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# ULFA's pro-talks faction signs peace agreement

*Outfit to abjure violence, surrender arms, join democratic process*  
● Golden day for Assam: Himanta ● Big devp package for Assam on anvil

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** The ULFA's pro-talks faction on Friday signed a peace accord with the Central and the Assam governments, agreeing to shun violence, surrender all arms, disband the organisation and join the democratic process.

Union home minister Amit Shah, who was present along with Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the signing of the accord in the national capital, called it a golden day for the people of Assam.

"Assam has suffered for a long due to the violence of the ULFA and 10,000 people have lost their lives in this violence since 1979," he said.

Shah said the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) -- the oldest insurgent group of Assam -- agreed to abjure violence, surrender arms, disband the organisation, vacate their camps and join the democratic process.

A big development package will be given to Assam as part of the accord. Every clause of the pact will be fully implemented, he said.

"The agreement is a significant milestone to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a peaceful, prosperous and insurgency-free Northeast and bringing everlasting peace, prosperity and all-round development of Assam," he said and added that the accord will be implemented in a time-bound manner.



Shah said the home ministry, under the prime minister's guidance, worked with the vision of a Northeast that is free from extremism, violence and conflict.

In the last five years, nine peace- and border-related agreements have been signed with several insurgent groups and among different states in the Northeast, establishing peace in large parts of the region, he said.

More than 9,000 cadres have surrendered and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has been lifted from 85 per cent area of Assam, he said.

Shah said that after the formation of the Modi government in 2014, violent incidents in Assam decreased by 87 per cent, deaths by 90

per cent and kidnappings by 84 per cent.

So far, 7,500 cadres have surrendered in Assam alone, which will have additional 750 after the accord's signing. Thus, the surrender of a total 8,200 cadres in Assam alone will be completed and it will be the beginning of a new era of peace, he said.

The home minister said the Modi government signed an agreement with the Tripura-based insurgent group NLF in 2019, groups belonging to the Bru and the Bodo communities in 2020, a group of the Karbi tribals of Assam in 2021 and with an Adivasi group in 2022.

The Assam-Meghalaya and the Assam-Arunachal border agreements and the agree-

ment with the Manipur-based insurgent group UNLF were signed in 2023, he added.

With this agreement with the ULFA, a new era of peace is going to begin for the entire Northeast, and especially Assam, Shah said.

A time-bound programme will be made by the home ministry to fulfil the ULFA's demands and a committee will be formed for its monitoring, the home minister added.

He said in all the agreements signed after 2019, the Modi government is ahead of time and efforts have been made to fulfil all the conditions. This would not have been possible without Prime Minister Modi's broader vision of an insurgency-free Northeast.

Chief Minister Sarma termed the accord "historic" and said it fructified due to the guidance and leadership of Modi and Shah.

Sarma said among the 10,000 people killed in ULFA violence, around 400 to 500 were security personnel while the rest were native people of Assam.

According to the accord, about Rs 1.5 lakh crore will be invested in Assam in various development projects. Besides, in future delimitation exercises, the existing principle will be applied in Assam so that the interests of the indigenous people of the state are protected, he said.

"The accord will give political security and constitutional safeguards to the indigenous people of (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Three cases of grenade-lobbing solved: Assam DGP

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** In a major breakthrough, the Assam director general of police, GP Singh, claimed that they have successfully cracked three recent grenade-lobbing cases by arresting the culprits.

Taking to the micro-blogging site X, Singh share the news on Thursday, stating, "In an excellent operation lasting weeks, the three crimes of grenade lobbing by a banned organisation in Tinsukia, Sivasagar, and Jorhat have been cracked, perpetrators arrested, and motorcycles used recovered."

"People instigating these perpetrators through online platforms have also been identified and would be brought to book whichever corner they are in. The evidence would be presented in the appropriate court of law in due course," he added.

He affirmed the police's commitment to protecting the people of the state from violent crimes, acknowledging and commending the efforts of every officer and personnel involved in the operations.

As per Jorhat superintendent of police (SP) ML Meena, two individuals, identified as Achyut Gogoi and Biraj Kachari, allegedly involved in a grenade attack near an army camp in Jorhat, were apprehended separately from Moran in Dibrugarh district and Titabor in Jorhat district on Thursday.

"The motorcycle used in the crime was also seized," the SP added.

However, the aftermath of the incidents took a tragic turn as a 24-year-old man, Dipankar Gogoi, reportedly died by suicide after being questioned multiple times by the police.

Following this, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma ordered an additional chief secretary-level inquiry into the matter, while the DGP directed an inquiry by the IGP (Eastern Range).

Earlier, the ULFA(I) had claimed responsibility for the grenade attacks, attributing them to the "arrogance" of DGP Singh. In response, Singh challenged the outfit, stating they could target him directly instead of endangering the lives of innocent civilians.



## NIA arrests five for human trafficking in Tripura

**AGARTALA, Dec 29:** The National Investigation Agency has arrested five persons from various parts of Tripura for their alleged involvement in human trafficking, a senior police officer said on Friday.

NIA teams arrived in the north-eastern state on Thursday and made the arrests from Irani in Unakoti district and Belonia and Sabroom in South Tripura district, the officer said.

The probe agency carried out the operation with the help of the BSF and did not inform the state police about their plan, the officer added. The arrests came days after BSF director general Nitin Agarwal visited the state and inspected unfenced borders and emphasised the need to fence those areas.

"As many as five persons were arrested for facilitating human trafficking (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Next steps after examining ruling, discussion with legal team: MEA on 8 Indians in Qatar

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** A day after a Qatari court dropped the death sentences given to eight former Indian Navy personnel, India on Friday said it will explore the next possible steps in the case after studying the verdict and holding discussions with their legal team and family members.

The Court of Appeal in Qatar commuted the death penalty handed down to the Indians and sentenced them to prison for varying durations on Thursday, weeks after their family members filed an appeal against the earlier order by another court.

The Navy veterans were sentenced to death by Qatar's Court of First Instance on October 26.

"For the moment, I do not have any additional information to share till we see the judgment," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)



spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said at his weekly media briefing.

"The sentences have been reduced. But till we have the details, I do not want to comment. We will, of course, be discussing the next possible steps with the legal team and the family members," he said while responding to a volley of questions.

It is learnt that the prison terms handed to the former Indian Navy

personnel range from three years to 25 years.

"We would urge you again not to engage in speculation. The interests of Indians and their family members is our foremost concern," Bagchi said.

The MEA said on Thursday that the Qatari court had reduced the sentences of the Indians.

"We have stood by them since the beginning of the matter and we will continue to extend all consular and legal assistance. We will also continue to take up the matter with the Qatari authorities," the ministry said.

The Indian nationals, who worked for private company Al Dahra, were arrested in August last year reportedly in a case of espionage. Neither the Qatari authorities nor New Delhi made the charges (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Sarbananda Sonowal applauds historic ULFA peace agreement

HT Correspondent

**DIBRUGARH, Dec 29:** Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Friday hailed the peace agreement with the ULFA pro-talks faction as "historic and a moment of socio-economic optimism for Assam."

"Peace with ULFA reaffirms 'Modi Ki Guarantee' for a resurgent, peaceful and vibrant Assam," proclaimed Sonowal, emphasising the transformative impact of the accord.

The signing of the historic peace accord on Friday marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing peace efforts, orchestrated under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The tripartite agreement sealed the commitment between



ULFA, the Union government, and the Assam government.

Addressing the significance of this milestone, Sonowal stated,

## Himanta apologises for 'incorrect translation' of Bhagavad Gita verse

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has apologised for posting an incorrect translation of a verse from Bhagavad Gita on his social media handle.

Sarma explained that the post, containing an incorrect translation of a verse from the Bhagavad Gita, was shared by one of his team members.

The chief minister promptly deleted the post upon realizing the mistake and apologised for any offence caused.

"As a routine I upload one sloka

of Bhagavad Gita every morning on my social media handles. Till date, I have posted 668 slokas. Recently one of my team members posted a sloka from Chapter 18 verse 44 with an incorrect translation. As soon as I noticed the mistake, I promptly deleted the post," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X on Thursday.

Sarma emphasized Assam's commitment to a casteless society, attributing it to the reform movement led by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva. "The state of Assam reflects a perfect picture of a casteless society," (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## NSCN (K-YA) claims responsibility for killing former Arunachal MLA

**ITANAGAR, Dec 29:** The Yung Aung faction of banned militant outfit NSCN-K has claimed responsibility for the assassination of former legislator Yumsem Matey in Arunachal Pradesh earlier this month.

The former Congress lawmaker was shot dead by gunmen at Raho village in Tirap district along the India-Myanmar border on December 16.

A statement issued by the outfit on Thursday said Matey was killed due to his "active involvement in anti-NSCN activities".

"He was masterminding anti-NSCN propaganda in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. He



conspired against the NSCN/GPRN and allowed himself to be the tool of the adversaries," the statement said.

"For the last few years, the NSCN/GPRN exercised maximum patience by overlooking his misdeeds as to avoid unwanted situation in the interest of the Naga people. However, despite warnings, he continued his illegal activities and went overboard to provoke and compelled the NSCN/GPRN to take this extreme step," it added.

The outfit, however, added that "this case is not in any way related to the upcoming Arunachal Pradesh state assembly election as some suspected because the NSCN/GPRN will never meddle in state politics". Matey, along with three of his (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## India's 'generous gesture' will help continue lifesaving services towards Palestine Refugees: UNRWA

**JERUSALEM, Dec 29:** India's "generous gesture" will help the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) continue its lifesaving services for Palestinian refugees, the UN agency said on Friday, a day after New Delhi released the second tranche of USD 2.5 million to the UN agency.

UNRWA, functional since 1950, carries out direct relief and works programmes for registered Palestinian refugees.

"As we reach the end of a very difficult year in the region, UNRWA is grateful for the support of partners who continue to stand by Palestine Refugees," Tamara Alrifai, a spokesperson for UNRWA told PTI.

"The latest generous gesture by India will help the Agency continue its lifesaving services towards Palestine Refugees," she said.

Amid the raging war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, India's

Charge deAffaires in Ramallah, Elizabeth Rodrigues, handed over the second tranche of USD 2.5 million to UNRWA to fulfil India's annual commitment of 5 million US dollars for the year 2023-24.

UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from UN member states.

The Government of India had released the first tranche of its annual commitment in November, about a month ago.

The agency is struggling to keep up its functioning in the middle of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and had appreciated and welcomed India's "generous contribution" last month as well because of the difficult situation in the region, particularly in Gaza.

Palestinians in Gaza are bearing the brunt of the terrible conflict between Israel and Hamas, which has been ruling the Gaza Strip since 2007. Hamas' dastardly attack on Israel on October 7 prompted the Jewish (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## 'The festival organisers have implemented a plastic-free policy, prohibiting polythene bags'

## Karbi Youth Festival gears up for its golden jubilee edition

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, Dec 29:** The stage is set for the Golden Jubilee of the Karbi Youth Festival (KYF), the oldest ethnic festival of North-east India, at Taralango, scheduled from January 12 to 19.

In the festival, the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) will have the honor of hosting the President of India, Draupadi Murmu, on January 17. One of the highlights includes a bamboo stilts race aiming to set a record with 1500 participants.

The festival venue, Taralango, is bustling with activity as people are engaged in preparations. Additionally, to promote an eco-friendly environment, the festival organisers have implemented a plastic-free policy, prohibiting polythene bags and plastics within the complex.

On Thursday, Richard Tokbi, the executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and general secretary of



the Reception Committee (RC) for the KYF golden jubilee celebration, inspected the ongoing preparations at various sites in Taralango.

The EM expressed gratitude, stating, "We need to thank chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuli-

laya, and Arunachal Pradesh will accompany the President.

Supervising the work, Tokbi further mentioned that the preparation is 90 per cent complete.

KCS president, Chandrasing Kro, informed that the construction of monuments and KYF golden jubilee memorial stone is in progress. The construction of Ringbong Artu - Karbi traditional King and Dignitaries complex, Rangsin Sarpoo Open Stage, Kajir Ronghangpi Achetai - Open Stage, and Cheleng Athepai - representation of Cheleng cliff are complete. Rehearsals are underway with 2000 dancers practicing the KCS theme song for the inauguration day.

It is worth mentioning, with few days remaining for the grand celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the festival, various construction and beautification projects are underway. Renovation and decoration works are currently being undertaken by (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## HT BRIEFS Nilip Press Club

**KOILAMATI:** The 4th foundation day of Nilip Press Club (NPC) was celebrated with a daylong programme on December 28 at Sanglang Ghat picnic spot. A meeting was held which was chaired by NPC president, Semson Engti, principal, Chokihola Higher Secondary School, Dr Ronjit Ronghang mentioned the roles and responsibilities of a journalist in disseminating information to the masses. Principal, Longmirjeng College, Dentahtag, Bibison Rongpi said media persons should not hide from truth and should give the correct information to the masses. The chief adviser of NPC, Elison Timung said he will continue to support the development of NPC. Officer-in-charge (OC) of Chokihola Police Station, Jagodish Deka in his speech explained the rights, restriction, norms of journalists. He said the press is the fourth pillar in a democratic country and the duty of a journalist is to provide true information to the people. Assistant secretary, NPC, Pitot Teron and CEO of a portal news channel, Kolomsing Teron participated in the celebration.

## Woman arrested

**MEERUT (UP):** A woman allegedly conspired with her lover to kill her husband and portrayed the incident as robbery, police said here, adding that the accused woman and her lover were arrested on Friday. Senior superintendent of police (SSP) of Meerut Rohit Singh Sajwan said, "One Arun Prajapati, a native of the Baghat district had come to his in-laws place with his wife Archana in the Suroor police station area on Thursday. He was shot dead before his wife while returning the same day." The wife initially told police that some men stopped them and shot dead her husband in a robbery attempt.



# Govt's fiscal deficit in Nov exceeds 50 % of full year budget estimates

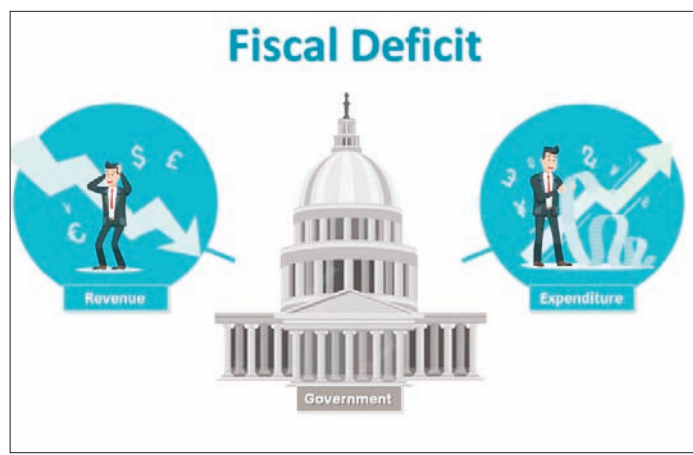
*Fiscal deficit of government at November end stands at ₹ 9.06 lakh crore*

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** The government's fiscal deficit at the end of November stood at ₹ 9.06 lakh crore or 50.7 per cent of the full-year budget estimate, according to data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) on Friday.

In absolute terms, the fiscal deficit, the difference between expenditure and revenue, was at ₹ 9,06,584 crore during the April-October period of 2023-24.

In the corresponding period last year, the deficit was at 58.9 per cent of the budget estimates of 2022-23.

For 2023-24, the fiscal deficit of the government is estimated to be at ₹ 17.86 lakh crore or 5.9 per cent of the GDP.



The central government received ₹ 17.4 lakh crore (64.3 per cent of corresponding BE 2023-24) of total receipts up to November 2023 comprising ₹ 14.35 lakh crore tax revenue (net), ₹ 2.84 lakh

crore of non-tax revenue and ₹ 25,463 crore of non-debt capital receipts.

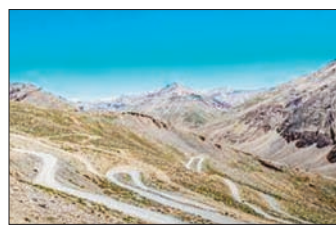
Non-debt capital receipts consist of recovery of loans and miscellaneous capital receipts.

As per the CGA data, total expenditure incurred by the central government was at ₹ 26.52 lakh crore (58.9 per cent of corresponding BE 2023-24) during April-November 2023.

Out of the total expenditure, ₹ 20.66 lakh crore was on revenue account and ₹ 5.85 lakh crore was on capital account.

Continuing the path of fiscal consolidation, the government intends to bring the fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26. (PTI)

## Centre sanctions ₹1,170 crore for road projects in Ladakh



**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari said the government has sanctioned ₹ 1,170.16 crore for 29 roads projects in Ladakh.

In a post on social media platform X, Gadkari said ₹ 1,170.16 crore has been sanctioned for 29 roads projects, encompassing state highway and other major roads in the Union Territory.

Additionally, ₹ 181.71 crore has been allocated for 8 bridges under the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) scheme for the fiscal year 2023-24, the road transport and highways minister said.

He said Ladakh, the largest Union Territory in terms of area and the second least populous in the country, will witness improved connectivity to its remote villages through the approved initiatives.

The enhancement in road connectivity is expected to stimulate economic activities, particularly in agriculture and tourism, contributing to the overall infrastructural development of Ladakh, he added. (PTI)

## Gold tumbles ₹ 350, silver plummets ₹1,000



**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Gold prices tumbled ₹ 350 to ₹ 63,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid weak cues in global markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at ₹ 64,300 per 10 grams.

Silver also plummeted ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 78,500 per kilogram, while it had settled at ₹ 79,500 per kg in the previous close.

Meanwhile, in the futures trade, the February contract of gold declined ₹ 244 to ₹ 63,145 per 10 grams on the MCX. Also, the March contract of silver plunged ₹ 1,166 to ₹ 73,793 per kilogram on the bourse.

In the overseas markets, gold and silver were trading lower at USD 2,070 per ounce and USD 23.80 per ounce, respectively.

Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,070 per ounce, down by USD 10 from the previous close in the international markets.

Comex gold dropped as traders locked profit after the precious metal prices hit a three-week high in the previous session, HDFC Securities' Senior Analyst of Commodities Samil Gandhi said.

Following a recovery in the dollar and rising US Treasury yields are also additional factors that weighed down on the yellow metal, Gandhi added. (PTI)

## RBI gives 3 more months to banks, NBFCs to implement modified norms

**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** The Reserve Bank (RBI) on Friday granted three more months up till April 1, 2024 to banks and NBFCs to implement the modified norms for levying penal charges in loan accounts, as part of fair lending practice.

In August, the central bank issued a circular on 'Fair Lending Practice - Penal Charges in Loan Accounts' and it was to come into effect from January 1, 2024.

"However, considering that certain clarifications and additional time has been sought by some regulated entities (REs) to reconfigure their internal systems and operationalize the circular, it has been decided to extend the timeline for implementation of the instructions by three months," the RBI said.

Accordingly, regulated entities, which include banks and NBFCs, have been asked to ensure that the instructions are implemented in respect of all the fresh loans availed from April 1, 2024 onwards.

In the case of existing loans, the RBI said the switchover to new penal charges regime should be ensured on the next review/renewal date falling on or after April 1, 2024, but not later than June 30, 2024.

Concerned over the practice of banks and non-

banking financial companies (NBFCs) using penal interest as a revenue enhancement tool, the Reserve Bank on August 18 had modified norms, under which lenders would be able to levy only "reasonable" penal charges in case of default in repayment of loans.

The banks and other lending institutions will not be allowed to levy penal interest with effect from January 1, 2024, it had said.

"Penalty, if charged, for non-compliance of material terms and conditions of loan contract by the borrower shall be treated as 'penal charges' and shall not be levied in the form of 'penal interest' that is added to the rate of interest charged on the advances," the August circular said.

It further said the quantum of penal charges "shall be reasonable and commensurate with the non-compliance" of material terms and conditions of loan contract without being discriminatory within a particular loan/product category.

Also, there should be no capitalisation of penal charges and no further interest computed on such charges. The instructions do not apply to credit cards, external commercial borrowings, trade credits and structured obligations which are covered under product-specific directions. (PTI)



## Markets gain nearly 20% in 2023, fall on final trading day

**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** Equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined on the last trading day of 2023 as investors preferred profit-taking after the recent sharp rally, finishing a record-setting year with benchmarks surging by up to 20 per cent.

After a five-day winning run, selling pressure emerged in energy, banking and IT counters on Friday, which dragged indices lower, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell 170.12 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 72,240.26 after a weak beginning to the trade. During the day, it dropped 327.74 points or 0.45 per cent to 72,082.64.

The wider gauge Nifty declined 47.30 points or 0.22 per cent to settle at 21,731.40. In intraday trade, the index slipped 101.8 points or 0.46 per cent to 21,676.90.

In 2023, the BSE benchmark jumped 11,399.52 points or 18.73 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 3,626.1 points or 20 per cent.

Among the Sensex firms, State Bank of India, Infosys, Titan, Tech Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, NTPC, ICICI Bank, Power Grid, Reliance Industries and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the major laggards.

On the other hand, Tata Motors, Nestle, Hin-

dustan Unilever, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finance and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers.

"The market witnessed mild profit booking on the last trading day of the year. The euphoria is expected to continue during the start of the next year on account of the exuberance of rate cuts and the drop in bond yields. Oil prices, on the other hand, fell by 10 per cent during the year, which could ease inflationary pressure and support the operating performance of the corporates."

"We feel that though the outlook on broader indexes is moderate in the short to medium term, the large caps will maintain their vibrancy due to strong earnings growth and in anticipation of the continuation of premium valuation," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled lower while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended with gains. Markets were closed in South Korea.

European markets were trading in positive territory. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Thursday.

Rising for the fifth consecutive day, the BSE benchmark jumped 371.95 points, or 0.52 per cent, to settle at an all-time closing high of 72,410.38 on Thursday.

The Nifty climbed to 123.95 points or 0.57 per cent to settle at a fresh record of 21,778.70.

In the last five trading sessions, the BSE benchmark rallied 1,904.07 points or 2.70 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 628.55 points or 2.97 per cent.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.86 per cent to USD 77.81 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 4,358.99 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. (PTI)



## Equity market investors turn richer by ₹ 81.90 lakh crore in 2023

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** In a memorable year for the equity market, Dalal Street investors added a whopping ₹ 81.90 lakh crore to their wealth in 2023 as a raft of positive factors powered a stellar rally in stocks.

Experts said India's strong macroeconomic fundamentals, political stability owing to the BJP's success in recent elections in three significant states, optimistic corporate earnings outlook, signals from the US Federal Reserve about three prospective rate cuts next year and heavy retail investors participation played a major role in fuelling the stock market rally in 2023.

In the year 2023, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 11,399.52 points or 18.73 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies climbed sharply by ₹ 81,90,598.32 crore this year to reach an all-time high of ₹ 3,64,28,846.25 crore.

The Indian market has demonstrated resilience, emerging as one of the standout performers within the broader emerging markets basket, Sunil Nyati, Managing Direc-

tor of Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

According to him, 2023 is not just a good year for the Indian stock market but also a triumph for retail investors.

"Retail investors, no longer prone to panic during corrections, are confidently holding onto their investments, ready to ride the wave of India's economic ascent," he added.

Indian equities added another feather to its cap as the combined market valuation of all listed companies on the leading stock exchange BSE reached the USD 4 trillion-milestone for the first time ever on November 29 this year.

"The surge can be attributed to a confluence of factors: the impending elections fostering political stability, promising whispers of rate cuts in 2024, and a much-needed decline in energy prices, finally enticing foreign investors back into the fold. This influx of foreign capital propelled largecap indices to new record highs," Nyati said.

It took just two-and-a-half years to hit the USD 4 trillion landmark

after the market capitalisation (m-cap) of all listed companies on the BSE touched the USD 3 trillion-mark on May 24, 2021.

Equity benchmark indices declined on the last trading day of 2023 as investors preferred profit-taking after the recent sharp rally. The 30-share BSE benchmark fell 170.12 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 72,240.26 on Friday. The Nifty declined 47.30 points or 0.22 per cent to settle at 21,731.40.

"With the BJP's sweeping victory in the state elections of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the confidence of investors regarding political continuity post 2024 Lok Sabha elections has received a big boost. Already the sentiments were buoyed by a healthy trend in corporate earnings growth and resilient domestic macros, and is now likely to strengthen further."

"This augurs well for macro and policy momentum for India, which, at the moment, is seeing the highest growth among major economies," according to a note by Motilal Oswal Broking and Distribution. (PTI)

## Nephrocare secures ₹ 8.08cr pre-IPO funding

**KOLKATA, Dec 29:** Nephrocare India, a Kolkata-based comprehensive renal care institution, has raised ₹ 8.08 crore in its pre-IPO round paving the way for its expansion plans, the company said on Friday.

The funding saw participation from marquee investors, who include former HDFC chairman Deepak Parekh, HDFC Securities chairman Bharat Shah, and founder and MD of Macleods Pharmaceuticals Rajendra Agarwal, it said.

The fresh infusion of capital will fuel Nephrocare India's target of establishing 22 high-end kidney care facilities across India by March 2026. Four centres are expected to be operational by the end of the current fiscal, the company said in a statement.

Its long-term vision is to establish 300 Nephrocare centres across the country within the next 8-10 years.

Highlighting the critical need for such expansion, company officials pointed out the vast demand for kidney care units in India, the statement said.

With an estimated seven crore patients struggling with chronic kidney diseases and only around 12,881 haemodialysis centres nationwide, access to proper treatment remains severely limited.

Nearly one in eleven Indians are susceptible to renal failure which is often driven by diabetes and hypertension, the officials said. (PTI)

## Key infra sectors growth up at 7.8 pc in Nov

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** The output of eight key infrastructure sectors increased by 7.8 per cent in November 2023 against a 5.7 per cent expansion in the year-ago period, according to the official data released on Friday. All sectors except crude oil and cement recorded healthy production growth in the month under review.

The core sector (coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity) growth in October was 12 per cent.

Coal and refinery products output recorded double-digit growth.

The output growth of eight sectors was 8.6 per cent in April-November 2023-24 against 8.1 per cent in the year-ago period. (PTI)

## Indian steel demand to surge this fiscal, moderation expected in FY'25



**KOLKATA, Dec 29:** The Indian steel sector has enjoyed a multi-year demand surge which will continue in the current FY'24, but it is expected to moderate in the coming fiscal, global analytics company Crisil said.

The sector has witnessed double digit demand growth rate of 11 to 13 per cent during three consecutive years and is likely to moderate to 3 to 5 per cent in FY'25, Miren Lodha, Director Research, Crisil Market Intelligence and Analytics said on Friday.

"We are clearly in the midst of a demand supercycle," Lodha told PTI.

The moderation is likely in the long steel segment in FY'25 ahead of the general election.

The only other instance of such a demand surge in the last two decades was between 2006 to 2008, he said.

Lodha said the infrastructure sector, a key driver of the steel demand, is expected to maintain its momentum fuelled by ongoing government projects.

The infrastructure segment has been driving a lot of momentum in the steel demand and is expected to continue in the coming years. However, government schemes like the Pradhan Mantri

Awaz Yojana are nearing conclusion, which could slow down the demand momentum in the steel sector, he said.

Lodha said the recent surge in steel imports, which has been prompted by lower Chinese prices and strong Indian demand, has raised concern among the domestic manufacturers.

"The disparity between import and domestic prices has triggered significant imports," he elaborated. But it will self correct in the long run with the ongoing capacity addition.

"New steelmaking capacity of 12-13 million tonnes is expected to come online in the second half of fiscal 25, aligning production with demand and reducing import dependence," Lodha said.

Additionally, the potential demand improvement in China after the Lunar New Year coupled with expected production cuts, could further curb Chinese exports to India.

Overall the Indian steel sector's outlook remains positive, albeit with a projected dip in demand next year. The industry's focus will be on ramping up domestic production and tackling import concerns to maintain a robust long-term growth, he added. (PTI)

## World stocks mixed in muted holiday trading as 2023 draws to a close

**BANGKOK, Dec 29:** European shares opened higher on Friday after a mixed session in Asia on the last trading day of the year for most markets. Germany's DAX rose 0.3% to 16,745.67 and the CAC 40 in Paris climbed 0.4% to 7,566.11. Britain's FTSE 100 edged 0.2% higher to 7,736.52.

The futures for the S&P 500 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average were up 0.1%.

Some world markets logged solid gains in 2023 while many have sagged. Benchmarks in France and Germany made double-digit advances while Britain's has climbed just under 3%.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gave up 0.2% to 33,464.17. It gained 27% in 2023, its best year in a decade as the Japanese central bank inched toward ending its longstanding ultra-lax monetary policy after inflation finally exceeded its target of about 2%.

The Hang Seng index in Hong Kong ended flat at 17,047.39, while the Shanghai Composite index gained 0.7% to 2,974.93. The Shanghai index lost about 3% this year and the Hang Seng fell nearly 14%.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 shed 0.3% to 7,590.80, having gained about 6% for the year.

India's Sensex slipped 0.3% to 72,279.18. It has gained more than 18% this year, reaching new highs as retail investors bought heavily on expectations that the Federal Reserve will begin cutting interest rates next year, giving the US and other economies a boost after it managed to bring inflation down from a peak of over 9% in 2022.

Taiwan's Taiex edged 0.1% higher. It ended the year up more than 26%, powered by strong gains for semiconductor makers.

Markets were closed in South Korea and Thailand.

On Thursday, Wall Street was mostly quiet ahead of the final trading day of the year, though every major index is on track for weekly gains.

The S&P 500 rose 0.1% and was on track for its ninth straight week of gains. It is up more than 24% for the year. A two-month rally has also pushed the benchmark index closer to breaking its all-time high set in January of 2022.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.1% and has gained 3.5% in 2023. (AP)

## Oil cos offer ₹ 6.87 a litre incentive on ethanol made from C-heavy molasses

*Incentive offered to maximize ethanol production from C-molasses*

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** State-owned fuel retailers have offered ₹ 6.87 per litre incentive on ethanol made from C-heavy molasses to shore up supplies.

"In order to maximise ethanol production from C-molasses route and improve the overall availability of ethanol for ethanol blended petrol programme, public sector oil marketing companies announce an incentive of ₹ 6.87 per litre for ethanol from C-heavy molasses," the oil ministry said in a post on X on Friday.

C molasses is a byproduct of sugar factories and its utilisation for ethanol production is an effective way to promote green economy, it said. Oil firms are mixing 12 per cent ethanol in petrol as part of a government programme to cut consumption of fossil fuel and import dependence.

Oil marketing companies Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL),



and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) announced the incentive.

The companies said the decision was taken to promote the supply of ethanol from C-heavy molasses.

The incentive amount will be payable over and above the previous Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) procurement price of ₹ 49.41 per litre.

The government will decide the prices of ethanol produced from B-heavy molasses and juice in a few days. The government can offer additional ethanol from C-heavy against lapsed allocations of juice or B-heavy ethanol.

The government might also convert the existing revised allocations of juice or B-heavy ethanol for supply as C-heavy. (PTI)



# Develop nation based on Bharat's time-tested selfhood: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Dec 29:** The RSS chief, Dr Mohan Bhagwat, delivered a powerful message on the imperative to develop the nation based on Bharat's time-tested selfhood during the grand 'Luit Subansiri Samavesh' of uniformed Swayamsevaks in Majuli. His address sparked reflections on whether Bharat has been able to preserve its 'Swa' or selfhood despite gaining independence, and he underscored the significance of patriotism and unity for the sustained preservation of independence. Bhagwat noted that the formation of the RSS was driven by the objective of awakening society to principles of patriotism, organisation, and a vibrant sense of selfhood.

The RSS chief highlighted that the foundation of 'Swa' should evolve in accordance with generational needs, drawing from both traditional knowledge and the best global insights.

Quoting the Vedic mantra "Aa no bhadrah kratavo yantu vishwa-to'dabdhaso aparitasudbhidah", he advocated for the acquisition of



knowledge from the entire world while upholding our unique heritage. Simultaneously, Bhagwat warned against adopting faulty models rooted in materialistic aspirations that have plagued the world in recent centuries. He highlighted that the Bharateeya model empowers society to achieve self-reliance across various dimensions.

Drawing attention to the geographical protection Bharat historically enjoyed against external aggressions, Bhagwat illuminated how this allowed our ancestors ample peaceful time for spiritual, artistic, and material development. He urged adherence to the righteous path exemplified by revered figures like Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev and Lachit Borphukan.

The Sarsangchalak stressed the importance of transforming personal virtues into organized efforts to build an empowered nation committed to global welfare, fostering a spirit of brotherhood akin to one large family.

Quoting the Upanishad's profound teachings of "Isavasyam Idam Sarvam" and endorsing the value of 'sanyam' for a broader vision, Bhagwat asserted that Bharat has been practicing secularism since ancient times.

He expressed the RSS's vision of becoming an instrument of global welfare by organising society holistically, bringing everyone together while eschewing individualistic selfish attitudes.

The uniformed Swayamsevaks displayed impressive physical drills during the gathering, attended by thousands from Majuli. Bhagwat's two-day visit to Majuli concluded with his departure to Dibrugarh for further deliberations, leaving behind a resonant call for the integration of Bharat's timeless wisdom with modern global insights to shape a self-reliant and harmonious nation.

## Kiren Rijiju joins Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra in Nagaon



**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Dec 29:** Union minister Kiren Rijiju participated in the 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' at Borbari Sabajanin Natya Mancha in Kakomari Gram Panchayat, Nagaon, organised under the Dalanghat Development Block.

Addressing the gathering, the minister underscored the government's commitment to inclusive development through various flagship schemes initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The primary goal of the Yatra is to ensure that all eligible individuals nationwide benefit from

these government-sponsored initiatives.

Rijiju announced the documentation of beneficiaries and those yet to receive benefits during the journey, with a record to be maintained by January 26, 2024. The event featured a welcome address by district commissioner Narendra Kr Shah.

Key participants included DDC Gunajit Kashyap, CEO of Nagaon Zila Parishad Ananta Gogoi, MLA Sashi Kanta Das, officials from the district administration, Dalanghat Development Block, and social activist Abhijit Nath.

## Assam Rifles hosts 'Know Your Army' lecture

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Dec 29:** Assam Rifles conducted an interactive and motivational lecture for students and local youth at Assam Rifles High School in Lokra on Friday, according to a press release.

The event included an interaction with school students and local youths, receiving appreciation from the school's principal and teaching staff who considered it a 'unique opportunity' for the attendees to experience the Army/Assam Rifles firsthand.

The gathering of 34 people acknowledged the chance provided to young minds to understand the challenges faced by Army/Assam Rifles soldiers in their daily efforts to maintain peace in the region.

The positive role played by the Army/AR in offering support and motivation to the youth was widely praised by the school community.

## CM Himanta launches WhatsApp channel

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** In a proactive step towards fostering direct communication, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated a WhatsApp channel and announced through his official social media account on X, "I have started my WhatsApp Channel today. Looking forward to remaining connected through this medium!"

The chief minister expressed enthusiasm for maintaining a direct connection with the public through this newly established medium and encouraged citizens to join the channel by clicking on the provided link.

Emphasising its role, he stated that the channel is designed to keep citizens abreast of the state's developmental journey, underscoring the government's commitment to transparency and active citizen participation.

## Lanka PS seizes suspected ganja

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** In a recent anti-drug operation led by Lanka PS, law enforcement authorities arrested two individuals and confiscated a total of 40 kilograms of suspected ganja from their possession.

A case has been registered to initiate legal proceedings against the apprehended suspects.

## Exhibition center inaugurated

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** The Publication Board Assam (PBA), the All Assam Publishers' and Book Sellers' Association, has inaugurated the Information and Public Relations Department's exhibition center at the ongoing Assam Book Fair in Guwahati. The formal opening ceremony was officiated by the secretary of the department, Arundhati Chakravarty.

This exhibition center by the Information and Public Relations Department showcases a variety of publications, including Lachit Borphukan - Assam's Hero who Halted the Mughals, Bardowa, Shri Surya Pahar, and a compilation of chief minister's speeches. The display includes an array of books and literature, enhancing the book fair's appeal.

The event saw the presence of Manabendra Dev Ray, director of Information and Public Relations Department, Ratan Saud, deputy director, and art adviser Indrani Deka.

## Tragic suicide of Nagaon Urban High School in-charge

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Dec 29:** In a shocking incident, Partha Sarathi Laskar, the in-charge school head of Nagaon Urban High School, was found dead by suicide inside a classroom this afternoon.

Laskar hanged himself from a ceiling fan, and the reasons behind this tragic act are yet to be revealed, according to sources.

Local police from Nagaon Police Station swiftly responded to the information and reached the scene.

The senior teacher's body was then sent to Nagaon BP Civil Hospital for autopsy.

An unnatural death (UD) case has been registered, and authorities have initiated an investigation into the incident, as reported on Friday evening.

It's worth noting that, at the time of the unfortunate event, a special program organised by the alumni association of the school was underway within the school premises.

The sudden suicide of the school head has elicited strong reactions from the residents of the small town, creating a sense of shock and sorrow in the community.

## 'Katha-Saurabh: An Evening Tea Adda' to be held in Majuli

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Dec 29:** The second installment of the engaging intellectual gathering, 'Katha-Saurabh: An Evening Tea Adda,' is set to take place on Saturday at Kamalabari in Majuli. A collaborative effort by Jorhat-based state-level voluntary organizations: S I Media Foundation (SIMFA) and Bonphul, the upcoming program aims to foster a free and fair interaction on the topic 'Journalism and Social Life: As I See' with the esteemed guest, veteran journalist and writer Kishori Mohan Paul. Scheduled to commence at 3:30 pm, the event will unfold at 'Bhagali Joiba-Boichitrya Kshetra' in the Kamalabari area of the river-island district. Organisers anticipate the participation of conscientious citizens eager to engage in an exchange of views on the theme with the esteemed guest. It is worth noting that this program, initiated on December 4, 2022, in Jorhat, aims to provide a platform for discussing various socio-cultural issues with selected personalities from the state. The initiative was launched at the special initiative of Dr Nabajyoti Dutta, assistant professor at DHSK Commerce College, Dibrugarh, and Sanjit Kumar Bordoloi, writer.

## Two-day Kisan Mela kickstarts in Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Dec 29:** The eagerly awaited two-day Kisan Mela for 2023-24 commenced on Friday at the Gendrabil ME school playground in Kokrajhar. The event, organised by the Centrally Sponsored Scheme Agricultural Technology Management Agency (CSS-ATMA) and the Department of Agriculture, Kokrajhar, was inaugurated by MLA Lawrence Islay, representing Kokrajhar East LAC. The ceremony drew the participation of farmers from various regions and government officials.

The Kisan Mela showcased a vibrant display and sale of diverse farmers' produce, processed food items, locally crafted millet products, wines, and more. Over the two days, the event also featured farmer training sessions on the safe use of pesticides in agriculture crop fields, marketing of agricultural products, and interactions with experts in pig rearing, fish farming, and silkworm rearing.

The presence of key figures such as MCLA Doneswar Goary, chief scientist KVK, Kokrajhar Dr Sunil Kumar Paul, assistant manager ICRISAT Harsh Vardhan Mane, and district agriculture officer Diganta Thapa added to the significance of the occasion.

MLA Islay expressed his satisfaction with the positive environment created by the mela, highlighting its role in introducing new dimensions to crop production and marketing of agricultural products across the region. He highlighted the educational aspect of the event, providing farmers with valuable knowledge and information about cultivating multiple crops and sustainable development strategies. Islay urged farmer communities to engage in extensive crop production for the benefit of citizens at large. The Kisan Mela is poised to be a valuable platform for farmers to learn, share experiences, and contribute to the growth of agriculture in the region.

**Demow looks back at 2023!**

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Dec 29:** The year 2023 brought a mix of joyous and somber moments for the residents of Demow and its surrounding areas.

In January, Dr Sashidhar Phukan, born in Bokota Kukurasuwa Gaon near Demow in Sivasagar district, received the prestigious 'Assam Saurav Award' in the healthcare and public services sector.

However, the beginning of the year also saw a tragic incident in Sitalia Naogin, where 24 vultures lost their lives after consuming the carcass of a dead cow.

In March, the community mourned the loss of Loknath Gogoi, a renowned Peppa artist from Palengri near Demow.

On a positive note, in April, Demow Model Hospital secured the first rank in Swasthya Sewa Utsav during the Sivasagar district evaluation. June brought the sad news of the passing of Nirmal Debnath, a businessman and resident of Demow Dehajan Padmoni Path.

A tragic incident occurred in July in Nahat Deodubi, where a woman lost her life in a lightning strike. August witnessed a unique event as Bhagyadeep Rajgarh, a student from Deoriting Tea Estate, became deputy commissioner for a day. In the same month, Sayantana Saikia, a class 10 student from Demow Kushal Path, was selected for the State-level Kala Utsav.

In December, Dipshika Boruah from Deodubi Gaon participated in the Sakura Science Exchange Program in Japan.

Unfortunately, the month also marked the tragic death of Rupali Phulkonwar, an elderly woman killed by a herd of wild elephants in Hiloibam near Demow Nitaipukhuri.

Ending the year on a positive note, farmers in Nitaipukhuri celebrated the export of 500 kilograms of lablab beans (Urohi) to London, a significant achievement for the farmers of Dihingparia FPC in Sivasagar.

## Atul Bora attends Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** In a proactive engagement, minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Atul Bora attended the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra event at Boginodi Gram Panchayat in Lakhimpur, where he underscored the significance of various welfare schemes initiated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. Encouraging citizens to benefit from these programs, Bora highlighted the pivotal role of Panchayat representatives and government officials in effective implementation.

During the program, minister Atul Bora took the opportunity to distribute prizes to the winners of the 'Sanskritik Mahasangram', recognising and appreciating cultural contributions. The event witnessed the presence of several notable dignitaries and local residents, who actively participated, making the program a collaborative effort towards the betterment of the community. Simultaneously, Atul Bora seized the opportunity to interact with dedicated party workers in Majuli and Dhakuakhana, urging them to persist in their grassroots efforts to fortify the organisational foundation of AGP (Asom Gana Parishad). Recognising their diligence, Bora highlighted the crucial role played by party workers in building a robust political structure.

In another segment of his engagements, Atul Bora took stock of the ongoing initiatives in the Agriculture and Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Departments in Majuli. Meeting with district officials from these departments, Bora gained insights into the progress of various projects, reaffirming his commitment to overseeing and promoting development works at the ground level.

## 116<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of poet Ganesh Gogoi commemorated

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Dec 29:** The 116th birth anniversary of renowned poet Ganesh Gogoi, often referred to as 'Papori Kobi', was observed with a commemorative meeting at New Look Academy in Sivasagar on Thursday.

The ceremony commenced with Dipika Nath, a teacher, lighting the ceremonial lamp in front of the poet's portrait to inaugurate the function.

Srimanta Borthakur, the principal of the school, highlighted Ganesh Gogoi's multifaceted talent as a poet, dramatist, and lyricist, comparing it to the likes of John Keats and Byron.

Badan Sarma, a senior teacher, recited poems written by Ganesh

Gogoi, captivating the audience.

Actor Jayanta Borthakur added to the tribute by delivering an extemporaneous dialogue from a passage of Ganesh Gogoi's famous drama 'Sakunir Pratisodhi'.

Surajit Bordoloi, another teacher, spoke about the life and works of the poet.

Fariha Tabasum and Priyadarshini Dutta, both teachers, anchored the program.

Students from the school, including Tammi Kalita, Amlanjyoti Bora, Kabayasi Koch, Sanmilan Saikia, Archan Ayan Goswami, Prajna Priyam Dutta, Ayan Shafil Azam, Priyadarshini Dutta, Shahid Ahmed, and Prantik Chetri, participated by reading out poems written by the celebrated poet.

Known for its diverse flora and fauna, the Laokhowa Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary provides a habitat for the greater one-horned rhinoceros, Royal Bengal Tiger, and various bird species, making it a crucial area for biodiversity conservation.

## Women trained in water hyacinth crafts for sustainable livelihood

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** In a bid to offer alternative livelihood opportunities to women from marginalised communities in the Borunguri-Bongaon area surrounding the Laokhowa-Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary, a five-day workshop on water hyacinth crafts witnessed enthusiastic participation. Organised by prominent biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak in collaboration with Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve authority, Laokhowa-Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary, Nagaon Wildlife Division, Nagaon Girls' College, and Laokhowa Burhachapori Conservation Society (LBOS), the initiative received support from the US-based conservation agency, International Rhino Foundation.

The training aimed to skillfully develop 25 women participants, offering them an alternative livelihood to reduce dependence on forest resources and contribute to conservation efforts. "Empowering communities! @aaranyak, in



collaboration with LBOS and Forest Dept, hosts a Water Hyacinth Product Skill Training for EDCs of Laokhowa Bongaon and Barunguri Bongaon. Building skills, fostering sustainability!" tweeted Kaziranga National Park

& Tiger Reserve on the X microblogging platform on December 26.

Empowering women with water hyacinth craft skills not only enhances their livelihoods but also contributes to conservation by transforming an invasive plant into marketable products. This sustainable approach fosters economic independence while creatively utilising resources to address environmental challenges.

The training program, held from December 25-29, was graced by SK Gupta and R Gogoi, range officers of Dhaniya Range and Gorajan Range of Laokhowa Burhachapori WLS, Smarajit Ozha of Laokhowa-Burhachapori Conservation Society, senior Aaranyak official Arif Hussain, and Bonojit Lalung and Abhijit Bordoloi, members of Bongaon and Borunguri EDC, respectively.

Known for its diverse flora and fauna, the Laokhowa Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary provides a habitat for the greater one-horned rhinoceros, Royal Bengal Tiger, and various bird species, making it a crucial area for biodiversity conservation.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*The less you talk, the more you're listened to.*  
- Pauline Phillips

## Will 2024 be a year of reckoning for trade unions?

The trade union movement in India may be heading for a year of reckoning in 2024. The first half of the year will see much intensified, aggressive, and confrontational protests against the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led ruling establishment, especially till the Lok Sabha General elections conclude by May-end. The course of the movement in the second half of the year would depend on the decision of the elected government on implementation of the four controversial labour codes, hitherto deferred by the Centre due to stiff resistance from the workers' unions. The joint platform of 10 Central Trade Unions (CTUs) and SKM, an umbrella organisation of hundreds of farmers' union in the country have decided jointly to continue their decisive protest action right from the beginning of the year in January against the PM Narendra Modi's anti-worker, anti-farmer, and pro-corporate policies. It is just a continuation of the long struggle of the farmers and workers against Modi's controversial three farm laws and four labour codes since 2020, that continued through 2021, 2022, and 2023. Though the three farm laws were withdrawn by PM Narendra Modi in November 2021, farmers are feeling cheated on account of the unfulfilled promises.

However, the Modi government is bent upon four controversial labour laws, which have just been deferred due to stiff resistance by CTUs, who feel that if Modi would come to power again, these codes would be rolled out in the second half of the year 2024. They allege that the four labour codes would make the workers just "economic slaves." Therefore, CTUs and SKM led workers' and farmers' movements are bound to intensify during the election campaigns. As the country is heading towards a more informalisation of workers, both in the informal and formal sectors, the trade union movement will have many other challenges ahead. Unemployment rate in the country is very high and real-time wages have been on the decline due to price rise. Organised sectors have been given rights to hire workers on contracts and many jobs are being outsourced. Trade unionism has been considerably weakened ever since the Modi government came to power. Trade unions would not face greater challenges in protecting workers rights but also themselves, in the fast changing world of work. Trade unions would need even widening their membership among informal sector workers to remain relevant in the present circumstances for which they would have to work hard.

Larger coalition of workers can only be a solution to protect the labour force and the gains achieved by the glorious labour movement of the country, especially at a time of political uncertainty in the election year. 2024 would therefore be a year of reckoning for the trade union movement, irrespective of whether PM Modi returns to power or not, on account of the fast changing world of work at a time when the majority of the workforce are without any social security coverage.

## A year of historic firsts: Unprecedented events of 2023



As the year 2023 draws to a close, it is crucial to take a moment to acknowledge the extraordinary accomplishments and groundbreaking discoveries that have defined this year as a monumental one in history. From the unfathomable depths of space exploration to the revolutionary advances in medical science and the alarming environmental concerns, the world has borne witness to events that have reshaped the course of humanity.

One of the most remarkable feats of 2023 was the historic landing of the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft on the uncharted terrain of the South Pole of the Moon. On August 23, 2023, India achieved this momentous milestone, marking the first time in history that a spacecraft had successfully made contact with this unexplored region. The significance of this achievement lies in the potential discovery of water beneath the moon's surface, a critical element for human habitation. The joy and pride felt by the 1.4 billion people of India reverberated across the globe, uniting humanity in a moment of shared exhilaration.

However, amid the triumph of space exploration, 2023 also brought to light a disconcerting environmental revelation. Japanese scientists made the unprecedented discovery of microplastic particles in clouds, originating from the world's oceans. This alarming finding underscores the pervasive threat of plastic pollution, with far-reaching implications for the environment and human health. It reignites the urgent call to combat plastic pollution and safeguard the delicate balance of our planet.

The year 2023 also presented another harrowing revelation – it was declared as the hottest year in

the past 1.5 million years by the Copernicus Climate Change Service of the European Union. The exponential rise in global temperatures, attributed to climate change and relentless greenhouse gas emissions, poses an imminent threat to the sustainability of our planet. This stark reality necessitates immediate and decisive action to mitigate the catastrophic effects of climate change.

Amidst these environmental concerns, the scientific community achieved a monumental breakthrough with the unprecedented success of Gerthe-Jaan Oskam, a paralyzed man from the Netherlands, who defied the limitations of his condition with the aid of a digital implant. Through this revolutionary technology, Gerthe-Jaan was able to walk again by transmitting commands from his brain to his spinal cord, marking a pivotal moment in the realm of medical innovation.

The dichotomy of these unprecedented events of 2023 – valiant discoveries in space exploration and medical science juxtaposed with the sobering environmental realities – epitomizes the complex fabric of human progress. While we grapple with formidable challenges that imperil our planet, we also witness the indomitable spirit of human ingenuity and the transformative power of technology.

As we bid adieu to the year 2023, the legacy of these events will undeniably shape the course of history, propelling humanity into an uncertain but hopeful future. The year 2023 will forever be remembered as a turning point in our collective journey, challenging us to confront the pressing issues of our time with resolute determination and unwavering innovation. *(The author can be reached at shashankadas0007@gmail.com)*

# A year in space exploration

In the cosmic dance of achievements, Chandrayaan-3's gentle touchdown on the lunar surface this year served as a cosmic exclamation point, solidifying India's esteemed position among the elite spacefaring nations - rubbing shoulders with the likes of the United States, China, and Russia. The triumph of the Indian Space Research Organisation in this monumental mission is undoubtedly a celestial feat, yet it merely echoes the crescendo of other space odysseys that dared to redefine the limits of human imagination.

While the current year has showcased remarkable achievements, it falls somewhat shy of the awe-inspiring events that unfolded in 2022. That pivotal year witnessed NASA's monumental launch of the Artemis 1 Moon mission, signifying humanity's initial stride toward the lunar embrace. Preceding this, the unveiling of captivating images by the groundbreaking James Webb Space Telescope added a mesmerizing chapter to our cosmic narrative. Let's not forget the resounding impact of China as it accomplished the construction of its inaugural space station, leaving ripples in the celestial waters.

While 2023 may not quite match the stellar spectacle of space exploration witnessed in 2022, it would be a disservice to deem the past year unremarkable. NASA, the stalwart of American space endeavors, maintained its prolific trajectory with a string of landmark missions. Notable among them is the OSIRIS-REX mission, which triumphantly brought back a snippet of the asteroid Benu, and the Psyche mission, a celestial odyssey aimed at unraveling the mysteries surrounding the genesis of planetary cores.

In a noteworthy achievement for human space exploration this year, China's Shenzhou 16 mission embarked on a historic journey to its Tiangong space station on May 29, carrying a crew of three astronauts into orbit. This mission set a

new global record, elevating the total number of humans in orbit to an unprecedented 17. The Tiangong space station hosted six astronauts, while the International Space Station accommodated a complement of 11 spacefarers during this remarkable period.

Amidst the celestial endeavors, not all missions unfolded with celestial grace. Russia's Luna-25, marking its return to independent lunar exploration after decades, faced a bittersweet fate as it crash-landed on the lunar surface. Striving to achieve the unprecedented feat of landing near the moon's South Pole, the mission encountered an unexpected setback. Similarly, the Hakuto mission, the trailblazing pioneer of privately-led lunar exploration, experienced a lunar rendezvous ending in a crash after nearly five months in the cosmic expanse. Adding to the cosmic drama, Elon Musk's SpaceX witnessed not one but two explosive interludes in the year. The colossal Starship, touted as the largest rocket ever constructed, faced spectacular explosions during its inaugural test flights, etching a fiery chapter in its ambitious odyssey.

India embarks on a dual cosmic odyssey with its groundbreaking ventures - the Chandrayaan-3 mission and the Aditya L1 solar probe, marking significant milestones in the nation's space exploration narrative. Chandrayaan-3 propels India into the league of the world's four nations capable of gracefully soft-landing spacecraft on the lunar surface. Meanwhile, the Aditya L1 mission carves its own niche as India's inaugural endeavor dedicated to unraveling the mysteries of the Sun and probing the intricacies of space weather. Having demonstrated its prowess in soft launches, ISRO sets its sights on the next frontier - harvesting lunar samples. The ambitious Chandrayaan-4, slated for liftoff in 2028, aims to bring back tangible lunar treasures. Chandrayaan-3 etched its name in history as the pioneering space-



craft to touch down near the Moon's South Pole. Shortly thereafter, ISRO, ever on the cosmic move, unleashed its inaugural Sun-gazing spacecraft, Aditya L1, embarking on a journey to the first Lagrange point, or L1, situated 1.5 million kilometers away - a strategic vantage point nestled between the Sun and

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

Earth.

NASA's OSIRIS-REX mission embarked on a celestial heist, snagging samples from the asteroid Benu during its interplanetary caper and bidding farewell in May 2021 for a two-year sojourn homeward. Come September 2023, the mission orchestrated a cosmic delivery, releasing a carefully packaged "parcel" containing the celestial loot. The designated landing spot, a Utah desert, played host to the extraterrestrial special delivery as per NASA's cosmic itinerary. Benu, chosen for its role in this grand mission, is hailed as a celestial "time capsule," preserving echoes from the infancy of our solar system. Upon scrutinizing the pilfered samples, revelations emerged - a tapestry woven with high carbon content and the subtle trace of water. This cosmic loot, sourced from a 4.5-billion-year-old asteroid, unveils the profound connection between celestial bodies and the fundamental building blocks of life that have shaped our earthly existence.

Embarking on a cosmic quest akin to the scrutiny of Benu, delving into the

enigma of asteroids provides a celestial Rosetta Stone to decipher the origins and intricacies of our solar system. Enter Psyche - the dual-named asteroid and the captivating mission set to unveil its cosmic secrets. Nestled more than 500 million kilometers away, a cosmic expanse that beckons a 31-minute journey for even the swiftest of light, Psyche tantalizingly dances on the edge of our observational reach. NASA's visionary timeline projects a rendezvous with this distant celestial companion in six years. Psyche, shrouded in the mystery of its celestial composition, is speculated to house a wealth of metallic treasures. This cosmic anomaly raises the tantalizing prospect of being a planetesimal - a cosmic mason laying the foundational bricks of planetary systems. Unveiling the secrets harbored by Psyche becomes a cosmic key, offering scientists a unique lens into the cores of rocky planets mirroring our own terrestrial abode. As the Earth's core remains an elusive enigma for direct study, the exploration of planetesimals like Psyche emerges as a celestial window, providing a cosmic tableau to unravel the intricate narrative of our planet and the solar system's genesis.

In the lunar chronicles scripted by the Hakuto mission, Tokyo-based space tech trailblazer ispace took the helm, charting a course to potentially secure the title of the first private lunar mission. The prospect of ispace joining the esteemed league, akin to India's soft lunar landing prowess, added an intriguing di-

mension to the cosmic narrative. Yet, in the eleventh hour before the lunar rendezvous, a celestial silence enveloped the ground teams, severing the connection with the lunar voyager. Over six agonizing hours later, the inevitable was confirmed - ispace acknowledged a somber truth, conceding to the "high probability" that the lunar lander had met a fateful collision with the Moon, succumbing to the cosmic forces. Despite the lunar tragedy, the Hakuto saga leaves an indelible mark on the spaceflight saga, signaling a transformative era. Merely a decade past, the notion of a company like ispace spearheading its lunar odyssey would have been deemed implausible. However, the celestial stage has witnessed a paradigm shift, with space tech enterprises such as SpaceX, Rocket Lab, and their ilk, boldly stepping into leading roles, heralding a new era of cosmic pioneers.

The endeavors of both the Hakuto mission and Russia's Luna-25 served as poignant reminders of the formidable challenges posed by lunar landings, a terrain that proved demanding until Chandrayaan-3's successful touchdown. Luna-25, marking Russia's return to lunar exploration after a hiatus of 46 years since the erstwhile Soviet Union's last landing, unfortunately concluded in adversity, as the spacecraft met a lunar collision. The lunar landscape, though seemingly conquered with over 20 triumphant soft landings - six of which hosted intrepid astronauts - reveals its capricious nature. Remarkably, all successful landings unfolded

in the brief window between 1966 and 1976, barring the three recent Chinese achievements. However, the last four years witnessed a collective lunar quest by private and governmental space agencies from India, Israel, Japan, and Russia - each endeavoring to softly embrace the Moon, only to face setbacks in the critical denouement: the actual landing. Chandrayaan-3 emerged triumphant, illuminating India's lunar prowess, while Hakuto and Luna-25 served as stark testaments to the lunar challenge that persists in our cosmic pursuits.

SpaceX's remarkable achievement of orchestrating two explosive spectacles with the Starship in a single year underscores the audacious ethos of the Elon Musk-led company. Amidst the fiery drama, SpaceX unfurls a paradigm that resonates with Silicon Valley's tech mantra - embracing failure as a catalyst for swift iteration. The company's modus operandi involves rapid development and deployment of technology, punctuated by failures that serve as invaluable lessons, fueling a continuous cycle of improvement.

In stark contrast, the bureaucratic intricacies entangling government space agencies often lead to prolonged development cycles, sacrificing time and resources in the meticulous crafting of missions. Enter the dynamic realm of private space technology juggernauts - SpaceX, Blue Origin, Rocket Lab, and their counterparts - architects of agility and speed. Fueled by distinct organizational structures, these entities emerge as nimble pioneers, outpacing their governmental counterparts in the race to innovate. Starship's dual explosions stand not only as pyrotechnic displays but also as a poignant reminder of how the nimbleness and agility inherent in private space enterprises can propel the acceleration of spaceflight endeavors, steering the cosmic narrative toward uncharted frontiers. *(The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)*

## 2023 going on 2024, the great battles against injustice ahead



By: P. Sudhir

The year 2023 ends with the dark shadow of the genocidal massacre of Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli war-machine. Nearly three months of Israel's brutal aggression has led to (till December 26) 20,915 people killed in Gaza, of which more than 8,000 are children; another 53,918 have been wounded and an unaccounted number of people are still buried in the debris of bombed buildings.

Israel's war on the Palestinians is fully backed by the USA which has sent more lethal arms and equipment to Israel since the start of the conflict on October 7. The US has been blocking any call for an immediate ceasefire by vetoing such resolutions in the United Nations Security Council.

While the US administration's staunch support for Israel is not a surprise, what is new, as far as India is concerned, is the Modi government's big shift in favour of Israel declaring full support for Israel's actions. India went to the extent of refusing to sup-

port a resolution in the UN General Assembly in October calling for a ceasefire. It is only at the second General Assembly vote in December on a resolution calling for ceasefire that India voted for it reluctantly. Not doing so would have isolated India, as every other country in Asia voted for the ceasefire.

2023 marked the final year of the Modi government's second term in office. It has been yet another year which has seen the closing in of the walls for Indian democracy, secularism and federalism. The shifting of parliament to a new building has symbolised its new denigrated status. The last session of Parliament this year saw 146 Opposition MPs, underlining the Modi government's intent to hollow out the essence of parliamentary democracy.

The desecularisation of the Indian State has proceeded apace. With judicial connivance, the question of original religious sites at Kashi and Mathura are being reopened and examined. The New Year will begin with the consecration of the Ram

temple at Ayodhya which has been made into a State-sponsored spectacle.

In BJP-ruled states, the minorities are being consigned to the status of second class citizens with restrictions on their livelihood like the meat-trade and periodic attacks and lynchings of those accused of transporting cows or beef. The bulldozer has become a symbol of vigilante action against Muslims.

Manipur witnessed the worst ethnic clashes from the month of May. Even after seven months, the ethnic divide between the Meitais and Kukis continues with security forces manning the buffer zone between the Valley and hill areas. The BJP chief minister is singularly responsible for this conflagration because of his partisan politics. The Centre has failed to bring about a political settlement through negotiations with all sides. Manipur is a standing testimony to the havoc majoritarian politics can play in a sensitive ethnic region.

Federalism came under severe attack in 2023. Governors of opposition-ruled states became more aggressive in interfering in the affairs of the state governments and in denying the rights of state legislatures to pass laws. The Supreme Court judgment on the abrogation of Article 370 and the court's refusal to adjudicate on the use of Article 3 of the constitution to dismantle the state of Jammu and Kashmir and create two union territories has given the stamp of judicial legitimacy to this gross violation of the federal principle.

The Modi government goes on claiming that India is the fastest growing economy in the world citing the GDP growth

figures. But, in terms of GDP per capita, India was ranked the lowest among the G20 countries with 2600 dollars in 2023. Further, whatever growth was registered has not translated into increased employment. As per the latest CMIE data, the unemployment rate in October this year was 10.05, the highest level in the past 21 months, while youth unemployment was 23.22 per cent.

Prices of essential commodities, particularly food items, continue to rise imposing a big burden on the poorest sections of the people. With real wages on the decline, rising prices and soaring unemployment, India's ranking in the global hunger index plummeted down to 111 out of 125 countries.

The corporate-communal nexus was prominently exemplified in 2023. The Hindenburg Research company's exposure of the Adani group's corporate fraud and stock manipulation became international news. But the Modi government stubbornly shielded Gautam Adani and refused to carry out a serious investigation of its favourite capitalist. An attack on Adani was seen as an attack on India under the Hindutva dispensation. As a result of the Modi government's benevolence to the big capitalists, income and wealth inequalities reached new heights. As per the Oxfam Report released in January 2023, the richest 1 per cent own more than 40 per cent of the wealth of the country, while the bottom half of the population together share just 3 per cent of wealth.

2023 also saw the sharpening of the instruments of repression and the widespread use of central agencies to target the opposition. The raids and arrests by

the Enforcement Directorate, Central Bureau of Investigation and Income Tax Department have become cynical weapons in the hands of the ruling party.

At the fag-end of the winter session of parliament, without the opposition being present, three new criminal law bills were adopted. This was supposed to be doing away with the legacy of colonialism whereas, in fact, it was a form of re-colonialisation. There are many provisions in the new criminal laws which do away with basic safeguards of citizens and usher in a police state.

The working class and peasantry have been struggling against the communal-corporate regime. For the first time, the Central Trade Unions and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha representing the working class and kisan movements held a joint convention in September and gave a united call for a three-day mahapadav in November. This joint protest action was preceded by a number of struggles of different sections of workers and peasants in various parts of the country. The year saw more sections of the working people coming out against the neo-liberal policies of the BJP government.

The latter half of 2023 saw the opposition parties coming together to form the INDIA grouping consisting of 28 parties. The aim of the opposition combine is to put up a united fight against the BJP in the general elections to be held in April-May, 2024. This will be a fight to defend democracy, secularism and federalism - all basic features of the Constitution. New Year 2024 will witness this great battle which will determine India's future. *(IPA Service)*



# Restoring mountain ecosystems as careers

By: **Ranjan K Baruah**

We should know that of the 20 plant species that supply 80% of the world's food, six originated and have been diversified in mountains: maize, potatoes, barley, sorghum, tomatoes, and apples. We should not forget that mountain ecosystems are under threat from pollution.

Not to be surprised but the fact is micro plastics have even been found as high as the summit of Mt. Everest. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Up to 84 percent of Endemic Mountain species are at risk of extinction.

For us mountains are close to us as we have lived near mountains and seen its importance. Mountains are natural jewels which we must treasure. They are home to 15% of the world's population and host about half of the world's biodiversity hotspots. They provide freshwater for everyday life to half of humanity, helping to sustain agriculture and supply clean energy and medicines.

As the global climate continues to warm, mountain glaciers melt affecting freshwater supplies downstream, and mountain people - some of the world's poorest - face even greater

struggles to survive. Steep slopes mean the clearing of forest for farming, settlements or infrastructure can cause soil erosion as well as the loss of habitat.

Erosion and pollution harm the quality of water flowing downstream and the productivity of soil.

This problem affects us all. We must reduce our carbon footprint and take care of these natural treasures.

International Mountain Day 2023, under the title "Restoring mountain ecosystems" is a chance to increase awareness about the relevance of mountain ecosystems and call for nature-

based solutions, best practices and investments that build resilience, reduce vulnerability and increase the ability of mountains to adapt to daily threats and extreme climatic events. The day is observed in 11th of December all over the world.

The healthier our ecosystems are, the healthier the planet - and its people.

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration aims to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. There are different courses available for those who want to work alone with the great mountains.

Few academic courses are life

sciences, environmental sciences, ecology, eco restoration, habitat management, wildlife studies, etc.

There are also courses related to adventure sports, tourism which not only might safeguard the mountains but also enhance economic activities for the mountain dwellers and improve their lives.

There are different online courses which can be chosen by aspirants who are interested in working with the mountains.

Choosing a career in the mountains is best for those who are passionate. Apart from research and studies there could be activities related to livelihood



as we could see that though people live in healthy areas they are not healthy financially.

Social workers may get them engaged and work with the people to improve their quality of lives. Ecosystem restoration or eco restoration is an interesting

course which is useful for people who want to work with the mountain diversity. *(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjan@gmail.com for any career related queries)*

## Anganwadi Recruitment 2024 – 42 Anganwadi Worker & Helper Posts

**Last Date: 02/01/2024**

Office of the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), Kathiatoli, Nagaon has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 42 Anganwadi Worker and Anganwadi Helper (Sahayika) vacancy in various Anganwadi centres. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

### 1. Anganwadi Worker

**No of posts:** 14 posts

**Educational Qualification:** Candidates must have passed Higher Secondary (Class 12th). If HS passed candidates not available in a particular area, then HSLC/AHM passed candidates will also be considered as eligible.

**Remuneration:** ` 4,500/- per month

### 2. Anganwadi Helper

**No of posts:** 28 posts

**Educational Qualification:** Candidates must have passed HSLC/ AHM. If HSLC/AHM passed candidates not available in a particular area, then Class IX passed candidates will also be considered as eligible.

**Remuneration:** ` 2,250/- per month

### Other Criteria of Anganwadi Recruitment

**Age Limit:** Candidates age should be between 18 years to 44 years as on 1st January 2023.

**Resident-ship:** The candidate who apply for the post of Anganwadi Worker/ Anganwadi Helper shall be a permanent resident residing in the concerned Anganwadi Centre survey area where Anganwadi Centre is located.

The residential proof of the candidate for the post of Anganwadi Worker/ Anganwadi Helper must be issued by the Gaon Bura/ Ward Member or the President of the Gaon Panchayat.

### How to Apply for Anganwadi Recruitment ?

# The prescribed application form will be available in the office of the Child Development Project Officer, Kathiatoli, Nagaon between 11 AM to 3 PM.

# The filled up application will be received in the office of the Child Development Project Officer, Kathiatoli, Nagaon in all working days till 2nd January 2024.

### Documents to Submit With Application Form

Candidates have to submit the self attested copies of the following mentioned documents along with the filled application form as required.

- # Recent Passport Size Colour Photograph (2 copies).
- # Age Proof.
- # Educational Qualification Certificates and Marksheets.
- # Address Proof.
- # Caste Certificate (If Applicable).
- # Disability Certificate (If Applicable).
- # Experience Certificate (If Applicable).

### Important Dates of Anganwadi Worker Recruitment 2024

- # **Starting date of submission of application:** 19th December 2023
- # **Last date of submission of application:** 2nd January 2024

## DC Charaideo Recruitment 2024 – 3 GIS Assistant Posts

**Last Date: 08/01/2024**

District Commissioner, Charaideo has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 3 GIS Assistant Posts under Charaideo District for engagement on contractual basis. Interested and eligible candidates may apply here .

**Name of post:** GIS Assistant

**No of posts:** 5 posts

**Place of work:** Respective Revenue Circle Office

**Pay:** Rs. 25000/- per month (fixed)

### Eligibility Criteria of DC Charaideo Recruitment

**Age Limit:** Above 21 years and not more than 45 years as on 01/01/2023.

### Essential Qualification:

# Bachelor's degree in Geography/Geology/Mathematics/Geo informatics/Physics/Computer Science or a related field with Certificate/Diploma in GIS & Remote Sensing or in Geo-informatics.

Or

# M.Tech./M.Sc. in GIS & Remote sensing/ Geo- informatics; MCA/ M.A/ M.Sc. in Geography/Geology/Mathematics/ Environmental Science with Geo-informatics as one of the subject or Certificate or Diploma in GIS/ Remote Sensing or Geo-informatics.

### Desirable Qualification:

- # Proficiency in GIS software such as ArcGIS, QGIS, Global Mapper or other industry-standard applications.
- # Familiarity with spatial data formats (e.g., Shape files, GeoJSON, KML) and coordinate systems.
- # Knowledge of geospatial analysis, image processing techniques, data collection through drone survey and tools for development of geospatial data, use of HRSI for land mapping, modern survey techniques using RTK GNSS Rovers, DGPS, ETS etc.
- # Effective communication and teamwork skills.
- # Ability to work independently and prioritize tasks effectively.
- # Prior experience in a GIS-related role or internship is preferred but not mandatory.

### Experience:

- # Preference will be given to those candidates having relevant work experience of minimum Experience 1 year.
- # Preference will be given to the RCCC trained candidates having command over GIS.

### Skills:

- # Proficiency in Arc Desktop, Arc Pro, AutoCAD, Global Mapper
- # Proficiency in MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Google Docs/Spreadsheets and
- # Fluency in Assamese, Hindi and English is required.

### How to Apply for DC Charaideo Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may appear in the walk in interview as per the schedule mentioned below.

Date: 08/01/2024

Time: 11:00 AM onwards.

Venue: O/o District Commissioner, Charaideo, Conference Hall.

### Documents needed in the Interview

1. Detailed Curriculum Vitae.
2. Photo Identity & Address Proof.
3. Original Educational Certificates (HSLC onwards) for verification.
4. Work Experience Certificates
5. Photocopy of all the certificates, mark sheets, experience certificates etc. to be submitted in the Interview.

## UPSC NDA & NA (I) Recruitment 2024 – 400 Vacancy, Apply Online

**Last Date: 09/01/2024**

Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 400 vacancy for National Defence Academy & Naval Academy Examination (I), 2024 (Indian Naval Academy Course (INAC)). Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

**Name of exam:** National Defence Academy & Naval Academy Examination (I), 2024

**No of posts:** 400 posts

### Vacancy Breakup:

- # **National Defence Academy:** 370
- # **Naval Academy (10+2 Cadet Entry Scheme):** 30

### Eligibility Criteria of UPSC NDA & NA (I) Recruitment

#### Educational Qualification:

**Army Wing of National Defence Academy:** 12th Class pass of the 10+2 pattern of School Education or equivalent examination conducted by a State Education Board or a University.

**Air Force and Naval Wings of National Defence Academy and for the 10+2 Cadet Entry Scheme at the Indian Naval Academy:** 12th Class pass with Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics of the 10+2 pattern of School Education or equivalent conducted by a State Education Board or a University.

Candidates who are appearing in the 12th Class under the 10+2 pattern of School Education or equivalent examination can also apply for this examination

**Age Limit:** Only unmarried male /female candidates born not earlier than 02nd July, 2005 and not later than 1st July, 2008 are eligible.

### Application Fee of UPSC NDA & NA (I) Exam

- # **Others:** ₹ 100/-
- # **SC/ST Candidates/Sons of JCOs/NCOs/ORs:** Nil
- # **Women:** Nil
- # **Payment Mode:** Online/ Offline

### Important Dates of UPSC NDA & NA Exam 2024

- + **Starting date of online application submission:** 20th December 2023
- + **Last date of online application submission:** 9th January 2024

## DC Kamrup Metro Recruitment 2024 – 5 GIS Assistant Posts

**Last Date: 09/01/2024.**

District Commissioner, Kamrup Metro has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 5 GIS Assistant Posts under Kamrup Metro District for engagement on contractual basis under Directorate of Land Records & Surveys etc., Assam. Interested and eligible candidates may apply here.

**Name of post:** GIS Assistant

**No of posts:** 5 posts

**Place of work:** Respective Revenue Circle Office

**Duration of Engagement:** Up to 31 March, 2024 subject to extension by Govt.

**Pay:** Rs. 25000/- per month (fixed)

### Eligibility Criteria of DC Kamrup Metro Recruitment

**Age Limit:** Above 21 years and not more than 45 years as on 01/01/2023

### Essential Qualification:

# Bachelor's degree in Geography/Geology/Mathematics/ Geo informatics/ Physics/Computer Science or a related field with Certificate/Diploma in GIS & Remote Sensing or in Geo-informatics.

Or

# M.Tech./M.Sc. in GIS & Remote sensing/ Geo- informatics; MCA/ M.A/ M.Sc. in Geography/Geology/Mathematics/ Environmental Science with Geo-informatics as one of the subject or Certificate or Diploma in GIS/ Remote Sensing or Geo-informatics.

### Desirable Qualification:

- # Proficiency in GIS software such as ArcGIS, QGIS, Global Mapper or other industry-standard applications.
- # Familiarity with spatial data formats (e.g., Shape files, GeoJSON, KML) and coordinate systems.
- # Knowledge of geospatial analysis, image processing techniques, data collection through drone survey and tools for development of geospatial data, use of HRSI for land mapping, modern survey techniques using RTK GNSS Rovers, DGPS, ETS etc.
- # Effective communication and teamwork skills.
- # Ability to work independently and prioritize tasks effectively.
- # Prior experience in a GIS-related role or internship is preferred but not mandatory.

### Experience:

- # Preference will be given to those candidates having relevant work experience of minimum Experience 1 year.
- # Preference will be given to the RCCC trained candidates having command over GIS.

### Skills:

- # Proficiency in Arc Desktop, Arc Pro, AutoCAD, Global Mapper

- # Proficiency in MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Google Docs/Spreadsheets and
- # Fluency in Assamese, Hindi and English is required.

### How to Apply for DC Kamrup Metro Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may appear in the walk in interview as per the schedule mentioned below.

Date: 09/01/2024

Time: 10:00 AM onwards.

Venue: O/o District Commissioner, Kamrup Metro, Conference Hall.

### Documents needed in the Interview

1. Detailed Curriculum Vitae.
2. Photo Identity & Address Proof.
3. Original Educational Certificates (HSLC onwards) for verification.
4. Work Experience Certificates
5. Photocopy of all the certificates, mark sheets, experience certificates etc. to be submitted in the Interview.

## DEE LP UP Teacher Recruitment 2024 – 5550 Assistant Teacher Posts

**Last Date: 2/2/2024**

Directorate of Elementary Education (DEE), Assam has released two employment notifications for the recruitment of 5550 posts of Assistant Teacher in Lower and Upper Primary Schools of Assam under the Directorate of Elementary Education, Assam. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here.

**Name of post:** Assistant Teacher (LP) & Assistant Teacher (UP)

**No of posts:** 5550 posts

# **Lower Primary:** 3800 posts

# **Upper Primary:** 1750 posts

**Scale of pay:** PB-2 of Rs.14,000 – Rs.70,000 plus Grade Pay and other allowances as admissible under the rules.

**District-wise vacancy:** The district-wise, medium-wise and category-wise break-up of vacancies showing the reservation for EWS/ OBC/ MOBC/ SC/ ST(P)/ ST(H)/ PwD/Women etc. can be seen at Advertisement Details (Vacancy Breakup) in due course of time.

### Eligibility Criteria for DEE LP UP Teacher Recruitment

**Nationality:** Candidates must be a Permanent Resident of Assam .

**Age Limit:** A candidate must not be less than 18 years of age and not more than 40 years as on 1st January 2023.

**Age Relaxation:** The Category-wise age relaxation for different categories are as mentioned below:

- # **Ex-Servicemen:** 2 years
- # **OBC/ MOBC:** 3 years
- # **SC/ST(P)/ST(H):** 5 years
- # **Persons with Disability (PwD):** 10 years

**Small Family Norms:** No person having more than two living children on or after 01/01/2021 from a single or multiple partners shall be eligible for appointment as per the Govt. policy on Small Family Norms .

**Medium of Instruction:** Either the Language-I or the Language-II of both ATET and CTET candidates shall match the medium of instruction of the school wherein the candidate wishes to apply

**ATET/ CTET Qualification:** The candidates who have passed ATET/ CTET for LP/ UP will be eligible for applying.

**Educational Qualification:** Post-wise educational qualifications for each posts are as mentioned below .

### Assistant Teacher (LP)

**Qualification:** Senior Secondary (or its equivalent) with at least 50% marks and 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education (by whatever name known).

### Assistant Teacher (UP)

**Qualification:** Graduate from the UGC recognized University and 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education or B. Ed. or D. Ed. (Special Education) or B. Ed. (Special Education).

### Science Teacher (UP)

**Qualification:** B. Sc. from the UGC recognized University and 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education or B. Ed. or D. Ed. (Special Education) or B. Ed. (Special Education) .

### Hindi Teacher (UP)

**Qualification:** Graduate with Hindi as one of the subjects from the UGC recognized University and 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education or B. Ed. or D. Ed. (Special Education) or B. Ed. (Special Education).

### Documents To be Uploaded with DEE Teacher Online Application Form

Documents as mentioned below should be coloured scanned and upload while applying online.

- # Passport Size Photograph.
- # HSLC Admit Card.
- # HSSLC Mark-sheet and Certificate.
- # Graduation Mark-sheet and Certificate.
- # Any other Mark-sheet and Certificate of higher education.
- # DEEd/ BEd Marksheet (1st Year & 2nd Year) and Certificate.
- # Caste Certificate (in case of SC/ ST(P)/ST(H)/OBC/MOBC).
- # Document in support of Permanent Resident of Assam.
- # Certificate and Mark sheet of ATET/CTET for UPS.
- # Candidates with disabilities will have to enclose certificates of disabilities issued by Govt. authority.
- # Certificate of Ex-servicemen issued by the Director, Sainik Welfare Board.
- # Scanned Signature.

### Important Dates of DEE TET Teacher Recruitment 2024

- # **Starting date of submission of option:** 2nd January 2024, 10 AM
- # **Last date of submission of option:** 2nd February 2024, 10 PM



*The Ukrainian air force intercepted 87 of the missiles and 27 of the Shahed-type drones overnight*

## Russia fires 122 missiles and 36 drones in what Ukraine calls the biggest aerial barrage of the war

**KYIV, Dec 30:** Russia launched 122 missiles and 36 drones against Ukrainian targets, officials said Friday, killing at least 18 civilians across the country in what an air force official said was the biggest aerial barrage of the 22-month war.

The Ukrainian air force intercepted 87 of the missiles and 27 of the Shahed-type drones overnight, Ukraine's military chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi said.

Air Force commander Mykola Oleschuk wrote on his official Telegram channel: "The most massive aerial attack" since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

According to the Ukrainian air force, the previous biggest assault was in November 2022 when Russia launched 96 missiles against Ukraine. This year, the biggest was 81 missiles on March 9, air force records show.

Fighting along the front line is largely bogged down by winter weather after Ukraine's summer counteroffensive failed to make a significant breakthrough along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) line of contact.

Ukrainian officials have urged the country's Western allies to provide it



with more air defenses to protect itself against aerial attacks like Friday's one. Their appeals have come as signs of war fatigue strain efforts to keep support in place.

Western officials and analysts have warned that Russia had limited its cruise missile strikes in recent months in an apparent effort to build up stockpiles for massive strikes during the winter, hoping to break the Ukrainians' spirit.

At least 86 people were injured and an unknown number were buried under rubble during the roughly 18-hour onslaught, Ukrainian officials said. Among the buildings reported to be damaged across Ukraine were a maternity hospital, apartment

blocks and schools.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the Kremlin's forces used a wide variety of weapons, including ballistic and cruise missiles.

"Today, Russia used nearly every type of weapon in its arsenal," Zelenskyy said on social media platform X, formerly Twitter.

Ukrainian Air Force spokesman Yuri Ihnat said Russia "apparently launched everything they have," except for submarine-launched Kalibr missiles, in the attack.

The aerial attack that began Thursday and continued through the night hit six cities, including the capital, Kyiv, and other areas from east to west and north to south Ukraine, ac-

ording to authorities. Reports of deaths and damage came in from across the country. In Odesa, on the southern coast, falling drone wreckage started a fire at a multi-story residential building, according to the regional head, Oleh Kiper. Two people were killed and 15, including two children, were injured in the course of the Odesa attack, he said.

The mayor of the western city of Lviv, Andrii Sadovyi, said one person was killed and eight injured and three schools and a kindergarten were damaged in a drone attack in the region.

Several dozen missiles were launched towards Kyiv during the night, with more than 30 of them intercepted, said Serhii Poplo, head of the Kyiv military administration. The attack started a fire at a warehouse in the capital's Podil district where five people reportedly were pulled from the rubble.

In northeastern Ukraine, Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov said the city was subjected to at least three waves of aerial attacks overnight that included S-300 and Kh-21 missile launches. One person was killed and at least nine injured, officials said.

(AP)

## Maine bars Trump from ballot as US SC weighs states' authority to block former president

**PORTLAND (US), Dec 29:** Maine's Democratic secretary of state on Thursday removed former President Donald Trump from the state's presidential primary ballot under the Constitution's insurrection clause, becoming the first election official to take action unilaterally as the US Supreme Court is poised to decide whether Trump remains eligible to return to the White House.

The decision by Secretary of State Shenna Bellows follows a ruling earlier this month by the Colorado Supreme Court that booted Trump from the ballot there under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment. That decision has been stayed until the US Supreme Court decides whether Trump is barred by the Civil War-era provision, which prohibits those who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office.

The Trump campaign said it would appeal Bellows' decision to Maine's state courts, and Bellows suspended her ruling until that court system rules on the case. In the end, it is likely that the nation's highest court will have the final say on whether Trump appears on the ballot in Maine and in the other states.

Bellows found that Trump could no longer run for his prior job because his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol violated Section 3, which bans from office those who "engaged in insurrection." Bellows made the ruling after some state residents, including a bipartisan group of former lawmakers, challenged Trump's position on the ballot.

"I do not reach this conclusion lightly," Bellows wrote in her 34-page decision. "I am mindful that no

Secretary of State has ever deprived a presidential candidate of ballot access based on Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment. I am also mindful, however, that no presidential candidate has ever before engaged in insurrection."

The Trump campaign immediately slammed the ruling. "We are witnessing, in real-time, the attempted theft of an election and the disenfranchisement of the American voter," campaign spokesman Steven Cheung said in a statement.

Legal experts said that Thursday's ruling demonstrates the need for the nation's highest court, which has never ruled on Section 3, to clarify what states can do.

"It is clear that these decisions are going to keep popping up, and inconsistent decisions reached (like the many states keeping

Trump on the ballot over challenges) until there is final and decisive guidance from the U.S. Supreme Court," Rick Hasen, a law professor at the University of California-Los Angeles, wrote in response to the Maine decision. "It seems a certainty that SCOTUS will have to address the merits sooner or later."

While Maine has just four electoral votes, it's one of two states to split them. Trump won one of Maine's electors in 2020, so having him off the ballot there, should he emerge as the Republican general election candidate, could have outsized implications in a race that is expected to be narrowly decided.

That's in contrast to Colorado, which Trump lost by 13 percentage points in 2020 and where he wasn't expected to compete in November if he wins the Republican presidential nomination. (AP)



## NKorea's new reactor at nuke site likely to be formally operational next summer, Seoul says

**SEOUL, Dec 29:** A light-water reactor at North Korea's main nuclear complex will likely be formally operational by next summer, South Korea's defense minister said, amid suspicions that the North may use it as a new source of fissile materials for nuclear weapons.

Concerns about North Korea's nuclear program deepened recently as the UN atomic agency and foreign experts said they've detected signs indicating that North Korea had begun operating its light-water reactor at the Yongbyon nuclear complex.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said last week that his agency had observed increased levels of activity at and near the reactor and since mid-October, a strong water outflow from its cooling system.

He said the reactor is "a cause for concern" because it can produce plutonium — one of the two key ingredients used to manufacture nuclear weapons, along with highly enriched uranium.

The South Korean Defense Ministry said Friday that Defense Minister Shin Wonsik told local reporters a day before that his country had also spotted similar



cooling system-related activities associated with the reactor last summer. Shin said the reactor appears to be in the stage of a trial operation and that it's expected to be officially operational around next summer.

North Korea has long produced weapons-grade plutonium from its widely known 5-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon. The light-water reactor would be an additional source of bomb fuels. Yongbyon has a uranium enrichment facility as well. There are questions about the reactor's reported operation, as light-water reactors are best-suited for electricity generation.

Shin noted there has been no country which has used light-water reactors to produce weapons-grade plutonium. However, many observers say North Korea could adapt one at Yongbyon to produce

weapons-grade plutonium.

"(North Korea's) commissioning of a new light water nuclear power plant raises serious concerns, including safety," the US Mission to the UN in Vienna said Saturday in a message posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "(North Korea's) unlawful nuclear, ballistic missile programs continue to pose a grave threat to international peace & security," Grossi also noted the North's operation of the light-water reactor violates UN Security Council resolutions.

The IAEA and foreign governments have no access to Yongbyon and other suspected nuclear sites in North Korea, and they typically rely on satellite imagery to monitor the North's nuclear activities. North Korea kicked out IAEA inspectors from the country in 2009.

Outside estimates on the size of North Korea's nuclear arsenal vary, ranging from 20-60 to more than 100. Since his diplomacy with the US collapsed in 2019, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has repeatedly vowed to build more nuclear weapons and introduce high-tech weapons to cope with what he calls intensifying US hostility. (AP)

## Iran executes four people for alleged links with Israel's Mossad

**TEHRAN, Dec 29:** Iran executed on Friday four people and sentenced several others to prison for having alleged links with Israel's Mossad security service, local media reported.

Mizan, the news website affiliated with the country's judiciary, said three men and one woman were executed Friday morning.

It identified the men as Vafa Hanareh, Aram Omari, Rahman Parhaz and the woman as Nasim Namazi. The report didn't say how the deaths were carried out, but Iran usually applies hanging.

The four were charged with kidnapping several Iranian security forces to extract intelligence information, Mizan reported. They were also accused of setting fire to cars and apartments of some of Iran's intelligence agents.

The report also said several others - working with the same group - were each sentenced to 10 years in jail, without giving further details. This came less than a week after an alleged Israeli airstrike killed a high-ranking Iranian general in Syria.

Iran and Israel have long accused each other of spying and waging a shadow war for years. (AP)

## 1,151 BGB platoons on patrol across Bangladesh ahead of Jan 7 polls

**DHAKA, Dec 29:** Bangladesh on Friday deployed a total of 1,151 platoons of paramilitary border guards across the country to ensure that the January 7 general election can be held in a free, fair and peaceful manner amid a boycott by the main Opposition BNP and its allies.

The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel will work in tandem with the police, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and armed forces for 13 days surrounding the January 7 polls, starting on Friday. Typically, each platoon consists of around 30 BGB troopers. From December 29 to January 10, the BGB will operate as a mobile and striking force to ensure security in constituencies across the country, including Dhaka, the paramilitary force said.

Army personnel will be deployed across the country from January 3 to January 10 to help maintain law and order before, during, and after the upcoming national polls.

Ailing former premier Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is carrying out an anti-election street campaign, calling for intermittent strikes and transport blockades, saying no election under the incumbent government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would be fair or neutral.

The BNP has also called for civil disobedience against the Awami Party-led dispensation, urging people not to pay taxes and utility bills to press its demand for a non-party interim government for election oversight by amending the country's Constitution.

The BNP is boycotting the election after its demand for an interim non-party neutral government to organise the voting was rejected by the government. The party had boycotted the 2014 election but took part in 2018 polls, which party leaders later said was a mistake alleging that the voting was marred with widespread rigging and intimidation.



Since October 29, the BNP has been holding intermittent nationwide strikes and transport blockades.

According to a media tally, 11 people died, 386 vehicles were torched, and four trains were derailed from tracks in the past two months in political violence. Police arrested thousands of opposition activists and figures, including de-facto BNP leader and party secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, over charges of violence. Hasina, 76, also the President of the Awami Party, alleged that BNP is hatching conspiracies from abroad, in an apparent reference to the party's acting chairman and Zia's son Tarique Rahman who has taken refuge in the UK to evade jail terms.

Several Bangladeshi courts declared Rahman a "fugitive" as he took refuge in the UK to evade jail terms for several criminal charges, including a grenade attack on a rally of the then-opposition Awami League in 2004 in which 24 people were killed. Hasina narrowly escaped the attack, which also wounded some 500 of her party leaders, activists and supporters.

Zia, 78, was also convicted and jailed on two graft charges with a 17-year jail term. However, she is now in a hospital with multiple health issues.

The US and other major Western countries called for dialogue between the ruling Awami League and particularly with the BNP to ensure an inclusive and credible election, which, however, saw no headway due to reluctance from both sides. (PTI)

## New Indian envoy to SL calls on PM to discuss multidimensional bilateral ties

**COLOMBO, Dec 29:** India's new High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Santosh Jha on Friday called on Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and discussed a wide range of topics related to the multidimensional bilateral ties. Jha assumed charge as the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka last week.

"High Commissioner called on H.E PM @DCRGunawardena today. They discussed a wide range of topics pertaining to the multidimensional India-Sri Lanka relationship" the Indian mission posted on X. They also emphasised that centuries-old linkages in Buddhism are central to the abiding connection between the people of the two countries.

A senior Indian diplomat, Jha was India's Ambassador to the European Union, Belgium & Luxembourg before taking up his assignment in Colombo. Jha had also served in Colombo from 2007-2010 as Counsellor at the High Commission, handling work related to commercial and economic matters. During this period, he played a major role in building the architecture of India-Sri Lanka development cooperation. (PTI)

## Indo-Canadian man arrested for break-ins and thefts: Canada

**TORONTO, Dec 29:** A 41-year-old Indo-Canadian man has been arrested for multiple break-ins and thefts at Hindu temples in Canada's Durham Region and Greater Toronto Area, police said. However, the offences do not appear to be hate crimes or motivated by hate, Durham Regional Police said in a press release on Thursday. The police identified the man as Jagdish Pandher from Brampton city. According to the press release, in the early hours of October 8, police responded to a break-and-enter at a Hindu temple in the area of Bayly Street and Krosno Boulevard in Pickering.

Pandher was seen on security surveillance footage breaking into the temple and taking a large quantity of cash from the donation boxes. He fled the area before police arrival, it said. He was "seen on surveillance footage later that morning committing additional break-and-enters at Hindu temples in Pickering and Ajax," the release said.

Police say the suspect has been linked to numerous other break-and-enters at Hindu temples throughout the year. (PTI)

## Pak court allows Imran Khan's party leaders to hold election meetings with him in jail

**ISLAMABAD, Dec 29:** The Islamabad High Court on Friday granted leaders and lawyers of Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan's party to visit him at Adiala Jail and hold election strategy meetings in the run-up to the February 8 polls.

The order was passed by Justice Mianqul Hasan Aurangzeb on a petition filed by Khan seeking permission to hold meetings with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party members Asad Qaiser, Junaid Akbar Khan, senators Aurangzeb Khan and Dost Mohammad Khan and Ishfaq Meherban among others to strategise

ahead of the elections.

The plea filed by the 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician also requested the court to instruct the superintendent of Adiala Jail to ensure privacy for Khan during his consultations with his legal team.

During Friday's hearing, Attorney-General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan, lawyers of Khan's party and the Adiala Jail superintendent appeared in the IHC.



PTI counsel Shoaib Shaheen said the party needed to hold discussions for the allotment of 700 tickets while the AGP raised objections to the maintainability of the plea. Justice Aurangzeb expressed displeasure at Awan's arguments and asked: "Is the additional note from the Supreme Court insufficient for you? Do you want me to write a note against you as well?"

He passed these remarks in reference to Justice Athar Minallah's additional note in the cipher case against Khan and ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

The cipher case is related to the alleged mishandling of a diplomatic document sent by the Pakistan embassy in March last year. The Federal Investigation Agency filed a case on August 15 that the accused violated the secret laws of the country while trying to exploit the cable for political purposes. Both Khan and Qureshi were given bail by the Supreme Court in the cipher case. In his note, the

Supreme Court judge had highlighted that it was the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the government's duty to ensure that the public was facilitated in expressing its will through a "genuine election", adding that it was also bound to ensure that there was no perception of oppression or repression against one political party while others were treated favourably.

Mentioning these remarks, Justice Aurangzeb said the AGP and advocate general were representing the caretaker government and should therefore be impartial. (PTI)

## Russian poet receives 7-year prison sentence for reciting verses against war in Ukraine

**MOSCOW, Dec 29:** A Russian poet was given a 7-year prison sentence on Thursday for reciting verses against Russia's war in Ukraine, a tough punishment that comes during a relentless Kremlin crackdown on dissent.

Moscow's Tverskoi District Court convicted Artyom Kamardin on charges of making calls undermining national security and inciting hatred, which related to him reading his anti-war poems during a street performance in downtown Moscow in September 2022.

Yegor Shtovba, who participated in the event and recited Kamardin's verses, was sentenced to 5 1/2 years on the same charges.

The gathering next to the monument to poet Vladimir Mayakovsky was held days after President Vladimir Putin ordered a mobilization of 300,000 reservists amid Moscow's military setbacks in Ukraine. The widely unpopular move prompted hundreds of thou-

sands to flee Russia to avoid being recruited into the military.

Police swiftly dispersed the performance and soon arrested Kamardin and several other participants.

Russian media quoted Kamardin's friends and his lawyer as saying that police beat and raped him during the arrest. Soon after, he was shown apologizing for his action in a police video released by pro-Kremlin media, his face bruised. Authorities have taken no action to investigate the alleged abuse by police.

During Thursday's hearing, Kamardin's wife, Alexandra Popova, was escorted out of the courtroom by bailiffs after she shouted "Shame!" following the verdict. Popova, who spoke to journalists after the hearing, and several other people were later detained on charges of holding an unsanctioned "rally" outside the court building. (AP)

## Around 500 climbers, including four Indians, conquer Mt Everest in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the first successful summit

**KATHMANDU, Dec 29:** Despite concerns about rising temperatures, melting glaciers and snow and increasing extreme weather events, the mountaineering community celebrated the 70th anniversary of scaling Mount Everest with around 500 climbers, including four Indians, making it to the summit in 2023.

Ever since New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Nepal's Sherpa Tenzing Norgay summited the 8,848.86 metres (29,032 feet) high Mt Everest, a.k.a. Sagarmatha in Nepali, on May 29, 1953, thousands of climbers from across the globe, including India and Nepal, have been attracted to the highest peak in the world, scores of them reached the summit while many lost their lives.

Official data showed that since 1953's Hillary-Norgay summit, around 7,000 mountaineers have successfully scaled Mt Everest while over 300 have lost their lives.

The year 2023 was no exception. A total of 478 climbers, including 103 females, summited Everest in the Spring of 2023, the only narrow window available to climb the extremely high altitudes.



Four Indian nationals stood atop Mt Everest and one died in the high mountains this year. Yashi Jain, Mithil Raju, Sunil Kumar and Pinkhi Haris Chhed successfully scaled the highest peak in the world on May 17.

Suzanne Leopoldina Jesus, an Indian mountaineer with a pacemaker, died near the Everest Base Camp while attempting to climb the peak on May 18.

Officials said 11 climbers, including four Nepalese, one Indian and one Chinese, died while eight went missing during their respective expeditions to Mt Everest.

Nepal's Kami Rita Sherpa, 53, set a new

world record of climbing Mt Everest 28 times with two summits this season on May 17 and May 23. Kami Rita's record till 2022 was equalled by compatriot, Sherpa Pasang Dawa, 46, who made it to the highest peak for the 26th time this year on May 14 and the 27th time on May 17. But it is not just the Sherpa community that continued to break records and test human endurance in the rarified air of the high-altitude Himalayas in Nepal.

Hari Budhamagar, 43, a double amputee ex-British Gurkha soldier scaled Mt Everest, scripted history by becoming the first in the category to scale the world's highest peak with artificial legs, on May 19.

On the same day, May 19, Shrinivas Sainis Dattatraya, 39, an Indian-origin Singaporean climber went missing while returning from the summit of Mount Everest.

No expedition in the high-altitude Himalayas is complete without the help of the Sherpa community that lives around the foothills of the snow-clad mountains. That also makes them the most vulnerable in the dangerous treks to the world's highest moun-

tain region.

Three Nepalese Sherpa guides - Themwa Tenzing Sherpa, Lakpa Rita Sherpa and Badure Sherpa - went missing on April 12 after a massive ice sheet of more than 50 metres tumbled down the mountain and buried them deep under five to six metres of snow on the most dangerous section of Mt Everest amidst an avalanche, making it the season's first accident at the world's tallest peak.

Nepal granted a record 466 climbing permits, including 40 from India, for Mt Everest this spring, from climbers from 65 different countries. This broke the previous record of 2021, which was 409. In 2022, the number was 323. Mountaineering is a good revenue stream for the tiny Himalayan nation of Nepal with a large mountain community dependent on mountaineering and related tourism in the region.

And, therefore, the depleting glaciers, rising temperatures and increasing extreme rainfall events are a cause of worry for the large number of people whose livelihoods are at stake in the changing climate. (AP)



# Govt aims at expansion of saffron cultivation in Northeast

*Saffron, a popular spice costs minimum of ₹ 3.5 lakh per kg in market*



**SHILLONG, Dec 29:** The Centre is eyeing at expansion of saffron cultivation in the northeastern states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya in collaboration with state governments to improve farm income, an official said.

Saffron is a costly spice fetching a minimum of Rs 3.5 lakh per kilogramme and is rich in bioactive compounds with therapeutic properties.

The North East Center for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), an autonomous body under the Department of Science and Technology of the central government brought good quantity of saffron seeds for the pilot project

from producer groups in Kashmir in 2020.

The seeds were distributed to 64 farmers in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Mizoram as part of a trial and the yield in terms of Saffron seeds and flowers was above average in the pilot project, NECTAR director general Arun Sarma told PTI.

The pilot project for the cultivation of saffron found that the soil and climatic conditions of certain parts of the Northeast are suitable for cultivation of saffron, the official said.

Sharma said his office in collaboration with the respective governments of these states is ready for expansion of the saffron cultivation

the farmers involved in the project where they were provided with saffron combs.

At Mairang, Sister Reshmi, who is director of Foster Care home of the Well Springs Social Service Society said she planted about 100 kg of saffron seeds out of which over 2,200 flowers were harvested.

Mairang is one of the coldest places in Meghalaya with a dry arid environment from September till about March.

"We planted in the first week of October this year and within a few weeks, we harvested the flowers," she said, adding that NECTAR buys back all the harvest.

She believes that saffron could become a cash crop for families in the Mairang area considering that the plant whose leaves are similar to that of garlic is not affected by heavy frosting during winter months.

"While all other plants have died, including vegetables, saffron plants are all green, alive and thriving," she said. At Thangning, 25 km South of here and located under Mawkynew Community and Rural Development Block, Pdianghuh Kharumnud reported similar yields.

"We are grateful to NECTAR and Bah Collin for having chosen us. We are the only saffron farmer in the area. We were given about 40 kg of combs. We harvested more than 2,000 flowers," Kharumnud said. (PTI)

project. At the NECTAR office here, Sarma has a team that looks after the saffron cultivation project exclusively which is being led by senior officer Collin Z Renthlei, a scientist, and other programme associates.

Collin, who had earlier been posted in Jammu and Kashmir, played a crucial role in the pilot project of the NECTAR.

"I am happy with the results of the saffron project because although we do not get snow in most places in the Northeast except in Arunachal Pradesh, the yield is good," he said.

In Meghalaya, PTI visited Mairang and Thangning and met

## MPCC celebrates INC foundation day

**IMPHAL, Dec 29:** Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) has celebrated the 139th foundation day celebration of Indian National Congress (INC) by observing several programmes at the Congress Bhawan in Imphal.

Apart from the main function at Congress Bhawan on Thursday, the day was also celebrated at district and block levels across Manipur.

In the absence of the prominent leaders including MPCC president K Meghachandra, the main celebration function held at Congress Bhawan began with MLA Th Lokeshwar who is also the treasurer of the MPCC, hoisting the INC flag in the presence of senior leaders, members and workers of the party.

The MPCC president, CWC member Gaikhangam along with some other leaders of the party were out of station as they were in Nagpur to participate in a massive rally 'Hai Taiyaar Hum', which the All India Congress Committee (AICC) organized in connection with the 139th foundation day of the party.

MLA Th Lokeshwar, in his speech on the occasion, came down heavily on the BJP-led government in the state for its "inability" to re-



solve the nearly eight-month old crisis in the state.

The crisis unfolding in the state since May 3 last has affected all sections of the society. The protracted crisis has put the people at the limit of their woes.

"The state government, on the other hand, did nothing to resolve the crisis except lip service," he alleged.

The Congress leader then stressed on the need for a concerted effort of the people to protect and

safeguard the territorial integrity of the state, while alleging that the unity of the people of the state is at stake under the present government. The MLA also appealed to the people not to allow them to be carried away by rumors and propagandas which may create enmity among the different communities living together in the state.

He hoped that peace and normalcy will be restored in the state with the coming of the New Year. (NNN)

## Arms, ammunition recovered in Manipur

**IMPHAL, Dec 29:** Caches of arms and ammunition were recovered as the police continued joint operations with the security forces in fringe and vulnerable areas of violent affected districts of Manipur. Police sources said that a cache of arms and ammunition was recovered by Churachandpur police in a joint operation with the troops of 46 Assam Rifles in the surrounding forest area of L Kanan village under the Behiang Police station of the district on Thursday morning.

The operation that started from 5 am and lasted till 10 am, was conducted based on reliable input regarding caching of arms and ammunition in the area, the police said. During the operation, the combined team came across a cache of arms and ammunition wrapped in polythene which was concealed in a

bush. The recovered items were two 9mm pistols with magazines, one loaded with five rounds and another two rounds, and an empty magazine of a 9mm pistol, the police also said.

Arms and ammunition was also recovered in another operation in the foothill villages of Pungdongbam, Sekta and Lousangkhang under the Lamlai Police Station of Imphal East district bordering Kangpokpi district, the police added.

One M16 rifle marked as M16A1 with a magazine loaded with four rounds and one M21 sniper rifle marked nil with an empty magazine and three 36 HE grenades without detonators were found in the cache, the police further said.

A combined team of police commandos, 22 Assam Rifles and a platoon of 12 battalion of CRPF

conducted the operation based on reliable input. The operation started around 8.15 am and lasted till 10 am. The recovered arms and ammunition were handed over to Lamlai Police Station for further legal procedures.

The police along with the security forces have been conducting search operations in the fringe and vulnerable areas across the violent affected districts of the state since the middle week of September last to recover arms and ammunition in the possessions of the miscreants.

After the outbreak of ethnic violence on May 3 last, a total of 5,669 different types of sophisticated arms and around 500,000 rounds of ammunition were looted from different police stations and armories by mobs and individuals. (NNN)

## Anand Mahindra invites Meghalaya CM to perform at Blues Festival

*CM's performance with band members of Saga receives 17,000 views*



**SHILLONG, Dec 29:** Impressed by Meghalaya Chief M Conrad K Sangma's performance of Iron Maiden's solo guitar on stage, Mahindra Group chairman Anand Mahindra has invited him for the popular Mahindra Blues Festival in February 2024.

"Uber cool... we need you out here at the @mahindrablues in Feb @SangmaConrad," Mahindra wrote on X.

The performance during his recent band reunion in Tura, which was shared on Sangma's Instagram han-

dle, received over 17,000 views on Friday.

In his reply, the Meghalaya chief minister said, "Would love to @anandmahindra... need more practice though".

Sangma used to perform with his band Saga during his college days in Delhi and would often meet up with the band members for private jam sessions.

The chief minister frequently shares videos of himself playing the electric guitar, covering songs by Iron Maiden and other popular rock metal bands. (PTI)

## Mizoram accords general consent to CBI to probe offences

**AIZWAL, Dec 29:** The Mizoram government has granted general consent to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe offences in the state.

In a gazette notification on Thursday, the state government said, "In exercise of the powers conferred by section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, the Government of Mizoram hereby accords consent to exercise powers and jurisdiction of the members of the Delhi Special Police Establishment for investigation of offences in the state of Mizoram."

"The Government of Mizoram grants consent for a CBI investiga-

tion of offences in the state of Mizoram. Our government is resolute in eliminating corruption for the welfare of our citizens," CM Lalduhoma posted on X on Friday.

Soon after the swearing-in ceremony on December 8, Lalduhoma had announced that his Zoram People's Movement government will accord priority to anti-corruption measures and will invite the CBI to probe graft cases in the state.

According to the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946, the CBI requires the consent of the state government to conduct an investigation within its jurisdiction. (PTI)

## APIC implements hybrid mode of e-filing of appeals

**ITANAGAR, Dec 29:** Arunachal Pradesh Information Commission (APIC) on Friday successfully implemented the hybrid mode of hearing and e-filing of appeals and complaints, a senior official said.

From now, the links for availing the option of hybrid mode of hearing will be published in the daily cause list, APIC registrar Taro Mize said. He revealed that the provision for e-filing of appeals and complaints is available on the APIC website apic.arunachal.gov.in.

Mize appealed to all stakeholders, public information officers and litigants to avail the services.

In October, the Supreme Court had set December 31 as deadline for information commissions across the country to provide facility of e-filing of complaints and appeals. (PTI)

## NFR's Mizoram project to revolutionize communication, commerce in NE

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** The Northeast Frontier Railways' (NFR) Bhairabi - Sairang New Line Railway Project will mark the dawn of a new era in terms of communication and commerce in the northeastern region of the country, especially in Mizoram.

The project is at an advance stage of completion. The Bhairabi - Sairang project aims to create an additional 51.38 km of railway track in the Mizoram. The project has already achieved physical progress of 91 per cent.

Construction of the Bhairabi - Sairang railway project involves multiple tunnels and bridges in tough terrains. The total length of tunnels in this project is 12853 meters out of which 12710 meters tunneling works has already been completed. The project will have total 55 major bridges and 87 minor bridges, out of which work for 12 major bridges and 85 minor bridges have been completed so far. The work of construction of the tallest pier of the project i.e. Pier P-4 of bridge number 196 in the approach of Sairang station has also been completed. Height



of this pier is 104 meter which is 42 meter taller than the Qutub Minar. The project also includes seven road over bridges and nine road under bridges.

Though there are many challenges in execution of this project like very less working days due to very heavy and prolonged monsoons, very tough and hilly terrain through deep forests, poor accessibility, non-availability of construction materials and skilled labor in Mizoram etc., the NFR is making

all efforts for fulfilling its commitment of earliest commissioning of the project.

The new rail project will provide enhanced connectivity to the people of the Mizoram, facilitate the growth small scale industries in the area and boost tourism of the state. People of the region will get long distance access across the country. I will ensure uninterrupted supply of essential goods at low costs to Mizoram to cater to the needs of the people.

## Assam Guv visits sattra

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 29:** Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria visited Konwerpur Sri Sri Barkhatpar Sattra in Sivasagar on Friday and offered his prayers there. On visiting the sattra, the Governor said that the Sattra impeccably upholds the legacy of neo-Vaishnavite ideology, a profound vision promoted by Vaishnavite saints Srimanta Sankardev and Madhavdev. The sattra has been very astutely propagating the novel creations of the two Vaishnava saints. The refined presentation of mukha bhaoana, khul badon, and borgeet are getting adequate patronage by the sattra. He said that these elements added to the enchantment of his visit. He also said, "Religious and spiritual institutions play a crucial role in enriching society, and fostering a bond of unity. These institutions serve as a bridge connecting the aspirations of our past to the future. These establishments provide a platform for individuals to appreciate their heritage, and facilitate a deeper understanding of our cultural roots."

## Sarbananda Sonowal unveils busts of distinguished figures in Dibrugarh

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Dec 29:** Union minister of ports, shipping, and waterways & Ayush, Sarbananda Sonowal, unveiled the busts of two distinguished personalities, Amaresh Datta and Phanindra Nath Ghosh at the India Club and Theatrical Institution in Dibrugarh on Friday. In his speech, Sonowal highlighted the remarkable contributions made by these two eminent personalities. Amaresh Datta (1919-2020) was a shining beacon in the field of education. Regarded as an esteemed scholar, critic, and poet of his time, his intellectual prowess gained recognition from prestigious institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Uppsala Universities.

"I am fortunate that I've attended his classes and learned a lot from him. He was a true scholar and has a deep understanding of English literature," Sonowal said. Datta served as the head of the department of English at the Gauhati University from 1964 to 1980 and later held the same position at Dibrugarh University from 1980 to 1984. Datta's deep understanding of Shakespearean literature further elevated his scholarly reputation.

Phanindra Nath Ghosh (1896-1956), another luminary of Dibrugarh, achieved renown as a highly respected doctor, dedicated social worker, and compassionate philanthropist. Ghosh's exceptional humility and approachability endeared him to the masses, earning him widespread popularity. His heartfelt commitment to serving the community resonated deeply with people from all walks of life. Additionally, Ghosh held the position of Vice-Chairman of the Dibrugarh Municipal Board in 1935, further exemplifying his dedication to public service. The bust unveiling ceremony was also attended by Union Minister of state for petroleum and natural gas Rameswar Telu, eminent litterateur and former Asom Sahitya Sabha president Nagen Saikia, Assam Medical College and Hospital's principal Sanjeeb Kakati, India Club and Theatrical Institution's president Saikat Patra.

## MISSING PERSON



**Bharati Ray —26 YEARS OLD.**

The above is a photograph of missing woman namely Bharati Ray - 26 years old, complainant: Narayan Ch. Barman, S/O: Manglu Barman of village Pokalagi Pt. II, PS: Golakganj, Dist- Dhubri, Assam who has been missing from his house, as reported by the complainant at Chagolia OP.

On receipt of the information, a missing entry vides Chagolia OP GDE No. 430, dated: 26/12/2023 was made and investigated into for tracing out the missing woman.

**The descriptive roll of the missing woman as follows:-**

1. Height - 5 feet.
2. Complexion - swarthy.
3. Age - 26 years.
4. Wearing - Red colour saree.
5. W/O - Narayan Ch. Barman
6. Religion - Hinduism.

All effort may kindly be taken to trace out the above woman with intimation to the undersigned.

Sd/-

Superintendent of police,  
Dhubri, Assam

Janasanyog /D/15520/23/30-Dec-23

## HNLC against shutting down of MCCL

**SHILLONG, Dec 29:** The Hyniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC) has expressed its opposition to the Meghalaya government's move to shut down the Mawmluh Cherra Cements Limited (MCCL) even as it asked the NPP legislator from Sohra Gavin M Mylliemgap to take responsibility by resigning as MLA of the area failing, which action will be taken against him.

At the same time, the outfit has also offered to provide the employees of the MCCL a monthly salary of ₹ 25,000 if they join its cause.

The statement also came at a time when the process of peace talks between the Centre, state and the outfit is on.

"If the government proceeds with the shutting down of MCCL, it would be appropriate for MLA Sohra Gavin to assume responsibility. In fact, he should resign from his position as MLA," HNLC general secretary cum publicity secretary Sainkupar Nongtraw said in a state-

ment issued today.

He also warned, "If he (Gavin) refuses to step down, the HNLC will hold him accountable. Just as you and your government dare to bury MCCL alive, we will hold you accountable by our own actions. Traitors of the people should be punished with death."

The outfit leader further said, "Currently, we do not see any other feasible alternatives. Therefore, the HNLC would like to extend an offer to the employees of this factory, if they are willing to join our cause, we will provide them with a monthly salary of ₹ 25,000. Eligible individuals should be below 45 years of age and undergo basic military training. If they demonstrate commitment to our cause and ideology, we will consider offering them an attractive salary."

"Finally, the government should cease sweet-talking and dilly-dallying, and refrain from sugarcoating the truth or else," he asserted. (NNN)



## Nitish elected JD(U) president as party lauds his role in bringing together opposition parties

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar was elected Janata Dal (United) president on Friday at the meeting of the party's national executive which lauded his role in bringing together opposition parties and spearheading the demand for caste census.

Party's chief spokesperson K C Tyagi said Kumar has agreed to take over the mantle from Lalad Singh.

Singh stepped down at the closed-door meeting and proposed Kumar's name, saying his leadership will be needed at this crucial juncture in the run up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls while he will be busy fighting his own election. He currently represents Munger constituency in Lok Sabha.

The national council meeting of the party, scheduled to be held later in the day, will ratify decisions, including on his presidency, taken in the executive meeting.

Sources said most key leaders within the party were of the view that Kumar being its most prominent face should take charge of the organisation at this crucial time.

The party is part of the opposition INDIA bloc.

Singh's leadership style was also criticised by several leaders within the party in their recent interactions with Kumar, the sources said.



Amid reports of rift within the party, the chief minister has worked to project a picture of unity by keeping him by his side. Sources within the party have been dismissive of reports that Singh's perceived proximity to the RJD was a reason behind his ouster, noting that he has been a close ally of Kumar for decades.

Kumar said in the executive meeting that he was not personally keen to take over as the party's president but will abide by the decision of national executive members who heartily endorsed the development, sources said.

Many enthusiastic members of the party raised slogans at the venue, projecting their leader as a prime

ministerial candidate.

Among several proposals discussed in the meeting was the Kumar's leadership in pushing for caste census and getting a "caste survey" done in Bihar, leading to the state government enhancing the reservation from the existing 60 per cent to 75 per cent.

Every party is supporting it now, it noted.

Amid the JD(U)'s perceived unhappiness with leading members of the INDIA bloc for not giving its most preeminent leader a formal role in the alliance, one of the proposals has cited his role in reaching out to different opposition parties to bring them together after he snapped ties

with the BJP in August, 2022.

Its general secretary Dhananjay Singh noted that it was Kumar who made it clear that there cannot be an opposition alliance without the Congress when some regional satraps, including BRS leader K Chandrashekar Rao, had floated the idea of a front of different non-BJP parties minus the Congress.

The executive has also condemned the suspension of 146 opposition MPs from Parliament during the recent Winter Session.

Kumar said in the meeting that he will ensure that senior members of the party are given different roles.

Singh had on Thursday rebuffed reports about his likely departure as JD(U) president and any rift within the party.

"You are trying to set the narrative... JD(U) is one and will remain united," he said in response to the media's queries on his resignation and differences in the party, asserting that it is a routine meeting, a view also echoed by Kumar before he boarded the flight from Patna to Delhi.

"If I have to resign, I will call you (mediapersons) and consult you about what to write in the resignation letter so that you can go to the BJP office and get the draft," Singh had said sarcastically. (PTI)

## Tribals, Dalits will be eligible for pension: CM Soren

**RANCHI, Dec 29:** Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren on Friday announced that tribals and Dalits in the state will be eligible for pension benefits on reaching the age of 50 years. Soren made the announcement while addressing a function on Ranchi's Morabadi ground organised to mark the completion of four years of the JMM-led government in the state. "The government has decided to provide pension benefits to tribals and Dalits on reaching the age of 50 years. The death rate among them is high and they do not get jobs after 60 years," he reasoned.

Soren claimed that only 16 lakh people had received pension benefits in the 20 years after the formation of Jharkhand in 2000 but his government has provided pension to 36 lakh people, mostly those aged above 60 years.

"In four years of our government, we have given pension benefits to 36 lakh people above 60 years of age, widows above 18 years of age and also physically challenged persons..." he said. Soren asserted that his government was relentlessly working for the welfare of the people and a large number of schemes were being implemented for the first time, including his government's outreach programme 'Aapki Yojna, Aapki Sarkar, Aapke Dwar' delivering benefits of the government schemes to villagers at their doorsteps. (PTI)

## Prez assent to bill for appointment of CEC, ECs



**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** President Droupadi Murmu has given her assent to a bill that seeks to put in place a mechanism for the appointment of chief election commissioner and other election commissioners, according to a government notification issued Friday. The chief election commissioner and other election commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023, has provisions to set up a search committee chaired by the law minister and two other persons not below the rank of secretary, to prepare a panel of five persons for consideration of the selection committee for appointment as CEC or ECs.

The bill also has provisions for a Selection Committee, chaired by the prime minister, leader of the opposition and a Union minister, to make recommendations to the President for appointment of CEC and other ECs.

The President also granted assent to the Press and Registration of Periodi-

cals Bill, to replace a British-era law governing the publishing industry and simplify the process of registration of periodicals. The Bill replaces the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867. Rajya Sabha passed the Bill on August 3.

"This bill is simple, smart and has a simultaneous process for registration of newspapers and periodicals. Earlier newspapers or magazines had to pass through an eight-step registration process. This can now be done at the click of a button," Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur said responding to the discussion on the bill in the Lok Sabha on December 21. He said newspapers and periodicals will now be able to get registered within two months as against the two to three years required earlier. The President also granted assent to the Central Goods and Services Tax (Second Amendment) Bill, 2023, and the Provisional Collection of Taxes Bill, 2023. (PTI)

## Measures being put in place to deal with fog impacting flight operations, says Scindia

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Amid dense fog disrupting flight operations at the Delhi airport in the last few days, Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday said the ministry is coordinating with the airport and airlines, and putting in place measures to deal with the issue.

Terming the fog issue as a "transitory phenomenon", the minister in an interview to PTI also said this year the situation has been slightly unprecedented in terms of the density of fog.

Many flights were diverted and scores were delayed at the Delhi airport due to dense fog.

"Fog issue is an issue that we encounter 15-20 days every year... this year, there has been unprecedented fog for the last three or four days. We are coordinating with all the airlines to make sure that they have CAT II and CAT III-trained pilots during fog hours, thereby easing congestion," Scindia said.

CAT II and III requirement pertains to operating flights in low visibility conditions. The civil aviation ministry is monitoring the fog situation on a daily basis.

He also said measures are being put in place, including to monitor congestion at a landing airport so that take off is not allowed if there is no direct routing as that will ensure there is no congestion.



"We are putting in place all those measures between airports and airlines... it is slightly unprecedented in terms of density of the fog but it is a transitory phenomenon," he added.

On Thursday, airport sources said a total of 58 flights, the majority of them operated by domestic carriers, were diverted due to bad weather between 0000 hours of December 25 to 0600 hours of December 28. (PTI)

## Raut irks Congress by saying seat-sharing talks with it have to 'start from zero'

**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Friday said his party would contest 23 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra, and the seat-sharing talks with the Congress have to "start from zero" as the latter had "not won any seat" in the previous elections, a statement that drew a sharp response from the state Congress.

The majority of the Sena MPs are now with the Eknath Shinde faction and the Congress now happens to be the biggest party in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance, state Congress leaders Sanjay Nirupam and Milind Deora pointed out.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena, Sharad Pawar faction of the Nationalist Congress Party and Congress are part of the MVA.

Speaking to reporters, Raut said the Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders, including Thackeray, have been holding talks with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi and

general secretary K C Venugopal over seat-sharing.

"We have said that we have been contesting 23 seats in Maharashtra and (will also contest) Dadra Nagar Haveli," Raut said, adding that "the Shiv Sena is the biggest party" in Maharashtra while the Congress is a national party.

The current MP of Dadra Nagar Haveli is from the Sena.

"We have decided that the seats won by us (MVA allies) will be discussed later. The Congress does not figure in it as it has not won any seat in Maharashtra. So talks with the Congress have to start from zero in the state," Raut further said.

Asked about state Congress leaders pointing out that the Sena is no longer a united party, Raut said the Congress did not split up, and yet it lost the recent assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

"A party is tested on the ground. Our party workers are with us. Even

if our party split, we won the Andheri assembly bypoll and you (the Congress) won the Kasba Peth assembly bypoll with our support," Raut said.

The Congress, nevertheless, remains an important part of the MVA, and the alliance partners will contest the coming elections together, he said. In the 2019 general elections, the undivided Shiv Sena under Uddhav Thackeray's leadership -- in alliance with the BJP -- contested 23 seats and won 18. It later broke off the ties with the BJP, and in 2022 the Sena itself split after Eknath Shinde rebelled against Thackeray.

The NCP won four seats in Maharashtra in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and the Congress only one. The Congress's lone MP from Chandrapur, Balu Dhanorkar, died earlier this year.

Congress leader Sanjay Nirupam hit back at Raut, saying the Shiv Sena (UBT) cannot win any seat on its own. It needs the Congress and

vice versa, said the former MP.

Of the 18 MPs of the Shiv Sena, more than a dozen MPs have deserted the Uddhav Thackeray camp and joined the Shinde faction, he said.

"They don't even have a guarantee as to whether the remaining MPs will stay with them," Nirupam added.

Milind Deora, another Congress leader from the state, tweeted that any alliance in Maharashtra cannot materialize without consultation with the state Congress leadership.

Deora, a former Mumbai MP who is now a joint treasurer of the Congress, said, "I want to tell Sanjay Raut that any alliance cannot move forward without consultation with the Maharashtra Congress leadership."

He also objected to Raut's contention that despite losing 40 MLAs to the Shinde faction, the Sena (UBT) is the largest party in the MVA alliance. (PTI)

## Shah's Instagram followers cross 1 cr

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Union home minister Amit Shah's followers on Instagram have crossed 10 million (one-crore) mark, with BJP sources saying their numbers saw a steep rise following the passage in Parliament of some landmark bills, including three legislations which overhaul criminal codes and laws. Shah, a key strategist of the party, has over 34.1 million followers on X, 10.7 million on Instagram and 15 million on Facebook, and he has been the most followed politician on social media after Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They noted that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, seen as the most visible opposition leader, has 6.8 million followers on Facebook, 5.1 million on Instagram and 24.7 million on X. Party leaders said Shah's following has seen a consistent rise after he became the BJP president in 2014 following its massive victory as it for the first time won a majority in Lok Sabha on its own with Modi as the prime ministerial face. (PTI)

## NTA has hiked fee of 2024 CUET-PG application forms, alleges SFI

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** The Students' Federation of India (SFI) on Friday alleged that the National Testing Agency has increased the fee of 2024 CUET-PG application forms. In a letter to NTA Director Subodh Kumar Singh, the student body's Delhi state committee said the fee hike is a "blatant attack" on higher education opportunities for students in the country. It is "anti-student" and a step towards "privatisation" of education, it said. There was no immediate response from the agency to the letter or the allegation of the students' wing of the CPI(M), even as an SFI delegation met senior advisor, National Testing Agency (NTA), HC Gupta, on the issue and demanded the rollback of the "fee hike".

The Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-PG for admission to

postgraduate programmes in universities across the country is conducted by the NTA. In a statement, the SFI alleged that the NTA has hiked the fee for CUET-PG application forms by ₹ 200 for all categories "due to lack of funds" and it will impact especially those belonging to marginalised communities and from backward regions.

"The NTA highlighted that enough funds are not being released... which is leading to such hikes," it said. The agency, the SFI claimed, has increased the fee by ₹ 200 for all categories. The current fee for general category students is ₹ 1,200, for students from economically weaker sections and other backward classes ₹ 1,000, for those from scheduled castes and tribes ₹ 900, and ₹ 800 for persons with disabilities, it claimed.

"The SFI strongly opposes this logic and calls it out for being another step that the government at large is taking towards the complete privatisation of education," the SFI said in its letter to NTA Director Singh. The delegation that met Gupta at the NTA office comprised SFI members Mehina (Delhi University), Nadia (Jamia Millia Islamia), Sagar (Jawaharlal Nehru University) and Vibhu (Ambedkar University).

In a related development, students' outfits AISA and ABVP highlighted the non-inclusion of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in the list of colleges taking CUET-PG 2024 application forms on the CUET website.

The university has now notified that it is a technical glitch and it will be rectified within a couple of days, the students' outfits said. (PTI)

## Cooperatives should open accounts in co-op banks, says Shah; asks GSC Bank to create system

**AHMEDABAD, Dec 29:** Union minister Amit Shah on Friday urged the Gujarat State Cooperative Bank to develop a system so that all cooperative entities in the state can open accounts in cooperative banks.

He made the suggestion while virtually inaugurating a building of Surendranagar District Cooperative Bank.

As part of a pilot project launched by GSC Bank recently, all cooperative societies in two districts have opened their accounts with cooperative banks, said Shah, who holds the Home and Cooperation portfolios in the Narendra Modi government.

"At present, cooperative entities open their accounts in other banks. Thus, cooperative banks do not have cash when they need it. The GSC Bank launched a pilot project to open bank accounts of all cooperative entities of two districts in cooperative banks. As a result, such banks in these two districts received deposits of ₹ 800 crore," said Shah in his virtual address. The Ahmedabad-headquartered GSC Bank is an apex bank that serves the credit and financial needs of nearly 28 lakh farmers through 18 District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs).

"Since Ajay Patel (chief of GSC Bank) is here, I urge him to replicate this pilot project across Gujarat and open bank accounts of various cooperative entities, such as dairies and APMCs, in cooperative banks," said Shah.

Shah informed the audience the Narendra Modi government has approved a plan to establish two lakh new multipurpose Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) across the country, for which a budget of ₹ 2,500 crore has been earmarked.

The new National Cooperative Policy will be launched soon, the Union minister added.

On the occasion, he hailed the management of the Surendranagar District Cooperative Bank for turning it into a profit-making entity in just 14 years.

"In 2009, the bank had incurred a loss of ₹ 71 crore. Today, the bank's annual profit is Rs 7 crore. Moreover, it has deposits worth ₹ 400 crore and it has given loans to nearly 28,000 farmers of this arid region," said Shah.

The new building, spread across 1,500 square meter area, was constructed at a cost of ₹ 10 crore and now has 1,000 lockers, said Shah. (PTI)

## Ram temple inauguration by PM, a 'gross misuse of religious sentiments', says Yechury

**KANNUR, Dec 29:** CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury on Friday said the inauguration of Ram temple in Ayodhya by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the presence of other Constitutional functionaries was a "gross misuse of religious sentiments" for BJP's political gain. Addressing the media, Yechury said that the Constitution clearly defines secularism as the separation of religion from politics and the state.

He said that the inauguration of the temple represents an overt politicisation of religion, which contradicts the principles of the Constitution.

"Here, this function, the inauguration is going to be done by the Prime Minister of India in the presence of the UP chief minister and those who hold other Constitutional positions. We feel this is a gross misuse of the religious sentiments of the people for their (BJP) political purposes. This is the open politicisation of religion which is not in consonance with the Constitution or the Supreme Court rulings," Yechury said.

He said the strategy to counter

this politicisation was to strictly adhere to secularism.

"You cannot combat this sort of religious fundamentalism of all these Hindutva offences by being a soft Hindutva or a soft saffron approach," the senior Left leader said.

The Ram temple will be inaugurated on January 22, where PM Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and more than 6,000 people are expected to attend the grand "Pran Pratistha" ceremony. Yechury also attacked the BJP-led NDA government on various aspects, including the issue of surveillance and the alleged failure of the economy.

Referring to the recent issue of Apple phone notifications in connection with intrusion or monitoring of handsets, he said, "this is a surveillance state that has been put in place" and it was not merely an intrusion into our privacy, which it is, but it is much more than that.

"It is a surveillance state where everything is being monitored. Even conversations," he added.

The Left leader rubbished the BJP's claim of a "vibrant economy" and termed it as propaganda.

"As far as people are concerned, the last 10 years is the worst as far as their livelihood is concerned. Unemployment is at the highest. This government has been doing a lot of data fudging. Manipulation of data. And now they have added a new category to the employment of unpaid labour," Yechury said.

He claimed that there is an inability for the industry to grow in the country due to lack of domestic demand.

"As far as the industry is concerned, its inability to grow is because of the lack of domestic demand. People don't have the money or purchasing power. For the bulk of the Indian people, their actual purchasing power is declining. And when there is no demand, there are no future investments," he said. Yechury said that as per the government's own projection for this fiscal year, the proposals for new investments have come down by more than 70 per cent, both in the private and governmental sectors. The Left leader also pointed out that in terms of per capita income, India is at 142nd position out of the 180 countries. (PTI)

## Temple visits, academic exchanges: Sangamam delegates rediscover age-old Tamil Nadu-Kashi link

**VARANASI, Dec 29:** Cultural performances, temple visits and academic dialogues on the banks of the Ganga gave delegates attending the Kashi Tamil Sangamam here an opportunity to rediscover the age-old links between Tamil Nadu and Kashi two of the country's ancient seats of learning.

The second edition of the sangamam, organised by the Union education ministry, began on December 17 and will conclude on Saturday. It is being attended by 1,400 delegates from Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry.

"The visits to ghats and temples in Kashi and Prayagraj... it has been a mesmerising experience. Each place has a huge significance for people from Tamil Nadu, and the confluence of cultures is not a new phenomenon," Satish Raj, a chemistry teacher from Tamil Nadu, who was part of the writers' delegation, said.

The delegates have been divided into groups named after seven sacred rivers of the country and each comprises 200 members -- students' group (Ganga), teachers' group (Yamuna), professionals' group (Godavari), spiritual group (Saraswati), group of farmers and artisans (Nar-



mada), writers' group (Sindhu) and group of traders and businessmen (Kaveri).

Raj added that the academic sessions at the Namoo ghat here were the most interesting for him.

Trustee at the Kashi Vishwanath temple, K Venkata Ramana Ghanapati, said delegates witnessed and experienced cuisines and different aspects of lifestyle and culture of the regions. Ghanapati, who is the first trustee of Tamil origin at the temple, said the itinerary of the delegates include a two-day outbound trip, a two-day return trip to Varanasi and a

one-day trip each to Prayagraj and Ayodhya. "Till now, five delegate groups have visited Kashi," he said.

More than 42,000 people had registered till December 8 to attend the sangamam, of which 1,400 were selected by a committee, according to officials.

Raj Chennai, another delegate, said that he is excited about the last leg of the trip, which is to Ayodhya. "We are less than a month away from the inauguration of the Ram temple. I am looking forward to visiting Ayodhya...I will definitely come back again after the inauguration," Chennai

said. The consecration ceremony of the temple is scheduled to be held on January 22 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend it.

Stalls at the Namoo ghat showcasing handloom, handicrafts and cuisine gave delegates an insight into the rich aspects of Tamil Nadu's and Kashi's art and culture. Cultural programmes, combining the cultures of the two places, organised during the evenings, were a major attraction for the visiting delegates.

Seminars, discussions and lectures were organised to deliberate on literature, ancient texts, philosophy, spirituality, music, dance, drama, yoga, ayurveda, handloom and handicrafts as well as modern innovations, business exchanges, EdTech and other next-generation technologies.

Experts and scholars, local practitioners of various disciplines and professions from Tamil Nadu and Kashi are participating in these exchanges.

The sangamam aims at rediscovering, reaffirming and celebrating the age-old links between Tamil Nadu and Kashi. The first edition was a month-long event organised last year and more than 2,500 people from Tamil Nadu participated in it. (PTI)



## NJAC never given chance to work, led to friction in functioning of collegium: Justice S K Kaul

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Former Supreme Court judge Sanjay Kishan Kaul said on Friday the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) was never given a chance to work, leading to angst in political circles and friction in the working of the collegium system of judges appointing judges to higher judiciary.

The Narendra Modi government, after coming to power in 2014, got enacted the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act. The NJAC, tasked with the responsibility of making judicial appointments, comprised the Chief Justice of India, two senior Supreme Court judges, the union law minister and two other eminent persons nominated by the CJI, the prime minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

However, in October 2015, the Supreme Court had struck down the NJAC Act holding it unconstitutional. In an interview with PTI, Justice Kaul, who demitted office on December 25, said one has to accept there is a problem with the collegium system and it will be "unrealistic" to say that it is working smoothly.

Justice Kaul, who was part of the top court bench which refused to accord marriage rights to same-sex couples under the existing laws, said the case was not strictly legal but involved social issues, and the government may introduce a law to effectuate such a right to



them in future.

"Could NJAC have been dealt differently is a hindsight. Maybe, it could have been kept pending to experiment. It was never given a chance to work. When it was struck down there was angst in political circles that a unanimous decision of Parliament had been struck down like this and the judges are not letting the system change. That has brought some friction in the working of the (collegium) system post the NJAC."

"If people say it (collegium) works smoothly, that would be unrealistic in a sense because that is not a fact. That is reflected by the number of appointments which remain pending. Even till today, certain names which have been

recommended, are pending. We have to accept that there is a problem in the system. If we close our eyes to the problem we will not come to a solution. You must acknowledge the problem first and then only you can come up with a solution," Kaul said. Justice Kaul, who was a member of the Supreme Court collegium for over a year, said at present the collegium system is the law of the land and it must be implemented as it stands. "What should be the way forward is very difficult to say. Because the collegium system is the law of the land. So the collegium system, as it stands, must be implemented. If in its wisdom, the Parliament tomorrow says some other system should come in place tak-

ing cognisance of a fault found, it is for them to do so, we cannot do so. Therefore, there is a responsibility on us that the existing law is followed," he said.

Referring to the collegium's pending recommendations with the government, he said the friction is "reflected" in the number of appointments which remain pending.

The NJAC Act, which was passed in 2014, provided for the procedure to be followed for recommending persons for appointment as the Chief Justice of India, other judges of the Supreme Court, and chief justice and judges of high courts.

Responding to a question about whether delayed disposal of cases amounted to denial of justice to common litigants, he said, "It is so. But what is to be done? Can a judge decide a hundred cases in a day? No..."

On the issue of judges taking up post-retirement assignments, Justice Kaul said he was not interested in securing one, and the issue should be best left to the discretion of retired judges.

During his tenure of over six years and 10 months as a judge of the apex court, Justice Kaul was part of several landmark judgments including those that held the right to privacy a fundamental right and upheld the Centre's decision to abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution that bestowed special status on the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. (PTI)

## Rahul Gandhi ignored Amethi's development but built guest house for himself: Smriti Irani

**AMETHI (UP), Dec 29:** Union minister Smriti Irani Friday alleged that former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi ignored the development of Amethi, a constituency he represented in the Lok Sabha for 15 years, but built a guest house for himself.

During an interaction with people in Munshiganj here, the villagers drew her attention to the drainage problem in their area.

Irani, a Lok Sabha MP of the BJP from Amethi, said, "It has only been four-and-a-half years for me. Rahul Gandhi has been MP for 15 years but he did not pay any attention to this. He did not even think about development and only built his guest house in Munshiganj."

"His government was at the Centre for 10 years but he did not even think about the development of Amethi. Here, work was being done only on paper. Rahul Gandhi could not even build a drain properly in Amethi," she said.

Irani was referring to a guest house on the premises of Sanjay Gandhi Hospital in Munshiganj which was used by Rahul Gandhi and his family during their visits to the constituency.

Later, an objection was raised citing the government had given the land to the hospital on lease and the guest house was built there. A notice was served to the Sanjay Gandhi Hospital by the district magistrate after which the guest house was converted into the residence of the administrator of the Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Trust.



The Union minister said that under the BJP government, work has been done on the ground in Amethi and development works were being done at a rapid pace. Amethi is moving forward on the path of continuous development, she stressed.

During her visit to the constituency, Irani listened to the problems of the people through public dialogue programmes in Ramdevpur, Munshiganj, Sarai Khema, Loniapur, and Pithipur and directed the officials concerned to solve the issues. Her plan to return to Delhi on Friday has been cancelled and she will continue to tour the constituency on December 30 also. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## ULFA's pro-talks faction signs

Assam by way of delimitation, land rights," Sarma said, adding 726 more cadres will join the mainstream now.

ULFA leader Sashadhar Choudhary, while thanking Modi, Shah and Sarma, expressed hope that the pact will bring durable peace and stability in Assam.

Officials said a host of long-standing political, economic and social issues concerning Assam, besides provisions for cultural safeguards and land rights to the indigenous people, have been incorporated in the accord. Besides the 16-member delegation led by ULFA 'Chairman' Arabinda Rajkhowa, representatives from 13 civil society organisations were also present on the occasion. The accord came after 12 years of unconditional negotiations between the Rajkhowa-led ULFA faction and the government, the officials said.

The peace pact is expected to end the decades-old insurgency in Assam.

However, the ULFA's hardline faction headed by Paresh Baruah is not a part of the agreement. Baruah is believed to be residing at a place along the China-Myanmar border.

Sarma said Baruah is likely to join the peace process now and that state government representatives are in touch with him.

The ULFA was formed in 1979 with the demand for a "sovereign Assam". Since then, it has been involved in subversive activities that led to the central government declaring it a banned outfit in 1990.

The Rajkhowa-led faction joined peace talks with the government on September 3, 2011, after an agreement for Suspension of Operations was signed between the ULFA and the central and the state governments. (PTI)

## NIA arrests five for human trafficking

from Bangladesh. They were identified as Suman Tripura (24), Kangfru Mog (31) and Amalesh Das from South Tripura district and Nachim Ali (60) and his son Jubel Ali (21) of Irani in Unakoti district," the officer said.

On November 8, the NIA had conducted operations in four bordering districts and arrested 20 people for facilitating cross border movement of illegal migrants.

On December 21, Agarwal had inspected NC Nagar BOP in Sepahijala district and stressed on the need to plug the gaps in the fencing to stop infiltration. (PTI)

## Next steps after examining ruling,

against them public. Bagchi was asked whether the commutation of the death sentences makes it possible for India to invoke a 2015 pact with Qatar on the transfer of sentenced persons.

The pact provides for the citizens of India and Qatar who have been convicted and sentenced for criminal offences to serve their sentences in their home country.

"Yes, there is such an agreement. However, I am not sure whether such an agreement requires ratification by both sides and I would have to check whether the Qatari side has ratified it or not," the MEA spokesperson said.

It has been learnt that Qatar is yet to ratify the pact.

India has entered into prisoner-transfer treaties with many countries that allow a person convicted of a crime to be transferred to his or her home country to serve the prison sentence.

The charges were filed against the eight Navy veterans on March 25 and they were tried under Qatari law.

All the former officers had "unblemished stints" of up to 20 years in the Indian Navy and held important positions, including that of instructors, in the force.

Al Dhara Global closed its operations in Doha in May and all those working there (primarily Indians) have since returned home. (PTI)

## Sarbananda Sonowal applauds historic

Sonowal highlighted the commitment to ensuring permanent peace for Assam's journey toward a new age of prosperity.

Sonowal elaborated on Modi's deliberate efforts to elevate the region to unprecedented levels of development and progress.

"Not only does this bring closure to an age-old issue, but it also provides an opportunity for our society to explore avenues to become active members of nation-building," he remarked.

Driven by the philosophy of 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas,' India, under the inspiring leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is confidently surging towards a new age of economic growth and social equality, consolidating the nation's march towards an Atmanirbhar Bharat by 2047, as articulated by Sonowal.

## NSCN (K-YA) claims responsibility for

supporters, had gone to the village for some personal work when someone took the former MLA towards a jungle on some pretext and shot him, killing him on the spot.

Matay was elected as an MLA from Khonsa West assembly constituency on a Congress ticket in 2009. He joined the BJP in 2015 and earlier this year, declared his willingness to contest the assembly polls in 2024.

Before entering politics, he had served as a district adult education officer in Changlang district.

The state government had on December 21 decided to transfer the case to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). Subsequently, the state home department forwarded the case to the Ministry of Home Affairs for appropriate direction to the NIA in this matter.

Of the 239 insurgency-related fatalities in the state since March 2000, 183 have been reported in the Tirap-Changlang-Longding (TCL) region, according to official data. (PTI)

## Himanta apologises for 'incorrect

thanks to the reform movement led by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva. If the deleted post has offended anyone, I sincerely apologise," he added.

The controversy unfolded when an audio-visual post claimed to represent a Bhagavad Gita verse, leading to opposition criticism and accusations of regressive ideology.

## India's "generous gesture" will help

State to declare an all-out war against the Islamist faction and it has pounded the territory to its south-west with continued air and ground strikes.

India's support is meant to help the UN agency's core programmes and services, including education, health-care, relief and social services provided to Palestinian refugees.

New Delhi has underlined its continued support for the agency's activities in the region and the services it provides to the Palestinian refugees.

Earlier on November 19, India had also delivered 32 tonnes of "humanitarian assistance to the people of Palestine" via the El-Arish Airport in Egypt.

Since 2018, India has given USD 30 million to UNRWA.

Since the October 7 attack by Hamas on Israel and the retaliatory action by Israel, more than two-thirds of the Gaza population – of approximately 2.3 million – has fled their homes to move southwards.

The UNRWA has been struggling to provide basic services to hundreds of thousands of people in shelters.

Before the war in Gaza, UNRWA was already facing an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. The agency is mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.6 million Palestine refugees registered with it across its five fields of operation. (PTI)

## Karbi Youth Festival gears up

the respective departments. Government department stalls, including those of the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary department and the Dairy Development department, are receiving makeovers to enhance their attractiveness. Tiles are being fitted on the floors and ceilings, partitions are being created inside the stalls for the exhibition of poultry and livestock items, and an attractive gate is being installed in front of the stalls.

## Congress to formally start seat-sharing talks with allies next week; alliance committee holds meetings

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Congress's National Alliance Committee, set up to facilitate seat-sharing talks with allies, will hold meetings with party leaders from the states here on Friday and Saturday, and the negotiations with the allies will formally start next week after the panel submits a report to party chief Mallikarjun Kharge.

With the clock ticking for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and preparations taking shape for the party's "Bharat Nyay Yatra", the Congress, which sounded its poll bugle at a rally in Nagpur on Thursday, is set to hold a series of high-level meetings.

According to sources, Kharge held an interaction with the Congress general secretaries in-charge of all states after the rally at Nagpur on Thursday evening and discussed the upcoming polls and organisational issues.

The five-member National Alliance Committee of the Congress is scheduled to hold meetings on Friday and Saturday with leaders from the states where the party is likely to contest the general election in an alliance with other INDIA bloc constituents.

The committee will then submit a report to the party president, providing details for the negotiation, including listing out the seats where the Congress is in a strong position.

The sources added that while in some states, talks with the allies have already started at the local level, the negotiations will formally start next week, after the report is presented. They also said while the equations with other parties may differ in states, the final call on the alliance will be taken from a "national perspective".

The committee formed last week is headed by senior Congress leader Mukul Wasnik and has Ashok Gehlot, Bhupesh Baghel, Salman Khurshid and Mohan Prakash as its members.

The first meeting of the party's manifesto committee for the general election, headed by former Union minister P Chidambaram, is scheduled to be held on January 4.

Kharge, along with former party chief Rahul Gandhi and general secretary K C Venugopal, held a series of meetings with state Congress chiefs and



other leaders over the last few days. While broad discussions were held on forming alliances, the meetings largely focused on organisational matters and the strategy for the Lok Sabha polls.

Another meeting will be held on January 4 with party leaders, including Congress chiefs and legislative party leaders from the states through which the "Bharat Nyay Yatra" will pass. The final route of the march will be decided at the meeting.

The detailed route of the yatra will be announced on January 8 while a theme song will be released on January 12.

The sources said the yatratis will cover around 120 kilometres a day, including around five to seven km on foot.

A number of public meetings and interactive sessions with locals and marginalised groups have been planned during the yatra.

The "Bharat Nyay Yatra" led by Gandhi will start from Manipur in the east on January 14 and conclude in Mumbai in western India in March. It will cover 14 states and 85 districts.

The march will traverse through Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Leaders from other INDIA bloc parties are also expected to join the yatra, though the plans are yet to be finalised. (PTI)

## Centre paves way for benefit of reservation in promotions for its 'divyangjan' staffers

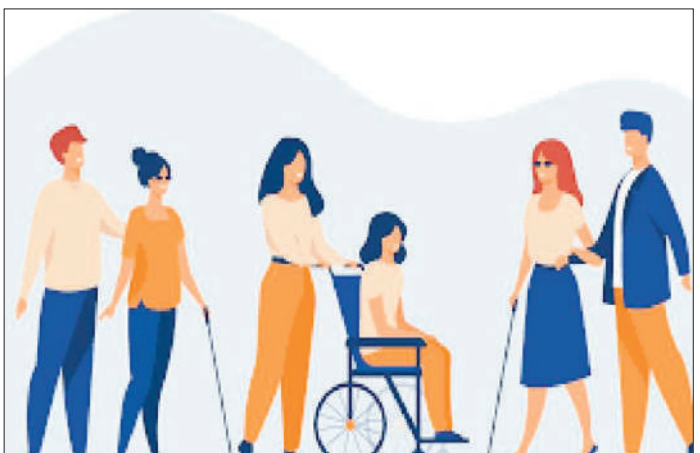
**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** In a major move, the Centre has decided to give the benefit of reservation in promotions to its employees with benchmark disabilities (divyangjans), according to an order issued by the personnel ministry.

The eligible staffers would be considered for the promotions on "notional basis" with effect from June 30, 2016, the order said.

"PwD (person with disabilities) employees in posts and services of the central government will be considered for grant of the benefit of reservation in promotion up to the lowest rung of Group 'A' on notional basis with effect from 30.6.2016, subject to their fulfilment of the eligibility conditions..." the order issued to the secretaries of all central government departments read.

Any such promotion during the period from June 30, 2016 till the PwD employee actually assumes the charge of the post will only be on notional basis and the actual financial benefit of promotion will be effective from the date he or she actually assumes the charge of the promoted post, it said.

It means no financial arrear will be admissible to them for the period between the date on which they get the benefit of notional promotion and the date on which they actually



assume or have already assumed the charge of the promoted post, the order explained.

The personnel ministry has also suggested the creation of supernumerary posts (permanent posts created under special circumstances for a specific period) so that the inter-se seniority of the officials in various grades is not affected and to avoid "administrative inconvenience".

"Extending the benefit of reservation in promotion to the PwD employees on notional basis between 30.6.2016 and actual assumption of the charge of the post may affect the inter-se seniority of the officials in various grades. Due to this, there

may be cases in which some officials may have to be placed in a select list or seniority list, subsequent to the year of their existing or present seniority list or select list," it said.

This may have a chain effect as it may result in a revision of the seniority lists in the subsequent years in many cases, which may cause administrative inconvenience, the order added.

"In order to avoid such a situation, supernumerary posts may be created to adjust the lien of such PwD employees with effect from the date on or after 30.6.2016, when they become eligible to get the benefit of reservation in promotion, till the

availability of the vacancy in which the promotion is to be made or till they vacate the post on their retirement, further promotion etc., whichever is earlier," it said.

The creation of such supernumerary posts will be personal to the PwD employee who is given the benefit of reservation in promotion on notional basis. This post will stand abolished on the date when such a PwD employee is adjusted against the available vacancy in the grade in which the promotion is given or when the PwD employee vacates the post on his or her retirement, further promotion etc., the order said.

All ministries and departments have been advised to undertake an exercise to ascertain the requirement of supernumerary posts and submit the proposal for the creation of the posts to the Department of Expenditure through the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), it added.

"It is clarified that the benefit of notional promotion, as proposed above, shall not adversely affect those PwD candidates who have already been granted the benefit of reservation in promotion in personam (made against a specific person) in pursuance of the orders and judgments of various courts of law," the order said. (PTI)



# GARY OLDMAN SAYS HE WAS 'MEDIocre' IN 'HARRY POTTER' MOVIES

**LOS ANGELES, Dec 29:** Oscar-winning actor Gary Oldman says he is not a fan of his performance as Sirius Black in the "Harry Potter" franchise. During his appearance on the latest episode of the 'Happy Sad Confused' podcast, the British actor said his portrayal of the fan-favourite character was "mediocre".

"I think my work is mediocre in it. No, I do. Maybe if I had read the books like Alan (Rickman, who played Severus Snape), if I had got ahead of the curve, if I had known what's coming, I

honestly think I would have played it differently," Oldman said. The "Harry Potter" movies were adapted from author JK Rowling's book series of the same title. The franchise titles are "The Philosopher's Stone", "The Chamber of Secrets", "The Prisoner of Azkaban", "The Goblet of Fire", "The Order of the Phoenix", "The Half-Blood Prince" and "The Deathly Hallows – Part 1 & 2".

Oldman had starred as Sirius Black in "The Prisoner of Azkaban", "The Goblet of Fire", "The Order of the Phoenix" and "The Deathly



Hallows Part 2". The 65-year-old actor admitted that he often criticises his performances in the films.

"I'll tell you what it is. It's like anything, I think if I sat and watched myself in something and said, 'My God, I'm amazing,' that would be a very sad day, because you want to make the next thing better," Oldman said.

"It's so subjective. It's such a personal thing that you're looking at that other people are not seeing... It's not to disrespect someone who says to me, 'Oh, I really love you in that movie,' and I'm think-

ing, 'I'm terrible in that movie. What are they talking about?' It's not that. It's (that) they're seeing something else," he added.

Recently, Oldman had revealed that being part of popular franchises "Harry Potter" and Christopher Nolan's "The Dark Knight" trilogy "saved" him as a single father.

In Nolan's movies, which featured Christian Bale as superhero The Batman, Oldman had essayed the role of Commissioner Gordon.

"At 42 years old, I woke up, you know, sort of divorced and I had custody of these boys.

That, in itself, was ... that was hard because there was a shift in the industry where a lot of productions were... in Hungary, Budapest, Prague, Australia, you know, all of these places. So, I turned down a lot of work.

"Thank God for 'Harry Potter'. I tell you, the two — Batman and Harry Potter — really, they saved me, because it meant that I could do the least amount of work for the most amount of money and then be home with the kids," Oldman had said during his appearance on "The Drew Barrymore Show". (PTI)

## Kusha Kapila: I have mostly essayed extremely urban characters



**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** Actress Kusha Kapila, who plays Chhaya in the coming-of-age drama series 'Dehati Ladke', shared how she has mostly essayed extremely urban characters, and in this show, she has played a professor unlike her previous roles.

The social media personality and YouTuber, Kusha is known for her roles in 'Selfie', 'Plan A Plan B', 'Thank You for Coming', 'Case Toh Banta Hai', and others.

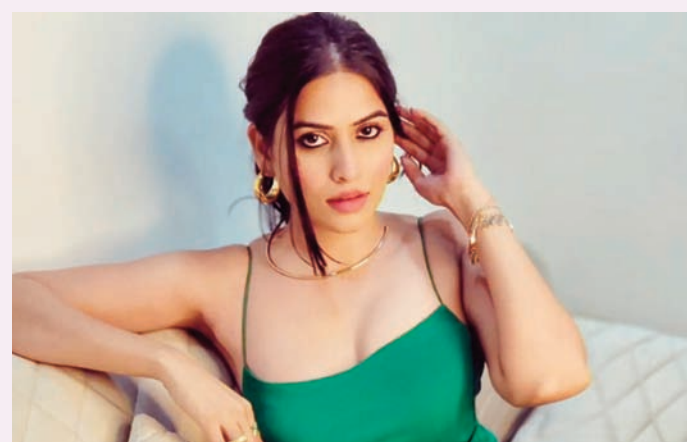
Speaking about her role in 'Dehati Ladke', she shared: "Chhaya is a liberal and progressive woman, who is an Assistant Professor at Rajat's university. She finds love in Rajat's mentor, Prashant. Chhaya has a mind of her own; she is a strong-headed yet amicable person, and people find it easy to open up to her. Besides being progressive, she is also unafraid to make mistakes in life." Talking about taking up a role unlike any other she has played in

the past, Kusha said: "Interestingly, my character in 'Dehati Ladke' is unlike any other roles that I have done in the past. I have mostly essayed extremely urban characters. I've never really played a professor, especially somebody who quotes poets and imparts wisdom at the drop of a hat. So, that was very interesting." Based on a best-selling Hindi novel, the narrative not only evokes a sense of nostalgia for college days, but also imparts valuable life lessons about embracing life to the fullest. The series follows the journey of Rajat, a simple boy from a small village, who embarks on a quest to chase his dreams in the glare of Lucknow city.

This young adult series features Shine Pandey, Raghav Sharma, Tanish Neeraj, Saamya Jainn, Aasif Khan, and Kusha.

It is streaming on Amazon miniTV. (AGENCIES)

## South film industry allows me to explore acting: Sneha Singh Sisodia



**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** Actress Sneha Singh Sisodia, known for her roles in 'Meri Chidiya', 'Chashmish', and 'Operation Mayfair', has opened up on why she prefers to work in the South film industry, saying it allows her to explore the core aspects of acting and offers roles that align with her preferences.

Having worked in Hindi and South Film Industries, Sneha is currently engaged in various projects down south. Her upcoming film, 'Dakshina', set for a 2024 release, features her as the lead IPS officer.

Additionally, she will be part of a comedy movie with Venela Kishore and Harsh Vardhan, as well as a film with Nikhil Siddhartha under Ram Charan Productions. Sneha recently shared insights into her experiences in both industries, her preferences, and discussed her series 'Oh My Wife'.

When asked about her preferred industry if she were given a choice, Sneha promptly responded: "Without a second thought, I prefer the South film industry. It allows me to explore the core aspects of acting

and offers roles that align with my preferences. I'm getting the kinds of roles and content that I've always wanted to do. It's giving me opportunities to learn, explore, and build myself as an actor." "On the other hand, in the Hindi Film Industry, I haven't received any fulfilling offers yet despite my efforts. The roles I'm being offered are not very satisfying. Moreover, to reach a good director, one has to get through many middlemen, like the casting directors. The entire process is tedious, and there's groupism that often overshadows talent."

Reflecting on the differences in working patterns of both South and Hindi industry, Sneha said: "The South Film industry has an excellent technical team, they always do things ethically. They are particular about time and are very punctual. If the shift starts at 7 AM, they wrap up by 7 PM, their time management is on point. Directors down South, give actors the chance to perform freely and ensure that they get into the details of their characters." (AGENCIES)

## Prabhas to collaborate with director Maruthi for next film

**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** Actor Prabhas is set to collaborate with Telugu director Maruthi for an upcoming feature film, the makers said on Friday. The movie, which will be the 24th film of Prabhas' career, was announced by production banner People Media Factory on microblogging site X. The studio said the movie's title and first look will be released on the festival of Pongal in January 2024.

"People Media Factory proudly unveils the Dinosaur transformed into an absolute DARLING. First Look and Title will be unveiled on Pongal.



#Prabhas #PrabhasPongalFeast," it posted. Maruthi, known for directing films such as "Ee Rojullo", "Bus Stop", "Shailaja Reddy Aludra", "Manchi Rojulochaie" and "Pakka Commercial", said he is excited to collaborate with Prabhas for the upcoming project.

"Excited and been waiting for this moment for a long time! Happy to present Rebel Star #Prabhas in a brand new avatar. See you all for Pongal #PrabhasPongalFeast," the filmmaker posted on X.

Prabhas currently stars in filmmaker Prashanth Neel's "Salaar: Part 1 – Ceasefire", which grossed over Rs 500 crore in worldwide collection.

He will next star in "Kalki 2898 AD", directed by Nag Ashwin and also starring Amitabh Bachchan, Kamal Haasan, Deepika Padukone and Disha Patani. The film is expected to be released in 2024. (PTI)

## From multiplex mogul to singer: Life comes full circle for PVR INOX chief Ajay Bijli

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** He had a college band and a love for music he says he left behind to handle the family business but when life gave him a chance to pursue his teen passion he grasped it eagerly - and today Ajay Bijli, PVR INOX managing director, can be heard crooning a song in "Dunki".

Bijli started with covers of the songs that he likes in English and Hindi during the COVID-19 pandemic. He then decided to take things to the next level by singing an original track and it resulted in "Waheguru, Ik Onkar", a spiritual number that features prominently in Shah Rukh Khan's new release "Dunki" and is also available on T-series as a music video.

"It is a passion project and I hope that when people listen to the song, it helps them. I am not a religious guru or anything. I am just singing a song that resonated with me. It's a prayer and has different meanings and interpretations for different people. I hope it touches people's hearts," Bijli told PTI in an interview.

Shot in the scenic Pathar Sahib Gurudwara near Leh, Ladakh, the video is directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra with Shekhar Ravjiani attached as the composer and Ravi Verman as the cinematographer.

Bijli, who is a regular with his 'riyaz' (practice) and has been taking music lessons from a guru, said he always had a love for singing.

"I have been very fond of music right from the beginning. I had a band in college called Modus Operandi but in 1988 when I finished college, the band also finished because I started work in my transport company and then my love for cinema started in 1990," he said.

His family had a transport business and owned Vasant Vihar's Priya Cinema, which Bijli later expanded into a multiplex chain called PVR. The company recently completed its merger with INOX and is now known as PVR INOX.

Bijli, who now has a new band called Random Order, said the spiritual song is his first of-

ficial release. He wanted to begin his musical journey by remembering god through a track that also connects him to his roots as a Punjabi.

"My mother really likes the song and I also wanted to give a tribute to her through this," he added. Once he decided to record the song, Bijli approached Ravjiani as he had liked the composer's rendition of "Hanuman Chalisa".

"I reached out to him and said, 'Shekhar, can you do a favour for me. Can you do an original rendition of 'Ik Onkar'. And he said, 'Okay, I will do it for you'. He did it for free without charging. I love the music he created, the loop of 'Waheguru'."

Bijli thought he will shoot the music video at the iconic Golden Temple in Amritsar or Delhi's Bangla Sahib Gurudwara. But Mehra suggested that they shoot the video at Pathar Sahib Gurudwara near Leh, Ladakh.

It was just a coincidence that the song became a part of "Dunki", directed by Rajkumar Hirani.

Shah Rukh Khan, his friend from school days, was discussing the film with him when Bijli realised that the song could find a place in the movie that's set in Punjab.

"I spoke to Raju and said, 'Listen, I have sung this rendition of 'Ik Onkar' and I believe the movie is set in Punjab and there is some gurdwara scene'. He said, 'Yes, we have such scenes'. I said, 'Can I just send you my song'. He said, 'Yes, send it and I will see if I can fit it anywhere. But I have to like it and it has to resonate and go with the overall theme'. I said, 'Yes of course, I am just taking a chance'."

Luckily, Hirani liked the song and decided to include it in the film's background and also made it a part of the official album.

Post "Waheguru, Ik Onkar", Bijli plans to share his music with the public through songs on the theme of hope.

"I am approaching music directors whose music I like. I like Amit Trivedi's music a lot, so I reached out to him a few months ago and I

asked if I could do some songs. I explained to him that I am 56 years old and can't do frivolous stuff.

"It has to be fun and positive because Covid was a time when everybody got very depressed. So I want songs of hope that bring a smile," Bijli said, adding that his aim is to create songs that have "depth and longevity".

Trivedi has written two songs that have been penned by Swanand Kirkire and Bijli plans to record it soon.

Bijli is happy that music has become a part of his life once again after so many years.

"Life comes full circle. Of course, my first job as the MD of PVR INOX is to run the company. I have a responsibility towards the shareholders and 25,000 people who work in PVR and 200 million visitors. But when people ask me, 'How do you get the time?' I always tell them that there are businessmen who play golf or tennis. They pursue other passions of riding or driving. This is my passion." (PTI)



# Indian women's team works with Rupinder Pal Singh to address penalty corner conversion woes

**BENGALURU, Dec 29:** In order to fix its perennial penalty-corner woes, the Indian women's hockey team is engaged in a skill-sharpening exercise with legendary drag flicker Rupinder Pal Singh during the on-going five-day camp here ahead of next month's FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers in Ranchi.

Despite winning the recent Asian Champions Trophy in Ranchi defeating Japan, India had wasted plenty of penalty corners, and coach Janneke Schop-

man had marked it as an area that needed urgent improvement.

Ace women's drag flicker Gurjit Kaur termed the camp, that began on Wednesday at the SAI Bengaluru, as a perfect learning space ahead of the crucial qualifiers.

The Olympic qualifiers are scheduled to be held between January 13 and 19, 2024.

"We are learning new things each day and looking to further improve our game by focusing on specific aspects that need re-

finement. Rupinder has been instrumental in guiding us.

"As we gear up for the upcoming tournaments, we are confident that the lessons learned here will contribute significantly to our performance on the field," said Gurjit.

It was not tough to see why Gurjit emphasised on improvement as the women outfit's shortcomings in penalty-corner conversion was quite evident in the Hangzhou Asian Games, where they ended up with a

bronze medal.

In that tournament, India had earned 69 penalty corners and converted just 16 of them at an average of 23.1 percent.

That Achilles' heel haunted them in the semifinal against hosts China as India could not score off the six penalty corners they earned.

Eventually, India lost that game 0-4.

India nearly botched up the bronze medal match against Japan too as they could score

only once from 11 penalty corners. However, they managed a 2-1 win over the Asian rivals.

Deepika, who regularly takes the penalty corner, said Rupinder shared the nuances about drag flicking such as the angle to take the shot and how to tackle the first-rushers from the opposition defence.

"He shared insights on the first rushers, how they have become fearless and close down on the ball faster than before. To counter this, he advised us to pick up the

ball faster.

"We also picked his brain on how to beat the first rusher, determining the line the rusher follows, where to get the ball stopped, which angle to take the shot in, and how to deal with mis-trapped balls," noted Deepika.

Rupinder, who had scored a whopping 234 goals in 223 appearances before his retirement in 2021, said he was satisfied by the lesson-intake ability of his wards.

"Gurjit and Deepika are exceptional drag flickers. They quickly understand and implement my pointers. This crash course will be a fantastic way to brush up their skills before heading to Ranchi," said the towering full-back, who played a stellar role in India's bronze-winning effort in the Tokyo Olympics 2020.

In the Olympics Qualifiers ahead of the 2024 Paris Games, India are placed in Pool B along with New Zealand, Italy, and the United States. (PTI)

## Premier League: Arsenal beaten 2-0 by West Ham for 1st home loss in this season

**LONDON, Dec 29:** Arsenal lost at home for the first time since May as a 2-0 defeat to West Ham cost Mikel Arteta's team the chance to return to the top of the Premier League on Thursday.

Goals by Tomas Soucek in the 13th minute and former Arsenal player Konstantinos Mavropanos in the 55th — combined with a stout defensive display — gave West Ham a surprising win at Emirates Stadium and continued a midseason blip by the Gunners.

That's just one win in its last four league matches for Arsenal, which was in first place for Christmas and needs to beat Fulham away on Sunday to be in that position heading into 2024. Arsenal is currently in second place and two points behind Liverpool, which doesn't play again until New Year's Day.

It could have been an even bigger win for West Ham but Said Benrahma had a penalty saved by Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya in the sixth minute of stoppage time.

There was some controversy over the first goal, with cameras not showing definitively if the ball was out of play when Jarrod Bowen turned it back into the area for Soucek to force home. Bowen's leg blocked the best sight of whether any of the ball was in play and the referee stayed with the onfield decision of giving the goal.

A similar situation occurred with Arsenal at Newcastle, which scored the only goal of their game at St. James' Park on Nov. 4 amid debate over whether the ball was in play as a cross came in for Anthony Gordon's strike. West Ham lost Lucas Paqueta to an apparent left hamstring injury just after the half-hour mark — the Brazilian had been a doubt at the start of the game — but losing one of their key players didn't put the visitors out of their stride. (AP)

## Tottenham outplayed in 4-2 loss at Brighton

**BRIGHTON, ENGLAND, Dec 29:** Tottenham's top-four credentials were damaged by a miserable performance in a 4-2 loss at Brighton in the Premier League on Thursday.

Late goals for Tottenham by Alejo Veliz and Ben Davies gave the score a respectable look but the visitors were outplayed at Amex Stadium by a Brighton team missing up to 10 players through injury. Jack Hinshelwood powered a shot into the roof of the net in the 11th minute and Joao Pedro converted a penalty in the 23rd after Dejan Kulusevski pulled back Danny Welbeck in the area. James Milner also struck the post for Brighton in a first half that saw Tottenham's defense — missing injured center backs Cristian Romero and Micky van de Ven — get sliced open time and again. Richarlison also hit the post and had a goal ruled out for offside for Tottenham before halftime substitute Pervis Estupinan made it 3-0 with a shot from 25 yards (meters) that flew into the top corner in the 63rd. Joao Pedro scored his second — again from the penalty spot — in the 75th after Evan Ferguson was fouled by Giovanni Lo Celso, but Tottenham then rallied late. Veliz netted his first Premier League goal after Kulusevski blocked Lewis Dunk's clearance straight to Son, who set up the Argentine forward in the 81st. When Davies headed in Pedro Porro's cross four minutes later, a sensational comeback was potentially on but Brighton held on despite more chances for Tottenham, which would have jumped back into the top four with a victory. (AP)

## INDIA ARE CLUBBED WITH AUSTRALIA, UZBEKISTAN & SYRIA

# Final line will be drawn by players' strength of character: Stimac on Asian Cup squad

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Lined up to face strong sides like Australia and Uzbekistan in the AFC Asian Cup football in Doha next month, India head coach Igor Stimac on Friday said "strength of character" will be the parameter to decide who will be included in the final squad.

India are clubbed with formidable Australia, strong central Asian side Uzbekistan and tricky Syria — all above Stimac's team in the FIFA rankings — in the group stage of the Asian Cup from January 13 onwards.

"All the boys in the (probable) list are similar in their football qualities. What we are looking for the final list of 26 is definitely experience, physical strength, and the final line will be drawn by the strength of their character," Stimac said on the All India Football Federation's social media handles.

"This is very important for us as a team, because no matter the talent, if there is no character nothing can be achieved," he added.

Stimac will announce his final 26 players before the team's departure on Saturday. Regarding areas which the team needs improvement, he said, "I am looking for defensive compactness, offensive transition, and the set pieces mostly."

"It's also very important to work on man marking inside the box, because I was not happy with that part of our game, in the last few games. We started leaking some unnecessary goals inside the box because marking was not properly done."

India will face Australia on January 13, before playing against Uzbekistan (January 18) and Syria (January 23).

"All three opponents are techni-



cally good, physically strong, with great speed. So, we are not going to have much difference in approach of all these three games.

"The main focus for us will be to check the fitness level of our players at present and see how much we can develop in the next two weeks," he said.

Stimac is also grappling with injuries to few of his key players. Defensive midfielder Jeakson Singh, who underwent surgery on his left shoulder early last month, was named among the 50 probabilities but he is uncertain to be in the final 26.

Midfielders Glan Martins and Shah Abdul Samad, both Mohun

Bagan players, had suffered injuries recently, which has given more headache to Stimac.

Central defender Anwar Ali and winger Ashique Kuruniyan, two key players in Stimac's scheme of things, were not named in the 50-player list due to long term injuries.

The 1998 World Cup bronze medallist from Croatia said he wanted the players to believe in themselves and enjoy the game during the Asian Cup in Doha, where they will be playing in the stadiums which had hosted the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

"I am sure our fans will turn out in huge numbers to support the Blue

Tigers and help them reach the needed level of confidence," he said while speaking to the AFC Asian Cup Local Organising Committee.

On talismanic captain Sunil Chhetri, the head coach said, "Chhetri is unbelievable. It's really important for our younger players to have such an inspirational figure as a captain."

"I hope the team can make the nation proud by playing to the best of its abilities."

Stimac's former team-mate at West Ham and England World Cupper Trevor Sinclair will assist him as part of the Indian team coaching staff during the Asian Cup. (PTI)

## Wrestling Federation of India office moved out of Brij Bhushan's residence

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Friday moved its office out of the residence of its former president and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, after the sports ministry had recently raised serious objections to it.

"The WFI will operate from a new address in New Delhi after vacating Brij Bhushan's premises," a source told PTI on condition of anonymity.



The new WFI office is located in the Hari Nagar area of New Delhi.

The ministry, while suspending the newly-formed WFI panel under president Sanjay Singh on December 24, three days after he was elected its head, had cited the office running from Brij Bhushan's residence as one of the reasons for taking the stringent action.

"The business of the federation is

being run from the premises controlled by former office bearers (Brij Bhushan) — which is also the alleged premises wherein sexual harassment of the players have been alleged and present(ly) the court is hearing the matter," the ministry had said in its letter.

The ministry also said the new body was working under the "complete control of former (WFI) office-bearers", which was not in conformity with the National Sports Code.

Several top wrestlers, including Olympic medallists Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik and World Championship medallist Vinesh Phogat have levelled allegations of sexual

harassment against Brij Bhushan and the case is being heard in the Delhi High Court.

After Sanjay Singh, a close aide of Brij Bhushan, was elected WFI chief on December 21, Sakshi decided to retire from wrestling, while Bajrang returned his Padma Shri and Vinesh decided to give her Khel Ratna and Arjuna Award back, alleging they did not want any close associate of the BJP MP to run the federation.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has once again instituted a three-member ad-hoc committee under the chairmanship of Wushu Association of India chief Bhupender Singh Bajwa to run the affairs of the sport. (PTI)

# Rahul Gandhi shows Jiu-Jitsu skills during meeting with Bajrang, other wrestlers

**NEW DELHI, Dec 29:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had demonstrated his Jiu-Jitsu skills while engaging in a martial art bout with wrestler Bajrang Punia during his visit to the Virendra Akhara in Haryana's Hajar district amid the row over Wrestling Federation of India elections. Gandhi had a practice session with the wrestlers and displayed the Japanese martial art skills to them during the early morning visit on Wednesday.

In a video uploaded by Bajrang on 'X' on Thursday, Gandhi can be seen showing the 'locks' and 'chokes' technique in Jiu-Jitsu as he pinned Olympic Games bronze medallist Bajrang down on the mat. Jiu jitsu is a Japanese martial art form and a close combat sport.

The former Congress president also learnt some of the wrestling moves such as 'dhoobi pachaad' and 'dhak' with Bajrang explaining him the difference between wrestling on the mat and on ground.

Gandhi is known to have an inclination towards combat sports and is also trained in Aikido, a modern Japanese martial art form.

According to Rahul's aikido coach Sensei Paritos Kar, the Congress MP appeared for a test in 2013 which he passed and was subsequently awarded the black belt. Gandhi had breakfast with the wrestlers during his meeting with them. He had milk, 'bajre ki roti' and 'saag' and was also offered some locally-grown vegetables which he took along with him.

"Today Rahul ji came to our akhara and we felt really good, he

came to see how the wrestlers live and train and everyone was very happy," Bajrang said in the video.

"He (Gandhi) said he practices Jiu-Jitsu, he was telling us the moves and how it starts and I showed the basics of our game like 'dhoobi pachaad' and 'dhak'."

Dhoobi pachaad is a famous move in which a wrestler lifts his opponent on the shoulders and then slams him to the mat, and in dhak, the wrestler holds his opponent in a headlock before throwing him to the ground.

Gandhi's visit to the wrestling academy came days after Punia, who has been at the forefront of the protests against former WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, returned his Padma Shri to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Punia took the decision following the election of Brij Bhushan's close aide Sanjay Singh as the president of the WFI. The government suspended the new committee last Sunday.

"If we don't raise the voice of our daughters and such people continue to curb them, then no daughter or sister will be able to raise their concerns in future in our country," Bajrang said.

"I didn't want to leave it (Padma Shri), if our sisters and daughters are not safe then what I will do with these laurels. They are our pride, if they are safe then we will get our pride on its own."

On December 21, 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. Following the election, Rio Olympics bronze medallist Sakshi Malik announced that she would quit the sport, while World Championship medallist Vinesh Phogat returned her Khel Ratna and Arjuna Award to the government in protest against Sanjay's election. (PTI)

## India Women face stern challenge in 2nd ODI against Australia

**MUMBAI, Dec 29:** A test of character awaits Harmanpreet Kaur's India Women here in the second ODI against Australia on Saturday if they are to end their losing streak at home against the rampant visitors and keep the three-match series alive.

India were outplayed thoroughly in the first ODI on Thursday at the Wankhede Stadium despite the hosts notching up their highest-ever total against Australia — 282/8 — riding on the brilliance of Jemimah Rodrigues (82) and Pooja Vastrakar (62 not out).

When it came to defending the total, India used seven different bowlers including Harmanpreet (3-0-32-0) but to no avail, as Australia romped home with more than three overs and six wickets to spare.

India's crushing defeat was not only their eighth consecutive at home but the manner in which the hosts went down would create some concerns in the dressing room.

After Sneha Rana flew to her left to take a diving catch to get rid of Alyssa Healy in the first over off Renuka Singh, India's fielding dropped and plenty of errors in the field assisted the Australian pair of Phoebe Litchfield and Ellyse Perry as they piled up a 148-run stand for the second wicket.

India's new ball bowlers, particularly Vastrakar, could not impose themselves and the fate was same for the senior spinners Deepti Sharma (1/55) and Rana, who had created a lot of trouble for the visiting batters during the one-off Test at this venue last week.

As it was the case on her T20I debut, Saika Ishaque (6-0-48-0) faced troubles settling down as a bowler and plenty of mistakes in the field only added to the team's woes.

Before Rodrigues and Vastrakar rescued India with their 68-run stand for the eighth wicket, India were struggling with the bat with most of the batters not able to convert their starts as well.

But the ask will be tough for India to put this loss behind and recover quickly in a day's time for the second ODI, their seventh match across formats in the last 23 days in this packed home season.

Playing top-flight cricket consistently could take its toll and India Women will have to find their ways around it as they play an overall 11 matches across formats in a mere 35 days.

It also remains to be seen if vice-captain and key opening batter Smriti Mandhana, who missed the first ODI for being unwell, would be available for the second match.

Similarly, there were no further updates on Rodrigues than that she struggled with hydration issues. The right-handed batter, at one stage during her innings, ran towards the team dugout to throw up as she battled intense heat and humidity while producing one of her finest innings at the biggest stage.

The biggest challenge, however, for the think tank as well as those on the field, would be to find ways to stop this long and daunting Australian batting line-up.

The Indians will also have to find a way to stop the Australian vice-captain Tahlia McGrath, who has struck three fifties on this tour already and looks in prime form.

The pitch for the first ODI was a batting-friendly surface and is not expected to be a lot different for the remaining two matches at this venue, which implies bowling would be India's biggest concern going into this contest. For Australia, it was a near-perfect outing with the team putting up a fine show in the field even though they leaked runs in the death overs.

India scored 56 off the final six overs in one final push which made Australia's task only tougher, but death overs bowling and batting is one area that the visitors want to improve upon. (PTI)



# Prasidh's performance hints at bare bench strength

**CENTURION, Dec 29:** A few weeks ago, India's bowling coach Paras Mhambrey in an interview to PTI was very clear that no coach can claim credit to have created a pacer of Mohammed Shami's calibre.

On the second and third day of the first Test against South Africa when Dean Elgar, David Bedingham and Marco Jansen were making a mockery of Shardul Thakur and debutant Prasidh Krishna, Shami's absence was felt like never before.

It could be said with a degree of certainty that Prasidh might have played his first and last Test for some time and in the next game Ravindra Jadeja and Avesh Khan would walk into the playing XI in place of him and Shardul Thakur.

The Indian fans got a reality check that the country's second line of red ball bowlers aren't exactly finished products and the days of dominance due to Jasprit Bumrah, Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Ishant Sharma and Umesh Yadav could be all but over.

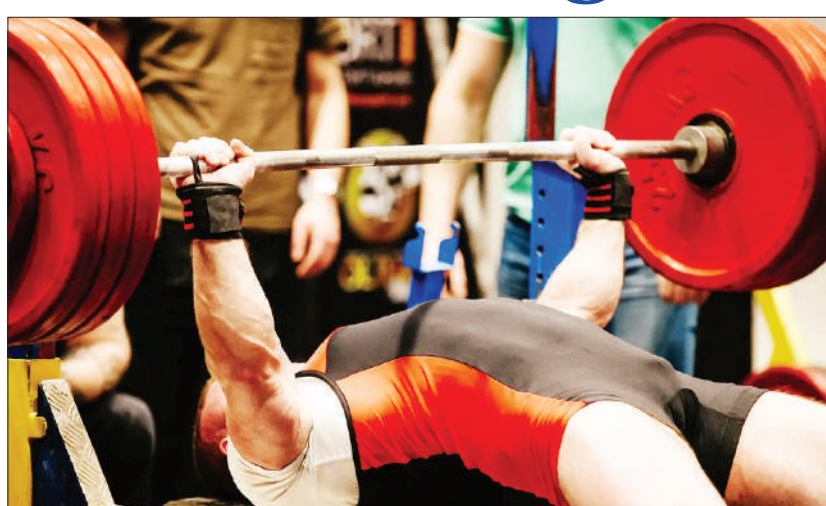
Ishant and Umesh are unofficially done with their Test careers and Shami is nearer to end rather than start.

They say it takes two to tango and Bumrah without Shami is incomplete and the vice versa is equally true.

Siraj is the third angle to the triangle. "Shami has a chronic left heel issue. A lot of people don't know that he took injections regularly during World Cup and played the entire tournament through pain.

"But you must understand that as you grow older, recovery from each niggle or big injury takes that more time," a former Bengal teammate of Shami, aware of his situation told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

Prasidh's shoddy performance must



have set the alarm bells ringing in the Indian camp.

While Rohit Sharma, as any skipper would do publicly, backed the Bengaluru man, who was playing only his 13th first-class game, the manner in which Avesh Khan was summoned by the Indian team management after his five-wicket haul for India A indicated the panic that has set in among the ranks.

"Poor Prasidh... The kid isn't ready for Test cricket. He doesn't have skills to bowl second and third spells yet. They went with him based on his ability to hit the deck. But they forgot when he last played a proper season of Ranji Trophy? Just one India A game isn't enough," a former India bowler told PTI.

He said that even Avesh's inclusion wouldn't make much of a difference unless he is given a long rope.

"The problem is India's next generation of pacers don't evoke the same kind of ex-

citement and confidence that Bumrah, Shami, Ishant and Siraj produced.

"Avesh is same type of bowler like Prasidh but plays red ball cricket more regularly. So he might hit better lengths. Navdeep Saini is still playing India A for six years. That tells you the story," the bowler, who refused to be named, said.

Shardul Thakur's long rope as bits and pieces cricketer also might come to an end as he is neither looking menacing with the ball nor dependable with the bat. Had Hardik Pandya been interested in playing red ball cricket, Shardul wouldn't have been in the horizon of Tests but with lack of good multi-skilled cricketers in domestic set-up, he is considered to be the best among whatever talent is available in store.

India might still handle this WTC cycle but possessing a bowling attack with an ability to take 20 sticks is a distant reality. (PTI)

## India fined for slow over-rate, docked two WTC points after 1<sup>st</sup> Test against South Africa

**DUBAI, Dec 29:** India's heaviest defeat in South Africa in the first Test at Centurion came along with a fine of 10 per cent of their match fees and Rohit Sharma's team being docked two crucial points in the World Test Championship (WTC).

India lost inside three days in an abject surrender to the South African side, suffering the heaviest defeat in the African nation by an innings and 32 runs in the first of the two Tests.

"Chris Broad of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees imposed the sanction after India were ruled to be two overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration," the ICC said in a release on Friday.

As per the Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which is in context to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined five per cent of their match

fee for every over their side fails to bowl in the stipulated time.

Additionally, one point per over short is docked by the ICC for its WTC, which means India lost two points.

"India captain Rohit Sharma pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing," the ICC added.

The charges were levelled by on-field umpires Paul Reiffel and Langton Rusere, third umpire Ahsan Raza and fourth umpire Stephen Harris.

Before the penalty India were placed fifth in the points table with 16 points and a PCT of 44.44.

After the penalty, they've dropped below Australia to sixth spot with a PCT of 38.39. India play one more Test in South Africa before returning home. (PTI)

## Mother and Child Protection (MCP) Card

Let us know about it's importance

### Salient Features of MCP Card

- It contains important information regarding care during prenatal and postnatal period, including danger signs during pregnancy and care.
- It contains essential information on newborn care, immunization, diarrhoea, pneumonia and how to prevent diseases for children.
- Information on various Flagship Government Schemes and its benefits.

### Importance of MCP Card

- It acts as a ready reference for all Pregnant women to know the required health check-ups and treatments that they should avail.
- All medical records of the Pregnant Women are updated by the ANM on the MCP card.
- During pregnancy it helps the beneficiaries to avail the various health benefits provided by the Government.
- Details of the health records of the newborns are updated in the card so that the parents/guardians can take proper care of the child.
- It helps in availing the birth certificate of the newborn child.
- Anganwadi workers record the age wise height and weight of the children so that timely health interventions can be done whenever needed.



The MCP card should be kept safely. Only one card is issued for each Pregnant Women and her child.



To know more contact ASHA/ANM

NHM/D/2023-24/1709



A unique initiative upholding the right to live with dignity of aging parents and dependent divyang siblings

## Assam Employees' PRANAM Act

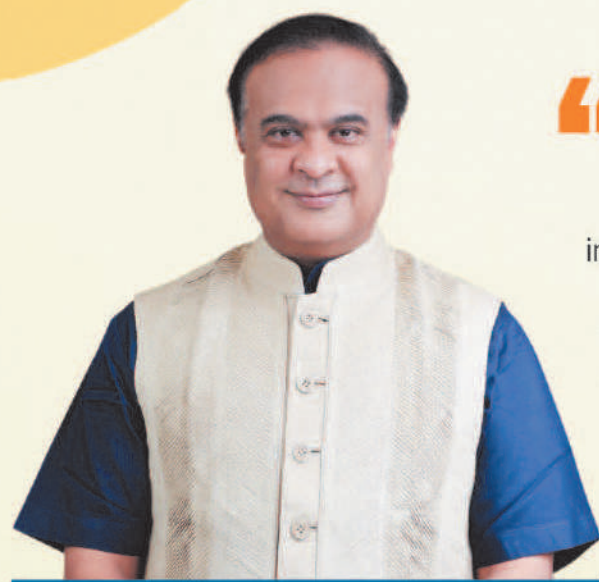
(The Assam Employees' Parent Responsibility and Norms for Accountability and Monitoring Act, 2017)

### Salient features

- All employees working under the State Government / Government undertakings / State PSUs come under the purview of this Act
- Three-tier structure with time-bound procedure to deliver timely justice
- If any parent or divyang sibling of the Government employee is financially neglected, compensation up to 10% (and in exceptional cases up to 15%) can be claimed by them from the monthly salary of the employee concerned
- If a government employee dies before retirement, his/her dependent and financially neglected parents and divyang siblings can claim compensation upto 10% (and in exceptional cases up to 15%) from the Compassionate Pension received by the spouse/legal heir. However this is not applicable in the case of Family Pension
- If the designated authority or appropriate authority has, without any reasonable cause, refused to receive an application or has not disposed of the application within the time-limit, PRANAM Commission will impose a penalty of Rs. 100 per day

### Procedure for seeking compensation

- Aggrieved parents/divyang siblings need to submit their application to the Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO), who is the designated authority of the employee concerned. The DDO is empowered to determine the eligibility of the claim and is bound to dispose of the case within 90 days
- In case the DDO fails to dispose of the case within the time limit or if the employee, parent or divyang sibling is aggrieved by the order of the designated authority, appeal may be preferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Appellate Authority, the Commissioner & Secretary, GAD, Assam Secretariat, Dispur
- In case the Commissioner & Secretary, GAD fails to dispose of the case within 60 days or if any of the parties concerned is aggrieved by the order, the appeal may be preferred to the PRANAM Commission
- The PRANAM Commission will dispose of the appeal within 90 days and the decision of Commission will be final and binding



**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam

“We are very proud that Assam is the first state in the country to implement the PRANAM Act which is an effort to protect elderly parents and divyang siblings of Government employees in their times of need”



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