

WORLD
NATION

- Gaza ground offensive expanded into urban refugee camps: Israeli military
- Former Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif will seek a fourth term in office
- Govt bans Masarat Alam faction of Muslim League Jammu Kashmir
- Parliament has turned into dark, deep chamber: Derek O'Brien

THE HILLS TIMES

www.thehillstimes.in

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXIV

Issue No. 342

RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2023 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

'Availability of weapons a big challenge'

Myanmar instability, weapons with Manipur groups key issues in restoring peace: Lt Gen Kalita

KOLKATA, Dec 27: Eastern army commander Lt General RP Kalita on Wednesday said the availability of a large number of firearms with the warring groups in Manipur and instability in Myanmar leading to influx of people from the neighbouring country are the key challenges in restoring peace in the strife-torn Northeastern state.

Kalita said till the time firearms are available with members of the warring Kuki and Meitei communities, the situation can flare up any time.

"The availability of weapons with both the communities, whether stolen from Manipur police armoury or obtained from Myanmar, continues to pose a challenge," general officer commanding-in-chief, Eastern Army Command, Lt General RP Kalita, who is set to retire on December 31, said during a media interaction



at Fort William here.

Kalita said the duty of the armed forces is to ensure absence of violent activities. He mentioned that this duty has been successfully implemented in Manipur, where it was called due to the ethnic conflict between the Kukis and Meiteis.

"We need to recover all the

weapons that were stolen from the police armoury or those made available to the people from various sources. We have to ensure that society remains free of all kinds of weapons," he said.

The Eastern army commander said the armed forces have launched (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

16-member pro-talks ULFA team leaves for Delhi to sign pact

Arabinda confident of resolving issues through accord

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: A 16-member delegation of ULFA pro-talks faction led by chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa left for New Delhi on Wednesday for the proposed signing of a tripartite peace accord with the central and the state governments on December 29.

Besides Rajkhowa, other senior members of the delegation comprises the outfit's foreign secretary Sasadhar Choudhury, finance secretary Chitranon Hazarika, cultural secretary Pranati Dekha, deputy commander-in-chief Raju Barua, among others.

The outfit's general secretary, Anup Chetia, has been camping in New Delhi since Monday and held



talks with peace interlocutor AK Mishra on Tuesday. Rajkhowa told reporters at the

Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport here before their departure that they were 'opti-

mistic that the accord will be in the interest of the people of Assam and will resolve a long-standing issue'.

He said the peace talks, which began in 2011, was a long process of discussions and negotiations but 'we are now going to New Delhi with the hope that there will be an amicable solution'.

Union home ministry officials were likely to hold talks with the ULFA leaders on Wednesday evening.

The peace accord was likely to be signed on December 29 in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah and Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The Centre had sent a draft of the proposed (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Himanta orders probe into suicide of youth allegedly linked to Jorhat grenade blast

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has ordered a high-level inquiry into the suspected suicide of 24-year-old Dipankar Gogoi from Titabar town in Jorhat district.

Gogoi, who was picked up by the police for questioning in connection with the grenade explosion near an army camp in Jorhat on December 14, was found hanging from a tree on Tuesday.

The deceased's family alleges that Dipankar took the extreme step due to the police torture he reportedly endured during recent interrogations.

"The Government of Assam will institute an additional chief secretary-level inquiry into the death of Mr Dipankar Gogoi, son of Mr Khagen Gogoi, from GariKuri Brinasayak Gaon, Titabar on 26/12/23. The inquiry will be concluded within 30 days," the chief

minister wrote on micro-blogging site X.

Meanwhile, Jorhat superintendent of police ML Meena has denied any mistreatment during Gogoi's police questioning at Titabar police station, emphasising that Gogoi, while not directly connected to the blast, had indirect links.

Meena revealed that Gogoi was implicated in arms smuggling, having recently acquired a pistol from Sanjiv Baruah, involved in a shooting incident at Lichubari a month ago.

Several organisations protested at Titabar police station, decriing alleged police torture and harassment of youths connected to ULFA-related grenade blasts in upper Assam.

SP Meena also disclosed that Dipankar Gogoi had undergone 15 to 20 days of training from ULFA in Myanmar (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Govt working to make cooperative strong part of rural life: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said his government is working to make cooperatives a strong part of rural life, asserting that they are being scaled up massively in sectors like agriculture and fisheries after making a mark in fields such as dairy and sugar production.

In an interaction with beneficiaries of the ongoing 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra', he said the change in the lives of crores of beneficiaries of his government's welfare schemes in the last 10 years has been a story of courage, satisfaction and dreams.

Modi said it has been a great source of satisfaction for him to see the self-confidence of people when he interacts with them.

During the yatra, he said one crore people have been given 'Ayushman' card, a health insurance scheme run by the govern-



ment for the poor, 1.25 crore people have undergone health check-ups while more than 70 lakh inspected for tuberculosis.

Taking a swipe at previous dispensations, he said if the situation during their tenure had prevailed now, then prospective beneficiaries of these schemes would have lost their hopes doing rounds of government offices.

There is no nepotism and bribery now to get these benefits, he said, adding "Modi is like family to you. You don't need any connection."

In the 10 years of his government, 10 crore women have joined self-help groups across the country and have been given ₹ 7.5 lakh crore through banks, he said, adding (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Assam govt announces massive teacher recruitment drive

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: In a significant step towards fulfilling its promise of job creation, Assam education minister Ranajit Pegu has announced the recruitment of 14,223 school teachers statewide.

In a series of posts on micro-blogging site X, on Wednesday, Pegu said the Directorate of Secondary Education has released the advertisement for 1,424 post-graduate and 7,249 graduate teachers.

"Directorate of Secondary Education has released an advertisement for recruitment of 1424 Post Graduate Teachers (Arts), (2) Graduate Teacher (Science), (3) Graduate Teachers (Hindi) and (4) Graduate Teacher (Sanskrit) of the different Provincialised Secondary Schools," Pegu wrote on X.

Simultaneously, the Directorate

of Elementary Education has advertised 3,800 Assistant Teachers for Lower Primary (LP) Schools and 1,750 positions for Assistant Teachers, Science Teachers, and Hindi Teachers in Upper Primary (UP) Schools.

Reacting on the same, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed confidence, and said, "Today, our government has released vacancies for over 10,000 posts in the education department. We will not only deliver but exceed our promise of creating more than 1 lakh government jobs in the most transparent manner in Assam's history."

It is worth mentioning that this move follows the BJP's commitment during the 2021 assembly polls to provide one lakh government jobs annually in Assam, however, the party later clarified that the target was for the entire five-year tenure.

Union minister asks public to enroll for welfare schemes

AGARTALA, Dec 27: Union social empowerment and social justice minister Pratima Bhoumik on Wednesday urged people to visit the 'Modi's guarantee vehicle' (information, education and communications van) to get themselves enrolled for welfare schemes.

Forms of all welfare schemes are available in the vans, which will visit people's doorsteps till January 25, the union minister said.

"If you haven't got the benefits go and enroll your name for the scheme you want", she said at a Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra in Tripura's Sepahijala district.

"Don't worry if you miss the van. A system will be operational in each block till January 25 where you can go and enroll yourself for various (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

RIVER DELIGHT



Children enjoying the natural scenery of the Subansiri River at Gogamukh on Wednesday. UB Photos

'It is the responsibility of an aware society to solve these problems'

Prez Murmu urges extensive organ donation awareness campaigns to bridge transplant gap

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Asserting that many patients are deprived of liver, kidney or other transplant due to non-availability of organs, President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said there was a need to organise more and more awareness campaigns on a larger scale to encourage people about organ donation.

Addressing the ninth convocation of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) here, the President suggested that more attention should be paid to preventive healthcare.

"It can be said that liver is the security guard of our body. Health problems related to liver are serious in our country and the huge number of diseases caused by them is a cause for worry," Murmu said.



She said the ILBS is expected to make a significant contribution in the prevention of liver diseases.

The President said that due to non-availability of sufficient number of organs, many patients are

deprived of liver, kidney or any other transplant.

"Unfortunately, unethical practices related to organ donation also come to light from time to time. It is the responsibility of an aware so-

ciety to solve these problems. In our country, there is a need to organise more and more awareness campaigns on a larger scale to encourage people about organ donation," Murmu said.

The President advised doctors to take care of themselves.

She said that amidst the challenges like long duty hours, continuous emergency cases and night duties, they have to continuously serve the patients with full alertness and enthusiasm.

"Therefore, it is important that despite all the challenges, they all remain physically, mentally and spiritually healthy and alert," Murmu was quoted as having said in a statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The President said that the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Suspecting 'possible terror attack', Israel issues travel warning for India

JERUSALEM, Dec 27: The Israeli National Security Council has issued a travel advisory for its citizens in India, suspecting that an explosion near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi on Tuesday was "a possible terror attack".

No one was injured in the blast that occurred near the Israel embassy in the Chanakyapuri diplomatic enclave in New Delhi on Tuesday evening.

When contacted, Israeli embassy spokesperson Guy Nir said, "We can confirm that around 5:48 pm, there was a blast in close proximity to the embassy. Delhi Police and the security team are still investigating the situation."

The recommendations of the Israeli National Security Council (NSC) on Tuesday, which came amid concerns of a "recurrence of events", apply especially to New Delhi.

Israeli nationals have been warned to try to avoid going to crowded places (malls and markets) and places identified as serving Westerners/Jews and Israelis.

They have also been urged to be on heightened alert in public places



(including restaurants, hotels, pubs, etc).

The recommendations also suggest avoiding openly displaying Israeli symbols, refraining from attending unsecured large-scale events, and avoiding publicising itineraries on social media as well as photographs and details of visits in real-time.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry, in a press statement earlier on Tuesday, said that there were no casualties in the explosion.

"The incident is under investigation by the local authorities in full cooperation with the Israeli security forces", the ministry said.

Soon after the explosion, which took place in a green belt area outside the Central Hindi Training Institute (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

India-Russia relations reflect geopolitical realities and strategic convergence: Jaishankar



MOSCOW, Dec 27: India-Russia relations reflect geopolitical realities, strategic convergence and mutual benefit, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said Wednesday as he held a wide-ranging and "useful" meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov here during which they discussed the international sit-

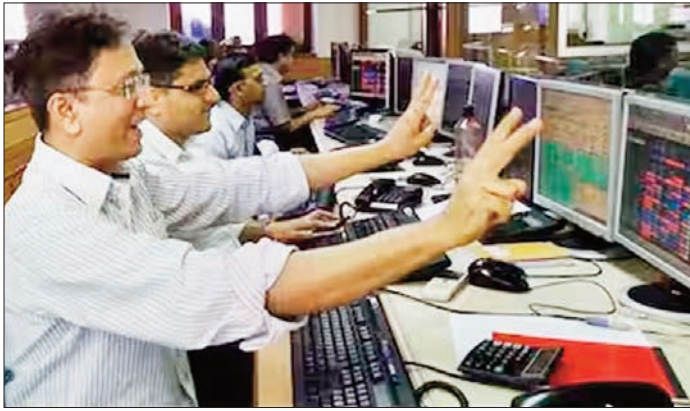
uation and contemporary issues.

Jaishankar, who is on a five-day visit to Russia, and Lavrov also exchanged views on the Indo-Pacific region, the Ukraine conflict, the Gaza situation, Afghanistan and Central Asia, BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, G20 and the UN.

"A wide-ranging and useful meeting with FM Sergey Lavrov of Russia. As strategic partners, discussed the international situation and contemporary issues," Jaishankar said in a post on X.

He noted the progress in bilateral economic cooperation, energy trade, connectivity efforts, military-technical cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. "Signed Protocol on Consultations for the period 2024-28. India-Russia relations reflect geopolitical realities, strategic convergence and mutual benefit," he said. "For us, Russia is a valued partner, a time-tested partner. It is a (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Sensex scales 72k peak for first time; Nifty hits all-time high



MUMBAI, Dec 27: Sensex and Nifty soared to fresh closing record highs on Wednesday, with the 30-share benchmark index crossing the historic 72,000 mark, boosted by optimism over the country's macroeconomic fundamentals and firm global market trends.

Reflecting broader investor bullishness, the 50-share index surged to a record high of 21,654.75 on intense buying in metal, commodity, auto and banking sectors.

Rising for the fourth straight session, the BSE gauge jumped 701.63 points or 0.98 per cent to settle at its all-time closing high of 72,038.43. During the day, it zoomed 783.05 points or 1.09 per cent to reach its intra-day lifetime high of 72,119.85.

The Nifty climbed 213.40 points or 1 per cent to settle at a record high of 21,654.75. During the day, it rallied 234.4 points or 1.09 per cent to reach its all-time intra-day peak of 21,675.75.

"The upbeat domestic market continued reaching a new record high and easily recovered the last week's losses. This upward trend was predominantly supported by the Santa Claus rally in anticipation of early rate cuts by the US Fed and cooling global inflation," said Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services.

UltraTech Cement was the biggest gainer on the Sensex chart, rising 4.23 per cent, followed by JSW Steel, Tata Motors, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Larsen & Toubro, Infosys and Bajaj Finserv were the major gainers.

On the other hand, NTPC and Tech Mahindra were the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.41 per cent, and smallcap index advanced 0.20 per cent.

Among the indices, metal

jumped 1.33 per cent, auto climbed 1.33 per cent, commodities (1.19 per cent), tech (0.96 per cent), IT (0.68 per cent), consumer durables (0.67 per cent) and capital goods (0.67 per cent).

Utilities, power and services were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains.

European markets were mostly trading in positive territory. The US markets ended in the green on Tuesday.

"After a brief midweek panic last week, bulls are back with a bang, albeit with some caution. India VIX has touched a new high in a multi-month time frame, indicating the possibility of some volatility as we approach the monthly expiry.

"FIIs have been buyers in the last couple of sessions in Index options while they continue to stay long in the index futures segment. Banks have been a bit late to this party but now seem ready to break out from the current range. PSU Banks are the strongest while private banks are expected to play catch up," Rahul Sharma Director, Head- Technical & Derivative Research, JM Financial Services, said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.21 per cent to USD 80.90 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 95.20 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

"21,800 on the Nifty and 49,000 on the Nifty Bank seems likely tomorrow," Sharma said.

The BSE benchmark climbed 229.84 points or 0.32 per cent to settle at 71,336.80 on Tuesday. The Nifty advanced 91.95 points or 0.43 per cent to 21,441.35. (PTI)

TotalEnergies, holds about 19.75 per cent stake in AGEL

TotalEnergies invests USD 300 million in joint venture with Adani Green Energy

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: French energy giant TotalEnergies has invested USD 300 million (about ₹ 2,500 crore) in a renewable energy joint venture with Adani Green Energy Ltd as it continues to repose faith in the conglomerate run by billionaire Gautam Adani.

The Adani group firm and the French giant will own 50:50 stake in the company which in turn will house a 1,050 MW project portfolio.

"TotalEnergies has acquired a 50 per cent stake in Adani Renewable Energy Nine Ltd (ARE9L) for an amount of USD 300 million," Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) said in a stock exchange filing.

ARE9L is a subsidiary of AGEL.

The 1,050 MW project portfolio includes 300 megawatts (MW) of operational capacity, 500 MW of under-construction solar projects and 250 MW of under-development projects.

TotalEnergies, which holds about 19.75 per cent stake in AGEL, had previously invested in Adani Green Energy Twenty

Three Ltd, another subsidiary of AGEL.

"As per the valuation report dated November 27, 2023 obtained from Mazars Advisory LLP, an independent valuer, the aggregate valuation of the project portfolio companies is equivalent to USD 489 million," AGEL said in a notice to shareholders seeking approval for the TotalEnergies deal.

"As part of the transaction, TotalEnergies will acquire a 50 per cent stake in ARE9L, which will house this Project portfolio companies, for an amount of USD 300 million which are terms more beneficial to the company (AGEL)." Upon the under-construction and under-development projects achieving commercial operations, TotalEnergies will also invest an additional amount to be determined based on actual project cost subject to certain parameters around the project cost and timelines.

"Such further funding by TotalEnergies will be over and above the initial investment of USD 300 million and will be subject to suitable approvals as may be required," it added.



The French firm infused an amount of Rs 4,013 crore into AGE23L by subscribing to compulsorily convertible debentures issued by AGE23L, which have been used to redeem the existing non-convertible debentures held by TotalEnergies.

"The (Wednesday's) transaction also reinforces the strategic alliance between the company (AGEL) and TotalEnergies and will support the company in becoming the Indian leader of renewable energy, with a target of 45 GW renewable power capacity by 2030," the notice said.

Later in a statement, AGEL said the 1,050 MW joint venture (JV) with TotalEnergies has been completed. "As part of the JV, TotalEnergies invested USD 300 million in AGEL subsidiary, for acquiring 50 per cent stake in the projects."

This follows the binding agreement about the JV announced between AGEL and TotalEnergies in September 2023.

The JV houses the 1,050 MW portfolio comprising a mix of already operational (300 MW), under-construction (500 MW) and under-development assets (250 MW) with a blend of both solar and wind power projects in India.

"With this transaction, TotalEnergies has reinforced its strategic alliance with AGEL and support in enabling AGEL's target of 45 GW capacity by 2030," it said.

AGEL develops, owns, and operates utility-scale grid-connected solar, wind, and hybrid renewable power plants and has an operating renewable portfolio of 8.4 gigawatts (GW).

On December 26, AGEL announced that its board has approved the promoter's plan to infuse Rs 9,350 crore into the company by investing in warrants of the company. This, together with a debt worth USD 1.4 billion raised earlier this month, takes the total funds raised by the company to USD 3 billion. (PTI)

'9AM Tea' celebrating bicentennial year of Assam Tea

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: The bicentennial year of Assam Tea marked -in a grand manner by '9AM Tea' by announcing mega offer for their customers. '9AM Tea' franchise store t-amour organised a free Christmas Tea Party to promote Assam Tea Globally at Ambari Store in Guwahati.

On this occasion, a large number of people participated in the Free Christmas Tea Party and enjoyed different varieties of Assam Tea. Not only the local people but also the people from outside states sipped the ultimate taste of Assam Tea. On this occasion, Rupesh Khakholia, founder of '9AM Tea', said that many types of parties are often organised during the festive season. But with a new initiative and new concept, keeping in mind the completion of 200 years of Assam Tea, we organised a Free Christmas Tea Party, so that the tourists coming for the holidays could sip Assam Tea. During the day-long free Christmas Tea party, a large number of people enjoyed Lemon Black Tea, Ginger Black Tea, Chamomile Green Tea, Kulhaar Masala Tea along with cookies offered by us. He further said on the occasion of the bicentennial year of Assam Tea, '9AM Tea's franchise store t-amour is offering up to 40% mega discount offer on Flavored Tea of Assam. This discount will continue till Magh Bihu ie January 14 2024.

RBI asks NBFCs to broad-base fundraising, reduce dependence on banks

MUMBAI, Dec 27: The Reserve Bank on Wednesday asked non-bank finance companies to broad-base their fundraising to limit reliance on banks as it called for strengthening balance sheets and guarding against frauds and data breaches.

According to the report 'Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2022-23' released by the RBI, the Indian banking system and NBFCs remain sound and resilient, backed by high capital ratios, strengthening asset quality and robust earnings growth.

The consolidated balance sheet of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) in 2022-23 expanded by 12.2 per cent, driven by credit to retail and services sectors. Deposit growth also picked up, although it trailed credit growth, it said.

Looking ahead, it said, "Given the increasing interconnectedness between banks and NBFCs, the latter should focus on broadbasing their funding sources and re-

duce overdependence on bank funding. Banks and non-banks both, need to bring in greater empathy in their customer services". The concerted efforts are needed by all stakeholders to protect the banking and payments system from the risks of fraud and data breaches emanating from cyber threats, the report added.

"Overall, banks and NBFCs need to further strengthen their balance sheets through robust governance and risk management practices to meet the growing aspirations of the Indian economy," it said.

As per the report, the improvement in asset quality of banks that began in 2018-19 continued during 2022-23, and even in the first half (April-September) of 2023-24, the gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio stood at 3.2 per cent. Higher net interest income and lower provisioning boosted net interest margin (NIM) and profitability in 2022-23, it said. (PTI)

Gold rises ₹100; silver plunges ₹350

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Gold prices rose ₹ 100 to ₹ 63,850 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a bullish trend in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous close, the precious metal had closed at ₹ 63,750 per 10 grams.

However, silver plunged ₹ 350 to ₹ 79,100 per kilogram, while it had finished at ₹ 79,450 per kg in the previous trade.

Saunil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said gold prices edged higher on Wednesday, in the Delhi markets trading at ₹ 63,850/10 grams, up by ₹ 100 following a bullish trend in the overseas markets.

In the futures trade on the MCX, the February contract of gold jumped ₹ 334 to ₹ 63,359 per 10 grams. Also, the March contract of silver bounced ₹ 109 to ₹ 75,135 per kilogram on the bourse.

In the international markets, gold was trading higher at USD 2,067 per ounce, while silver was down at USD 24.15 per ounce.

"Gold prices continue to inch higher, as soft inflation data fuelled more bets on early interest rate cuts in 2024 and weighed on the dollar index and US treasury yields," Navneet Damani, senior vice-president of commodity research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said. (PTI)

Odds for more sports betting expansion could fade after rapid growth to 38 states

JEFFERSON CITY, Dec 27: At his suburban St. Louis home, Brett Koenig can pull out his smartphone and open a sports betting app. But he can't place a bet. He is blocked by a pop-up message noting he is not in a legal location.

Missouri is one of a dozen states where sports wagering remains illegal more than five years after the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for states to adopt it.

"It just seems silly that everyone else can do it and we can't," said Koenig, who has launched a social media campaign called "Let MO Play" to rally support for legal sports betting in his home state.

Other states have reaped a total of over \$4 billion of taxes from more than \$280 billion wagered on sports since 2018. Vermont will become the latest to accept sports bets, starting Jan. 11. But the odds for expansion to additional states appear iffy in 2024 because of political resistance and the sometimes competing financial interests of existing gambling operators.

"The handful of states yet to legalize are last for a reason: They all have multiple obstacles," said Becca Giden, policy director at Eilers & Krejcik Gaming, a California-based consulting firm.

After a "whirlwind" of expansion, the playing field for further sports betting has narrowed to a group of states where various stakeholders all "want to kind of maximize what they get out of the legalization framework," said Chris Cylke, senior vice president of government relations at the American Gaming Association, which represents the industry. "So that can create some friction."

The states where sports betting remains illegal are Alabama, Alaska, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Utah.

California and Texas, the nation's two most populous states, would be the biggest prizes for sports bettors. But neither appear particularly likely to adopt it in 2024.

Voters in California last year overwhelmingly defeated two rival sports betting initiatives following a record \$463 million raised by supporters and opponents. The advertising barrage was fueled by divisions among online gaming companies, tribal casinos and horse tracks. Those tensions have continued, with Native American tribes objecting to a new sports betting initiative that is seeking signatures to appear on the 2024 ballot.

The proposed sale of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team to a politically active family that runs the Las Vegas Sands casino company has raised speculation of a bigger push for legal sports betting in Texas. But the state Legislature is not in regular session in 2024, and Texas has no means of placing citizen initiatives on the ballot.

Neighboring Oklahoma already has



scores of casinos run by tribes. Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt announced a plan in November to allow in-person sports betting at tribal casinos and online sports wagering through platforms licensed by the state. But his plan doesn't appear to have support from tribes, with whom Stitt has been feuding.

Minnesota is perhaps the next likeliest state to authorize sports betting, but that probably would require a bipartisan vote in the Senate, where Democrats hold a slim one-seat advantage over Republicans. Lawmakers this past year struggled to resolve differences between tribal casinos, which want exclusive rights over online and in-person sports betting, and horse racing tracks, which also want a greater share of the gambling market. But they will try again.

"From the perspective of the tribes, the moment is now, and they'd like to see it done this year," said Democratic state Sen. Matt Klein, a sponsor of sports betting legislation.

Efforts to legalize sports betting in Missouri have repeatedly stalled in the state Senate, where Republican Sen. Denny Hoskins insists it must be paired with the regulation of legally questionable slot-machine-style video games that have popped up in convenience stores and truck stops. Casinos oppose that.

Online sports wagering companies, casinos, professional sports teams and video gaming terminal interests have combined to hire about 80 lobbyists in Missouri.

The St. Louis Cardinals also are leading a coalition of the state's professional sports teams proposing an initiative petition to put sports betting on the November ballot. But Senate President Pro Tem Caleb Rowden doubts the prospects of both the initiative petition and legislation, bemoaning that Missouri may "lose out on probably some fairly significant economic activity."

Data suggests Missourians are interested in sports betting. From mid-June to mid-December, the technology firm GeoComply Solutions processed over 13.5 million location checks from 280,000 devices lo-

cated in Missouri attempting to access mobile sports betting sites. About 48% were trying to use sportsbooks in Kansas, and 40% in Illinois. They were blocked from doing so.

When Koenig wants to bet on sports, he drives 45 minutes from his Missouri home to Illinois. He is not alone.

GeoComply processed 42,000 location checks from 1,900 online sports betting accounts that traveled from Missouri to an Illinois border town in the past six months. When the Kansas City Chiefs hosted the Buffalo Bills on Dec. 10, GeoComply tallied 786 location checks from 570 sportsbook accounts traveling from Missouri border towns into Kansas.

"It's very easy for people to cross over, place their bets and then return to their home and watch the game," GeoComply spokesman John Pappas said. "We see this thousands of times a day, a week, in any given state where it's not legal."

In Georgia, Republican Gov. Brian Kemp has expressed an openness to legalizing sports betting. But the effort stalled this past year when the Senate rejected a proposed constitutional amendment that would have let voters decide the issue. The debate is complex because proponents of casinos and horse racing want to leverage sports wagering to also legalize those forms of gambling.

Though still a toss-up, Georgia may be the most realistic candidate to authorize sports betting in 2024, Giden said. She expects a well-funded lobbying effort from the likes of online betting operators and sports teams.

To legally bet on sports in Alabama also would require a constitutional amendment approved by voters. In the Legislature, sports wagering proposals have become intertwined with broader efforts to expand gambling beyond the current tribal casinos, dog racing tracks and charitable bingo operators. None have been successful yet. (AP)

MUMBAI, Dec 27: The rupee declined 16 paise to settle at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday due to sustained outflow of foreign funds and increased demand for American currency from importers and banks.

According to forex traders, a robust buying trend in the domestic equity market failed to boost sentiment as investors remained concerned over volatile crude oil prices fearing disruption in global trade through the Red Sea route.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened at 83.21 and traded between the peak of 83.20 and the lowest level of 83.35 against dollar during intra-day deals. The local unit finally settled at 83.35 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a fall of 16 paise from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the domestic currency settled at 83.19 against the dollar.

Anuj Choudhary, research analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said Indian rupee depreciated on dollar demand from foreign banks and importers.

"FII outflows also weighed on the rupee. However, positive domestic markets and the weak tone in the US dollar cushioned the downside," he said but added that the rupee is expected to trade with a slight neg-



ative bias on month-end dollar demand from oil marketing companies and importers.

"USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 83 to ₹ 83.70," he said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally lower at 101.07 on Wednesday.

Global oil price benchmark Brent crude slipped 0.16 per cent to USD 80.94 per barrel.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 701.63 points or 0.98 per cent to settle at a fresh peak of 72,038.43 points. The broader NSE Nifty soared 213.40 points or 1 per cent to 21,654.75 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 95.20 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

No.PKDIM/6/2023-24/2074

Date 26/12/2023

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and twenty five paise) only in prescribed form which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the printed APWD F-2 form of Tender Agreement are hereby invited from the eligible registered Contractors for the year 2023-24 of Irrigation Department, Assam and BTC for submitting tenders for the Schemes under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00 p.m. on 06/01/2024 and will be opened on the same day at 2.00 p.m. by the undersigned or the officers authorized to open the tenders in presence of the tenderers or their authorized representatives who may wish to present.

In the event of non functioning of the office on the date due to any reason or any Govt holiday being declared on that day then next working day of the office will be the date of receiving and opening of the tenders.

The rate to be quoted in percentage (%) basis i.e at per estimate/below the estimate/above the estimate rate.

No. of Schemes: Total 15 (Fifteen) Nos of Schemes under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2023-24 (Group list is enclosed as Annexure-I).

Approximate Value: Rs. 2,62,51,744.00 (In different groups).

Time of Completion: 60 (Sixty) days from the date of issue of Work Order.

The detailed N.I.T. particulars and Tender Paper may be obtained in all working days during office hrs from the office of the undersigned on payment of non-refundable Rs.500.00 in the form of Demand Draft only from any Nationalized Bank duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary BTC, Kokrajhar payable at Kokrajhar up to 1.00 PM on 05/01/2024. Tender paper must be filled up addressing to all points/terms specified with the tender form, otherwise tender will be treated as cancelled. The contractors must submit Self attested copy of Up to date Registration Certificate, Labour Certificate, I.T. Return Certificate, GST Registration, Pan card, Xerox copy of Bank pass book along with the Tenders. The tenderer has to deposit 2% for General (1% for SC/ST/OBC/MOBC) as Security Deposit Money against the work value in the form of Fixed Deposit/Call Deposit from any Scheduled Bank guaranteed by RBI and duly pledged in favour of the Undersigned along with the tender. The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the tenders without assigning any reason thereof and also the undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest tendered rate. Payment/Proportionate payment for the work will be made subject to the availability of full fund/part fund under the concerned Head of A/c and proportionate to the physical progress of works. No claims (Including any interest on bill amount) whatsoever will be entertained for delayed payment due to non-receipt of fund from the authority under the concern head of A/c and Department will in no case be responsible for the same.

Sd/- (S. Barman)
Executive Engineer,
Paneri-Kalaigaon Division (Irrigation), Tanga

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1014

ELECTRICAL TRD MODIFICATION WORK

Tender Notice No. TRD-LMG-13 of 2023-24 Dated: 23-12-2023.

E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:

Tender No. EL-TRD-NFR-DPU-OHE-MOD-10. Name of work: Electrical TRD Modification work in connection with construction of new FOB over Four (04) Nos. of Line at Diphu station under "Amrit Bharat Scheme".

Tender Value: ₹ 73,48,177.90. Earnest Money: ₹ 11,47,000/-

Date & Time of Closing of Tender: 15.00 hrs. on 17-01-2024. For details please visit www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DEE/TRD & GS/Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

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CEM Pramod Boro chairs review meeting on developmental schemes

CEM Boro reiterated the BTR government's unwavering commitment to facilitating comprehensive development in the region

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 27: A comprehensive review meeting focusing on the various developmental schemes across different departments of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) government was convened at the CEM's conference hall of BTC Secretariat, Bodofa Nwgrw in Kokrajhar on Wednesday.

The meeting, chaired by Pramod Boro, chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Region, aimed to assess the progress of ongoing projects and schemes and evaluate the completion status of initiatives undertaken by various departments.

The meeting saw the participation of key officials, including deputy chief executive member Gabinda Chandra Basumatary, BTR executive members Ranjit Basumatary, Dhananjay Basumatary, Rakesh Brahma, Arup Kumar Dey, and Diganta Baruah.

Deliberations covered diverse sectors such as Health & Family Welfare, Panchayat & Rural Development, Forest & Environment, Handloom & Textile, Irrigation, and Animal Husbandry & Veterinary.

The BTR government, during the meeting, placed emphasis on ensuring the timely completion of schemes and projects. CEM Pramod Boro expressed that the review meeting served as a platform to discuss ongoing projects, assess



challenges, and formulate strategies for effective implementation and completion of initiatives across the BTR region.

CEM Boro reiterated the BTR government's unwavering commitment to facilitating comprehensive development in the region.

He highlighted the government's dedication to providing services that contribute to years of sustained development and the welfare of citizens. The meeting critically evaluated the

progress of various ongoing projects, identifying challenges, and exploring strategic measures to guarantee the successful and timely execution of BTR government initiatives.

In summary, the meeting played a crucial role in aligning efforts, addressing challenges, and fostering a collaborative approach among different departments for the holistic development of the Bodoland Territorial Region.

Foundation pole for 63rd Annual Bodo Sahitya Sabha Conference erected in Boko

HT Correspondent

BOKO, Dec 27: The foundation pole (Laikhuta) for the upcoming 63rd Annual Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) conference, scheduled to be held from January 19 to January 21, 2024, at Boko Gandhi Field, has been erected. The ceremony involved the participation of Urkhao Gwra Brahma, minister of Handloom & Textile and Sericulture, along with other dignitaries. During the ceremony, the president of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Dr Surat Narzary, hoisted the flag of the organisation.

The event was attended by notable figures, including Anil Basumatary, chief executive member of Boro Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council, Hemanga Thakuria, Palashbari MLA and president of the Reception Committee, and Ramakanta Rabha, vice-president of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC), among others. The foundation pole erection event also featured a public meeting organised by the Reception Committee.

Dr Surat Narzary, in his speech, accentuated the importance of cooperation among various tribal and



general communities for the development of all groups residing in the state. He urged people to participate actively in the upcoming conference.

Nagarmal Swargiary, RHAC executive member and working president of the Reception Committee, presided over the meeting, expressing assurance of full cooperation from the Rabha community. State minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma highlighted the collaborative ef-

forts expected from different tribes and communities, ensuring the success of the conference.

He expressed confidence in the support from chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and mentioned the commitment of state minister Pijush Hazarika in the conference's publicity.

Minister Brahma clarified that discussions involving Assam's division or sentiments against non-Bodo people had never taken place on the BSS platform.

He called for support from all tribal communities, highlighting that mutual support would help communities progress not only in their regions but across India.

Hemanta Boro, the cultural convener of the BSS reception committee, announced that more than 500 boys and girls would perform traditional Bodo dances during the conference, adding a vibrant cultural dimension to the event.

Preparatory meeting held in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 27: A preparatory meeting for the upcoming district level Khel Maharan 2023-24 was convened at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's Office in Nagaon. Chaired by Narendra Kumar Shah, DC, Nagaon, the meeting outlined the roadmap for organising the Khel Maharan event, scheduled to commence on January 5, 2024, and conclude on January 7, 2024.

In the meeting, additional district commissioner Lakshya Jyoti Das provided insights into the preparations and highlighted that the district-level competitions would encompass various sports categories, including athletics, football, volleyball, kabaddi, and kho-kho. A total of 1728 participants have qualified for the district-level Khel Maharan, comprising 384 athletes for Athletics, 24 football teams, 32 volleyball teams, 32 kabaddi teams, and 16 Kho-Kho teams.

Simultaneously, preparations for the district level of Assam Sanskritik Mahasangram 2023-24 were also discussed in the meeting. Assistant commissioner Jebin Gulnar shared that over 1094 participants would be competing in the district-level Assam Sanskritik Mahasangram 2023-24 in Nagaon.

Tragic road accident in Balipara

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 27: In a devastating incident, two separate road accidents occurred in the Balipara area under Chardwar Police Station in Sonitpur district, claiming the lives of five youths on the spot on Tuesday night.

The deceased have been identified as Debasit Basumatary of Dakhinsila, Sunfeng Basumatary of Tharabari, Bipul Das of Balipara-Dhekeri Gaon, Kasem Ali, and Rose Islam of Gudam Ghat. The tragic incident unfolded as the youths were returning home after enjoying a cultural event organised in connection with the Balipara ME School's centenary celebration at Balipara. The news has cast a pall of gloom over the entire area.

A team from the district administration, including district commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra and SP Sushanta Biswa Samah, visited the site on Wednesday to assess the situation.

CSIR-NEIST hosts 9th IISF 2023 outreach program

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 27: The 9th India International Science Festival (IISF) 2023 held its one-day Outreach Programme at CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology (CSIR-NEIST) on Tuesday. The event witnessed the participation of various schools in and around Jorhat, including Shankardev Vidya Niketan, Dohotia Girls' Higher Secondary School, Balya Bhawan, and St Joseph's Higher Secondary School.

The program commenced with an inaugural address by Dr G Narahari Sastry, director of CSIR-NEIST. Dr Sastry underscored India's rich scientific heritage and the responsibility of the younger generation to carry it forward. He encouraged students, stating that science knows no age and can be pursued by anyone with a curious and inquisitive mind.



Dr Sastry conveyed a message to the students, highlighting the importance of overcoming personal vices as the real enemies to progress in life. Air Commodore Sameer Pradhan, the chief guest, stressed the significance of peace in our lives and the need for continuous develop-

ment through science and technology interventions to address future challenges.

Rajib Chandra Sarma, from Vijnana Bharati (VIBA) and secretary for VIBA-NER, spoke about the importance of IISF 2023, urging students to embrace India's cultural

and scientific heritage. He emphasised the value-based traditional Gurukul education system and encouraged students to identify their talents. Dr Kalyani Medhi, principal scientist of CSIR-NEIST, showcased the institute's scientific achievements through a presentation, highlighting technologies, processes, and products developed and commercialised over six decades.

Dr Dipankar Neog, senior principal scientist and program coordinator, proposed the vote of thanks, acknowledging the active participation of students and schools in the outreach programme. The IISF 2023, scheduled from January 17 to 20, 2024, in Faridabad, Haryana, was introduced to the students, encouraging them to be part of the event and contribute to the growth of the nation.

OBITUARY

Shyam Mishra, the son of the late freedom fighter Hari Prasad Mishra and a resident of Samar Dalani, passed away on Wednesday afternoon at the age of 65 due to severe fever at his residence.

He played a significant role in various socio-cultural organisations, including the Lakhargarh Samar Dalani Village Development Committee.

Shyam Mishra is survived by his wife, a son, a daughter, and numerous relatives.

Guwahati Airport conducts simulated mock drill on earthquake preparedness

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: Guwahati International Airport took a proactive step towards disaster preparedness by organising a simulated mock drill focusing on earthquake scenarios.

The mock exercise, conducted in collaboration with the airport operator and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), aimed to assess and enhance the implementation of prescribed emergency plans at the airport premises.

The earthquake preparedness drill took place at the airport office premises and was closely overseen by Jayanta Prakash, controller NDRF, Monoj Kumar Rana, AC, state police, State Fire, ARFF, Airport Medical Team, and security personnel.

The simulated scenario involved a sample of rescue operations, showcasing the response strategies for buildings damaged by an earthquake.

Various exercises were carried out, emphasising the efficient rescue of workers from severely damaged structures.

The drill commenced at 11 am, with employees

and workers receiving detailed briefings on the simulated emergency situation.

A dramatic enactment illustrated the coordinated efforts of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), and local police personnel, highlighting the swift response required within the first 15 minutes after an earthquake.

Key representatives from CISF, fire and security departments, state police, and NTPC were among the first responders, initiating rescue operations promptly.

The SDRF team established an incident command post, demonstrating various recovery techniques. Following initial first aid at a tent set up outside, individuals were safely rescued from the simulated damaged building and promptly transported to the hospital.

The entire exercise concluded smoothly by 11:45 am, serving as a crucial step in ensuring the airport's preparedness for emergency situations and the safety of passengers and staff.

Mirza Ghalib remembered on his 226th birth anniversary in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 27: Mirza Beg Asadulla Khan, renowned as Mirza Ghalib, the iconic Urdu and Persian poet of the Indian subcontinent, was commemorated on his 226th birth anniversary by the Sivasagar New Look Academy.

The academy organised a program titled 'Celebrating Ghalib', which saw the participation of upper-class students, teachers, guardians, and distinguished guests.

The principal of the Academy, Srimanta Borthakur, highlighted Mirza Ghalib's profound understanding of human psychology and his intricate yet lucid style of writing that set him apart in Urdu literature.

Ghalib's poems and shayaris are characterised by a rare combination of elegance and simplicity. Guest speaker Hamida Begum, a retired professor from Demow College, spoke about the life and times of Mirza Ghalib.

Another speaker, Manoj Kumar Borthakur, shed light on Ghalib's poems, describing them as a wonderful blend of mysticism, Sufism, humanism, and realism in the Urdu language.



In his speech, Subhashish Borthakur, a teacher, emphasized that Urdu, although the mother tongue of over 23 crore Muslims, is not exclusive to Muslims, similar to Sanskrit, and should be embraced by anyone with a literary taste.

The event featured readings of Ghalib's poems and shayaris by Bidisha Riguru, Angelika Gogoi, and Rameisha Rounak Ulla.

The program aimed to pay tribute to Mirza Ghalib's literary legacy and promote Urdu literature beyond linguistic boundaries.

Jorhat AAU's ACIFSR conducts training on crop diversification in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: The Advanced Centre for Integrated Farming Systems Research (ACIFSR) at Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Jorhat, organised specialised training sessions focusing on 'Crop Diversification' in Karbi Anglong. The training aimed to empower farmers with knowledge and strategies to maximise farm productivity and profitability.

The first training, titled 'Crop Diversification towards High-Value Crops for Maximising Farm Productivity and Profitability in Hill Zone of Assam', was conducted at Kuligaon, Karbi Anglong, starting from December 18, 2023.

The second training, themed 'Resource Management and Socio-Economic Development through Crop Diversification and Intensification', targeted extension officers, development officials, and input dealers. This session took place in Bokajan, Karbi Anglong, from December 23, 2023.

The inaugural program for the training of officials in Bokajan was chaired by Ananta Shyam,



deputy director of Agriculture, Karbi Anglong. Hunmili Terangpi, agricultural development officer of Bokajan circle, was also present during the ceremony. Dr Debasish Borah, chief agronomist at ACIFSR, AAU Jorhat, led both training programs.

The training sessions involved a team of scientists, including Dr Bhabesh Gogoi (Soil Science), Dr Monisha Borah (Agricultural Economics), and Lipika Talukdar (Agronomy), who served as resource persons. The discussions focused on the significance of crop diversification and its role in

enhancing farm productivity, profitability, resource management, and the socio-economic development of the farming community.

These training programs were sponsored by ICAR-IIFSR (Indian Institute of Farming Systems Research), Modupuram, Meerut, UP, as part of a pilot project on crop diversification in the district. The interactive sessions facilitated farmer-scientist-officials discussions, fostering a deeper understanding of the benefits of crop diversification for sustainable agricultural practices and rural development.

Aaranyak launches school awareness campaign in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: Aaranyak, a leading research-based biodiversity conservation organisation in north-east India, has initiated a school awareness campaign focused on cleaning, protecting, and conserving the deteriorated water bodies in the city of Guwahati.

The primary objective of the campaign is to raise awareness among students and teachers in selected schools near various rivers and wetlands in the city. The initiative aims to impart knowledge about the causes and impacts of water pollution and ecological degradation on the urban environment and human health. Aaranyak, through its Water, Climate, and Hazard Division (WATCH), encourages students and teachers to take actions to reduce pollution in and around water bodies, promoting responsible waste disposal practices. The organisation envisions students and teachers as primary change-makers who can influence families, schools, and society at large.

Awareness sessions have already been conducted in four schools—Beltola High School, Hatigaon High



School, South Beltola ME School, and South Beltola High School in the southern part of the city from December 21 to 23. The campaign covered areas with degraded water bodies like the Basistha and Bahini rivers, which flow through the region, impacting the environment and public health negatively.

Dr Partha Jyoti Das, senior scientist with Aaranyak and head of WATCH, highlighted that the initiative engaged around 200 students and teachers during the initial phase and will extend to cover more schools over the next month, focus-

ing on areas with different degraded water bodies in the city.

During these awareness sessions, Aaranyak researchers and educators delivered presentations to students, explaining the present condition of water bodies, the causes of their degradation, and the observed and potential impacts on the environment and public health. The campaign utilised PowerPoint presentations and printed materials with educational information in both English and Assamese to sensitise students.

The campaign aimed to address

key questions, including the importance of keeping rivers and wetlands clean for environmental and health security, the impacts of pollution on the environment and public health, citizen responsibilities for improving the ecophysiological health of water bodies, and ways students and teachers can contribute to the government's efforts in rejuvenating the water bodies.

Dr Das stated that the program would benefit over 20 schools situated near urban water bodies, promoting sustainable practices. Aaranyak hopes that through this and future programs, citizens will understand the positive outcomes of restoring and protecting urban water bodies, including biodiversity preservation, improved public health, groundwater recharge, ecotourism potential, public recreation, visual beauty, and overall citizen well-being.

The Aaranyak team conducting the campaign includes Hemanta Phukon, Kakoli Sarma, Leena Sharma, Jyotimsita Kashyap, and Bhanita Deka, working under the supervision of environmental scientist Dr Partha Jyoti Das.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? - Robert Browning*

Shah's strategic shift in Bengal

In a recent visit to Kolkata, Union Home Minister Amit Shah articulated a strategic shift for the BJP's West Bengal unit, emphasizing the role of social media and door-to-door campaigning over traditional public meetings and rallies. Shah, a seasoned political strategist, is seemingly acknowledging the organizational challenges faced by the party in the state. While recognizing the importance of social media in contemporary political communication, Shah's avoidance of explicit mention of rallies and street corner meetings hints at a concern – the absence of charismatic crowd-pullers among the state leadership. This move reflects Shah's acknowledgment that the state unit lacks figures capable of drawing large crowds, a vital component of successful political campaigns. The call for door-to-door campaigning, however, raises skepticism. Past attempts at such approaches have backfired, as illustrated by Rahul Sinha's encounter with the late Soumitra Chattopadhyay. The lack of research on the state BJP's part was apparent, and the incident underscored the importance of understanding local sentiments and affiliations before engaging in such efforts. Amit Shah, known for his pragmatic approach, is fully aware of the organizational weaknesses within the West Bengal unit. His push for increased social media usage is not just about modern communication; it serves to divert attention from the dearth of top party leaders actively participating in the upcoming 2024 elections. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Shah likely to be engaged in a nationwide campaign, their absence from state-centric activities might impact the BJP's electoral prospects in West Bengal.

The composition of the core poll panel, with the induction of former state chief Dilip Ghosh, adds a significant dimension. Ghosh, a leader with a proven track record, played a pivotal role in BJP's success in the 2014 Assembly polls and the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. His inclusion signals a recognition of his organizational acumen, emphasizing the importance of experienced leaders in navigating the complex political landscape of West Bengal. Notably, the return of Ghosh and another former state chief, Rahul Sinha, to the limelight is a clear indication of a new organizational equation within the party. The exclusion of four Ministers of State and the message conveyed to the 14 MPs from the state indicate a restructuring aimed at addressing the weaknesses in the state unit. While Shah's diagnosis of the state unit's weaknesses is evident, the real test lies in the 2024 Lok Sabha poll results. The party's grassroots organization in West Bengal is facing challenges, and the effectiveness of Shah's prescription will only be fully gauged in the electoral outcome. Amit Shah's recalibration of BJP's strategy in West Bengal reflects a pragmatic response to organizational challenges.

The emphasis on social media, the inclusion of experienced leaders in the core poll panel, and the restructuring of the state leadership highlight a concerted effort to address weaknesses. As the political landscape evolves, only time will reveal the impact of these strategic adjustments on the BJP's fortunes in the upcoming elections. Amit Shah's recent Kolkata visit reveals a strategic shift for the BJP in West Bengal, prioritizing social media and door-to-door campaigns amid organizational challenges.

Bharat vs. India: The battle for identity and ideals in 2024

Rahul Shivshankar and Siddhartha Talya's recently launched book, "Modi and India: 2024 and the Battle for Bharat," stands out for its readability and meticulous research. I had the privilege of being a speaker at the event, sharing the platform with a distinguished panel featuring RSS leader Ram Madhav, BJP vice-president Jay Panda, scientist and commentator Dr. A.R. Ranganathan, and ANI's Smita Prakash.

The authors kick off with a thought-provoking query: "Will the 2024 election mark a mandate for the establishment of Hindu Rashtra?" While the question is polemical, it doesn't serve as the central thesis of the book. Instead, the authors aim to articulate compelling reasons for India to shed its colonial legacy, rectify overlooked or distorted facets of its historical narrative, and embark on a journey of rediscovering the profound civilization to which it belongs – a transition towards Bharat.

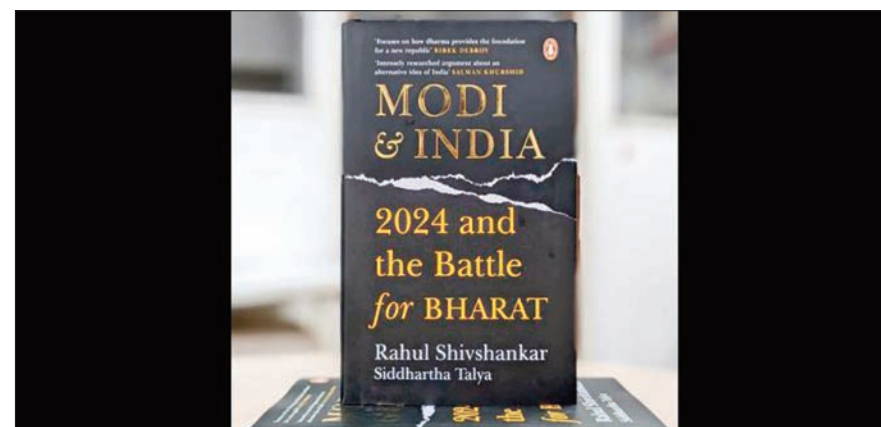
The use of 'Bharat' here stands in contrast to 'India,' suggesting that while one signifies cultural rootedness and authenticity, the other represents the dominance of a rootless anglicized elite and mindless mimicry of the West. However, the debate between India and Bharat is somewhat exaggerated. Bharat encapsulates our ancient civilization, while India has evolved into an international brand, rapidly ascending as a global power. The book's core argument holds weight: colo-

nization extends beyond the physical subjugation of a populace; it infiltrates the realm of their minds. While political freedom may have a defined moment, the erasure of cultural colonization takes decades thereafter, and India serves as a poignant illustration of this enduring process.

Post August 15, 1947, power and influence predominantly fell into the hands of 'brown sahebs,' individuals detached from their own culture, exhibiting Westernized behaviors, and often dismissive of India's rich heritage.

Fluent in English rather than their native languages, they were inheritors of a legacy that struggled to connect with its roots. In my book, "Becoming Indian: The Unfinished Revolution of Culture and Identity," I delve into this transformation. Jawaharlal Nehru, despite being a key architect of democratic and secular India, viewed progress through a Western lens, harboring impatience to shed what he deemed as "the deadwood of our past," often conflating it with superstition, prejudice, and sterile ritual.

While it's undeniable that the old Indian civilization had its imperfections, summarily dismissing its remarkable achievements is akin to discarding the baby with the bathwater. As a young nation but one of the world's oldest civilizations, our past boasts remarkable advancements in a myriad of fields – philosophy, science, arts and culture, political theory, literature, grammar, and beyond – fueled by moulis



soch or the power of original thought. I delve into these aspects in detail in my book, "The Great Hindu Civilisation."

Rahul Shivshankar's conviction lies in the belief that with the advent of Narendra Modi, the elections in 2024 could mark the inception of a "formation of a dharma-inspired 'second republic'" and a decisive reclamation of Bharat.

Certainly, the pursuit of the goal is commendable, even though the definition of dharma in Indian thought remains highly intricate. Questions arise about whose dharma, what form of dharma, whether it is absolute or contextual. As Yudhishtira in the Mahabharata wisely states to Draupadi, "Dharma is sukshma (subtle). Who has defined it?" Regardless, certain principles are undeniably contrary to India's interests. Bharat should steer clear of xenophobia; it must not, as Mohan Bhagwat emphasizes, embrace the "boisterous rhetoric of

supremacy." It should uphold the tenet of Sarva Dharma Sambhava, respecting all faiths.

Embracing the inclusive nature of Hinduism, it must shun reflexive exclusionism. It should be assimilative when necessary, eschewing dogmatic rejectionism. A progressive stance should prevail, avoiding the perpetuation of outdated orthodoxies. Critical thinking should be embraced, rejecting attempts to homogenize Hinduism by a self-anointed group of Hindu guardians who claim sole understanding. Gender parity should be a belief, and readiness for reform should override mindless glorification of the past.

Indeed, there are certain issues that warrant rectification. The book extensively discusses the practice of minority appeasement in the past, driven by vote bank politics. It's undeniable that instances such as the overruling of the Supreme

Court's Shah Bano judgment stand as glaring examples. However, it's important to acknowledge that politically motivated appeasement hasn't substantially improved the lives of Muslims themselves. Additionally, there are concerns that evoke legitimate resentment among Hindus, including government control of Hindu temples and occasional downplaying of Islamic extremism.

However, responding with aggressive Hindu majoritarianism is not the solution. India stands as a multi-religious, plural, and multi-cultural nation. Attempts to force this undeniable reality into an intolerant Hindu monolith are neither desirable nor feasible. Such an approach has the potential to become the source of endemic instability, tarnishing not only our international image but also impacting our economic ambitions.

In a candid acknowledgment, Rahul Shivshankar recognizes the looming threat of potential distortions. He specifically sin-

gles out organizations like Bajrang Dal, emphasizing their worrisome trend of attracting members in record numbers. This, in turn, poses a risk to the BJP's meticulously crafted strategy of evolving into a broad-based party with pan-India appeal, rooted in the richness of Hindu ethos. The paradox lies in these organizations, such as Bajrang Dal, evolving into entities operating outside the bounds of established norms.

Ironically, their foot-soldiers often lack a profound understanding of Hinduism or the magnificence of Hindu civilization. In a lighthearted comment during the launch discussion, I jestingly remarked that if a Bajrang Dal activist were confined to a room and tasked with writing one coherent page on Hinduism and Hindu civilization, they might spend a lifetime in that room. Ram Madhav concurred, humorously adding that, given the chance, they might not even manage to draft a comprehensible troll tweet!

The authors also denounce instances of "chilling hate speeches," particularly those witnessed in certain Dharam Sansads. They openly acknowledge the challenge faced by the Sangh Parivar in curbing radicalized Hindus influenced by the less reasonable ideas of the Hindu Right. Consequently, they aptly conclude that India's aspiration to become a Vishwa Guru is only present "for the BJP to squander." (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Saffron ecosystem continues to communalise with impunity

By: Arun Srivastava

Many unsavoury incidents are taking place. The list is quite long. What stands out is that every incident owes its birth to the RSS move to communalise and polarise the democratic structure and its functioning and weaponise the administrative institutions and apparatuses. Four days back the Army had picked up 15 civilians from Topa Peer, a village in Kashmir, for questioning and the bodies of three of them, bearing injury marks, were found near an encounter site. The remaining 12 persons have been admitted to different hospitals in critical conditions.

Political parties staged protests and demanded an impartial probe into the mysterious deaths. The bodies were found near the site of an ambush of Army vehicles in Poonch district, which left five soldiers dead. "I saw a video that shows Armymen thrashing people and spraying red chilli powder on their wounds. It is heart-wrenching, however, I do not know about its authenticity," PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti said.

Senior CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami demanded a prompt and impartial inquiry while condemning the militant attack on the soldiers. The death of three civilians has acquired such an embarrassing form that it forced the Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande to fly into Jammu and Kashmir and exhort commanders to conduct operations in a "most professional manner" and remain "resolute and steadfast against all challenges".

Sending a strong message that it has taken a serious note of the death of the three civilians which has sparked allegations of custodial torture and widespread outrage, the Army has initiated a Court of Inquiry. Brigadier Padam Acharya of 13 Sector Rashtriya Rifles and three other officers had been "attached" pending internal investigations, implying they had been divested of the leadership of their brigade. This was done, to placate the local population and ensure proper investigations.

Of late, the Army taking action against the civilians had become a common feature. The counter-insurgency unit of the Army was in the news for wrong reasons in October also when one of its major-rank officers opened fire on his colleagues and exploded grenades inside the Neeli post camp near Thanamandi, leaving five personnel including three officers injured. On September 2, 2022, Amnesty International alleged that the Indian government had drastically intensified the repression of rights in Jammu & Kashmir in the three years since the change in status of the region. Aakar Patel, chair of the board of Amnesty International India, alleged that "civil society and media in Jammu and Kashmir have been subjected to a

vicious crackdown by the Indian government, which is determined to stifle dissent using draconian laws, policies and unlawful practices in their arsenal".

The attitude and approach of the government had sent a wrong message to Army too. Ever since the BJP government came to power, some of the Army men have become assertive against the common people.

The Modi government is out to finish off parliamentary institutions. On December 25, Congress party President Mallikarjun Kharge accused Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar of being the "agent of autocracy". He alleged that the BJP has weaponised suspension of MPs as a convenient tool to undermine democracy. Kharge said Dhankhar was toying the government's line and argued that normal functioning of Parliament was not possible without adherence to constitutional principles and parliamentary practices.

The manner in which the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha suspended 146 members of parliament makes it explicit that the presiding officers had resorted to this measure only at the instruction of the government. However, the Opposition parties, including the Congress, were anguished at the role of the presiding officers, particularly of Dhankhar who allowed himself to be used in the partisan political warfare. Some members recall how he had used the Governor's administrative set-up, while he was Governor of Bengal, to embarrass Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and had not let her perform her duties and responsibilities.

The manner in which Dhankhar wants to project the mimicry issue as a personal insult also underlines the efforts of the RSS and BJP to communalise parliamentary procedures for electoral benefit. Dhankhar's reference to his caste and the farming community in the context of the mimicry incident has convinced most Opposition leaders that he is bent on engaging in a kind of politicized that is not in tune with the high constitutional office he holds.

The alacrity shown by Narendra Modi in picking up the thread and equating it with the Jat pride lays bare the design. There is no denying that Dhankhar has provided the BJP with enough political ammunition to polarise the Jats and create the communal impression that INDIA and Rahul Gandhi were indulging in a game of vilification. This was a shrewd move of the BJP which is using Dhankhar's caste to woo back Jats who had distanced themselves from the BJP in the wake of the farmers agitation.

Modi or Dhankhar could not succeed in their mission to polarise Jats because Olympic medal winner Sakshi Malik, a Jat, announced her retirement from wrestling in protest against BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's continuing dominance of the wrestling federation.

The image of the crying Jat woman washed out Dhankhar's design. Bajrang Punia, again a Jat, wrestler of international repute, returned his Padma Shri over the Brij Bhushan controversy, bringing the issue of sexual exploitation of athletes to the forefront of the national discourse.

Dhankhar has been quite evasive and tried to put the blame for suspension of the MPs on the individuals. But he could not succeed in his designs because of Kharge who wrote to Dhankhar: "I would like to clarify on the points that you have raised and request that you examine my concerns objectively and with neutrality as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. Your letter unfortunately justifies the autocratic and arrogant attitude of the government towards Parliament. The letter most shockingly justifies the denigration of parliamentary practices and subversion of democracy."

Hinting at the Chairman's failure to enforce parliamentary norms and traditions, Kharge wrote: "I recognise it is well within your powers as Chairman to decide on these notices (submitted by the Opposition demanding the home minister's statement). However, it was regrettable that the Chair condoned the attitude of the home minister and the government who did not wish to make a statement on the floor of the House. It was even more regrettable that the home minister made his first public statement before a TV channel when Parliament was in session and the Chair did not find that 'sacrilaging the temple of democracy'."

Kharge further said: "You have also mentioned that disorder was deliberate and strategised and predetermined. I would like to submit that if anything, it is the mass suspension of the Opposition MPs from both Houses of Parliament that seems to be predetermined and premeditated by the Government and I am most sorry to say, executed without any application of mind, as can be seen by the suspension of an INDIA party MP who was not even present in the Parliament."

Modi and his lieutenant Amit Shah, who have acquired expertise in coercing and resorting to torture for ruling the country, had in fact chalked out the plan to suspend the MPs long back. They knew that without this they would not succeed in having the house pass the three draconian criminal law bills. It is worth recalling that a Union minister had informed an Opposition MP that most Opposition MPs would be suspended even before the Home Minister came to the Rajya Sabha. "We would have expected the Chairman to have inquired if such a threat was indeed issued. Such comments grossly undermine the Chair who we believe is the final authority on conducting the House including suspension of members," Kharge had said. (IPA Service)

The motorcycle expedition- A rebel's spiritual journey

By: Dr. Aniruddha Babar

Through rugged roads where echoes weep,

*Noklak's spirit, secrets steep.
A nation's heartbeat, resilient and strong.*

*In the face of despair and battles,
hope prolongs.*

*On my Motorcycle, a pledge to transform,
For India's unity, in every storm.*

"In the dust of forgotten roads, I found the unwritten stories of Noklak, echoing the silent struggles of a nation. From the handlebars of my motorcycle, I pledge not just a journey, but a transformative odyssey to uplift, empower, and unify every forgotten corner of our resilient motherland."

In the boundless embrace of the open road, my motorcycle became more than mere steel and rubber; it transformed into the chariot of my spiritual quest. The call of adventure led me to Noklak, a remote realm in the heart of Nagaland. The journey, perilous and unknown, unfolded as a cinematic odyssey, blending emotional turmoil, poignant insights, and the raw beauty of an untamed land. As my wheels spun through the uncharted terrain, the landscape unfolded like a forgotten chapter of Earth's story. Mountains loomed like ancient sentinels, their peaks lost in the embrace of heavy clouds. My solitude on the desolate roads became a pilgrimage, each bend revealing stories etched in the craggy rocks and verdant valleys.

However, as I ventured deeper into Noklak, the majestic scenery belied the harsh reality that gripped its people. The suffering of the locals became palpable, etched in the lines on their faces and the weariness in their eyes. The absence of basic amenities, such as public healthcare facilities, echoed in the silent cries of those who endured the pangs of illness with stoic resilience. Poverty, an unwelcome companion in this forgotten corner of the world, left its mark on every soul. The stark absence of educational infrastructure painted a bleak future for the younger generation, a generation bereft of proper schooling facilities and college opportunities. As the road beneath my wheels dwindled to mere dirt paths, I bore witness to a community grappling with the cruel hand dealt by circumstance.

The specter of early deaths loomed heavily, casting shadows over families and the community at large. Each premature departure carried with it the weight of unfulfilled dreams and unspoken aspirations. The high prevalence of HIV, drug addiction, and alcoholism among the people further painted a grim picture of a community trapped in the cycle of despair.

Amidst the unfolding tragedy, the resounding silence of the roads under-



scored the helplessness of the people. Noklak's isolation, both geographically and sociopolitically, seemed to have left its inhabitants to fend for themselves in a world oblivious to their struggles. It was a poignant revelation of the human spirit's resilience, a testament to their unwavering strength in the face of adversity.

Noklak opened my eyes to a reality that transcended the scenic beauty I initially sought. The land of forgotten dreams and untold struggles demanded recognition. It was a place where the absence of roads mirrored the metaphorical roadblocks faced by its people. My heart broke witnessing the silent cries of anguish, and as I navigated the treacherous terrains, it became clear that this expedition was more than a physical journey – it was a soul-stirring awakening.

As the harsh winds whispered tales of suffering, my heart resonated with the pain of an entire community. In the face of adversity, they clung to their indomitable spirit, finding solace in the echoes of the mountains that had witnessed their struggles through generations. I was not just a traveler passing through; I became a witness to their story, a conduit for their unheard voices. The return journey, laden with the weight of newfound awareness, transformed me. The arduous path had carved a profound impact on my soul. A new man was born on the dusty trails of Noklak – a man forged in the crucible of empathy, understanding, and a visceral connection to the human experience.

Noklak, with its painful revelations and heartbreaking truths, became a crucible of transformation. The landscape, once merely a backdrop, now mirrored the resilience of a people tethered to the roots of their homeland. I left not just with memories of a dangerous motorcycle expedition but with a visceral understanding of the fragility of life, the power of community, and the urgent need for collective action.

As I rode away, the echoes of Noklak lingered in the air, a haunting melody of suffering and strength. The cinematic odyssey had left an indelible mark on my heart, and I carried the weight of their stories with me. The newfound purpose resonated in the roar of my motorcycle, and I vowed to be a harbinger

ger of change, a voice for those whose whispers had been drowned in the vast expanse of the forgotten hills. In the rearview mirror, I glimpsed the silhouette of Noklak, a place that had cracked open my heart and revealed the universality of human struggle. The journey had not just been a solo expedition; it had been a communion with the collective soul of a community left on the fringes. The roads may have been rugged, the path treacherous, but what I discovered transcended the physical challenges – it was the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

And so, as I rode into the horizon, leaving behind the mountains and the untold stories, a poignant truth echoed in the wind: a new man had emerged from the crucible of Noklak, forever marked by the harrowing expedition that had unraveled the layers of complacency and exposed the urgency of compassion. As I navigated the winding roads back from Noklak, a resolve crystallized within me. The heartbreaking tales of the people, their struggles, and the silent cries echoing through the valleys had struck a chord deep within my being. I decided, in that transformative moment, to change everything. No longer could I be a mere observer; their stories became my stories, their suffering my responsibility. As the motorcycle rumbled beneath me, I vowed to be an instrument of change, a catalyst for hope in a place where despair had taken root. The dust of Noklak clung to my clothes, but more significantly, the spirit of Noklak clung to my soul, propelling me into a new chapter where empathy, action, and advocacy would guide my every step. The desolate roads I had traveled had become a metaphor for the journey that lay ahead – arduous, uncertain, but filled with the promise of making a difference.

As the dust of Noklak clung to my clothes and the spirit of the resilient people clung to my soul, a profound sense of duty ignited within me. The struggles and hardships faced by the community mirrored the larger narrative of our nation – India. Noklak, with its untold stories and forgotten dreams, became a microcosm of the challenges our diverse country faces. The echoes of the winding roads through the rugged terrain resonated with the indomitable spirit that defines our great nation. In that transformative moment, I realized that the change I vowed to bring was not just for Noklak but for India – a commitment to uplift the forgotten, empower the marginalized, and foster a united, prosperous future for every corner of our motherland. The motorcycle became not just a vehicle but a symbol of national unity, riding with purpose towards a brighter tomorrow for all. (The author is an academician in the Dept. of Political Science, Tetso College, Nagaland)

Recycling: Need, aims & advantages

By: Reneeka Chatterjee

Recycling is the process of collecting and converting useless products which would otherwise be discarded as waste into useful and beneficial new products, be it to serve the original purpose or to serve another purpose. Recycling is a dynamic process that converts a used product into a new product and therefore gives it a new life cycle.

Reducing, recycling, and reusing waste play a significant role in fostering a sustainable future for all living organisms. Issues such as global warming, environmental pollution, acid rain, ozone layer depletion, and climate change must be addressed at the earliest.

Recycling waste might just be the first step towards creating a more beautiful and a healthier planet for all living creatures to survive in.

How are products recycled and reused? The recycling loop is a process that primarily involves three distinct steps. The first step involves collecting the waste materials from the drop-

off centre. The second step involves segregating, sorting out, and processing the waste materials, and then selling them off. The third step is the most crucial step which involves converting the waste materials into new and useful products which take on a new life as consumer goods. Then, these consumer goods are sold in the market for purchase.

A few typical materials which can be recycled are ferrous metals like iron and steel, aluminium cans, glass, wood, paper and cardboard, newspapers and magazines, motor oil, tyres, and cellulose and plastics.

However, black plastic cannot be recycled because it is non-biodegradable, and clutters drains and chokes living organisms. Black plastic is generally not sorted for recycling because much of it cannot be retrieved. It is too dominant of a colourant and much of it does not mix well with other plastic.

The recyclability of a product depends on its ability to retain or acquire the features that it possessed in its original form so that it is useful as a consumer good, to those who purchase it.



Countries and economies also need to figure out to what extent recycling waste items is feasible for them, both environmentally and fiscally or financially.

Why is recycling relevant and important? "If you're not recycling, you're throwing away a lot more than your trash," says the Environmental Defense Fund (which has its headquarters in the USA).

In the era of urbanisation and industrialisation, all countries, both developed and developing, produce waste on gigantic scales. The need of the hour is to not only chemically treat the waste but also judiciously re-

duce and reuse it. Every year, American countries reportedly dump their hazardous wastes on the coasts of African and Asian countries. This is not only morally incorrect but also deadly because it leads to the spread of harmful diseases.

The purpose of recycling is to minimise the production of waste, and resultantly, conserve energy. Recycling is a key component of the modern waste reduction process. Since reusing and reducing waste heavily relies on recycling waste, recycling has emerged as a matter of paramount importance in the process of waste reduction. Re-

cycling aims at reducing pollution, encouraging environmental sustainability, and reducing the consumption of raw materials by substituting them with recycled products.

How is recycling environmentally and economically advantageous? Recycling reduces the need for solid waste disposal. Therefore, it reduces pollution and diminishes the need for deposition of solid waste in landfills. Dumping waste in landfills causes land and water pollution. Recycling also reduces the need for incineration. Incineration causes air pollution.

The materials that are used for recycling serve as a substitute for scarce and non-renewable sources of energy. A few of these energy sources are coal, petroleum, natural gas, and even trees. Hence, recycling conserves natural resources.

Recycling has uncountable advantages. It helps in maintaining the oxygen-carbon dioxide balance in the ecosystem and reduces carbon emissions, thereby reducing the carbon footprint. It promotes judicious usage of energy and reduces environmental

pollution. Recycling also generates employment for many people in various sectors by creating jobs in local industries.

Recycling is synonymous with stewardship of natural resources and non-renewable sources of energy. It encourages preservation of the natural landscape for the planet's wildlife and for us humans to cherish too.

How can you recycle your waste? Remember that it all starts with you. If you want to bring change in the world, you have to be the change first. Recycling must begin at home with simple items. Recycling begins and ends at home and at work. It should be taught to all children in school as well so that eventually, it turns into a way of life. Only conservation can prevent depletion.

Plastic bags can be used to collect soiled litter. (Switching to paper or cloth bags is a more viable option these days.) Milk cartons or broken glass bottles can be used as flower pots. Empty bottles which are not used can be otherwise used as paint bottles. Jeans or pants that

no longer fit can be cut and used as cloth for dusting or cleaning. Old newspapers can be used for packing and wrapping up items. Unclean water or water that is not potable can be used for gardening and watering house plants.

With the onset of the era of digitalisation, recycling of electronic wastes such as electronic gadgets and devices has become significant. Many discarded cell phones find their final home in the landfills. Thus, any item that seems obsolete and redundant may still be used to manufacture useful and beneficial products. That is the very essence of recycling. As conscientious citizens of planet Earth, it is only fair to leave behind a safe and healthy planet for the future generations to live in.

Have you ever recycled and reused waste products or trash? Do share your experiences of recycling used products in the comments section below! Let us all pledge to make Mother Earth a safer, happier, and healthier planet for all living beings around us. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

The Sahara Desert used to be a green Savannah and new research explains why

By: Edward Armstrong

Algeria's Tassili N'Ajjer plateau is Africa's largest national park. Among its vast sandstone formations is perhaps the world's largest art museum. Over 15,000 etchings and paintings are exhibited there, some as much as 11,000 years old according to scientific dating techniques, representing a unique ethnological and climatological record of the region.

Curiously, however, these images do not depict the arid, barren landscape that is present in the Tassili N'Ajjer today. Instead, they portray a vibrant savannah inhabited by elephants, giraffes, rhinos and hippos. This rock art is an important record of the past environmental conditions that prevailed in the Sahara, the world's largest hot desert.

These images depict a period approximately 6,000-11,000 years ago called the Green Sahara or North African Humid Period. There is widespread climatological evidence that during this period the Sahara supported wooded savannah ecosystems and numerous rivers and lakes in what are now Libya, Niger, Chad and Mali.

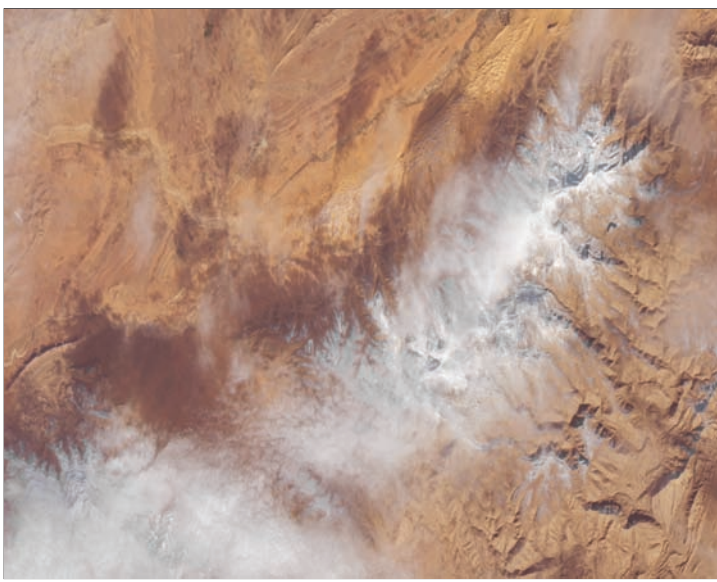
This greening of the Sahara didn't happen once. Using marine and lake sediments, scientists have identified over 230 of these greenings occurring about every 21,000 years over the past eight million years. These greening events provided vegetated corridors which influenced species' distribution and evolution, including the out-of-Africa migrations of ancient humans.

These dramatic greenings would have required a large-scale reorganisation of the atmospheric system to bring rains to this hyper-arid region. But most climate models haven't been able to simulate how dramatic these events were. As a team of climate modellers and anthropologists, we have overcome this obstacle. We developed a climate model that more accurately simulates atmospheric circulation over the Sahara and the impacts of vegetation on rainfall.

We identified why North Africa greened approximately every 21,000 years over the past eight million years. It was caused by changes in the Earth's orbital precession – the slight wobbling of the planet while rotating. This moves the Northern Hemisphere closer to the sun during the summer months.

This caused warmer summers in the Northern Hemisphere, and warmer air is able to hold more moisture. This intensified the strength of the West African Monsoon system and shifted the African rainbelt northwards. This increased Saharan rainfall, resulting in the spread of savannah and wooded grassland across the desert from the tropics to the Mediterranean, providing a vast habitat for plants and animals.

Our results demonstrate the sensitivity of the Sahara Desert to changes in past climate. They explain how this sensitivity affects rainfall across North Africa. This is important for understanding the implications of present-day climate change (driven by human activities). Warmer temperatures in the future may also enhance mon-



soon strength, with both local and global impacts.

Earth's changing orbit

The fact that the wetter periods in North Africa have recurred every 21,000 years or so is a big clue about what causes them: variations in Earth's orbit.

Due to gravitational influences from the moon and other planets in our solar system, the orbit of the Earth around the sun is not constant. It has cyclic variations on multi-thousand-year timescales. These orbital cycles are termed Milankovitch cycles; they influence the amount of energy the Earth receives from the sun.

On 100,000-year cycles, the shape of Earth's orbit (or eccentricity) shifts between circular and oval, and on 41,000-year cycles the tilt of Earth's axis varies (termed obliquity).

Eccentricity and obliquity cycles are responsible for driving the ice ages of the past 2.4 million years. The third Milankovitch cycle is precession. This concerns Earth's wobble on its axis, which varies on a 21,000-year timescale. The similarity between the precession cycle and the timing of the humid periods indicates that precession is their dominant driver. Precession influences seasonal contrasts, increasing them in one hemisphere and reducing them in another. During warmer Northern Hemisphere summers, a consequent increase in North African summer rainfall would have initiated a humid phase, resulting in the spread of vegetation across the region.

In our study, we also identified that the humid periods did not occur during the ice ages, when large glacial ice sheets covered much of the Polar Regions. This is because these vast ice sheets cooled the atmosphere. The cooling countered the influence of precession and suppressed the expansion of the African monsoon system.

The ice ages are driven by the eccentricity cycle, which determines how circular Earth's orbit is around the sun. So our findings show that eccentricity indirectly influences the magnitude of the humid periods via its influence on the ice sheets. This highlights, for the first time, a major connection between these distant high-latitude and tropical regions.

The Sahara acts as a gate. It controls the dispersal of species between north and sub-Saharan

Africa, and in and out of the continent. The gate was open when the Sahara was green and closed when deserts prevailed. Our results reveal the sensitivity of this gate to Earth's orbit around the sun. They also show that high-latitude ice sheets may have restricted the dispersal of species during the glacial periods of the last 800,000 years.

Our ability to model the African humid periods helps us understand the alternation of humid and arid phases. This had major consequences for the dispersal and evolution of species, including humans, within and out of Africa.

Furthermore, it provides a tool for understanding future greening in response to climate change and its environmental impact.

Refined models may, in the future, be able to identify how climate warming will influence rainfall and vegetation in the Sahara region, and the wider implications for society. (Courtesy: The Wire)

By: Dr. Satvavan Saurabh

Fertilizer is one of the important inputs required to increase agricultural production and farmers' income in India. India ranks second in the world and first among South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries in terms of total fertilizer consumption. Changes in government policies related to fertilizer distribution and use have significantly affected nutrient use ratios. Excessive use or misuse or unbalanced use of fertilizer nutrients is causing environmental degradation and climate change.

The compounded harmful effects of unbalanced fertilizer use are not only increasing soil and atmospheric pollution but also affecting water bodies (eutrophication) and posing a threat to biodiversity and human health. Excessive use of fertilizers leads to environmental pollution as their residual and unused amounts will become pollutants for air, water, and soil. It also initiates the process of eutrophication in water bodies, thereby reducing soil quality by killing soil microflora, etc.

Excessive use of fertilizers also increases the acidity of the soil. Excessive use of fertilizers also disturbs the soil ecosystem which ultimately hampers the productivity of the soil. Chemical fertilizers have their uses, but they also have hidden dangers. Whether used in the field or on lawns, applying more than can be used to help plants grow harms the environment and human health. Since the damage caused by chemical fertilizers is often long-term and cumulative, it may be wise to consider alternative and sustainable methods of fertilizing the soil. The environmental problems caused by the use of chemical fertilizers are bad and will take many years to solve. However, an immediate concern with chemical fertilizers is the impact on human health. At the very least, food crops produced using chemical fertilizers may not be as nutritious as they should be. This is because chemical fertilizers are detrimental to plant health, resulting in crops that have low nutritional value. Plants will grow on slightly more than NPK, but they will be missing essential nutrients like calcium, zinc, and iron or will grow less well. It may affect the health of people who consume it. In the

Europe has a wolf problem, and a late Norwegian philosopher had the solution

By: Nora Ward

Europe's "wolf problem" is fast becoming a source of social and political tension. Relative conservation success across the continent has led to calls for action from worried politicians and farming and hunting groups. And the European Commission has now proposed a change in their international status, from "strictly protected" to "protected", which could allow people to hunt wolves.

Annotated map of Europe

However, changing the protection status may not be the best solution, especially as only three of the nine wolf populations in the EU have reached favourable conservation status. Instead, perhaps the time is ripe for a renewed focus on learning to live — again — with wolves. Proven prevention strategies, such as fencing and the use of guard dogs, play a critical role in this. But the question may be fundamentally philosophical. Namely, it boils down to how to coexist — and the cultivation of ethical principles and values which undergird a successful coexistence.

'Deep ecology' and the equal right to exist

In this task, the work of Norwegian environmental philosopher Arne Næss (1912-2009) might be of help. Næss is known as the father of "deep ecology", an ethical theory that contends that all life has intrinsic value. Næss argued that all beings, whether human or nonhuman, have an equal right to exist and flourish, a principle he called "biospherical egalitarianism".

As this applies to wolves, Næss was clear: wolves have

just as much a right to be here as we do.

Næss wrote an essay with biologist Ivar Mysterud stating: "The well-being of the species wolf as part of human and nonhuman life on Earth has value in itself!" As a result, they argued, "humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity, including wolf habitats and races, except to satisfy vital needs!"

Despite this ostensibly radical challenge to human-centred ethical norms, Næss demonstrated a pragmatic approach in how the principle of

biospherical egalitarianism was applied in practice. For example, he considered the important contextual factors of local wolf-human interactions, writing:

For some sheep holders, the need to protect their sheep from wolves or to be in some way compensated is today vital. It means protecting the basis of their economy and home where they have lived for generations.

In addition to human interests, he also took seriously the moral obligation to reduce the suffering of sheep and other domestic animals. This is especially salient as humans have reduced the capacity of these species to evade wolves.

Mouflon, the wild ancestor of domestic sheep, do their best to avoid large predators by fleeing into mountains. In contrast, after thousands of

years of selective breeding, modern livestock have fewer genetic defences and are left to fend for themselves in fenced-in fields.

Man has a heart, not just a brain

Næss avoided a one-size-fits-all answer to the question of wolves (a position other scholars criticised him for). But his focus on articulating general ethical principles to serve as a backdrop for contextual decisions may have importance in the increasingly heated and political nature of this rewinding debate.

For example, Næss used the term "mixed community" to denote places which

prise humans and those species who play a clear role in human affairs. Challenging the tendency to define community only in human terms, Næss contended that this framing helps to "break down some of the barriers commonly erected between humans and any other forms of life within our common space".

In doing so, this can open pathways for increased identification and empathy for non-human others — a capacity Næss believed all humans have, stemming from an inherent continuity between human and nonhuman life.

Indeed, as the pioneering American conservationist Aldo Leopold similarly maintained, perceiving ourselves in a community with others is a



prerequisite for moral action. In this case, it helps to make concrete the idea of a wolf's right to exist — they are members of the community just like us.

Applying this ethical framework of "mixed communities" to current EU deliberations can have some benefits. For example, it may inspire the further development of creative, mutually beneficial solutions such as economic compensation for livestock losses — a move which Næss called for — as well as improving wolf-attack prevention. It may also play an effective role in countering the often-baseless fear and hysteria around wolves (Næss blamed the brothers Grimm for the animals' bad public image). Perhaps most important of all, though, is the potential for connecting with our emotional elements. As Næss said: "Man has a heart, not only a brain."

To move towards a sustainable coexistence, it is not enough to appeal to abstractions about scientific benefits or devise perfectly efficient compensation schemes. This must also derive from a sense of solidarity with other species — a full recognition that, in Næss's words: "Humans are not alone on this planet."

Interestingly, as a recent study showed, most people living in rural communities in the EU already believe that wolves have a right to exist, corresponding with Næss's relative optimism about the possibility of mixed communities. This is all the more important to remember in light of the worrying political divisiveness in relation to Europe's so-called wolf problem. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Chemical fertilizers swallowing environment and health

By: Dr. Satvavan Saurabh

Fertilizer is one of the important inputs required to increase agricultural production and farmers' income in India. India ranks second in the world and first among South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries in terms of total fertilizer consumption. Changes in government policies related to fertilizer distribution and use have significantly affected nutrient use ratios. Excessive use or misuse or unbalanced use of fertilizer nutrients is causing environmental degradation and climate change.

The compounded harmful effects of unbalanced fertilizer use are not only increasing soil and atmospheric pollution but also affecting water bodies (eutrophication) and posing a threat to biodiversity and human health. Excessive use of fertilizers leads to environmental pollution as their residual and unused amounts will become pollutants for air, water, and soil. It also initiates the process of eutrophication in water bodies, thereby reducing soil quality by killing soil microflora, etc.

Excessive use of fertilizers also increases the acidity of the soil. Excessive use of fertilizers also disturbs the soil ecosystem which ultimately hampers the productivity of the soil. Chemical fertilizers have their uses, but they also have hidden dangers. Whether used in the field or on lawns, applying more than can be used to help plants grow harms the environment and human health. Since the damage caused by chemical fertilizers is often long-term and cumulative, it may be wise to consider alternative and sustainable methods of fertilizing the soil. The environmental problems caused by the use of chemical fertilizers are bad and will take many years to solve. However, an immediate concern with chemical fertilizers is the impact on human health. At the very least, food crops produced using chemical fertilizers may not be as nutritious as they should be. This is because chemical fertilizers are detrimental to plant health, resulting in crops that have low nutritional value. Plants will grow on slightly more than NPK, but they will be missing essential nutrients like calcium, zinc, and iron or will grow less well. It may affect the health of people who consume it. In the

worst case, chemical fertilizers can increase the risk of developing cancer in adults and children and can adversely affect fetal brain development.

At present, there is a great need for balance in the use of fertilizers for the sake of environment and health. Educate farmers about best practices for fertilizer use, including correct amounts, timing, and application techniques. Farmers who gain more knowledge will be better equipped to make decisions. Implement targeted subsidy programs that focus on supporting small and marginalized farmers who face financial constraints. This ensures that subsidies are given to those who need it most.

Promote the implementation of precision agriculture techniques, such as soil testing and nutrient management strategies, to maximize fertilizer use based on particular crop and soil requirements. This reduces the negative impact on the environment and usage. Encourage organic farming methods that naturally increase soil fertility and reduce the need for chemical fertilizers. This may benefit biodiversity and soil health.

Invest in research and development to create and encour-

age the use of nutrient-efficient and environmentally friendly fertilizers. Part of this is examining options that reduce impacts on the environment and human health. Reform fertilizer subsidy policies to ensure that they are efficient and transparent and do not encourage overuse.

Consider moving to a nutrient-based subsidy system that focuses on supporting the application of specific nutrients rather than general fertilizers. Promote the use of INM technologies, which combine nutritional inputs from both organic and inorganic sources. This strategy minimizes its negative impacts on the environment while maintaining soil fertility. Encourage crop rotation and diversification to interrupt the cycle of pests and diseases and reduce the need for continued high fertilizer inputs. To encourage and support the application of ecological principles in agricultural systems through agroecological practices that reduces dependence on external inputs and emphasize sustainability.

Ensure that policies reflect the needs and reality of local communities by involving farmers in community decision-making processes. As a

result, people may feel more accountable and invest in sustainable farming practices. Adoption of best crop and fertilizer management practices, i.e. use of neem oil-coated urea, growing of nutrient efficient genotypes, balanced nutrient applications, adoption of preventive strategies, and organic farming practices facilitated by enabling policies can achieve a reduction of 20-30%.

Can. Use of fertilizer. The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India is making holistic efforts to ensure balanced use of fertilizers for major agricultural, horticultural, and medicinal crops.

India needs to establish a well-defined comprehensive system that enforces stringent policies on balanced fertilizer use, besides facilitating integrated nutrient management and cultivation of efficient crop genotypes with locally available organic manure/crop residues. To make any amendment in the fertilizer subsidy program successful and long-term, the Central Government should also involve all concerned parties such as farmers, state governments, and fertilizer companies in the reform process.

The military later said it was operating in Bureij and asserted that it had located a Hamas training camp

Israeli military says Gaza ground offensive has expanded into urban refugee camps

RAFAH, Dec 27: Israeli forces on Tuesday expanded their ground offensive into urban refugee camps in central Gaza after bombarding the crowded Palestinian communities and ordering residents to evacuate.

Gaza's main telecom provider announced another "complete interruption" of services in the besieged territory. The military's announcement of the new battle zone threatens further destruction in a war that Israel says will last for "many months" as it vows to crush the ruling Hamas militant group after its October 7 attack. Israeli forces have been engaged in heavy urban fighting in northern Gaza and the southern city of Khan Younis, driving Palestinians into ever-smaller areas in search of refuge. The US said Israel's minister for strategic affairs, Ron Dermer, was meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

Despite US calls for Israel to curb civilian casualties and international pressure for a cease-fire, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the military was deepening the fighting.

"We say to the Hamas terrorists: We see you and we will get to you," Netanyahu

said.

Israel's offensive is one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history. More than 20,900 Palestinians, two-thirds women and children, have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, whose count doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants. The agency said 240 people were killed over the past 24 hours.

The UN human rights office said the continued bombardment of middle Gaza had claimed more than 100 Palestinian lives since Christmas Eve. The office noted that Israel had ordered some residents to move there.

Israel said it would no longer grant automatic visas to UN employees and accused the world body of being "complicit partners" in Hamas' tactics. Government spokesman Eylon Levy said Israel would consider visa requests case by case. That could further limit aid efforts in Gaza.

Residents of central Gaza described shelling and airstrikes shaking the Nuseirat, Maghazi and Bureij camps. The built-up towns hold Palestinians driven from their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 war, along with their descendants.

"The bombing was very in-



tense," Radwan Abu Sheitta said by phone from Bureij.

The Israeli military ordered residents to evacuate a belt of territory the width of central Gaza, urging them to move to nearby Deir al-Balah. The UN humanitarian office said the area ordered evacuated was home to nearly 90,000 people before the war and now shelters more than 61,000 displaced people, mostly from the north. The military later said it was operating in Bureij and asserted that it had located a Hamas training camp.

The telecom outage announced by Paltel follows similar outages through much of the war. NetBlocks, a group that tracks internet outages, confirmed that network connectivity in Gaza was disrupted again and "likely to leave most residents offline."

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said several countries had sent proposals to

resolve the conflict following news of an Egyptian proposal that would include a transitional Palestinian government in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. He did not offer details of the proposals.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel faces a "multi-arena war" on seven fronts — Gaza and the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Iran. "We have responded and acted already on six of these," he told the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee. Iranian-backed militia groups around the region have stepped up attacks in support of Hamas.

Iranian-backed militias in Iraq carried out a drone strike on a US base in Irbil on Monday, wounding three American service members, according to US officials. In response, US warplanes hit three locations in Iraq connected to a main militia, Kataib Hezbollah.

Almost daily, Hezbollah and Israel exchange missiles, airstrikes and shelling across the Israeli-Lebanese border. On Tuesday, Israel's military said Hezbollah struck a Greek Orthodox church in northern Israel with a missile, wounding two Israeli Christians, and fired again on arriving soldiers, wounding nine.

"Hezbollah is risking the stability of the region for the sake of Hamas," said Israel's military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari.

In the Red Sea, attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen against commercial ships have disrupted trade and prompted a US-led multinational naval operation to protect shipping routes. The Israeli military said a fighter jet on Tuesday shot down a "hostile aerial target" above the Red Sea that the military asserted was on its way to Israeli territory.

The USS Laboon, a Navy destroyer, and American fighter jets shot down 12 drones, three anti-ship ballistic missiles and two land-attack cruise missiles in the southern Red Sea that were fired by the Yemen-based Houthis over a 10-hour period Tuesday, according to the Pentagon. US Central Command said there was no damage to ships in the area or reported injuries. (AP)

North Korea's Kim boasts of achievements as he opens key year-end political meeting

SEOUL, Dec 27: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un praised what he called achievements and victories that strengthened national power and boosted the country's prestige this year, as he opened a key political meeting to set new policy goals for 2024, state media reported on Wednesday.

Experts said that during this week's year-end plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party, North Korea would likely hype its progress in arms development because the country lacks economic achievements amid persistent international sanctions and pandemic-related economic hardships.

In his opening-day speech at the meeting that began on Tuesday, Kim defined 2023 "as a year of great turn and great change both in name and reality, in which (North Korea) left a great trace in the glorious course of development in the efforts to improve the national power and enhance the prestige of the country," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

KCNA said North Korea achieved a rapid advancement in its defence capabilities this year thanks to the launch of its first military spy satellite in November and the introduction of other sophisticated weapons.

KCNA said North Korea also reported a rare good harvest this year as the country finished building new irrigation facilities ahead of schedule and met major agricultural state objectives. It said that modern streets, new houses and other buildings were built in Pyongyang and elsewhere across the country.

The Workers' Party meeting, expected to last several days, will review state projects from this year and establish new objectives for next year. In recent years, North Korea has published the results of its meeting, including Kim's closing speech, in state media on January 1, allowing him to skip his New Year's Day address.

The meeting comes after North Korea launched its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile, the solid-fuelled Hwasong-18, which is designed to strike the mainland US, into the sea last week. North Korea said the Hwasong-18 launch, the third of its kind this year, was meant to warn the US and South Korea over their confrontational



moves against North Korea.

On November 21, North Korea put its first military spy satellite into orbit, though outside experts question whether it can send militarily useful high-resolution imagery.

The launches of the Hwasong-18 missile and the spy satellite were part of an ongoing run of weapons tests by North Korea since last year. Kim has maintained he was forced to expand his nuclear arsenal to cope with increasing hostilities from the US and its allies toward the North, but foreign experts say he eventually hopes to use an enlarged arsenal to win greater outside concessions when diplomacy resumes.

Last Thursday, South Korean Defence Minister Shin Wonsik told lawmakers that North Korea appeared to be speeding up its weapons testing activities to highlight its achievements in defence sectors because it lacked major progress in the economy and public livelihoods.

In recent years, North Korea's fragile economy was severely battered by pandemic-related curbs, U.S.-led sanctions and the North's own mismanagement. But monitoring groups say there are no signs of a humanitarian crisis or social chaos that could threaten Kim's absolute rule at home.

In August, South Korea's National Intelligence Service told lawmakers that North Korea's economy shrank each year from 2020 to 2022 and that its gross domestic product last year was 12 per cent less than in 2016. (AP)

Sweden moves a step closer to NATO membership after Turkey's parliamentary committee gives approval

ANKARA, Dec 27: The Turkish parliament's foreign affairs committee gave its consent to Sweden's bid to join NATO on Tuesday, drawing the previously nonaligned Nordic country closer to membership in the Western military alliance.

Sweden's accession protocol will now need to be approved in the Turkish parliament's general assembly for the last stage of the legislative process in Turkey. No date has been set.

Turkey, a NATO member, has delayed ratification of Sweden's membership for more than a year, accusing the country of being too lenient toward groups that Ankara regards as threats to its security, including Kurdish militants and members of a network that Ankara blames for a failed coup in 2016.

The Turkish parliament's foreign affairs committee had begun discussing Sweden's membership in NATO last month. But the meeting was adjourned after legislators from Erdogan's ruling party submitted a motion for a postponement on grounds that some issues needed more clarification and that negotiations with Sweden hadn't "matured" enough.

On Tuesday, the committee resumed its deliberations and a large majority of legislators in the committee voted in favor of Sweden's application to join.

Briefing the committee members before the vote, Deputy Foreign Minister Burak Akcapar cited steps Sweden had taken steps to meet Turkish demands, including lifting

restrictions on defense industry sales and amending anti-terrorism laws in ways that "no one could have imagined five or six years ago."

"It is unrealistic to expect that the Swedish authorities will immediately fulfill all of our demands. This is a process, and this process requires long-term and consistent effort," he said, adding that Turkey would continue to monitor Sweden's progress.

Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström welcomed the committee's decision on a message posted on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter.

"The next step is for parliament to vote on the matter. We look forward to becoming a member of NATO," he tweeted.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg also welcomed the development, saying that he counts on Turkey and Hungary "to now complete their ratifications as soon as possible. Sweden's membership will make NATO stronger."

Hungary has also stalled Sweden's bid, alleging that Swedish politicians have told "blatant lies" about the condition of Hungary's democracy. Hungary hasn't announced when the country's ratification may occur.



Earlier this month, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had openly linked ratification of Sweden's NATO membership to the U.S. Congress' approval of a Turkish request to purchase 40 new F-16 fighter jets and kits to modernize Turkey's existing fleet.

Erdogan also called on Canada and other NATO allies to life arms embargoes imposed on Turkey.

The White House has backed the Turkish F-16 request but there is opposition in Congress to military sales to Turkey.

Sweden and Finland abandoned their traditional positions of military non-alignment to seek protection under NATO's security umbrella.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Finland joined the alliance in April, becoming NATO's 31st member, after Turkey's parliament ratified the Nordic country's bid.

NATO requires the unanimous approval of all existing members to expand, and Turkey and Hungary are the only countries that have been holding out.

The delays have frustrated other NATO allies who were swift to accept Sweden and Finland into the alliance. (AP)

Missing pregnant Texas teen and her boyfriend found dead in a car in San Antonio

SAN ANTONIO, Dec 27: A missing pregnant Texas teenager and her boyfriend were found dead in a parked car on Tuesday in San Antonio and police said they may have been there for days.

Savanah Nicole Soto, 18, and Matthew Guerra, 22, were reported missing by police in Leon Valley, a few miles northwest of San Antonio suburb. Two bodies were found in a Kia Optima matching the description of one belonging to the boyfriend and they may have been there for three or four days, Police Chief William P. McManus said at a news conference.

He didn't identify the bodies pending confirmation by the medical examiner but said they were believed to be those of the missing couple. McManus didn't provide other details and said he didn't know whether a weapon had been found in the car.

"What we're looking at right now is a very, very perplexing crime scene," the chief said.

"Detectives right now are looking at this as a possible murder

but we don't know for sure," he said. "Because of the complexity, the complex crime scene, we can't say for sure what we have."

The bodies were found Tuesday afternoon after someone spotted the car in the parking lot of an apartment complex in San Antonio and alerted the family, KENS-TV reported. Relatives then called police.

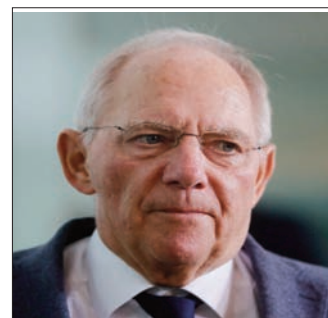
Soto was a week overdue to deliver and was scheduled to have an induced labor at a hospital last Saturday night, her family told the station. Gloria Cordova said she last heard from her daughter on Friday afternoon and got no answer when she knocked on her Leon Valley apartment door Saturday afternoon.

Leon Valley police issued a CLEAR Alert for Soto on Monday and later said her boyfriend also was missing. Soto's family organized a search of the area near her apartment on Christmas night.

"Savanah was so, so happy because she was going to be a mommy. It breaks my heart," her mother told KENS-TV. (AP)

Wolfgang Schaeuble, German elder statesman and finance minister during euro debt crisis, dies at 81

BERLIN, Dec 27: Wolfgang Schaeuble, who helped negotiate German reunification in 1990 and as finance minister was a central figure in the austerity-heavy effort to drag Europe out of its debt crisis more than two decades later, has died. He was 81.



Schaeuble died at home on Tuesday evening, his family told German news agency dpa on Wednesday.

Schaeuble became Chancellor Angela Merkel's finance minister in October 2009, just before revelations about Greece's ballooning budget deficit set off the crisis that engulfed the continent and threatened to destabilize world's financial order.

A longtime supporter of greater European unity, he helped lead a yearslong effort that aimed for deeper integration and a stricter rulebook. But Germany drew criticism for its emphasis on austerity and a perceived lack of generosity.

After eight years as finance minister, Schaeuble cemented his status as an elder statesman by becoming the German parliament's speaker — the last step in a long front-line political career that saw him overcome daunting setbacks. (AP)

Pakistan goes for crucial elections in New Year as ties with India remain frozen

ISLAMABAD, Dec 27: Pakistan-India bilateral relations remained frozen for the fourth year over the vexed Kashmir issue but analysts hope the strained ties could be repaired if Nawaz Sharif becomes the prime minister for a record fourth time in the general elections in February in the absence of his main challenger Imran Khan who is in jail in multiple cases.

The main highlight of the outgoing year was a visit to India by then-foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in May to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation ministerial meet in Goa.

The usual pre-visit hype centred on the question of any meeting between Bilawal and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar. But both sides did not show any desire for such a meeting. Instead, the two leaders in their official speeches at the ministerial huddle, targeted each other's countries through innuendoes and pointed jargon.

Bilawal's choice of words, especially urging the participants not to let terrorism hinder political relations, irked many in India. Jaishankar in his address to the SCO meeting underscored the importance of stopping the issue of cross-border terrorism.

Thus, Bilawal's trip, which was the first by a Pakistani foreign minister to India in almost 12 years, failed to repair the strained ties which remained frozen over the Kashmir issue. Pakistan down-



graded its diplomatic relations with India by expelling its envoy in Islamabad and stopped trade ties following New Delhi's decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019 after abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution. In December, Pakistan's current caretaker government and Pakistani political leaders also reacted sharply to India's Supreme Court upholding the Indian government's decision to abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution.

As the year 2023 fades into history, it leaves a feeble ray of hope that changes may come in the India-Pakistan equation due to the changing regional situation and domestic compulsions.

Pakistan has lately found itself in an enviable position due to the floundering of its gamble in Afghanistan. The Taliban takeover has badly backfired, as the rulers in Kabul have refused to break ties with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pak-

istan militants, who are responsible for the endless bloodbath in the country, forcing Islamabad to recalibrate its stance and options. The immediate result has been the issuance of marching orders for hundreds and thousands of Afghans living illegally. So far, more than 400,000 have been expelled. The orders have not been reversed despite protests and threats by the Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Second, elections are slated to take place on February 8 next year, and former three-time premier Nawaz Sharif, who returned from the UK after a four-year self-exile, is likely to make a record fourth-time ascendancy to power.

As a prelude to his rise to power, 73-year-old Sharif has been acquitted in all corruption cases and enjoys the protocols of a prime minister-designate. According to analysts, Sharif is considered an ardent advocate of having good ties with all neighbours, especially India. He made his intention clear while addressing his party leaders in Lahore on December 7, when he said that repairing diplomatic ties with neighbouring nations, including India, Afghanistan, and Iran, was on the agenda of his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party. "How can you achieve global status when your neighbours are upset with you?" he asked.

Sharif, who had opposed the Kargil war of 1999 and was later

oustied by then-military chief Pervez Musharraf because he was against this "misadventure," said that he was right to oppose it.

"Time has proved us right as far as the Kargil episode is concerned," he said, which may have been well received by his audience in India. Sharif talking about his successes during his previous tenures also included improvement in the ties with India and sought endorsement of his policy towards India by posing a question: "

During whose tenures did two Indian prime ministers visit Pakistan? First Atal Bihari Vajpayee and later Narendra Modi." After his Lahore address, the leading Dawn newspaper quoted a political observer saying Sharif has a record of improving ties with India.

"Improving ties with India has always remained a point of conflict between Nawaz and the establishment in the past. Whenever Nawaz Sharif came to power, he tried to shake hands with India against the wishes of the powers that be," the paper quoted the expert without identifying him.

He enjoys good relations with Prime Minister Narendra Modi who, like him, is in a race to gain power for another term in the next year's elections. Their presence on the two countries' national scenes may help ease bilateral tension.

Pakistan would also like to keep its eastern front quiet to focus on

Cabinet approves widening of Khowai-Harina road in Tripura

Centre earmarks ₹2,486.78 crore for road project, JICA to provide loan assistance

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: The Union cabinet on Wednesday gave its approval for widening of the 135-km stretch of Khowai-Harina road in Tripura, according to an official statement.

The project involves an investment of ₹2,486.78 crore which includes a loan component of ₹1,511.70 crore (JPY 23,129 million), the statement said.

The loan assistance will be given from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) under Official Development Assistance (ODA) scheme, it added.

The project is envisaged to facilitate better road connectivity between various parts of Tripura and to provide alternative access to Assam and Meghalaya from Tripura apart from existing national highway-8.

"The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has given its approval for improve-



ment and widening to two lane with paved shoulder of road from km 101.300 (Khowai) to km 236.213 (Harina) of NH-208, covering a total length of 134.913 kms in Tripura," the statement said.

The statement noted that development of the project stretch of NH-208 would not only improve interstate connectivity between Assam and Tripura via the national highway, but also reduce the transit time and provide safer connectivity for the travellers.

The project stretch also passes very close to the Bangladesh border and it would improve connectivity to Bangladesh through Kailashahar, Kamalpur and Khowai border check post, it said.

The statement said land border trade would also potentially grow with the improvement in road network in the region through development of the project road.

The construction period for the project will be two years, which includes the maintenance of these national highways stretches for five years in the case of flexible pavement and 10 years in the case of rigid pavement after completion of construction. (PTI)

Arunachal's Tirap district gets 'Har Ghar Jal' status

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: The Tirap district in Arunachal Pradesh has been accorded the 'Har Ghar Jal' (pip water connection in every home) status under the central scheme 'Jal Jeevan Mission'.



The Jal Jeevan Mission envisages providing adequate potable drinking water through individual household tap connections to all households in rural areas of the country by 2024.

Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu congratulated the Tirap district administrating for achieving the feat of providing piped water connections in every rural household in the district.

"By getting #Har Ghar Jal By getting #HarGharJal certified status, District Administration of Tirap in Khonsa Division has proved that where there is a will, there is a way," Pema Khandu said on a post in X.

"Ensuring clean water for every home is a remarkable achievement, reflecting Team Arunachal's collective commitment to the well-being of every citizen," he further said in the post.

গোহাৰি



উপৰোক্ত ছোৱালী দুজনী যোৱা ইং ৫/৪/২০১৯ আৰু ১/৭/২-২২
তাৰিখৰ পৰা শিশু সুৰক্ষা সমিতি কামদৰ্শন নিৰ্দেশ অনুসৰি কামদৰ্শন
দিল্লীৰ অন্তৰ্গত শিশুগৃহত বন্দী হয়। ছোৱালী দুজনীৰ এতিয়ালৈ
কোনো ধৰণৰ আইনগত ও চৈৱিক অভিভাৱক বিচাৰি পোৱা নাই।

তেওঁলোকৰ কোনো অভিভাৱক বাতৰি প্ৰকাশৰ চানি (৪) মাহৰ
ভিতৰত উপযুক্ত প্ৰমাণ পত্ৰ সহিত নিম্নোক্ত ঠিকনাত যোগাযোগ
কৰিব যেন। অন্যথা শিশু দুটি আইনগত সংস্থাপনৰ বাবদ কৰা হ'ব।

যোগাযোগৰ ঠিকনাঃ-

দিল্লী শিশু সুৰক্ষা বিষয়াৰ কাৰ্যালয়
আমিনগাওঁ, হাৰো চক
বন্দন বেক কেম্পাচ, কামদৰ্শন
ফোন নং- ৭৭
ফোন নং- ৮৬৩৮৪৩৭০৫২
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Sd/-
District Child Protection Officer
D.C.P.U. Kamrup

Janasanyog /D/15402/23/28-Dec-23

Displaced people stage hunger strike in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 27: Internally Displaced People (IDP) staying at a relief camp in Manipur's Bishnupur district went on a relay-hunger strike after the Manipur government failed to disburse relief compensation it had promised.

The IDP staged the relay-hunger strike on Tuesday under the aegis of the Churachandpur Meitei Ethnic Clash Victims' Committee after no positive response came forth from the government to an ultimatum served by the committee to release the compensation on or before December 25.

Women and children staying at the relief camp opened at a government school premises at Kha Potsangbam of Bishnupur district staged the relay-hunger strike.

A leader of the committee taking part in the strike alleged that despite the ultimatum served by the committee, no positive response came forth from the government side till date.

He alleged that despite the promises made by both the state and the central governments, they have not received any compensation till date.

"If the government continues to ignore their demand, they will launch intense forms of agitations in the coming days", he announced.

He said that even after staying in the relief camps for the last seven months, they are not getting any assistance directly, but through the authorities running these camps.

It has caused many inconveniences as they could not maintain their families directly, he added.

To get rid from these inconveniences, they have been pressing the authorities to provide the assistance, in kind or money to them directly so that they arrange meals for themselves.

IDPs staying at different relief camps also turned up and joined the relay-hunger strike.

Thousands of people displaced from their villages in Churachandpur district after the outbreak of the ethnic clash on May 3 last are staying at various relief camps opened in Bishnupur district. (NNN)

Alternate road connectivity being developed along Indo-China border

KOLKATA, Dec 27: Eastern army commander Lt General Rana Pratap Kalita on Wednesday said that there are plans to construct alternate road-connectivity in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. This is being done to enable India to match China in terms of infrastructure development along the borders between the two countries.

He said the Chinese have an advantage in some areas because they started infrastructure development in these places early.

"In the last five to 10 years, a lot of focus has been on infrastructure development and I am sure in another couple of years, we will be able to match the capability of the PLA (People's Liberation Army of China)," general officer commanding-in-chief, eastern army command, Lt General R P Kalita said in a media interaction at Fort William here.

Asserting that there is still a lot of work to do, Kalita, who is set to retire on December 31, said given the rate at which India is carrying out infrastructure development, it can be achieved by that time frame.

As of now, the PLA has a certain amount of advantage over India as far as infrastructure in certain specific areas is concerned, he added. "Otherwise, we have been able to match," he said.

To a question about priority areas for infrastructure development in border areas for dual civil-military use, Kalita said road connectivity up to the border posts, data communication and mobile connectivity, helipads and airports in the remote areas top the list.

"Because of large distances involved and these areas being prone to landslides,



snowslides and avalanches, we need to depend on helipads and ALGs (advanced landing grounds) to a large measure," he said.

He also highlighted the need for accommodation for people to stay and operate from these areas.

Kalita said plans are afoot to build alternative road connectivity in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

Strategically important north Sikkim was cut off after flash floods in Teesta river on October 4 washed away parts of the arterial national highway 10 at Singtam in the small Himalayan state, which shares its borders with China, Nepal and Bhutan.

Kalita said that there exists some alternative routes but these are not well developed.

He said infrastructure development will not only help the armed forces, but will also be beneficial to the local populace in bettering their lives as well as increasing livelihood opportunities through increase in tourism activities. (PTI)

India will be developed nation by 2047: Rajkumar Ranjan Singh

ITANAGAR, Dec 27: Union minister of state for external affairs and education Rajkumar Ranjan Singh on Wednesday asserted that India will be a developed country by 2047, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Participating at the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra programme at Ziro in Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, the Union minister said that the Modi government has set goals for the empowerment of women, youth, farmers and poor to achieve United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and make India a developed nation by 2047.

India will celebrate the centenary of its independence in 2047.

Calling for 'Jan Bhagidari' in achieving the sustainable goals, the minister said people's participation is the key to transforming India into a strong, self-reliant, knowledge-based developed nation as envisioned, an official re-

lease said.

"Today, we all have taken the pledge to contribute to making India a developed nation by 2047 and I believe we will leave no stone unturned in making our dreams come true," he said.

Singh also distributed subsidy-related tools and equipment along with certificates to beneficiaries under various social empowerment schemes of agriculture, horticulture, dairy development, fisheries, women and child development and civil supplies departments.

Speaking on the occasion, state agriculture minister, Tage Taki said, "I assure you (Singh) that the people of the district will whole-heartedly cooperate in achieving goals of making India a developed nation by 2047."

State education minister, Taba Tedir informed the Union minister that Ziro Plateau has turned into a tourism hub. (PTI)



Centre committed to empowering women, says Union minister in Arunachal

Several schemes, programmes launched for women empowerment in country



ITANAGAR, Dec 27: Union minister of state for railways and textiles, Darshana Vikram Jardosh on Wednesday said the BJP-led NDA government at the centre is committed to empowering women.

Addressing a Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra at Kharsot gram panchayat in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang district, the Union minister said the centre has launched several schemes and programmes in the country for women's empowerment.

Highlighting the success of the Jal Jeevan Mission, Jardosh expressed satisfaction over the scheme's saturation in the border district, an official communiqué informed here.

"The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra has covered over 150,000 villages in the coun-

try," the minister said, while acknowledging the role of information, education and communication (IEC) vans in spreading awareness about various government welfare schemes among citizens.

She said people residing in remote border areas are also getting benefits from the initiative.

Speaking on the occasion, Lungla lawmaker Tsering Lhamu commended the rapid development in her constituency under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Emphasising collective efforts towards national progress, Lhamu thanked the central government for its special focus on border region residents, especially advancement in the road sector, education and healthcare. (PTI)

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT :: DIPHU :: ASSAM

Memo No. DPU/RD/MT/2023/709

Dated Diphu, the 26th December, 2023

List of seized unclaimed vehicles of Karbi Anglong District

SI. NO.	NAME OF OS	TYPE OF VEHICLE	REGD. NO.	ENGINE NO.	CHASIS NO.
1.	Dillai PS	Maruti Zen VX	NL-02C-1617	Illegible	Illegible
2.	Dillai PS	Indica DLS	MP-09H-7324	Illegible	Illegible
3.	Dillai PS	Bolero	MN-03P-0321	Illegible	Illegible
4.	Dillai PS	TATA Sumo	MN-01K-0985	Illegible	Illegible
5.	Dillai PS	Yamaha M cycle	KA-52CA-18	Illegible	Illegible
6.	Dillai PS	Scorpio	AS-01-AR-7885	Illegible	Illegible
7.	Khatkhati PS	Yamaha M Cycle	UK-07-X-1802	Illegible	Illegible
8.	Khatkhati PS	Pulsar M Cycle	NL-04E-7658	Illegible	Illegible
9.	Khatkhati PS	Bolero LMV	MN-05A-5706	Illegible	Illegible
10.	Khatkhati PS	Scooter	AS-03-1632	Illegible	Illegible
11.	Khatkhati PS	Kawasaki M Cycle	NL-07E-1266	Illegible	Illegible
12.	Khatkhati PS	Honda M Cycle	AS-09-E-2605	Illegible	Illegible
13.	Khatkhati PS	LP Truck HMV	NL-01G-9098	Illegible	Illegible
14.	Khatkhati PS	Bolero Pick Up	AS-01T-1705	Illegible	Illegible
15.	Khatkhati PS	Pulsar M Cycle	AS-05F-1278	Illegible	Illegible
16.	Khatkhati PS	Avenger M Cycle	Nil	Illegible	Illegible
17.	Khatkhati PS	Breeza	HP-38F-5823	13A-589036	FB1SKE516482
18.	Khatkhati PS	TATA Ace	WB-15D-5257	Illegible	Illegible
19.	Khatkhati PS	Swift VXI	MN-02C-0655	Illegible	Illegible
20.	Khatkhati PS	Truck	WB-19F-1476	Illegible	Illegible
21.	Manja PS	Hyundai i10	Nil	A91202263	ISICR9406325
22.	Manja PS	Bolero SLX	UP-90F-9137	AA4F19043	0AKAZF81745
23.	Manja PS	Bolero Vehicle	MN-07B-0449	GA94J61867	GAJC92J78323
24.	Manja PS	Hyundai Creta	UK-08AL-9090	BFM434996	UFM035957K
25.	Manja PS	Toyota Corola	DL-4CNA-0891	1ZZ2737949	ZEC206834455
26.	Manja PS	Chevrolet Optra	AS-01AG-5175	051103647K	19DTFHF00618
27.	Manja PS	Baleno	PB-06AT-9514	MN4492594	B22SJL607967
28.	Borpathat PS	TATA Sumo	HT-61-9974	Illegible	Illegible
29.	Borpathat PS	Bolero SLX	WB-20U-3240	Illegible	Illegible
30.	Borpathat PS	Hyundai Verma	MN-01X-5155	Illegible	Illegible
31.	Borpathat PS	Ikon Flair	AS-26-2936	Illegible	Illegible
32.	Borpathat PS	Bolero Pick Up	AS-01GC-8486	Illegible	Illegible
33.	Samelangso PS	Activa 3G	Nil	1-82-220996	504FG2212428
34.	Bakalia PS	Bolero	BR-11M-0746	Illegible	Illegible
35.	Bakalia PS	Bolero Plus	WB-74X-0878	Illegible	Illegible
36.	Bakalia PS	Yamaha M Cycle	Nil	Illegible	0BICZ002826
37.	Bakalia PS	Yamaha M Cycle	Nil	3J5E0008792	4514H0008785
38.	Bakalia PS	Hyundai Vehicle	NL-02C-9350	Illegible	Illegible
39.	Bakalia PS	Honda (Scooty)	AS-09G-3149	Illegible	Illegible
40.	Bakalia PS	Yamaha R15	AS-09H-1200	4E0027377	6713L0023670
41.	Bakalia PS	Alto LX	AS-16-5648	8DN3057508	D81500299427
42.	Bakalia PS	TATA Indigo GLX	AS-01AR-1288	Illegible	Illegible
43.	Diphu PS	M Cycle Discover	Nil	ZPDGZ1849	B24DPH35014
44.	Diphu PS	Hyundai Creta	AS-01DH-7531	Illegible	Illegible
45.	Diphu PS	Fortuner	MH-4BF-8199	Illegible	Illegible
46.	Diphu PS	Baleno	HR-51W-5639	Illegible	Illegible

Sd/-
Superintendent of Police
Karbi Anglong District
Diphu :: Assam

Memo No. DPU/RD/MT/2023/

Dated Diphu, the December, 2023

Mere sloganeering will not fool people, Modi ensured 'nyay': BJP on Cong's 'Bharat Nyay Yatra'

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: The BJP on Wednesday made light of the 'Bharat Nyay Yatra' announced by the Congress as "mere sloganeering" and said it will not "fool" people.

Union minister and senior BJP leader Meenakshi Lekhi asserted that it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has provided justice to everyone by ensuring that development reaches all. Claiming that all kinds of injustice were inflicted on people, including social injustice, she alleged that the Congress ran an unjust system during its many decades in power.

The banking system was a big example of this injustice as bank loans were given due to personal connections to those responsible for NPA (non-performing assets) while Modi has laid the foundation for social justice by including crores of people in the financial system by opening their bank accounts, she said.

BJP national spokesperson Nalin Kohli also hit out at the Congress and said the opposition party cannot fool Indians by coining some slogans. Its leader Rahul Gandhi has been seen in the company of people who advocate "tukde-tukde" (division) of India.

The Congress leader goes abroad seeking foreign interference in the country's democracy, Kohli alleged.

"Real nyay" is what Modi has been doing since 2014 by ensuring that development reaches every corner of the country and everyone, he said and cited measures for electrification of every village, free ration for the poor, building of subsidised homes and provision of Mudra loans to make his point.

"All this is happening because PM Modi cares for people. Mere sloganeering does not change anything. What changes is your intent and commitment to implement good policies which Modi is doing," he said. (PTI)

Israel Embassy blast: Two youths caught on CCTV, security beefed up in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Delhi Police has intensified its probe into a low-intensity blast that occurred near the Israel Embassy here and sources said two youths were caught on camera walking on the road close to the spot shortly before the explosion.

The National Security Guard (NSG) along with forensic experts visited the spot Wednesday morning and collected samples of leaves and grass that they suspected might contain chemicals used in the explosion, police sources said. A team of NSG's dog squad also inspected the spot with two canines, they said.

The team of forensic experts has marked the places with the signage of "A", "B" and "C" from the spot where the low-intensity blast took place on Tuesday.

The experts have used magnetic gadgets to detect the intensity of the blast, said sources.

The officials of Delhi Police Special Cell and local police inspected the spot and a group of paramilitary personnel were deployed there.

An official said as of now the police is contemplating to register an FIR.

The police have also beefed up security in the national capital after the blast near the embassy in Chanakypuri diplomatic enclave, an official said.

Areas around the Israel embassy and Jewish establishments in Delhi have been put under the watch of the security personnel. The local police have been asked to increase the vigil in the national capital, the official said Wednesday.

According to police sources, CCTV footage have been recovered from near the spot in which two youths were found walking on the road, shortly before the blast. "It is yet to be ascertained whether they are suspects," the official added.

Security agencies have collected multiple CCTV footage from the lanes of Abdul Kalam Road and Prithviraj Road. (PTI)

Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (NG) activists damage signboards for not using Kannada

BENGALURU, Dec 27: The Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (Narayana Gowda faction) on Wednesday targeted business establishments in Bengaluru and damaged their signboards and name plates which did not use Kannada.

The activists took out rallies in various parts of the city, especially in the business hubs such as MG Road, Brigade Road, Lavelle Road, UB City, Chamaraajpet, Chickpet, Kempe Gowda Road, Gandhi Nagar, St Marks Road, Cunningham Road, Residency Road and Sadahalli Gate near Devanahalli. The activists claimed that the business establishments were "undermining the official language of Karnataka, which is Kannada."

Many malls, shops, commercial buildings, companies and factories, especially multinational companies, faced the ire of KRV activists, who damaged and defaced signboards and name plates which were not in Kannada.

Later, the agitating members including the KRV convener T A Narayana Gowda, were taken under preventive custody by police. Addressing reporters, Gowda said the name plates and signboards in Karnataka should be in Kannada.

Citing BBMP rules, he said, "60 per cent of the signboards and name plates should be in Kannada. We are not against your business but if you are doing business in Karnataka then you have to respect our lan-

Govt bans Masarat Alam faction of Muslim League Jammu Kashmir

'Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) is declared as an 'Unlawful Association' under UAPA'

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: A faction of Muslim League Jammu Kashmir, led by separatist leader Masarat Alam Bhat, was on Wednesday declared a banned organisation by the government under the stringent anti-terror law.

The ban comes as a response to the outfit's involvement in anti-national and secessionist activities in Jammu and Kashmir, with the intent to create a reign of terror in the country, the Union Home Ministry said.

Union home minister Amit Shah, while announcing the ban under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, emphasised that the Modi government's message is clear that those who act against the unity, sovereignty, and integrity of the nation will face the full wrath of the law and will not be spared.

"The Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) is declared as an 'Unlawful Association' under UAPA. This organisation and its members are involved in anti-national and secessionist activities in J&K, supporting terrorist activities, and inciting people to establish Islamic rule in J&K," Shah said in a post on 'X'.

Masarat Alam Bhat is known for his anti-India and pro-Pakistan propaganda.

Bhat became the chairman of the hardline faction of the Hurriyat Conference following the death of Syed Ali Shah Geelani. Currently, he is incarcerated.



The Union Home Ministry, in a notification, stated that the objectives of the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) are to attain freedom for Jammu and Kashmir from India, merge it with Pakistan, and establish Islamic rule.

The organisation's members have been involved in secessionist activities, raising funds through various sources, including Pakistan and its proxy organisations, to support terrorist activities and sustain stone-pelting on security forces in Jammu and Kashmir.

The home ministry emphasised that the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam

faction) and its members show disrespect towards the constitutional authority and setup of the country.

Their unlawful activities undermine the integrity, sovereignty, security, and communal harmony of India.

Additionally, there have been indications of the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) having linkages with banned terrorist organisations.

The outfit and its members have been supporting terrorist activities with the intent to create terror in the country, thereby endangering its security and public order.

Their anti-national activities demonstrate disregard and disrespect for the constitutional authority and sovereignty of India, the ministry said.

The Central government believes that immediate action is necessary against the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) to curb its unlawful activities, which pose a threat to the territorial integrity, security, and sovereignty of the country.

The outfit is likely to continue advocating the secession of Jammu and Kashmir from India, promoting false narratives, and inciting anti-national sentiments among the people of the region, which could disrupt public safety.

Therefore, exercising the powers conferred by the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act,

1967, the Central government has declared the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) as an unlawful association with immediate effect, the ministry said.

The ban will remain in effect for a period of five years from the date of its publication in the official gazette, unless otherwise ordered.

Bhat has been in jail since 2010 for his alleged involvement in violent protests in the Kashmir valley.

His release in 2015 became the first impediment in PDP-BJP alliance when the then chief minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed got him released immediately after taking oath.

Under pressure from its ally BJP, the then state government had to rearrest him on charges of sedition and waging war against the state after allegedly raising pro-Pakistan slogans at a rally.

Bhat was accused of playing a key role in organising violent protests in Kashmir in 2010, which resulted in the deaths of over 100 youths.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the guidance of Home Minister Amit Shah, the government has maintained a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, the ministry said.

This year alone, four organisations have been banned under the anti-terror law UAPA, and six individuals have been declared as terrorists, according to a home ministry official. (PTI)

Parliament has turned into dark, deep chamber: Derek O'Brien

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien on Wednesday said Parliament has turned into a "deep, dark chamber," as he accused the central government of maintaining silence on the security breach.

In a post on X, O'Brien said that unlike now, after the 2001 Parliament attack, the then prime minister and home minister had given statements in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

"2001 Parliament attack: In 3 working days, a full discussion in Parliament. PM gave statement in Rajya Sabha, Home Minister in Lok Sabha," O'Brien said.

"2023 breach: GOVT SILENT. 146 MPs suspended for demanding discussion & statement from Home Minister. Parliament turned into a deep, dark chamber," he said. O'Brien added that in 2001, just three working days after the attack on Parliament, Rajya Sabha had held a discussion.

"The Minister of External Affairs, speaking on behalf of the Home Minister, provided a detailed statement. The discussion lasted two days from 18th to 19th December, and then Prime Minister Vajpayee delivered a statement on the second day. Home Minister L K Advani addressed the Lok Sabha on 19 December, 2001,"

O'Brien told PTI.

On December 13, the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament attack, two people jumped into the chamber of the Lower House of Parliament from the public gallery during the Zero Hour, released yellow gas from canisters they had been hiding in their shoes, and shouted slogans before they were overpowered by MPs.

Following the incident, opposition MPs demanded a discussion on the breach, and a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah.

As many as 100 opposition MPs in Lok Sabha, and 46 in Rajya Sabha, were suspended during the session for indiscipline as they raised their demand vociferously, leading to frequent adjournments.

O'Brien, who was the first Rajya Sabha MP to be suspended, also had a breach of privilege motion moved against him for staying in the House after being suspended. The matter has been referred to the Privileges committee of the House.

As per Parliament records, after the December 2001 attack on Parliament, a debate was held in both the Houses, and then home minister LK Advani had replied to the debate, while prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee made interventions in both Houses. (PTI)

Kharge, Rahul hold meeting with Cong leaders from Andhra Pradesh

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: The top Congress leadership held a meeting with leaders of the party's Andhra Pradesh unit on Wednesday to discuss the strategy for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in the southern state. The meeting that was attended by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi and other top leaders of the party comes amid a series of such deliberations being held by the Congress high-command with its state leaders ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Taking to X, Kharge said it was an important strategy meeting where the leaders shared their thoughts on strengthening the party for the general election.

"Everyone believes that ground situation has drastically changed after govern-



ment formation in Karnataka and Telangana. Every leader and worker is going to work hard and re-establish the bond which the people of Andhra Pradesh once shared with the Congress party," Kharge said on the microblogging platform. Talking to reporters, Congress's Andhra Pradesh in-charge Manickam Tagore said

the meeting went on for more than two hours and the party's plans for the Lok Sabha election as well as the state Assembly polls were discussed.

"We invite all voices who believe in the Congress's ideology to join the party to rebuild Andhra Pradesh, a dream which got lost because of the (Narendra) Modi govern-

ment's discrimination. Unkept promises of the Centre in the last 10 years have destroyed Andhra Pradesh's development. The Congress is ready to fight the battle of 2024," Tagore said.

Asked if the party will go for an alliance in the southern state for the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls, he said a decision in this regard will be taken by the top leadership.

Tagore also said seat sharing was not discussed at the meeting.

Andhra Pradesh has 25 Lok Sabha seats, of which 22 are with the Yuvaana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP), while the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) holds the remaining three. The YSRCP is also in power in the state and has 147 of the 175 MLAs in the Assembly. (PTI)

K'taka minister Kharge appeals to disgruntled BJP MLA Yatnal to expose Covid irregularities

DHARWAD (K'TAKA), Dec 27: Karnataka minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday appealed to the disgruntled BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal to make the documents public related to the alleged ₹ 40,000 crore scam in Covid-19 management during the previous BJP government in the state.

The minister said Yatnal should at least hand over the details to the Justice John Michael Cunha Commission of Inquiry to probe into the coronavirus related irregularities. Kharge, who is the son of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, suspected the involvement of the Central government in the Covid scam.

"Yatnal has said that if he is expelled from the BJP then he will release all the documents (related to Covid mismanagement). I appeal to him through the media to please make the documents public, keeping in mind the people of Karnataka and to safeguard their interest. Or at least share them with Justice John Michael Cunha Committee Commission of Inquiry," Kharge, who holds IT/BT and Rural Development and Panchayat Raj portfolios, told reporters.

He said people know that Yatnal is upright but he has to bring his honesty before the commission.

"If you (Yatnal) are not interested in handing it over to the commission then share it with the media because it is a Rs 40,000 crore scam. There is no humanity if they (previous BJP government) made money from corpses," Kharge said reacting to BJP MLA's statement.

Yatnal on Tuesday warned that he would expose the alleged irregularities of ₹ 40,000 crore that happened during the BJP government in Karnataka led by B S Yediyurappa at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic if he was expelled from the party. The MLA said, "They (the BJP government in Karnataka) have done everything (huge corruption during Covid). Let them serve me a notice and try to expel me from the party, I will expose them."

Stating that these allegations were not by the Congress but a BJP MLA and a former union minister, Kharge asked the BJP state president B Y Vijayendra and opposition leader in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka to clarify the charges.

To a question why the Central level leaders were silent on the irregularities in Covid management, Kharge claimed they too would have got their share.

The minister added that the title of '40 per cent commission' given to the previous BJP government was not from the Con-

gress but from their own (BJP) party leaders and Karnataka State Contractors' Association. "Did we ask them to make money out of corpses? Even though we were alleging that there was large scale corruption in the procurement of medical equipment, the then Speaker said the investigation should not continue further and it is illegal."

"Have you ever heard that the Speaker wrote to the public accounts committee? It is quite visible that everyone's involvement is there - Central as well as the state government," Kharge said.

Asked when the inquiry report was expected, the minister said the commission has not yet submitted the report because it is still inquiring into it since it pertains to a massive ₹ 40,000 crore irregularity.

Kharge said these charges were serious because Yatnal has been repeatedly saying it. He added that Yatnal had been accusing Vijayendra of being a 'Shadow CM' when his father B S Yediyurappa was the Chief Minister.

Yatnal, who has launched a tirade against Yediyurappa and his family, especially after his second son B Y Vijayendra was made the BJP state president, said there was large-scale corruption in coronavirus management during the BJP government. (PTI)

Indo-Nepal under tight vigil ahead of Modi's Ayodhya visit

MAHARAJGANJ (UP), Dec 27: The state police and the Sashastra Seema Bal along with intelligence agencies have increased vigil on the India-Nepal border in view of the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ayodhya, officials said on Wednesday.

The tight watch is being maintained on the porous border of India-Nepal ahead of Modi's arrival for the inauguration of Shri Ram Airport in Ayodhya on 30 December.

The grand Ram Temple is slated for inauguration on January 22.

"To prevent the movement of unwanted elements in the area, the security agencies have been asked to ascertain the identities of people before allowing them to cross over through the border," Deputy Inspector General, Sashastra Seema Bal, Gorakhpur, Akhileshwar

Singh said.

"Cameras have been put on SSB posts besides the main roads. Dog squads and one platoon of women vigil have also been deployed. Metal detectors have been installed at Sonauli and Thuthibari outposts on the Indo-Nepal border," Singh said.

In addition to this, security agencies such as Indo-Nepal Border Police, Local Intelligence Unit (LIU) and intelligence agencies have been asked to be on alert on the border, Singh added.

Intelligence units have also been asked to keep an eye on religious places along the border.

Police and SSB in Maharajganj, Siddharthanagar, Shravasti and Balrampur districts, which share the border with Nepal, have been put on high alert, the DIG said (PTI)

Ammonia gas leaks from subsea pipeline of TN fertiliser plant, several people hospitalised

CHENNAI, Dec 27: An ammonia gas leak from a subsea pipeline linked to a private fertiliser manufacturing unit in north Chennai has caused illness among local residents, with about 25 people hospitalised.

Officials on Wednesday reported symptoms such as shortness of breath and nausea among the affected people, who are currently undergoing treatment. Following the leak, at about 11.45 pm on December 26, an odour that caused severe discomfort to people spread through air in north Chennai areas. A number of persons fainted after experiencing 'burning sensation' in their throat and chest. Many people who were asleep woke up in panic and scurried out of their homes and alerted neighbours and all of them soon reached the main roads unsure of what to do.

For the people of north Chennai, it was double whammy, as they were affected by the recent oil spill and now the ammonia gas leak. About 25 people including children, who were residents of areas close to the fertiliser manufacturing facility were hospitalised. Most of them experienced unease, shortness of breath, nausea, and faintness.

According to representatives of fish-



ermen villages, Chinna Kuppam, Periya Kuppam, Netaji Nagar, Burma Nagar in north Chennai were among the affected neighbourhoods.

People had a tough time finding vehicles midnight and used whatever vehicles were available like autorickshaws and motorcycles to reach hospitals.

An elderly woman fainted after bouts of vomiting and she was rushed to a hospital in an autorickshaw. Buses and ambulances were also deployed by au-

thorities to immediately bring affected people to hospitals many kilometers away from the location of the fertiliser unit. Some fishermen and local people who happened to be on the beachfront at midnight noticed unusual sound and water gushing out from select spots above the subsea pipeline.

Health Minister Ma Subramanian visited the Government Stanley Medical College Hospital here and spoke to people admitted from gas-hit areas and interacted with hospital authorities.

Coromandel International Limited, a Murugappa group company said in a statement: "As part of routine operation, we noticed abnormality on 26/12/2023 at 23.30 hrs in the ammonia unloading subsea pipeline near shore-side, outside the plant premises. Our Standard Operating Procedure activated immediately, and we have isolated ammonia system facility and brought the situation to normalcy in the shortest time."

During the process, the company said, "few members in the local community expressed discomfort and were given medical attention immediately. All are safe and normalcy is restored. We have informed relevant authorities about the incident. Coromandel has always adhered to the highest safety standards and emergency response system."

After the company officials 'addressed' the issue, police personnel pacified people who gathered on roads and requested them to go back to their homes as 'there is no problem'. Agitated residents, however, gathered in front of the fertiliser manufacturing company's premises this morning and raised slogans and demanded the unit's immediate closure. (PTI)

VIKSIT BHARAT SANKALP YATRA

PM Modi interacts with diverse group of beneficiaries

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: From farmers to self-help group members, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday interacted with a diverse group of beneficiaries of various government schemes as part of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra.

The yatra is being undertaken across the country with the aim to attain saturation of flagship schemes of the government through ensuring that the benefits of these schemes reach all targeted beneficiaries in a time bound manner.

Prime Minister Modi connected with a diverse group of beneficiaries participating in the Sankalp Yatra through video conferencing.

The event saw thousands of participants from various corners of the country, including Union ministers, MPs, MLAs, and local representatives.

According to an official statement, the prime minister began by acknowledging Sapna Prajapati from Rajasthan's Kota, a beneficiary of the SVANidhi scheme who played a crucial role in mask-making during the pandemic.

Praising her for her digital business transactions, PM Modi highlighted her group's promotion of millets, an initiative applauded by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla.

The PM encouraged women en-



trepreneurs like Sapna to leverage the Vishwakarma Scheme and contribute to the success of 'Modi ki Guarantee ki Gaadi'.

"Your collective 'Matru Shakti' will take you to new heights and I ask all you 'didis' to make 'Modi ki Guarantee ki Gaadi' a great success by telling people about the benefits they can avail," Modi was quoted as saying in the statement.

Continuing the engagement, he greeted Harikrishnan, a farmer from Thiruvallur, Tamil Nadu, who has successfully embraced modern agricultural practices.

The farmer, a beneficiary of various government schemes, including

Ayushman Bharat Yojana, commended the introduction of Nano Urea and the support provided by the government.

Modi reiterated the government's commitment to stand with farmers and appreciated their adoption of modern techniques, according to the statement.

Further, the PM extended greetings to Gurdev Singh from Haridwar, involved in both farming and fisheries.

Singh shared his success story under the Matsya Sampada Yojna, which doubled his income.

Emphasizing the importance of animal husbandry, fisheries, and the

blue revolution, Modi reiterated the government's commitment to augmenting farm income through innovative practices.

In another inspiring story, Rubina Khan from Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, a member of a self-help group (SHG), shared her entrepreneurial journey. With a loan from her SHG, Rubina transitioned from a labourer to a successful businesswoman, contributing to pandemic relief efforts by making masks and sanitiser.

The prime minister applauded her confidence and pledged to make two crore women from SHGs 'lakhpati', emphasising the role of SHGs in fostering self-reliance.

The session continued with Arjun Singh, a tea garden worker from Tripura, who transformed his life through various government schemes like PM Awas, Ujjwala, and free toilets.

Expressing satisfaction, Modi highlighted the ease with which beneficiaries like Arjun are availing the benefits, reflecting the success of the government's initiatives.

The prime minister underscored the importance of the confidence displayed by women entrepreneurs and beneficiaries, emphasizing that their empowerment is integral to making the nation self-reliant. (PTI)

Rajnath reviews security situation along LoC

JAMMU, Dec 27: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday visited the border districts of Rajouri and Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir and reviewed the security situation along the Line of Control (LoC), officials said. Singh also carried out a firsthand assessment of the ongoing counter-terror operations in the two districts, they said.

The defence minister's visit comes nearly a week after four soldiers were killed when their vehicles were ambushed by terrorists in the Surankote area of Poonch on December 21.

Accompanied by Army chief General Manoj Pande and General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi and Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, the defence minister flew to Rajouri district this afternoon immediately after his arrival here.

On his return from Rajouri, Singh visited Raj Bhawan and held a closed door security review meeting, the officials said.

They said the defence minister was briefed on the prevalent security situation, counter-infiltration grid and operational preparedness.

The aspects associated with the operating challenges were discussed by Singh with the commanders on ground, the officials said, adding he called for professional conduct and due diligence while carrying out operations.

Singh expressed satisfaction for the high level of synergy between the security forces, civil administration, J&K Police, Central Armed Police Forces and other security agencies in projecting a clear message of resoluteness towards improving of the security environment that is conducive to fostering a new era of development in the Union territory. (PTI)

Three new laws have unshackled Indian Criminal Justice system from colonial legacy, says VP Dhankhar



HYDERABAD, Dec 27: The three new laws -- the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act -- have unshackled the Indian Criminal Justice system from its colonial legacy while keeping the focus on justice rather than punishment, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar said on Wednesday.

Speaking after releasing a postal special cover to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of legal luminary late Justice Konda Madhav Reddy, former Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh and Mumbai High Courts, Dhankhar here said he is happy to note that all three organs -- the judiciary, the executive and the legislature are performing commendably and catalysing the unprecedented rise of Bharat.

During the past decade, significant strides have been made in the judicial system, emphasising digitalisation through the eCourts project and the National Judicial Data Grid, he said.

These have not only enhanced transparency and accessibility, but have resulted in reduction in pen-

dency of cases, the vice-president added.

Major legal reforms included the establishment of commercial courts and amendments to arbitration laws, aiming at faster dispute resolution, he said, adding that initiatives such as the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) have been taken to strengthen legal aid mechanisms for the underprivileged sections of society, ensuring access to justice for all.

"When we come to the legislature, just a few days ago, three new (criminal code) bills were introduced. They got the assent of the President of India," he said.

"The new laws -- the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act -- have unshackled the Indian Criminal Justice system from its colonial legacy, while keeping the focus on justice rather than punishment. It is a monumental, revolutionary change from 'Dhanda vidhan' to 'Nyaya vidhan'," Dhankhar said.

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday gave assent to the criminal justice bills, turning them into

laws. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act will replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872.

Lauding the passing of the Women's Reservation Bill by Parliament, which seeks to provide 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, the vice-president said it was another landmark in our legal landscape.

This law marks a long overdue measure that will give women their rightful place in our democracy, and amplify the voice of one half of our society, he said.

According to him, India's digital penetration has been so very impactful that the digital transactions in 2022 were four times the combined transactions of USA, UK, France and Germany.

The per capita internet consumption of the country was more than that of the USA and China taken together while India's UPI (unified payment interface) has been adopted even by countries like Singapore, Dhankhar said.

The most transformative steps have been undertaken by the government through public participation, highlighting the strength of our democracy, he remarked.

From undertaking a nationwide 'Swachh Bharat' campaign to bringing nearly a billion people online through a path-breaking digital public infrastructure push, the face of Bharat "we are witnessing today is markedly different from what we have seen even a decade ago," Dhankhar noted.

Telangana Governor Tamlilaisai Soundararajan and Telangana High Court Chief Justice Alok Aradhe were among the dignitaries present. (PTI)

Mann attacks Centre for not including Punjab's tableau for Republic Day parade

CHANDIGARH, Dec 27: Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday hit out at the BJP-led central government over non-inclusion of the state's tableau for the Republic Day parade, alleging the Centre has discriminated against the state.

He said that like the last year, this year too, Punjab's tableau for the Republic Day parade on January 26 will not be included.

"The Centre has discriminated against Punjab," alleged Mann, adding that both Punjab and Delhi are not on the list whose tableaux have been selected.

Mann was addressing a press conference in Chandigarh after visiting Fatehgarh Sahib.

Mann said they received a letter from the Centre on Wednesday, which shows that Punjab's tableau has not been included.

When asked about the reason for the rejection, Mann said they have only been informed about the list of states whose tableaux have been selected.

"Every year on the occasion of Republic Day, through their tableaux various states showcase their

culture and traditions," he said.

He said that this year the Centre had written a letter to the state "asking our willingness regarding the state's tableau. On August 4, 2023, we wrote a letter of willingness and also mentioned that not just in January 2024, but for 2025 and 2026 also, we expressed our willingness that our tableau be included".

We proposed three tableaux from Punjab for short-listing and even gave them designs for this, and our officers also held meetings in this regard with the Centre.

"Punjab Kurbaniya ate Shahadatan Da Itihaas, the second tableau proposed was the Nari Shakti -- Mai Bhago, the first lady warrior of Sikhism and the third was Punjab da Ameer Virsa de Odi Peshkari," he said.

Among the selected states include Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Odisha, Manipur, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Goa, Meghalaya, Ladakh, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, said Mann. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Arabinda confident of resolving

agreement to the pro-talks faction in April this year. Another round of discussions were held with the faction in New Delhi in August. In October, Chetia had said they had sent their suggestions regarding the draft proposals to the Centre. The ULFA was formed at Rang Ghar in Sivasagar in 1979 and was banned in 1990 when it started an armed conflict against the state.

The outfit split into two factions in 2011 when the pro-talk faction led by Rajkhowa decided to return to the state from abroad and participate in peace talks while the other group ULFA (Independent), led by its commander Paresh Barua, was opposed to negotiations unless the 'sovereignty' clause was included.

The pro-talk ULFA had submitted a 12-point charter of demands on which the talks should be held and these include constitutional and political arrangements and reforms, protection of the identity and material resources of the local indigenous population of Assam, financial and economic arrangements, status report on missing ULFA leaders and cadres, amnesty, reintegration and rehabilitation of ULFA members and affected people, settlement of all royalties on mines/minerals including oil on a retrospective compensatory basis and rights of independent use for a sustainable economic development in future.

The demand of the pro-talk faction also encompassed the right to engage in specific relationships with foreign countries for promotion of mutual trade, commerce and cultural relationship, restoration, protection, preservation and spread of indigenous culture of Assam.

The chief minister on assuming office in 2021 had sent out an olive branch to the ULFA(I) for talks with the latter announcing a ceasefire of operations. However, recently the outfit carried out three blasts in Tinsukia, Sivasagar and Jorhat which they claimed was in response to the 'arrogant' attitude of Director General of Police G P Singh.

The police retaliated by injuring five persons, two suspected ULFA(I) linkmen and three youth who were allegedly on their way to join the outfit, in shoot-outs. (PTI)

'Availability of weapons a big

numerous coordinated operations and a number of weapons and ammunition have been recovered in the last five-six months. Kalita said the conflict between the junta and rival forces in Myanmar has spread to areas closer to India's border. He said whenever there are violent activities between Myanmar Army and opposing forces, civilian population from the villages located close to the border come to the Indian side seeking refuge.

The Army commander said while some of them return after violence abates, others prefer to stay put.

Kalita said state police, supported by the Assam Rifles, have taken their biometric details and their data is being compiled.

"But definitely this continuous influx and movement of population across the borders causes some sort of anxiety in terms of contraband and weapons smuggling," he said.

He said these challenges are accentuated by difficult terrains between India and Myanmar, making it difficult for the armed forces to dominate every inch of the border.

Kalita said efforts are being made by the Centre and the state government to engage both the communities. Stating that dialogue is already taking place at the political and civil society levels of the two communities, he said, "I think that is the only way forward through which you can look for a permanent solution." (PTI)

Himanta orders probe into suicide of

in 2019 before surrendering along with Pranjal Jyot of Sivasagar. The police claim to have found incriminating evidence on Gogoi's phone, claiming his indirect involvement in the grenade blast case.

Govt working to make cooperative

that it is his dream to make 2 crore women 'lakhpati'. The prime minister said his government is working to build lakhs of storage facilities to help farmers. (PTI)

Union minister asks public to

schemes", she said. Asserting that the Prime Minister wants people to get VIP treatment, the minister claimed all steps have been taken to ensure that benefits reach people.

She said in the last two days, as many as 8,000 families got enrolled under Ayushman Bharat, a health insurance scheme. Another 9,000 families have got cooking gas connections over the past couple days in the state. (PTI)

Suspecting 'possible terror attack',

located near the embassy, teams of Delhi Police's Special Cell, bomb disposal squad and fire department rushed to the spot. An almost three-hour-long search operation was carried out in the area.

A National Investigation Agency (NIA) team also examined the site, a senior police officer in New Delhi said. After the incident, security was further beefed up around the embassy and other Israeli establishments, according to officials. Earlier this month, the NSC warned Israel to reconsider all their travel abroad and called on those who do need to travel overseas to avoid outward displays of their Jewish and Israeli identities amid rising antisemitism around the world amidst the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas militant group in Gaza. In the past, too, the Israeli embassy and its staff have come under attack in New Delhi.

There was an explosion outside the Israeli embassy in 2021 in which cars were damaged, but no casualties were reported. In February 2012, the wife of an Israeli security staff at the embassy was injured in an attack on her car in New Delhi.

Security has been high around the Israel embassy in New Delhi since the war between Israel and Hamas began earlier this year, security officials said. (PTI)

India-Russia relations reflect geopolitical

relationship from which both India and Russia have benefitted enormously," Jaishankar said while responding to a question during a joint media appearance along with Lavrov after talks.

"My presence here today and the fact that all the developments that I have pointed out including our growing trade investments, our military-technical cooperation, our connectivity projects all of this will give you a good sense of the importance and value that we attach to the relationship," he added.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Jaishankar said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin have been in frequent contact. "Our relations have been very strong, very steady. And I think we have lived up to a special and privileged strategic partnership. This year we have already met six times, and this is our 7th meeting," he said. During today's meeting, the two sides focussed on bilateral cooperation in different spheres, adjusting it to changing circumstances and demands.

Jaishankar said the two sides have seen different expressions of their cooperation this year. "I will also mention our presence at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum at the Far Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok at the meetings. And on the bilateral economic cooperation the India, Russia intergovernmental commission, which I had co-chaired with Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov," he said.

"We are very glad to see continued progress and we expect a strong Russian participation at the Vibrant Gujarat meeting in January," he added. On his part, Lavrov said the relations between India and Russia are very long and very good and it's good to see that they're moving on consistently in the present moment.

On Tuesday, Jaishankar held a "comprehensive and productive" meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Manturov on the bilateral economic cooperation during which they witnessed the signing of some "very important" agreements related to the construction of the future power-generating units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu. The ties between India and Russia remained strong notwithstanding Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. India has not yet condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and it has been maintaining that the crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue. India's import of Russian crude oil has gone up significantly despite increasing disquiet over it in many Western countries.

"The time-tested India-Russia partnership has remained stable and resilient and continues to be characterised by the spirit of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a press release ahead of Jaishankar's visit. (PTI)

Prez Murmu urges extensive organ

ILBS has carved its own niche in a span of only 13 years on the strength of world-class efficiency and integrity.

She was happy to note that more than 1,000 liver transplants and approximately 300 renal transplants have been performed at the ILBS. Murmu stated that India is becoming an international healthcare hub on the strength of institutions like ILBS by providing world-class health services at relatively low cost.

The President said that with the integration of life sciences and modern information technology, revolutionary changes are taking place in the field of healthcare. She termed the establishment of Artificial Intelligence Learning Unit in ILBS as a timely initiative. Murmu urged the ILBS to continue to work in the field of research along with providing treatment. (PTI)

Study highlights urban environmental aspects key to child development

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Air and noise pollution, overcrowding and limited green space are some of the key areas of environmental exposure in early life that can impact development, new research has found. The study, led by University of Technology Sydney, Australia, and analysing 235 research articles from across 41 countries, has highlighted such key aspects of environmental exposure in childhood influencing growth.

The first 2000 days of life (0-5 years) are recognised as a critical period impacting physical, cognitive, social and emotional health outcomes in later life.

Other exposure factors crucial to child development include atmosphere, chemical and metal exposure, neighbourhood-built features, community support, and residential living environment, the researchers said in their study published in the journal Public Health Research and Practice.

The findings help understand the health risks of urban living, which can further inform the design and planning of urban environments to improve these outcomes, as it is expected that by 2030, more than



60 per cent of the world's population will live in urban areas, the team said.

"Urban planners and policymakers need to recognise the role that everyday urban environments provide as a foundation for health and wellbeing," said lead researcher Erica McIntyre from the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney.

One of the concerns around urban living that the study investigated the most was that of air pollution. The researchers found that exposure to pollutants like particulate matter and toxins emitted

from vehicles and industry can have long-term consequences on neurological development, in addition to leading to respiratory problems such as asthma.

They also found that lack of access to parks, gardens, and natural surroundings can deprive young children of crucial sensory experiences and opportunities for exploration, thus impacting physical and cognitive development.

The team said the findings highlighted the need to better understand aspects of urban design - such as access to green space - that can promote mental health, given

that these issues are increasing in prevalence in children and teenagers.

"Incorporating child-friendly designs, advocating for more green spaces, noise and pollution-reduction measures, and walkable neighbourhoods that encourage physical activity are just some of the measures that help create environments conducive to healthy child development," said McIntyre. Further, the fast-paced nature of city life often leaves parents and carers feeling disconnected and overwhelmed, lacking the vital support networks crucial for healthy infant development. Thus, the families face challenges such as social isolation and limited community support, the researchers said.

"Programs providing parenting classes, playgroups, and community centres can foster connections and support networks crucial for navigating the challenges of parenting," said McIntyre.

She also emphasised the need for further research, policy advocacy, and community involvement to address the challenges of raising children in urban settings. (PTI)

KARAN JOHAR CONFIRMS PROJECT WITH SALMAN KHAN ON SUPERSTAR'S 58TH BIRTHDAY



MUMBAI, Dec 27: Filmmaker Karan Johar on Wednesday shared a heartwarming note for superstar Salman Khan on his 58th birthday and confirmed that they will be collaborating on an upcoming project.

In an Instagram post, Johar shared the story of how Salman became a part of the cast of his directorial debut "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", featuring Shah Rukh Khan, Kajol and Rani Mukerji.

"Twenty-five years ago, I was at a party lost and confused... A massive movie star came up to me and asked me why I was standing by a corner... I told him I had been to several actors for a part but was politely rejected... the superstars sister is close to me so he graciously said she had spoken highly

of my script and that I should meet him the next day to narrate the film to him," Johar recalled.

The 50-year-old director said he never imagined that he would get to narrate the script to the actor.

"I went with a prayer in my heart and a deep desire for a miracle and narrated the first of the film like my life depended on it. He looked at me at the interval point (by then I was looking like I was at the Sahara desert and water could keep me alive) kindly offered me water and said 'I'm on!!!"

"I was perplexed and said but 'you are in the second half, you haven't heard it?' He said 'I love your father and my sister will kill me if I don't do this movie' and that's how Salman Khan was in KKHH'," Johar said.

In the 1998 romantic drama, Salman had an extended cameo as Aman, the fiancé of Kajol's Anjali who graciously lets go of her in the end. Johar thanked Salman's Alvira Khan Agnihotri and also credited his father Yash Johar's goodwill in the industry that helped him cast Salman in the movie.

"Gestures and stories like this just don't happen today! Happy birthday Salman! So much love and respect for you always... Also 25 years later we will finally have a story to tell again... not saying any more than that happy happy birthday," Johar concluded the post. The filmmaker is yet to share the details of his project with Salman. It is not known if Johar will be directing the project or only serve as a producer. (PTI)

Oscar-winning 'Parasite' actor Lee Sun-kyun found dead at 48

SINGAPORE, Dec 27: South Korean actor Lee Sun Gyun, known for his roles in the Academy Award-winning film Parasite, has tragically passed away, according to South Korean authorities. The actor was involved in a drug case and had been under investigation since October. On December 27, police responded to an emergency call reporting an unconscious person in a parked car at Waryong Park. The caller, who identified herself as Lee Sun Gyun's wife, mentioned that he had left home after leaving a note indicating suicidal intentions.

The 48-year-old actor, renowned for his work in films like Sleep, Coffee Prince, and A Hard Day, had faced public scrutiny due to the drug case and had withdrawn from several upcoming projects. Earlier in the morning, police confirmed the individual's identity as Lee Sun Gyun, and evidence such as burning charcoal briquettes in his car pointed to suicide. The actor had been investigated by the police three times for alleged drug use.

Authorities reported that Lee Sun Gyun left behind either a suicide note or a 'will' for his wife. The police received a call at night from his wife, stating that her husband had left the house after writing a note that resembled a will. Despite facing uncertainties in the drug case, a detailed analysis by the National Institute of Forensic Science confirmed the absence of drugs in his system following a reagent test. Lee Sun Gyun had sought a lie detector test on the 26th in an effort to clear his name. Several other industry A-listers, including BIGBANG's G-Dragon, had also faced drug allegations but were cleared after tests. (AGENCIES)



NOT PARTS, WHOLE 2023 WAS BEST: SHAH RUKH KHAN

Glen Powell on 'Twisters' spin-off: It's a completely original story

LOS ANGELES, Dec 27: Hollywood star Glen Powell says his upcoming spin-off movie to blockbuster movie "Twisters" is a "completely original story".

"Minari" maker Lee Isaac Chung is directing the film from a script by "The Revenant" writer Mark L Smith. The movie will also feature Daisy Edgar-Jones.

The 1996 original, starring Helen Hunt and Bill Paxton, centered around a separated storm-chasing couple who reunite to track the storm of the century in Oklahoma.

Powell, known for movies "Everybody Wants Some!!" and

"Top Gun: Maverick", said he recently completed filming the new "Twisters" film, which is a standalone story.

"It's definitely not a reboot. We're not trying to recreate the story from the first one. It's a completely original story. There are no characters from the original movie back, so it's not really a continuation.

"It's just its own standalone story in the modern-day. I don't think anyone has brought up this movie in forever, but talking to people, they're like, 'That was one of my favourite movies growing up. That movie terrified me'," the 35-year-old actor said.

Powell recalled the advice he got from Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise when they were working on the 2022 hit "Top Gun: Maverick", which was a sequel to Cruise's 1986 movie "Top Gun".

"When I was working on 'Top Gun', Cruise brought up a really interesting thing, where he's like, 'If you want to make movies of a certain size and scope and scale, you have to figure out what can connect with everyone around the world in every territory.'

"And humans versus weather is a very universal idea—how powerful we really are in the face of these cataclysmic forces," the actor said.

The new "Twisters" movie, backed by Universal and Amblin Entertainment, will also feature Anthony Ramos, Brandon Perea and Daryl McCormack. (PTI)



MUMBAI, Dec 27: Superstar Shah Rukh Khan, who reclaimed his 'King of Bollywood' title in 2023 with three consecutive hits in "Pathaan", "Jawan" and "Dunki", on Wednesday said the whole year was the best for him.

The actor held an #AskSRK session with his fans on X as the comedy drama completed a week of its release. It has earned over Rs 250 crore in gross box office collections since its debut last Thursday.

Directed by Rajkumar Hirani, "Dunki" is a saga of friendships, borders, nostalgia for home and love. The film is Shah Rukh's third release for 2023 after "Pathaan" and "Jawan".

When a fan asked what part of 2023 was best, Shah Rukh replied: "Not parts the whole 2023 was best!!!"

The 58-year-old actor also answered which was the hardest and the most demanding film for him among "Pathaan", "Jawan" and "Dunki".

"When u have to deal with varied emotions it's always more of a work for an actor. So Dunki it is (sic)" he said.

There is no bigger gift than entertaining people, Shah Rukh said in another post.

Asked how he deals with opinions about his work, the actor responded by saying, "Ha ha u have heard the saying 'opinions are like *****, everyone has one!' I work on belief not on opinions my friend. (sic)"

When an admirer reminded him that it is Salman Khan's birthday today, the actor said he had already wished his friend and contemporary, just not on social media.

"I know and I have wished him. I don't do it on social media because it's personal na?" he said.

"Dunki", based on an illegal immigration technique 'donkey flight', also stars Taapsee Pannu, Vicky Kaushal, Boman Irani, Vikram Kochhar and Anil Grover. (PTI)

Wanted to give faithful adaptation to fans: Walker Scobell on playing Percy Jackson in new series

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: There's a hero's journey in every story, says Walker Scobell who wanted to get it right with his iteration of Percy Jackson, the lead protagonist of author Rick Riordan's famous novel series.

Scobell made a promising debut with Netflix's "The Adam Project", co-starring Ryan Reynolds and Mark Ruffalo, and now leads his own show, "Percy Jackson And The Olympians", adapted from Riordan's book series.

The 14-year-old actor plays the lead character, the son of Greek god Poseidon, who embarks on various quests to prevent disasters in both the mortal and mythical worlds. The character was earlier essayed by actor Logan Lerman in two feature films.

"There's definitely some pressure from ourselves to try to get it right. And we didn't want to let anyone down and give the fans a very faithful adap-

tation, give them what they deserve after so many years," Scobell told PTI in a virtual interview.

"It's based on lessons that you learn in real life. Everyone has a hero's journey to some extent and I think every movie, every character has a hero's journey. And Percy's journey was very defined and I think it was really important to get that right," he added.

"Percy Jackson And The Olympians", which currently streams on Disney+ Hotstar, sees the titular hero journeying across America to return Zeus' master bolt and stop an all-out war.

After losing his mother, Percy is sheltered at Camp Half-Blood, a sanctuary for demigod children. He must prove himself and confront his origins once he discovers he too is a demigod.

Scobell said he was excited to step in and play the iconic role as he is a

fan of the books.

"We're all pretty big fans before we even started filming. I read the books when I was in fifth grade," he added.

In the series, Scobell is joined by actors Leah Jeffries and Aryan Simhadri as Percy's friends Annabeth Chase and Grover Underwood, respectively.

Jeffries, 14, said she was happy to have Riordan's books for reference while she was playing Chase, who is the daughter of Greek goddess Athena and has been training at Camp Half-Blood for five years.

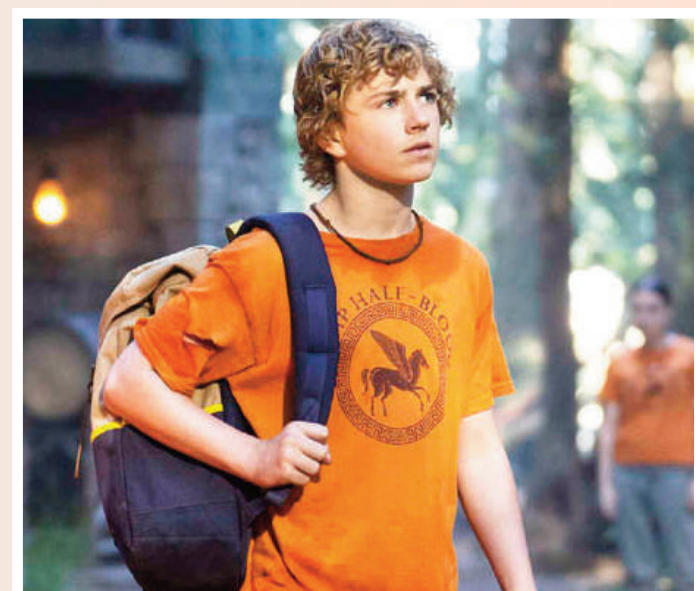
"Coming into playing Annabeth, it wasn't just like some new character. They're making the show for the first time ever and it had a big backstory. They had movies made on it. So I feel like it was more of an excitement to know that many people have put themselves into this character. And now since I get to do it with a whole series

for many years and be this character, I feel like it's even better.

"So reading the books and watching the movies and seeing how the characters play out and how the chemistry is I definitely feel like that helped a lot with the series also," she said.

Simhadri, a 17-year-old Indian-American actor, described Underwood as the "soul of the group". In Riordan's books, Underwood is Percy's best friend and a satyr, a half human and half goat, who is disguised through magic as a 12-year-old boy.

"He tries to keep everything grounded and he's very empathetic, which is very helpful when you're dealing with characters like Percy and Annabeth, who really keep everything inside. He is able to have that connection and it was something that I talked to Walker and Leah about a lot," he said. (PTI)



Manchester United stage a rousing comeback to beat Aston Villa 3-2

MANCHESTER, ENGLAND, Dec 27: Manchester United staged a rousing second-half comeback to beat Aston Villa 3-2 in the Premier League on Tuesday after conceding two goals inside 26 minutes at Old Trafford.

In the first game since British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe agreed to buy a stake of up to 25% of the 20-time league champions, Erik ten Hag's team made a dreadful start and was booed by its own fans in the first half.

But it completely changed the atmosphere with two goals from Alejandro Garnacho and a winner from Rasmus Hojlund.

"I think our fans they deserved it. They are always behind us and we've had so many setbacks. So I'm really pleased from the performance of this team," United manager Ten Hag said. "What kind of team can handle and deal with the amount of setbacks we have had?"

"They are resilient, they have showed character and their personality to turn it around."

United moved up to sixth place.

In front of the watching Dave Brailsford, who will become a director of United and is expected to play a prominent role in the running of its soccer department, Villa went ahead through John McGinn and Leander Dendoncker in the 21st and 26th minutes.

Brailsford, who is sporting director of Ratcliffe's INEOS Sport, sat in the directors' seats at the stadium and would have heard loud jeers after Dendoncker doubled Villa's lead, while the away fans sang "Old Trafford is falling down" and goaded Ten Hag with chants of "You're getting sacked (fired) in the morning."



United went into the game without a win or a goal in its previous four matches in all competitions, having lost three

times during that run. Trailing 2-0 at halftime, the atmosphere was toxic and United's defending was shambolic.

McGinn's goal came direct from a free kick on the right as the midfielder's cross was allowed to bounce in the area and

carried on into the back of the net without anyone getting a touch.

Five minutes later Villa doubled its lead after more bad defending from United when, from a corner, Dendoncker stuck a foot out to divert

Clement Lenglet's header over the line.

Third-place Villa looked set to move up to second and level on points with leader Liverpool, but the game completely changed after the break.

Garnacho thought he had pulled a goal back just after halftime, only for his celebrations to be cut short when his effort was ruled offside by VAR.

He didn't have long to wait before he got the ball in the back of the net again, however, as United piled on the pressure.

Bruno Fernandes played in Marcus Rashford on the left and he crossed to the on-running Garnacho to convert at the far post in the 59th.

Garnacho scored his second in the 71st and Old Trafford erupted. Fernandes was involved again, with a deflected cross that fell to Garnacho in the box. The forward's shot then took another deflection as it beat Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez.

Hojlund completed the comeback in the 82nd with a left-footed volley from a corner for his first league goal since his \$82 million move from Atlanta in the offseason.

It sparked wild celebrations from the home fans and Ten Hag followed suit on the sideline.

"I am so happy that the strikers scored today, because that is what we needed," Ten Hag said. "I know they are capable of that, Rasmus and Rashford and Garnacho. They are all good finishers and we have more than that too. They have to show it every game." (AP)

'Selection system combining trials and assessment will work better for Indian boxing'

GREATER NOIDA, Dec 27: A new selection system which will have a trial as well as a two-week assessment, giving equal weightage to both, will work better in the Indian boxing setup, feels World Championship bronze medallist Simranjit Kaur.

Since early this year, the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) has done away with selection trials.

The governing body has instead employed a new policy drafted in consultation with High-Performance Director (HPD) Ireland's Bernard Dunne, in which the boxers undergo a two-week evaluation process where they are judged on various parameters.

"The system has changed a lot (in recent times). Selection trials aren't there anymore. We feel bad that why we are not having trials," Simranjit, who settled for silver at the National Championships, told PTI.

"Most boxers are in favour of trials. A lot of boxers have spoken to him (Bernard) to have trials. But he sticks to the system in Ireland." Simranjit, a regular in the national camp, had recently failed to make the cut for the Asian Games, finishing behind Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaismine Lamboria in the assessment.

"Ireland is a small nation it has fewer boxers as compared to India. I am not saying only we are correct. He can be right also."

"He wants to look at all parameters which is good. But we say maybe you can do both. A trial as well as an assessment. Give 50 percent weightage. I feel it can be balanced," she added.

Many boxers, including World Championship silver medallist Amit Panghal, have questioned the new assessment system, with several of them taking the federation to court.

The 28-year-old feels it is difficult for a boxer to take the pressure of selection for 15 days.

"There is a lot of mental pressure in boxing. The trials are 2-3 days while the assessment is 2-3 weeks. To take that much pressure for 15-20 days is a lot. Our body gets too stressed, we can't give 100 per cent every day." The 2019 Asian Championship silver medallist feels conducting a trial gives clarity to the boxers, adding that she is clueless as to what the coaches are looking for.

"There should be trials for major competitions so that judges from outside can analyse and judge us. Inside the camp coaches analyse us but with trials, there is a lot of clarity, if we win we go if we lose we don't."

"We have to show our boxing (skills) in the ring. If I run very well, it is not necessary that I will box well. Weightage should be given to the performance in the ring." "They convey the feedback and we try to work on that. I try and give my best but what exactly they want I'm not sure," the seasoned boxer said.

Since the Tokyo Olympics, Simranjit has struggled with form and the Punjab boxer has taken the time out to reflect on where she is lacking.

"I had 3 months to prepare for this (nationals). I have worked on my fitness and diet, which has helped me in the ring. (PTI)

Australia Women acquire 'helpful insights' from Pat Cummins' side ahead of ODIs against India

MUMBAI, Dec 27: Ace batter Beth Mooney on Wednesday revealed that Australia Women have picked the brains of their 2023 ODI World Cup winning men counterparts, acquiring 'really helpful insights' in terms of playing one-dayers in India.

Australia are gearing up for a three-match series against India starting here on Thursday.

While they enjoyed a dominant ODI record against India — 40 wins in 50 matches — Australia Women do not want to leave anyone unturned when it comes to their preparations.

"We have taken a little bit of insight from the Australian men's team that were over here recently playing the ODI World Cup and getting some insights from them has been really helpful," Mooney told the media here before Australia's training session at the Wankhede Stadium.

"It is just about adapting as quickly as we can. The death bowling and batting is going to be really important, making sure we nail that."

"Hopefully, we can fine tune a few things in this series and in the next six months before that

T20 World Cup in Bangladesh and then obviously the ODI World Cup the following year," Mooney added.

Mooney acknowledged India thrive on crowd support at home and added that seven-time World Cup winners Australia will be keen on making them go 'quiet early on' in the series.

"We know India are a huge threat in white-ball cricket. They have had a lot of success over the last couple of years and got some world-class players in their lineup. So is a great challenge for this Australian team to come out firing and nullify that as early as possible in this white-ball series," Mooney said.

"Hopefully, we can keep them (crowd) quiet as early as possible in the ODI — that will be a really big factor in the series as a whole but first and foremost in the first game," Mooney added.

It is not usual for the Australian Women team to play away from home during Christmas time, as they began the India tour with an eight-wicket thrashing in the one-off Test.

Mooney seconded her captain Alyssa Healy that there could

have been another Test on this tour.

"We took a lot out of that Test match. It is a real shame we did not get to play another one given all that we learnt from it," she said.

"The last two days have been great to switch off and get away from cricket but we are ready to go tonight and have a good training into the first ODI tomorrow (Thursday)," Mooney added.

With the next T20 World Cup in Bangladesh slated for 2024 and the next 50-over World Cup scheduled in 2025 in India, Mooney said the series will help attain as much learning as possible.

"It is probably just trying to get as much learning as possible. We have got a different looking side now compared to a couple of years ago and certainly when the 2013 ODI World Cup was over here in India," she said.

"We want to take as much out of this series and obviously we go to Bangladesh in April as well so we want to take (in) as much as we can out of those series and really learn about the conditions," she added. (PTI)

Liverpool goes top of the Premier League after 2-0 win against Burnley

BURNLEY, ENGLAND, Dec 27: Liverpool moved to the top of the Premier League with a 2-0 win at Burnley on Tuesday.

Darwin Nunez and Diogo Jota scored in either half at Turf Moor and Jurgen Klopp's team moved two points clear of second-place Arsenal, having played a game more.

Nunez ended a 12-game scoring drought for Liverpool with a goal in the sixth minute — his first

since Nov. 1.

After having a number of chances to extend its lead, Liverpool made certain of the points through substitute Jota in the 90th. Liverpool went into the game after draws against Manchester United and Arsenal had denied it the chance to take first place at Christmas.

With Arsenal not in action until its game against West Ham on Thursday, the Merseyside team



had another opportunity to go top.

Nunez put his team on course for victory with a first-time curled finish from around 25 yards (me-

ters). Liverpool dominated the chances and Mohamed Salah hit the bar with one effort in the first half, while Cody Gakpo and Harvey Elliott had goals ruled out either side of the break.

With Burnley searching for a goal of its own, Liverpool finally got its second after a swift break, with Djota firing a powerful shot low from a tight angle on the left.

It was his 50th goal for the club. (AP)

Rahul Gandhi meets Bajrang amid row over Brij Bushan loyalist Sanjay Singh's election as WFI chief

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday met Olympic bronze medalist Bajrang Punia and other wrestlers at Jhajjar in Haryana amid a row over the election of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh loyalist Sanjay Singh as Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president. Bajrang had returned his Padma Shri on Friday in protest over Sanjay's election as president in the WFI polls last week.

Gandhi, a former Congress president, met and interacted with the wrestlers at the Virendra Akhada at Jhajjar's Chhara village where Bajrang began his journey

in the sport.

"He (Rahul Gandhi) came to see our routine (training). He did wrestling and exercise with me. He came to see what is the day-to-day life of a wrestler," Bajrang told reporters.

The meeting came a day after World Championship medallist Vinesh Phogat returned her Khel Ratna and Arjuna Award to the government in protest against Sanjay's election.

Gandhi asked on his social media handle whether parents will still send their children to take up wrestling if "the daughters of India" have to leave their

Akhada to fight for their rights and justice on the streets.

"After years of hard work, patience and unmatched discipline, and shedding blood and sweat, a player brings a medal for his or her country," Gandhi wrote on 'X'. "There is only one question - if these players, the daughters of India, have to leave the fight in their Akhadas to fight for their rights and justice on the streets, then who will encourage their children to choose this path?"

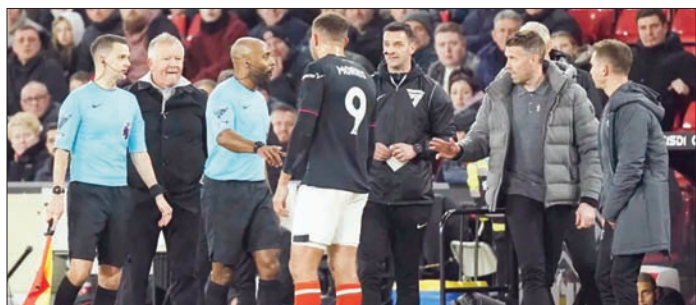
"These are innocent, straightforward and simple people from farmer families, let them serve the tricolour. With full honour

and respect, let them make India proud," Gandhi was referring to the five-month-long protest of wrestlers at Jantar Mantar, led by Bajrang, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik, accusing former WFI chief Brij Bhushan of sexually exploiting several women grapplers.

On Thursday, Sanjay was elected as the WFI president as the panel led by the close aide of Brij Bhushan won 13 of the 15 posts.

The wrestlers had demanded that no close associate of Brij Bhushan should enter the WFI administration. (PTI)

Luton manager says Carlton Morris was target of alleged racist comment



SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND, Dec 27: An alleged racist comment was made by a fan toward Luton player Carlton Morris during his team's Premier League match against Sheffield United. Luton manager Rob Edwards said the police had talked to Morris after the game at Bramall Lane, which Luton won 3-2. "There was an alleged racist comment, the police are dealing with that, they have spoken to Carlton and got his take on it, so it is with them now, I have no more comment on it," the Luton manager said. "He is alright — he was, at the time,

pretty angry but he seems fine now." Morris came on as a 71st-minute substitute and created two chances that led to own-goals in his team's win. The match was the first in the Premier League in 15 years to be officiated by a black referee. Sam Allison took charge of the game. He spoke to both managers following the incident, Sheffield United boss Chris Wilder said. "There was a comment that was made and the referee came over to speak to me and Rob from a racial point of view, which is obviously not great if found to be the case," he said. (AP)

Karbi Anglong Khel Maharan gets underway at KASA stadium

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 27: Khel Maharan, Karbi Anglong district level competition got under way at Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) stadium here on Wednesday. The Khel Maharan has been organised under the initiative of Sports and Youth Welfare Department, Govt. of Assam, to identify talents in the state of Assam. The competition conclude on December 30.

The events of competition include football, athletics, volleyball, kabadi and khokho. The winning teams and individuals from the Legislative Assembly (LA) level are competing in the district level for selection in the state level competition. Teams of three LA segments Howraghat, Diphu and Bokajan are competing in the event. Inaugurating the competition, District Commissioner, Madhumita Bhagawati said the registration of players at the Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) level was 40,000. The winning teams and individuals will be able to compete at the state level.

The DC also informed the event will conclude on December 30 where guardian Minister (HAD), Jugen Mohan and Chief Executive Member (CEM), of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang will attend.

On the first day athletic events were held for both boys and girls of above 19 and under 19 categories. In the evening football for boys was played. B o k a j a n LA defeated Diphu LA by 3-0. Deuri Kro opened the account in the 52nd minute, while Helo Rengma scored two goals in the 46th and in 60th minute.

The DC gave away medals and certificates to the winners in the athletic competition. The inaugural ceremony was attended by General Secretary, KASA, Dr. Pankaj Teron and Treasurer, Kensing Engthi and other KASA officials.

Athletic results:
Female
100 metre race, above 19, first position was won by Mohima Boro of Diphu LA; second Barley Nath of Bokajan LA and third Anjali Boro of Diphu LA.

In 200 metre race, first position was won by Mohima Boro of Diphu LA; second Barley Nath of Bokajan LA and third Anjali Boro of Diphu LA. In 400 metre race, first position was won by Kajir Milikpi of Diphu LA; second Runima Narzary of Howraghat LA and Sarathi Dargal of Bokajan LA and in 800 metre race, first position was won by Kajir Milikpi of Diphu LA. Ronima Narzary

of Howraghat and third Runbina Teronpi of Diphu. In under 19, 100 metre race, first position was won by Sarmika Ronghangpi of Diphu LA; second Priya Ghimire of Bokajan LA and third Priya Koch of Diphu LA. In 200 metre race, first position was won by Priya Ghimiri of Bokajan LA; second Sermika Ronghangpi and third Samairani Basumatary of Diphu LA respectively. In 400 metre race first position was won by Larlyn Timungpi, second Lakshmi Beypri and third Riya Keot of Diphu LA respectively and in 800 metre race first position was won by Larlyn Timungpi and second Riya Keot of Diphu LA and third Martina Teronpi of Bokajan.

Boys
Above 19 years age category 100 metre race first position was won by Deepjyoti Boro of Howraghat and second by Dittule Das and third by Dering Hasnu of Diphu LA. In 200 metre race first position was won by Deepjyoti Das of Howraghat and second by Dittule Das and third by Dering Hasnu of Diphu LA respectively.

In 400 metre race first position was won by Anand Das, second by Sikaru Baglary and third by Bijoy Chetry of Diphu LA respectively and in 800 metre race first position was won by Anand Das of Diphu LA, second by Raju Gogoi and third by Thomas Malar of Bokajan LA. In under-19 age category in 100 metre race, first position was won by Swmdwn Basumatary of Diphu LA and second position was won by Sakhit Rongpi and third by Sarmukrang Terang of Bokajan LA respectively.

In 200 metre race first position was won by Swmdwn Basumatary of Diphu LA and second by Sakhit Rongpi and third by Thengtom Rongphar of Bokajan LA respectively. In 400 metre race first position was won by Sarbong Rongpi of Diphu LA, second position by Deep Marak of Bokajan and third by Rahul Keot of Diphu LA and in 800 metre race first position was won by Sarkiri Rongpi and second Harata Engthi and Sarcheon Kro of Diphu LA respectively.

Ton-up Rahul takes India to 245, SA 49 for 1 at lunch



CENTURION, Dec 27: KL Rahul scored one of his most satisfying hundreds in extremely difficult batting conditions to take India to an above-par first innings score of 245 against South Africa on the second day of the opening Test here Wednesday.

At lunch, South Africa were 49 for one as Rahul followed his hundred with a regulation catch to dismiss Aiden Markram (5), who was forced to nick one off Mohammed Siraj (1/19) that nipped away a shade after pitching.

Siraj used the overcast conditions to good effect as he continuously troubled Dean Elgar (30 batting) and Tony de Zorzi (12 batting) beating their bats on a number of occasions.

Starting the day unbeaten on 70, Rahul made 101 off just 137 balls and this innings could well be considered on par with some of the

best knocks played by Indians in SENA countries if the degree of difficulty is taken into account.

No Test batter from any other country has been able to score two Test hundreds at the Supersport Park and Rahul now holds that unique record.

His innings had 14 boundaries and four sixes as he most of the time decided to ride the bounce rather than get on top of it en route his eighth Test ton.

Someone, who was dropped earlier this year during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India on account of poor form, this was some comeback where he was literally the lone ranger.

Consistency has been the problem for the Bengaluru man but class has never been an issue as his range is as good as a Virat Kohli or a Rohit Sharma.

The ramp shot off Kagiso

Rabada (5/59 in 20 overs) was pure class while a quick bye run stolen off Gerald Coetzee to prevent a genuine No. 11 Prasidh Krishna from facing more of the fast bowler was pragmatic.

Rahul got into the 90s with a smashing six as he picked Rabada's length very early and dispatched him into square leg grass embankments.

The hundred came when he slogged Coetzee into the L Cow Corner for his fourth and final maximum.

There were no overt celebrations and he must have felt more relief than joy after an effort which will certainly rank among his best in recent times.

Credit must go to Siraj (5 off 22 balls) for hanging around and the 47 runs added for the ninth wicket could prove to be invaluable in the final context of the match. (PTI)

Australia out for 318 at lunch on 2nd day of 2nd test against Pakistan

MELBOURNE, Dec 27: Marcus Labuschagne scored a patient 63 as Australia was bowled out for 318 at lunch on the second day of the second cricket test against Pakistan on Wednesday.

On a Melbourne Cricket Ground pitch that continues to offer sideways movement for the seam bowlers, Australia lost seven wickets for 131 in an entertaining session that lasted for over 2 1-2 hours due to rain delays on the opening day Tuesday.

In contrast to Labuschagne's 155-ball knock, Mitchell Marsh adopted an attacking mindset, blasting 41 off 60 deliveries.

Invited to bat first in overcast conditions, Australia reached 187-3 at stumps Tuesday. David Warner, who was dropped at slip on two, scored 38 in a 90-run opening stand with Usman Khawaja (42).

Steve Smith added 26 in a 46-run partnership with Labuschagne for the third wicket as Australia battled through a tough afternoon on a rain-interrupted first day of play when only 66 of the scheduled 90 overs were bowled.

Travis Head (17) fell in the fifth over Wednesday, caught at second slip off the bowling of Shaheen Shah Afridi (2-85). Aamir Jamal (3-64) removed Labuschagne in a key strike, caught at slip at 250-5 after a 46-run stand with Marsh.

Marsh on seven was given out LBW, but the right-hander successfully reviewed the decision as replays showed an inside edge.

In an action-packed over from Hasan Ali (2-61), Marsh was given out again next delivery caught behind, but the brawny batter received a second reprieve when he appealed against the decision and replays indicated no edge.

But Pakistan kept nagging away and further reward came when Labuschagne was caught at first slip at 250-5. Pakistan took the second new ball after 80 overs and quickly removed Alex Carey (4) and Mitchell Starc (9).

Marsh, who struck six fours and one six, holed out to deep third man at 286-8.

The third test in the three-match series is scheduled to begin Jan. 3 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, where Pakistan won its last test in Australia nearly 30 years ago.

Australia won the first test in Perth last week by 360 runs. (AP)

IOA forms 3-member ad hoc committee to run affairs of suspended WFI

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) on Wednesday constituted a three-member ad hoc committee to run the day-to-day affairs of the WFI after the sports ministry suspended the wrestling national body for not following the provisions of its own constitution while taking decisions.

Wushu Association of India president Bhopinder Singh Bajwa will be the chairman of the panel with hockey Olympian M M Somaya and former international shuttler Manjusha Kanwar being the other two members.

The Sports Ministry on Sunday suspended the WFI, three days after it elected new office bearers with Brij Bhushan Singh loyalist Sanjay Singh as president, and also asked IOA to constitute an ad-hoc panel to manage the affairs of the sports body.

The IOA said in a release that the newly-elected president and officials of WFI have made arbitrary decisions in violation of their own constitutional provisions and also flouted principles of good governance.

"The IOA has recently become aware that the recently appointed President and officials of WFI have made arbitrary decisions in violation of their own constitutional provisions and against the principles of good governance espoused by IOC and further without following due process overturned the rulings of the IOA-appointed Ad hoc Committee," IOA president PT Usha said in the release.

"This not only highlights a governance gap within the federation but also signifies a noticeable departure from established norms."

"Since the IOA considers adherence to governance norms as vital for ensuring fair play, transparency and accountability and to safeguard the interests of sportspersons as espoused by IOC and to ensure continuity, it has been decided to appoint an Ad hoc committee..."

The ad hoc committee was



tasked to oversee and supervise WFI's operations, which include athlete selection, submitting entries for athletes to participate in international events, organizing sports activities, handling bank accounts, managing the website, and other related responsibilities.

"This is an Olympic year, we must start preparing from now. We will conduct all senior and junior championships soon, along with camps, to maximize our chances of winning medals in the (Paris) Olympics," Bajwa told PTI.

"Our goal is to achieve the maximum number of medals in the Olympics for our country, as this is one of the most popular games in India and has significant potential."

Bajwa was also one of the members of the earlier ad hoc committee formed by the IOA in April to run the affairs of WFI and to conduct its elections. After repeated delays due to court cases, elections were finally held on December 21 with Brij Bhushan's close aide Sanjay winning the presidential poll.

Hours after getting elected as WFI President on Thursday, Sanjay had announced that age group national championships

will be held from December 28 in Gonda in UP, which is BJP MP Brij Bhushan's constituency.

The government, while suspending the WFI, cited its "hasty announcement" of organising the U-15 and U-20 nationals "without following due procedure and not giving sufficient notice to wrestlers" for preparations.

The ministry felt the new WFI body was working under the complete control of its former office-bearers, which was not in conformity with the National Sports Code.

Sanjay's election as WFI chief led to Rio Olympics medallist Sakshi Malik announcing her retirement from wrestling as she said she would not continue the sport with a close aide of Brij Bhushan at the helm of the national federation. Tokyo Olympics bronze winner Bajrang Punia also returned his Padma Shri to the government.

World Championships medalist Vinesh Phogat followed suit as she returned her Khel Ratna and Arjuna Award.

The trio had led a five-month-long protest of wrestlers at Jantar Mantar, accusing Brij Bhushan of sexually exploiting several women grapplers. (PTI)

CA looking at three-match Test series against India and England in future: CEO Hockley

MELBOURNE, Dec 27: Cricket Australia is looking to increase "marquee" women's Test series at home against India and England to three matches from the current one-off contest, according to its Chief executive Nick Hockley.

The CA top official said the governing body will "keep advocating for more Test cricket" in the women's game.

Hockley's comments came after captain Alyssa Healy felt a sense of unfinished business following Australia's historic defeat to India in Mumbai last week. Playing their first Test in India since 1984, Australia were beaten by eight wickets in the one-off contest at the Wankhede Stadium.

"We'll keep advocating for more Test cricket as part of multi-

format series," he told SEN.

"Maybe that's something in the future that we can think about key marquee series going to three Tests."

Marquee series for Australia would be against England and India-only, with New Zealand reluctant to schedule women's Tests, according to cricket.com.au.

The loss in Mumbai was Australia's first against India in 11 Tests, with Healy saying she would love to be involved in more red-ball cricket.

"It would create a real contest over three games. That would be an unbelievable experience for our group, and probably a true test of both sides' abilities," she had said. (PTI)

Confident India look to resurrect poor ODI record against Australia in three-match series



MUMBAI, Dec 27: Flying high after two consecutive Test wins, India Women will now shift focus to white-ball cricket as they take on seven-time world champions Australia in a three-match ODI series, looking to resurrect their dismal record in the format, here on Thursday.

India have been in top form winning their last three contests — two Tests and one T20I — after losing the first two T20Is to England and concede the three-match series in this long home season.

After crushing England by a record 347 runs in the one-off Test, India carried the momentum to defeat Australia by eight wickets last week here at the Wankhede Stadium, which will also be the venue for the three-match ODI series.

Given their current form, India will eye more success in the fixtures lined up but the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side would know that it has a huge task cut out against Australia who have historically dominated them in 50-overs cricket.

India have only 10 wins and 40 losses to show from 50 ODIs against Australia overall, while at home, their record has been simply terrible.

With only four wins in 21 ODIs and 17 defeats at home, India have not beaten

Australia in any of their last seven matches playing at home since February 2007.

In fact, the last time India and Australia played ODI cricket at the Wankhede Stadium, the home team suffered heavy defeats in March 2012, losing by 221 runs and five wickets in the last two ODIs of the three-match series.

India had lost the opening ODI heavily at Ahmedabad by 30 runs and were eventually whitewashed.

However, India have a new leadership pair of skipper Harmanpreet and coach Amol Majumdar and it will be a perfect opportunity to bolster their preparations for the ODI World Cup in 2025. These games will also bring a chance to improve a recent poor record in 50-overs cricket against this opponent.

India have lost each of the last seven ODIs — including a 0-3 whitewash at home in 2018 — against Australia to remain winless for about six years now, a trend that Kaur's side would want to change starting with the first ODI to be played here on Thursday.

India have added fresh talent to their arsenal going into this white-ball leg against Australia with the exciting Shreyanka Patil, Saika Ishaque, Mannat Kashyap and Titas

Sadhu getting their maiden ODI call-ups.

However, India will be without Devika Vaidya who was dropped despite taking six wickets in three matches in Bangladesh.

India have played only three ODIs this year — a three-match away series in Bangladesh — which ended in a 1-1 draw with the third game culminating in a tie in controversial circumstances, leading to skipper Kaur being banned for the next two matches.

While Jemimah Rodrigues has been India's top run-maker in three ODIs this year with 129 runs, for Australia it is their left-hand opener Beth Mooney who has amassed 387 runs with one century and two fifties in 11 matches.

Phoebe Litchfield and Ellyse Perry have also been among runs for the visitors, who will be keen to put the lessons learnt about the conditions during the one-off Test to good use as new skipper Alyssa Healy looks to win another series with an eye on the 2024 T20 World Cup in Bangladesh.

The visitors will bank on Ashleigh Gardner — 21 wickets in 11 ODIs this year — to continue with her successful run.

Overall, Australia's confidence would not have taken a beating in the Test, given white-ball cricket is a format that players are more used to, something that Healy admitted as well after the one-off Test.

Squads:

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque, Renuka Singh Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Pooja Vastrakar, Sneha Rana, Harleen Deol.

Australia: Darcie Brown, Heather Graham, Ashleigh Gardner, Kim Garth, Alyssa Healy (c&wk), Jess Jonassen, Alana King, Phoebe Litchfield, Tahlia McGrath, Beth Mooney (wk), Ellyse Perry, Megan Schutt, Annabel Sutherland, Georgia Wareham.

Time: 1:30pm IST. (PTI)

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