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NATION

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Our crackdown has yielded encouraging results in women & child health sphere: Himanta State records decline in teenage pregnancies

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that the state has witnessed decline in teenage pregnancies which have come down drastically to 40,012 this year from the previous year's 1,05,942.

Taking to the micro-blogging site X, Sarma said that the government's relentless pursuit against child marriage and teenage pregnancy is yielding positive results.

"Our relentless pursuit against child marriage and teenage pregnancy is yielding positive results. Registered teenage pregnancies in the State has come down drastically from 1,05,942 in 2022-23 to 40,012 in 2023-24. We won't rest until we bring this figure to zero," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

The chief minister also pre-



sented data indicating a significant reduction in teen pregnancies across districts.

As per the data, Dhubri and South Salmara, with the highest cases at 14,769 last year, decreased to 5,482 this year. Similarly, such

cases in Nagaon and Hojai declined from 12,107 to 4,578, and Barpeta and Bajali decreased from 11,449 to 4,000.

It is worth mentioning that recently, Sarma had declared to eradicate this social issue by 2026,

designating all gram panchayat secretaries as child marriage prevention officers. Sarma also claimed a notable reduction of over 33 per cent in maternal deaths and nearly 15 per cent in child deaths since the launch of the crackdown.

"Child marriage is a social evil which also manifests undesirable health outcomes such as high infant and maternal mortality rates. Our crackdown has yielded encouraging results in the women & child health sphere. By 2026 Assam will end this abhorrent practice," Sarma had said.

Further, highlighting the challenges, Sarma emphasised that Assam's infant mortality rate (IMR) and maternal mortality rates (MMR) had surpassed the national average, particularly in specific districts. He attributed the primary cause to (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

BJP, Congress announce candidates for NC Hills Autonomous Council election

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) on Tuesday announced the names of all their 28 candidates for the forthcoming Members of Autonomous Council (MAC) election to the 13 NC Hills Autonomous Council, scheduled for January 8, 2024.

According to an official statement, the selection was done by the committee formed by the BJP. The declaration was made formally in the office of the BJP Assam Pradesh on Tuesday.

In this election, a few new candidates were included, such as Mohet Hojai, Niranjan Hojai, Rupali Langthasa, S T Jem Hrangkhoh, and Namrang Jeme.

"Apart from this, several new faces were seen in constituencies like Mahur, Langting, Dautuhaja, Maibang (E), and Maibang (W). In the prestigious Haflong constituency, where the BJP has never won an election so far, the saffron party has chosen the present president of BJP Dima Hasao," the statement added.

On the other hand, Congress also released a list of its party candidates for the said election.

Recently, during a press conference, the election commissioner, Alok Kumar, said that due to the unavailability of electronic voting machines (EVMs), the elec-



tion will employ traditional ballot papers.

He further informed that the deadline for filing nominations in all 28 constituencies is December 21, with application scrutiny slated for the following day.

The total voters count in Dima Hasao district's constituencies is 1,41,124, with 70,485 men and 70,639 women, he said.

"Withdrawal of candidature can be done until December 22, and the final list of candidates will be published on the same day. Polling hours are set from 8 am to 4 pm on January 8, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

HT BRIEFS

Leopard attack

GUWAHATI: Three persons, including two forest department employees, were injured in an attack by a leopard which strayed into an under-construction building in a densely populated residential locality here on Tuesday, a forest official said. The leopard, suspected to have strayed from the forest surrounding the city, attacked and injured a construction worker in the Fatasil Ambari area. Panic-stricken residents of the area called the forest department and when its employees reached the spot, the leopard attacked two of them. The leopard was tranquillised after four hours and taken to the Assam State Zoo in a cage, the official added.

MoU signed

GUWAHATI: The Lead Agency on Road Safety under the Transport Department, Government of Assam, and Young Indians (YI), Guwahati vertical, have officially entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate on the "Chota Cop" project. The MoU signing ceremony held on 19th December, 2023 at the office of the Secretary to the Government of Assam, Transport Department, marked a significant step towards enhancing road safety awareness among children in schools across Guwahati, Assam, India. The ceremony was graced by the esteemed presence of Adil Khan, IAS, Secretary to the Government of Assam, Transport Department, who played a pivotal role in endorsing the collaboration. Gaurav Upadhyay, IPS, Additional Secretary to the Government of Assam, Transport Department and Head of the Lead Agency on Road Safety, Assam, signed the MoU. The event also witnessed the presence of Rahul Chandra Das, managing director, ASTC, along with members of Young Indians, Guwahati Chapter. Adil Khan, IAS, stated, "This collaboration signifies our commitment to fostering a culture of road safety from a young age.

Govt to implement project for development of cities in phase manner

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: The Assam government is gearing up for implementation of a project for planned, rapid and sustainable development of urban areas, with a meeting to draw the outline held here on Tuesday. Housing and Urban Affairs minister Ashok Singhal chaired the meeting to formulate the 'Ten Cities Development Concept' (Doh Shahr, Ek Rupayan) to be undertaken by his department, an official statement said.

Under the concept, emphasis will be placed on manpower rationalisation and capacity building, delivering municipal services online or digitally and strengthening financial infrastructure in the specific cities.

The selected towns will undergo

comprehensive improvements across various domains, the statement said.

Under the City Infrastructure Development Fund (CIDF), initiatives include city beautification, open-air theatre, traffic control system, convention centre, sports complex and enhancement of water bodies.

The activities will be undertaken through various Central and state government schemes and programmes, with 10 cities and towns to be covered in each phase.

Participants in the meeting expressed their views on proper urban planning, solid waste management, clean and regular water supply, public infrastructure, traffic management, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Oppn will remain in opposition with less strength in 2024 LS polls: Modi

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday accused the opposition parties of providing "muted and indirect" support to the security breach incident in Parliament and asserted that they will remain in opposition with further reduced numbers in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections because of their conduct.

Addressing what he said was the last BJP parliamentary party meeting this year, Modi pretty much laid out the theme for the ruling alliance's campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha election as he took a swipe at the INDIA bloc over its meeting on Tuesday.

Slamming opposition parties for disrupting Parliament proceedings, Modi said they were giving a "political spin" to the incident in frustration over their losses in the recent



assembly polls. Their goal is to throw out his government but the government's goal is to ensure a bright future for India," he added.

"Some People are uniting in their intent to remove the BJP from power while we are patriots working for the betterment of India. They are utilising their strength to remove

the government while we are utilising our strength for the betterment of India," parliamentary affairs minister Pralhad Joshi said, quoting the Prime Minister.

Modi asserted that the opposition's conduct in Parliament will ensure their numbers go further down in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls while the BJP boosts its tally. Pointing to some empty rows in the auditorium where all BJP MPs had collected, he said these will be filled up after the 2024 polls.

Referring to the December 13 incident of two persons jumping into the Lok Sabha chamber from the visitors' gallery and opening smoke cans, he said anyone who believes in democracy will not accept such an act. This act should have been condemned unilaterally, he added. "Unfortunately, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Section 144 imposed in Manipur

CHURACHANDPUR, Dec 19: The Manipur government has imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPc for two months in Churachandpur district following fresh violence, according to an official order.

Various parts of the northeastern state have been rocked by ethnic strife since May this year. Incidents of sporadic violence were reported from several places in Churachandpur district, especially in Thangkangphai village, on Monday.

"There are still chances of breach of peace due to the confrontation between the two groups of people... and the situation is still tense," the district magistrate said in an order. The prohibitory orders prohibiting gathering of five or more people and carrying arms were imposed on Monday and it would be in force till February 18, 2024. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Three ULFA(I) linkmen arrested in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: Close on the heels of recent blasts in three major towns of Assam, three suspected ULFA (Independent) linkmen have been arrested from a house in Guwahati, police said on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided a house in Pandu area of the city late on Monday night and nabbed a person, identified as Ashim Adhikari, who was allegedly involved in the recruitment of cadres for the banned outfit. Following his interrogation, the police apprehended two others from the same area and seized a pistol and some cartridges from their possession.

Security has been tightened across the state following recent blasts near security establishments in Tinsukia, Sivasagar and Jorhat.

The ULFA(I) had claimed responsibility for the blasts stating it was carried out in response to the "arrogance" of state director general of police G P Singh who is trying to



'establish the outfit's demand as a law and order problem and not a political issue'.

The DGP had in response to the ULFA(I)'s allegations said they "always refer to me and if they have a cause with me, they can always target me. I live in Kahilipara and my office (DGP headquarters) is in Ulubari, (both in Guwahati). They can come and target me. Why are they harassing the common people by lobbying a

grenade here and there'. Singh had in another statement earlier said that the police was "committed to wipe out the remnants of terrorism that impedes the growth of the state. And for that, if we have to sacrifice our life, we shall not hesitate, nor shall we waver from our determination to use full the might of law against those who stand in the path of our state's growth, progress and development". (PTI)

PM Modi speaks to Netanyahu, calls for early restoration of peace

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday held a "productive" conversation with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu on the Israel-Hamas conflict including "shared concerns" over the safety of maritime traffic in the region.

In the phone talks, Modi emphasised on an early and peaceful resolution of the conflict, including the release of all hostages, through "dialogue and diplomacy" as well as continued humanitarian assistance to the affected people. The prime minister's office (PMO) said Modi received a phone call from the Israeli prime minister. "Had a productive exchange of views with PM @netanyahu on the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, including shared concerns on the safety of maritime traffic," Modi posted on 'X'.

"Highlighted India's consistent stand in favour of early restoration of peace & stability in the region with continued humanitarian assistance for the affected," he said. There have been concerns over the safety of maritime traffic in the region. A missile reportedly fired by Yemen's Houthi militants hit a commercial tanker in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen last week triggering

concerns. In a statement, the PMO said Netanyahu briefed Modi on the recent developments in the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. "The two leaders shared concerns regarding the safety of maritime traffic," it said.

"The prime minister reiterated the need for continued humanitarian aid for the affected population and emphasised an early and peaceful resolution of the conflict, including the release of all hostages, through dialogue and diplomacy," it added.

The PMO said the two leaders agreed to remain in touch. Israel has been continuing its military offensive in Gaza as part of its retaliation to the unprecedented attack on Israeli cities by Hamas on October 7. Hamas killed around 1,200 people in Israel and kidnapped more than 220 others some of whom were released during a brief ceasefire. Around 17,000 people have been killed in Gaza in the Israeli offensive, according to the Hamas authorities in Gaza. India has been calling for de-escalation of the situation and creating conditions for an early resumption of direct peace negotiations towards a two-state solution to the Palestine issue. India strongly condemned the terror attack by Hamas. (PTI)

Tuliram announces development initiatives

HT Correspondent

DONGKAMUKAM, Dec 19: Unity, Victory and Prosperity Rally was held in Bithung Rengthama Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency in West Karbi Anglong, the home constituency of the chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang.

Addressing the rally at Sarsenot LP school playground here, CEM Ronghang said that the major urban areas of West Karbi Anglong will be connected with black top roads soon.

"The main road to the district headquarter Hamren will be made into a two lane road," he added.

The CEM reiterated that the BJP is for the development of all tribes and communities. The people should have faith in it. Those BPL families who are left out will be given NFSA cards soon. A few SHGs were given cheques of ₹ 10,000. The rally was attended by the deputy speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly, Dr Numal Momin; MLAs Rupsing Teron, Bidhyang Englang and Darsing Ronghang; (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Row over Trinamool leader mimicry of VP Dhankhar

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: Suspended from Parliament, opposition leaders on Tuesday staged protests on the stairs of the building with Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee breaking into an impromptu skit mocking Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Rahul Gandhi making a video of the performance, sparking a political controversy.

The targeting of the vice president drew sharp reactions from the BJP as the Rajya Sabha chairman himself termed the opposition actions as "shameful" and "insult" of his background as a farmer and "position as a Jat".

"Imagine what must be going through my heart when your senior leader videographs a Member of Parliament mocking the institution of the chairman... Don't take on my background as a farmer," Dhankhar said in Rajya Sabha, addressing senior Congress leader P Chidambaram.

The institution of the chairman,

he added, has been ravaged and that too by a political party that has ruled for so long.

"A member of Parliament videographing another one, for what. I had suffered, I tell you, on Instagram, Mr Chidambaram (who was present in the House), your party put a video that was withdrawn later on that was shame to me. You used Twitter, the official handle of the spokesperson to demean me, insult me, insult my background as a farmer, insult my position as a Jat, insult my position as chairman," Dhankhar said.

Parliamentary Affairs minister Pralhad Joshi termed this as a mockery of democracy and the constitutional institutions.

In a post on X, he said, "The I.N.D.I alliance reaches a new low as suspended TMC MP mimics a constitutional position, and the so-called messiah of democratic values, @RahulGandhi, stands there laughing at it. They are a disgrace to democracy, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

'Our work makes clear that respiration is also important for memory processing during sleep'

Breathing during sleep may be influencing how our brains form memories: Study

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: Our breathing during sleep may be influencing how memories in our brains are being consolidated, a new study has found. While it is known that sleep-related brain rhythms are linked with reactivation of memory contents during sleep, researchers from Germany and the UK found that these rhythms, such as oscillations and spindles, are linked to breathing.

"Our results show that our breathing and the emergence of characteristic slow oscillation and spindle patterns are linked," said Thomas Schreiner, Department of Psychology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany, and the corresponding author of the study published in the journal Nature Communications. Sleep spindles refer to short bursts of increased brain activity during sleep.

"Although other studies had already established a connection be-



tween breathing and cognition during wake, our work makes clear that respiration is also important for memory processing during sleep," said Schreiner.

For the study, the researchers included 20 study participants and over the course of two sessions

showed them 120 images, all of them associated with certain words.

The participants then slept for around two hours in the laboratory. The brain activity over the entire duration of learning and sleeping was recorded, along with their breathing. Upon waking up, the in-

dividuals were questioned about the associations they had learned.

The researchers found that along with reactivation of content learnt prior to sleep, the "precision of these sleep-related brain rhythms increases from childhood to adolescence and then declines again during aging."

Further, because respiration frequency also changed with age, the researchers analysed the recorded data on breathing and were able to establish a connection between the sleep-related brain activity and breathing.

As older people often struggle with sleep disorders, respiratory disorders, and declining memory function, the team said they plan to investigate if they were linked and if interventions such as CPAP masks, that help breathe unobstructed, made sense from a cognitive perspective. (PTI)

RBI tightens norms to check evergreening of loans by lenders through AIFs

MUMBAI, Dec 19: In a move to curb "evergreening" of loans, the Reserve Bank on Tuesday barred banks and NBFCs from investing in any scheme of Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) having investment in companies that have taken loan from the lenders concerned in the past 12 months.

Banks and NBFCs, which are Regulated Entities (RE) under the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), make investments in units of AIFs as part of their regular investment operations.

Venture capital funds, angel funds, infrastructure funds, private equity funds and hedge funds, among others, are AIFs.

In a circular, RBI said, "certain transactions of REs involving AIFs that raise regulatory concerns have come to our notice".

These transactions entail substitution of direct loan exposure of REs to borrowers, with indirect exposure through investments in units of AIFs, it said.

RBI said that in order to address concerns relating to possible evergreening through this route, REs cannot make investments in any scheme of AIFs which has downstream investments either directly or indirectly in a debtor company of the lender.

Further, it has directed lenders that such investments would be required to be liquidated within 30 days.

In case, REs are not able to liquidate their investments within the prescribed time limit, they should make 100 per cent provision on such investments, it added.

The debtor company of the RE means any entity to which the lender currently has or previously had a loan or investment exposure anytime during the preceding 12 months. (PTI)



Telecom Bill 2023 progressive, forward-looking, brings predictability: Industry captains

Legislation ensures predictability and availability of spectrum covering aspects such as reformatting, harmonisation and trading/leasing/sharing

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: The industry on Tuesday said the new telecom Bill introduced in the Lok Sabha is progressive and forward-looking, and marks groundbreaking reforms by streamlining India's licensing landscape.

Leading voices of telecom industry, including Bharti Airtel MD and CEO Gopal Vittal, and Vodafone Idea CEO Akshaya Moondra, lauded various provisions of the Bill, especially those related to security provisions, right of way, and simplification of licensing among others.

"I would like to warmly compliment the government for introducing a progressive and forward-looking Telecommunications Bill in Parliament. The Bill suggests groundbreaking reforms by streamlining India's licensing landscape," Vittal said.

He said the Bill aims to simplify the current "convoluted system" that includes various types of licensing (license, registration, permission), into a "more cohesive and efficient" authorisation-based regime.

"The seminal spectrum reforms initiated in 2021 eliminated SUC for future spectrum assignments and provided the option of moratorium of past spectrum dues and annual spectrum roadmap. These reforms have now gained further momentum under the proposed Telecommunications Bill 2023," he said.

The proposed legislation ensures predictability and availability of spectrum covering aspects such as reformatting, harmonisation and trading/leasing/sharing. This, he said, will lead to the creation of a robust digital infrastructure and increased penetration of services, benefitting all Indians.

The captains of the telecom industry also appreciated the reforms related to Right of



Way (RoW).

"The proposed reform on RoW is yet another seminal move that is set to accelerate the rollout of telecom infrastructure, including 5G in the country. The move will provide the necessary enforceability of central RoW rules at the local level," Vittal said.

The provisions related to public and private property, common ducts further instill confidence in the industry for faster rollout, he added.

According to him, another pivotal reform involves the restructuring of penalties, as the government simplifies the penalty framework regime under the proposed Bill.

This will be achieved through a tiered system of graded penalties proportionate to the breach.

"The introduction of a voluntary undertaking and an appeal process within the government aims to mitigate litigations thereby promoting more efficient resolution of dis-

putes," he said.

Vittal said the government has rightfully retained oversight of telecom networks from a sovereign security perspective, a requirement integral to India's telecom licences over the last two decades.

Vodafone Idea CEO Akshaya Moondra described the Telecommunications Bill, 2023, as a watershed moment in the telecom reform process and said it reaffirms the government's commitment to provide Indian telecom with a future-fit framework that helps achieve the growth aspirations of new India.

"The Bill carries several forward-looking provisions that will help deliver the benefits of digital connectivity to all our citizens. We warmly welcome the rationalisation of penalties and the legal enforceability of right of way provisions, a long-standing request of the industry," he said.

Security of telecom networks is paramount, and the Bill recognises telecom as

critical infrastructure and prescribes punitive consequences for those who damage it, he said.

"By highlighting the duties of users, the Bill puts equal responsibility on consumers to meet the requirements of national security," he said.

The government on Monday introduced a new telecom Bill in the Lok Sabha, which seeks to allow the authorities to temporarily take control of telecom services in the interest of national security, provide for a non-auction route for allocation of satellite spectrum and drop OTT in the definition of services.

The Telecommunications Bill, 2023, proposes that the Centre will take temporary possession of telecom networks in case of any public emergency or in the interest of public safety.

The Bill proposes to stop transmission and intercept messages in case of public emergency, in the interest of the public, to prevent incitement for committing offence.

"On the occurrence of any public emergency, including disaster management, or in the interest of public safety, the central government or a state government or any officer specially authorised in this behalf by the central government or a state government, if satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do, by notification — take temporary possession of any telecommunication service or telecommunication network from an authorised entity," the Bill said.

The Bill was introduced in the lower House by communications minister Ashwini Vaishnaw amid a din over the Opposition demanding a statement by home minister Amit Shah on the Parliament security breach issue. (PTI)

India should go up the value chain in electronics components manufacturing: MeitY Secy

KOLKATA, Dec 19: India should move up the value chain in the manufacture of electronics components from the present levels of 15 per cent, a top official of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) said on Tuesday.

S Krishnan, secretary Ministry of electronics and information technology said that even at 15 per cent value addition, the employment potential is immense and the government is prepared to support this endeavour by the entrepreneurs.

Speaking at the Merchants Chamber of Commerce and Industry here, Krishnan said "Electronics manufacturing in the country is an important part of the new policy of the government. Now the present level of value addition by Indian companies is 15 per cent. Work should be directed towards increasing this percentage and the government is prepared to support this".

More electronics components



manufacturing units should come up in the country. "The component eco-system should come up in India and investments have to be made", he added.

Regarding semiconductors, he said that India requires a resilient supply chain and the government has earmarked an amount of ₹ 75,000 crore to be spent over a period of five years towards giving subsidy. Supplies were disrupted during COVID-19 affecting industries like automobiles.

Krishnan said one of the goals of the government is to make the digital economy of the size of USD one trillion by 2030.

According to him, the increasing digital sector is an enabler of

growth and technological advancements will give boost to productivity.

"Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are coming together with improvements in the hardware", he said.

"Presently the portion of the hardware component in the country's digital economy is USD 100 billion. This amount should go up to USD 300 billion over five to six years time", he added.

Referring to the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP) of 2023, he said that it has been enacted and the rules of the legislation are currently being drafted following which they will be put in the public domain.

"These rules will also act as a stepping stone to regulate data flows to AI", he said.

He also said there is heightened alertness in the case of cyber security to keep the cyberinfrastructure of the country safe. (PTI)

BUYING IN FMCG, OIL SHARES Sensex, Nifty hit new record highs on firm global trends

MUMBAI, Dec 19: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty scaled new lifetime high levels in intra-day trade on Tuesday before closing with gains on the back of buying in FMCG and oil shares and positive global cues.

In a volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 122.10 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 71,437.19. During the day, the barometer jumped 308.62 points or 0.43 per cent to reach its all-time intra-day high of 71,623.71.

The broader Nifty climbed 86.4 points or 0.40 per cent to hit its record peak of 21,505.05. It finally closed higher by 34.45 points or 0.16 per cent at 21,453.10.

Buying in FMCG, oil and gas, power and select banking shares supported the recovery while losses in IT and auto shares capped gains, analysts said.

Among the Sensex firms, Nestle rose the most by 4.66 per cent. NTPC rose by 2.16 per cent, Reliance Industries by 1.53 per cent,



State Bank of India by 1.04 per cent and Hindustan Unilever by 1.03 per cent. ITC, Power Grid and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.

Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finserv and Maruti were among the laggards.

"The broader market sustained its optimism, but the incremental rally is contracting. Investors are cautious ahead of the Eurozone inflation data announcement, which is forecast to drop marginally," said Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.31 per cent while smallcap index climbed 0.10 per cent.

Among the indices, energy jumped 1.49 per cent, FMCG climbed 1.24 per cent, utilities (0.75 per cent), oil & gas (0.46 per cent) and power (0.39 per cent).

Commodities, consumer discretionary, IT, auto, tech and capital goods were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the positive territory, while Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading in the green. The US markets ended with gains on Monday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.30 per cent to USD 77.72 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 33.51 crore on Monday after continuous buying, according to exchange data.

Snapping its three-day rally, the BSE benchmark declined 168.66 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at 71,315.09 on Monday. The Nifty fell by 38 points or 0.18 per cent to 21,418.65. (PTI)

Rupee falls 9 paise to close at 83.19 against US dollar



MUMBAI, Dec 19: The rupee declined by 9 paise to settle at 83.19 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday due to dollar buying by importers amid lingering worries over oil supplies through the Red Sea route.

Forex traders said that positive sentiment in the stock market, a weak greenback against major currencies overseas and steady crude oil prices restricted losses in the local currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened flat at 83.10 against the greenback and traded between the peak of 83.09 and the lowest level of 83.22. It finally settled at 83.19, registering a loss of 9 paise over its previous close.

Traders said dollar buying by importers following a recent spike in the rupee amid increased FII inflows kept the unit under pressure. On Monday, the domestic currency settled 7 paise lower at 83.10 against the dollar, a day after witnessing a jump of 27 paise on Friday. The rupee breached the 82 level twice this week to touch a high of 82.90.

Traders are also concerned over oil supplies amid attacks by rebel group Houthi on ships. While Maersk on Tuesday announced that it may reroute some of its vessels around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, the US and a host of other nations are creating a new force to protect ships transiting the Red Sea that have come under attack by drones and ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.04 per cent lower at 102.13 on Tuesday.

Global oil price benchmark Brent crude was almost flat at USD 77.95 per barrel.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 122.10 points or 0.17 per cent higher at 71,437.19. The broader NSE Nifty rose 34.45 points or 0.16 per cent at 21,453.10.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the equity market on Monday as they offloaded shares worth ₹ 33.51 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Star Cement commits to Bihar investment at Bihar Business Connect 2023

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: The 'Bihar Business Connect 2023,' a Global Investors' Summit held on 13th-14th December 2023 in Patna, witnessed Star Cement Limited's commitment to invest in Bihar. Attended by over 302 domestic and foreign companies, the summit aimed to bring together key stakeholders to discuss and deliberate business ideas.

The event saw the presence of Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar, finance minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary, minister of water resources Sanjay Kumar Jha, and minister of industries Samir Kumar Mahaseth.

Pradeep Purohit, chief operating officer of Star Cement Limited, attended the summit and expressed excitement about the strategic collaboration with the government of Bihar. He committed to investing in Bihar, emphasising the company's confidence in a partnership that would yield mutually beneficial

outcomes. The Government of Bihar has pledged support, including single window clearance and industrial policy support.

Speaking on the occasion, Purohit stated, "We look forward to building transformative solutions for the state government. We are confident that this partnership will yield mutually beneficial outcomes as we embark on key initiatives together." He also commended the Bihar government for its developmental and social schemes.

Vinit Kumar Tiwari, chief executive officer of Star Cement Limited, highlighted Bihar's strategic importance for lucrative industrial investments. He emphasized the company's commitment to the people of Bihar through this investment, positioning it strategically for future growth. Star Cement Limited, already operating in select Bihar markets, envisions the new plant as a key factor in operating across the entire state, contributing to the brand's future growth.

Gold rises ₹ 50, silver slumps ₹ 250

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: Gold edged higher by ₹ 50 to ₹ 62,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid gains in the precious metal prices internationally, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at ₹ 62,750 per 10 grams. However, silver slumped ₹ 250 to ₹ 77,700 per kilogram, while it had settled at ₹ 77,950 per kg in the previous close.

HDFC Securities' senior analyst of commodities Saumil Gandhi said gold prices traded slightly up on Tuesday in the Delhi markets, trading at ₹ 62,800/10 grams, up ₹ 50 against the previous close.

In the futures trade, the February contract of gold fell ₹ 84 to ₹ 62,207 per 10 grams on the MCX.

However, the March contract for silver jumped ₹ 172 to ₹ 74,582 per kilogram on the bourse. (PTI)

POCO unveils POCO C65: Perfect blend of power and style

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: In a technological stride, POCO, a prominent brand, has officially launched its latest device, the POCO C65, starting at an attractive price of Rs 7,499*. This cutting-edge device promises

a seamless fusion of style and performance, driven by the MediaTek Helio G85 chipset.

The POCO C65 showcases a sleek and ergonomic design, incorporating Corning Gorilla Glass for durability, splash resistance, and dust protection. Notably, it features a side-mounted fingerprint scanner for enhanced security and convenient access. The device offers expansive storage options, supporting up to 1TB with dual Nano SIM slots and a dedicated microSD card slot.

One of its standout features is the gorge-

ous 6.74-inch HD+ display, boasting a 90Hz refresh rate for an immersive viewing experience. Himanshu Tandon, Country Head of POCO India, expressed, "With the introduction of the POCO C65, our focus is on enriching our product lineup in

the affordable segment. This new addition exemplifies our commitment to providing consumers with a dynamic smartphone that harmoniously blends style and performance."

Driven by the robust MediaTek Helio G85 chipset, the POCO C65 ensures lightning-fast processing speeds and optimal efficiency. The device houses a 50MP AI triple rear camera, an 8MP front camera, and a range of features like film filters, night mode, and AI portrait mode with depth control, offering versatile photography capabilities.



Google to pay \$700M in antitrust settlement reached with states

Like apple does in its iphone app store, google collects commissions ranging from 15% to 30% on in-app purchases

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec 19: Google has agreed to pay \$700 million and make several other concessions to settle allegations that it had been stifling competition against its Android app store — the same issue that went to trial in another case that could result in even bigger changes.

Although Google struck the deal with state attorneys general in September, the settlement's terms weren't revealed until late Monday in documents filed in San Francisco federal court. The disclosure came a week after a federal court jury rebuked Google for deploying anticompetitive tactics in its Play Store for Android apps.

The settlement with the states includes \$630 million to compensate U.S. consumers funneled into a payment processing system that state attorneys general alleged drove up the prices for digital transactions within apps downloaded from the Play Store. That store caters to the Android software that powers most of the world's smartphones.

Like Apple does in its iPhone app store,

Google collects commissions ranging from 15% to 30% on in-app purchases — fees that state attorneys general contended drove prices higher than they would have been had there been an open market for payment processing. Those commissions generated billions of dollars in profit annually for Google, according to evidence presented in the recent trial focused on its Play Store. Consumers eligible for a piece of the \$630 million compensation fund are supposed to be automatically notified about various options for how they can receive their cut of the money.

Another \$70 million of the pre-trial settlement will cover the penalties and other costs that Google is being forced to pay to the states.

Google also agreed to make other changes designed to make it even easier for consumers to download and install Android apps from other outlets besides its Play Store for the next five years. It will refrain from issuing as many security warnings, or "scare screens," when alternative choices are being used.



The makers of Android apps will also gain more flexibility to offer alternative payment choices to consumers instead of having transactions automatically processed through the Play Store and its commission system. Apps will also be able to promote lower prices available to consumers who choose an alternate to the Play Store's payment processing.

Washington DC Attorney General Brian Schwab hailed the settlement as a victory for the tens of millions of people in the U.S. that rely on Android phones to help manage their lives. "For far too long, Google's anticompetitive practices in the

distribution of apps deprived Android users of choices and forced them to pay artificially elevated prices," Schwab said.

Wilson White, Google's vice president of government affairs and public policy, framed the deal as a positive for the company, despite the money and concessions it entails. The settlement "builds on Android's choice and flexibility, maintains strong security protections, and retains Google's ability to compete with other (software) makers, and invest in the Android ecosystem for users and developers," White wrote in a blog post.

Although the state attorneys general hailed the settlement as a huge win for consumers, it didn't go far enough for Epic Games, which spearheaded the attack on Google's app store practices with an antitrust lawsuit filed in August 2020.

Epic, the maker of the popular Fortnite video game, rebuffed the settlement in September and instead chose to take its case to trial, even though it had already lost on most of its key claims in a similar trial targeting Apple and its iPhone app store in

2021. The Apple trial, though, was decided by a federal judge instead of the jury that vindicated Epic with a unanimous verdict that Google had built anticompetitive barriers around the Play Store. Google has vowed to appeal the verdict.

But the trial's outcome nevertheless raises the specter of Google potentially being ordered to pay even more money as punishment for its past practices and making even more dramatic changes to its lucrative Android app ecosystem.

Those changes will be determined next year by U.S. District Judge James Donato, who presided over the Epic Games trial. Donato also still must approve Google's Play Store settlement with the states.

Google faces an even bigger legal threat in another antitrust case targeting its dominant search engine that serves as the centerpiece of a digital ad empire that generates more than \$200 billion in sales annually. Closing arguments in a trial pitting Google against the Justice Department are scheduled for early May before a federal judge in Washington D.C. (AP)

ELECTRICAL WORKS AT TINSUKIA DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: TSK/Elect/151,
Dated: 18-12-2023. E-Tender is invited by the undersigned for the following work,
Tender No.: LV-T-14-TSK-868; Brief Description of Item : At Tinsukia Division: Repairing of 2 (Two) Nos of 500KVA, 33/11KV Power Transformer Under SSE/Elect/Dibrugarh Town. Tender Value: ₹10,00,286/-; Earnest Money: ₹20,000/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 13:00 hrs. and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 10-01-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 13:00 hrs. on 10-01-2024 in the website www.irops.gov.in

DRM (Elect), Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

47 aspirants for Cong LS tickets in state

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: Altogether 47 aspirants in Assam have so far applied for Congress tickets for the Lok Sabha elections next year, though none of the three incumbent party MPs are among them, sources said.

The deadline for accepting applications from party members for the 2024 Lok Sabha election tickets will end on Tuesday.

The north-eastern state has 14 Lok Sabha seats. Of the three incumbent Congress MPs from Assam, one has collected the form but has not submitted it, a party source said.

"We have so far received 47 applications for various Lok Sabha seats. Among them, there are many women aspirants."

"Barpeta MP Abdul Khaleque got his application form collected on Monday, though the other two MPs – Pradyut Bordoloi from Nagaon and Gaurav Gogoi from Kaliabor – are yet to take their papers," the source said.

He, however, said the deadline for receiving



applications could be extended.

"As a Parliament session is going on, our leaders are busy. The time for accepting the applications is likely to be extended," he said.

The process for accepting the filled-up forms began on December 11, and each applicant is

required to deposit a fee of Rs one lakh, according to a circular issued by the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) earlier this month.

With the Congress being a part of a 15-member opposition forum in the state, aiming at contesting the 2024 Lok Sabha elections together, it will have to refrain from fielding candidates from certain constituencies, the party said.

Fees of aspirants who submit applications for such constituencies will be refunded, the circular said.

The 15-party United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA) has been formed in line with the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).

The BJP, Rajiv Dal, CPI(M), CPI, Jatiya Dal-Asom, NCP, RJD, Janata Dal (U), TMC, CPI(ML) and AAP are among the UOFA alliance. It had recently held a two-day conclave to decide on strategies for the Lok Sabha polls. (PTI)

Governor for sharing mutual learning for NEP implementation

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria has stressed the need for sharing mutual learning among different higher education institutions for proper NEP implementation in the state.

He also called for a meeting of heads of higher education institutions to further push for the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, an official release said.

Kataria presided over the second consultative committee meeting on higher education on Monday and expressed interest in facilitating the implementation of NEP 2020. The meeting delved into crucial

topics, including the establishment of a NEP cell and preparatory steps for launching postgraduate education based on NEP 2020 in all the higher educational institutions and examinations under the four-year undergraduate programmes in alignment with the new guidelines, the release said.

The preparation of the institutions for the introduction of one or two years PG programmes from the academic year 2024-2025 was also discussed, it said.

Emphasis was also placed on readiness for UG/PG research labs and on the importance of education in "environmental science and cli-

mate change". The Governor called upon members of the group to form small committees to visit various institutions for in-depth discussions on academic and administrative matters.

He also decided to conduct a conference with heads of higher education institutions to give a fillip to the implementation of NEP 2020 in Assam. Kataria encouraged the institutions to actively adopt intellectual property rights, patenting, trademark and copyright practices in their research and development cells, suggesting the creation of dedicated cells or centres in each institution. (PTI)

Fourth Sishu Grantha Utsav concludes in Bokota Khamun

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Dec 19: The fourth Sishu Grantha (Book) Utsav 2023 concluded in Bidyakunja Jatiya Vidyalay, Bokota Khamun near Demow, under the patronage of Adhyan Chakra Bokota, Bokota-Bakharbena Senior Citizen Sammilan, in association with Bidyakunja Jatiya Vidyalay, local schools, and the people of Bokota. The event, which commenced on December 15 and concluded on December 17, featured various activities and competitions aimed at promoting literature and learning among children.

A drawing competition was organised, along with a spelling genius competition conducted by Dr Pratim Sarma, professor of English at Dikhowmukh College. A quiz competition was also held with the support of Nature Bekon, Ellura Bigyan Mancha, Sivasagar District Rural Library Association, and Rongpur Barta, conducted by Jehiruddin Khan. During the program, the book titled 'Byatikrami Vidyalay' by Jehiruddin Khan was released by Nabanit Hazarika and Prasanta Borghain.

The prize distribution ceremony acknowledged the winners of different competitions held during the Sishu Grantha Utsav. Chief guests for the event included Dr Bikash Ranjan Konwar, district child protection officer, Jayanta Madhab Gogoi, a writer, Munmi Hazarika, a writer, and Dr Surajit Giri, an anaesthesia specialist at Demow Model Hospital. Dr Durlav Sensusa, professor at Assam Women University, was present as an invited guest. The cultural program featured performances by students, adding vibrancy to the event.

Lili Dihingia receives 'Satyabrat Chaliha Samaj Bhaskar Bota'



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 19: The 'Satyabrat Chaliha Samaj Bhaskar Bota', established in memory of the prominent entrepreneur and social worker Satyabrat Chaliha, cousin of former chief minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha, was conferred upon distinguished social worker and women's rights advocate Lili Dihingia at her residence in Lakshminagar on Tuesday, acknowledging her exceptional contributions despite her current ailing and bedridden condition.

Monica Saikia, the president of Sivasagar Jila Mahila Samiti and a leading women's activist, pre-

sented the award to Lili Dihingia. During the ceremony, Saikia reflected on Dihingia's remarkable dedication, recalling the times when she traversed remote villages on foot and bullock carts to organise women and establish the primary units of Asom Mahila Samiti. Described as a leading voice for women's rights, Dihingia was honoured with a citation, a gamosa, and a chadar. The ceremony drew the presence of over a hundred members who gathered at Lili Dihingia's residence, expressing gratitude and seeking her blessings for her outstanding contributions to social welfare.

FLN examination conducted for 2400 primary school students



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 19: The Sivasagar District Education Department, in collaboration with the District Social Welfare Department, organised the inaugural Fundamental Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) examination for more than 2400 primary school students from 1101 schools across the four education blocks – Nazira, Kheluwa (Sivasagar), Demow, and Amguri of the district on Monday. District commis-

sioner AV Yadav played a key role in overseeing the successful conduct of the examination. District and block-level officials, teachers, and CRCCs fulfilled their responsibilities efficiently to ensure the smooth administration of the examination, aimed at preparing students for the upcoming Gunotsav starting on January 3, 2024. Primary teachers served as internal evaluators, while high and higher secondary teachers were appointed as external evaluators.

Three injured in Jagiroad flyover accident

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Dec 19: In a road mishap on Monday night at the under-construction Jagiroad flyover, three individuals were injured, with one person identified as Miridul Goswami of Dayang Belguri village under Jagiroad Police Station in serious condition. The accident occurred when a motorcycle and a scooter collided head-on on the flyover,

which is scheduled to be inaugurated by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on December 24. The seriously injured victim was promptly transported to Guwahati Medical College for further treatment. Despite the upcoming inauguration, the flyover has not been opened for traffic, and both ends of the bridge were closed to traffic by the police following the accident.

NFR initiates operation of three pairs of shuttle trains

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: The North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced a measure to enhance passenger convenience by introducing three pairs of shuttle trains. Operating daily between Rangiya Jn. and New Bongaigaon Jn., these Shuttle trains will undertake seven trips in both directions from December 20 to 26, 2023.

The schedule for these shuttle trains is as follows: Shuttle Train No 00809/00810 (Rangiya – New Bongaigaon - Rangiya) will depart from Rangiya at 06:15 hours, reaching New Bongaigaon at 09:30 hours. In the return direction, it will depart from New Bongaigaon at 17:30 hours and reach Rangiya at 20:45 hours. Shuttle Train No 00811/00812 (New Bongaigaon – Rangiya - New Bongaigaon) will depart from New Bongaigaon at 06:30 hours, reaching Rangiya at 09:45 hours. On the return journey, the train will depart from Rangiya at 10:15 hours and



reach New Bongaigaon at 13:15 hours. Shuttle Train No 00813/00814 (New Bongaigaon – Rangiya - New Bongaigaon) will depart from New Bongaigaon at 13:40 hours, reaching Rangiya at 16:45 hours. In the return direction, it will depart from Rangiya at 17:45 hours and reach New Bongaigaon at 21:00 hours.

These Shuttle trains will have scheduled stops at Ghograpar, Nalbari, Kaithalkuchi, Tihu, Nizsariha

Halt, Pathsala, Sorupeta, Guachha, Barpetta Road, Sorbhog, Patiladaha, Bijni, Chaprakata, and Bongaigaon stations.

The initiative is expected to benefit passengers of scheduled trains that have been affected by cancellations, diversions, or short terminations due to ongoing infrastructure developmental works between Changsari and Aghori Railway stations of Rangiya division.

Singing and dancing competition held in Bokajan

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Dec 19: The Student Prayer Movement organised an engaging singing and dancing competition at Top Visionary Residential School, Raikom Aklam in Bokajan, creating an atmosphere filled with talent and enthusiasm.

In the singing competition, Alisha Rongpharpi clinched the 1st prize, followed by Sarjinong Dera securing the second prize, and -Ing Kro earning the third prize.

The dancing competition showcased remarkable performances, with the Believers Eastern Church troupe securing the top spot. The

2nd prize went to the troupe of Klirdap Baptist Church, while the 3rd prize was awarded to CRC Church, and the 4th prize was claimed by the Assembly of God, 10 Mile.

The prize distribution ceremony was graced by the presence of Gumyile Singnarpi, the proprietor of Top Visionary Residential School, alongside Raju Engleng, the president of Karbi Students Association, Bokajan District Committee, and other distinguished guests. The event not only celebrated the winners but also highlighted the vibrant talent within the local community.

Unidentified male body found in Bokajan

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Dec 19: An unidentified male dead body was discovered at Balipathar near NH 39 under Bokajan Police Station in Karbi Anglong. Passersby noticed the body during the day and promptly informed the police. The police took custody of the body and forwarded it to Diphu Medical College & Hospital for a post-mortem examination.

The deceased, dressed in a red jacket and track pants, is not recognised as a local resident. The circumstances surrounding the discovery of the body remain under investigation.

NIRDPR NERC launches training program on CCDRR

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, North Eastern Regional Centre (NIRD&PR - NERC), in collaboration with CCDRR Centre, National Institute of Disaster Management (Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India), inaugurated a five-day Training of Trainers program on Child-Centric Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) from Monday which will continue till December 21, 2023. The event is being held at NIRDPR - NERC, Khanapara, Guwahati.

The initiative is crucial given the global threats posed by disasters to the lives and well-being of children. Over the past two decades, India has encountered various catastrophic events, making the need for effective Child-Centric Disaster Risk Reduction strategies paramount. The training program aims to equip officials from departments such as Women and Child, Police, Education, Rural Development, and the NGO sector with the necessary skills and knowledge.

The objectives of the program include: Describing the concept of child-centric disaster risk reduction and listing CCDRR activities; Identifying and listing children's rights and protecting these rights during disasters; Developing

strategies for school safety with the active engagement of children; Explaining the impact of disasters on the mental health of children; Describing the life cycle and risk-informed approach for child-centric risk reduction.

Conducted under the patronage of Rajendra Ratnoo (IAS), executive director, NIDM, and Prof Murugesan, director, NIRD&PR - NERC, Assam, the program is supervised by Prof Santosh Kumar, senior advisor & project director, CCDRR, NIDM, and Dr V Suresh Babu, associate professor, NIRD&PR - NERC, Guwahati. Dr Kumar Raka, senior programme officer, CCDRR, NIDM, and Dr Balu I, consultant, CCDRR, are actively coordinating the Training of Trainers program.

Dr Balu I, consultant, CCDRR, provided an introduction to the program, highlighting its objectives and modalities. Dr V Suresh Babu, associate professor, NIRD&PR - NERC, delivered opening remarks, highlighting the significance of Child-Centric Disaster Risk Reduction concepts and child rights.

Dr Kumar Raka, senior programme officer at CCDRR (NIDM), delivered the keynote address, stressing the importance of a child-centric perspective in disaster risk reduction. He shared the vision of 'zero tolerance for children

at risk' and underscored the transformative nature of the training for participants.

Prof. Murugesan, director, NIRD&PR, offered insights into collaborative efforts between government agencies and communities to address challenges posed by disasters and climate change. He stated the importance of protecting the rights of all children from violations at all times.

Notably, the Training of Trainers on Child-Centric Disaster Risk Reduction aims to build a cadre of skilled trainers at the state and district level, fostering resilience building for children. The program is anticipated to have a lasting impact on state and community preparedness for child protection in the face of contemporary and future risks.

Following the Training of Trainers, a regional workshop on 'Integrating Gender Sensitive and Child-Friendly Approaches in Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Preparedness' is scheduled for December 22, 2023. This workshop, conducted in collaboration with NIRD&PR, Assam State Disaster Management Authority, and technical support from Bal Raksha Bharat, aims to initiate a gender-sensitive and inclusive discourse for child-centric disaster risk reduction at the regional level.

Retired assistant teacher passes away in Demow

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Dec 19: Biren Chetia, aged 82 and a former assistant teacher at Athabari Higher Secondary School, breathed his last on Tuesday morning at Siu-Ka-Pha Multi Hospital, located in Desang Rajabari near Demow. Chetia, a resident of Athabari Chetia Gaon, had been undergoing treatment at the hospital for the past two days due to ailing health.

The news of Biren Chetia's demise has been met with deep sorrow, especially in the Athabari community. The Athabari Higher Secondary School expressed its condolences for the loss of a respected retired faculty member. The entire Athabari area has joined in mourning the passing of Biren Chetia, acknowledging his contributions to education. Survived by his wife, two sons, and a large circle of relatives, Biren Chetia's departure marks the end of an era for those who knew him. His dedication to shaping young minds during his tenure as an assistant teacher has left a lasting impact on the community. The residents of Athabari and beyond extended their heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved family.



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 19: Dr Pratibha Sharma, a renowned Sattriya dancer from Tezpur, has been appointed as the project director of Sattriya Kendra Guwahati, established under the Sangeet Natak Akademi. The Kendra aims to promote, propagate, and preserve the Sattriya tradition of Assam, supporting various activities related to Sattriya dance, music, Ankiya Bhaona (Theatre), and more.

Dr Sharma, recognised in national and international dance circles, has received several accolades, including the National Nrityamani Award and Nritya-Jyoti title. She began learning Sattriya at an early age under Guru Tuleswar Tamuli Borbayan and later trained under the guidance of the eminent dancing maestro Padmashree Nrityacharyya Jatini Goswami, a recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. In addition to Sattriya, she has also

received training in Kathak Dance under Guru Shanti Shankar Das Gupta since 1991 in Tezpur.

Dr Sharma, a graded artist of Guwahati Doordarshan and an empanelled artist of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, was awarded the senior fellowship for the year 2019-20 by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. As an outstanding performer of Sattriya dance, she has showcased her talent on various prestigious national and international platforms.

Former chairman of VDC passes away

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Dec 19: Amar Ingti, the former chairman of the Village Development Committee (VDC) and a prominent member of the Autonomous Council constituency in Howraghat, passed away on Tuesday morning due to a heart attack.

In addition to his political contributions, Amar Ingti was known for his passion for football, both as a player and a referee. He also served as the president of the Temple Management Committee in Pan Ingti village.

Amar Ingti is survived by his wife, two sons, and a host of relatives. His untimely demise is mourned by the community, remembering him for his multifaceted roles and dedication to the welfare of the village. The loss is deeply felt, and condolences pour in for the departed leader from various quarters.

Guv Kataria attends 4th convocation of Assam Science and Technology University

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria, and chancellor of Assam Science and Technology University (ASTU), stated that the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century, presenting a comprehensive plan to reshape the educational ecosystem of the country from pre-primary to higher education.

Addressing the 4th convocation of the University at Srimanta Sankaradeva International Auditorium in the city on Monday, the Governor said that educational institutions need to formulate effective strategies and make sincere efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the education policy. He added that ASTU needs to spearhead a special strategy to implement the policy with a particular emphasis on science and technology, research and development, focusing on an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach in the coming days.

The Governor said that ASTU should also take the initiative to strengthen the ecosystem of science and technology for the development of human resources. Highlighting

technological proliferation, the Governor mentioned that never in human history has such rapid technological change and ubiquity of technology been seen. Technology has changed every human activity. As youth easily get attracted to technological development, he advised ASTU to help students understand the coordination of technology and social aspects in a healthy way.

The Governor also said that it is heartening to see that the students, with the help of the able guidance of ASTU, have made their unique identity in the field of technical education through their hard work. He said, "I sincerely hope that the University will continue to pursue its mission with its commitment and values and encourage all to strive for the progress of society."

Governor Kataria expressed happiness to note that ASTU is focusing on diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD courses in specialised areas of engineering, technology, architecture, management, etc. It is a commendable step by the University to pay special attention to research and innovations while designing its courses and curriculum



in line with the needs of the times, the Governor added.

Congratulating the graduates, the Governor said that the convocation marks the outcome of their commitment, hard work, and perseverance. Further, wishing the degree holders for the new phase of their life, the

Governor also urged them to work towards the betterment of society and the nation.

It may be noted that a total of 2422 students consisting of PhD, postgraduate, and undergraduate levels have passed out for the session 2022 - 2023, receiving their degrees in various disciplines in the convocation.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder.
- George Washington

Suspension of MPs threat to democracy

In an unprecedented move, the Narendra Modi-led BJP government has suspended a total of 92 opposition MPs, with an additional 50 from the Lok Sabha, sparking concerns about the functioning of a democratic parliament. The suspension, the highest in 34 years, has led to accusations that the government aims for an Opposition-free Parliament. The suspended MPs, a mix of diverse non-BJP representatives, gathered on the Parliament front, showcasing their hidden talents and openly celebrating their suspension with mimics of Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdish Dhankar. This unusual spectacle unfolded as the INDIA bloc, comprising various opposition parties, intended to convey their unity and future plans to the electorate during a meeting at the Ashoka Hotel in the Capital. The Congress strongly criticized the Modi government for "bulldozing key bills" without any dissent, portraying a government seemingly indifferent to parliamentary decorum. The mass suspensions, 78 in a single day, marked a historic high for both the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha.

A total of 33 Lok Sabha MPs and 34 Rajya Sabha MPs now face suspension for the remainder of the Winter Session. The cases of three Lok Sabha MPs and 11 Rajya Sabha MPs were referred to the Privileges Committee of Parliament. The situation raises questions about the Modi government's intentions, with critics suggesting a shift towards authoritarianism. The term "undeclared emergency" is being evoked, emphasizing the unprecedented scale and impact of the suspensions. A recent breach in Parliament security further fueled concerns, exposing vulnerabilities in the New Parliament's armor. Denying these weaknesses could be perilous for the government, as safeguarding the sanctity of Parliament requires more than a mere show of strength. Some citizens report hearing strange noises in their cars, humorously speculated to be the suspended MPs cursing the government. The broader concern is that such curbs may affect the entire nation. A sense of foreboding has lingered since May 2014, and there is talk of a dark curse on India, solidifying over a decade.

As the Winter Session progresses, the absence of a significant opposition presence signals a challenging period ahead. The recurring ruckus in Parliament becomes a lullaby for BJP leaders, who seemingly sleep soundly amid the chaos. The BJP appears undisturbed by the tumultuous atmosphere, treating it as the 'Sound of Music' that accompanies Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his MPs to bed each night when Parliament is in session. Since the December 13 Parliament security breach, chaos has dominated both Houses. However, the Modi government seems more concerned with countering the electoral threat posed by the INDIA bloc than addressing security concerns. The recent victories in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan have not guaranteed BJP success in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, adding to the government's nervousness, especially considering the Congress's victory in Telangana. The BJP's struggles in southern states intensify as the party is seemingly informed that the south of the Vindhyas is out of bounds, presenting a considerable challenge. The Opposition's potential boycott of Parliament could escalate if MPs collectively resign, leaving Prime Minister Narendra Modi grappling with the consequences. In this tumultuous political landscape, the BJP government's focus on political threats rather than addressing parliamentary issues raises significant concerns about the state of Indian democracy. The Winter Session remains unpredictable, with the Opposition's response becoming a crucial factor in determining the future trajectory of the nation's political landscape.

Reforming the Election Commission: A critical analysis of the 2023 bill

By: Dipak Kurmi

The inception of The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs), will now align with those of a Supreme Court judge, in contrast to the initial proposal equating them to the Cabinet secretary. Notably, the search committee tasked with shortlisting names for the EC will be led by a Cabinet minister, a departure from the initial arrangement with the Cabinet secretary at the helm. Additionally, the bill aims to shield commissioners from legal challenges during their tenure. These alterations are commendable as they are poised to enhance the independence, autonomy, and prestige of the commission.

The inception of the bill was prompted by a directive from a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court. This directive, disapproving of the arbitrary manner in which appointments to the Election Commission were previously made, established a mechanism for the process.

However, this mechanism, consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Chief Justice of India, curtailed the government's unchecked authority to appoint individuals to the panel. The judicial decree, nonetheless, emphasized that its prescription would be of a limited duration until Parliament enacted legislation on the matter.

The new bill, ratified by the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday, essentially restores to the current government the authority to determine the composition of the panel. It outlines a committee, consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, or the leader of the largest party in the Lok Sabha, and a minister designated by the Prime Minister, responsible for selecting the Chief Election Commissioner and the other Election Commissioners. The provision eliminates the presence of a judiciary representative in the panel, thereby reverting the choice of the panel back to the executive.

Upon examination, we observe no significant deviation from the period when the President appointed individuals based on the recommendations of the Union council of ministers, led by the Prime Minister.

However, the government has introduced several key amendments to the bill presented in August. The status, as well as the

salary and perks of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the Election Commissioners (ECs), will now align with those of a Supreme Court judge, in contrast to the initial proposal equating them to the Cabinet secretary. Notably, the search committee tasked with shortlisting names for the EC will be led by a Cabinet minister, a departure from the initial arrangement with the Cabinet secretary at the helm. Additionally, the bill aims to shield commissioners from legal challenges during their tenure. These alterations are commendable as they are poised to enhance the independence, autonomy, and prestige of the commission.

The major institutions of our democracy, including the constitutional courts, the Election Commission, and the Comptroller and Auditor-General, have, despite occasional displays of weaknesses, consistently upheld the independence expected of them. The paramount prerequisite for the flourishing of democracy is unquestionably free and fair elections, a responsibility primarily entrusted to the Election Commission.

The integrity of a democratic institution hinges not solely on the determination of those in charge but on institutional mechanisms designed to ensure both independence and fairness. It is the character of the institution itself, rather than the individuals within it, that should dictate its quality. The Election Commission of India, for the most part, has met people's expectations, drawing strength from democracy and reciprocally empowering it.

Although occasional allegations suggest the EC may align with the government in power, they have predominantly upheld the people's will in the electoral process. One can only anticipate that the government, wielding its newfound authority, will use it to bolster the Election Commission's character, further fortifying our representative democracy and parliamentary system. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Narendra Modi-The quintessential unifier

The Supreme Court's verdict on the abrogation of Article 370 would give a momentous moral boost to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Narendra Modi. Modi's efficient leadership and pragmatic nationalistic approach seem to gain enormous support from across the country. The judiciary had unequivocally stood in tune with what the government executed in 2019. Jammu and Kashmir since then was ripped off its prerogatives and outcries for reinstating its special status were heard from selective corners. But the government's excellent initiatives in the direction of giving the area a fillip in development were deeply convincing and self explanatory. There have been concerted efforts to translate the already chaotic and deteriorating atmosphere in the most beautiful landscape in India into a meaningful possibility of tranquility and peace and the result of it began to show up with the world community noticing it. The pomp and discipline with which the national celebrations are celebrated in Jammu and Kashmir these days gives us the gist of transformation that the present union territories have come across.

Jammu and Kashmir's journey as a terrain of terror to a destination that people would prefer to land as a tourist was an affirmative ascent in its recent history. This was possible with the effective involvement of the Indian army that went out on a hunting expedition tracking the terror hideouts and brilliantly eliminating them. People's support for a positive change could catapult the momentum of its makeover further. But the Supreme Court's upholding the abrogation would exacerbate the dilemma of people and parties that stood for divisiveness and their disenchantment seems to help the government to expose their double standard and hypocrisy and corruption.

Whatever, the court came up

with its pronouncement at a time when the ruling party and its leadership are in high spirits after winning elections in three crucial states and the national elections almost at a hand-stretch distance. Critical decisions and drastic transformative changes have been becoming talking points since 2014. The general election that year witnessed the rise of a true nationalist and statesman. The Modi factor came as a sweeping generational change and the impact of its gaining hold on the national arena was unprecedented.

Having decimated decades of Congress rule, his rise to the top job was not only an aspirational moment for a huge number of voters who voted for his party but with that began a fresh and defining chapter of nationalism in India with a majoritarian thrust capturing the imagination of a new version of vote bank politics. This had been subdued and pushed hard to insignificance ever since the country jumped into freedom and its Nehruvian Socialism holding its reigns for decades. And the Modi rise had given India a meaningful mandate, the largest one that any political party managed to win from outside the Congress bandwagon. For the Congress, the landslide victory of Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 was the last humongous people's verdict. The national election after the assassination of Indira Gandhi was principally an exercise of sympathy that the nation remorselessly executed. People voted on the loss that the untimely death of their leader caused but the vacuum was not effectively filled by her son though he enjoyed a landslide victory. The party was later reduced almost to a nominal player that won meager seats and its dominance came clattering down with the saffron storm in 2014.

India's enormous exercise of casting the franchise is an example of democracy celebrating its principles with greater assertion of values. Modi's victory in 2014



was criticized as a calamity for India and a blot on its democratic values. This was mainly due to his being cornered with indescribable malignity by a section of the media in India and abroad. A deliberate accusation further castigated him to be the monster ruler who had intentionally given permission for the butchery of Muslims in his home state Gujarat during the post Godhra riots. It was almost predicted and conceded that Modi by no means would ascend to the top of world's largest democracy. I still remember my conversation with an eccentric traveler from California to India's northeast in 2014. A T-shirt designer, as he introduced him to me during my travels to this area, was on a cycling expedition to one of the most strategically important locations in the state of Arunachal Pradesh along the India-China border. He was firmly convinced of the reasons that he thought would defeat Modi. For him there was not even a microscopic chance for Modi to win the popular mandate. The hate-mongering was deafeningly resolute and potty mouthed sociopaths continued to dehumanize him until the judiciary gave him a clean chit. But Modi's party won 282 of the 543 seats in parliament, reducing its principal opposition the Congress to a mere 44 seats, practically trimming its right to lead the opposition.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: M R Lal

Probably, Modi's experiment to bank on the majority sentiments towards the remodeling of a state took an unusual turn. India's clueless colonial masters had decided to divide the country between its Muslim population and the gargantuan Hindu population which the former was terribly intolerant to. But an anglicized Jawaharlal Nehru remained culturally lenient to the colonialist impudence for India's civilizational ethos and

had chiseled a secular nation out of an amputated landscape which accommodated Hindus and other Indic religions and a section of the undecided Muslims that refused to migrate to an Islamic Pakistan. The Modi rise in India's electoral spectrum was principally accentuating a fundamental sentiment, a discontent that continued to consume the essential readiness of its electorate to democratically take a revenge on the animalization of a polytheistic religious framework called Hinduism. Aggressively subduing the essential cultural vigor of generations of a subverted Hindu majority, the successive ruling class that followed the Nehruvian secularism had ruthlessly distorted the values that it preserved for centuries. There has always been a tribe of insinulators successively working to distort, dismantle and disgustingly strangle its existence in the name of secularism, liberal-

ism and free press.

That was the moment when Modi came to the national stage, essentially gaining accolades for the Hindu unity that the post Godhra riots had blessed him with. His performance as a futuristic Chief Minister with development as his mission had further made him electorally unassailable in the Sangh Parivar cohort. Modi's success has multifaceted implications. He facilitated the country with greater quality of development but he did not forget to cement its civilizational existence with universal values that the landscape once projected and propagated. This combination of nationalistic spiritual values with the latest count of scientific temperament was a perfect combination. The values enshrined in India's spiritual texts have found global acceptance with the government officially launching them for international platforms. In his yet another surprising move, Modi had launched the party's most prominent saffron clad Yogi as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Probably, that was one of the trump cards that Modi's political brilliance exerted with futuristic calculations.

Yogi, being voted to power for the second term, has transformed the state into an investment destination and its social ambience of febrile callousness and corruption seem to have almost been rooted out. Modi has not only managed to culturally unite the scattered sentiments of a huge section of the country's population, but he could also help it survive irrespective of dividing factors such as castes and outcries for a head-counting in the name of castes sprung from across the opposition camp. The recent election results could further enhance his image as an ultimate unifier of nationalistic sentiments rising above the pulpit of caste arithmetic. (The author is a freelance journalist who can be reached at mr-lalu30@gmail.com)

Yemen's Houthi rebels attack on ships poses threat to trade through red sea

By: Girish Linganna

Yemen's Houthi rebels have carried out hijackings, missile strikes, and drone attacks on ships, leading Danish shipping and logistics company AP Moller-Maersk and German shipping and container transportation firm Hapag-Lloyd to temporarily suspend shipments via the Red Sea.

The announcements made on Friday by AP Moller-Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd indicate that large companies are now recognizing the security risks in the Red Sea region. However, there could be potential effects on global oil markets and the cost of energy for consumers. The extent of the disruption will depend on how major international actors respond to the impending crisis, according to experts. According to a statement from Maersk, their decision to pause shipments through the Red Sea is based on their worries about the increasingly dangerous security situation in the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The recent attacks by missiles and drones on commercial ships pose a major risk to the safety and security of the crew members onboard, the statement mentioned.

Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd jointly control around 25% of the global shipping fleet. The increased instability in the Red Sea can be attributed to the conflict between Israel and Gaza, which started on October 7. Over the past 10 weeks, during which Israel has been conducting airstrikes on Gaza, the Houthi rebels have launched attacks on at least eight ships in the Bab el-

Mandeb strait. This strait separates Eritrea and Djibouti from the Arabian Peninsula. With a width of just 29km (18 miles) at its narrowest point, the Bab el-Mandeb strait plays a crucial role in international trade. Approximately 10% of the world's seaborne crude oil passes through this strait, making any disruptions a global concern.

The Houthis have been attacking ships that have some ownership connection to Israel or that transport goods to Israel through the Red Sea. In November, they claimed to have seized the Galaxy Leader cargo ship, which they believed to be Israeli-owned. However, Israel stated that the ship was actually owned by a British company and operated by a Japanese team, with no Israelis on board. The ship was originally bound for India.

The rebels, who have held significant territory in Yemen since 2014, have vowed to persist with these attacks until there is a comprehensive truce in Gaza. Their objective is to increase the consequences for the US and other nations that provide assistance to Israel in different capacities.

These acts of aggression also indicate that the Houthis are a formidable presence in Yemen and a significant member of the alliance known as the "axis of resistance." This alliance includes Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Syrian government, as well as several groups in Syria and Iraq that are supported by Iran. The Houthis are demonstrating their growing boldness and determination in this group.

There is limited evidence to indicate that the Houthi attacks will

cease in the near future. This raises concerns about the impact on the oil market. According to Colby Connelly, a senior analyst at Energy Intelligence, an energy information company based in Washington, the attacks have had a noticeable but not significant impact on the oil market. With the continuation of these attacks, the markets have increasingly paid attention. As a result, the prices of crude oil have risen towards the end of the week, reaching levels higher than those observed in the previous days. This is mainly due to the fact that these attacks show no signs of stopping unless a more forceful effort is made to put an end to them, as explained by Colby Connelly. As tensions escalate, it is uncertain how this crisis in the Red Sea will unfold. According to Paul Sullivan, a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center, if the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is limited in terms of oil traffic due to regional tensions, there is a high possibility that the price of oil to certain locations will increase. This is primarily because of the added premiums on insurance and the products themselves, as a result of the crisis and potential conflict.

Considering the current situation, it is uncertain, but not likely, that such a scenario will occur. However, in a region of escalating tensions, unexpected outcomes are possible. If the situation deteriorates to the extent that various cargoes need to be redirected around Africa, it could result in significant changes to cargo contracts, including those involving oil and

liquefied natural gas (LNG). As a consequence, prices would face upward pressure. Although the recent decline in oil prices may provide some relief, it is not expected to last long, as stated by Sullivan.

One of the complexities of this situation is the unpredictable nature of Houthi missile and drone attacks. These attacks do not adhere to a clear pattern, making it challenging to anticipate their next move. As Colby Connelly stated, the Houthis' actions are increasingly making it difficult to predict their future actions.

If the Houthis were to attempt to blockade the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, it would have significant ramifications. Colby Connelly explained that the consequences would involve increased shipping insurance risks, expenses related to alternative routes, and the potential for disruptions in supply chains, among other factors. However, he also expressed doubt regarding the Houthis' capability to carry out such an action. Furthermore, he emphasized that any attempt to do so would inevitably provoke a swift and forceful response.

The disruptive actions of the Houthis in the Red Sea have the potential to draw increased scrutiny and pressure from various factors such as China, India, Gulf Cooperation Council states, Iran, and Western powers. China opposes any disruption to global trade, including in strategic routes such as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Suez Canal, due to the negative impacts it would have on its economy. As a result, there is a possibility that China, at its own request, might

exert pressure on the Houthis to reduce their aggressive actions in the Red Sea. Amin Mohseni, a senior economics lecturer at American University, shared this perspective with the media house.

It is worth mentioning that several countries, including the US, UK, China, Germany, Spain, Italy, France, Saudi Arabia, and Japan, already have military bases in Djibouti, which serve to constrain the Houthis' aggressive actions in the Red Sea over the long term. Additionally, there is interest from both Russia and India in establishing their own military bases in the region, further reinforcing the efforts to limit the influence of the Houthis. Sullivan believes that certain global players may increase their presence in the region to safeguard uninterrupted shipping from Yemeni actors. He suggests that China and possibly India could deploy more assets to protect their oil interests, and NATO could strengthen task forces to ensure the freedom and security of navigation. Sullivan also expects the US to become more involved as tensions escalate in the region. Despite the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza, with a high number of Palestinian casualties exceeding 18,700, the Houthis are likely to remain committed to influencing the situation as much as they can. The ongoing violence in Gaza is expected to result in a sustained high level of risk in the Red Sea region. As a result, both the shipping industry and the global community should be prepared for new economic challenges to emerge. (IPA Service)

South Africa's ruling party faces split before national elections in 2024

By: Roger McKenzie

Former South African president Jacob Zuma has denounced the governing African National Congress (ANC) and vowed to vote for a new political formation in next year's general election. Mr Zuma, who led the ANC from 2007 to 2017, said on Saturday that he was backing the newly formed Ukhonto we Sizwe party, which is named after the ANC military wing that was disbanded after the liberation struggle ended in victory.

The former president called on other South Africans to vote for the new formation, claiming that it would be "a betrayal to vote for the ANC" of President Cyril Ramaphosa. Even former president Thabo Mbeki said in an interview on Saturday that his "answer was still outstanding" when asked if he would encourage people to vote ANC in next year's general election.

Recent polls have suggested that the

ANC could win less than 50 per cent of the national vote for the first time and may need to form a coalition government to remain in power. Zuma described the ANC and Ramaphosa as a "proxy for white monopoly capital" and claimed that his decision was part of a bid to rescue the ANC.

"I have decided that I cannot and will not campaign for the ANC of Ramaphosa in 2024. My conscience will not allow me to lie to the people of South Africa and to pretend that the ANC of Ramaphosa is the ANC of Luthuli, Tambo and Mandela," said Mr Zuma, referring to previous ANC leaders Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela. But former ANC MP Andrew Feinstein told the Morning Star he did not expect Zuma's endorsement of the Ukhonto we Sizwe party to have much impact. "Amidst the failings of the ANC to govern in a competent, accountable and non-corrupt manner, dozens of small parties have sprung up," he said. "The key issue is whether they will deprive the ANC

of a majority for the first time in the country's democratic history."

"The biggest challenge will be to get people to the polls as disaffection with not just the ANC but politics generally takes hold," Feinstein added. Zuma was ousted as president in 2018 and replaced by Mr Ramaphosa amid wide-ranging allegations of corruption in government and state-owned companies during his time in office, which began in 2009.

The ANC indicated this week that it would take legal action over the use of the name Ukhonto we Sizwe because it belonged to the existing party. Zuma, who served as leader of the ruling ANC and the country for nearly a decade, said he had been asked by some ANC leaders if he would campaign for the party in next year's elections. "I have decided that I cannot and will not campaign for the ANC of (current South African President) Ramaphosa in 2024," he said. He said his conscience will not allow him to pretend

that Ramaphosa's ANC is the ANC of late founding father Nelson Mandela or the late Oliver Tambo or Albert John Luthuli, who once led the party.

"The ANC is being led by some leaders who are behaving in a manner that does not reflect the true character of the organization that liberated South Africans from apartheid," he said. "When I was president of the ANC, dissenting voices were never sided (sidelined) as in the present, even the 'Zuma must fall' brigade were free to express themselves." He claimed dissenting voices are being suppressed under Ramaphosa. Zuma claimed the ANC under Ramaphosa is a proxy of white monopoly capital, alleging that the party has been infiltrated by its enemies. Now, he said, South Africans must save the ANC revolution from its enemies. "It would be betrayal to campaign for the ANC of Ramaphosa. It is not the ANC that I joined and went to jail for," he said, referring to the apartheid era. (IPA Service)

Woman judge's seeking permission to die exposes 'Nari Shakti Vandan' hype

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Only a few months ago, RSS-BJP clan had created hype around "Nari Shakti Vandan", just after PM Narendra Modi government had introduced Women's Reservation Bill, 2023 on September 19 in a special session of Parliament. Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam was the new epithet for the Bill which was brought forward as if BJP was the only champion of the women's cause. In November 2023 state elections, RSS-BJP clan campaigned against ruling opposition states claiming women were not safe there, as if only opposition parties are at fault. However, in the beginning of December 2023, when Crime in India report for 2022 was released we knew that crime against women in India rose sharply by 4 per cent, and situation was worse even in BJP ruled states,

such as Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. And now a victim woman judge in Uttar Pradesh seeks permission from Supreme Court of India to die with dignity, since she was unable to get justice.

A total of 4,45,256 cases of crime against women were registered during 2022, showing an increase of 4.0% over 2021 (4,28,278 cases). Majority of cases under crime against women under IPC were registered under 'Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives' (31.4%) followed by 'Kidnapping & Abduction of Women' (19.2%), 'Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty' (18.7%), and 'Rape' (7.1%). The crime rate registered per lakh women population was 66.4 in 2022 in comparison with 64.5 in 2021.

How serious PM Modi led Union Government is, as far as

crime in India is concerned, can be understood just by the fact that as many other data, this crime data was also delayed by at least five months, during which no one knew about the correct figure. It would have been released much earlier than the "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam" but then how RSS-BJP could claim "Nari Shakti Vandan" when the crime against women was rising by 4 per cent? Then there was election in November 2023, and the revelation that crime against women was worse even in BJP ruled states would have prevented the RSS-BJP clan to campaign against opposition rules for rising crime against women. Thus delay in releasing the report is now being seen as mere politics, to create advantage to BJP.

Chief Justice of India, Justice D Y Chandrachud has taken the open letter of the woman judge

from Uttar Pradesh seriously that went viral on social media alleging sexual harassment by a senior and requesting permission to kill herself. "Kindly permit me to end my life in a dignified way," the woman requested. She said that a probe was ordered into her allegations after she filed a complaint with the Internal Complaints Committee of the High Court in July 2023, but the inquiry is "a farce and a sham." It is just an example, how the woman victims are being treated in our country, which requires attention of the judiciary and everyone involved in the Criminal Justice Administrations across India, since the crime against women is rising sharply.

Crime against women in India under Indian Penal Code (IPC) and under the Special and Local Laws (SLL) are on the rise. In terms of number of crime in

2022, Uttar Pradesh was worst with 65743 cases, followed by 45331 in Maharashtra, 45058 in Rajasthan, 34738 in West Bengal, and 32765 in Madhya Pradesh.

As for the crime rate per lakh population in 2022 is concerned, Telangana was worst with 117, followed by 115.1 in Rajasthan, 118.7 in Haryana, 103.3 in Odisha, and 96.2 in Andhra Pradesh. In states, crime against women rate is 65.4, in UTs 101.8, and all India rate is 66.4. Crime against women in Delhi is 144.4. The far worse record of crime against women in Union Territories show that where the PM Modi led government is directly responsible for administering the rule of law through policing directly under its nose is performing far worse than the states, both ruled by the BJP and the opposition political parties.

It is another matter that when

it comes to political campaigns and alibis, PM Modi government says the law and order is state subject, and hence states are responsible for rising crime against women. They also love to blame the opposition ruled states, but the data shows that crime against women are on the rise in both the BJP and opposition ruled states, which needs to be addressed without playing politics, since women's safety is far more important than attractive votes by falsely shifting blames to others.

Now come to the action taken against the culprits. Chargesheeting rate in states altogether was only 75.9 per cent in 2022 while in UTs it was even less at 71.9 per cent. Does it not mean that policing under Union Government is worse than under the state governments. Is it not then unethical when rulers in the Centre tell the electorate during

election campaigns, as we have seen in Rajasthan recently, that women's safety is threatened under opposition rule? At all India level chargesheeting rate was only 75.8 per cent.

It should also be noted that chargesheeting rate in Delhi was only 72.6 per cent where crime against women rate was highest in the Country. Delhi Police is of course under the BJP led Centre. As for the states are concerned chargesheeting rate in Mizoram was 98 per cent, Kerala 94.5, West Bengal 92.5, Nagaland 92.2, Andhra Pradesh 92.7, and Tamil Nadu 90.6 per cent. These were the top states for chargesheeting and barring NDA in Mizoram, no state was ruled by the BJP. It is therefore, RSS-BJP clan must drop their empty "Nari Vandan" slogan and their governments must act now for the real safety of women in the country. (IPA Service)

India's remarkable progress to cut maternal deaths has hit a climate change hurdle – water shortages



By: Cheena Kapoor

Sonu Bohra's first pregnancy coincided with one of the longest dry spells she had seen in her home village of Sal, high in the Himalayas in Uttarakhand. By the time she went into labour, it had not rained for almost six months and the taps had run dry for days.

When her waters broke, an ambulance came to take her to the nearest medical centre, in Chauramehta. But they refused to admit her, saying they had run out of water. The ambulance driver decided to take her to the next centre, 55 kilometres away in Pati – a drive of several hours on the poor roads. But when they arrived, they discovered the same problem. They set off for the next health centre, but it was too late. The baby was coming. In the end, Bohra gave birth by the roadside, helped by the ambulance driver.

As she watched her healthy two-year-old son playing and shrieking with joy outside their home, Bohra recalled the excruciating pain she endured giving birth to him. She knows it could all have ended very differently. "I was terrified," she recalled. "Other pregnant women have died. Everyone knows that these [maternal] deaths are high in this area. When the first hospital said no, I was worried that I might end up dying as well, like the others I've heard about. I started praying. My biggest concern was that the child inside me should remain alive and well."

For nearly two decades, India has been working to transform its record on maternal health. It has expanded maternity units in rural areas, provided free ambulances to ensure women can get to them safely, and set up a vast network of community health workers known ASHA, or Accredited Social Health Activists, to provide advice, organise antenatal check-ups and coordinate transportation to hospital when women go into labour.

The proportion of women delivering their babies in hospitals or clinics rather than at home has more than doubled, from just over 40% in 2005-'06 to nearly 90% in 2019-'21. India's maternal mortality rate has dropped from 400 deaths per 100,000 births in 2007-'09 to 97 per 100,000 in 2018-'20, meeting a government target to bring it below 100 by 2020.

It is one of the country's biggest public health victories of recent decades and has won international praise. Yet as Bohra's experience shows, the strategy of encouraging institutional deliveries has hit an unexpected hurdle – climate change.

India has 18% of the world's population and just 4% of its water resources, according to the World Bank. It is the world's largest user of groundwater, exceeding the United States and China combined, according to a United Nations report published in October that warned India's north-western region, including states Punjab and Haryana, would experience critically low groundwater availability by 2025.

As a changing climate has brought more erratic rainfall patterns that are less easy to predict than they were, water shortages have made it impossible for hospitals in drought-hit parts of the country to operate year-round. Even in major cities, some are having to delay planned surgeries during the

driest times of the year – the hot months ahead of the monsoon rains, when water reserves run low. Unlike a planned surgery, labour cannot be postponed.

In 2019, Chennai – home to about five million people – came close to completely running out of water, threatening essential services and forcing authorities to bring supplies in by train.

In mountainous areas like Uttarakhand where Bohra lives, the problem is particularly acute because the terrain makes it challenging to build and maintain infrastructure like water pipes or truck in water by tankers, according to Parmanand Punetha, chief engineer at the Uttarakhand water department.

The main hospital in Uttarakhand's Champawat district, in which Bohra's village is located, has struggled for years with water shortages. The main aquifer that its piped water supply comes from dried up at the height of the summer, when it has to rely on supplies coming in by truck. The hospital needs 25,000 litres of water a day, but the trucks only deliver about 10,000 a day, if they get there at all – sometimes they are blocked by landslides.

A new pipeline was installed this year that draws water from a different aquifer. But with extraction outpacing the rate at which these underground sources naturally replenish, that will not last forever. "More springs are running dry with every passing year," said Punetha.

On a hot day during this year's dry season, a long queue of pregnant women were waiting to be seen. Rukmani Devi, 33 and six months pregnant, said she usually found the washrooms at the hospital were closed. "I really worry about giving birth here," she said. "There's nowhere even to wash yourself after giving birth."

The hospital's Chief Medical Officer Dr KK Agarwal said he was aware of other cases like Bohra's, but could not put a figure to just how many they are. "We have been raising this issue [water supply] with the authorities for years now," he said. "Any project that needs government approval has to go through a long chain of paperwork for approvals... It takes time."

With no data showing how often water-related maternity ward closures occur, it is difficult to know how many women have been impacted. But there is anecdotal evidence that it is happening elsewhere in India as overexploitation of groundwater has led the water table to drop, making it harder to source water during the summer.

Dr Rakesh Kumar heads a small government health centre in Bihar that relies on water deliveries by tanker during the dry season, but receives far less than it needs to operate at full capacity. The centre has been forced to turn women away fearing infection if hygiene standards cannot be maintained.

"We perform a minimum of 200 deliveries a month here," he said. "But during peak summers, the centre receives only one water tanker a day. Most days we have to ask patient's attendants to bring water from the nearby hand pump, or are forced to send them away for delivery if we cannot manage to get water."

In neighbouring Jharkhand, one health worker said her local primary healthcare centre had suffered consist-

tent water shortages in recent years. "The submersible pump at the health centre stopped working a few years ago as the ground water dried up," she said. "The washrooms are never open. Women here now prefer to deliver babies at home. We have to spend a lot of time and energy convincing them to go to the nearest hospital for delivery."

Dr Margaret Montgomery, the World Health Organization's lead on water, sanitation and hygiene in healthcare facilities, said closed washrooms would put women off going to health facilities. "If toilets do not work, women do not want to go to a facility; this is a real disincentive," she said. "India has made huge gains in reversing MMR but climate change and missed indicators into national health system monitoring and unsystematic review into budgeting will compound health risks for mothers and newborns."

Globally, 16.6 million women give birth in hospitals and clinics every year without adequate water, according to WaterAid. The international charity's advocacy advisor for health Annie Mossa said that more than 11% of all maternal deaths and 26% of neonatal deaths can be attributed to unclean births. "Every two seconds, a woman gives birth in a facility without adequate water," she said. "Yet, there does not appear to be specific data regarding maternal health, even though the World Health Organization resolved in 2008 to do more research on the impact of climate change on health."

Even where hospitals have adequate supplies, water shortages are impacting pregnant women's ability to access care. Hospitals in drought-affected parts of Kenya have recorded a drop in deliveries as local nomadic or semi-nomadic communities have deviated from their traditional migration patterns in search of pasture for their livestock, taking them further away and making it harder to get to hospitals on time.

Dr Antony Apalia, who heads the government's health work in the worst-hit county of Turkana in north-western Kenya, said that during the worst of the drought this year, only around one in four births there were attended by a registered nurse – well below the 70% recorded in October 2022.

To address the problem, authorities in arid and semi-arid areas of the country have deployed mobile health facilities using vans or even camels. They are also using chips placed in the bracelets that young women traditionally wear to track the location of new and expectant mothers and try to ensure they can access pre- and antenatal services.

In India, reducing maternal mortality remains a key policy goal, as does the impact of water shortages. But the connection between the two has received little attention, experts say. A 2019 report on water management by the Niti Aayog public policy think-tank noted that at least 200,000 Indians die every year from the lack of sanitation that results from water shortages, yet its main policy focus was agriculture. Maternal healthcare was not mentioned.

"We keep hearing news reports of how a pregnant woman miscarried while carrying water home or was refused admission due to shortage of water," said Anant Bhan, a global health researcher in bioethics and health policy. "Yet, there is no comprehensive analysis." If current trends continue, India will not meet the global target of bringing maternal mortality below 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030, warned Montgomery of the World Health Organization.

"The problem of maternal and newborn mortality caused due to inadequate water can be solved. It's just a matter of political will and leadership," she said. "But if we go by the current trends, the world will fall short in ending preventable maternal mortality by more than one million lives." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Websites using AI to 'undress' women receive unprecedented traction, study finds

By: Abhishek Anand

Websites that used artificial intelligence (AI) to undress people, especially women, received more than 24 million unique visits in September alone, a study conducted by a social media analytics firm named Graphika found.

The findings highlight the rampant misuse of AI and an urgent need for laws to regulate them.

It analysed around 34 websites that use AI tools to manipulate existing images and videos of people to make them appear nude without their consent. The firm called the services offered by these websites "non-consensual intimate imagery" (NCII).

These NCII providers misuse the popularity of different social media platforms to market their "services" and divert traffic to their websites. The study found that the volume of referral link spam has increased by more than 2,000 percent on platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter) and Reddit since the beginning of this year.

How do these models operate?

These websites function on a freemium model. This means that

users are allowed to generate a few free images but once that expires, they required to purchase additional "credits" to access premium tools or to further generate such images. The manipulation of existing images raises privacy concerns for everybody, especially women, who can be targeted using the help of such websites.

It further said, "Users are required to purchase additional 'credits' or 'tokens' to access features such as higher resolution exports, 'age' and 'body trait' customization, and inpainting - a feature where the AI model will replace a highlighted part of the image with requested content, such as removing clothing."

Earlier this year, we saw deepfakes of Bollywood actors Rashmika Mandanna and Kajol going viral on social media platforms. While these clips prompted responses from different public figures, it also highlighted the threats that AI tools possess when misused by bad actors.

Why are these websites emerging?

The study highlighted that the growth in accessibility of open-source artificial intelligence image

diffusion models has allowed several websites to easily provide such realistic NCII at a large scale. You may ask how? It is because of the availability of such tools have significantly brought down the time and cost of generating such images.

"Without such providers, their customers would need to host, maintain, and run their own custom image diffusion models - a time-consuming and sometimes expensive process," the study said.

What next?

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had expressed his concern over the threats posed by AI tools and deepfakes while addressing a gathering.

The Quint had analysed how the use of deepfakes could impact the elections, and how bad actors can use them to further narratives and spread disinformation across social media platforms. You can read the analysis here.

The union government is soon planning to introduce regulations to control the spread of deepfakes on the internet. As the accessibility of tools increase, the future will tell if the regulations would address the privacy violations on such websites. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Dry skin during winters is bad for diabetics

By: Shahnaz Husain

Winter is here. North winds, cold temperatures, sleet, and snow wreak havoc on your skin.

With a drop in temperature, most people with diabetes experience higher blood sugar levels in winter. This occurs because the body tends to release more glucose to keep itself warm in winter, but this ends up being more harmful than helpful for those having diabetes.

The intake of comfort foods (rich in carbohydrates and sugar), a tradition of eating seasonal sweets specially made with jaggery, and a sedentary lifestyle with limited physical activity increases blood sugar levels during winter as the body is unable to process glucose.

As many as 1/4 of people with diabetes will have a skin disorder caused or affected by diabetes at some time in winter. This is what some refer to as 'winter itch'. When sugar is high, the body loses fluid, causing your skin to become dry. This occurs because the body is turning the water into urine to remove the excess sugar from the blood.

During the winter dry air, lowered humidity outdoors, heaters in the home, hot water and more irritating fabrics such as wool can all be contributing factors to dry and itchy skin. Diabetes also affects the ability to heal those cracks and fight off any infection.

People with diabetes need to maintain proper winter skin care to avoid cracking, bleeding, and other possible skin complications.

1. Moisturize: In the winter months and on the feet and hands, a moisturizing cream or ointment is preferable. The thicker the moisturizer, the less evaporation of water from the skin occurs. Skin moisturizers, which rehydrate the epidermis and seal in moisture, are the first step in combating dry skin. Regular moisturizing fights dry skin.

Before you get dressed for the day, start with a daytime moisturizer. Any time you wash your face, hands, or body, you strip your skin of its natural oils. Since these oils help to lock in moisture, it's vital to replace them. That's why it's important to use a moisturizer any time you wash your skin, especially in winter. Creams and ointments generally work better than



lotions because they are thicker and more protective. Creams and ointments are more likely to contain petroleum jelly, mineral oil, glycerine, and shea butter, which help keep moisture in the body.

Rub the moisturizer into the skin so that it doesn't leave your skin feeling sticky or pool between the fingers or toes. Keep a small bottle of moisturizer with you in case you need to reapply while away from home. Moisturize before bed, too. Consider using a special nighttime moisturizer because they often have ingredients that promote healing while they moisturize.

You can even opt for coconut oil as a natural moisturizer.

In case you are someone who might skip this step in a hurry, you can always keep a travel-size bottle in your purse.

2. Apply sunscreen daily: Use sunscreen with at least SPF 30 even in shorter winter days and less sunlight to protect your skin from wind, sun, and cold temperatures if you are a diabetic patient. Apply sunscreen on top of your moisturizer. Your skin is exposed to the sun and sunburn even during the winter when the temperatures are low.

If you are living in higher hills covered with snow then, the snow can reflect the sun and increase your chances and the severity of sunburn. Lips become easily chapped in winter so protect them with lip balm that also contains sunscreen. Dry, cracked lips may increase your risk of cold sores. Keep in mind, that the snow can reflect 80% of the sun's ultraviolet rays.

3. Hydration and Nutrition: Proper hydration is essential for diabetic patients to keep the skin moisturised and prevent dryness during winter. Remember to drink at least 8 glasses of water a day.

This will help your skin look fresh and supple on the long run. You can even drink fresh juices and green tea. Stay clear of carbonated beverages. If you work in office environment or work from home then it is the more important to drink sufficient water, soups and juices; as the indoor heaters suck the humidity out of the air which can cause fluctuation in body temperature. Stay hydrated in the cold weather, even if you are not as thirsty. Consuming water helps keep your skin moist on the inside.

Drink plenty of fluids like lime water (without sugar), buttermilk, but not soft drinks and coconut water. Eat healthy foods like whole grains, less saturated fat and lots of fruits and vegetables. Consume fruits and vegetables high in antioxidants, like berries and leafy greens, to protect the skin from oxidative damage. Stay away from excessive caffeine and alcohol as they can dehydrate your skin.

Diabetes can lead to nerve damage and numbness in your feet, so it's imperative to check them daily for any blisters or cuts you may not feel. While full body massage is beneficial, don't forget your scalp and feet. Even the smallest injury can be prone to infection due to poor circulation that can compromise healing. One of the main symptoms of diabetes is that cuts and wounds heal slowly.

Opt for mild ointments. A foot cream for diabetic skin helps keep this problem-prone area moisturized-but avoid applying between your toes, as this is a common spot for fungal infections. Treat yourself to a massage now and then to improve your blood circulation. You can go to a spa for this or even rope in your family members. (The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)

The US military's Central Command reported two more of the attacks on commercial vessels

Pentagon announces new international mission to counter attacks on commercial vessels in Red Sea

MANAMA, Dec 19: The U.S. and a host of other nations are creating a new force to protect ships transiting the Red Sea that have come under attack by drones and ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced on Tuesday in Bahrain. The seriousness of the attacks, several of which have damaged the vessels, has led multiple shipping companies to order their ships to hold in place and not enter the Bab el-Mandeb Strait until the security situation can be addressed.

The U.S. military's Central Command reported two more of the attacks on commercial vessels on Monday. A strike by attack drone and ballistic missile hit a tanker off Yemen, at roughly the same time a cargo ship reported an explosive detonating in the water near them, the military said.

"This is an international challenge that demands collective action," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in statement released just after midnight in Bahrain. "Therefore today I am announcing the establishment of Operation Prosperity Guardian, an important new multinational

security initiative."

There are about 400 commercial vessels in the southern Red Sea, an area roughly the size of Washington D.C. to Boston, at any given time, a senior military official told reporters traveling in Bahrain with Austin. Under the new mission, the military ships that have increased their presence in the region will not necessarily escort a specific vessel, but position the military ships to be able to provide umbrella protection to as many as possible at a given time, the official said on the condition of anonymity to provide additional details that had not been made public on how the new mission will work.

In the last four weeks, Houthi militants have attacked or seized commercial ships 12 times, and still hold 25 members of the MV Galaxy Leader hostage in Yemen, Austin said in remarks on Tuesday in a ministerial meeting on the new maritime mission. The U.S. is still actively seeking member countries to join the mission, and increase the number of navies present and participating. The United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain



have joined, Austin said. Some of those countries will conduct joint patrols while others provide intelligence support in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

One notably absent participant is China, which has warships in the region, but those ships have not responded to previous calls for assistance by commercial vessels, even though some of the ships attacked have had ties to Hong Kong, the military official said. Several other countries have also agreed to be involved in the operation but prefer not to be publicly named, a defense official said on the condition of anonymity to discuss additional details of the new mission that have not been publicly announced.

The mission will be coordinated by the already existing

Combined Task Force 153, which was set up in April 2022 to improve maritime security in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden. While the task force has primarily provided a headquarters structure to date, the goal of the new mission is to generate ships and other assets to carry out the protection. There have been 39 member nations in CTF 153, but officials were working to determine which of them would participate in this latest effort.

Separately, the United States has also called on the United Nations Security Council to take action against the attacks.

In a letter to council members obtained Monday by The Associated Press, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said Houthi attacks

targeting commercial vessels legally transiting the international waterways continue to threaten "navigational rights and freedoms, international maritime security, and international commerce."

The 15 council members discussed the Houthi threat behind closed doors on Monday but took no immediate action. Two U.S. warships — the USS Carney and the USS Mason, Navy destroyers — have been moving through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait daily to help deter and respond to attacks from the Houthis.

The move to set up the expanded operation came after three commercial vessels were struck by missiles fired by Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen on Dec. 3. Those attacks were part of an escalating campaign of violence that also included armed and other drones launched in the direction of U.S. warships.

To date the US has not struck back at the Iranian-backed Houthi operating in Yemen or targeted any of the militants' weapons or other sites. On Monday Austin did not answer a question as to why the Pentagon had not conducted a counterstrike. (AP)

Midnight earthquake kills 118 people, injures over 500 in northwest China

BEIJING/JISHISHAN, Dec 19: At least 118 people were killed and over 500 others injured when a powerful 6.2-magnitude earthquake struck a remote mountainous region in northwest China just before midnight, the local earthquake relief headquarters said on Tuesday. According to the China Earthquake Networks Centre, the shallow quake jolted Gansu and Qinghai provinces at 11:59 p.m. on Monday, with a focal depth of 10 kilometres.

The epicentre of the earthquake Liugou township is about 8 kilometres from the county seat of Jishishan Bao'an, Dongxiang, Sala autonomous county in Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture in Gansu. Experts say shallow quakes cause heavy damage to infrastructure.

Qinghai province is adjacent to the Tibet Himalayan region which is prone to frequent earthquakes due to shifting of continental plates. A second quake struck the neighbouring Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region hours later on Tuesday.

The Atux City of Kizilsu Kirgiz Autonomous Prefecture in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, was struck by the earthquake at 9:46 a.m. local time on Tuesday, the CENC said. The epicentre, with a depth of 10 km, was monitored at 40.02 degrees north latitude and 77.86 degrees east longitude, the CENC said.

Gansu and Qinghai also experienced aftershocks. While 105 people were killed in Gansu, 13 others died in Qinghai due to the quake, according to official media reports. So far 579 people have been reported injured in the quake-hit areas, officials said.

The quake has damaged 6,381 houses in

Jishishan. So far 32 aftershocks were recorded, with the largest registering a magnitude of 4.0, said Han Shujun, a spokesperson for the provincial emergency management department, at the press conference.

The quake has destroyed some rural roads, leading to power outages and telecommunication failures. The maintenance crew has been working overnight to repair the damaged infrastructure. Several villages suffered power failures and disruption of water.

The Ministry of Transport, which monitors the operation of roads, said on Tuesday morning that a bridge across the Yellow River had cracked because of the quake.

According to local meteorological authorities, the daily low temperature in Jishishan is reported to climb minus 10 degrees Celsius on Tuesday.

The provincial fire and rescue department sent 580 rescuers aided with 88 fire engines, 12 search and rescue dogs, and more than 10,000 sets of equipment to the disaster area.

The railway authority has suspended passenger and cargo trains passing through the quake zone and ordered a safety check of railway tracks. Hu Changsheng, the ruling Communist Party chief of Gansu, and Ren Zhenhe, the governor of Gansu, have rushed to the disaster-hit area to command rescue and relief efforts. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang have ordered all-out rescue efforts to minimise casualties after the earthquake. Xi asked local authorities to rescue and treat the injured people promptly, and closely monitor the earthquake situation and weather changes to prevent secondary disasters. (PTT)



Indian-American Congressman Shri Thanedar comes under attack by anti-Israel protesters

WASHINGTON, Dec 19: Indian-American Congressman Shri Thanedar was targeted by a group of anti-Israel protesters over the weekend blowing car horns and screaming for his "silence" on the deaths of Palestinians in Gaza and his stand on the Israel-Hamas war.

Thanedar, 68, has taken a staunchly supportive approach to Israel following the horrific attack by Hamas militants on October 7.

"This is my home at 3 AM," Thanedar wrote in a post on X on Monday, including a video that showed cars lined in the street outside his home, an individual waving a cloth-like material, and others screaming through megaphones.

"You are complicit in the bombing of Gaza... Your silence is violence. Your silence is abhorrent, and we will not let you sleep!" one protester shouted.

"There will be a price to pay," the protester added before becoming largely inaudible.

Thanedar has expressed his strong support for Israel on his campaign website, including vowing to "defend Israel's right to exist and to thrive."

"In this time of great international uncertainty, it is now more important than ever before to reaffirm as a people, and as a nation, our unequivocal support for the state of Israel, the lone democracy in the Middle East and one of our closest, and strongest, allies across the globe," the Democratic Party lawmaker from Michigan wrote.

He has also described Hamas as a barbaric terrorist organisation and there is a need to eliminate the terror outfit.

Thanedar recently formed the Congressional Caucus for Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains.

A Maharashtrian, Thanedar grew up in Belgaum in Karnataka. He came to the US in hopes of becoming a successful businessman and now wants to serve the community he lives with. (PTT)

North Korea's Kim threatens 'more offensive actions' against US after watching powerful missile test

SEOUL, Dec 19: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un threatened "more offensive actions" to repel what he called increasing US-led military threats after he supervised the third test of his country's most advanced missile designed to strike the mainland US, state media reported on Tuesday.

Kim's statement suggests he is confident in his growing missile arsenal and will likely continue weapons testing activities ahead of next year's presidential election in the United States. But many observers say North Korea still needs to perform more significant tests to prove it has functioning missiles targeting the U.S. mainland.

After watching on Monday's launch of the Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile, Kim said the test showed how North Korea could re-

spond if the United States were to make "a wrong decision against it," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim stressed the need to "never overlook all the reckless and irresponsible military threats of the enemies ... and to strongly counter them with more offensive actions," KCNA said.

The Hwasong-18 ICBM is a developmental, solid-fueled ICBM that is considered North Korea's most powerful weapon. Its built-in solid propellant makes launches harder for outsiders to detect than liquid-fueled missiles, which must be fueled before liftoffs.

But many foreign experts say North Korea still has some other technological hurdles to master to acquire reliable nuclear-tipped ICBMs, such as one to protect warheads from the harsh conditions of atmospheric reentry.

KCNA said the Hwasong-18 missile, launched on a high angle to avoid neighboring countries, flew a distance



of 1,002 kilometers (622 miles) for 73.5 minutes at a maximum altitude of 6,518 kilometers (4,050 miles) before landing in an area off the North's east coast.

It said Kim expressed "great satisfaction" with the launch, which verified again the reliability of "the most powerful strategic core striking means" of North Korea.

It was the North's third test of the Hwasong-18 missile. Its two previous launches occurred in April and July.

"Based on their statement, this looks to have been an exercise in signaling and a developmental test in one," said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"There's nothing new here technically as far as I can tell at this early stage, but they're certainly growing increasingly confident in their new solid propellant ICBM."

Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said the North's latest ICBM test is yet another indicator of how far its missile

engine technology has progressed, but added there are limits to what North Korea can learn from lofted trajectory firings.

"Demonstrating warhead targeting and reentry capabilities would involve provocative launches across greater distances," Easley said.

"So more significant tests of both technology and diplomacy are likely in the New Year." KCNA said its Hwasong-18 test was meant to issue a warning over its rivals' confrontational military moves on North Korea.

It said a recent U.S.-South Korean meeting to discuss their nuclear deterrence plan openly revealed their intention to hold joint drills with a simulated nuclear attack on North Korea. (AP)

4 killed as train torched by unidentified persons in Bangladesh amid political unrest

DHAKA, Dec 19: Unidentified persons set on fire a passenger train here in the Bangladesh capital on Tuesday killing at least four people, including a woman and her minor son, amidst the political unrest over the January 7 elections.

The attack coincided with the nationwide stoppage called by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Tuesday as part of its ongoing campaign to boycott the polls and launch a formal protest against the Election Commission's polls schedule.

The arson attack on the train was the fifth in the past month but the deadliest so far in terms of casualties.

The miscreants set on fire three compartments of the Dhaka-bound inter-district Mohanganj Express early morning shortly after the train left the Airport Railway Station at the entry point of the capital, police and witnesses said. "The passengers saw the fire after the train left the Airport station, it was stopped at the next stop at Tejgaon station," Tejgaon police station officer-in-charge Mohammad Mohsin said.

Awami League earlier said it would encourage the independent, including the party's rebel candidates to make the polls participatory though voters have little option other than reelecting the ruling party for the fourth consecutive term since the December 2008 elections.

At least four persons, including a woman and her child, have died after the train was set on fire amid a hartal called by the BNP. Mohsin said another minor boy was missing while his mother awaited in front of the gutted compartment as fire service rescuers were searching inside. Railway officials said the locomotive master halted the train at Tejgaon where the



fire service rescuers doused the blaze and retrieved four bodies while two of the dead remained unidentified.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League has emerged as the prime contender in the absence of ailing ex-premier Khaleda Zia's BNP which has boycotted the January 7 polls since its demands for a no-party caretaker government to organise the voting were not met. Awami League is contesting the polls against its technical

Opposition in Parliament Jatiya Party and independent candidates, including the rebel contenders who fielded their candidature after failing to secure the party nomination.

Awami League earlier said it would encourage the independent, including the party's rebel candidates to make the polls participatory though voters have little option other than reelecting the ruling party for the fourth consecutive term since the December 2008 elections.

One passenger was killed last week and dozens wounded as saboteurs uprooted railway tracks on the same train on the same route last week when seven car-

riages derailed in Gazipur on the outskirts of the capital.

Dozens of trucks, buses and private cars were torched since late October while the violence killed at least six persons.

Hasina, meanwhile, said, "They can't oust the government by killing people."

Bangladesh will deploy the Army for 13 days from December 29 to maintain order "in aid of civil power" ahead of the January 7 general elections amid the political unrest. However, the military called it a routine poll time duty.

The Election Commission announced the polls schedule on November 15 amid continued political unrest. BNP has repeatedly been saying no election under the ruling Awami League would be fair, demanding the government's resignation to pave the way for an interim non-party neutral government for polls oversight.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal earlier said despite the need for a "congenial atmosphere" for a smooth election, "for a long time there exist differences of opinions

among political leaderships on the question of election, particularly over the institutional method of the polling."

In a veiled reference to BNP and its allies, Awal said his office invited all registered political parties who were "reluctant" to take part in the upcoming polls for dialogues with the Commission but "they rejected the invitation".

But he asked the nearly 110 million voters to freely exercise their rights franchise in an "enthusiastic atmosphere, discarding all worries, tensions and unease".

BNP 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.

According to media reports, over 10,000 opposition leaders and activists, including BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir have been arrested in a nationwide crackdown while BNP claimed the figure to be as high as 20,000.

A Dhaka court on Monday denied a bail request from Alamgir, meaning he could not guide his party ahead of the election next month.

He is the key party leader since the ailing Zia is hospitalised and faces 17 years of imprisonment following her conviction in two corruption cases that her party says were politically motivated. (PTT)

West accuses Iran of illegally testing missiles, transferring drones to Russia, enriching uranium

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 19: The Western powers in the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran accused Tehran on Monday of developing and testing ballistic missiles, transferring hundreds of drones to Russia, and enriching uranium to an unprecedented 60 per cent level for a country without a nuclear weapons programme — all in violation of a UN resolution endorsing the deal.

Iran and its ally, Russia, dismissed the charges by Britain, France and Germany, strongly supported by the United States, which pulled out of the agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2018.

The six-party agreement was aimed at ensuring that Iran could not develop atomic weapons. Under the accord, Tehran agreed to limit enrichment of uranium to levels necessary for the peaceful use of nuclear power in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

The sharp exchanges came at the Security Council's semi-annual meeting on the implementation of its resolution endorsing the 2015 nuclear deal.

Both Iran's UN Ambassador Amir Iravani and Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia blamed the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA. Western sanctions and an "anti-Iran" stance for the current standoff.

Iravani said Iran is allowed to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and Nebenzia rejected alleged evidence that it was using Iranian drones in Ukraine.

Then-President Donald Trump said when unilaterally pulling out of the accord in 2018 that he would negotiate a stronger deal, but that didn't happen. Iran began breaking the terms a year later and its 60 per cent enrichment is near weapons-grade levels, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN nuclear watchdog.

Formal talks to try to find a roadmap to restart the JCPOA collapsed in August 2022.

At Monday's council meeting, UN political chief Rosemary DiCarlo stressed that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres still considers the JCPOA "the best available option to ensure that the Iranian nuclear programme remains exclusively peaceful".

She urged Iran to reverse course, as did the three European countries who issued a joint statement quoting the IAEA as saying Iran's stockpiles of enriched uranium now stand at 22 times the JCPOA limit.

"There is no credible civilian justification for the state of Iran's nuclear programme," the UK, France and Germany said. "The current trajectory only brings Iran closer to weapons-related capabilities."

The Europeans and US Minister Counselor John Kelley stressed that they would use all means to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. (AP)

Iceland volcano erupts weeks after thousands were evacuated from a town on Reykjanes Peninsula

STOCKHOLM, Dec 19: A volcanic eruption started on Monday night on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, turning the sky orange and prompting the country's civil defence to be on high alert.

The eruption appears to have occurred about four kilometers (2.4 miles) from the town of Grindavik, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said. Grainy webcam video showed the moment of the eruption as a flash of light illuminating the sky at 22:17 local time. As the eruption spread, magma, or semi-molten rock, could be seen spewing along the ridge of a hill.

"The magma flow seems to be at least a hundred cubic metres per second, maybe more. So this would be considered a big eruption in this area at least," Vidir Reynisson, head of Iceland's Civil Protection and Emergency Management told the Icelandic public broadcaster, RUV.

In November, police evacuated the town or Grindavik after strong seismic activity in the area damaged homes and raised fears of an imminent eruption.

Iceland sits above a volcanic hot spot in the North Atlantic and averages an eruption every four to five years. The most disruptive in recent times was the 2010 eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which spewed huge clouds of ash into the atmosphere and grounded flights across Europe for days because of fears ash could damage airplane engines. Scientists say a new eruption would likely produce lava but not an ash cloud.

A coast guard helicopter will attempt to confirm the exact location — and size — of the eruption, and will also measure gas emissions.

Grindavik, a fishing town of 3,400, sits on the Reykjanes Peninsula, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) southwest of the capital, Reykjavik and not far from Keflavik Airport, Iceland's main facility for international flights. (AP)

At least 13 dead, 178 injured after a massive fuel depot explosion in Guinea's capital

CONAKRY (GUINEA), Dec 19: An explosion and inferno at Guinea's main fuel depot in the capital of Conakry left at least 13 people dead and 178 injured, authorities said on Monday, as the West African country was assisted by other nations in managing the disaster.

The massive explosion sparked the fire at the Guinean Petroleum Company depot after midnight Sunday, Guinea's presidency said. It caused significant damage in the heart of the Kaloum administrative district, home to most government offices.

At least 89 of the 178 people injured have been treated and are back home, the government said in a statement. It also updated the casualty toll that Guinea's Civil Protection Service had earlier said was provisional. Among the 13 killed were foreigners, it added.

Authorities said an investigation has started to reveal what

caused the explosion at the depot that supplies most of the fuel in Guinea. The depot had been in the process of being relocated to a remote site in a bid to avoid such a disaster.

There are now fears of a major supply disruption as the country relies on imported refined petroleum products. Officials were "identifying vital fuel-related needs to prevent possible disruptions in supplies from the capital to other parts of the country", the government said in the statement.

A worker at the depot was quoted by the Conakry-based Guinee Matin news website as saying the explosion occurred while a ship was offloading. "I lost several of my friends in this fire. Some like me are guards, others are technicians. ... All offices are destroyed as well as all equipment," said the worker identified as Ahmed Conde.

Security Minister Bachir Di-

allo said on state television the fire had been contained and some countries including Senegal and Mali were sending medical and safety teams.

The fire razed several offices and buildings. Many residents fled their homes as thick smoke spread.

"I was sleeping when I heard a whistle, then a deafening explosion," said resident Mounatou Balde.

Authorities shut down schools and public places in the capital. Access to the district was shut except for essential services. The presidency asked people to stay at home.

Col. Mamadi Doumbouya, who was sworn in as interim president following a coup in 2021, said the state is taking full care of those injured.

"I call on the people of Guinea to show solidarity and prayer for the nation in these moments of hard trial," Doumbouya added. (AP)

Children from across the country including Nagaland were present to join the Campaign in Kolkata

Child in Need Institute (CINI) launches nationwide campaign

AAI may take over Lengpui airport: Official

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 19: In a groundbreaking endeavor to address the impending climate crisis, National level non-government organisation Child in Need Institute (CINI) unveiled the visionary "What Children Want" a nationwide campaign, with a specific focus on the Impact of Environment on Children, highlighting the urgency of Climate Change.

This transformative initiative was launched in Kolkata marking a pivotal moment in empowering children under the age of 18 as climate champions. The campaign aims to position children at the forefront of climate change strategies and disaster response plans, recognising their indispensable role in shaping the future of our planet. The campaign encompasses a range of vital themes, including reducing single-use plastics, promoting energy conservation, encouraging clothing rejuvenation, advocating for healthy dietary habits, and disseminating scientific knowledge.

As the specter of climate change and environmental degradation

looms large on a global scale, posing existential threats to humanity, it is children, women, and the elderly who find themselves most susceptible. Governments worldwide have initiated a spectrum of policies, frameworks, and protocols to contend with these complex issues. India, notably, has been actively engaged in global efforts to combat climate change and mitigate the effects of global warming, particularly through a series of progressive green initiatives.

In response to these pressing challenges, CINI adopted a proactive stance by soliciting expert opinions and amplifying the voices of children from grassroots communities across 12 Indian states through a rigorous consultative process. This concerted effort aimed to craft a comprehensive roadmap for addressing the alarming predicament of environmental degradation. Children from across the country including Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Nagaland, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Delhi were present to join the Campaign in



Kolkata. To further their overarching mission, CINI organized a National Consultation on Environment and Climate Change, with a specialised focus on children. The occasion marked the inauguration of a Nationwide Campaign dedicated to Environment & Children, aimed at collating extensive evidence regarding children's aspirations for a sustainable environment, spanning the breadth and depth of India.

The Outcome of the Consulta-

tion was to provide an esteemed platform for in-depth consultative discourse on environmental and climate change issues, featuring contributions from experts and the voices of children, while exploring their impact on children's rights.

Establish a robust coordination mechanism among stakeholders and craft a comprehensive roadmap for collective advocacy and policy influence, with a clear focus on safeguarding children's rights from an environmental per-

spective.

Sujoy Roy, the National Advocacy Officer at CINI, emphasised the campaign's core mission, stating, "We aspire to awaken children to the profound impact of their everyday actions. We firmly believe that instilling environmentally responsible habits during their formative years will yield lasting results."

A recent study conducted as part of the state-level "What Children Want" campaign in Kolkata and the Sundarbans area revealed concerning environmental apprehensions among children. The data indicates that in Kolkata, a significant majority of children (54.07%) fear the devastation caused by cyclones, in stark contrast to the Sundarbans, where over half of the children (52.88%) are haunted by the fear of their entire region submerging. These location-specific fears underscore the deep psychological impact of environmental threats on young minds, highlighting the urgent need for awareness and action to address region-specific environmental challenges.

Against the backdrop of an esca-

lating global climate crisis, one that disproportionately threatens children and the environment, Dr. Samir Chaudhuri, Founder, CINI wholeheartedly supported the campaign's overarching goal. Dr. Chaudhuri stated, "By actively involving children in the climate action narrative, we are engaging the decision-makers of the future, those poised to usher in the transformative changes our world urgently requires."

Krishna, a young participant in the CINI program, conveyed the enthusiasm of children for this initiative, saying, "As a child, I'm excited to be part of this campaign. We learn about the environment in school, and now we can take real action to protect our planet. It's our future, after all."

For nearly half a century, the Child in Need Institute (CINI) has been at the forefront of efforts to uplift vulnerable children in rural and urban communities across India. Their unwavering mission encompasses ensuring that children and adolescents have unfettered access to essential services and entitlements, including health, nutrition, education, protection, participation, and a safe living environment.

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 19: The Airport Authority of India (AAI) may receive control of the state's sole airport, located in Lengpui close to Aizawl, from the newly formed Mizoram government led by chief minister Lalduhoma, an official said.

The official further claimed that the state government would take action to turn over the Lengpui airport to the AAI following a meeting of the council of ministers on December 14. According to him, the meeting also resolved that the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare will receive control of the sole Zoram Medical College (ZMC) from the government.

The state government owns and maintains ZMC and the Lengpui airport. ZMC is situated near Falkawn, roughly 16 kilometres from the state capital, while Lengpui is situated roughly 29 kilometres west of Aizawl.

The Lengpui airport's VIP-only dropping zone was recently abolished by the state government and made public, thanks to the initiative of home minister K. Sapdanga.

Lalduhoma had previously declared that in order to get the state government through its severe financial problems, the incoming administration will pursue privatisation and disinvestment.

According to officials, the new government feels that Mizoram, being a small state with limited revenue streams, cannot afford to retain the airport due to its high maintenance costs. The resource mobilisation department, which had been set up by the previous Mizo National Front (MNF) government, was similarly abolished by the state government. Rather, the duty of improving the state's resources was given to the Mizoram Resource Mobilisation Committee (MRMC).

Lalduhoma is the chairman of the MRMC and also holds the positions of finance, planning, and programme execution. Haukhuma Hauzel, a retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer and former state chief secretary, was named vice chairman.

Hauzel is given the title of minister of state and will receive Re 1 per month in pay.

DM promulgates Section 144 to keep water bodies clean

HT Bureau
WILLIAMNAGAR, Dec 19: East Garo Hills District Magistrate, Vibhor Aggarwal, has promulgated Section 144 of the CrPc in the entire district with immediate effect to keep the water bodies clean by prohibiting conversion of water bodies for any other purpose, setting up new industries or expansion of existing industries near the water bodies like lakes, dumping of solid and bio-medical wastes, discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from industries, towns, villages and other human settlements, etc.

The order also said that emergent steps are necessary to be taken to prevent any pollution of water bodies and rivers to maintain cleanliness in the district.

Tripura trade body seeks Rubber Board's help to lift B'desh ban on exports

AGARTALA, Dec 19: An industry body in Tripura has sought the Rubber Board's intervention to lift a ban by the Bangladesh government on supplies of rubber-based products to the neighbouring country through the northeastern state, officials said.

India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Tripura chapter general secretary Sujit Ray said local traders are suffering from the restriction on exports of rubber-based products to the neighbouring country.

These products are part of the list of items which are banned from exporting to

Bangladesh from Tripura-based land ports even as the northeastern state is the second highest rubber producer in India, Ray told reporters.

An average 90,712 metric tonnes of rubber is produced in Tripura annually.

Ray and several others from the industry held a meeting with Rubber Board's chairman Sawar Dhanania on Monday.

"Bangladesh is a big market for us. If we are not allowed to sell our best products to the neighbouring country, local traders will suffer. India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Tripura Merchants' Associ-

ation (TMA) have urged the chairman of Rubber Board India Sawar Dhanania to get this impasse over at the earliest," he said.

Officials of the Land Port Authority of India, representatives from the Rubber Board and Tripura Merchants' Association, dealers and producers were present at the meeting.

Claiming that the meeting was fruitful, Ray mentioned, "Dhanania gave a patient hearing to our points and said that he would take up the matter with the ministry concerned for getting an approval for export of rubber through our border with Bangladesh."

The Bangladesh government had imposed the ban on the import of rubber-made goods through the state's border with the neighbouring country even as there is no such restriction on other border trade routes, Land Ports Authority of India Manager Debasish Nandi told PTI on Tuesday.

Not only rubber-based products but tea produced from the northeastern state is also not allowed to be exported to the neighbouring country despite many attempts by Santosh Saha, the former chairman of Tripura Tea Development Corporation to remove such a restriction. (PTI)

ArSRLM inks MoU with SBI for banking services to SHGs

ITANAGAR, Dec 19: Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM) on Tuesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the State Bank of India for banking services to self-help groups in the state. Rural Development and Panchayati Raj secretary Amarnath Talwade and SBI Dibrugarh deputy general manager Aftab Ahmad Mallick represented the ArSRLM and SBI respectively in the MoU signing ceremony.

The MoU has been signed to expedite the SHG bank linkage on savings, credit, insurance and remittances for 12,000 self-help groups promoted under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM) in the northeastern state.

Talwade said that approximately 12,000 SHGs, 821 primary level federations (PLFs) and 28 cluster level federations (CLFs) will be benefited through this MoU by availing the credit linkage and accessing all the major financial products and services of the bank through the largest banking network of the country.

Mallick said SBI will extend all support for facilitating the SHGs and its higher federation's credit requirement along with the basic banking products. (PTI)

Develop a strong sense of empathy: Arunachal Governor to students

ITANAGAR, Dec 19: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) on Tuesday advised the students to be highly creative, socially aware, and develop a strong sense of empathy.

Gracing the 10th convocation of the National Institute of Technology (NIT) at Jote, near here, the governor asked the students to create a new work culture that would adhere to values, ethics and morals, in a world that is besieged with several conflicts and concerns.

He asked the graduating students to come back to the institute as alumni as and when possible and give back whatever they can, knowledge sharing lectures, donations, mentoring, and opportunities for placement of students.

Terming convocation as an essential day in the lives of graduating students and a significant landmark in their life's journey, Parnaik congratulated the students and said that they have earned their degrees and awards



through hard work and dedication to maintain high standards.

"Learning is a continuous process and the students must apply their learning to contribute to the progress of our country and in the process, make an excellent career for themselves and their families," he emphasised.

He reminded the graduating students that they are the leaders of tomorrow and they would be setting the stan-

dards that would enable India to become a fully developed and responsible country.

Reminding the students of Viksit Bharat@2047, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Parnaik appealed to them to contribute innovative ideas for the progress of the nation in the Amrit Kaal.

Referring to National Education Policy 2020, the governor said that policy is to instil among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought but also in spirit, intellect and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values and disposition that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen.

As many as 186 students were awarded degrees on the occasion including, 146 in undergraduate courses, 21 master's degree and 19 PhD. (PTI)

Farmers' Day celebrated in North Garo Hills, Meghalaya

CM Sangma inspects the ongoing construction of Bajengdoba-Resubelpara-Mendipathar-Damra Road

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: In a jubilant celebration of agricultural prowess, Farmers' Day, an event dedicated to honouring the relentless efforts of the agrarian community, was proudly commemorated on December 18 at Resubelpara, North Garo Hills District of Meghalaya.

Chief minister Conrad K Sangma graced the event in the presence of MLA of Williamnagar and the Minister of Housing and PHE Department, Govt of Meghalaya, Marquise Marak, Timothy D Shira, deputy speaker, and MLA, Resubelpara, Jude Rangku T. Sangma, MCS, PD, DDRD and Verdi Sangma, MCS, Assistant Commissioner, NGH & BDO, Resubelpara, who delivered inspiring addresses emphasising the pivotal role farmers play in sustaining our community and fostering economic growth.

Chief minister, Conrad K Sangma, while reflecting on the Agricultural Prowess of Meghalaya informed that 100 more processing plants will be sanctioned in the state. Chief minister said, "To achieve our goals, we need farmers actively involved in selling processed farm produce for higher returns. The government is fully committed to supporting them through schemes like Focus and Focus+, ensuring financial assistance and proper fund utilisation. We're also providing financial aid to preserve Meghalaya's biodiversity and assisting communities in maintaining forest cover. Programs like YESH Meghalaya offer vital support to the youth. Tackling sub-



stance abuse is a joint effort, and the government has launched initiatives to guide the youth." Chief minister urged the youths to Say No To Drugs.

MLA of Williamnagar and the minister of housing and PHE department, Govt of Meghalaya, Marquise Marak said, "Farmers are the backbone of our society. With the leadership of chief minister Conrad K Sangma, the Government has launched different programs and schemes that are farmer oriented. We have started adopting environment friendly technologies. The government arranges such programs to provide exposure and support for the improvement of our farmers, ultimately elevating our overall standard of living."

Among different Mission Mode Projects by the Government of Meghalaya, the Lakadong Turmeric Mission, in just five years has seen a 13-fold rise in production. As part of the Apiculture Mission, the government has assisted more than 4000 beekeepers by creating market-linkage and encouraging sustainable methods. The Meghalaya Piggery Mission has

impacted 27,150 people and through partnership with the National Cooperative Development Corporation, New Delhi, 1664 breeding units and 5476 fattening units were established resulting in an investment of more than ₹ 64 crores. 1530 dairy producers have benefited from the establishment of 100 cooperative organizations and 1731 dairy cows under the Meghalaya Milk Mission.

Throughout the day, a series of engaging and educational activities unfolded, showcasing the rich agricultural heritage of the region. Short films showcasing agricultural practices and interventions from Meghalaya, as well as highlighting the impactful initiatives of the PES Scheme, took center stage at the Farmers' Day event.

A cheque distribution ceremony on FOCUS Scheme, Working Capital Loans, YESH, and PES was also conducted. It is to be noted that ₹ 7.95 lakhs of financial grant to 14 PGs have been provided through the FOCUS Scheme, ₹ 8.10 lakhs of financial grant to 21 Youth Groups through YESH, ₹ 70 lakhs of loans to Farmer Collectives through Working Capital Loans and ₹ 2.61 crores transferred to 60 beneficiaries through PES.

Unveiling a new era for farmers, the inauguration of 17 processing units became a cornerstone of the Farmers' Day event, symbolising a leap forward in empowering our agricultural community with advanced facilities for enhanced productivity, value addition, and sustainable growth.

Meghalaya govt launches a state-of-the-art 10-Bed ICU Project and Tele-ICU Hub

SHILLONG, Dec 19: The Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Meghalaya, takes a monumental step forward in healthcare infrastructure with the launch of a state-of-the-art 10-bedded Intensive Care Unit (ICU) Project and Tele-ICU Hub and the inauguration of the 10-bed ICU Ward and Tele-ICU Hub, which marks a significant milestone in enhancing critical care services across the region. The event, held on December 19 at the State Convention Centre, Shillong, brought together key stakeholders, government officials, healthcare professionals, and community leaders to witness the unveiling of this pioneering healthcare initiative. The project aims to address the increasing demand for advanced critical care facilities and to bridge the gap between urban and rural healthcare services, ensuring timely and high-quality medical interventions for patients with severe health conditions.

While addressing the gathering, CM Sangma extended his gratitude to all stakeholders who played a crucial role in making this epic ICU project a success. He informed that several ICUs are being launched at certain locations, emphasising the aim to ensure optimal utility and reach even the most inaccessible regions. "Our project aligns with the vision set five and a half years ago, prioritising social sectors with healthcare at the forefront," he mentioned. He added, "Meghalaya has seen a drastic reduction in Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) from 200+ to 120, reflecting the transformative impact of technology on our healthcare sector. I envision a great future in showcasing how technology can revolutionise healthcare for the entire country." The project establishes an interconnected network between the 10-bed ICU Ward and the Tele-ICU Hub, enabling seamless communication and real-time data sharing for better patient outcomes. The 10-bed ICU has state-of-the-art medical facilities, advanced life support systems, and specialised equipment to provide comprehensive critical care services. The Tele-ICU Hub leverages technology to enable remote monitoring and consultation by intensivists and critical care specialists. This innovation ensures that even remote areas can access expert guidance in critical care management.

Speaking on the occasion, minister of health and family welfare, Mazel Ampareen Lyngdoh, stated, "The state of Meghalaya boasts a

significant strength in our nursing fraternity. I call upon our nursing staff and doctors to collaborate on this community-involved project. While there may be apprehension about artificial intelligence, today we witness how this technology strengthens our community, especially in healthcare. This initiative reflects Meghalaya's commitment to leveraging technology for the benefit of our citizens."

Sampath Kumar, IAS, principal secretary, Health & Family Welfare Department, while addressing the gathering, said, "Meghalaya, with its unique challenges, is leveraging technology to address geographical barriers. Our approach involves mobilising both supply and demand-side interventions and working on a lifecycle-based strategy to extend the healthy lifespan of our residents by 10-15 years. In the last three years, we have seen a significant 40% reduction in MMR. The chief minister envisions elevating our state to the top ten states in the next 5-10 years. This project is a testament to our commitment to overcoming challenges and improving healthcare accessibility for our people." Public health expert and scientist Nachiket Mor highlighted the critical role of healthcare in reaching the last mile and transforming the potential of the state. This initiative reflects the government's continuous efforts to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and meet the evolving needs of the community. It is a testament to the ongoing efforts to strengthen the healthcare infrastructure and improve health outcomes in Meghalaya.

Distinguished dignitaries in attendance were Conrad K. Sangma, chief minister, Government of Meghalaya, as the chief guest, and Mazel Ampareen Lyngdoh, minister of health and family welfare, Government of Meghalaya, as the guest of honour. Donald Philip Wahlang, chief secretary; Sampath Kumar, IAS, principal secretary, health and family welfare; Joram Beda, commissioner and secretary, health and family welfare, Government of Meghalaya; and Rangkumar S., IAS, secretary, health and family welfare, Government of Meghalaya, Joram Beda, commissioner & secretary, health & family welfare, and Rangkumar S., IAS, secretary, health & family welfare, graced the occasion as special guests. Nachiket Mor, a public health expert and scientist, and Sudarshan Hanumappa, founder of Karuna Trust, were also present at the event. Srikanth Nadhamuni, Chairman, 10BedICU, attended the event virtually.

No.KOK/BLDG/Tech-210/2023-24/4190

Date 13/12/2023

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing Non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only with a validity period of 180 (One hundred eighty) days which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 Form are invited from the intending Registered contractors of classes of the Assam PWD (Bldg.) and BTC for submitting tender for the works stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up-to 1-30 pm of 22-12-2023 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2.00 Pm.

Sl. No.	Name of work	(Approx.) Estimated value of work	Earnest money 2% for GNL & 1% for SI/SC/OBC/MOBC	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
1	Repairing & Painting of Boundary wall, painting of planetarium and Science Centre Building and Installation of Entrance gate of Planetarium and Science Centre at Kokrajhar. (Construction of Sentry Post, Ticket Counter and Internal ICBP road (Part)	Rs.8,95,077/-	Rs. 18,000/- & Rs. 9,000/-	Rs. 500/-	4 (four) month

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up-to 1-30 pm in all working days from 21-12-2023 to 22-12-2023 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker cheque/Bank draft/Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary BTC, Kokrajhar. The contractor should submit up-to date Registration Certificate of contractor, latest clearance certificate of Income Tax and GST etc. along with the tender paper. In case the office is remain closed/bandh for any circumstances on tender receiving/opening date, then the same will be received/opened in the next working days.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, PWD,
Kokrajhar District & Chirang District
Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/970

INDIA bloc meeting: Mamata and Kejriwal propose Kharge as PM face

Leaders to brainstorm on joint campaign ahead of LS polls

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: West Bengal chief minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday proposed Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's name as the prime ministerial candidate of opposition bloc INDIA during a meeting in the national capital.

However, veteran Congress leader Kharge said it is important to win first and everything else can be decided later.

Significantly, while MDMK leader Vaiko said Kharge's name was proposed by Banerjee and Kejriwal, other leaders, on the condition of anonymity, maintained that there was no final decision on the issue during the meeting.

After his name was proposed as a candidate to become the country's first Dalit Prime Minister at a meeting attended by 28 opposition leaders here, Kharge said, "I work for the downtrodden. Let's win first, then we will see. I don't seek anything."

"First we have to win and get a majority, then MPs will decide democratically," Kharge when asked if he could be the PM candidate for the opposition alliance.

Banerjee after her arrival in the national capital on Monday, had told reporters that any decision on the Prime Ministerial face of the alliance will be taken after the election.

"When so many political parties are together, it is a democracy, with different states, different views and different opinions, but ultimately INDIA is a platform where we are fighting together," said Banerjee.



"The BJP doesn't have any allies. The NDA is gone. We are not like that. It will be better, after the elections, we have to see the results, and then announce the PM candidate. All parties will decide that," she had said.

"You can decide how a party can do better for the people and motherland. You have to give priority to the people of India. What is going on right now is autocracy, which is not desired by anyone," she said.

Meanwhile, the top leaders also discussed the way forward, including seat-sharing, for taking on the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The issue of suspension of 141 opposition

MPs in both Houses of Parliament came up at the meeting with leaders cutting across party lines condemning the action against the members. Harping on putting up a united front, the Congress alleged that democracy is being "mercilessly murdered" and MPs who raise people's issues are suspended from the House.

"In such an adverse situation, our unity is our strength," the party posted on X after the meeting began.

The opposition leaders are deliberating on a blueprint for a joint campaign, seat-sharing arrangement and redrawing their strategy after the Congress suffered a setback in the

recent assembly polls, where BJP won in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Evolving a "core positive agenda" will also be among the main challenges before the INDIA bloc.

"We will give a befitting reply to the dictatorship of Modi government. Will not be afraid, will not stop, will fight and win. Jai Hind," the Congress posted.

This is the fourth meeting of the INDIA bloc leaders, with the first one held in Patna, followed by meetings in Bengaluru and Mumbai.

Sources said there is a likelihood that seat-sharing talks may begin immediately and would end by this month itself, amid demands by some leaders to finish them soonest. The leaders would also brainstorm on evolving their joint campaign strategy and presenting a positive agenda to emerge as an alternative to the BJP.

According to a senior Congress leader, the constituents of the opposition alliance intend to move forward with the theme "Main Nahin, Hum (We, Not Me)" at the meeting.

The meeting began at the Ashoka Hotel here with Kharge, Gandhi, West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann in attendance besides NCP supremo Sharad Pawar. (PTI)

Lok Sabha passes Bill to give immediate effect to customs, excise duty proposals

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed a bill that seeks to give immediate effect to the changes in customs and excise duties announced in the budget.

The House after a brief discussion on the 'Provisional Collection of Taxes Bill, 2023' passed the bill by voice vote. Jayant Sinha (BJP) and B V Satyavathi (YSRCP) participated in the brief discussion on the bill which is aimed at curbing speculative activities following changes in customs and excise duties in the budget.

Moving the bill for passage, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Bill, 2023 seeks to obtain the authority from Parliament to provisionally levy and collect the newly imposed or increased duties of customs and excise for 75 days. This bill proposes to replace the erstwhile Provisional Collection of Taxes Act, 1931 with a minor change that is technical in nature.

The provisions of the bill empower collection provisionally, during the period between the introduction and enactment of the bill the increased customs or central excise duty where such duty rate is increased beyond the statutory rate approved by Parliament or where such duty is newly imposed, she said. While the changes in rates of



income and corporate taxes, incorporated in the Budget announced on February 1, are effective from April 1 or a notified date, most of the changes in customs and excise duty rates become effective from midnight.

The bill provides for the "immediate effect for a limited period" of provisions in bills relating to the imposition or increase of duties of customs or excise. Sitharaman said the bill incorporates the existing provisions of the 1931 Bill.

"By invoking this particular Act, we are able to temporarily ensure, till the time the Finance Bill gets passed, no speculative activities are happening," she said while introducing the bill in Lok Sabha last week. (PTI)

Karnataka CM meets PM, seeks ₹ 18,000 crore drought relief from Centre

BENGALURU, Dec 19: Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi and requested early release of a drought relief of ₹ 18,177.44 crore from the Centre, and said the farmers of the state are in deep distress.

The Congress government in the state has been critical of the Modi government alleging delay in releasing drought relief to the state, despite its repeated requests, and even after the central team of officials visiting and conducting inspections in various affected regions.

The Karnataka government has declared 223 out of 236 taluks as drought-hit.

"It is learnt that the sub-committee of the National Executive Committee, chaired by the Union agriculture secretary, met on November 13 and considered Karnataka's memorandums and the report of the inter-ministerial central team (IMCT). The sub-committee, it is also learnt, has submitted its report to the ministry of home, which is expected to place the same before the high-level committee chaired by the Union home minister," Siddaramaiah said in a memorandum to the PM.

"It is nearly three months since we submitted our first memorandum and two months since the IMCT made its field visits. The farmers of Karnataka are in deep distress. Since crops have failed, it is necessary that we pay the input subsidy to the farmers soon so as to alleviate their hardship and suffering," he said.

Siddaramaiah was accompanied by Karnataka revenue minister Krishna Byre Gowda during the meeting with PM.

Listing out memorandums submitted to the central government seeking relief and the Government of India deputed the IMCT, which visited the state during October 4-9, the CM said in his memorandum to PM said, "...total claim of Karnataka to ₹ 18,177.44 crore." The ₹ 18,177.44 crore drought relief sought from National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) include ₹ 4,663.12 crore input subsidy, ₹ 12,577.86 crore gratuitous relief, ₹ 566.78 crore for drinking water purposes, ₹ 363.68 crore for animal husbandry interventions.

Further noting that under MGNREGA, for the taluks where drought has been declared, the number of days of employment should be increased from 100

days per job card to 150 days, Siddaramaiah said a request for this has been made and the matter is pending in ministry of rural development for a long time. "Kindly expedite a decision on this very important matter."

According to the state government, around 48.19 lakh hectares of agriculture and horticulture crops have suffered crop losses ranging from 33 to 100 per cent, with the majority of area reporting loss of more than 80 per cent.

The chief minister noted that small and marginal farmers are most affected, as about 83 per cent of the land area under cultivation is covered by small and marginal farm holdings.

The land area under cultivation falling under small and marginal farm holdings (SMF) is very important to determine the input subsidy payable to the state, he said. Karnataka has a robust digital database of farmers under the system called FRUITS (Farmer Registration & Unified Beneficiary Identification System). This system is Aadhaar enabled and therefore is very reliable.

Requesting the Centre to consider the area under SMF holdings as per the Aadhaar enabled FRUITS digital database, the CM said, the trends since 1970-71 show that, due to constant sub-division and fragmentation of holdings, the number of SMF holdings, and therefore the area under such land holdings, has been increasing.

The 2015-16 agriculture census shows that in Karnataka 43.94 per cent of land area belongs to SMF holdings. However, as per the FRUITS database of Karnataka, 83 per cent of land is covered by holdings which are small and marginal.

"It is therefore to request the Prime Minister to direct the High-Level Committee under the Union home minister to consider the number of and area under SMF holdings as per the FRUITS database of Karnataka," he said.

The average size of operational holding in Karnataka has decreased from 3.2 Ha in 1970-71 to 1.35 Ha in 2015-16, Siddaramaiah further said. "The average size would have further decreased in the last 8 years since 2015-16. Therefore, relying on 2015-16 data (agriculture census) would cause great injustice to Karnataka." (PTI)

Ruckus in Jharkhand assembly, 3 BJP MLAs suspended

RANCHI, Dec 19: The Jharkhand assembly on Tuesday witnessed uproarious scenes as three BJP legislators were suspended for the remainder of the winter session and marshalled out of the House for "creating disturbances" in the proceedings.

The other BJP legislators staged a walkout in protest against the Speaker's action.

As the proceedings resumed at 12.30 pm after the House was adjourned following uproar by both opposition and treasury benches, BJP chief whip Biranchi Narayan and legislator Bhanu Pratap Sahi trooped into the well in support of their demands.

Speaker Rabindra Nath Mahto said the legislators were creating disturbance in the house proceedings.

"I suspend Biranchi Narayan and Bhanu Pratap Sahi from the ongoing session," Mahto said. Another legislator JP Patel was also suspended.

Following his directions, marshalls took the legislators out of the House. Leader of Opposition Amar Bauri termed the Speaker's action as dictatorship.

"We were raising the issue concerning the state's youth. But, the government doesn't have any reply. BJP protested the suspension of legislators. We are staging a walkout," Bauri said.

Earlier protests by legislators led to a washout of the question hour in the Assembly.

The BJP-led opposition as well as ruling party legislators created an uproarious scene in the Assembly over their demands.

The House assembled around 11 am for the day's business. BJP



raised the demand for clearing the employment policy of the state and a debate on the issue in the House.

Raising slogans against the government, the BJP legislators trooped into the well.

Legislators of the ruling coalition also reached there and demanded a resolution condemning the suspension of 92 members from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha by the speaker. Reacting to this, the leader of Opposition, Amar Bauri said that when they raised the issue of cash-haul linked to Congress MP Dhiraj Sahu, it was said that the matter was not related to the State assembly.

"How the ruling party members can demand a resolution in this House condemning suspension of the MPs, while it was done by speakers in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. I think their proposal should be rejected," Bauri said.

Bauri said that over 18,000 workers of Panchayat secretariat

and physically challenged youths are on the streets for employment. "Employment is a sensitive issue and CM should give his statement on this in the House," he said.

Replying to Bauri, parliamentary affairs minister Alamgir Alam said that agitation by the youths was the result of wrongdoing by the previous government.

"This government is sensitive and will find a solution for all the problems," Alam said.

Minister Mithilesh Thakur said that the BJP is trying to divert the minds of people from real issues.

The speaker repeatedly requested the opposition and Congress members to go back to their seats.

"Don't you want the question hour? Should I rename the question hour as Hangama hour," Mahto said.

Amid the uproar, the speaker adjourned the House till 12.30 pm. (PTI)

Elgar Parishad case: HC grants bail to Gautam Navlakha

MUMBAI, Dec 19: The Bombay High Court on Tuesday granted bail to activist Gautam Navlakha, arrested in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case.

A division bench headed by Justice A S Gadgarkar said Navlakha's plea seeking bail was "allowed".

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) urged the court to stay operation of the order for a period of six weeks so that it could file an appeal in the Supreme Court. The bench stayed the order for three weeks.

Navlakha, who was arrested in August 2018, was in November last year permitted by the Supreme Court to be placed under house arrest. He is residing in Navi Mumbai at present.

The high court granted Navlakha bail on a surety of Rs 1 lakh. He is the seventh accused in the case to be granted bail.

In April this year, a special court had refused to grant bail to Navlakha, noting that there was prima facie evidence to show that the activist was an active member of banned outfit CPI (Maoist).

In his appeal filed in the high court, Navlakha said the special court had erred while refusing bail to him.

This is Navlakha's second round of appeal in the high court seeking regular bail.

Navlakha had earlier moved the high court after the special NIA court rejected his regular bail plea in September last year.

The NIA had then opposed Navlakha's bail plea, claiming that he had been introduced to a Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) General for his recruitment, which shows his nexus with the organisation. (PTI)

Former CM Raman Singh elected speaker of Chhattisgarh assembly

RAIPUR, Dec 19: Senior BJP MLA and former Chhattisgarh chief minister Raman Singh was on Tuesday unanimously elected as the speaker of the state legislative assembly. The first session of the newly-elected assembly began here on Tuesday.

Singh (71) filed his nomination for the speaker's post on Sunday and said his new responsibility will be to take everyone together in the Chhattisgarh Vidhan Sabha.

The Congress, which ruled Chhattisgarh for last five years, suffered a shock defeat in the assembly polls held last month at the hands of the BJP which bagged 54 out of 90 seats, restricting the grand old party to 35 seats. The Gondwana Ganatantra Party (GGP) won one segment. As the assembly session commenced on Tuesday, pro-tem speaker Ramvihar Netam administered the oath to BJP and Congress legislators and one MLA from the GGP as members of the legislative assembly.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, leader of opposition Charan Das Mahant, deputy chief ministers Arun Sao and Vijay Sharma, former CMs Raman Singh and Bhupesh Baghel were among the legislators who were administered oath by the pro-tem speaker. (PTI)

India did not yield to pressure on fossil fuels: Environment minister

Around 40 % of global carbon dioxide emissions stem from coal

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: India did not accede to the pressure from developed countries on the issue of fossil fuels at the UN climate conference in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Union environment minister Bhupendra Yadav said on Tuesday.

Responding to questions at a press conference here, he also said India is committed to meeting the energy needs of its people and will also have to rely on coal power until it achieves developed country status.

Yadav said the country cannot meet the energy needs of its people by just "importing oil and gas".

"While we are increasing our renewable capacity, we will also have to rely on coal power until we achieve the objective of a developed India," he said.

India relies on coal for about 70 per cent of its power generation and aims to add 17 gigawatts of coal-based power generation capacity in the next 16 months.

Responding to a question from PTI, Yadav said India "strongly resisted" the rich nations' call for limitations on new and unabated coal power generation. "We said you cannot dictate or tie up any country."

Around 40 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions stem from coal, with oil and gas accounting for the remaining percentage.

Developing countries, including India, pushed rich nations to take the lead in climate action and "that's why the climate



conference in Dubai got extended", Yadav said.

COP28 outcome revealed a "softening" of the language on developed countries taking the lead in moving away from fossil fuels, he said.

He said India accounts for 17 per cent of the global population but its contribution to global carbon emissions is just four per cent. "Poverty eradication is a priority for

many nations. So, we did not give in to the pressure from developed countries (to stop using fossil fuels)," Yadav said.

The minister said developed nations, which have taken up a large part of the carbon budget for 1.5 degrees Celsius (since the start of the industrial revolution) and spent it on their own development, are required to provide finance and technological support to developing countries to help

them combat climate change.

"We have different starting points. Countries that developed first, taking up a large part of the carbon budget in the process, should also take the lead in combating climate change."

"But they are pressuring developing nations to end the use of fossil fuels. We did not accept it (at COP28). We said efforts to (limit temperature rise to) 1.5 degrees Celsius should be seen in light of national circumstances and should adhere to (the principles of) equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities."

These principles acknowledge that countries' efforts to combat climate change should be considered in light of their contributions to total emissions. They also stress that wealthier nations should bear primary responsibilities due to their substantial historical emissions.

Countries reached a historic deal on a "transition away from fossil fuels" at COP28 in Dubai last week while emerging economies like India and China strongly resisted the targeting of coal.

The deal called for tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency rates by 2030 which, according to the International Energy Agency, is critical to avoid breaching the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold.

Yadav said India reduced its GDP emission intensity by 33 per cent between 2005

and 2019, achieving the target 11 years in advance. The country reached its non-fossil fuel targets nine years ahead of schedule.

The emission intensity of the economy refers to the total amount of greenhouse gases emitted for every unit increase in gross domestic product.

At COP28, the minister said, India also asked rich nations to vacate carbon space by achieving negative carbon emissions (removing more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than emitted), not merely reaching net zero by 2050.

According to the Global Carbon Project, a group of international scientists, India's per capita carbon dioxide emissions rose by around five per cent in 2022 to reach two tonnes but these were still less than half of the global average.

The United States topped the per capita emissions chart with every individual in the country emitting 14.9 tonnes of CO2, followed by Russia (11.4), Japan (8.5), China (8), and the European Union (6.2). The global average stood at 4.7 tonnes.

The US is also the biggest CO2 emitter since the industrial revolution.

Over the entire period 1850-2022, the US' cumulative emissions amounted to 115 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide (GtC) (24 per cent of the world's total), the EU's to 80 GtC (17 per cent) and China's to 70 GtC (15 per cent). India has emitted 15 GtC since 1850 which is just 3 per cent of the world's total. (PTI)

Southern districts in Tamil Nadu severely affected by rains

Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi received highest rainfall ever recorded in last 47-60 years

NEW DELHI / CHENNAI, Dec 19: The southern districts of Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi were among the severely affected by unprecedented rains as they received their annual rainfall on a single day leading to massive inundation, Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin said on Tuesday.

As the state was coping with the relief and rehabilitation of the four districts including Chennai where Cyclone Michaung wreaked havoc on December 4, heavy rains battered the southern districts of Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Tenkasi and Kanyakumari, on December 17 and 18. Relief and rehabilitation in these districts would be taken up in the same vigour in which the state government had launched the activities in Chennai and suburbs, Stalin said and added that he would personally visit Thoothukudi on Wednesday to oversee the relief and rehabilitation activities.

"The rainfall received in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi was



the highest ever recorded in history - in the last 47-60 years. You all know that a year's rainfall was emptied from the skies in one day. Kavalpatinam alone received 94 cm rainfall," the chief minister told reporters in the national capital.

The quantum of rainfall received was far above the prediction of the IMD for December 17 and 18, he said.

Eight state ministers and 10 IAS officers besides trained state forces and 10 NDRF teams were involved in the rescue operations in the southern districts. Army help has also been sought, he added.

So far 12,653 people have been rescued and lodged in relief camps and they are being taken care of. Also, food is being distributed to the marooned people through heli-

copters.

According to the CM, people from 4 districts including Chennai, affected by Cyclone Michaung, were saved due to precautionary measures taken by the state government before and after the cyclone, thereby minimising the loss of lives and damage to property.

"We have requested additional funds of ₹ 7,033 crore as interim relief and ₹ 12,059 crore as permanent relief for Chennai and suburbs, as this was a major disaster. And we have commenced the distribution of relief of ₹ 6,000 to each family in the 4 affected districts without waiting for the central funds," he said.

Complete relief work could be carried out only if the central government provided the funds fully, he said. He would take up this issue and also submit a detailed report on the extend of damages in the southern districts to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his meeting tonight and seek additional central assistance. (PTI)

6 held for cyber crimes, supplying SIM cards to fraudsters

DWARKA (GUJARAT), Dec 19: Police in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district has arrested six persons for alleged involvement in various cyber crimes including sextortion and sale of SIM cards to online fraudsters.

As many as 600 illegally activated SIM cards from Gujarat were supplied to fraudsters through a Rajasthan-based man, said Raghav Jain, assistant superintendent of police, Devbhumi Dwarka.

The arrested men were identified as Hasan Shaikh (25), Altaf Shaikh (25) and Aarif Mirza (25), all three Vadodara-based SIM card retailers; Gopal Gurjar (50), Dalwirsingh Beniwal (30) and Azru Mohammad Mev, all residents of Rajasthan.

While investigating cyber fraud cases registered in the district, police found that the mobile SIM cards used by the fraudsters were registered in the names of Vadodara residents but later operated from Rajasthan, ASP Jain told reporters. The three accused held from Vadodara were friends and working as SIM card retailers for the last one year, he said.

"Some time ago, the trio came into contact with one Dhansingh Gurjar who offered to buy pre-activated SIM cards for them for ₹ 350 apiece. To activate a dummy SIM card, the trio used to take a (genuine) customer's biometric fingerprint twice, one to activate the original SIM card and another to activate a dummy card without the customer's knowledge," Jain said. In all, the trio allegedly supplied nearly 600 SIM cards to Dhansingh Gurjar and his father Gopal Gurjar, resident of Ghoghar village in Rajasthan's Deeg district. While Dhansingh is on the run, Devbhumi Dwarka police raided his house and nabbed Gopal who confessed to have sold SIM cards to various fraudsters, said the official.

Police also nabbed Beniwal from Karauli district of Rajasthan for allegedly duping a Khambhalia-based businessman by posting a Facebook advertisement, said Jain, adding that Beniwal holds an MTech degree. (PTI)

ED arrests woman, seizes luxury cars after raids against 'bitcoin ponzi'

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday said it has arrested a woman and seized three luxury cars and some jewellery after recent raids against the promoters of a 'bitcoin ponzi scheme' where as much as ₹ 6,600 crore worth of public deposits were collected.

Simpay Bhardwaj alias Simpy Gaur was taken into custody on December 17 and after she was produced before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in Mumbai the next day, the court sent her to ED custody till December 26, the agency said in a statement.

The investigation is against a company called Variable Pte Ltd and others and was known as 'Gain Bitcoin Ponzi scheme', it said.

The money laundering case stems from multiple FIRs registered by the Maharashtra and Delhi Police against the company and its promoters like Simpy Bhardwaj, Amit Bhardwaj, Ajay Bhardwaj, Vivek Bhardwaj, Mahender Bhardwaj and a number of MLM (multi-level marketing) agents.



It was alleged in the police complaints, the ED said, that they had collected about ₹ 6,600 crore in the form of Bitcoin from the public in the name of investment.

Probe found, the ED said, that Simpy Bhardwaj along with her husband Ajay Bhardwaj and MLM agents played an "active role" in luring innocent investors by "promising huge returns on the investment and cheated the public by way of committing fraud."

The "proceeds of crime" generated out of this scam were transferred to various overseas

companies and were used for purchasing properties abroad and Simpy Bhardwaj was actively involved in generating, concealing and layering of the proceeds of crime, the ED alleged.

During the raids, three cars including a Mercedes and a Audi, some "incriminating" documents and jewellery worth of ₹ 18.91 lakh was seized even as assets worth ₹ 69 crore have been attached in the case till now. The main accused Ajay Bhardwaj and Mahender Bhardwaj are absconding, the ED said. (PTI)

QCI, Andhra Pradesh forge agreement to empower agriculture

VIJAYAWADA, Dec 19: The Quality Council of India on Tuesday signed an agreement with the Andhra Pradesh government to provide technical support to empower agriculture and allied sectors at various levels and thereby enhance quality and farmers' income.

The two entities forged the agreement at the 'Gunvatta Sankalp' event held at Vijayawada in the presence of agriculture minister K Govardhan Reddy and senior officials. "Our association with QCI started in the month of April and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in the presence of the chief minister. Today, again we are entering into a broad MoU to take the good work to the next level by infusing quality component in each and everything," said Agriculture special secretary Gopal Krishna Dwivedi.

He noted that the southern state has identified some sectors such as agriculture, aquaculture and others in the interest of farmers to associate with the QCI.

Citing soil testing as one such activity, Dwivedi noted that chief minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy always insists on farmers being able to get a soil test done on the lines of an individual getting a blood test.

He further said that agri-labs, marketing and several

other wings associated with farming and farmers are to be improved upon involving the QCI to successfully cater to markets in Europe and the United States of America (USA).

According to Dwivedi, if quality is emphasised then farmers, producers, industries and all others are going benefit, hence, QCI will be closely associated with from the stage of testing, dissemination of information, functioning of Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBK), laboratories and all aspects. QCI will offer expertise to develop conformity assessment framework for the state's agricultural sector, setting up clear quality standards to make sure best practices are followed in the entire value chain from farm to fork.

Providing training programmes, QCI will empower farmers, cooperatives, industry players and government officials to navigate the quality ecosystem, along with accreditation services.

A Raj, chief executive, National Board for Quality Promotion (NBQP), QCI observed that in the second phase of QCI's association with Andhra Pradesh will involve sectors of healthcare, education and others. (PTI)

HC orders speed trial in 32-yr-old Gyanvapi case

PRAYAGRAJ, Dec 19: The Allahabad High Court on Tuesday dismissed pleas challenging the maintainability of a 1991 suit seeking the "restoration" of a temple where the Gyanvapi mosque now exists in Varanasi, while observing that the "religious character" of a disputed place can only be decided by the court.

The high court dismissed five connected petitions filed over the years by the mosque management committee and the Uttar Pradesh Central Sunni Waqf Board.

It held that the suit filed before the district court is not barred by the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 that mandated that the "religious character" of a place cannot be changed from what existed on 15 August, 1947.

In an important observation, Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal said the Act did not define the term "religious character" and this can only be determined through evidence in court presented by the opposing parties.

"Either the Gyanvapi compound has a Hindu religious character or a Muslim religious character. It can't have dual character at the same time," Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal said.

He ordered that the trial in the case which is of "vital national importance" should be concluded as soon as possible, preferably within six months.

"In the national interest, it is required that the suit must proceed expeditiously and be decided with utmost urgency with the cooperation of both the contesting parties without resorting to any dilatory tactics," he said, cautioning against any "unnecessary adjournment" in the lower court.

The order on the Gyanvapi mosque-Kashi Vishwanath temple issue follows other significant court rulings on temple-mosque disputes in Uttar Pradesh over the past months.

The Supreme Court earlier gave its go-ahead for a survey of the Gyanvapi mosque premises by the Archaeological Survey of India and the high court al-

lowed a survey of the Shahi Idgah mosque that adjoins the Krishna Janmasthan temple in Mathura.

Hindu litigants say the two mosques were built after the demolition, or partial demolition, of temples and the surveys would through up evidence proving this.

The high court took note of the ASI survey conducted at the Gyanvapi masjid, following directions by the trial court which is hearing the petition of a group of women seeking regular access to Hindu deities depicted on the mosque's rear wall.

If required, the lower court may direct ASI for a further survey, the judge added.

"The dispute raised in the suit is of vital national importance. It is not a suit between the two individual parties. It affects two major communities of the country," he said while calling for a speedy trial.

The case was filed by petitioners seeking the right to worship in the Gyanvapi mosque adjoining the Kashi Vishwanath temple. Muslim litigants had challenged the maintainability of the suit, citing the 1991 Act.

But the court said, "The Act does not define "religious character", and only "conversion" and "place of worship" have been defined under the Act."

"What will be the religious character of the disputed place can only be arrived by the competent court after the evidences are led by the parties to the suit," it said.

"Either the Gyanvapi Compound has a Hindu religious character or a Muslim religious character. It can't have dual character at the same time. The religious character has to be ascertained by the Court considering pleadings of the parties, and evidences led in support of pleadings," it said.

The Places of Worship Act had exempted only the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute from its purview.

After a landmark Supreme Court verdict four years back, the first phase of the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya is nearly over. The consecration ceremony will take place next month. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

State records decline

child marriage. The chief minister also said that in 2020, under-5 mortality in the state was 40 per cent, exceeding the national average of 32 per cent.

As per sarma, the government's response involved arresting over 5,000 individuals in a comprehensive crackdown against child marriage, appointing gram panchayat secretaries as officers for prevention. "These efforts led to a 33.4 per cent reduction in maternal deaths (from 766 to 510) and a 14.7 percent decrease in child deaths (from 7,872 to 6,718)," Sarma added.

BJP, Congress announce

while the counting of votes will take place on January 12. In the event of re-polling requirements, it is scheduled for January 10," Kumar added. Kumar also highlighted the logistics challenges, stating that 10-15 per cent of polling stations are situated in extremely remote and difficult terrain with non-motorable roads. "To address this, the ASEC will grant two additional days for polling officials to reach these booths," the election commissioner said.

He also mentioned that the total number of voters has seen a 15.4 per cent increase compared to the 2019 council election, and the voting will adhere to the latest photo electoral rolls published on November 14.

Govt to implement

street lights, and the implementation of green-blue elements such as open spaces, parks, and water bodies in these cities. The meeting was attended by finance minister Ajanta Neog, labour and employment minister Sanjay Kishan and eight MLAs, along with government officials. (PTI)

Oppn will remain in

what I have been witnessing is that the opposition is letting out its frustration of losing in the elections and giving political spin to the entire incident. They are even giving muted and indirect support to it which is worrisome. Giving support to the incident and saying things like what else they could have done is worrisome and condemnable," he said, according to a source.

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi had recently said that issues like unemployment and price rise were behind the security breach.

"How can a party believing in democratic values overtly or covertly justify it," the Prime Minister said, according to BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad.

The conduct of these parties clearly indicates they have made up their mind to remain in opposition and are practicing for it, Modi said, adding that the nation has also made up its mind to keep them there and to reduce their strength even further.

Modi asked BJP MPs to maintain restraint and adhere to democratic norms.

"We should expose opposition keeping in mind to keep our voice under control and stay within the limits of democracy. In the coming days, no matter whether others are participating or not, we must participate in Parliament's proceedings," he said, noting that some important bills are coming up for discussion in the two Houses. It would have been good if the opposition had participated in these debates but good deeds are perhaps not in their fate, he said in a biting criticism of these parties, according to party leaders.

The Prime Minister also exhorted BJP members to inform first-time voters about the situation in the country 10 years back, noting that those aged around 18 years have only seen his government's development works and India's rising stature globally. They might not be aware of the corruption and misrule a decade back, he said.

A campaign on these lines can be taken up on the National Voters' Day, which falls on January 25, he said. Modi asked them to visit border villages to witness development there and highlight it. He said Dhordo in Gujarat is a model village for the development of border villages and noted that it has bagged a UN honour for the best tourist destination place recently.

Modi also drew attention to his use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) during his address at Kashi Tamil Sangamam in Varanasi on Sunday which translated his Hindi speech in Tamil in almost real-time.

The experience shared by people was good, he said, adding that he will try to explore more ways of using the language AI tool to connect with them.

Noting that he has never missed any BJP parliamentary party meeting, which is held almost every week during Parliament's session, he said he feels very satisfied about it. "I am happy that even today the BJP Karyakarta is alive in me," he said. The Winter Session of Parliament will end on December 22. (PTI)

Section 144 imposed

All efforts have been made by law enforcement agencies to maintain peace in the affected areas, district magistrate Dharm Kumar S said. More than 180 people were killed since the violence erupted on May 3 after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts. (PTI)

Tuliram announces

chairman of KAAC, Raju Tisso and others. 73 opposition workers from All Party Hills Leaders Conference joined the BJP in the rally. With the holding of the rally, all the 26 MAC constituencies have been covered under KAAC.

Row over Trinamool

to the people they represent, and to the nation." The BJP also termed Banerjee's conduct as condemnable.

"This is an example of how the opposition is sabotaging parliamentary democracy. TMC leader Kalyan Banerjee is mocking the Vice President in the Parliament premises, and Rahul Gandhi is recording the video; nothing can be more unfortunate than this," Rakesh Sinha, BJP Rajya Sabha member said.

Opposition members, who were suspended from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, had gathered on the stairs of Parliament on Tuesday morning raising slogans against the government and waving placards demanding a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah in the House on the security breach in Parliament.

Suddenly, Banerjee stood up and started mocking the Vice President by mimicking the way he walked and conducted the proceedings in Rajya Sabha. Leaning forward with a bent back, Banerjee called out Rahul Gandhi who was standing with the opposition members and made certain remarks about having a spine.

The opposition members cheered Banerjee and Gandhi soon started making a video of Trinamool leader's performance mocking the vice president. Some opposition members also mimicked Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla's style of conducting House proceedings.

As the video of Banerjee's performance went viral on social media, the BJP slammed the opposition for insulting the institution of Parliament by mimicking the Lok Sabha Speaker and Rajya Sabha chairman.

"The opposition actions are condemnable. They are venting the frustration of their defeat in the assembly elections in Parliament and have shown utter disregard to the institution of Parliament," BJP Rajya Sabha member Dinesh Sharma said. BJP spokesman Sambit Patra said those pretending to unite India are supporting those who want to divide the country. "Their main agenda is to break India and not unite India. The people of the country will break the arrogance of the arrogant coalition in 2024," Patra said.

A total of 141 members of Parliament have been suspended from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for waving placards and raising slogans in the House. (PTI)

Community radio brings out voice of people in Bengal's remote villages

Radio jockeys visit people of remote village to air programmes on issues affecting them

SILIGURI (WB), Dec 19: In a nondescript village among tea gardens in the northern part of West Bengal, an elderly retired army soldier narrates the stories of bravery during fights. In another such hamlet, a woman sings songs which are relatable to those living in all nearby villages.

As their voices are aired on a community radio, listeners hear with rapt attention as they connect those expressions to be their own.

"Recently we visited Dupkin village where we came across a widowed woman who told us how listening to our community radio station helped her overcome depression," radio jockey (RJ) Samir told PTI.

Samir and other RJs who work for Radio Salesian 90.8 FM, a community radio station, visit remote hill villages 6,500 feet above sea level in Darjeeling district to meet local Nepali-speaking people and make programmes on issues affecting them.

In a community radio, local people produce and broadcast their own programmes and participate in operating the station.

"From the first week of November this year, our RJs have started moving out to villages every Saturday. We have an ambitious plan to reach out to 40 remote villages," said Father CM Paul, founder-director of Radio Salesian

and vice principal of Salesian College.

These villages are often not easily accessible by vehicles, compelling the RJs to cover a portion of the journey on foot, Fr Paul told PTI.

He said the RJs bring out what is happening in those remote villages and the issues like transport, water, sanitation, health, education and unemployment faced by the villagers.

"After talking to the villagers, our RJs try to help them with their issues and also tell them about government schemes which are likely to mitigate their problems," Fr Paul said.

The RJs also try to create awareness among the villagers about having names in the voters' list and the importance of voting.

Radio Salesian operates from 8 am to 8 pm daily. As mandated by regulations, 50 per cent or more of the programmes are made in collaboration with the community.

"We have programmes for all categories of people - children, youths, women, elderly people, farmers, entrepreneurs, success stories," Fr Paul said.

The RJs have become celebrities and their visit to a village turns out to be a festival.

"We visit villages to give a voice to them. They treat us like celebrities and organise feasts for us. Retired Gurkha soldiers of the Indian Army tell us how they fought and other

stories of bravery of fellow soldiers," Samir said.

The RJs also encourage the villagers with their talent in singing and sports. The pre-recorded programmes of village visits are aired from 7 am to 8 am. The programmes of the radio station are in Nepali and sometimes in English.

Live shows are interactive and popular with the audience as they call on mobile, even from neighbouring districts of Nepal from where they make WhatsApp calls or send voice mails, Fr Paul said.

Radio Salesian is the first college-based community radio of Darjeeling Hills, as well as of North Bengal, Fr Paul claimed.

He said the FM radio station which started operations in 2016 serves not only stakeholders of the college community (Faculty, students and their guardians) but also the local tea garden population spread out in the far-flung tea gardens and hill stations of Darjeeling, Mirik and Kurseong.

"We work with government departments of health and family welfare, women and children, UNICEF as well as NGOs for various campaigns related to health, literacy, sanitation and so on," said the founder director of the radio station. (PTI)

Kajol, Kriti Sanon's 'Do Patti' concludes filming

MUMBAI, Dec 19: Streaming service Netflix on Tuesday announced that "Do Patti", starring Kajol and Kriti Sanon, has finished shooting and will be released on its platform in 2024.

Billed as a captivating mystery thriller set in the hills of north India, the movie is directed by Shashanka Chaturvedi, popularly known as BOB.

Netflix shared the news on its official Instagram page and posted a photo of the two actors from the

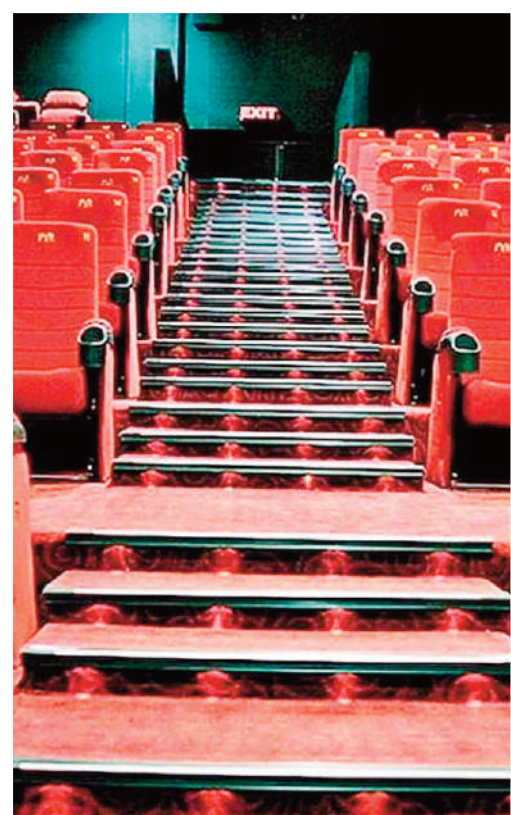
film's set.

"Anddd it's a WRAPPP! The exciting journey of #DoPatti comes to an end, arriving in 2024, only on Netflix! #DoPattiOnNetflix #ComingSoon," the streamer said.

"Do Patti" is the maiden production of Sanon and writer Kanika Dhillon's newly-launched banners Blue Butterfly Films and Kathha Pictures, respectively.

The film marks the second collaboration

between Kajol and Sanon after Rohit Shetty's 2015 film "Dilwale". (PTI)



I-Day weekend in 2023 witnessed highest footfall in theatres: report

MUMBAI, Dec 19: Millions of Indians opted for the big screen experience in 2023, said a new report by ticketing platform BookMyShow, with the Independence Day weekend witnessing the largest attendance of 10.9 million audiences in theatres across the country.

In its report, titled 'Best of 2023 - #EntertainmentOnASpree', the online platform said it sold a whopping 2.8 million movie tickets on August 13, breaking the record for the highest number of tickets sold for a single day.

"In fact, 1,648,508 cinephiles

proved their love for cinemas, watching at least six movies and more this year, reflecting a commitment to watch films on the big screen, with an average frequency of at least once every two months," the report stated.

According to BookMyShow, the most popular titles of 2023 were Shah Rukh Khan-starrer "Jawan" and "Pathaan", Sunny Deol's "Gadar 2", Rajinikanth's "Jailer", Ranbir Kapoor-led "Animal", Vijay's "Leo", the Mani Ratnam directorial "Ponniyan Selvan: Part 2", Salman Khan's "Tiger 3", "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani" and "OMG 2".

The online platform also shared its report card for live events on-ground.

It said 2023 was a "momentous year" with 13.5 million people choosing to step out for live events.

"Unwilling to compromise, Indians have chosen premium live entertainment and elevated their experience this year with an impressive growth of 82 per cent over last year for specially crafted international live events, accompanied by a 2.3x growth in BookMyShow Live's enthusiastic consumer cohort of premium event-goers. (PTI)

VETERAN ACTOR TANUJA DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL

MUMBAI, Dec 19: Veteran actor Tanuja, who was admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) of a hospital here, was discharged on Monday night, a source said.

The 80-year-old actor, known for movies such as "Jewel Thief" and "Haathi Mere Saathi", was taken to a Juhu hospital on Sunday evening following age-related complications.

"She was discharged from the hospital late last night as all her health

parameters were normal," the source told PTI on Tuesday.

Tanuja, a popular actor in the 1960s and 1970s, has worked in several Hindi and Bengali films such as "Baharen Phir Bhi Aayengi", "Mere Jeevan Sathi", "Jeene Ki Raah" as well as "Deya Neya", "Teen Bhubaner Pare" and "Prothom Kadam Phool".

She made her film debut as a child artiste with the 1950 film "Hamari



Beti", which also launched her elder sister Nutan's career. The film was the directorial debut of her mother, veteran star Shobhna Samarth.

Tanuja, who has also starred in TV shows "Aarambh" and "Junoon", is the mother of actors Kajol and Tanishaa Mukerji.

Tanuja was last seen in Prime Video's 2022 anthology "Modern Love: Mumbai". (PTI)

Visa wala gurdwara, graveyard romance to homecoming: 'Dunki' team shares BTS stories of SRK-starrer

NEW DELHI, Dec 19: Days ahead of the release of "Dunki", actors Shah Rukh Khan, Taapsee Pannu and director Rajkumar Hirani sat down for a conversation in which they discussed the origins of the film and its behind-the-scenes stories. "Dunki", a comedy drama based on an illegal immigration technique 'donkey flight', is slated to be released worldwide on Thursday.

In a 29-minute interaction shared by Shah Rukh on his official X page, Hirani said the germ of the film's story came from the imagery of a house near Jalandhar, Punjab, with a large cemented replica of an Air India plane on its terrace, something he initially found funny. "There are many houses in Punjab that have planes on the rooftops. I was quite amazed by that and that's what piqued our curiosity. Family members of those children who live abroad find it fashionable to put these planes on top of their houses," said the filmmaker, known for "3 Idiots" and "Munna Bhai" films.

When he started re-searching for the film, Hirani said he discovered how people who seek a better life in countries such as the UK and Canada take the illegal 'donkey route', called 'dunki' in Punjabi, out of India when they court visa troubles.

There's also a holy place in Jalandhar's Tahlan village called Visa Wala Gurdwara, where people aspiring to go abroad offer prayers. "There are shops outside that sell toy planes. Thousands of devotees offer these planes and show their passport to the gurus inside the gurdwara with the belief that they will get the visa," the director said.

Shah Rukh reiterated that "Dunki" is all about homecoming. "Dunki" means being apart from your loved ones. That is the essence of the film. We leave our home so that we can finally come back home with family. Sometimes, it happens and sometimes, it doesn't," he said.

The film marks his third and last release of 2023 following back-to-back action blockbusters in "Pathaan" and "Jawan". (PTI)



YOU CAN'T PLAN TO MAKE A PAN-INDIA MOVIE: 'SALAAR' DIRECTOR PRASHANTH NEEL

MUMBAI, Dec 19: Film-maker Prashanth Neel says movies like his "KGF" franchise that organically travel across the country do well, a phenomenon he hopes is repeated with his latest directorial "Salaar: Part 1 - Ceasefire".

Neel and Yash, the lead star of "KGF" series, rose to national prominence after the success of "KGF: Chapter 1", the 2018 Kannada period action film. Its 2022 follow-up, "KGF: Chapter 2" also starred Bollywood actors Raveena Tandon and Sanjay Dutt in key roles.

The director, who made his debut with 2014's "Ugramm", said he never plans his films as pan-India projects.

"I've written a story and I've executed it. I don't know if it (Salaar) is going to be a pan-India movie or not. But if it becomes a pan-India movie, then that's an absolute bonus for all of us. Like, 'KGF' happened very organically.

"Movies that happen organically always do well.

You can't plan to make a pan-India movie, you can't plan and say that I'm going to bring these actors from this industry to make it a pan-India movie. It doesn't work like that," Neel told PTI in an interview here.

"Salaar" revolves around two friends Deva and Vardha, played by Prabhas and Prithviraj Sukumaran, who end up becoming arch rivals. It will be released on Friday.

The 43-year-old director said the journey of the film started over 15 years ago.

"It was an idea that was in my head. But it needed a very big budget. So, I made my first film 'Ugramm', then I made 'KGF'. I was occupied with 'KGF' for almost eight years. During COVID-19, I narrated this subject ('Salaar') to Prabhas sir and he agreed to do it," he recalled.

The USP of "Salaar" is an emotion between two friends and how this emotion translates to violence forms the core of the story, Neel said.

According to the director, equal importance should be

given to the story and the characters in big-budget films.

"We make a movie to tell a story and we want the right characters, right actors to portray every role. There's a commercial aspect with a star and we get bigger budgets to do what we want. But the criteria is the same that this is the character, it is not the hero who is playing the hero because if we think like that then we have lost the battle," he added.

With "Salaar", Neel said his aim was for Prabhas ("Baahubali") to shed his superstar persona.

"There was never a pressure to make 'Salaar'. The idea is to make sure that the actor looks like a character. You don't want to show Prabhas as Prabhas, you want to show him as a character and I tried our best to do something like that," he said.

While the director acknowledged that Prabhas had a difficult run at the box office with his recent releases "Adipurush" and "Radhe



Shyam", he said a star can always bounce back after a hit film.

"Prabhas is a big star. After 'Baahubali', he became the biggest star. People are not going to forget something like that. Stars have always been stars; they can have one flop or 20 flops, they just need to give one hit. Recently, Shah

Rukh Khan showed us that a star is always a star, there's no denying that," Neel added.

A box office showdown is expected between "Salaar" and Rajkumar Hirani's "Dunki". The latter, starring Shah Rukh Khan, will hit the screens a day before "Salaar" on Thursday.

About the release, Neel said he doesn't meddle in the business aspect of a movie. "I don't get involved in the logistics of what happens after the movie is ready. My brief is I've to make a movie on a given budget and I've to give it to them at a time that they want to release," he said. (PTI)

India's Hardik, Savita win accolades in FIH Annual awards



LAUSANNE (SWITZERLAND), Dec 19: Indian men's hockey team midfielder Hardik Singh and women's side captain Savita on Tuesday won the FIH Player of the Year and Goalkeeper of the Year (women) awards respectively.

The awards were declared following a vote by an expert panel, National Associations -- represented by their respective national teams' captains and coaches, fans and media.

With 114 caps to his name, Hardik is the next big thing in Indian hockey. He rightly showcased that, when he became a vital cog in India's bronze-medal win at the 2020 Olympics and his performance have gone from strength to strength since then. This is Hardik's second big award this year as he was also conferred the Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr award for Player of the Year 2022.

With his flamboyance in the midfield, he has become one of the pivotal members of the Indian team in recent years.

"When you've got a great team, they make your game better and life easier. I am grateful for all those who have voted for me and thankful to the entire team and Hockey India for helping me reach this stage," said the current India vice-captain.

As for Savita, this is her third consecutive FIH Women's Goalkeeper of the Year award, having won the recognition in 2021 and 2022.

The Indian custodian has been in prolific form throughout 2023. Starting from the Test matches in Australia to the Hangzhou Asian Games, Savita has been on top of her game.

The 33-year-old helped India emerge as the champions of the Asian Champions Trophy held in October in India. She will be looking to help India qualify for the Paris Olympics with a top three finish at the upcoming FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier in Ranchi in January next year.

"Thankful to all my teammates and support staff who have helped me grow as an individual. This award will motivate me to work harder and get more success for our country. Lastly, thankful to all those who voted for me," she said.

Xan de Waard of the Netherlands has been elected as 2023 FIH Player of the Year in the women's category.

Dutch goalkeeper Pirmin Blaak won the FIH Goalkeeper of the Year awards among men, while the awards for FIH Rising Stars went to Teresa Lima (Spain) and Gaspard Xavier (France).

China women's head coach Alyson Annan and Germany men's head coach André Hennig won the FIH Coaches of the Year awards, while Ayanna McClean (Trinidad-and-Tobago) and Ben Götting (Germany) were awarded with the FIH Umpires of the Year recognitions. (PTI)

Australia Women to draw lessons from India-England one-off Test, says Tahlia McGrath



MUMBAI, Dec 19: Australia Women will take in lessons from last week's one-off Test between India and England while getting ready for the 'unknown' during their sole Test starting here on Thursday, said vice-captain Tahlia McGrath on Tuesday.

The Aussies will begin their all-format series against India with a four-day one-off Test from December 21 to 24 followed by three ODIs and as many T20Is.

Australia have had a few training sessions here at the Wankhede Stadium including a trial match last Sunday, with the conditions and behaviour of the surface being a special area of focus.

"We were able to catch bits and pieces (of India's match against England). A lot of it was (about having) big training days for us, but certainly kept an eye on that game and how it panned out," McGrath told the media after Australia's training session.

"We learnt a lot from that, seeing how both teams attacked the game, seeing how they played the conditions," she said.

"While we are not entirely sure how these conditions are going to play, we have got a lot of plans in place. We feel like we are really well-prepared going into the game," McGrath said both India and Australia have 'phenomenal' bowling attacks, which will force the batters to be at the top of their game. India had bundled out England for 136 and 131 during their match. "Test match cricket is all about taking 20 wickets and they were able to do that. For us, it is about trying to combat that," she said. "The biggest key about batting in India is (a) you have got to

be really clear on the plan. Before you go out there, you got to know how you're going to play the conditions." "And (b), you've got to stick to your strengths individually as a batter. That is going to look differently for all our batters, how we approach that," she said.

"We have got some really crafty spinners, net bowlers came and bowled at us and that has been a fantastic challenge and while the Indians have a phenomenal bowling attack, so do we," McGrath said. With the Australian team stacked with all-rounders, McGrath said the visitors have all weapons to tackle India, especially all-rounders.

"Obviously, (there is) still a little bit to go and see what the pitch is going to be like (and) what direction we go, but we are spoilt for choices," McGrath said.

"It is a tough job for Midge (captain Alyssa Healy) because she has got bowling options but if you look at out-and-out pace we have got people that can swing the ball, leg-spin, off-spin, left-arm... we have got so many options (that) we can combat anything we need to," she said. "Certainly, the fact that we have got so many all-rounders gives us a lot of flexibility in that final XI," McGrath added.

With Healy being appointed as the full-time Australia captain after the retirement of Meg Lanning, McGrath said it was time for the new leaders to take their side ahead. "You cannot replace Meg Lanning. Her stats, captaincy, just speaks for itself but the fact that now Midge and I are in full-time role we are really excited about the challenge and leading this team forward," McGrath said. (PTI)

TROY COOLEY ON INDIA WOMEN SEAMERS 'Biggest improvement is they have added skills and variations'

MUMBAI, Dec 19: India Women's bowling coach Troy Cooley on Tuesday lauded his side's seamers for their hard work to improve upon their skill-sets, which he said has brought success, amply displayed during the record 347-run win over England in the one-off Test last week.

India's next assignment is another one-off Test against Australia starting here on Thursday.

"I know what sort of work they are putting in. The growth has been in line with the work they have done. They are very keen to grow and develop skills," Cooley told the media here after the team's training session. "The biggest improvement is that they have added skills and variations but not only that — the control and when to use them. That has come in quite nicely so the strategy behind what ball they are going to use — attack or defence — we talk about talking to the ball now and they are getting some answers back," said Cooley. Cooley, who is also the fast bowling coach at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru, was brought into India Women's coaching staff for the home series against England and Australia, having worked with the group for the tri-series in South Africa earlier this year. Not working on a permanent basis may have its own impact but Cooley said working on the individual strength of each player helps in the longer run.

"I get to see them quite often," said Cooley. "On and off, obviously (right now) out of the NCA, which is very supportive of all the targeted players. I have definitely had some contacts, be it camps or ready to go on tours, if I am lucky enough to get on for a tour. But again, a lot of credit goes back to the states and their coaches that they have had. We all make sure whatever we do complements



(with) what they have done," he said. India bowler Renuka Singh Thakur has been making early inroads on opposition batting line-up on a persistent basis and Cooley praised the right-arm seamer for using her variations deftly.

"She has worked extremely hard to not only develop her fitness but also skills," he said.

"We are starting to see some rewards of all the hard work. Not only can she swing the ball back in naturally, she has now got the ball that straightens and leaves the right-hander. It is great to see her putting together her sequence of deliveries... the number of deliveries that she has got as options.

The tool box is quite big now and she has been using it in a very strategic and tactical way," Cooley added. In the last Test, Pooja Vas-trakar ran through England's top-order in the second innings with a three-wicket burst and Cooley was impressed with the way the right-arm seamer has been able to sort out her issues. (PTI)

Atalanta second-half goal rush hammers Salernitana in Serie A



ROME, Dec 19: Atalanta recovered from conceding an early goal to score four times in the second half and hammer Salernitana 4-1 in Serie A on Monday.

The result lifted the team from Bergamo into seventh place, a point behind Fiorentina and Napoli. Salernitana remained on the bottom. Salernitana came into the game with the worst away record in the league, having collected just two points from seven games and scoring a meager four goals.

But it threatened to end that appalling record with an early goal.

After 10 minutes, Lorenzo Pirola snuck in between two defenders to head home a deep cross from the right.

Luis Muriel equalized with a spectacular volley after 47 minutes and five minutes later Atalanta was ahead when Mario Pasalic cheekily slotted the ball between a defender's legs and past the unsighted keeper.

Belgian midfielder Charles De Ketelaere made it 3-1 eight minutes from time and Aleksei Miranchuk scored the last in the last minute. (AP)

'Preparations have begun for National Games to be held next year in U'khand'

DEHRADUN, Dec 19: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Tuesday said preparation of infrastructural facilities for the 38th National Games to be held in the state next year has started and a National Sports Secretariat has been formed for the purpose.

The National Games can be managed better through the Sports Secretariat, Dhami said in his address at the inauguration of the state level Sports Mahakumbh at Maharana Pratap Sports College in Dehradun.

Players who secure first, second and third positions in the Sports Mahakumbh will be provided sports kits, the chief minister announced.

He directed the officials of the sports department to make all preparations for the upcoming National Games at a fast pace and to look for good players in the state and make arrangements for better training for them.

The objective of the Sports Mahakumbh is to prepare players for major sporting events at the national and international level, he said.

Dhami expressed hope that



courts, besides open gym, are being built using the vacant spaces under flyovers.

He said that the state government is also trying to restart sports quota in jobs for young players, while a provision is also being made to give direct government jobs to players who win medals at national and international levels.

Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Rekha Arya said in the new sports policy implemented in the state, efforts have been made to provide every possible facility to the players.

About 4,000 players in the age group of eight to 14 years are being given Mukhyamantri Udiyanman Khiladi Unnayan Sports Scholarship in the state, while 2,600 players in the age group of 14 to 23 years are getting the benefits of the Mukhyamantri Udiyanman Khiladi Protsahan Yojana in the state.

He said a Sports Development Fund is being created for children from economically weaker sections while a Girls Sports College is being built at Lohaghat in the Champawat district. (PTI)

KKR CEO Mysore justifies Starc's huge pay check from skill-set standpoint

DUBAI, Dec 19: Mitchell Starc on Tuesday became the costliest player in the IPL history after Kolkata Knight Riders snapped him for a whopping Rs 24.75 crore in the auction and the team's CEO Venky Mysore justified the price tag, saying the Australian speedster "was a preferred player from skill-set standpoint".

Not long after Australia captain Pat Cummins fetched an unprecedented Rs 20.50 crore from Sunrisers Hyderabad, the KKR raised the bar for a record-breaking bid for Starc, who last played in the IPL in 2015.

"... obviously he (Starc) was a preferred player from skill set standpoint. Initially, we were not successful in some of the bids. Maybe that worked in our favour, because we did end up having money to do this. So we're just thankful that we were able to have him on our side," Mysore said. "It shows the value of the player and the skill set he (Starc) possesses. He's a fabulous player."

He said spending on a particular player is a matter of perspective



and each franchise decides how to "slice" its purse differently. "...now it seems like wow, Rs 24.75. I was telling someone that the salary cap of a team when IPL started in 2008 was Rs 20 crore. So things have changed. When the auction is over, all the 10 teams are going to walk out having spent 100 crores and each team decides to slice it differently," he said.

"So what you've paid to somebody ... is a matter of perspective. Ultimately, we're all spending the

same amount of money. When you plan your team, from a retention standpoint, with the auction far away, you've no idea of who are the players being released from other teams, trades happening, and all that. So it's a very dynamic environment." It was an intense bidding war between KKR and Gujarat Titans for Starc before the former lapped up the Australian left-arm pacer for a record deal.

Five-time champions Chennai Super Kings bought three key

players in Tuesday's auction in the form of Kiwi Rachin Ravindra, Daryl Mitchell and India medium pacer Shardul Thakur.

"It's not just who you get but it is the planning you do behind that. Mitchell was obviously an important player and that can throw you a little bit. A lot of nerves around it. I am just happy you get that main path under your belt and it went well for us," CSK head coach Stephen Fleming said.

Mitchell was bought by CSK for Rs 14 crore.

"Daryl is a different type of player, but his performances over the last 18-24 months have warranted this type of a price. He is an unfashionable player, often goes under the radar. With his ability to play spin, he is competitive and he is also a handy bowler. In Chhapauk, we can slide him into a role. Just like his performances, he fits in nicely and a good buy for us."

Fleming, however, played it safe when asked about a succession plan for the great Mahendra Singh Dhoni. "We've had succession plans for MS for about 10 years. It

is going to be a talking point, but he is as engaged and as enthusiastic as I have seen him for a while. While that passion is there for the team and franchise, we'll roll on."

Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori too was satisfied with the buys the team made in the auction.

SRH bought Australia's World Cup-winning skipper Pat Cummins for a whopping Rs 20.50 crore, besides grabbing Travis Head for Rs 6.80 crore.

"It is sort of tough to talk about what happened last season, but we were pretty adamant to get in left-handed batsman (Head). With (Aiden) Markram, (Henrich) Klaassen and Glenn Phillips in the squad, and with (Harry) Brook there in the middle, felt there was similarity between the four of them. So we just wanted to get some options."

"Everyone knows how well he (Head) has been playing for an extended period of time now. So we are grateful to get him at that price. We expected him to go for more. (PTI)

Starc leaves captain Cummins behind to become most expensive buy in IPL history



DUBAI, Dec 19 (PTI) Mitchell Starc surpassed his Australian bowling partner Pat Cummins to become the most expensive buy in IPL history with an eye popping bid of ₹ 24.75 crore as pacers attracted big moolah at the auction here on Tuesday.

Not long after Cummins fetched an unprecedented pay packet of 20.50 crore from Sunrisers Hyderabad, Starc raised the bar when Kolkata Knight Riders made a multi million dollar bid for the left-arm pacer who last played in the IPL in 2015.

Such are the unpredictable ways of IPL that the one third of the formidable Australian pace trio, Josh Hazlewood, went unsold in the first round of auction from a base price of ₹ 2 crore.

Gujarat Titans and KKR were involved in a long and exhilarating bidding battle for Starc before the latter lapped him up for a record deal.

Starc, 33, has usually prioritised international duty over IPL but decided to enter the auction with one eye on the T20 World Cup that follows the IPL.

He has only played only two seasons of the IPL, taking 34 wickets in 27 games at an average of 20.38.

In contrast, Cummins has been a regular at the IPL but skipped the 2023 edition to focus on the Ashes and the ODI World Cup.

An intense bidding war followed for Cummins with Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers Bangalore, Chennai Super Kings, and Sunrisers Hyderabad raising their paddles frenetically to secure the services of the fast bowling all-rounder.

In the end, it was SRH who broke the bank for Cummins, who drew the highest-ever bid surpassing the ₹ 18.5 crore that Punjab Kings had shelled out for England's Sam Curran last year.

It was not the first time that Cummins attracted huge sums at the IPL auction. Ahead of the 2020 edition, KKR had paid ₹ 15.5 crore for his services.

Besides Cummins, Sunrisers also grabbed World Cup final hero Travis Head for ₹ 6.80 crore.

Among the fast bowlers, the others who broke the bank were Harshal Patel

(₹ 11.75 crore to Punjab Kings), Alzarri Joseph (₹ 11.50 crore to RCB), Umesh Yadav (₹ 5.80 crore to Gujarat Titans) and Shivam Mavi (₹ 6.40 crore to LSG).

Harshal, who was released by RCB ahead of the auction, remains a sought after player with Punjab Kings going the distance for the out-of-favour India pacer.

In the batters category, Daryl Mitchell had a massive payday with Chennai Super Kings spending ₹ 14 crore for the New Zealand batter.

Head, who scored a match-winning century in the ODI World Cup final against India and also starred in the World Test Championship final against the Rohit Sharma-led team earlier this year, saw reigning champions Chennai Super Kings and SRH indulge in a bidding war.

The wicketkeeper batter was finally grabbed by 2016 champions SRH.

New Zealand batter Rachin Ravindra, with a base price of ₹ 50 lakh, was snapped by CSK for a modest ₹ 1.8 crore. Ravindra was another star of the

recently held ODI World Cup in India.

West Indies T20 skipper Rovman Powell emerged as the costliest player among capped batters, going to Rajasthan Royals for ₹ 7.40 crore.

Powell, who had a base price of ₹ 2 crore, was the first player to go under the hammer at the mini auction and as many as three teams showed keen interest to rope him in for the 2024 season.

Eventually, Rajasthan Royals got their hands on the big hitter, who also captains their team Barbados Royals in the Caribbean Premier League (CPL).

The trio of former Australia skipper Steve Smith, India's Manish Pandey and Rilee Rossouw went unsold, while England's Harry Brook was snapped by Delhi Capitals for ₹ 4 crore.

Young South Africa pacer Gerald Coetzee attracted a winning bid of ₹ 5 crore from Mumbai Indians while India pacer Shardul Thakur returned to CSK for ₹ 4 crore.

It is the first time that the auction is being held outside India. (PTI)

Shadab likely to be ruled out of New Zealand T20 series

KARACHI, Dec 19: Senior Pakistan all-rounder Shadab Khan is unlikely to make the cut for the upcoming T20I series in New Zealand in January as he is yet to fully recover from his ankle injury.

Shadab, however, is expected to continue his rehabilitation while being a part of the squad and will travel to New Zealand.

According to PCB sources, there were discussions to rest former captain Babar Azam and Muhammad Rizwan for the five-match series but the national selection committee changed its mind.

"Chief selector Wahab Riaz and his colleagues have held discussions online with the team director Muhammad Hafeez and new captain Shaheen Shah Afridi in the last two days," the PCB source said.

Test captain, Shan Masood is expected to be named in the T20 squad that plays in New Zealand from January 12 with fast bowler Haris Rauf also in line to make it despite refusing to play the Tests in Australia. Rauf is instead playing in the Big Bash in Australia.

The PCB source also informed that the selectors are against any kind of experi-

mentation with T20 World Cup being played in six months' time.

"The consensus is to start building the World Cup squad from now with no real surprises in store. But some players of the recent World Cup will be dropped," he added.

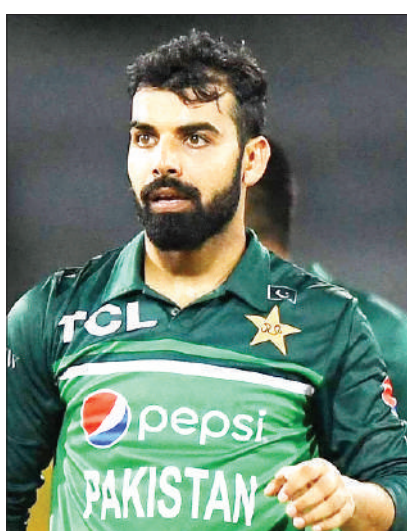
41-year-old Shoaib Malik had expressed his desire to play T20 cricket for Pakistan but Wahab and Co. feel that it will be a step in backward direction.

"There was discussion on whether Malik should be recalled to be utilised in the World Cup but it was felt that it would be better to rely on the younger players some of whom will be picked for New Zealand," he said.

Fakhar Zaman, Saim Ayub, Iftikhar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Muhammad Rizwan, Shan Masood, Muhammad Haris are among the batters who will be playing in New Zealand.

Fast bowlers, Naseem Shah and Ehsanullah will also not be considered as they are undergoing rehabilitation post surgeries.

While Naseem has had a shoulder operation in the UK, Ehsanullah is rehabili-



tating from an elbow surgery in Lahore.

The source said that the selectors had also decided to include spinner, Abrar Ahmad in the T20 squad for the first time even though he is recovering from an injury in Australia having missed the first Test in Perth. (PTI)

Still on recovery, will need a few months to be 100% fit: Rishabh Pant

DUBAI, Dec 19: The supremely gifted Rishabh Pant says he will need a few more months to get back to playing competitive cricket as he appreciated the love and support he received during his long rehabilitation period.

Pant had met with a horrifying car accident last year and missed the entire 2023 after undergoing a knee surgery.

"(I am feeling) much better (than) what I was doing a few months ago. So like, (I am) still on recovery towards 100 per cent (fitness). But hopefully in a few months time, I'll be able to do it," an optimistic Pant said in a video posted by the Delhi Capitals on its Instagram page.

The Delhi Capitals skipper, who will be present at the mini auction alongside Team Director Sourav Ganguly and head coach Ricky Ponting here on Tuesday, had a close shave after his car hit a divider on National Highway towards Roorkee and caught fire in a terrifying accident in December last year.

The 26-year-old suffered multiple injuries and is currently under going rehab at the National Cricket Academy in Ben-



galuru. However, he is expected to be back to action during the IPL which starts on March 22. What touched Pant was the love and concern shown by the fans, which he felt he realised for the first time.

"I think it's been really amazing because whenever we keep on playing cricket, we feel no one loves us because there is always pressure in so many things. But actually yes, it's a hard time.

"But I got to know at least people love us. They respect us and the kind of appreciation and the kind of concern I would

say people have shown over a period of time because of my injury," Pant said.

"I think it was heartfelt, like crazy for me because it means a lot as an individual," Pant said the love and affection shown by people has helped him make a quicker recovery.

"When you are going through a very rough time or something like that happens to you. It's not only physical, it's like mentally also and if your supporters and the people support you or show you love, it means a lot and it's it really helps in recovering."

In the absence of Pant, Australia opener David Warner led DC last season with the team finishing second from last.

"Thank you for always being supportive all the time. Yes, I know sometimes we have given you a hard time as fans.

"But see, we try to do our best all the time and, hopefully, next year in time to come, we will show the kind of respect or love you have shown over a period of time, hopefully we can reciprocate it over a period of time, and just keep supporting us," Pant said. (PTI)

Bowlers have once again let Pakistan down: Azhar Ali

KARACHI, Dec 19: Pakistan pacers let the team down by not restricting Australia on a track that offered variable bounce, former captain Azhar Ali said after a humiliating 360-run defeat in the opening Test in Perth.

Azhar, one of the finest players to have donned Pakistan whites, still plays first-class cricket and recently scored his 49th first-class hundred.

"The sort of uneven bounce we saw on the fourth day is no surprise Pakistan was bowled out for 89. It was very difficult coping with that awkward variable bounce all the time," Azhar said.

Azhar came down heavily on bowling unit, which he feels over the years had not come to the fore for Pakistan in the past few Test series Down Under.

"How many times have the bowlers bowled out Australia for low scores whereas the batsmen have from time to time put up good totals?," he questioned.

"Unless you bowl out Australia for under 250-300, you can't expect to win matches Down Under," he said.

Azhar, who hit a double hundred at the MCG during Pakistan's 2016 tour of Australia, observed that Shaheen Shah Afridi and company got carried away by the bounce and weren't disciplined enough to hit one length consistently.

"Many times our bowlers get carried away with the bounce and pace but the fact is you have to hit a consistent length to get wickets in Australia," he added. He pointed out that it had been a long time since Pakistani bowling attack had taken 20 wickets in a match in Australia whereas in this period many times Pakistan did put up big totals.

"Unless you take 20 wickets how can you expect to win against a tough opposition like Australia in their own backyard."

Interestingly on the 2010 tour of Australia, Pakistan pacers had bowled out Australia twice for low scores at Sydney but the batsmen couldn't even chase a gettable total of 176 runs in the fourth innings.

Azhar opined that Pakistan should have played one more specialist bowler in place of either Faheem Ashraf or Salman Ali Agha in Perth. (PTI)

'Notorious winner' Gambhir alongside Shreyas can transform KKR: Morgan

BENGALURU, Dec 19: Former Kolkata Knight Riders captain Eoin Morgan believed that the combination of mentor Gautam Gambhir and captain Shreyas Iyer could help the team to resurrect its fortunes in the IPL 2024.

The Knight Riders, who finished seventh in 2023 and 2022, have brought back two-time title winning captain Gambhir as their mentor ahead of the next edition.

Iyer had missed the whole of last IPL owing to an injury as Nitish Rana led the side.

"I think Shreyas missed last year, and obviously, Nitish Rana came in and did what he could on such short notice. You know, under high pressure circumstances and getting to know the new coach and trying to make things work proved very challenging.

"But bringing Gambhir back in who is a notorious winner. Having played alongside him and under him as captain, Gambhir knows how to get it done," said Morgan, IPL expert with JIO Cinema, during an interaction.

"Gambhir along with Shreyas will be mentoring KKR in every facet and given the record that he's had in the Knight Rider shirt, I think, it will make a positive impact."

Morgan, who had led England to an ODI World Cup victory in 2019, said Australian left-arm pacer Mitchell Starc will be a hot property in the auction on Tuesday.

Morgan opined that Starc could trigger a bidding war between the Knight Riders and Gujarat Titans.

"I think Mitchell Starc alongside Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, probably, Gerald Coetzee as overseas bowlers will be the most sought after. KKR and GT need good pacers at the moment.

GT probably have one of the biggest purses in this auction and they let go of



Hardik Pandya. So, they have a lot of recruiting to do, but I think they probably need an imposing strike bowler," said Morgan.

While Morgan asserted that bowlers will be in demand during the auction to be held in Dubai, a few batsmen such as England's Harry Brook, Australia's Travis Head and Rachin Ravindra of New Zealand will evince some interest from the bidders.

"When you look at the teams, I suppose they are coming into auction when their top-order is pretty much full. So, in that regard, I don't see many batters going for huge amounts of money.

"Brook is going to be in there and will be sought after. I think Head is going to create a strong buzz, given the last year and a half to two years he has had in all formats of the game.

Man of the Match in the WTC and World Cup final. He has really left an indelible mark on Indian minds. So, he will

definitely be sought after," he said. The Ireland-born cricketer said Ravindra also has an edge because of him being left-handed top-order batter.

"Likewise, Head, Ravindra is a player you can actually see teams identify with their need...you know, a top order left-handed batter. Whoever goes for one and doesn't get it and will go for the other," he added.

Morgan felt that all-rounder Shardul Thakur and uncapped batter Shah Rukh Khan could be the biggest buys among the Indian players.

Shardul could be the most-sought-after Indian player given his all-round ability and the flexibility with his bowling and the attacking nature in which he bats. He makes himself a very attractive selection.

"Shah Rukh too, because I think he's in fine form. He's so destructive and carries a sort of Rinku Singh model of finishing, and he could potentially create a bidding war," Morgan signed off. (PTI)

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Permanent Methods of Family Planning

NSV without surgery (Male)

LS Minilap, PPS (Female)

ACCEPTORS for ANTARA will be given incentives of Rs. 100/- (per dose)

ACCEPTORS for PPIUCD/PAIUCD will be given incentives of Rs. 300/-

ACCEPTORS for NSV will be given incentives of Rs. 3,000/-

ACCEPTORS for L.S. Minilap will be given incentives of Rs. 2,000/-

ACCEPTORS for PPS will be given incentives of Rs. 3,000/-

Incentives will be credited to ACCEPTORS' bank accounts.

Dial 104 for details or contact your ASHA/ANM

(NHM/D/2023-24/1632)