel's release of 240 Palestinian prisoners during a truce last month. Hamas has said no more hostages will be released until the war ends.

In response to the Oct. 7 attack, Israel launched one of the 21st century's deadliest air and ground offensives. More than 18,700

Palestinians have been killed, the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory said Thursday in its last update before a communications blackout that only lifted late Sunday. It says thousands more casualties are buried under the rubble. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths, but has said that most of those killed were women and children.

Israel's military says 126 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza offensive. It says it has killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence.

Israel blames the civilian deaths on Hamas, saying it uses them as human shields when it operates in dense, residential areas. But the military rarely comments on individual strikes, which frequently kill women, children and other civilians.

Heavy fighting around Gaza's hospitals, which are overflowing with patients and displaced people, has taken most of them out of service. Israel accuses militants of sheltering in health facilities and has provided evidence in some cases. Health officials deny the allegations and say the army has recklessly endangered civilians. (AP)



The NKorean missile flew about 1,000 kilometers before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula & Japan

North Korea conducts first long-range missile test in months, likely firing a solid-fuelled weapon

SEOUL, Dec 18: North Korea on Monday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, likely launching a developmental, more agile weapon, as it vows strong responses against U.S. and South Korean moves to boost their nuclear deterrence plans.

The South Korean government described the missile tested as a solid-fueled weapon, a likely reference to the North's road-mobile Hwasong-18 ICBM whose built-in solid propellants make its launch more difficult for adversaries to detect than liquid-fueled weapons. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un previously called the Hwasong-18 the most powerful weapon of his nuclear forces.

South Korea's military said the North Korean missile flew about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. It said the missile was launched on an elevated angle, an apparent attempt to avoid neighboring countries. Japanese lawmaker Masahisa Sato, citing Japan's Defense Ministry, said the missile rose as high as 6,000 kilometers (3,730 miles).

The reported flight details matched those of North Korea's second test of the Hwasong-18 missile in July. The North first test-fired the missile in April.

Since 2017, North Korea has carried out a slew of ICBM tests in a bid to acquire the



ability to launch nuclear strikes on the U.S. mainland. But all of its previous ICBM tests before April's Hwasong-18 launch involved liquid-propellant ICBMs, which need to be fueled before launch and cannot stay fueled for long periods of time.

In a trilateral call, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his South Korean and Japanese counterparts condemned the North Korean launch, which the White House said was "a flagrant" violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by the North. It said the three advisers also underscored the importance of sharing data and coordinating responses amid growing cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol ordered officials to maintain a solid South Ko-

rean-U.S. joint defense posture and respond "swiftly and overwhelmingly" to any North Korean provocations against South Korean territory. In a televised statement, senior South Korean military officer Lee Seung O separately warned that North Korea will be solely responsible for all the consequences that could occur due to its provocations.

The North's ICBM test was its second weapons firing in less than a day. On Sunday night, the North launched a short-range ballistic missile, also into the water off its east coast, according to the South Korean, Japanese and U.S. governments.

South Korea's military said the short-range missile flew about 570 kilometers (354 miles), a range that observers say is far enough to reach all key sites in South Korea, including U.S. military installations, if weapons are launched near the border with the South. The U.S. military said the launch highlighted "the destabilizing impact of (North Korea's) illicit weapons program."

Observers said the North's back-to-back launches were likely a protest against moves by South Korea and the United States to bolster their joint nuclear deterrence capabilities in the face of North Korea's evolving nuclear threats.

Senior U.S. and South Korean officials met in Washington on Friday for their second Nuclear Consultative Group meeting. They

agreed to update their nuclear deterrence and contingency strategies and incorporate nuclear operation scenarios in their combined military exercises next summer, according to Seoul officials.

The consultative body is responsible for sharing information on nuclear and strategic weapons operation plans and joint operations, though the U.S. will retain operational control of its nuclear weapons. U.S. officials said the group's establishment and other steps to solidify U.S. security commitment were meant to ease South Korean worries about North Korean provocations while keeping Seoul from pursuing its own nuclear program. The "U.S. side reiterated that any nuclear attack by (North Korea) against (South Korea) will be met with a swift, overwhelming, and decisive response," said a joint statement issued after Friday's meeting.

On Sunday, North Korea's Defense Ministry slammed its rivals' move to include nuclear operation scenarios in their joint drills, describing it as an open threat to potentially use nuclear weapons against the North.

"The armed forces of (North Korea) will thoroughly neutralize the U.S. and its vassal forces' attempt to ignite a nuclear war," the North Korean statement said. "Any attempt by the hostile forces to use armed force against (North Korea) will face a preemptive and deadly counteraction." (AP)

Israel approves appointment of Reuven Azar as new Ambassador to India

JERUSALEM, Dec 18: The Israeli government has approved the appointment of veteran diplomat Reuven Azar as its new Ambassador to India.

Azar, 56, will also serve as the non-resident Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Bhutan, a statement from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. His appointment is one of the 21 new Heads of Missions cleared by the Israeli government to assume service soon.

Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, congratulating the new appointees, said they will "represent Israel and its citizens, strengthen its economy and strengthen international support for the State of Israel."

Azar is currently serving as the Ambassador of Israel to Romania. It is not yet known when he will take charge in New Delhi. Azar will replace Naor Gilon, who has been serving as the Israeli ambassador to India since 2021.

Azar has earlier served as Head of the Israel-US-China internal task force at the Ministry



of Foreign Affairs, immediately after serving for three years as Deputy National Security Advisor for Foreign Policy at the National Security Council and Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister of Israel.

From 2014 to 2018, Azar was Deputy Ambassador at the Embassy of Israel in Washington, DC.

He also served as the Head of Middle East Research in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2012 to 2014 and as Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Israel in Amman from 2010 to 2012.

Since the completion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cadet

training programme in 1994, Azar mostly held Middle East-related positions such as Head of the Iran Sanctions Team and Director of Middle East Economic Research.

He has also covered different aspects of cooperation and negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, as well as research on Palestinian issues during his almost three decades of service. Azar served four years in Cairo as Head of the Economic and Trade Department at the Embassy of Israel. In an earlier stint in Washington from 2003 to 2006, he served as Counsellor for Political Affairs.

Azar was born in Argentina in 1967 and made Aliyah (immigration) with his family to Israel at the age of 13.

He served in a paratroopers battalion of the Israeli Defence Forces from 1985 to 1988 and was a reservist combat Sergeant up to 2008.

He has a graduate and post-graduate degree from the Hebrew University in International Relations. (PTI)

Taiwan reports 2 Chinese balloons near its territory as China steps up pressure ahead of elections



TAIPEI, Dec 18: Two Chinese balloons flew north of Taiwan, the island's Defense Ministry said on Monday, as China increases pressure on the self-ruled territory it claims as its own ahead of a presidential election in January.

The balloons crossed the sensitive Taiwan Strait separating the island from China and were detected about 110 nautical miles (204 kilometers) northwest of the northern port city of Keelung on Sunday, the ministry said.

It was the second time this month Taiwan reported a Chinese balloon near its territory, after one crossed southwest of Keelung on Dec. 7.

China's potential for using weather balloons to spy on other governments

came into focus earlier this year, when the United States shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon over the Atlantic Ocean, drawing China's ire.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry did not say whether it suspected the balloon could have been used for spying. China's Foreign Ministry did not immediately comment.

Beijing has increased pressure on Taiwan by sending military aircraft and warships near the island almost daily.

Taipei is preparing for a presidential election on Jan. 13. The front-runner, current Vice President William Lai of the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party, has been criticized by Beijing as a "separatist."

Lai has said he wants to maintain peace and the status quo in relations with China.

Taiwan split from China amid civil war in 1949, but Beijing continues to regard the island of 23 million with its high-tech economy as Chinese territory and has been steadily upping its threat to achieve that goal by military force if necessary. (AP)

Pak court rules against raising objections to delimitations of electoral boundaries after release of election schedule

ISLAMABAD, Dec 18: Pakistan's Supreme Court on Monday ruled against raising any objections to the delimitation of electoral boundaries after the issuance of the election schedule, removing further impediments in the path of the February 8 polls.

The schedule for Pakistan's general elections was issued on Friday night by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) after the intervention of the apex court.

A three-member bench of the top court, headed by interim Chief Justice Sardar Tariq, took up an appeal filed by the ECP against the Balochistan High Court's (BHC) decision to change the delimitations carried out by the polls organising body.

The decision was announced on the ECP's appeal against the delimitation of two constituencies in Zhob and Shirani in Balochistan province. The SC also nullified the BHC's decision on delimitation.

The changes were made in two constituencies in Balochistan by the BHC and the ECP moved to the apex court to scrap the changes.

The bench after hearing arguments set aside the BHC's order on Monday and accepted the ECP's appeal.

"Challenges to constituencies have all been rendered ineffective after the release of the election schedule," Justice Shah remarked.

Asserting that the electoral process could not be affected to provide relief to an individual, the court declared the high court decision null and void.

The move by the Supreme Court comes two days after it shut down an effort by the Lahore High Court to disrupt the election process by suspending appointments of returning officers and district returning officers from bureaucracy.

Elections are set to be held on February 8 next year and the ECP on Friday issued a detailed schedule. Earlier the delimitation process was completed on November 30.

After fresh delimitation, the National Assembly (NA) would consist of 336 seats, including 266 general seats, 60 seats reserved for women, and 10 for non-Muslims.

The delimitation shows that the strength of the Assembly has decreased by six seats from the previously 342 seats. (PTI)

Severe obesity at a very early age is nearly irreversible, and is strongly associated with chronic health problems and an early death

Study bolsters evidence that severe obesity increasing in young US kids

NEW YORK, Dec 18: A new study adds to evidence that severe obesity is becoming more common in young U.S. children.

There was some hope that children in a government food program might be bucking a trend in obesity rates — earlier research found rates were dropping a little about a decade ago for those kids. But an update released Monday in the journal Pediatrics shows the rate bounced back up a bit by 2020. The increase echoes other national data, which suggests around 2.5% of all preschool-aged children were severely obese during the same period.

"We were doing well and now we see this upward trend," said one of the study's authors, Heidi Blanck of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "We are dismayed at seeing these findings."

The study looked at children ages 2 to 4 enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children program, which provides healthy foods and other services to preschool-aged children in low-income families. The children were weighed and measured. The researchers found that 2.1% of kids in the program were severely obese in 2010. Six years later, the rate had dipped to 1.8%. But by



2020, it was 2%. That translates to about 33,000 of more than 1.6 million kids in the WIC program.

Significant increases were seen in 20 states with the highest rate in California at 2.8%. There also were notable rises in some racial and ethnic groups. The highest rate, about 2.8%, was in Hispanic kids. Experts say severe obesity at a very early age is nearly irreversible, and is strongly associated with chronic health problems and an early death.

It's not clear why the increase occurred, Blanck said. When WIC obesity rates dropped, some experts attributed it to 2009 policy changes that eliminated juice from infant food packages, provided less saturated fat, and tried to make it easier to buy fruits and vegetables. (PTI)

The package hasn't changed. But "the daily hardships that families living in poverty are facing may be harder today than they were 10 years ago, and the slight increases in the WIC package just weren't enough," said Dr. Sarah Armstrong, a Duke University childhood obesity researcher.

The researchers faced challenges. The number of kids in WIC declined in the past decade. And the study period included 2020, the year the COVID-19 pandemic hit, when fewer parents brought their children in to see doctors. That reduced the amount of complete information available.

Despite its limitations, it was a "very well done study," said Deanna Hoelscher, a childhood obesity researcher at the UTHealth Houston School of Public Health. "It gives you a hint of what's going on." What happened since 2020 is not yet known. Some small studies have suggested a marked increase in childhood obesity — especially during the pandemic, when kids were kept home from schools, eating and bedtime routines were disrupted and physical activity decreased.

"We are thinking it's going to get worse," Hoelscher said. (AP)

A suspected cyberattack paralyses the majority of gas stations across Iran

TEHRAN, Dec 18: Nearly 70% of Iran's gas stations went out of service on Monday following possible sabotage — a reference to cyberattacks, Iranian state TV reported. The report said a "software problem" caused the irregularity in the gas stations. It urged people not to rush to the stations that were still operational.

Israeli media, including the Times of Israel, blamed the problem on an attack by a hacker group dubbed "Gonjeshke Darande" or predatory sparrow. State TV quoted a statement by the Oil Ministry as saying more than 30% of gas stations remain in service. The country has some 33,000 gas stations. In recent years, Iran has seen a series of cyberattacks on its filling stations, railway system and industries. Surveillance cameras in government buildings, including prisons, have also been hacked in the past.

In 2022, the Gonjeshke Darande group hacked a major steel company in the southwest of the country. A cyberattack on Iran's fuel distribution system in 2021 paralyzed gas stations across the country, leading to long lines of angry motorists. The hacking group claimed responsibility for the attack on fuel pumps.

The country disconnected much of its government infrastructure from the internet after the Stuxnet computer virus — widely believed to be a joint U.S.-Israeli creation — disrupted thousands of Iranian centrifuges in the country's nuclear sites in the late 2000s. Iran, long sanctioned by the West, faces difficulties in getting up-to-date hardware and software, often relying on Chinese-manufactured electronics or older systems no longer being patched by manufacturers. That would make it easier for a potential hacker to target. Pirated versions of Windows and other software are common across Iran. (AP)

TGDC, which was established last year, does not have its own building Tripura working to boost state's healthcare sector: CM Manik Saha

AGARTALA, Dec 18: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Monday said his government has been working to boost the healthcare sector to turn the north-eastern state into a medical hub in future.

The chief minister, who is also a dentist, said that the administration is also contemplating setting up Ayurvedic and Homeopathic colleges in the state to boost the medical infrastructure here, he said while addressing the foundation day of the Tripura Government Dental College (TGDC).

The TGDC, which was established last year, does not have its own building.

"A place was offered to build a full-fledged campus for the TGDC but the site was not suitable to accommodate hostels for boys and girls and several departments. We are working to get a suitable place



for it as the government wants to make it a centre of excellence," Saha said. He said the government has a plan to introduce Master of

Dental Surgery (MDS) course in the TGDC. "Being a dental surgeon, I visited several dental colleges in the country. I had an opportunity to visit a dental college in Hong Kong. I consider the TGDC to be excellent as it is equipped with all modern equipment and facilities," he said.

Saha said the Mukhyamanti Jana Arogya Yojana, the health insurance scheme of the state government, will be launched shortly. "We have earmarked ₹ 59 crore for the health insurance scheme for 4.75 lakh people who have been left out of the Pradhan Mantri Jana Arogya Yojana," he said.

Saha added eight de-addiction centres will be set up in the state for rehabilitation of drug addicts with a cost of ₹ 160 crore.

Currently, the northeastern state has two medical colleges, one each regional level cancer centre and pharmacy college, apart from a dental college and nursing college. (PTI)

Manipur IGP visits refugee-hit Kamjong district

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: A Manipur police team headed by inspector general of police, Nisit Kumar assisted by DIGP Ningsam Wangam checked on the Myanmar refugees taking shelter in Manipur's Kamjong district bordering Myanmar on the east during the past 36 hours. Kamjong is the worst refugee-hit district in the state.

There are around 4,500 refugees in this district alone.

This was stated by the Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh while speaking at a function at Lilong, about 12km from Imphal on Monday. The IGP is also inspecting the biometric details taken by the Indian government authorities to the flooding refugees for foreign national identification.

These illegal refugees would be pushed back after the restoration of peace in their country -Myanmar, the CM said.

In the fresh bout of an influx of Myanmar nationals owing to the infighting between the Myanmar military junta and rebels for the past many weeks, Kamjong is the worst refugee-hit district in the state.

Manipur chief minister said that over 6,000 Myanmar nationals are currently taking shelter at the border districts of Kamjong, Tengnoupal, Chandel, Churachandpur, and Ukhrul. A new batch of 84 Myanmar nationals crossed the border on Sunday and took shelter at different relief camps in the Kamjong district.

With the arrival of new refugees, around 2,700 Myanmar refugees are taking shelter at the relief camps — Pheidia and Humingthana under the Chassad Police station of the Kamjong district as of Monday, officials said.

Disappointment over MPs failing to raise question on Manipur issue: MPCC

IMPHAL, Dec 18: Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) recently expressed disappointment when none of the three MPs from Manipur raised the prevailing crisis in the house of the ongoing session of the Parliament.

Addressing reporters at Imphal Congress Bhavan, MPCC vice-president and senior spokesperson of the party Hareeshwar Goswami said that it is very unfortunate that the MPs from Manipur were not able to raise any question on the Parliament floor regarding the ongoing conflict in Manipur nor they were able to raise any motion.

He said that MPs from other states raised questions and motions on matters concerning their states in the Parliament and even created ruckus in the house if they did not get satisfactory reply to their questions or the house did not entertain the motion they moved.

"But, not a single MP from Manipur had ever brought up any motion or kind at the Parliament even though the state is reeling under crisis for the last nearly eight months," he said.

The Congress leader then asked the reasons behind the MPs not being able to take the issue concerning Manipur to the Parliament while alleging that unable to move any motion, the MPs from the state showed their



responsiveness of being the representatives of the people of the state.

The MPCC vice president said that in line with the call given by the MPCC president, a delegation of the party recently met with the three MPs from the state in New Delhi and submitted memorandums pressing them to take up Manipur's protracted issue in the house of the Parliament in the ongoing winter session.

He said that the delegation met with the two MPs of Lok Sabha from the state Rajkumar Ranjan Singh who is also Union minister of state for Education and External Affairs and Lorho S Pfoze as well as the Rajya Sabha MP Leishemba Sanajaoba.

During the meeting, they also pressed the MPs to address and raise pertinent issues related to the ongoing crisis to the house of the par-

liament. The MPCC pressed the MPs to raise the issue in the interest of the people of the state and not in the interest of the party.

The Congress hoped that the MPs would take the issue to the parliament leaving behind their party affiliation considering the sentiments of the people of the state.

However, even though the ongoing session is going to end, any of the three MPs came up with a positive response till date. Goswami also questioned the MPs' reluctance to take a bold stand on the Manipur issue while asking if they were afraid to be expelled.

The Parliamentary session is ending soon, and it is crucial for them (MPs) to address the urgent issues facing Manipur," he added. (NNN)

TSF opposes demand to remove ST status based on religious conversion

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: The Twipra Student's Federation (TSF) strongly condemned the recent demands by the Janajati Suraksha Manch to revoke Scheduled Tribe (ST) benefits for individuals who convert to Christianity in Tripura.

TSF president Samrat Debbarma and general secretary Hamalu Jamatia stated, "We vehemently oppose the Janajati Suraksha Manch's demand to remove ST status based on religious conversion. This call to revoke ST status for Christians is not only discriminatory but also a direct violation of constitutional rights and the spirit of inclusivity."

The statement emphasised that the Indian Constitution upholds the principles of equality and religious freedom.

"The right to choose and practice one's faith is a fundamental human right that should not be infringed upon by any group or organization. Any attempt to penalize or discriminate against in-

dividuals based on their religious beliefs goes against the fundamental principles of our democratic society. Scheduled Tribes in our nation have historically faced marginalization and socio-economic challenges. Adding religious criteria to their eligibility for benefits only worsens their struggles and sets a dangerous precedent for discrimination," they added.

TSF further affirmed its commitment to upholding diversity, tolerance, and equality.

It said, "We believe it's crucial to foster an environment where individuals are free to embrace any faith without fear of retribution or losing their rightful benefits. We call upon all stakeholders to uphold the principles of justice, equality, and secularism enshrined in our Constitution." The organisation added by stating, "TSF remains committed to empowering and uplifting all tribal communities, safeguarding their rights, and fostering an environment of equality and mutual respect."

Social harmony, peace priorities of new govt in Mizoram: Minister

'The government will also make massive efforts to curb the consumption of alcohol'

AIZAWL, Dec 18: Peace and harmony in society was the priority of the new ZPM government in Mizoram. Home Minister K Sapdanga said on Monday, maintaining that it was also trying to ensure a comfortable life for the people of the state.

Sapdanga made the statement during his maiden trip as the home minister. Accompanied by excise minister Lalnginglova Hmar, he visited Saitual and Khawzawl in the northeastern part of the state.

The new government was giving priority to harmony and peace in society, besides ensuring a comfortable life for the people, he said.

He urged the people and the security forces to support the government in its ef-



orts. He said Saitual, Khawzawl and Champai districts were hotspots for illegal ac-

tivities, especially drug trafficking, as they share borders with Myanmar.

"There is a need for collective efforts by the government, NGOs and local leaders to curb drug smuggling," Sapdanga said.

He said that Mizoram can be made a better place for future generations if the government, NGOs and the people come together to fight anti-social elements.

Hmar said that besides fighting drugs, the government will also make massive efforts to curb the consumption of alcohol.

"The Mizo society has been adversely affected by drugs and alcohol," he said, seeking people's support in the fight against them. (PTI)



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ADVT. NO. 34/2023

No. 34PSC/DR-6/1/2023-2024

Assam Public Service Commission invites application from Indian Citizens as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India for the under-mentioned posts under Assam Government in the scale of pay as indicated below and carrying usual allowances as admissible under Rules of the Govt. of Assam.

- (1) **Name of the Post** :- Assistant Engineer (Mechanical) under joint cadre of Public Works Roads (PWRD) and Public Works (Building & National Highway) Department [PW(B&NH)]
- (2) **No of posts** :- 18 (Eighteen) Only
- (3) **Reservation of posts** :-

Name of the Service/Post	Open category		Reserved for OBC/MOBC		Reserved for SC		Reserved For STP		Reserved For STH		Grand Total		Post reserved for PwBD & Type of Disability	Ex-Servicemen
	Total	RFW	Total	RFW	Total	RFW	Total	RFW	Total	RFW	Total	RFW		
Assistant Engineer (Mechanical) under joint cadre of Public Works Roads (PWRD) and Public Works (Building & National Highway) Department [PW(B&NH)]	10	3	4	1	1	NIL	2	1	1	NIL	18	5	Deaf & HI = 1	NIL

* PwBD - Persons with Benchmark Disabilities; RFW - Reserved for Women.

* Reservation as per draft advertisement received from Government against total numbers of posts in the cadre.

NB: The Ex-Servicemen must upload Ex-Servicemen Identity Card issued by Zila Sainik Welfare Office of the state of Assam and Discharge Book while applying for the post.

4. **Scale of Pay** :- Pay scale + Grade Pay + Other allowances as admissible to the Assam State Government employees from time to time (per month).

Pay scale	Grade Pay	Pay Band
Rs. 30,000/- to 1,10,000/-	Rs. 12,700/-	Pay Band - 4

BEFORE FILLING UP THE APPLICATION FORM, CANDIDATES MUST NOTE THAT THE REQUIRED CERTIFICATES RELATING TO AGE, CASTE AND MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION WILL BE FETCHED FROM THE OTR PROFILE. CANDIDATES ARE TO UPDATE THE OTR PROFILE IF ANY ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE UPLOADED IN SUPPORT OF THE ADVERTISED POST.

5. Eligibility Criteria :-

The candidate must be an Indian Citizen as defined in Article 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India and must be a permanent resident of Assam.

As a domicile proof of the candidate, he/she must upload a copy of the valid Permanent Resident Certificate issued in Assam for educational purpose/Employment Exchange Registration Certificate will be treated as proof of residency.

(Upload necessary documents)

6. Education Qualification :-

- i. Bachelor Degree in Mechanical Engineering of an Indian or foreign University recognized by the Government.

OR

Passed Part A & B of the Associate Membership Examination of the Institution of Engineers (India) and possessing a certificate to that effect from the Institution of Engineers (India) only.

- ii. Degrees obtained through Distance mode of education will not be eligible.
- iii. Apart from English, the candidate should have adequate knowledge of at least 1(one) official language of the State of Assam (i.e. Assamese/Bengali/Bodo) except candidates belonging to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and Dima Hasao Autonomous Council.

(Upload relevant all semester/year mark sheet reflecting the subjects and the final pass certificate)

7. Age:

The candidates should not be less than 21 years of age and not more than 38 years of age as on 01-01-2023. The upper age limit is relaxable :

- (i) By 5 years for SC/ST candidates, i.e. upto 43 years.
- (ii) By 3 years for OBC/MOBC candidates i.e. upto 41 years as per Govt. Notification No. ABP. 6/2016/9 dated Dispur the 25th April 2018.
- (iii) For Ex-Servicemen, the maximum age shall be 50 (Fifty) years as on 01/01/2023 for Unreserved category, relaxable further by 3 (Three) years for OBC/MOBC candidates and 5 (Five) years for SC/ST candidates.
- (iv) Persons with benchmark disability (PwBD) 10 years irrespective of SC/ST/OBC and UR Category of candidates as per Govt. Memorandum No. ABP 180/2017/105 dated Dispur the 7th January, 2019.

The age limit of the candidates will be calculated on the basis of the Class-X/Class-XII Examination Admit Card/Pass Certificate/Marksheet issued by a recognized Central/State Board/Council where Age/Date of Birth (DOB) is clearly reflected.

No other document shall be accepted in lieu of the above mentioned documents for age proof.

8. For PwBD Category Candidate:

To be eligible for consideration under PwBD category, a candidate must possess Benchmark Disability and must produce necessary certificate issued by the competent authority.

(Upload relevant documents)

9. For Government Employees of the state of Assam:

Candidates, already in regular Government service, whether in permanent or temporary capacity other than casual/ad-hoc/daily wages/hourly paid/contract basis, in order to prove their employment, must upload a certificate against the applied post, issued by the competent authority under which he/she is working.

However, candidates, seeking pay protection, continuation in service etc., must upload 'NO OBJECTION CERTIFICATE (NOC)' against the applied post, issued by the competent authority under which he/she is working.

(Upload relevant documents)

10. The Small Family Norms :-

As per Govt.notification No. ABP.69/2019/17, dated Dispur, the 6th November/2019, candidates have to submit a declaration regarding "The Small Family Norms" in Form - A at the time of applying for the post.

(Upload necessary documents)

The advertisement has been issued as per draft advertisement furnished by the Government.

- (i) **STARTING DATE FOR ONLINE APPLICATION** : 22-12-2023
(ii) **CLOSING DATE FOR ONLINE APPLICATION** : 21-01-2024
(iii) **LAST DATE FOR PAYMENT OF APPLICATION FEE**: 23-01-2024

NB: For detail advertisement please visit APSC's official website www.apsc.nic.in (Recruitment Advertisement link).

Sd/-

Deputy Secretary,
Assam Public Service Commission
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22

Janasanyog /D/14912/23/19-Dec-23

Cong set to finalise list of appointees to key positions in state-run boards & corporations



BENGALURU, Dec 18: Ruling Congress in Karnataka appears set to finalise the list of party legislators and workers to be appointed to key positions in various state-run boards and corporations, during the visit of chief minister Siddaramaiah and deputy chief minister D K Shivakumar to New Delhi from Monday.

Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress President, said a list has already been sent to Congress high command for its approval.

"We will definitely finalise it and come, we have already sent the list and proposal, as there were elections (in five states) and as there was Assembly (session) there was a delay. Both the Chief Minister and I are going, we will finalise and come," he told reporters here ahead of leaving for the national capital.

Responding to a question on the chief minister reportedly getting an appointment to meet the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he merely said, "okay, we will meet."

According to the chief minister's tour plan shared with the media, he will be travelling to Delhi this evening and meeting union ministers there on Tuesday, while his return journey has been kept open. There is no official word on his meeting with the Prime Minister yet.

In case Siddaramaiah meets the PM, he is likely to take up several key issues concerning the state including delay in release of drought relief by the Centre, party sources said.

The deputy chief minister, who is travelling to Delhi ahead of the

chief minister, will be meeting some Union Minister this evening and also on Tuesday. His return journey too has been kept open.

Congress in Karnataka had prepared a list of party legislators and workers to be appointed to key positions in various state-run boards and corporations last month, in the presence of party General Secretary in-charge of Karnataka Ramdeep Singh Surjewala, even as there seems to be some differences among leaders over the process, with home minister G Parameshwara openly saying he was not consulted on the exercise.

There has been some disquiet and growing impatience within a section of the Congress party, with legislators, who could not make it to the Ministry and were keenly aspiring for the key posts in boards and corporations, unhappy about the delay in appointments.

Also many party men are upset over the delay in rewarding loyal workers, noting that the Congress has been in power for more than six months now.

Shivakumar had recently said that both Congress legislators and party workers would be appointed to these positions, and indicated that about 15 to 20 party MLAs and MLCs would be accommodated, and the rest would be distributed among loyal party workers.

Appointments to boards and corporations are said to be among the issues on which Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar had certain differences of opinion, according to party sources. (PTI)

Govt wants to bulldoze key bills without oppn, dissent: Cong after more MPs suspended

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: The Congress on Monday slammed the government over the suspension of Opposition MPs in Parliament, claiming that an "extreme level of dictatorship" was in place and "democracy has been suspended".

Soon after the suspension of 33 opposition Lok Sabha MPs, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said all democratic norms have been thrown into the dustbin by this "autocratic" government and it has shown zero accountability towards Parliament.

"First, intruders attacked Parliament. Then Modi government attacking Parliament and Democracy. All Democratic norms are being thrown into the dustbin by an autocratic Modi Government by suspending 47 MPs," he said in a post on X.

Thirteen Lok Sabha and one Rajya Sabha MPs were already suspended. "We have two simple and genuine demands - The Union Home Minister should make a statement in both Houses of Parliament on the inexcusable breach in the Parliament security and a detailed discussion should be held on the same," Kharge said.

The Congress president said the Prime Minister can give an interview to a newspaper and the home minister to TV channels "but they have zero accountability left to the Parliament

which represents the People of India". "With an Opposition-Less Parliament, the Modi Government can now bulldoze important pending legislations, crush any dissent, without any debate," Kharge, who is also the leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, said.

Congress leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who was also suspended for creating uproar in the house, said they have been demanding the House revoke the previous suspensions and the home minister make a statement in the House on the Parliament security breach of December 13.

Chowdhury said the home minister should let the people know about the security measures to be taken in Parliament.

"It is important to take the opposition along while running the House... but today's government has reached the extreme level of dictatorship. They are wielding the stick of 'bahubalis' (musclemen). They have suspended everybody," Chowdhury said after the latest suspensions.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said 13 INDIA bloc MPs were suspended from the Lok Sabha on December 14 for demanding a statement from the Home Minister on the security breach



of December 13 and today 33 more INDIA MPs, including a number of floor leaders, were suspended from the Lok Sabha for making the same "perfectly legitimate demand".

"Tanashahi ka Doosra Naam Modi-Shahi hai— democracy has been suspended!" Ramesh said.

Congress deputy leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi said, "This is a process for trampling upon the fundamental rights of the people by running a bulldozer over opposition power".

It shows the government does not want to run the House, he said, adding they have "stooped to such

level" to hide the failures of the home minister.

"No action has been taken against the BJP MP with whom this issue began. The opposition is raising the voice of the people who are asking Amit Shah why four people breached the security of Parliament despite him being a powerful home minister," Gogoi said.

Congress leader K C Venugopal said Parliament has now become a place for suspensions not for discussion and debates.

"It appears the government is hell bent on destroying every last shred of democracy in India. Dismissing 47

opposition MPs, including our Lok Sabha Leader

@adhirrcinc ji, shows that the BJP wants to finish off the institution of Parliament," he said.

The government must be held accountable in Parliament for the security breach that took place under their watch. Instead of taking action against the BJP MP who issued the pass to those intruders, the BJP is suspending opposition MPs, he said.

"With this attitude, they are ruining India's reputation abroad. India's goodwill comes from its 70-year-long track record as a robust democracy. With every such assault, they are putting us in the league of authoritarian regimes with dysfunctional legislatures and an overbearing executive," he said.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said, "This is the reality we are living with. It is shocking to see so many of my colleagues suspended for demanding accountability from the government in a parliamentary system! What is the point of a Parliament if Ministers do not wish to address it on issues of prime concern? Just to serve as a notice-board and rubber-stamp."

A total of 47 members of Parliament -- 46 from Lok Sabha and one from Rajya Sabha have been suspended so far (PTI).

EAM Jaishankar condoles demise of Emir

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: India will always remember the contributions of Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in strengthening India-Kuwait ties, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Monday on the demise of the Kuwaiti ruler.

Jaishankar visited the Kuwaiti embassy in Delhi this morning and paid his respects to the departed leader.

"Visited the Embassy of Kuwait in Delhi today morning to express condolences and pay my respects on the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait," he said on X.

"The Government and people of India will always remember his notable

contributions to the strengthening of our ties," he said.

Emir Jaber Al-Sabah, who played a key role in boosting India-Kuwait relations, died at the age of 86 on Saturday.

India observed a "state mourning" on Sunday as a mark of respect for the departed leader.

Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Sunday travelled to Kuwait as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's special envoy to pay condolences on the demise of the Emir.

In the demise of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait has lost a visionary leader who took the country towards progress and prosperity, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Sunday. (PTI)

ASI submits Gyanvapi survey report

VARANASI, Dec 18: The Archeological Survey of India (ASI) on Monday submitted its survey report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex in the district court which scheduled the next hearing on December 21.

Advocate Madan Mohan Yadav, who is representing the Hindu petitioners, said, "The report in sealed cover was placed before the court by the ASI's standing counsel Amit Srivastava."

Four senior officials of the ASI were also present in the

court. "The court has fixed December 21 to open the sealed report and submit its copies to the advocates of either side," Yadav said.

The ASI carried out the scientific survey of the Gyanvapi premises, located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, to determine whether the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple.

The survey was carried out on the order of a Varanasi court. (PTI)

First session of 16th Madhya Pradesh assembly begins; new MLAs take oath

BHOPAL, Dec 18: The first session of the 16th Madhya Pradesh assembly began here on Monday with pro-tem speaker Gopal Bhargava welcoming the newly-elected members to the house and starting the process of administering them the oath.

The four-day winter session commenced nearly a week after a new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government under chief minister Mohan Yadav took office.

At the outset, the pro-tem speaker informed the house about the Congress electing senior MLA Umang Singh as its legislature party leader, making him the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the assembly, a cabinet-level post.

Yadav congratulated Singh as his new appointment and said he looks forward to getting help from the opposition in taking the state's development to new heights.

Singhar, a former minister, thanked Yadav and treasury benches, and assured them that the opposition would play a constructive role inside and outside the assembly.

Thereafter, Yadav, Singh, deputy chief ministers Jagdish Devda, Rajendra Shukla, former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Narendra Singh Tomar, Kailash Vijayvargiya, Prahlad Patel and Jayant Malhiya (all four from BJP) and Ajay Singh (Congress) took oath as MLAs of 16th assembly.

The BJP has nominated senior leader and former Union minister Tomar for the post of the assembly speaker.

The saffron outfit had fielded Tomar and Patel, a Union minister till recently, and its general secretary Vijayvargiya in the November 17 assembly polls. Oath taking by the new MLAs is likely to continue throughout Tuesday as well. On the third day (December 20), the house will elect a regular speaker.

Of the 230 new legislators, Congress's Kamal Nath, elected from Chhindwara, is not attending the session. The former chief minister, who was replaced as the state Congress president a few days ago, has taken leave from the house. (PTI)

Several political parties demand statehood, extension of Article 371 to J&K

JAMMU, Dec 18: The leaders of various political parties held a meeting here on Monday and later staged a demonstration, demanding immediate restoration of statehood, assembly elections and extension of Article 371 to Jammu and Kashmir. The political parties, including the Shiv Sena (UBT), National Panthers Party (NPP) and Dogra Swabhiman Sangathan Party (DSSP), also highlighted their demand for deportation of illegally settled immigrants, early return and settlement of the Kashmiri migrant pandits and regularisation of the daily wagers.

This was the first such meeting in Jammu after the Supreme Court on December 11 upheld the abrogation of Article 370 by the Centre in August 2019.

"We have taken part in the 'all-party meet' organised by the Shiv Sena and Sainik Samaj Party and highlighted our demand for immediate restoration of statehood and democratically elected government in Jammu and Kashmir," NPP chairman and former minister Harsh Dev Singh told PTI after the meeting. The NPP chairman accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of ruling Jammu and Kashmir by a remote control over the past many years.

"Almost all the bureaucrats posted in J&K are from outside and do not know anything about the region as a result of which the alienation among the local populace is increasing with each passing day," he said.

"The democratically elected government is also an antidote against militancy, extremism and violence," Singh said, adding his party will always remain in the forefront to safeguard the interests of the people of Jammu region.

Manish Sahni, the president of Shiv Sena (UBT) Jammu and Kashmir, said that the meeting was organised to discuss various "burning issues" pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir, especially the Jammu region.

"The issues discussed in detail at the meeting include the restoration of statehood and extension of special status under



Article 371 to J&K besides holding of the assembly elections, deportation of illegally settled immigrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh and return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants," he added.

Sahni said the meeting also demanded immediate lifting of all toll plaza from Jammu-Pathankot highway given the heavy rush of the pilgrims to the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine and regularisation of daily wagers.

Jammu district president of DSSP, Vijayant Pathania, said his party supports extension of the Article 371 of the constitution to J&K to safeguard the land and jobs rights for the local populace.

"We attended the meeting which decided to form a committee to ensure that all the points on the agenda are highlighted for their implementation on the ground," he added.

Social activist Anna Durani said the eight points discussed and deliberated upon in the meeting include safeguarding the Dogra culture and heritage, and inclusion of Punjabi in the list of official languages. The participants highlighted the need for unity and a sustained struggle to achieve the eight-point agenda, she said. (PTI)

INDI Alliance will drive PM Modi out of power: Lalu

PATNA, Dec 18: RJD president Lalu Prasad on Monday bristled at the BJP's assertion that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will return for a third consecutive term, asserting that the INDI Alliance will "drive him out of power".

Prasad was approached with queries by journalists at the airport, where he had reached, alongside son and Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav, to board a flight to Delhi for the coalition meeting on Tuesday.

The ailing septuagenarian began on an ebullient note, saying he was looking forward to the meeting, where all the alliance partners will sit together and chalk out the strategy for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

"You people seem to have just one thing to say that Modi is going to come back (to power). If it is so, so be it... Please do not make a big fuss about Modi. We all in INDIA will drive him out of power," Prasad said.

He was commenting on the catchphrase 'Modi ki guarantee' with which the BJP has



been going to town to assert that the assurance of good governance will ensure the prime minister's return to power. Meanwhile, state BJP president Samrat Choudhary reacted to Prasad's statement, saying, "Lalu ji seems to be joking. He must have lost count of the number of times he has tasted electoral defeat. In Bihar, he is remembered for patronising criminals and indulging in corruption,

which has resulted in his conviction in fodder scam cases".

"The RJD is at present enjoying power in Bihar not through legitimate means, but because of the treachery of Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar, who had contested the assembly polls as our ally, but betrayed the mandate. Both his JD(U) and RJD will be punished by the people of Bihar," Choudhary added. (PTI)

Kiren Rijiju flags off India's maiden winter science expedition to Arctic

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju on Monday flagged off India's first-ever winter science expedition to the Arctic region, in a bid to maintain year-long presence at the Himadri research station in Svalbard in Norway.

A team of four scientists will embark on the journey on Tuesday to India's research station in the NyAlesund town on the Brogger peninsula where research institutes from 10 countries have laboratories.

Ny-Alesund is the world's northernmost settlement, situated at 79 degrees north latitude in the north-western region of Spitsbergen, Svalbard.

"In this maiden winter expedition, our scientists are poised to unravel further mysteries and push the boundaries of scientific knowledge about our 'Climate & Planet'," Rijiju said.



Earth Sciences Secretary M Ravichandran, National Centre for Polar Ocean Research Director Thamban Meloth and India Meteorological Department Director General Mruyunjay Mohapatra, among others, were present at the flag-off ceremony here.

"As we venture into un-

charted territory, India assumes a global role in Arctic exploration, contributing to the scientific community at large," Rijiju said.

He termed the expedition "historic" and said it held immense significance as India navigated the Arctic's critical influence on global climate, sea

levels and biodiversity for the first time.

"This is the first winter expedition to the Arctic. The team of scientists will stay at the research station at NyAlesund for 30 to 45 days and then will be replaced by another team," a senior official said.

He said India will now have a year-long presence at the research station in the Arctic region, as it has in the Antarctic near the South Pole.

India launched its Arctic research programme in 2007 with a focus on climate change in the region with the objective of studying connections between Arctic climate and Indian monsoon.

The government had unveiled the Arctic Policy last year, sharing plans to have more research stations and satellite ground stations in the region. (PTI)

SC restrains Pune civic body from felling trees for widening road in city

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: The Supreme Court has restrained the Pune civic body from felling trees till December 21 for widening one of the roads in the city to enable a litigant to move the Bombay High Court with the grievance. The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has decided to widen the Ganeshkhind Road stretch from the Savitribai Phule Pune University junction to Sancheti Chowk from the existing 36 metres to 45 metres. A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of senior lawyer Najmi Waziri appearing for the petitioner, and ordered that till Thursday no tree will be cut for widening the road.

"In order to enable the appellants to have a reasonable time to approach the High Court, we direct that no further felling of trees shall take place between the date of this order (from December 15) and till 5 pm of 21 December 2023 for the widening of Ganeshkhind Road," the bench ordered. While disposing of the plea filed by one Ameet Gurucharan Singh, the top court said since it was leaving the matter to the high court to take an appropriate decision, its order "shall not be construed as any expression of opinion on merits".

It noted a PIL was filed before the Bombay High Court by an organisation 'Parisar Sanarkshan Sanwardhan Sanstha' in October this year pertaining to the procedure

adopted by the Pune Municipal Corporation in granting permission for felling trees to facilitate widening of the Ganeshkhind Road.

The PIL was disposed of with certain observations and directions including that the Tree Authority, which is the final authority empowered to take a decision in the matter, needed to consider not only the report and recommendations submitted by the Tree Officer but also the objections and suggestions that may be filed by the general public.

"We, thus, find that the Tree Authority while issuing the impugned Notification dated 18th September 2023, hardly had any time either to consider the report and recommendations made by the Tree Officer or to take into consideration the objections and suggestions, which he might have received through the Tree Officer, from the members of the general public..." the high court had said. The high court had directed that the Tree Officer shall publish a fresh public notice giving a period of at least seven days for furnishing the objections and suggestions, in view of the permissions sought for felling of trees. The Tree Authority, while publishing a public notice, shall also personally inspect the trees, hold an inquiry and mention in the advertisement that if the trees to be removed are heritage trees, and determine the age of the trees sought to be removed as per the criteria and method which may have been notified by the government, it had said. (PTI)

Kerala CM, SFI are bullies: Guv Arif Mohammed Khan

Oppn parties demand restoration of statehood

MALAPPURAM (KERALA), Dec 18: Hardening his stance against chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan and the CPI(M)'s student outfit SFI, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan on Monday called them "bullies" and said he was "not going to be frightened" by them.

The Governor referred to the CM as "a bully" while responding to a query from reporters regarding Vijayan's statement a day ago that Khan was 'attempting to destroy' the peace in the southern state by making provocative statements.

"You know his (Vijayan's) history? How many murder cases he is involved in? What will a bully say? How am I provoking? If I nominate CPI(M) people to the senate, then it is ok?" Khan asked.

He also referred to the Students' Federation of India (SFI) activists as bullies.

"If they want to hurt me, they are most welcome. I am asking, come here. If you want to hurt me, come here. Why don't you come? They are only bullies. They are not students. All students belong to SFI? No other student has protested, it is only SFI. Why? Because after the Supreme Court judgement, they realise they cannot control and run the universities," Khan said.

As an example of the alleged "misuse and abuse" of powers by the ruling Left in the state with regard to universities, Khan claimed that in Calicut University, six carpenters were appointed when there was only a vacancy for one.

He also alleged that all six appointments were CPI(M) workers.

"They were misusing and abusing. They cannot anymore now that the SC has made the position absolutely clear that they have no role. That is what has upset them.

"That is why they are unhappy. I am telling through you (media) that the Vice-Chancellors (VCs) have to mend their ways. If I hear that they are succumbing to the



pleasure of the politicians..." he said.

Khan said that in the wake of the recent Supreme Court decision, the VCs cannot take instructions from the political executive.

"There is no way," he said. The Governor also said that the state government's reaction with regard to appointments made by him to the senate of universities shows "that they are still interfering" with the varsities.

The SC had recently quashed the reappointment of Gopinath Ravindran as VC of Kannur University and berated the Left government for its "unwarranted intervention" in the matter.

While speaking to the media outside the university guest house, Khan also praised the Kerala Police as being the finest and the best in the country and said that the force was not to be blamed as it was not being allowed to discharge its duties.

He said he has repeatedly asked whether such black banners would have been permitted had the CM been staying there.

"If the banners were here, the police were protecting them on the instructions of the CM. You remove the police from here and I assure you the first person to instruct the SFI not to come near me will be the CM.

it boldly and like monkeys they will fall back if you cease to flee before them. If you do not feel frightened, they will simply disappear into thin air," Khan said.

He further said that what he had said about Kannur was not about the place or the people living there.

"What I said or spoke about a famous novelist of Kerala has written -- that fascism came to Kerala when in Kannur one needed the permission of the CPI(M) to pluck coconuts from his own garden. I am talking about that thing. I am not talking of people of Kannur," he clarified.

The clarification comes in the wake of Vijayan, on Sunday, hitting out at the Governor over his Kannur remarks by saying it was a place that has a prominent space in the history of this country's freedom struggle.

On Saturday, addressing the media at the Calicut University, Khan had alleged that the CM was used to scaring people because he comes from Kannur which has a bloody history of killing each other.

When reporters referred to the allegations that the Governor was playing for the RSS, Khan said, "They are entitled to their opinion."

In the same breath, he also criticised the state government's outreach programme -- the Nava Kerala Sadas -- alleging that huge money was being spent only to collect applications and provide no solutions.

The Governor and the CM were at loggerheads after the SC verdict as Khan accused Vijayan of having exerted pressure on him with regard to reappointment of Ravindran.

Subsequently, his appointments to the senate of some universities invited the ire of the SFI which alleged that he was pushing the BJP-RSS nominees using his authority as the Chancellor of the universities in the state. (PTI)

New Jalpaiguri - Haldibari section of NFR to be electrified soon

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: N. F. Railway is moving forward with the aim towards 100 percent electrification of all un-electrified Broad Gauge routes of the zone. This aims to minimise railways dependency on fossil fuels and will help in its mission mode for Indian Railways towards becoming the largest "GREEN RAILWAYS" in the world. In an endeavour for complete electrification, N F Railway is doing electrification works till Haldibari, the last station on the India-Bangladesh border along the New Jalpaiguri-Dhaka route. Works of the Katihar- Tezranyanpur section in Bihar is also going on with full thrust. The work is expected to be completed very soon of these two sections of total 63.74 Route kilometres.

In the jurisdiction of NFR, out of the total electrified routes in North-eastern region, 921.01 Km in Assam, 9.58 Km in Meghalaya and 6.00 Km in Nagaland have already been electrified. Moreover, 285.87 Km in Bihar and 744.726 Km in West Bengal have already been electrified under the jurisdiction of N. F. Railway.

way.

The statutory inspections for these two sections of Katihar division of N.F. Railway are expected to be done very soon. The sections are Raninagar Jalpaiguri Junction - Haldibari (30.71 Route Kilometres) and Katihar Jn - Tezranyanpur (33.03 Route Kilometres) of Katihar Division. For further speeding up the electrification works, Indian Railway Construction International Limited (IRCON), Rail India Technical and Economic Service (RITES), NFR/Construction and Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE) have been executing the electrification works in a phased manner in different sections over the zone.

Electrification will significantly improve the mobility of trains on NFR and strengthen the Rail network in north-eastern states. In addition to the reduction in pollution, the financial performance of the Railway will also improve due to the shift from fossil fuel to electricity. This would also facilitate seamless traffic and also increase the average speed of trains resulting in punctuality of train movement.

Contd. from Page 1...

Parl security breach

an e-mail address...this e-mail account is used to take backup of chats every 24 hours," said a source privy to the investigation. Sources said that they are collecting all the data related to the accused's e-mail accounts, bank details, and family details, among others. "These e-mail addresses of the accused will help the police extract data of their chats. We are investigating the entire case from every possible angle. We have also requested Meta to share WhatsApp chats of the accused as their mobile phones have been damaged," another source said.

According to police, Lalit Jha, the "mastermind" of the Parliament security breach conspiracy, threw his mobile phone and burnt those of other accused in Rajasthan's Nagaur, where he fled after the incident.

Police later recovered fragments of broken and burnt mobile phones at Lalit's instance. These parts have been sent to the forensic department to see if data can be recovered from them.

Delhi Police has arrested six persons so far, Sagar Sharma, Manoranjan D. Amol Shinde, Neelam Devi, Lalit Jha and Mahesh Kumar for their alleged involvement in the Parliament security breach case. They have been booked under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Sagar and Manoranjan had jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour on December 13, released yellow smoke from canisters and shouted slogans before being overpowered by MPs. Around the same time, Amol and Neelam released coloured smoke from canisters outside the Parliament premises and raised slogans. Lalit, who was present outside the Parliament gate, had recorded the act on his mobile phone. He fled to Nagaur after uploading the video on social media and sharing it with his friends. Mahesh and another accused Kailash, who are cousins, allegedly arranged his stay there.

Later, Lalit and Mahesh came to Delhi and surrendered before police. The accused told police that they were influenced by the ideology of revolutionary Bhagat Singh and wanted to send a message to the government through their act. (PTI)

78 oppn MPs suspended

dignity of the House. Union parliamentary affairs minister Pralhad Joshi also appealed to the opposition MPs "with folded hands" to not wave the placards, saying it was agreed at the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee not to carry placards.

The opposition MPs ignored the appeals of Birla and Joshi, and continued their protests, resulting in the suspension of 78 members.

Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar first named the suspended members and then put the motion to vote, which was adopted by voice vote. The suspension triggered a political slugfest with opposition members terming the action as a "murder of democracy" and Goyal claiming that the action was necessary as the opposition MPs insulted the Lok Sabha Speaker and Rajya Sabha Chairman.

Accusing the Congress and its allies of "embarrassing" the country with their conduct, Goyal told reporters that opposition members brought placards and willfully disrupted parliamentary proceedings despite the decision taken earlier that placards would not be allowed in the Houses.

"It was clearly their preplanned strategy to not allow Parliament to run smoothly," he said, noting that a bill to provide reservation to women in Jammu and Kashmir, and Puducherry was taken up for consideration and passage in Rajya Sabha but protesting opposition members did not allow a discussion.

"The Congress and its allies are intrinsically against the interests of women and backward classes. Whenever the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes any step to empower backward classes and women, they are pained because the Congress and the Left are always against their empowerment," Goyal said.

The government has listed three bills replacing the colonial era criminal law for consideration and passing in Parliament, besides the draft legislation to provide for a mechanism to appoint chief election commissioner and election commissioners is pending passage from the Lok Sabha.

Parliament watchers termed the mass suspensions as "unprecedented" and perhaps for the first time in the history of Parliament. "It is an unprecedented development for 78 parliamentarians to be suspended in a single day," G Ravindra, a legislative expert and a keen watcher of Parliamentary proceedings said.

In 1989, 63 members of the Lok Sabha were suspended on March 15 for the remaining part of the week over the issue of tabling of the report of the Justice Thakkar Committee that inquired into the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In 2015, the then Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan suspended 25 Congress members for the next five working days for protesting with placards in the Well of the House. In the 15th Lok Sabha, several members of the Congress were suspended from the House over the issue of bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh. Among those suspended on Monday were Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Gaurav Gogoi, K Suresh, Amar Singh, Rajamohan Unnithan, Su. Thirunavukkarasar, K. Muralaedharan, Anto Antony (all from Congress) and Kalyan Banerjee, Aparupa Poddar, Prasad Banerjee, Sougata Ray, Satabdi Ray, Protima Mondal, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Asit Kumar Mal, Sunil Kumar Mondal (all from TMC). Others were -- T R Bala, A Raja, Dayanidhi Maran, T. Sumathy, K Navas Kani, Kalandidhi Veerasamy, C N Annadurai, S S Palanimanickam, G Selvam, S Ramalingam (all from DMK), ET Mohammed Basheer (IUML), N K Premachandran (RSP) and Kaushalendra Kumar (JD-U). In the Rajya Sabha, among the 34 suspended for the remainder of the session, 12 MPs are from the Congress. The suspended Rajya Sabha members are - Pramod Tiwari, Jairam Ramesh, Ameer Yajnik, Naranbhai J Rathwa, Syed Nasir Hussain, Shrimati Phulo Devi Netam, Shak-tisinh Gohil, K.C. Venugopal, Rajani Ashokrao Patil, Ranjeet Ranjan, Imran Pratapgarhi, Randeep Singh Surjewala (all Congress), while seven members are from TMC - Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Mohammed Nadimul Haque, Abir Ranjan Biswas, Santanu Sen, Mausam Noor, Prakash Chik Baraik and Samirul Islam.

Others suspended for the winter session are M Shanmugam, N. R. Elango, Kanimozhi NVN Somu, R. Giriraj (all DMK), Manoj Kumar Jha, Faiyaz Ahmad (both RJD), V. Sivadasan (CPI-M), Ram Nath Thakur, Anil Prasad Hegde (both JD-U), Vandana Chavan NCP), Ram Gopal Yadav, Javed Ali Khan (both SP), Mahua Maji (JMM), Jose K. Mani (KC-M) and Ajit Kumar Bhuyan (IND).

The 11 opposition members whose names have been referred to the privilege committee are - Jebi Mather Hisham, L Hanumanthaiah, Neeraj Dangi, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar, G. C. Chandrashekar (all Cong), Binoy Viswam, Sandosh Kumar P (both CPI), Mohamed Abdulla (DMK), John Brittas and A A Rahim (both CPI-M). Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said not only in the Lok Sabha but there was a "bloodbath" in the Rajya Sabha too. "Incidentally, I too figure in this Roll of Honour -- for the first time in my parliamentary career of 19 years," he said on X. "This is Murder of Democracy in India(MODI) at work!"

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who arrived in the national capital on Monday, ahead of a crucial INDIA bloc meeting, described the action against the MPs as a "mockery of democracy". (PTI)

EM Taro blames bad

in the monsoon," said Taro. The EM of the education department of KAAC, Richard Tokbi who was the chief guest said, "The teachers are nation builders who show the right direction to the society's future. Without teachers, the people would be clueless." Local MLA, Rupsing Teron, EM of KAAC, Rina Teranepi, outgoing president of AAPTA, Khairul Amin, president of AAPTA Mohonsing Kro and secretary Devika Devi also attended the conference.

3 dead in road mishap

(27), Nayansham (27) and Neangmai B Konyak. All of them hailed from Mon district in Nagaland. Meanwhile, the injured persons were rushed to the Bokajan Community Health Centre soon after the accident.

Four of the five injured have been identified as Kaiyong (20), a resident of Mon district in Nagaland, Anlong (11), a resident of Mon district (residents of Gypsy), Taipay (29) and Rahul Basumatary, a resident of Kamrup district of the state.

Drug mafia, illegal

between the neighbouring country's military and anti-junta groups." Police teams have been sent to monitor the situation, collect biometric details and make arrangements to provide them temporary shelters, he said.

"We are not against Chin Kuki, but only against those illegal immigrants. We simply want to identify those illegal sections by taking their biometric details and later have them leave when the situation in Myanmar improves," Singh said.

"Where is the mistake if I stressed on stopping illegal immigration? Will we agree to continuous influx and eventual suppression of the indigenous populace... original communities of the state becoming smaller and becoming a minority?" said the chief minister.

Commenting on the previous government, Singh said "The current crisis is due to their failure to properly enforce laws in the state. If they had fenced the almost 400-km international borders, cancelled the Free Movement Regime, this situation would not have come up." Singh also asked the security forces to take strict action against illegal possession of weapons and those taking the law into their own hands. "If this is not checked immediately, it has the potential to create misunderstanding among communities and unwanted incidents," he added. (PTI)

Arms, ammunition recovered

of sophisticated arms and around 500,000 rounds of ammunition were looted from police stations and armories by mobs and individuals. The maximum number of arms and ammunition were looted in Imphal West, Imphal East and Churachandpur districts, according to the police report.

The ethnic violence that broke out on May 3 has left at least 180 people dead and 50,000 displaced in the state. (NIN)

Lucknow zoo employee killed in attack by hippopotamus

LUCKNOW (UP), Dec 18: A zoo employee here died after being attacked by a hippopotamus on Monday, an official release said.

The man named Suraj had entered the enclosure of the hippopotamus in the Nawab Wajid Ali Shah Zoological Garden to clean it around 10.45 am on Monday when he was attacked leaving him seriously injured, it said.

He was immediately rushed to the Civil Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries after some time.

The release further said that Suraj had been working in the zoo since 2013 and was involved in carrying out various tasks relating to cleaning of different enclosures.

The staff are standing with the bereaved family, it added.

A senior zoo official said that detailed cleaning work was being done on Monday, which is an off day for the zoo park.

It is an unfortunate incident, he added.

Another official said that help of Rs 50,000 has been extended to the family of the deceased by the zoo administration. (PTI)

BJP and opposition trade barbs in council over Dawood 'relative' link claim

NAGPUR, Dec 18: Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday rejected NCP MLC Eknath Khadse's allegations that a BJP minister had attended a wedding in 2017-18 hosted by a family related to fugitive underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

Demanding Khadse's apology to the legislative council for making a baseless claim, Fadnavis said perhaps the allegation was raised because Uddhav Thackeray is present in the House.

Khadse, who belongs to the Sharad Pawar camp of NCP, showed photos of the cabinet minister attending a wedding and alleged that the family is related to Dawood Ibrahim, the prime accused in the 1993 Mumbai serial bomb blasts case.

Council chairperson Neelam Gorhe directed that the name of the minister be removed from the proceeding. She also rejected the opposition's demand for a discussion.

Fadnavis, also the Home

Minister, said, "The concerned minister and many other political leaders and government officers had attended the wedding of a nephew of a renowned Muslim priest in Nashik city, known as Shaheer-e-Khatib.

"An allegation was made that one of the daughters in the family of the in-laws of the bride's father has been married to one of the brothers of Dawood Ibrahim. There is no case against any one of them. In 2017-18, the investigation team has clearly stated that Shaheer-e-Khatib has nothing to do with Dawood," he said.

Targeting Shiv Sena-UBT, he said, "Why such rigorous attempts were not made when Saleem (Kutta) was with (Sudhakar) Badgujar? I reject these allegations. There is no such connection (Dawood link). He (Khadse) should apologise to the House."

Badgujar, who heads the Nashik city unit of Shiv Sena-UBT, is facing an investigation after BJP MLA Nitesh Rane displayed a photo in the state as-

sembly last week claiming Badgujar had danced with Dawood Ibrahim's aide Salim Kutta at a party.

Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena (Shinde) faction legislators raised slogans against Shiv Sena UBT, saying Salim Kutta is the new leader of UBT.

"Everybody knows who is the godfather of Sudhakar Badgujar in Mumbai. Badgujar finances Salim Kutta which is akin to promoting anti-nationalists," state minister Dada Bhuse told reporters on the premises of the Vidhan Bhavan in Nagpur.

Meanwhile, Congress MLA Kailas Gorantyal expressed doubts about the identity of the person purportedly seen in the video with Badgujar.

"Saleem Kutta or Saleem Kuria was murdered a long time ago in Mumbai in 1998. His three wives had approached a TADA court for the release of the property seized by the police earlier. The court had upheld their appeal. We don't know who this person is (dancing in the video)," he told reporters. (PTI)

Centre asks states to be vigilant as Covid cases rise

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: The Centre on Monday asked states and union territories to maintain constant vigil amid an uptick in Covid-19 cases and the detection of the first case of the new JN.1 variant in the country.

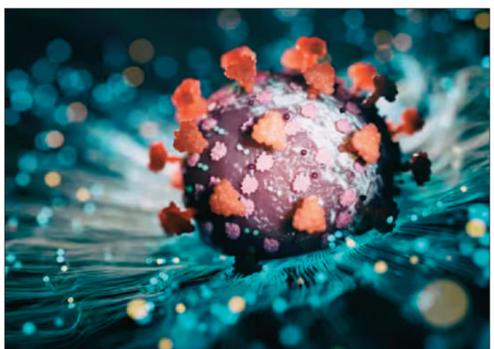
In a letter to states and union territories, Union Health Secretary Sudhansh Pant underlined that "due to consistent and collaborative actions between the Centre and state governments, we have been able to sustain the (COVID-19) trajectory at sustainable low rates".

"However, as the COVID-19 virus continues to circulate and its epidemiology behaviour gets settled with Indian weather conditions and circulation of other usual pathogens, it is important to keep the momentum going to effectively deal with the challenges in public health," he said.

Recently, a few states like Kerala have reported a slight increase in the number of Covid-19 cases, Pant noted.

India's first case of Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1 was detected in Kerala on December 8. Earlier, a traveller from Tamil Nadu's Tiruchirappalli district tested positive for the JN.1 variant in Singapore.

Considering the upcoming festive season, Pant said, states should put in place requisite public health measures and other arrangements



to minimise the risk of transmission of the disease.

States have been urged to ensure effective compliance of the detailed operational guidelines for revised surveillance strategy for COVID-19 as has been shared by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

They have asked to monitor and report district-wise cases of Influenza-like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) in all health facilities regularly for early detection of rising trend of cases.

States were also advised to ensure adequate testing in all districts as per COVID-19 testing guidelines and maintain the recom-

mended share of RT-PCR and antigen tests.

In his letter, Pant also stressed the need to increase the number of RT-PCR tests and send positive samples for genome sequencing to Indian SARS COV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) laboratories to enable timely detection of new variants, if any, in the country.

The states were asked to promote community awareness to seek people's continued support in managing COVID-19, including adherence to respiratory hygiene.

Stating that the first case of JN.1 (BA.2.86.1.1) has been detected in India, Pant attached details about the variant in an annexure. It stated that JN.1 (BA.2.86.1.1)

emerged in late 2023 and is a descendant of the BA.2.86 lineage (Pirola) of SARS COV-2.

The BA.2.86 lineage, first identified in August 2023, is phylogenetically distinct from the circulating SARS-CoV-2 Omicron XBB lineages, including EG.5.1 and HK.3.

BA.2.86 carries more than 30 mutations in the spike (S) protein, indicating a high potential for immune evasion.

The JN.1 variant has been reported in the USA, China, Singapore and India. Seven cases of the sub-variant have been reported from China.

More genetic sequencing data is required to confirm its presence in other countries.

It is not currently known whether the JN.1 infection produces symptoms different from other variants, the annexure stated.

In general, symptoms of Covid-19 tend to be similar across variants. There is also no indication of increased severity from JN.1

At this time, there is no evidence that JN.1 presents an increased risk to public health compared to other currently circulating variants, the annexure said.

The existing treatment line for COVID-19 is expected to be effective against JN.1 infection and updated vaccines are expected to increase protection against the variant, it said. (PTI)

UNLEASHING CREATIVITY JD INSTITUTE OF FASHION TECHNOLOGY PRESENTS ANNUAL DESIGN AWARDS, 2023

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 18: The Guwahati chapter of JD Institute of Fashion Technology had been exhibiting artistic creations by the students of Interior, Fashion and Jewellery design, over the years through Annual Design Awards. The curtain raiser for the JD Annual Design Awards was held on December 15 and the fashion show and interior exhibition on December 16th. Creativity, innovation and aesthetics all came together in the much-awaited Annual Design Awards of JD Institute of Fashion Technology, Guwahati.

The Institute was established in 1988 by Chandrakant Dalal and R.C. Dalal, which continues to serve as a platform to ignite the potential and intelligence of tomorrow's youth. JD Institute of Fashion Technology, Guwahati has completed 18 glorious years in the industry and is one of the top-most design institutes in India. It was the first platform of its kind to impart design education in Guwahati. Founded in 2005, JD Guwahati still boasts of being a pioneer in the art and design education sector in Assam and the neighboring states as well.

The event was graced by the presence of Rupal Dalal (Managing Director of JD Institute) and Harsh Dalal (Director of JD Institute). Illustrious personalities of the design circuit of Guwahati



city attended the day long extravaganza. Archana Tiwari, designer & owner of Pariyaat and Ar. Ritul Sharma, architect & owner of Akriti, along with the directors of the institute were among the jury. The leading personalities of fashion and interior design along with eminent industry professionals came under one roof to motivate the students to present their best work.

The theme for the JD Annual Design Awards, 2023 was 'INTERSECTION' that merges two completely opposing notions of contrasting paradigms and forms an individualized concept.

The interior design students put up an exhibition that displayed various innovative creations and concepts. A wall concept made from eco-friendly sustainable ma-

terials that has self-cooling capabilities was one of the noteworthy creations at the interior exhibition. The fashion show started with a brief speech by Sumita Dey Deka (Center Director of JD Guwahati) that highlighted the Institute's achievements and fostering constant growth of students in all professional fields. The fashion show showcased some splendid artistic creations and innovative design ideas. Usage of natural dyes on garments, hand painting and knotting techniques was seen. Noteworthy among these collections was the one that was designed using pre-owned denims and white shirts that were hand painted in graffiti artworks. Each collection was distinctly different from each other and displayed the thoughtful abstraction

of the student's work.

The fashion show was followed by the Annual Look book release by Rupal Dalal, Kamal Barman and the Directors of JD Guwahati. Students with exceptional work won awards like Best Design, Most Innovative, Most Commercially Viable and Best Research in Interior, Fashion and Jewellery design.

Rupal Dalal commended the student's efforts merged with sustainability and environment-friendliness. The laborious nature of each collection and the diligence of the students was stated by Ushmita Dey Hazarika (Director of JD Guwahati). The event ended with an introduction to the entire team behind the collective effort towards the Annual Design Awards.

When Muruganantham mistook Twinkle Khanna for Raveena Tandon

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: If not for actor-turned-writer Twinkle Khanna's "greed" to tell a good story, the real-life Padman Arunachalam Muruganantham mistaking her for actor Raveena Tandon could have literally led to the end of his chapter in her 2016 bestselling book "The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad".

Khanna based "The Sanitary Man of Sacred Land", one of the four stories in the book, on Tamil Nadu-based Muruganantham, who created affordable sanitary napkins for the women of his village.

According to Khanna, the activist mistook her as Tandon while giving his nod to write the story.

"He looked at me and mistook me

for Raveena Tandon. At that point, I didn't want to write his story but my greed was so much that I overcame that slight," she quipped during a discussion on her recently released book, "Welcome To Paradise", here at Sunder Nursery on Sunday.

She later produced the 2018 film "Pad Man", a fictionalised account of Muruganantham's life which starred her husband actor Akshay Kumar in the lead.

Fresh from completing a master's programme in fiction writing from London's

Goldsmith College, Khanna said it is fiction that makes the "truth more palatable".

The 50-year-old drove her point home with an interesting potato analogy.

"The truth is like a potato. You make French fries, you make aloo jeera, you are presenting potatoes only. The potato's chemical composition doesn't change.

"It is just the way it is everywhere, and that's what we do with all our experiences, memories... The truth doesn't change, we just change the way we are representing it," she explained.

A self-confessed fan of science fiction, the author advised budding writers to read genres as diverse as possible.

"No one can teach anyone to write. That would be

teaching you how your perspective is shaped and that doesn't happen. But they (the experts) do teach you how you can analyse your work because you are analysing everyone else's work, and that is the sort of scaffolding you can use," said Khanna, who reads at least three-four short stories every night.

"Welcome To Paradise", published by Juggernaut Books, is a collection of stories exploring the depth of loneliness, heart-break and deception. (PTI)



9TH AJANTA-ELLORA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL TO BEGIN FROM JANUARY 3

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, Dec 18: The ninth Ajanta-Ellora International Film Festival will be held in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar from January 3, the organisers have announced.

The five-day festival will kick off at Rukmini Auditorium of MGM University campus.

The opening ceremony will be attended by filmmakers R Balki, Anubhav Sinha and Principal Secretary of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Apurva Chandra, the organisers told reporters on Saturday.

Ashok Rane, festival director, said German-Finnish film "Fallen Leaves" will open the gala. Palme d'Or winning French courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall" will bring the curtain down on the latest edition of the festival on January 7, Rane added.

Veteran lyricist-screenwriter Javed Akhtar will be felicitated with the Padmapani Lifetime Achievement Award on the inaugural day.

Besides film screenings at Prozone Mall, the festival will also host events such as short film competitions, Indian film competition, master classes with Sinha and Balki, as well as interactive sessions.

The winning film team will be awarded the Golden Kailasha Award and a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh. Winners in best actor, actress and script categories will also receive awards at the festival.

Veteran actor and director Dhritiman Chatterjee will head the Indian film competition jury, which also consists of cinematographer Dimo Popov, director Nachiket Patwardhan, film critic Rashmi Doraiswamy, cine-

matographer Hari Nair, said chairman of organising committee Nandkishor Kagliwal.

FIPRESCI India awards will also be given to the winning films, Kagliwal added.

During the course of the gala, PIB senior officer Prakash Magdum will deliver a special lecture on 'Gandhi and Cinema' and Chatterjee will speak at a session titled 'Understanding Mrinal Sen' on the master filmmaker.

An interactive session with directors participating in the film competitions and a film appreciation workshop are also scheduled, said festival's artistic director Chandrakant Kulkarni.

The gala, earlier called Aurangabad International Film Festival (AIFF), is organised by Nath Group, Yashwantrao Chavan Centre, Mumbai and MGM University. (PTI)

'People say Kashmir is mini-Switzerland, I say Switzerland is mini-Kashmir'

SRINAGAR, Dec 18: Kashmir is tranquil and beautiful, says actor Bhagyashree, who wonders why people go abroad when there is so much beauty in India.

The 54-year-old, who shot to fame with her film debut "Maine Pyar Kiya" in 1989, said a lot of tourists want to visit the Valley but are apprehensive.

"Whenever I come here I

am reminded of Amir Khusro's couplet that 'If there is Paradise on Earth, it is here, it is here, it is here'. Do not miss visiting Kashmir in your lifetime. It is so tranquil and beautiful here that I do not understand why people go to Switzerland or Europe. When there is so much beauty in our own country, why go elsewhere?" Bhagyashree told PTI at a tourist resort in Anantnag

district.

"People here say Kashmir is a mini-Switzerland but I say Switzerland is mini-Kashmir. You feel inner peace here. People are so good that you will never face a problem," she added.

The actor also praised the Kashmiri cuisine and hospitality. "The food is very tasty and the people are sweet like jagery," she added. (PTI)

'The Family Man' third season likely to be released in 2025, have focus on NE: Krishna DK

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Filmmaker Krishna DK on Sunday said that shooting for the third season of spy thriller 'The Family Man' will begin within the next few months and the series is likely to be released in 2025.

In an interview with PTI at the ongoing 8th Brahmputra Valley Film Festival here, the director said the upcoming season of the series is currently in the developing stage and a "significant portion" of it will be based on issues of the Northeast, highlighting the complex geopolitics of the region.

"The third season of 'The Family Man' is under development right now. It's been long overdue. It'll go on the floors within the next few months," said Krishna of Raj & DK duo.

As the Amazon Prime Video series is set in the Northeast, a major chunk of shooting will also take place in the region, he added.

"We are yet to come and scout for locations, but that process should start soon. We will start interacting with local people here. We are still figuring out how to get things started. It's in the development phase," Krishna said.

The first and second seasons of 'The Family Man' with Manoj Vajpayee as the lead character were released in 2019 and 2021 respectively.

When asked about the possible release date of the third season of the show, which is one of the highest-viewed OTT series in India, the director said it would be "hopefully" in 2025.

"These things take a while -- post production, release etc. I let the studio talk about the release date. It's a long process -- shooting takes so many months, post-production takes so many more months and the release itself takes a few months," he added.

On the topic of 'The Family Man'

Season 3, Krishna declined to reveal it saying that a "significant portion" will be in the Northeast.

"I'll keep it under wraps. You've seen the show -- 'The Family Man' 1 and 2. We like to go around and showcase different parts of the country and its geopolitics. In Season 1, we dealt with Kashmir, we dealt with Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka in Season 2.

"This one (Season 3) I would like to keep under wraps what exactly it is about, but you get a sense of the kind of show it is. We tend to be balanced and sensitive about issues," he added.

Krishna said many of the local artistes from the Northeast will be included in the upcoming season to present the real picture of the places around the region.

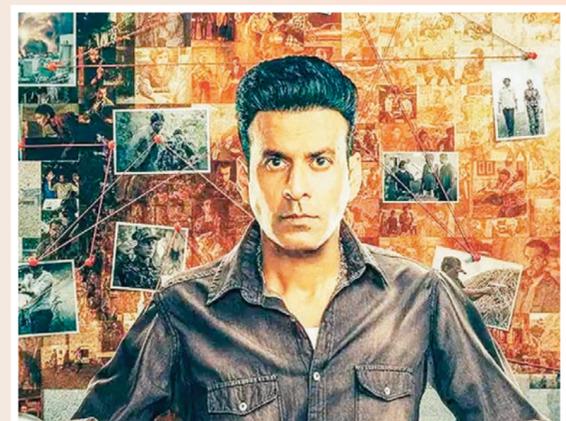
"One of the important things about 'The Family Man' is we want to be authentic. Whichever region we are show-

ing, we have taken out the form from that region to portray its own culture. It'll be a crime to take some reels and portray some other cultures," he added.

While attending the four-day 8th Brahmputra Valley Film Festival (BVFF), Krishna visited the Northeast for the first time and emphasised the importance of such small fests to promote local filmmakers.

"I've been to many film festivals like MAMI, IFFI and some big ones around the world. But I enjoy coming to more regional and niche film festivals like this one, because I think the opportunities of such film festivals are wide for filmmakers.

"It should be more spread out, especially for people who may not have access to coming to attend a bigger film festival. That's one of the reasons I wanted to come here. It's an amazing thing," he added. (PTI)



2nd ODI: Patidar or Rinku set for debut; India look to seal series

GOEBERHA, Dec 18: Immensely gifted Rajat Patidar will be pitted against the flamboyant Rinku Singh for the lone available batting slot when a determined Indian team gears up for the final kill against a lacklustre South Africa in the second ODI here on Tuesday.

After young pacers Arshdeep Singh and Avesh Khan produced a near flawless performance in the opening game that India won by eight wickets, KL Rahul wouldn't like to take his foot off the pedal and aim to heal the scars of 0-3 defeat here under his leadership back in 2022.

India will handover a debut ODI cap to one of its reserve batters as Shreyas Iyer has linked up with the Test squad after Sunday's game with an eye on the two-match series, starting on 'Boxing Day'.

The world wants to watch more of Rinku, the left-hander, who is earning new fans by thousands with every passing match. The diminutive left-hander has shown that he has the technique and temperament to succeed on South

African tracks that offer way more bounce compared to the sub-continent pitches.

However, the Indore-based right-hander Patidar had made it to Indian ODI team back in 2022 itself but in the past one year had to struggle and underwent a heel surgery earlier this year.

The Indian team management has very specific roles for players and while Rinku is being looked upon as a finisher at No. 6, the 30-year-old Patidar is more of a specialist No. 4 when he bats for his state team Madhya Pradesh.

Hence, with Iyer, a right-hander vacating a slot in the playing XI, his like-for-like replacement is Patidar.

In case of Rinku, the No.6 slot currently has been given to Sanju Samson, who is playing as a specialist batter behind skipper KL Rahul, who is donning the big gloves.

As has been the template of national team managements, they would like to give Samson, who is senior to Rinku, a fair go at that slot before turning to the southpaw.



However Rinku's brilliant List A record (near 50 average) will force the team management to give him a go.

In fact, both Rinku and Patidar could get a go but in that case, Tilak Varma, who got to face just a couple of deliveries in the opening game, will have to be

dropped from the playing eleven. That doesn't seem very logical at the moment.

The opening game witnessed the debut of young left-handed opener B Sai Sudharsan, whose silken half-century held a lot of promise going into the future.

For the hosts, this series is a massive white ball test for its batters in the post Quinton de Kock era. De Kock's exhilarating strokeplay at the top, allowed the Rassie van der Dussens, Heinrich Klaasens and David Millers to accelerate.

But in slightly helpful bowling conditions, India's fringe pacers exposed their shortcomings and they will have to put up a way better show in the second game, which will be a day/night affair.

Not much change in bowling combination

The bowling department will not need much tinkering after a near-perfect performance from Arshdeep and Avesh.

Mukesh Kumar, whose 0/46 in 7 overs did stick out like a sore thumb, would want to present an improved version of his bowling as he either went too full or at times bowled too short during the opening game.

In case the team management wants to experiment, it can replace Mukesh with his Bengal teammate Akash Deep but that looks unlikely in the second game

when the team is gunning for series glory.

In the spin department, both Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav, who have not been picked for Tests, wouldn't like to miss out on international matches and it is unlikely that they would volunteer to rest which would allow Rahul to give Yuzvendra Chahal a chance to play the only format he has been selected.

Squads:

India: KL Rahul (captain and wk), Ruturaj Gaikwad, B Sai Sudharsan, Tilak Varma, Rajat Patidar, Sanju Samson, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mukesh Kumar, Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan, Rinku Singh, Akash Deep, Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar.

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Otneil Bartman, Nandre Burger, Tony de Zorzi, Reeza Hendricks, Heinrich Klaasens, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Mhlabi Mpongwana, Wiaan Mulder, Andile Phehlukwayo, Rassie van der Dussen, Tabraiz Shamsi, Lizaad Williams, Kyle Verreynne.

Match Starts: 4:30 pm IST. (PTI)

Xabi Alonso and Leverkusen aim to take unbeaten run into 2024

DUESSELDORF, Dec 18: Xabi Alonso and his Bayer Leverkusen team have already secured top spot in the Bundesliga for the winter break. Now they need one more good result to take their record unbeaten run into the new year, too.

Even Harry Kane — on the best scoring run ever for a new Bundesliga arrival — hasn't been able to get Bayern Munich into its usual top spot going into the three-week break.

Leverkusen's 3-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt on Sunday was composed and clinical. In fact, the performance had everything that was missing from Bayern's 5-1 loss to the same opponent the week before. Nigerian striker Victor Boniface was again the star for Leverkusen. He finished with a goal and an assist, and the other goal was scored by Jeremie Frimpong on the rebound from Boniface's shot.

"It's been good, a big credit to the coach, the staff, all the players," Boniface said of Leverkusen's season so far. "Everyone



is giving 100% to achieve something like this and we are really proud of ourselves."

Leverkusen's record in all competitions for the 2023-24 season is 21 wins, three draws, no losses. That makes it the only unbeaten team in any of Europe's five biggest leagues, all the more impressive given that Leverkusen was in the relegation zone when

Alonso took charge 14 months ago.

The last test of 2023 before the winter break is at home Wednesday against Bochum, while second-place Bayern visits Wolfsburg. Now that Leverkusen looks like a true title contender, racking up points before the winter break takes on extra importance because Leverkusen could miss up

to five players in January and February during the African Cup of Nations. That includes Boniface, whose strong form for Leverkusen has put him firmly in contention to start for Nigeria. He made his debut for his country in September and has played all five games since.

In Boniface's absence, Leverkusen will need to lean on Patrik Schick, who has struggled with injuries since his breakout European Championship campaign for the Czech Republic two years ago, but has scored three times in eight games since his return in October. Filling in for the impressive Edmond Tapsoba and Odilon Kossonou in defense will be especially tricky too.

Kane scored twice in Bayern's 3-0 win over Stuttgart to become the fastest player ever to 20 Bundesliga goals, needing just 14 games to achieve the feat.

Bayern is four points off Leverkusen but has one more game to play because of a game against Union Berlin that was rescheduled

for Jan. 24 because of heavy snow.

It's a measure of Leverkusen's achievement that Bayern already has 35 points and still isn't top. At the same stage of the season last year, Bayern had 31 from its opening 14 games and led by four. Only a dramatic slide in the second half of the season allowed Borussia Dortmund to get close to challenging Bayern for the title.

Bayern's squad won't face the same impact from international tournaments in the new year, though right-back Noussair Mazraoui is expected to play for Morocco at the African Cup of Nations and central defender Kim Min-jae will be in action for South Korea at the Asian Cup. The return of Matthijs de Ligt to the squad against Stuttgart after a knee injury, even if he was only an unused substitute, is an encouraging sign that Bayern will have cover for Kim.

After the three-week winter break, the Bundesliga resumes Jan. 12 when Bayern hosts Hoffenheim. (AP)

Aston Villa calls for an investigation after Ollie Watkins says he was abused by a Brentford fan

BRENTFORD, Dec 18: Aston Villa called for an investigation after striker Ollie Watkins said he was abused by a Brentford fan on Sunday.

Watkins, who used to play for Brentford, scored the winning goal in Villa's 2-1 victory at GTech Community Stadium.

"Aston Villa FC wants to express its support for Ollie Watkins and, with the utmost respect for the big majority of Brentford fans and for the club, we ask the authorities to investigate this incident to find this individual," the club posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "Zero tolerance to abuse in football."

Watkins, an England international, left Brentford for Villa in 2020 and struck his winning goal in the 85th minute.

His celebrations sparked an on-field melee and Ezri Konsa and Saman Ghoddos were shown yellow cards.

"I have nothing but respect for the Brentford fans, I love the club, but there was one individual who was abusing me all game," Watkins said in Villa's post on X. "Personal abuse that footballers should not need to deal with. You can have banter, but this wasn't banter, hence my celebration."

Neither Watkins nor Villa described the nature of the alleged abuse.

Brentford manager Thomas Frank later described Watkins as "a top person of top integrity."

Both Brentford and Villa had players sent off, with Ben Mee red carded in the 71st and Boubacar Kamara shown red in stoppage time. (AP)



Guwahati set to host Khelo India University Games in Feb

GUWAHATI, Dec 18: Assam's largest city Guwahati is all set to host the next edition of Khelo India University Games early next year, officials said.

The fourth edition will see the participation of more than 4,000 sportspersons from over 200 varieties, they said.

"Under the leadership of Hon'ble PM Shri @narendramodi Guwahati is transforming into the sporting capital of India. After the success of the South Asian Games, and Khelo India Youth Games, the city is now ready to host the Khelo India University Games," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) posted on X. The event will be held from February 1-13 in 2024 across 18 sporting disciplines.

The competitions will be held in nine venues in Guwahati, including the Indira Gandhi Athletics Stadium, Gauhati University and LNPIE, Tepesia. (PTI)

Getting more bowling options to support Siraj real priority: RCB Director of Cricket

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Acquiring more bowling options to support pace spearhead Mohammad Siraj will be Royal Challengers Bangalore's top priority at the upcoming IPL auctions, team's Director of Cricket Mo Bobat said on Monday. RCB have retained 18 players, including star batter Virat Kohli, skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell and Siraj, and released 11 players. Those who have been released include the trio of medium pacer Harshal Patel, Sri Lanka leg spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and Australian quick Josh Hazlewood, depleting the team's bowling resources.

"Mohammad Siraj is a core part of what we do supporting Siraj with some more bowling options including overseas bowling options is going to be a real priority for us moving forward," Bobat was quoted as saying in a media release.

"Then we have got a core of local spinners, which I think is quite strong. Some of them got some opportunities over the last year or two and they might play more leading roles moving forward," he added.

A top heavy side, RCB traded Australia all-rounder Cameron Green for ₹ 17.5 crore from Mumbai Indians, to strengthen their middle order.

"We have got a strong core of retaining players, and we have got a very powerful top order. Part of the decision-making that we had around our player release decisions was to try and strengthen the middle order and bringing Cameron Green was a fantastic move."

RCB have a purse of ₹ 40.75 crore with a total of seven slots available to sign players.

Bobat also underscored the significance of fostering the right performance environment and culture for players to showcase their capabilities.

"I am committed to a long-term project here. We have a fantastic captain in Faf, and an excellent group of senior players with the experience of Virat, Maxi (Maxwell), and DK (Dinesh Karthik). So the ingredients are really strong."

"The next objective is to make sure we create the right performance, and culture where the players can really go and showcase what they are capable of, and go out and entertain the public."

"If we commit to our processes, play a brand of cricket that is aggressive, and have those moments where we're prepared to be brave it will get the fans going." (PTI)

Hardik will bring fresh thinking in MI, Rohit's contribution with bat has gone down: Gavaskar

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Legendary India cricketer Sunil Gavaskar reckons that Hardik Pandya, as the new leader, will bring in "fresh thinking" in the Mumbai Indians camp as Rohit Sharma appeared fatigued and has not contributed enough with the bat in the last few years.

The India T20 skipper was traded to Mumbai Indians ahead of the 2024 IPL auction, scheduled to take place in Dubai on Tuesday.

Rohit and Chennai Super Kings skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni are the most successful captains in the IPL, guiding their teams to five titles each in the lucrative league.

However, Mumbai Indians have gone without a title since 2021, finishing last in the 2022 edition.

Gavaskar said that it could be because Rohit is "fatigued" since he has been playing continuously not only as IPL team skipper but also as the India captain.

"See, we don't have to look at it (decision appoint Hardik as MI captain) as right or wrong. The decision they (MI) have taken has been for the benefit of the team. We can say that the contribution of Rohit, even with the bat, has become slightly lesser," Gavaskar told Star Sports.

"Earlier, there used to be a lot of contribution (with bat) from Rohit, but in the last few years, they have finished at number 9 or 10. And last year they qualified for the playoffs, but the 'josh' (enthusiasm) of Mumbai Indians was not there to be seen as we have seen in the past.



"Maybe because he has played cricket continuously he must have been fatigued, constantly captaining the Indian side and then Mumbai Indians," added Gavaskar.

Hardik, after leading Gujarat Titans to title triumph in the team's inaugural year in 2022 also led his side to runners-up finish this year.

The cricketer-turned-commentator felt Hardik has proved himself for the Gujarat franchise and his return to Mumbai Indians will infuse fresh ideas into the side.

"So, the decision that they have taken, he is a young player, young in terms of captaining a side, who has proven himself, taking Gujarat Titans to the finals twice and winning it once.

"So with the same thought process, they have made him captain. Because sometimes you need that fresh thinking, and he can bring that fresh thinking and I think the decision that has been taken, Mumbai Indians can benefit from

it and won't damage them," he added.

Former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan said the biggest challenge for Hardik at Mumbai Indians would be to manage senior players like Rohit, Suryakumar Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah, all of whom are leaders themselves.

"Now that this decision about Hardik Pandya has been taken, I think Suryakumar Yadav was involved in this discussion, Bumrah was in it as well, so for Hardik Pandya, the biggest challenge will be with all these people -- Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, who are leaders themselves, they have been captains of the Indian team in the past.

"Hardik will have to learn to manage these guys and it will be his biggest challenge. And this won't be easy for him," said Pathan.

He compared Rohit's stature with that of Dhoni, saying the stalwart had built the Mumbai franchise with his hard work and commitment.

"The stature that Rohit Sharma has in Mumbai Indians, I think it can be compared to the stature that Dhoni has in CSK. He has made this team with his own hard work and dedication through his captaincy."

"He's a great captain who has carried this team for years and last year, with the team they had, many people thought they could qualify for the playoffs. They qualified, even though they didn't have (pacer) Jofra Archer and their bowling was light.

"Even their form wasn't good. They didn't have the facilities of Bumrah (who was recovering from injury)," said Pathan. (PTI)

Kane scores twice to end brief goal drought as Bayern keeps pace with Leverkusen

BERLIN, Dec 18: Harry Kane ended his three-game goal drought on Sunday by scoring twice as Bayern Munich stayed on Bundesliga leader Bayer Leverkusen's heels with a 3-0 win over Stuttgart.

Bayern was under pressure going into the late game following Leverkusen's 3-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt — the team that routed Bayern 5-1 the weekend before.

But the 11-time defending champion stayed four points behind Leverkusen — the only unbeaten team left in the league — despite having to contend with the absences of Joshua Kimmich, Leon Goretzka and goalkeeper Sven Ulreich at short notice because of flu.

Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel only had 15 outfield players available to face Stuttgart, which drew with Leverkusen 1-1 last weekend.

But one of those players was Kane, who already had 18 goals in 13 Bundesliga games, albeit with-

out scoring in his last three appearances, including two Champions League matches.

"It felt like forever since I scored," Kane said.

Bayern fans restrained their early support to continue a week-end of protest against the German soccer league's plan to bring in an outside investor, but they couldn't help celebrating when Kane scored in the second minute.

Leroy Sané got past Alexander Nübel in the Stuttgart goal and slid the ball over for Kane's easy finish.

Nübel denied Konrad Laimer a second goal before the fans made their presence known with a huge cheer in the 12th — a reference to their role as a soccer team's 12th player.

Nübel was to get more opportunities to show his prowess to thwart Bayern's counterattacks, and both Kim Min-jae and Thomas Müller had goals ruled out for offside in the first half. (AP)

'Outstanding' Warner can play Test cricket for another year, feels Ian Healy

SYDNEY, Dec 18: David Warner can continue playing Test cricket for another year if he can extend the imperious form he displayed against Pakistan in the series-opener in Perth, former Australia wicketkeeper Ian Healy said on Monday.

The 37-year-old, who scored a match winning 164 off 211 ball in the first innings in the opening Test, which Australia won by 360 runs, is playing his swansong series. He is likely to bid adieu to the longest format of the game after the third Test in Sydney in his home ground.

"What I love about him is his durability. We all know how fit he must be because he's maintained his pace between wickets. I just love the way that he kept going and his feet moved," Healy said on SEN Radio.

"This is the bit I agree about Mitchell Johnson and what he said about, 'Why have a swansong, your last three years hasn't been very good and now you're picking the way you can retire'.

"But if he bats like that, he can go another year for mine (me) until he doesn't want to play anymore. That's what he's been missing in Test cricket, that footwork, balance and real bat speed when he needed it," he added.

Given his recent poor run in Test cricket, Warner faced a lot of criticism for publicly announcing he hopes to finish his Test career after this series in Sydney by former teammate Mitchell Johnson.

Johnson felt that the series against Pakistan should have been used to pick Warner's successor.

However, Healy feels the southpaw's century in difficult conditions won Australia the match in Perth.



"That 160 he made in the first innings won us a Test in Perth. It wasn't easy. I looked at it from afar on Thursday afternoon and I said, 'Oh, jeez, I wouldn't like to be Pakistan', they are going to feel about a foot shorter than they actually are tomorrow afternoon not knowing how difficult the conditions were.

"Maybe Pakistan missed the trick in the first session (on Day 1), bowling too short, but I don't know of anyone else that can make 160 that quick in tough conditions.

"I like the way Michael Slater made tough second innings batting conditions look. Mark Waugh could also make a mockery out of tough conditions, but David Warner was outstanding." (PTI)

Real Madrid beats Villarreal 4-1 to take Spanish league lead

MADRID, Dec 18: Real Madrid lead the Spanish league after beating Villarreal 4-1 but lost defender David Alaba with a serious knee injury on Sunday.

Jude Bellingham, Rodrygo, Brahim Diaz and Luka Modric scored for Madrid, which moved one point ahead of Girona ahead of the Catalan club's home game against Alaves on Monday. Madrid is seven points ahead of third-place Barcelona. The defending champion drew 1-1 at Valencia on Saturday. "It's always good to open a gap to Barcelona," Rodrygo said. "But seven points is not a lot, there is still a lot of league left. We have to keep this mindset and keep trying to win every match."

Alaba had to be helped off the field at the Santiago Bernabeu before halftime when his left knee buckled while he tried to steal the ball from an opponent near midfield. The Austria defender fell and immediately called for help while grabbing his knee. He couldn't put weight on his left leg while being carried off the field in the 34th minute.

Madrid said after the match that Alaba ruptured the anterior cruciate ligament and will need to undergo surgery in the next few days. The club did not immediately say how long he is expected to be sidelined.

"He was sad at halftime," Rodrygo said. "We have to wait for the tests but it's something that worries us."

It was the latest serious knee injury for Madrid this season. The club is already without goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and de-



fender Éder Militão because of cruciate ligament injuries that are expected to keep them out of action for a long period. Eduardo Camavinga and Arda Güler also sustained knee injuries.

"We are very sad because it's the third injury like this in the last four months. It's something that had never happened to one of my teams before," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "But the team has been able to overcome these injuries. It has done more than people thought it could do."

Bellingham and Rodrygo continued their good scoring runs to give Madrid a 2-0 first-half lead. Bellingham scored his league-

leading 13th goal with a header off a cross by Modric in the 25th, and Rodrygo added to the lead in the 37th for his fifth goal in his last six games. Bellingham has seven goals in his last nine matches with the club.

Diaz scored the third goal after a beautiful run that started near the midfield line in the 64th. He cleared two defenders before finding the net from inside the area. Modric closed the scoring with another shot from inside the box in the 68th.

José Luis Morales scored in the 54th for Villarreal, which hasn't won in three straight league matches and has dropped to 14th place. Villarreal has nine losses in 17 league

matches so far, its worst run at this point of a season.

Villarreal had been the last team to beat Madrid in the league at the Bernabeu, winning 3-2 last season. That was Madrid's only loss in its last 31 league matches as a host. It lost both of its league matches against Villarreal last season.

Diaz started instead of Joselu, while Lucas Vazquez was the right back in place of the injured Dani Carvajal.

THRILLING DRAW

Sixth-place Real Sociedad had three goals disallowed and twice hit the woodwork in a 0-0 home draw against seventh-place Real Betis. It was the ninth consecutive match without a loss for Sociedad in all competitions, and the third straight league draw for Manuel Pellegrini's Betis.

CADIZ HELD

Cadiz's winless run in the league reached 13 matches after a 1-1 draw at Las Palmas. Cadiz, which equalized with a goal by Chris Ramos in the 83rd, stayed only one point from the relegation zone. Las Palmas, which was seeking its fourth win in a row in all competitions, is in ninth place.

ALMERIA STILL WINLESS

Almeria drew 0-0 with Mallorca at home to remain the only winless team after 17 rounds. The Saudi-owned club has five draws and 12 losses. It is eight points behind the first team outside the relegation zone.

Mallorca, unbeaten in five straight games in all competitions, is in 15th place. (AP)

Club WC dates in the United States confirmed

Players' union FIFPRO not happy



JEDDAH, Dec 18: The first edition of the expanded FIFA Club World Cup in the United States will be staged from June 15 to July 13, 2025, world soccer's governing body said Sunday.

FIFA said the 32-team tournament, which will officially be called Mundial de Clubes FIFA, would be "harmoniously aligned with the International Match Calendar" to ensure there would be enough of a gap between the final and the start of domestic leagues.

"Clubs play a fundamental role in world football, and the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 will be a major milestone in providing clubs from all confederations with a fitting stage on which to shine at the highest level of the game," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said. "This will be an open competition based on sporting merit that will play a key role as part of our efforts to make football truly global."

The last edition of the Club World Cup in its current guise is currently being held in Saudi Arabia, where Champions League winner Manchester City is aiming to win the trophy for the first time. An annual tournament called the Coupe Intercontinentale de la FIFA

will be played from 2024 between the Champions League winner and the winner of a playoff between champions from the other soccer confederations.

PLAYER WELFARE

Players' union FIFPRO criticized the announcement. "The FIFA Council's decision today to schedule the first edition of the 32-team FIFA Club World Cup between June 15 and July 13 without implementing further player workload safeguards demonstrates a lack of consideration for the mental and physical health of participating players, as well as a disregard for their personal and family lives," it said in a statement.

It called for discussions to introduce player health and safety regulations as a "matter of urgency."

"The extreme mental and physical pressures at the pinnacle of the game is the principal concern of players with multiple club and national team competitions, leading to exhaustion, physical injuries, mental health issues, diminished performance, and risks to career longevity," the statement said. "They have repeatedly voiced concerns about mounting workload to their national player unions." (AP)

Mourinho favours new approach to deal with financial limitations at Roma

BOLOGNA, Dec 18: Jose Mourinho stated publicly for the first time that he wants to extend his contract at Roma — casting aside speculation that the veteran coach could be headed to a lucrative deal in cash-rich Saudi Arabia. But the 60-year-old coach's pledge came with a caveat. "I want to continue at Roma. And if I stay at Roma we've got to really think hard about the financial fair play limitations we have, because maybe it's better to work with younger players and give them some chances," Mourinho told Serie A rights holder DAZN after Roma was beaten 2-0 at Bologna on Sunday.

"That could present an opportunity for development, compared to players who have nothing left to develop. I want to continue and I'm open to a new approach," Mourinho added.

"When everyone is available we have sufficient quality to fight it out. We didn't finish fourth last season because we reached a European final and we had a lot of physical issues," Mourinho said after a game in which Roma was missing Romelu Lukaku and Paulo Dybala. "Without fundamental players, obviously it's tough for us." Roma finished sixth in Serie A last season. Mourinho's three-year deal at Roma expires after this season and Roma's American owners have given no indication on their plans for the coach.

While Mourinho guided Roma to European finals in both of his first two seasons at the club — winning the inaugural Conference League in 2022 and finishing runner-up to Sevilla in the Europa League last season — he's also had a series of suspensions for his verbal and at times vicious verbal attacks on referees.

"We haven't talked about it. You are the first person I have said this to," Mourinho told a DAZN reporter when asked if he's told the club yet of his desire to stay.

Mourinho added that Roma's fans, who travel to away games en masse throughout Italy and Europe, are "special."

"It would always be tough for me to separate from them," he said. "If the separation has to happen, it would never be because of my own choice." (AP)

Man United frustrates Liverpool as Arsenal moves back on top of the Premier League

LIVERPOOL, Dec 18: Erik ten Hag needed this. A 0-0 draw at Liverpool in the Premier League on Sunday won't win any beauty pageants, but a stubborn and battling performance at Anfield suggests Manchester United's players are up for the fight. On too many occasions this season, the opposite has looked to be the case.

"You have to fight always for the badge," United manager Ten Hag said. "The way we defended it was almost perfect. When we made a mistake there was always a teammate to sort it out. I think that is the big win from today. We have to keep this and bring this every game." United had folded at the home of its fiercest rival when routed 7-0 on its last visit in March.

With Ten Hag facing speculation over his position and his team eliminated from the Champions League at the earliest stage, he upset the odds to end Liverpool's 100% 11-game winning run at Anfield this season and also put a dent in Jurgen Klopp's bid to win the Premier League title.

A draw saw Liverpool knocked off the top of the table and into second place by Arsenal, which beat Brighton 2-0 and travels to Anfield on Saturday. Ten Hag will be more concerned about United's fortunes and, while a gutsy display will not totally shut out talk of a crisis at Old Trafford, it gives the Dutch coach something to build on.

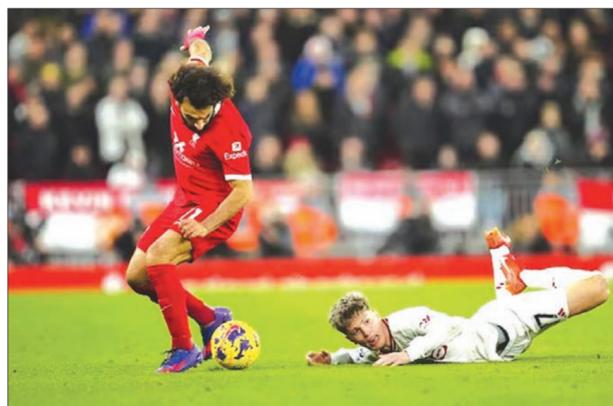
"We play in very high highs and also sometimes in very low lows," he said. "If you want to achieve something in a season you can't be below certain limits so we have to get the consistency." It was a frustrating day for Liverpool, which dominated the possession and chances, though Rasmus Hojlund's second-half effort from close range for United was arguably the best opening created by either team.

"The main thing I don't like is the result, we should have won the game," Klopp said. "I can't remember this kind of dominance against Manchester United as we did today. It was special, the atmosphere was special."

It was United's first draw in the league this season, having won nine and lost seven of its 16 games going into the match. The result leaves Ten Hag's team six points off fourth-place Manchester City. Second-place Liverpool is one point behind Arsenal and above third-place Aston Villa on goal difference.

ARSENAL ON TOP

After leading the Premier League for 248



days last season without going on to win the title, Arsenal looks like a serious challenger again. Mikel Arteta's team moved back to the top of the table on Sunday after a 2-0 win against Brighton and Liverpool's draw.

Arsenal had made the most of defending champion Manchester City's surprise draw against Crystal Palace on Saturday — and the weekend got even better for Arteta as Liverpool dropped points as well.

Gabriel Jesus and Kai Havertz both scored in the second half at Emirates Stadium to extend Arsenal's advantage over fourth-place City to five points.

VILLA COMEBACK

Third-place Aston Villa may well be a surprise challenger if it can continue its outstanding early season form after moving level on points with second-place Liverpool and one behind Arsenal.

Trailing 1-0 at Brentford over Keane Lewis-Potter's first-half goal, Unai Emery's team came back to win 2-1, with Ben Mee's red card in the 71st a turning point.

Alex Moreno evened the score at Gtech Community Stadium six minutes later and Ollie Watkins found the winner in the 85th.

Villa had Boubacar Kamara sent off in the seventh minute of stoppage time, but Villa held on to make it five wins out of its last six games in the league.

Later Villa asked for an investigation after Watkins said he had been abused by a Brent-

ford fan. "Aston Villa FC wants to express its support for Ollie Watkins and, with the utmost respect for the big majority of Brentford fans and for the club, we ask the authorities to investigate this incident to find this individual," it posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "Zero tolerance to abuse in football." Watkins referred to the incident after his winning goal.

"It was a feisty game and it spurred from my celebrations after I scored," he said. "That's not down to the lack of respect to the Brentford fans, but there was one individual who was abusing me all game so I felt like it was only right to celebrate in front of him."

KUDUS DOUBLE

Mohammed Kudus is looking like one of the buys of the season after West Ham signed him from Ajax for around \$48 million in August. He struck twice as David Moyes' team beat Wolves 3-0 at London Stadium. The attacker had also scored in Thursday's Europa League win against Freiburg and his double on Sunday made it four goals in his last five games. He has eight goals in all competitions for West Ham. Jarrod Bowen was also on the scoresheet for his 10th of the season.

TOM LOCKYER

Luton captain Tom Lockyer was undergoing tests and scans following his cardiac arrest on Saturday, Luton said. (AP)

Those two again: Lautaro and Thuram score as Inter opens up a 4-point lead atop Serie A

ROME, Dec 18: What a luxury for Inter Milan midfielder Nicolò Barella.

When his first pass for Lautaro Martinez was blocked, he sent his second attempt toward Marcus Thuram and watched as the France international quickly deposited the ball into the net.

Lautaro and Thuram have taken over from Napoli's Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia as Serie A's most dangerous strike pairing — and they're a big reason why Inter is starting to open up a gap at the top of the Italian league standings.

Lautaro and Thuram scored in each half as Inter won 2-0 at Lazio on Sunday and the Nerazzurri moved four points ahead of second-place Juventus, which was held to a 1-1 draw at Genoa on Friday.

Inter has lost only once this season — to Sassuolo in September.

Lautaro showed off his attacking instincts by intercepting an ill-advised back pass from Lazio fullback Adam Marusic to put Inter ahead. Then Thuram finished off the counterattack inspired by Barella.

Lautaro now has 15 goals and two assists in the league. Thuram has seven goals and six assists.

Lautaro celebrated his goal by revealing an undershirt with a dedication to his

hometown of Bahia Blanca, Argentina, which was hit by a deadly storm.

It was also an emotional victory for Inter coach Simone Inzaghi, who played most of his career at Lazio and began his coaching career with the Roman club.

Lazio ended with 10 men following a red card for Manuel Lazzari for protesting.

Maurizio Sarri's Lazio dropped into the bottom half of the table.

MEMORABLE MILAN DEBUT

The 18-year-old center back Jan-Carlo Simic had a debut to remember for AC Milan, scoring 17 minutes after he came on for an injured teammate in a 3-0 win over neighboring Monza at the San Siro.

Simic was mobbed by his teammates after redirecting in a cross from Rafael Leão late in the first half, having been unexpectedly thrust into action following an injury to Tommaso Pobega.

While he was born in Germany and began his career there, Simic has represented Serbia up to the under-19 level. His idol is former Milan captain Paolo Maldini.

"I watched videos of him when I was a little kid," Simic said. "It's an honor to be here."

Tijjani Reijnders and Noah Okafor



also scored for third-place Milan, which moved within five points of Juventus.

In a solid performance for the

Rossoneri after getting eliminated from the Champions League, United States international Christian Pulisic also rattled

the crossbar with a long-range shot and goalkeeper Mike Maignan made a difficult save on a shot from Monza standout Andrea Colpani.

It was the first time the two clubs met since the death in June of Silvio Berlusconi, the longtime Milan president who then bought Monza, which is still run by former Milan vice president Adriano Galliani.

Reijnders dribbled through Monza's defense before slotting in to give Milan an early advantage. The Netherlands midfielder also set up Okafor's goal midway through the second half.

Okafor then also exited with an apparent injury.

MOTTA BEATS MOURINHO

Bologna coach Thiago Motta got the better of his mentor as his team beat Jose Mourinho's Roma 2-0 to surge up into fourth place and the Champions League spots.

Motta played under Mourinho when Inter Milan won a treble of titles in 2010.

Roma was missing Romelu Lukaku, who was suspended, and Paulo Dybala, who was injured. The Giallorossi dropped down to seventh.

Nikola Moro put Bologna ahead toward the end of the first half by finishing off a swift counterattack. Then a cross

from Lewis Ferguson produced an own-goal from Rasmus Kristensen after the break.

Bologna has not played in Europe since featuring in the Intertoto Cup in 2002.

Before kickoff, family members of Sinisa Mihajlovic were invited onto the field to mark the one-year anniversary of the former Bologna coach's death from leukemia.

Bologna fans also chanted Mihajlovic's name in the closing minutes.

"The victory is for Sinisa," Motta said. "I'm sure he's watching us."

Added Mourinho about Motta, "He'll always be one of my kids."

Mourinho put on midfielder Renato Sanchez to start the second half and then — clearly unhappy with his performance — took him off after just 19 minutes.

Afterward, Mourinho stated publicly for the first time that he wants to extend his contract at Roma.

BERARDI'S BRACE

Lucas Beltran scored a late goal with the help of a deflection in Fiorentina's 1-0 win over Hellas Verona as the Viola moved into sixth.

Also, Domenico Berardi struck twice as Sassuolo came back to two goals down for a 2-2 draw at Udinese. (AP)