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NATION

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- 'We've deepened our partnership with India through Quad': Blinken
- Parliament passes Telecommunications Bill
- 3 more opposition MPs suspended from LS, total number now 100

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## All India Institute of Ayurveda signs MoU with Andrew Yule Group Sarba predicts tourism boom in Assam

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Thursday opined that tourism in Assam set to boom with the healing touch of Ayurveda and Yoga in the pristine lap of tea gardens.

He said this while addressing a gathering after a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA), India's leading institution in Ayurveda, and the Andrew Yule Group, a government of India enterprise.

The MoU is aimed at undertaking research in the tea estates of AYCL and discover its various health benefits of tea including exploring possibilities for possible applications in the Ayurvedic line of medication and treatments.

"Tea gardens have a mesmerising effect by rejuvenating the health and mind of any individual.



With this collaboration, we are unravelling a possibility of a booming tourism industry in Assam with the healing touch of Ayurveda and Yoga in the pristine lap of tea gardens," Sonowal added.

The Union minister further said that the vision of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi is to energise the possibilities of Assam and enable the growth engine of India towards becoming an Atmanirbhar nation by 2047. "Tea, with its numerous commercial viability and soothing effect, is set to draw strength from Ayurveda, our rich heritage, and

provide a platform for Assam towards becoming a new destination of healing tourism in the South East Asian region," he stated.

Sonowal said that traditionally, tea has many proven health benefits which must be studied scientifically and this agreement signed today is an attempt to scientifically catalogue the various health benefits of tea as well as explore possibilities of Tea's application in providing Ayurvedic medicine.

"Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government has been empowering the traditional knowledge of medicine like Ayurveda with a scientific validation, through modern research and development approach. This has enabled our rich heritage of Ayurveda and other traditional forms of medicine to provide solutions for a wider range of ailments, and allowing people to

enrich their quality of lives," he avowed.

He further said that from the days of the yore, the tea has been consumed by the indigenous population of Assam, both for its taste as well as healing touch, adding, "For long, this rich bounty of nature in Assam has remained merely as a cash crop. Decades have gone by but no sincere attempt was ever made to realise the rich herbal and healing power of tea." "As India reinvents itself under the inspiring leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, tea, one of the mainstays of Assam, is set to unlock its potential as a natural ingredient towards Ayurvedic formulations which are aimed at enriching the quality of lives of the people," Sonowal said. Notably, as per the agreement, the expert team from AIIA tea samples from various tea (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Over 11 lakh farmers benefitted under PM-KISAN since 2021: CM

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday claimed over 11 lakh farmers have received benefits under Pradhan Mantri Krishak Samman Nidhi ever since he came into power in 2021.

He said this while attending a Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra rally organised at R B Higher Secondary School playground located under the Rampur development block in Kamrup district in Guwahati.

"Only 2 lakh farmers across the state had registered themselves as beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Krishak Samman Nidhi when I became the chief minister of the state in 2021 but relentless efforts on the part of the state government led to the total number of farmers receiving benefits under the scheme cross-

ing the 11-lakh mark," an official statement quoted him as saying.

However, Sarma further said that figure is still less owing to the fact that there are estimated 25 lakh farmers in the state, adding, "In the Palashbari area itself there are numerous farmers who are yet to get their names registered for Pradhan Mantri Krishak Samman Nidhi".

On the occasion, Sarma said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra last November 15 with the aim of attaining cent per cent saturation point in the enrolment of eligible beneficiaries under the government's flagship social sector schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, Ujjwala Yojana, Suraksha Bima Yojana, Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Krishak Samman (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Assam can borrow ₹ 45,957 crore in FY25: NABARD

**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) on Thursday projected a credit potential of ₹ 45,957 crore for Assam for the 2024-25 fiscal, a rise of 16 per cent from the year-ago period.

During a state credit meeting, a State Focus Paper prepared by NABARD was released, an official statement said.

"NABARD projects credit potential of ₹ 45,957 crore for the state of Assam for the financial year 2024-25, which was 16 per cent higher than the previous year," it added. Out of the total projected credit potential, ₹ 21,529 crore is towards agriculture and allied activities, it said.

"Further, credit potential of ₹ 19,012 crore has been projected towards MSME sector, while credit potential for informal credit -- SHGs/JLGs (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

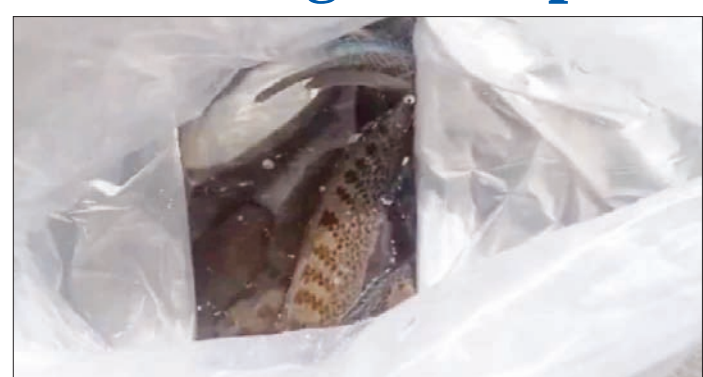
## 500 Channa Barca fish worth ₹ 4.5 crore seized at Dibrugarh airport

**HT Correspondent**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** The authorities of the Assam Forest Department seized 500 Channa Barca fishes at Dibrugarh airport on Thursday, said state chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

These rare species of fish are valued at ₹ 4.5 crore in the international market and is one of the biggest exotic fish seizures in recent times.

"In a successful anti-smuggling operation carried out by @assam-forest- 500 Channa Barca fishes have been seized at Dibrugarh Airport. These rare species of fish are valued at ₹ 4.5 crore in the international market & is one of the biggest exotic fish seizures in recent times," the Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

Speaking on the same, a forest official said, "The rare Channa Barca fish was being transported to Kolkata via flight and was inter-



cepted at Dibrugarh Airport during inspection. We have detained two individuals in connection with the smuggling and are currently questioning them." "On Thursday, we seized some fish at Dibrugarh Airport, which has been sent for analysis in the laboratory," he added.

Reports suggest that Sridhan Sarkar and Jiten Sarkar, operating under the name Choudhury Enter-

prise in Kolkata, attempted to smuggle these exotic Channa Barca fishes via an Indigo flight. The duo purchased the fishes from various sources in rural Gujjan areas of Tinsukia district, acquiring them at ₹ 400 per kg.

Their intended destination was Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, and China. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## No plan to make Covid testing mandatory at airports as of now: Health Ministry sources

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** There is no plan so far to make RT-PCR testing for Covid-19 mandatory at airports for travellers, Union health ministry sources said on Thursday, amid an uptick in coronavirus infections in India. Even though the number of cases is rising and the JN.1 sub-variant has been detected in the country, there is no cause of immediate concern as 92 per cent of those infected are opting for home-based treatment, indicating mild illness, they said.

There is also no increase in hospitalisation rates and Covid-19 is an incidental finding in people hospitalised due to other medical conditions. In the last two weeks, 22 people have died due to Covid-19 in the country. India on Thursday recorded 594 fresh Covid-19 infections while the number of active

cases increased to 2,669 from 2,311 the previous day, according to Union health ministry data.

The death toll has climbed to 5,33,327 with six more people -- three from Kerala, two from Karnataka and one from Punjab -- succumbing to the viral disease, the data updated at 8 am stated. As many as 21 cases of the JN.1 variant had been detected across the country till Wednesday.

NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr V K Paul on Wednesday said that the scientific community in India is closely investigating the new variant as he emphasised the need for states to ramp up testing and strengthen surveillance systems.

"There is no plan so far to make RT-PCR testing for Covid-19 mandatory at airports," a source said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Transport officers in vigilance net over bribery charge

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** The Directorate of Vigilance & Anti-Corruption (DVAC) on Thursday apprehended an enforcement inspector for allegedly demanding bribe in Karimganj, said an official statement.

The accused identified as Sahab Uddin Tapadar had demanded ₹ 16,000 as bribe from the complainant for allowing free movement of the vehicles.

"A complaint was received at this Directorate of Vigilance & Anti-Corruption, Assam, alleging that Sahab Uddin Tapadar, the enforcement inspector -- cum- I/C District Transport Officer, of office of the District Transport Officer and Secretary Regional Transport Authority in Karimganj in conspiracy with Abu (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Burmese supari worth ₹ 5 lakh seized in Bokajan

**HT Correspondent**  
**BOKAJAN, Dec 21:** The police in Karbi Anglong recovered illegal dry area nut from Myanmar, known as Burmese Supari from a truck on Wednesday here in Bokajan.

A truck, bearing registration number AS 25 EC 2165, which was coming from Dimapur, was intercepted during a routine check at Dillai Gate under Dillai Police Station in Karbi Anglong and upon searching, the police recovered 50 quintals of Burmese Supari.

The contraband is worth ₹ 5 lakh in the market. In this connection two have been arrested, identified as Sadam Hussain and Rubul Amin, both are residents of Morigaon district in Assam. In October this year, the police in Karbi Anglong had recovered illegal dry area nut from a dumper truck in the morning here in Bokajan. The police made the recovery when they were checking vehicles on NH 39 under Khatkhathi Police (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## CM urges students to promote India's culture globally



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** Chief Minister on Thursday urged students to play a pivotal role in positioning the nation as an epicentre of flourishing good practices and rich culture.

While addressing a gathering after the inauguration of academic block of a city based university at Betkuchi here in Guwahati, Sarma emphasised the significance of India's heritage, and encouraged students to take the lead in upholding and promoting the nation's values on the global stage.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is trying to make India 'Biswa Guru' called upon the students to take a lead in positioning the nation as an epicentre of its flourishing good practices and culture," an official statement quoted Sarma as saying.

Talking about 'Sanskrit' and 'Sanskriti', Sarma said India with its rich repository of human resources can really offer a lot to other countries of the world with regard to their value-based human resources.

"He, therefore, asked the students to empower themselves socially, culturally and academically to contribute to transforming India into a Viksit Bharat," the statement added.

Sarma also said that a student's life is the most formative period of

one's life and asked the students to resolutely focus on their dreams, have self-confidence and self-determination and reach their targets.

He also said that the students always represent the collective aspiration of their family and asked them to build morally sound character, remain away from all negative stimuli and chase their dream. "They should try to become famous in their chosen fields and contribute positively to the development of the state and country," he added.

Dr. Sarma also asked the university management to work more resolutely to create human resources whom society and the alma mater will be proud of. Along with creating prolific physical infrastructure, the university should also be a vehicle to transform its students into luminaries in their chosen fields.

Sarma further said that university with its robust infrastructure and matching academic facilities including its experienced faculty members should take crucial role in nurturing the latest concepts like AI, machine learning, Block Chain, Big Data Analysis, Mobile Internet, Internet of Things (IOT), Augmented Reality, among its students.

"This would help the students to make them competent and empowered to face the present day world," he avowed.

## Space given to anti-India elements in Canada core issue: MEA

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** India once again asserted on Thursday that its "core issue" with Canada remains that of the space given to separatists, terrorists and anti-India elements in that country.

The comments of Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Arindam Bagchi came a day after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said India's ties with Canada may have undergone "a tonal shift" following the indictment of an Indian national in the US for plotting an assassination attempt on a Sikh separatist.

"Our position has been consistent. We have highlighted how we see the problem and frankly, the core issue remains the space that is given to extremists, terrorists and anti-India elements in that country," Bagchi said. He, however, chose not to make a direct comment on Trudeau's remarks.

"I would not like to say whether they have noted a shift or not. Certainly, our positions have remained consistent and we would hope that they would take action on such extremist elements that are misusing freedom of speech and expression from their country," Bagchi said.

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Trudeau's allegation in September of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia on June 18. India designated Nijjar as a terrorist in 2020.

New Delhi rejected Trudeau's charges as "absurd". "I think there is a beginning of an understanding that they cannot bluster their way through this and there is openness to collaborating in a way that perhaps they were less open before," Trudeau said. He said the US indictment appears to have convinced the Indian government to adopt a more sober tone. "There is an understanding that maybe, maybe just churning out attacks against Canada is not going to make this problem go away. We do not want (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## 'Unity, Victory, and Prosperity Rally' aims to promote government's devp schemes: Tuliram



**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Dec 21:** The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang said that the 'Unity, Victory and Prosperity Rally' was for taking the message of development schemes

implemented by the government.

In the press conference held at Taralango here, the CEM said the Rally was held after the decision was taken in a joint parliamentary meeting between KAAC and BJP.

"A decision was taken during a joint parliamentary meeting be-

tween Team Karbi Anglong and BJP party to reach out to the people about the poll promises made by our chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma in the last KAAC election, 2022. The CM has surveyed all the 26 Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituencies in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong during the last KAAC poll campaign and has given his assurance to develop road infrastructure and others," the CEM added.

The CEM further said, "After the election, the CM visited Diphu to lay foundation stone for ₹ 2,500 crores projects for Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. Among them were the ₹ 920 crore road constructions under Asom Mala from Howraghat Tiniali to Hamren via Dongkamukam and from Rajagaon to Khanduli (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## The President of India, Draupadi Murmu, has been invited to attend the festival KYF's golden jubilee preparations in full swing

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Dec 21:** With just twenty days remaining for the grand celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Karbi Youth Festival (KYF), organised by the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) at Taralango, various construction and beautification projects are underway in preparation.

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



On Thursday, the executive member (EM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) for Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, D Upping Maslai, inaugurated the renovated stalls of the two departments in the presence of District Veterinary Officer (DVO), Dr Dilip Mahanta, and assistant di-

rector, dairy extension service, Dr Abdur Rahman.

Annually, the Animal Husbandry & Veterinary department and the Dairy Development Department set up stalls for the exhibition of poultry and livestock, attracting numerous visitors and often receiving recognition for the

best department exhibition stall. This year, given the Golden Jubilee celebration, promises to be exceptional. The EM mentioned that the President of India, Draupadi Murmu, has been invited to the festival. Additionally, invitations have been extended to the Governor of Assam and the Embassies of 20 neighboring countries.

DVO Mahanta highlighted that this year's exhibition is emphasizing the popularisation of the National Livestock Mission, which aims at employment generation, entrepreneurship development, and an increase in per-animal productivity, targeting enhanced production of meat, goat milk, eggs, and wool.

In a subsequent event, the EM distributed ducklings to more than 50 beneficiaries under the initiative of the Duck Breeding Farm, Phuloni. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

# Sensex rebounds 358 pts on buying in HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries

Markets found the winning momentum in the afternoon session

**MUMBAI, Dec 21:** Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty recovered by more than half cent on Thursday following buying in index majors HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 358.79 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,865.10 with 21 of its stocks ending in the green and nine in the red.

The barometer opened lower and fell further by 585.92 points or 0.83 per cent to a low of 69,920.39. But, markets found the winning momentum in the afternoon session and climbed 452.4 points or 0.64 per cent to 70,958.71.

The broader Nifty rallied 104.90 points or 0.50 per cent to 21,255.05 as 38 of its constituents advanced and 12 declined. During the day, it hit a high of 21,288.35 and a low of 20,976.80.

Both key indices had hit record

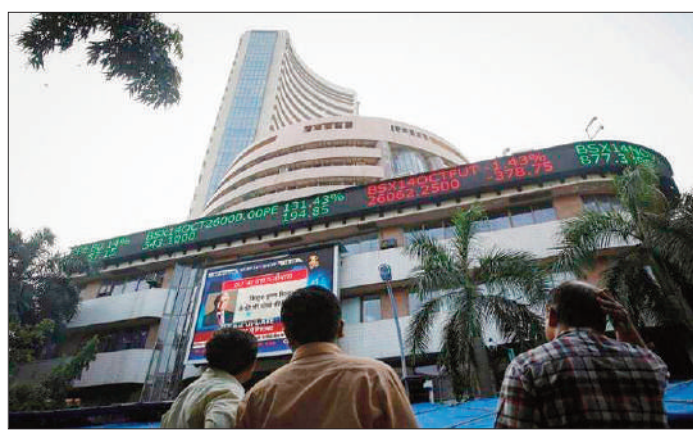
high levels in intra-day trade on Wednesday before closing sharply down by over 1 per cent. Sensex tanked 930 points while Nifty lost around 303 points.

Most sectors participated in the rebound on Thursday with energy, metal and banking sectors emerging as top performers, analysts said.

Buying in HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries helped indices to recover from day's lows, they said. RIL and HDFC contributed more than 300 points to Sensex gains.

Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid rose the most by 2.27 per cent, HDFC Bank by 1.82 per cent, Kotak Bank by 1.66 per cent, and Reliance Industries by 1.38 per cent. NTPC, State Bank of India, Tata Steel and Bharti Airtel were also among the gainers.

Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, HCL Tech and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the major laggards.



"After a subdued start, the market reversed from the day's low amid buy-on-dips strategy. However, the overall trend is subdued, FIIs stayed muted ahead of festive break and global market traded on a negative note ahead of announcement of the US GDP data today," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE

smallcap gauge jumped 1.69 per cent and midcap index climbed 1.61 per cent.

Among the indices, utilities rallied 2.46 per cent, power jumped 2.43 per cent, oil & gas (1.72 per cent), telecommunication (1.64 per cent) and energy (1.62 per cent).

Auto emerged as the only laggard.

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

European markets were trading in the negative territory. The US markets ended lower on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.33 per cent to USD 79.96 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,322.08 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

## Asian shares fall as Wall Street retreats, ending record-setting rally

**TOKYO, Dec 21:** Asian shares fell on Thursday after Wall Street hit the brakes on its big rally following disappointing corporate profit reports and warnings that the market had surged too far, too fast.

US futures rose while oil prices

dipped as data showed an unexpected increase in US inventories.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index fell 1.6 per cent to 33,140.47, with Japanese automaker Toyota leading losses on the benchmark, falling as much as 4 per cent. The company said on Wednesday it is recalling 1 million vehicles over a defect that could cause airbags not to deploy, increasing the risk of injury. That came on top of news that Toyota small-car subsidiary Daihatsu had suspended shipments of all its vehicles in Japan and abroad after an investigation found improper safety testing involving 64 models, including some made for Toyota, Mazda and Subaru. Japanese transport ministry officials raided Daihatsu's offices on Thursday.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 slipped 0.5 per cent to 7,504.10. South Korea's Kospi shed 0.6 per cent to 2,600.02. Hong Kong's Hang Seng was flat at 16,617.87, while the Shanghai Composite added 0.6 per cent to 2,918.71.

India's Sensex was 0.2 per cent higher and Bangkok's SET gained 0.2 per cent.

Wednesday's losses on Wall Street were widespread, and roughly 95 per cent of companies within the S&P 500 declined.

The S&P 500 slumped 1.5 per cent to 4,698.35 for its worst loss since beginning a monster-sized rally shortly before Halloween. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1.3 per cent to 37,082.00 from its record high, while the Nasdaq composite sank 1.5 per cent to 14,777.94.

FedEx tumbled 12.1 per cent for one of the market's biggest losses after reporting weaker revenue and profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It also now expects its revenue for its full fiscal year to fall from year-earlier levels, rather than being roughly flat, because of pressures on demand.

The package delivery company pumps commerce around the world, and its signal for potentially

weaker demand could dim the hope that's fuelled Wall Street's recent rally; that the Federal Reserve can pull off a perfect landing for the economy by slowing it enough to stifle high inflation but not so much that it causes a recession.

Winnipeg Industries' stock dropped 5.6 per cent after it also fell short of analysts' profit expectations for the latest quarter.

General Mills, which sells Progresso soup and Yoplait yogurt, reported stronger profit for the latest quarter than expected, but its revenue fell short as a recovery in its sales volume was slower than expected. Its stock fell 3.6 per cent.

Still, a pair of reports showed the US economy may be in stronger overall shape than expected. Both confidence among consumers in December and sales of previously occupied homes in November improved more than economists had expected.

Encouraging signs that inflation is cooling globally also continue to pile up. In the United Kingdom, inflation in November unexpectedly slowed to 3.9 per cent from October's 4.6 per cent rate, reaching its lowest level since 2021.

Easing rises in prices are raising hopes that central banks around the world can pivot in 2024 from their campaigns to hike interest rates sharply, which were meant to get inflation under control. For the Federal Reserve in particular, the general expectation is for its main interest rate to fall by at least 1.50 percentage points in 2024 from its current range of 5.25 per cent to 5.50 per cent, which is its highest level in more than two decades.

Treasury yields have been tumbling since late October on such hopes, and they fell again following the UK inflation report.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 3.86 per cent from 3.85 per cent late Wednesday.

In other dealings, US benchmark crude oil was down 8 cents at USD 74.14 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, the international standard, lost 7 cents to USD 79.63 per barrel.

The US dollar fell to 143.15 Japanese yen from 143.56 yen. The euro rose to USD 1.0945 from USD 1.0943 late Wednesday. (AP)

## Gold slips ₹ 50; silver jumps ₹ 600

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Gold on Thursday slipped ₹ 50 to ₹ 63,050 per 10 grams in the national capital amid bearish trade in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous close, the yellow metal had ended at ₹ 63,100 per 10 grams.

However, silver bounced Rs 600 to ₹ 79,100 per kilogram.

In the futures trade on the MCX, February contract of gold increased ₹ 25 to ₹ 62,440 per 10 grams. However, March contract of silver declined ₹ 126 to ₹ 75,360 per kg on the bourse.

Gold was trading lower at USD 2,037 per ounce, while silver was up at USD 24.25 per ounce in the global markets.

In the context of the fall in gold prices, Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said the dollar index recovered some of its losses after better-than-expected US macro data. (PTI)

## Retail inflation for farm workers rises to 7.37 pc in Nov, 7.13 pc for rural labourers

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Retail inflation for farm workers rose to 7.37 per cent and that for rural labourers climbed to 7.13 per cent in November, mainly due to higher prices of certain food items.

Retail inflation in October was 7.08 per cent and 6.92 per cent for farm workers and rural labourers, respectively, according to an official statement.

Food inflation stood at 9.38 per cent and 9.14 per cent for agricultural and rural workers, respectively, in November compared to the respective figures of 8.42 per cent and 8.18 per cent in October 2023, and 6.19 per cent and 6.05 per cent recorded in the corresponding month of previous year (November 2022), a labour ministry statement said.

According to the statement, point-to-point rate of inflation based on the CPI-AL (Consumer Price Index-Agricultural Labourers) and CPI-RL (rural labourers) stood at 7.37 per cent and 7.13 per cent in November this year as compared to 7.08 per cent and 6.92 per cent, respectively, in October 2023.

The two comparable numbers were 6.87 per cent and 6.99 per cent in November last year, the ministry said.

All-India Consumer Price Index for agricul-



tural labourers in November this year increased 12 points to 1,253, while the index for rural workers advanced 11 points to 1,262.

The two indices were 1,241 points and 1,251 points, respectively, in October this year.

Major contribution towards the rise in general index of agricultural labourers and rural labourers came from the group of food items to the extent of 10.85 and 10.50 points, respectively, driven by a rise in prices of rice, wheat, pulses, onion, turmeric whole, garlic, mixed spices, etc.

There has been an upward trend in the index across all the states except West Bengal (both CPI-AL and CPI-RL indices decreased) and Himachal Pradesh (CPI-AL index decreased).

In case of agricultural labourers, the index in-

creased 1 to 10 points in 11 states, rose 11 to 20 points in four states and went up more than 20 points in three states. With 1,453 points, Tamil Nadu topped the index table whereas Himachal Pradesh stood at the bottom with 958 points.

The benchmark for rural labourers increased 1 to 10 points in 11 states, climbed 11 to 20 points in five states and jumped more than 20 points in three states.

Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with 1,439 points each topped the index table whereas Himachal Pradesh stayed at the bottom with 1,015 points.

Among states, the maximum increase of 27 points in CPI-AL index was seen in Maharashtra, which was mainly driven by the increased prices of jowar, rice, wheat, atta, tapioca, arhar dal, onion and sugar etc.

For CPI-RL, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu saw a rise of 24 points each, mainly due to increase in prices of rice, jowar, ragi, fish, fresh, onion, arhar dal, vegetables and fruits (especially brinjal, tomato and lady finger) etc.

West Bengal recorded the steepest fall of 14 points in both the indices due to a drop in prices of rice, ginger, chilly green, vegetables and fruits (especially brinjal & lady finger), firewood etc, the ministry stated. (PTI)

## Ashok Leyland bags order for 552 buses from TN transport entity

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Commercial vehicle major Ashok Leyland on Thursday said it has bagged an order to supply 552 buses from Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSCT). The ultra-low entry (ULE) buses would be used for public transport, the company said in a statement. Ashok Leyland has been a long-standing supplier of buses to TNSCT, having supplied over 18,477 buses till date.

"This order reinforces our dedication to creating very efficient and technologically advanced products that exceed our customer expectations and contribute to the growth of public transportation," Ashok Leyland Managing Director & CEO Shenu Agarwal said. The Hinduja Group flagship said it will complete the delivery of the buses within the next few months. (PTI)

## Airtel Business enters into strategic partnership with IntelliSmart

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** Bharti Airtel ("Airtel"), one of India's leading telecommunications service providers on Thursday announced that it has formed a strategic partnership to power up to 20 million smart meters with IntelliSmart Infrastructure Private Limited, a leading smart metering and digital solutions provider. This partnership also marks Airtel's foray into high end applications such as Advance metering infrastructure and meter data management systems along with Cloud and Analytics. This is the largest such deal in the smart metering space in the country. It will significantly contribute towards Airtel's fast-growing IoT deployment across sectors.

Airtel's IoT proposition includes its proprietary platform the "Airtel IoT Hub" which will help the utility track and monitor these smart meters with advanced analytics while

maintaining extremely high reliability augmented with telco grade security. Housed on Airtel's own cloud network, the IoT hub will allow enterprise users the capability to connect and manage billions of devices and applications in a highly secure and seamless fashion.

Ganesh Lakshminarayanan, CEO, Airtel Business (India) said about the venture, "We have further strengthened our market leadership as the largest IoT enabler in the country. IoT is one of the fastest-growing business segments for Airtel Business and, with this deal, we are now strategically positioned to play a pivotal role in driving the Govt. of India's vision of digitising 250 million conventional meters to smart meters. As we connect the devices across the country on our platform, we will exponentially grow our current IoT market share of 55.4% (as on Q1 FY23-24)." Anil Rawal, MD & CEO, Intel-

lismart Infrastructure Pvt Ltd had this to say, "India's smart metering programme is one of the significant steps taken by the government to modernise the power distribution sector. Smart meters are critical building blocks for smart grids and a fundamental enabler of the digitalisation efforts of the power system. As we set forward to implement one of India's largest portfolios of smart meters, we are relying on some of the most able and potent partners in the sector for various solution elements to support the successful deployment of our Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) solutions. We are confident that the on-boarding of Airtel as a strategic partner will be a significant step towards our goal of creating strong associations to strengthen our infrastructure solution with a resilient and secure cloud-hosted cellular communication network."

## Rupee falls 9 paise to settle at 83.27 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, Dec 21:** The rupee fell by 9 paise to settle at 83.27 against the US dollar on Thursday as withdrawal of foreign funds amid concerns over global trade disruption through the Red Sea route dented investor sentiment.

According to forex analysts, despite positive sentiment in the domestic equity markets and a weak American currency against major global currencies, the Indian unit was weighed down by the volatile crude oil prices.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.19 and traded between the peak of 83.18 and the lowest level of 83.28 against the dollar during intra-day deals.

It settled at 83.27 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a fall of 9 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the domestic currency settled at 83.18 against the dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent lower at 101.97 on Thursday.

Global oil price benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.31 per cent to USD 79.95 per barrel.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 358.79 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,865.10. The broader NSE Nifty soared 104.90 points or 0.50 per cent to 21,255.05.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the equity market on Wednesday as they offloaded shares worth ₹ 1,322.08 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

## Tata Trusts introduces 'Gaanth Pe Dhyaan'

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** Furthering its mission to raise awareness about the benefits of early detection for breast cancer, Tata Trusts on Thursday introduced, 'Gaanth Pe Dhyaan', an innovative initiative through a unique event hosted at Dibrugarh Cancer Centre, a unit of Assam Cancer Care Foundation (ACCF) - a joint initiative of the government of Assam and Tata Trusts. A part of the larger 'Kaise Ka Cancer' campaign, 'Gaanth Pe Dhyaan' aims to build awareness, encourage open conversations, and drive community action towards breast cancer by using the metaphor of 'lumps in food' and emphasizing the importance of breast self-examination amongst women.

Breast cancer disproportionately affects women in India, with over 50 per cent of breast cancer cases in the country being diagnosed in the late stages. This delay in diagnosis and treatment comes from a lack of awareness and can be fatal, if not detected early. Tata Trusts is dedicated to turning the tide on the issue by engaging with women to educate them on the importance of early detection using a simple and innovative metaphor.

Cooking a meal for their families forms an integral part of most women's daily lives. Drawing inspiration from the meticulous care women put into cooking, especially in order to prevent the formation of lumps in their food, the 'Gaanth Pe Dhyaan' campaign draws a

parallel, urging women to apply the same diligence to their health and self-examine their breasts regularly for any signs of a "gaanth" (lump), which could potentially be cancerous.

Continuing its journey across the nation, 'Gaanth Pe Dhyaan' saw its fourth edition conducted in Dibrugarh on Thursday in partnership with MasterChef Season 7 Runner-up, Chef Santa Sarmah. This follows its successful launch in Ranchi, in October, the Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a second leg at Tata Medical Center, Kolkata in early December, and its third edition at SVICCAR, Tirupati last week.

Captivating an audience, predominantly of women from local communities, with an interactive culinary

demonstration at the event, Chef Santa Sarmah prepared the local favourite Narakhinha Soup, which helped to maintain relatability with the audience. Demonstrating a preparation of this soup, she discussed how lumps in food preparation can ruin the taste and texture of a dish and highlighted that they are equally undesirable in the breast. This metaphor forms the central pillar of the 'Gaanth Pe Dhyaan' initiative, encouraging women to give their bodies the same care and attention through breast self-examination, as they give to the meals that they cook. Energised by the event and the simple message, over 150 women registered for breast cancer screening at the Dibrugarh Cancer Care facility.

## Amazon India signs an MoU with the Indian Coast Guard

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** Amazon India on Thursday signed an MoU with the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), under Ministry of defence, to provide ex-service personnel with work opportunities across the company, in line with its commitment towards an inclusive workplace.

At Amazon India, there has been a consistent focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in its workforce where unique perspectives are valued and welcomed. The company fosters a culture that is conducive to growth and offers people equal opportunities to unlock their full potential while empowering them to do more. The company's commitment on providing equal access to opportunities and resources cuts across all communities of talent including focused efforts around women, LGBTQIA+, military veterans and the differently abled, amongst others from different backgrounds, demographics, and social strata, to enable them to expand their horizons. Over the last few years, Amazon India has launched multiple initiatives to bring diversity, equity, and inclusion into the workforce.

In August 2019, Amazon India launched a Military Veterans Employment program to create hundreds of opportunities for military veterans and their spouses across the company's fulfilment network, across India. This was done in partnership with the Army Welfare Placement Organization (AWPO) to create continued work oppor-



tunities for military veterans and their families across India. More recently, Amazon India further strengthened its commitment to provide ex-service personnel with work opportunities across its growing operations network in India by renewing its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Directorate General Resettlement (DGR). This MoU with the DGR enables Amazon India to mobilize the untapped potential of veterans, giving it access to a greater talent

pipeline.

"At Amazon, we are very humbled to build further on our efforts to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion at our workplace. Due to the deep appreciation of the wealth of experience and unique perspective of ex-service personnel, Amazon runs the Military Veterans Employment Programme globally. With the signing of this MoU, we are excited to work with the Indian Coast Guard towards a common goal of creating meaningful work opportunities for our veterans and their families. We will continue to leverage the wealth of experience of military veterans, who are an incomparable addition to Amazon," said Deepti Varma, VP, People Experience Technology, Amazon India, Japan & Emerging Markets.

The Indian Coast Guard, said, "The vast experience our veterans possess can be leveraged for tremendous success across diverse industries and businesses. Amazon India has taken proactive steps in offering employment opportunities to military veterans. This MoU marks a significant milestone as we unite in the pursuit of a shared objective: fostering meaningful career paths for ex-service personnel from the Indian Coast Guard."

With this new MoU, Amazon India will be collaborating with the ICG, to realize their mutual goal of helping ex-servicemen from military background pursue their corporate careers through opportunities at Amazon or in other corporate roles.

### ELECTRICAL WORKS AT TINSUKIA DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: TSK/Elect/152, Dated: 19-12-2023. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:  
Tender No.: LV-T-14-TSK-Gatishadi-06;  
Brief Description of Item: At Tinsukia Division - Upgradation of passenger amenities facilities at Dibrugarh and New Tinsukia station in connection with Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Tender Value: ₹1,63,54,237/- Earnest Money: ₹2,31,800/- Date & time of closing of tender: 13:00 hrs. and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 11-01-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 13:00 hrs. on 11-01-2024 in the website www.irops.gov.in.  
DRM (Elect), Tinsukia  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
Serving Customers With A Smile

### LOST

I have lost my original Registration Certificate bearing Registration No. 186837 with session of 2021-22 of Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC). Any finder may kindly contact at the address and mobile numbers mentioned below.  
Contact: 9854474533  
Mayushree Talukdar  
D/o- Late Sanatan Talukdar  
Tini no Salbari,  
P.O. - Noonmati, P.S. - Noonmati  
Pin Code: 781020

### AFFIDAVIT

I FAKRUL AHMED, C/O- ASMAN ALI, Vill-Nagayapam, P.O.+ P.S. Jamunamukh, declared by affidavit at Ho-jaiSankardevnagar court, that my actual name is FAKRUL AHMED and father Name is ASMAN ALI but my name and father name is recorded in my birth certificate, HSLC Admit card as My Name- MD. FAKRUL AHMED and Father Name- MD. ASMAN ALI . MD. FAKRUL AHMED and FAKRUL AHMED is a Same and single person. and MD. ASMAN ALI and ASMAN ALI is a Same and single person is my father.

# Karbi Anglong's millet product launch prog signals sustainable shift

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Dec 21:** In a groundbreaking event, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) proudly declared the successful launch of the Millet Product Launching Program, marking a significant shift in the region's agricultural practices. The ceremony, held at the KAAC conference hall on Thursday, at 11:00 am, showcased the commitment of the region to sustainable agriculture and rural development. Executed with precision by Jirsong Asong Diphu and supported by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), this ambitious project signifies a transformative moment.

The event attracted a distinguished audience, with the principal secretary of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council leading the dignitaries. The conference hall was filled with key officials from the council, including BDOs of all the blocks, deputy secretaries of various departments, DDM NABARD, lead district manager (LDM), and bank managers from different banks. The director of Jirsong Asong and the entire project team instrumental in the initiative were also present to mark this historic occasion.

In an official inauguration filled with optimism, the principal secretary unveiled an



extensive range of Karbi Anglong millet products. The products included millet rice and millet flour, showcasing the importance of embracing sustainable and nutritious alternatives. The program went beyond conventional offerings by introducing a captivating array of value-added products, comprising millet cake, cookies, bread, and muffins. These innovations align with the

broader vision of promoting diverse and healthy dietary choices among the local populace.

The program not only celebrated product launches but also paid homage to the unsung heroes of agriculture—the millet cultivators. Their presence was a poignant acknowledgment of their integral role in the program's success, highlighting the collaborative effort

that propels the entire millet supply chain from cultivation to production and distribution.

During his address, the principal secretary expressed the profound impact of this initiative on the community, stating, "This endeavour reflects our commitment to sustainable agricultural practices and empowers our local farmers. The collaboration with NABARD has been instrumental in bringing this vision to fruition, and we are excited about the positive impact it will have on our community."

This comprehensive program signifies more than just a product launch; it is a strategic step towards ensuring food security, empowering local farmers, and fostering resilience in the face of changing agricultural landscapes. By promoting millet-based products, the initiative aims to enhance nutritional diversity and contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

As applause echoed through the conference hall, it was evident that the Karbi Anglong Millet Product Launching Program had set the stage for a new era in sustainable agriculture, resonating with the aspirations of a community dedicated to shaping its own prosperous future. The program was attended by 80 persons from all walks of life.

## Health minister Keshab Mahanta joins 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra'



**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, Dec 21:** Keshab Mahanta, the minister of Health and Family Welfare, Information Technology, and more, actively participated in the 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' program organised by the Morigaon Municipal Board. During the inauguration of the program, the minister elucidated its objective, emphasising the need to raise awareness about the central government's initiatives led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the state government's efforts under the leadership of CM Himanta Biswa Sarma. The primary goal of the program is to inform the public about these schemes, ensuring that citizens receive their benefits directly without any intermediaries. Minister Mahanta stressed that the government aims to eliminate middlemen interference in governmental schemes, ensuring that citizens do not face deprivation.

He underscored the symbiotic relationship between the development of individuals and the overall progress of the country. The minister addressed various topics, including road safety, and highlighted prominent schemes

such as Jal Jeevan Abhiyan, Orunodoi Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. Moreover, he drew attention to the health insurance facility provided under the Ayushman Card, offering coverage of up to ₹ 5 lakh per annum.

MLA Ramakanta Deuri from Morigaon also attended the event, and stated the concerted efforts of both state and central governments to implement numerous welfare schemes for the benefit of the underprivileged. District commissioner Devashish Sharma extended a warm welcome to the gathering, which included beneficiaries of various schemes. As part of the program, the Department of Agriculture organised a demonstration showcasing the use of drone technology for nano urea. The event saw the presence of chief executive officer of the Zilla Parishad Lakhi Nandan Soharia, district development commissioner Devayani Chowdhury, Morigaon Municipality's chairman Jogesh Tamuly, BJP's president Prabin Medhi, along with various dignitaries, officers, employees, and beneficiaries of different schemes.

## Professional makeup artist course launched at Dhing College

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Dec 21:** In a significant development, the professional makeup artist course, part of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0, was ceremonially inaugurated at Dhing College during a momentous event last Wednesday.

Dr Biman Hazarika, the college principal, inaugurated the program by lighting the lamp, accompanied by Dipranjan Buragohain, the course coordinator and assistant professor in the department of Economics, who delivered an insightful speech on the profound significance of skill courses and their role in providing self-employment opportunities. With over 30 enthusiastic participants from the greater Dhing area, the inaugural session of the course witnessed a positive and energetic start.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Biman Hazarika underscored the crucial role played by such courses in enhancing the entrepreneurial abilities of the unemployed population. Emphasising the government's commitment to promoting self-employment, Dr Hazarika highlighted the importance of empowering individuals through skill development, aligning with the national initiative. He elaborated on how the beauty and wellness sector, specifically the art of professional makeup, can serve as a promising avenue for self-employment.

Dr Snigdha Mahanta, the college's vice-principal, also graced the program and shared insights on the nation's mission to foster skill development and self-employment, as stated in a press note.

## GU hosts Viksit Bharat @2047: Voice of Youth

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** Gauhati University, in collaboration with GU NSS Cell, organised the 'Viksit Bharat @2047: Voice of Youth' event and a mass registration drive campaign on the MyGov.in portal and My Bharat portal. The event took place at the Phanidhar Datta Seminar Hall on Thursday.

Dr Ranjan Kr Kakati, director of Students' Welfare at Gauhati University and nodal officer for Viksit Bharat @2047, emphasised the importance of youth participation in the campaign. He encouraged the youth to voice their opinions and contribute to the vision of making India a developed nation by 2047. The campaign aligns with the government's vision to achieve comprehensive development, including economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and good governance.

Prof Dibya Jyoti Mahanta, dean of the Study Centre at KKHSSO University, inaugurated the program and underscored the responsibility of today's youth in contributing to India's development by 2047.

Prof Eeshankur Saikia, head of the department of Applied Science at Gauhati University, provided details about the registration procedure on the MyGov.in portal and shared insights into the Viksit Bharat @2047 initiative.

Jangjilong, regional director of NSS NER Guwahati, explained the registration process for the My Bharat portal and highlighted the benefits of registration.

## Handicrafts design development training organised by Kamrup West Forest Division

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** The Kamrup West Forest Division has initiated a month-long handicrafts design development training in cane & bamboo in association with the development commissioner (Handicraft) Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. The training, conducted under the Skill Development in Handicraft Sector (NHDS) scheme of the National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP), took place in Chandubi, Palashbari area.

The inauguration ceremony was held at Loharghat Range Inspection Bungalow premises at Rajapara village near Chandubi Lake, organised by the Loharghat Forest Range. The program aimed to provide training to 32 male and female participants from the local area.

West Kamrup Forest Divisional Officer (DFO) Dimpi Bora, director of Development Commissioner Handicrafts North Eastern Region PC Haldar, assistant director

Dhiraj Kumar, Abanta Bora, designer, and master craftsman Basanta Kalita were among the dignitaries present at the inaugural program. The program focused on empowering villagers by providing them with skills in handicrafts, particularly in bamboo and cane.

DFO Dimpi Bora has been actively working to develop the livelihoods of villagers in remote areas under the West Kamrup Divisional Forest Office. Various training programs, including bamboo ornament making and nursery training, have been conducted to make villagers self-reliant and financially independent.

In her statement, DFO Bora highlighted the success of previous training programs, where trained villagers participated in the Chandubi Festival and generated around ₹ 1 lakh in sales. The Forest Department has been conducting several training programs, including those in bamboo handicrafts, jewelry making, and

tourism journalism.

Trainee Kanaklata Rabha expressed gratitude to the Forest Department for providing essential training and support, enabling her to contribute to her family's income. She said that without the department's initiatives, they might not have progressed financially.

Director of Development Commissioner Handicrafts North Eastern Region PC Haldar discussed the importance of the training in developing the skills of artists and promoting their participation in national and international fairs. The Development Commissioner (Handicraft) Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, will cover the expenditures of the participants.

The Forest Department's efforts to involve the rural community in economic development through various training programs have garnered appreciation from participants and contributed to the overall upliftment of the community.

## Entrance of Palengi High School attracts pedestrians with flowers



**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Dec 21:** The entrance of Palengi High School, a government school near Demow in Sivasagar District, has become a point of attraction for pedestrians. The school's entrance is adorned with beautiful flower tubs, creating an aesthetically pleasing environment. This initiative was taken by former students of Palengi High School, the present school governing body, teachers, and well-wishers.

The school authorities have installed CCTV cameras to monitor

the area, ensuring the security and proper upkeep of the flower arrangements. Present students studying at Palengi High School are actively involved in taking care of the flower tubs, watering the plants, and contributing to creating a beautiful environment that attracts pedestrians.

This collaborative effort between former students, the school governing body, teachers, and current students showcases a sense of pride and community engagement, enhancing the overall appeal of the school's entrance.

## AAJU announces awards for promising journalists

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Dec 21:** The All Assam Journalists' Union (AAJU) has revealed the winners of journalism awards in memory of four distinguished journalists from the state: martyr journalist Kamala Saikia, former AAJU president Rohini Medhi, noted journalist Nirmal Das, and former AAJU president Abul Haque Choudhury.

In a press conference held at the AAJU office, president Pankaj Kumar Nath and vice president Rajesh Dutta announced the results. The awards were given in different categories, and the winners are as follows:

Martyr Journalist Kamala Saikia Memorial Investigative Journalism Award to Bhaskar Jyoti Bhuyan, special correspondent of Asomiya Pratidin from Chaiduar under Biswanath district; Rohini Medhi Memorial Rural Journalism Award to Arup Shandily, senior staff reporter of Dainik Asam; Journalist Nirmal Das Memorial Environmental Journalism Award to Sayad Rabiul Hoque of Goalpara district, correspondent from Krishnai for Asomiya Pratidin; Journalist Abul Haque Choudhury Memorial Tourism Journalism Award to Jayanta Kumar Sarma, correspondent of Agradoot from Kaliabor under Nagaon district, and Jayanta Deka, correspondent of Asomiya Pratidin from Daulsala of Nalbari district.

## 68<sup>th</sup> Battalion Sashastra Seema Bal celebrates 60<sup>th</sup> Raising Day



**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Dec 21:** The 68th Battalion Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) celebrated its 60th Raising Day on Wednesday with a formal event at Devendra Nagar. The commemorative ceremony took place at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Parade Ground

within the 68th Battalion SSB, Debendranagar, Tezpur Frontier.

Under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India, Sashastra Seema Bal, originally established as the Special Service Bureau (SSB) on March 15, 1963, marked

its current Raising Day on December 20, following the presidential assent to the SSB Act, 2007.

The 60th Raising Day event showcased a series of demonstrations, spotlighting the exceptional capabilities and skills of the Sashastra Seema Bal. Inspector general of Tezpur Frontier, Binod Nayak, graced the occasion as the chief guest, acknowledging the formal display of skills and expressing gratitude to all personnel for their exemplary performance. In his address, he underscored the vital role played by the SSB in managing India's international borders with Bhutan and Nepal. The SSB continues to be instrumental in ensuring security at various points in Arunachal Pradesh.

## E-rickshaw driver apprehended

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Dec 21:** In a distressing incident, Meer Hussain, an e-rickshaw driver, was apprehended by Nagaon Police for allegedly attempting to molest a college girl near the Nagaon Police Reserve.

According to sources, the incident unfolded when the e-rickshaw driver targeted the college girl, who was waiting alone for an auto-rickshaw to attend her class. Exploiting the opportunity of her solitude, the driver allegedly attempted to molest her on an aban-

doned road. The victim, however, raised an alarm by shouting, prompting the accused e-rickshaw driver to hastily flee from the scene.

Subsequently, some of the victim's friends, who were in the vicinity near Borghat Bypass Chariali, located and detained the suspect. They promptly handed him over to the local police station. The college girl, deeply affected by the incident, filed a First Information Report (FIR) with the Nagaon Police Station, detailing the alleged molestation attempt.

## Demow's Dipshikha Boruah participates in Japan's Sakura Science Exchange Program

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Dec 21:** Dipshikha Boruah, the accomplished daughter of Bidyadhar Boruah from Deodubi Gaon near Demow, recently participated in Japan's Sakura Science Exchange Program. The initiative, organised by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, Department of School Education and Literacy at Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi, took place from December 10 to December 16. Representing the state of Assam, Dipshikha Boruah, along with four other students and a teacher guide, shared insights into their enriching experience.

When approached for comment, Dipshikha Boruah provided details about the diverse participating group, which included 64 students from India, 20 from China, and 5 each from South Africa, Kenya, and Egypt. Describing the itinerary, she shared that on the first day, the participants explored the Tokyo Asakusa Temple and the National Museum of Nature and Science. The second day featured an orientation program at the Japan Science and Technology Agency Headquarters, followed by visits to the Miraikan Museum and Tokyo University.

The third day's agenda included a visit to the National Institute of Information and Commu-



nication Technology (NICT), where the students received instruction on wireless networks. Additionally, they had the opportunity to meet Sibi George, the ambassador of India to Japan, at the Embassy of India in Japan. Meikei High School welcomed the participants on the fourth day for a lecture program, and on the fifth day, they explored the Mitsubishi Minatomirai In-

dustrial Museum, JAMSTEC, and Waseda University near Tokyo. The program concluded with a closing ceremony during which participants received certificates.

Dipshikha Boruah highlighted the punctuality of the Japanese culture and expressed admiration for the kindness and humility demonstrated by the people of Japan.

## 7-day faculty development program unveiled

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Dec 21:** DBT Star College, Dhing College is organising a seven-day faculty development programme at Dhing College. The programme is being conducted by the department of Chemistry and department of Zoology and was inaugurated by the college principal, Dr Biman Hazarika, through the lighting of the lamp at the auditorium of the department of Zoology. Dr Mukut Moni Saikia, coordinator of DBT Star College, and head of the department of Zoology, Dr Purnima Das Bora, are hosting the programme. The faculty development programme aims to create awareness among teachers in educational institutions in the periphery to promote science education and benefit students and society by utilising the laboratories provided by DBT Star College.

The event was attended by Dr Snigdha Mahanta, vice-principal of the college. On the first day, Maya Moni Devi, a young writer, presented an analysis on 'The Need for Teaching Literature in the Classroom', and Dr Mukut Moni Saikia presented an analysis on 'Carbon Radiation, Carbon Emissions, Carbon Credit' in the afternoon session.

Dr Bhuvan Chandra Chutia, associate professor, department of Zoology, Nagaon College, highlighted the commercialisation of yam and scientific breeding, conservation, and enhancement of yam on December 18. In the afternoon session, Dr Sujata Bhattacharya, principal, Nagaon Law College, was present as an expert, analysing various aspects of the Women and Child Protection Act. On December 19, Dr Purnima Das Bora, head of the department of Zoology, Dhing College, discussed the self-healing system of the control and coordination of mind and body. In the afternoon session, Dr Jayashree Pathak discussed hygiene and healthcare of children and women.

On Wednesday, Dr Niranjana Deka, head of KVK, Nagaon, and eminent scientist, discussed 'Social Development through Awareness of Agriculture and Related Sectors' and the role of teachers in creating awareness in society for agricultural development. In the afternoon session, associate professor Robin Sharma Barua, department of Physics, Dhing College, discussed the effects of microwaves on human health.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Influence is the exhalation of character*  
- W. M. Taylor

## TMC MP's mimicry backfires

As soon as the opposition thought it had a chance and the moral upper hand following the suspension of 143 Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs and was about to win over more voters, it was defeated by its own objective. This was said by a three-time Serampore MP for the Trinamool Congress, who also serves as the party's chief whip in the Lok Sabha. Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar was being impersonated by Kalyan Banerjee. Furthermore, Dhankhar oversees the Rajya Sabha, as INDIA is aware. This forced the INDIA bloc and Banerjee's party to retreat. As Vice President Pranab Mukherjee called the President to convey his concerns, President Droupadi Murmu denounced the incident. Things deteriorated to the point where Banerjee was removed from a delegation led by TMC chief Mamata Banerjee and comprising party MPs, who met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to request his intervention in facilitating the passage of Union government funds intended for a number of West Bengal development projects.

Being a shrewd politician, the TMC chief knew that the Serampore MP's attendance would have tainted the atmosphere of the meeting, which is said to have ended amicably. Despite her strong disapproval of the Prime Minister's actions, the TMC chieftain didn't want to offend him at this particular moment. According to Kalyan Banerjee's own admission, the leader of his party had notified him that he would not be joining the delegation. Banerjee's mention of Dr. Kakali Ghosh Dasgupta's exclusion would not excuse his misbehaviour or the awkward situation it would have caused. The news that Congress MP Rahul Gandhi had clicked on Banerjee's impersonation on his phone did not help the suspended Lok Sabha MP. Ultimately, it has proven to be a belated act of INDIA bloc solidarity. The suspension of Members of both Houses gave the Opposition a bit of a reprieve following the disastrous election results in three of the five states that recently held elections.

The Trinamool MP gave the BJP a chance to raise the point of disobeying a constitutional office. To put it bluntly, the Serampore MP's action was childish. It appears that Banerjee has realised his action a little too late. However, his statement that the last thing he wanted to do was hurt Dhankhar, who is a senior lawyer to him, didn't go over well. If the Trinamool chief had publicly reprimanded Banerjee, the situation might have been salvaged. She missed the opportunity to lead by example because she didn't. A Trinamool leader has previously disrespected the occupant of a powerful constitutional position. The state Cabinet member Akhil Giri was the one who had previously disrespected President Droupadi Murmu.

Nobody is immune to criticism or inquiry when holding a constitutional office. The Opposition has a responsibility to do this. Kalyan Banerjee, however, went too far. It was an unworthy act for a representative of the people. He has been unexpectedly caught off guard. He's been stumped as a result, as is the INDIA bloc. The process squandered the sympathy that the Opposition had garnered from voters after its MPs in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were suspended. The India bloc has fallen off the wagon when there was little reason to.

## Kanaklata Barua: The unyielding spirit of Assamese valour in the struggle for independence



By: Dipak Kurmi

In the annals of India's fight for freedom, the name Kanaklata Barua shines brightly - a symbol of unwavering determination and sacrifice. Born on 22nd December 1924 in the quaint village of Baragabari, Assam, Kanaklata's life unfolded in the backdrop of a colonial era, marked by oppression and the fervent call for independence.

Kanaklata's journey began in adversity as she became an orphan at the tender age of five. Yet, from the ashes of her early struggles emerged a sense of responsibility and duty that would shape her destiny. Raised in the 'Dolakasharia' family under Gohpur Police Station, Kanaklata embodied the spirit of a true patriot.

The pivotal moment in Kanaklata's life occurred on the historic day of 20th September 1942 - a day etched in the annals of the Quit India Movement. In Baragabari, under the leadership of local luminaries like Jonaram Bhuyan, Jiten Borah, and Mukunda Kakati, preparations were underway for a momentous event. The mission: to hoist the Indian national flag at the Gohpur Police Station, a British stronghold, echoing Gandhiji's call for non-violent resistance.

Undeterred by her youth and unsophisticated background, 18-year-old Kanaklata enthusiastically enrolled in the volunteers' force for this daring endeavor. In the early morning hours, she bid a poignant farewell to her siblings, sensing the gravity of the mission ahead. With the national flag in hand, Kanaklata joined the picketers at Baragabari Chari, standing proudly at the forefront of the women volunteers.

The journey to Gohpur Police Station, spanning 12 kilometers, became a march of courage and conviction. Joined by fellow volunteers shouting slogans of defiance, they aimed to challenge the British imperialists peacefully. Despite the looming dangers, Kanaklata's impassioned speech on the verge of imminent death rallied the volunteers, inspiring them to face the challenges ahead.

As they reached the Thana gates, surrounded by the police force led by R.M. Sunia, the volunteers faced resistance. The police, armed and unyielding, refused entry, leading to a standoff. In a pivotal moment, Kanaklata, with the national flag held high, confronted the police. Her words, asserting the invincibility of their souls, resonated as a powerful declaration of indomitable spirit.

The response was brutal. Without warning, the British armed police opened fire on the unarmed picketers. In this tragic moment, Kanaklata fell victim to Constable Gopal Chhipahi's gunfire, becoming a martyr for the cause.

The sacrifice, however, did not dampen the spirit of the volunteers. In the evening, Rampati Rajkhowa succeeded in hoisting the national flag on the Thana building, a testament to their resilience.

Kanaklata's legacy lives on, transcending time and inspiring generations. Her sacrifice, akin to Rani of Jhansi and Joan of Arc, remains a beacon of courage and dedication. As we celebrate the 100th birth anniversary, let us remember Kanaklata Barua - a valiant daughter of Assam who, in the face of adversity, stood tall for the freedom of our nation. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

# The labour movement in United States witnessed a breakthrough year in 2023

Strikes and threats of strikes extracted contracts ranging from good to excellent from employers across the country this year. Half a million US workers walked out - machinists, teachers, baristas, nurses, hotel housekeepers, and autoworkers - with much of the motion coming from unions led by reformers.

The year started out with a squeaker of an election victory that turned out to be momentous. In late 2022, the Members United slate swept most top offices at the United Auto Workers (UAW) on a platform of "No Concessions, No Corruption, No Tiers." March saw a presidential runoff pitting the old guard incumbent against an obscure Kokomo, Indiana, electrician and union rep named Shawn Fain. Among 140,000 votes cast, Fain won by a few hundred.

"Our job now is to put the members back in the driver's seat, regain the trust of the rank and file, and put the companies on notice," he said then. "We are ending give-back unionism and company control in the UAW."

Nine months later, the union's stand-up strike has notched sweeping victories against the Big Three, autoworkers in nonunion plants are hustling to join, public opinion of striking workers is at a several-decade high, and Fain is nearly a household name.

But the 150,000 Big Three autoworkers weren't even the biggest work group to win thanks to new, more militant leadership. The 340,000 Teamsters at UPS notched their biggest contract gains ever by mounting a strike threat that reverberated through truck barns and warehouses across the country. Managers huddled nervously as UPSers marched into work together, galvanized by breakfast meetings and practice pickets.

The union's new leaders, President Sean O'Brien and Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman, gave detailed reports on negotiations and bargained down to the wire, while the reform caucus that backed their 2022 election, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), spearheaded a program of shop-floor organizing and pickets. It was a winning combination that netted big wage gains and eliminated a second tier of drivers and a forced sixth workday.

The change in direction in both the Teamsters and the UAW has roots in reform caucuses who long argued for a struggle, not cuddle, approach to the companies.

In the Teamsters, the groundwork was laid in 1989 when the federal government threatened to take over the union due to corruption. Teamsters for a Democratic Union argued against government control. Instead, they said that democracy in the union - member control - would be the force that would end corruption.

In a consent agreement, the union switched to one-member, one-vote elections for top leaders, replacing the easily controlled elections held at conventions. TDU-backed leaders won in 1991, lost

in 1998, and won again in 2022, leading to a reinvigorated union, shop-floor mobilization, and the believable strike threat that extracted huge gains from UPS this year.

A similar process, on a compressed timeline, happened at the United Auto Workers. In 2019, then-president Gary Jones was removed from office and later pleaded guilty to embezzling union funds. He and his predecessor, Dennis Williams, were convicted and sent to prison along with a dozen others. A new reform caucus, Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD), followed the TDU model, arguing with the feds that the answer to corruption was member control.

No surprise: in a referendum, UAW members voted to switch to a one-member, one-vote system. That set the stage for the UAWD-backed slate, Members United, to surprise everyone by winning the presidency and a majority on the executive board.

It wasn't just Teamsters and the UAW, though. The half-million US workers who struck in 2023 doubled the strike number for 2022, which in turn nearly doubled the 2021 number, according to Johnnie Kallas of the Cornell Labor Action Tracker. A similar number struck in 2018 during the "Red for Ed" teacher uprisings, but this year there were many more private sector strikes, with actors, health care workers, and autoworkers leading the way.

Polling showed an uptick in union popularity to levels not seen since the 1960s. Strikes were popular, too: 78 percent supported the autoworkers, and 76 percent the actors and writers.

The year started off with a victory for seven thousand New York nurses (NYSNA) who struck and won strong language to enforce safer staffing levels. Their hospitals now pay big penalties if they don't keep enough nurses on the floor. Their victory inspired 1,700 nurses in New Jersey, members of the Steelworkers (USW), who have been on strike since August at Robert Wood Johnson hospital in New Brunswick.

In June, six thousand machinists at Spirit AeroSystems in Wichita hit the bricks, rejecting an offer their union pushed. They were objecting to sixty- and seventy-hour weeks. They won their weekends back.

The biggest strike of the year was by 160,000 actors in SAG-AFTRA who walked out in July, following 11,000 screenwriters (WGA) to the strike line. Hollywood sputtered to a halt as familiar faces made cameos in TV news reports from the picket line. They stayed out for four months. Writers won gains on pay, staffing, and sharing the bonanza from streaming.

In October a coalition of unions including the SEIU struck West Coast health care giant Kaiser Permanente - 75,000 people struck across four states, mostly in California. They won a 21 percent raise. Kaiser is under pressure from a new Cal-

ifornia law raising health care wages to a \$25 minimum over the next ten years.

In Los Angeles schools, support staff in SEIU Local 99 walked out and teachers followed, with 65,000 in two unions striking together. Reformers run the teachers' union in LA. New leadership similarly led Portland educators to strike in November for three weeks.

At the Big Three, 50,000 auto workers eventually struck in a strategically expanding action that caught the companies off guard. It started September 15 with one big plant of each of the Big Three: Ford, General Motors (GM), and Stellantis (formerly Chrysler). A week later the union called out GM and Stellantis parts

distribution centers, which supply profitable parts to dealerships. That got the companies' attention.

By expanding the strike to the companies that lagged and sparing those that were moving in the right direction, the union won contracts that abolished wage tiers and won life-changing raises for the lowest paid. While autoworkers didn't make up all the concessions of the last thirty years, they took big strides.

The award for most strikes surely goes to Los Angeles this year. In addition to the schools and the actors and writers, 15,000 UNITE HERE members have been on rolling short strikes at sixty-two hotels. Out-of-control housing prices mean hotel workers are commuting two hours each way, or living in their cars during the week, because they can't afford to live closer to their jobs.

Self-defense against changing tech was a recurring theme. At UPS, the new contract abolishes driver-facing surveillance cameras and forms a tech committee to approve changes. Actors and writers beat back the artificial intelligent-assisted theft of their work.

Automakers have been using the transition to electric vehicles (EVs) to undermine wages. Before the strike, union battery plant workers, who face dirty work and hazardous conditions, occupied a lower-paid tier. But with the new contract, union workers at GM's joint-venture battery plant Ultium Cells saw their top hourly rate immediately rise from \$20 to \$32.

Astonishingly, the union got GM and Stellantis to put new battery plants under the national contracts - even ones that are still being built or planned. At Ford the union will still have to organize these factories, but won neutrality agreements. "We've been told the EV future must be a race to the bottom," said Fain. "We called their bluff."

In Las Vegas, the culinary union (UNITE HERE) of hotel housekeepers and casino and restaurant workers, plus a separate local of bartenders, raised a strike threat with escalating marches and sit-ins. At the last minute, the three biggest properties agreed to major demands, including daily room cleaning.

This defeated a speed-up: the hotels had begun ordering housekeepers to clean rooms only at the end of a stay, meaning each room took much more work to clean, without reducing their daily room quota.

Often union organizers are told that striking is scary - a topic to downplay. But the opposite is proving to be the case: a powerful strike is a great recruiting tool.

Since the stand-up strike, hundreds of workers at non-union auto plants have been contacting the UAW to organize. At the Chattanooga, Tennessee, Volkswagen plant, workers signed one thousand cards in a week.

Workers across the economy have been clamoring to organize. The United Electrical Workers (UE) have scored a series of blowout votes to unionize among graduate workers - adding 14,000 members. At Northwestern, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Chicago, they won by more than 90 percent.

At the University of Minnesota, they won by 97 percent, in a unit that had voted down union efforts in 2005 and 2012; wages and health care were the top issues. Five thousand National Institutes of Health research fellows voted UAW "yes" by 97.8 percent in December.

All this organizing is creating pressure to strengthen labor law, and the Democrat-dominated National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has been cranking out favorable rulings.

Stericycle takes aim at company rules that chill organizing. Under the Cemex decision, if an employer commits an unfair labor practice so egregious that it would necessitate another union election, the employer will automatically have to recognize the union (assuming the union filed with majority support). That would have helped in the Kumho Tire drive, where a revote added years of delays.

Joe Biden's NLRB general counsel Jennifer Abruzzo is clearly trying to enforce the law: fired Starbucks workers, for example, have been able to get their jobs back. But deep-pocketed companies are still getting away with a strategy that Kallas at Cornell called "litigate litigate litigate, delay delay delay."

A theme this year is that reform movements led to bolder contract demands, which led to winning contract campaigns and strikes, which are giving workers hope in new organizing.

Inspired by good examples, the renovating spirit is sparking to life in more and more unions. There's already a sizable reform pole in the 1.2 million-member Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), centered in the union's biggest local. Rail machinist reformers look set to finally win a challenged election in the 7,500-member District Lodge 19, which represents rail mechanics all over the country.

A new caucus, CREW, has emerged in the Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE). And potential new organizing in the auto sector could change the country. It all adds up to exciting prospects as we enter 2024. (IPA Service)

## Republican presidential campaign in US is in turmoil as Vivek Ramaswamy backs Trump

By: Sushil Kuttty

There is political turmoil in India and American politics is coming to a boil. The fate of democracy, yeah? Should it bother us, common Indians, what happens in the USA? The excitement and the daily rumblings. If in India, it is the attrition on the steps of Parliament, in the United States, it is Donald Trump whose Tele-series 'The Apprentice', with its tag-line 'You're Fired', appears to be still running and the latest episode has Trump fired from the Colorado ballot by the Supreme Court of Colorado courtesy "insurrection" charge against him.

The excitement doubled when one of the two Indian-Americans in the fray for the Republican nomination threatened to remove himself from the Colorado ballot and join Trump. Indian-American candidate Vivek Ramaswamy is like Trump, unpredictable and volatile. Ramaswamy's threat puts Nikki Haley, the other Indian-American in the race, in a spot. Ramaswamy has asked Haley and Chris Christie and Ron DeSantis to also to remove themselves from the Colorado ballot.

Nikki Haley is trailing Donald Trump by a mile in the polls, but is yards ahead of Ramaswamy, why should she back Trump and Ramaswamy? Trump kept away from the Republican presidential debates but Vivek is there to raise the temperature above room-level and his favourite punching bag is the former UN envoy. Haley calls Vivek "scum" and Vivek holds up a "Nikki=Corrupt" placard. The two are playing the US version of "North Indian Vs. South Indian".

Now, Vivek has asked Nikki to dump her blank stare, which is Nikki's standard response to criticism, and do what Republican voters expect her to, which is stand firm with Vivek and serve the MAGA cause.

Haley was Trump's UN envoy and owes Trump her transformation from bit player to presidential hopeful. The wrath of the Trumpian Republicans awaits the insurrectionist in the Republican Party. And Ramaswamy's ultimatum is a warning to Nikki Haley, Ron DeSantis and Chris Christie.

At your own peril is the message. The MAGA movement is the mainstay of the Republican challenge to a second Biden-Kamala Harris term. But doesn't run with Nikki Haley. She is expecting Trump's conviction, sooner rather than later, and Nikki will not do a Vivek. Haley has powerful backers, huge moneybags and like a Republican voter told her to her face, "You speak and sound like a Democrat".

Contrast Vivek Ramaswamy with Nikki Haley. Nikki is the older person. Ramaswamy is the intelligent student banished to the back-bench. The mainstream American media sees in Ramaswamy another billionaire "insurrectionist". Ramaswamy's threat to remove himself from Colorado has upset Haley's plans. Ron DeSantis is in a dilemma and Chris Christie, though he wants the people to vote Trump out and not the court, must be praying for "more Colorados" as would Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

The advantage for Vivek Ramaswamy is that he has made a place for himself in the MAGA heart. Perhaps even Donald Trump's, who knows? 'The Republicans In Name Only' back Nikki Haley even as Donald Trump is the runaway victory in

opinion polls. And Vivek Ramaswamy has taken a liking for Donald Trump's coattails. The reality is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis ranks second behind Trump in the opinion polls, and Nikki Haley is snapping at the DeSantis heels while Vivek Ramaswamy gets all the nasty press and the YouTube's hurrahs.

Meanwhile, the Colorado ballot ban gives Trump more room to further deploy MAGA. Trump is placed ahead of Joe Biden in almost all of the swing states. The Colorado ban and Vivek Ramaswamy's threat to self-ban have together increased excitement to fever-pitch. There is the danger of Haley, DeSantis and Chris Christie being swept away in the Trump tsunami.

Vivek Ramaswamy's warning "I pledge to withdraw from the Colorado GOP primary ballot until Trump is also allowed to be

held under a neutral caretaker government, something that Zia and her allies have been pushing for as well.

Additionally, they have threatened to impose sanctions on key Bangladeshi government employees and politicians if their demands are not met. This interference could ultimately result in giving the opposition party an electoral advantage, all in the name of championing democracy.

It is ironic that the US is making these moves while simultaneously cozying up to the Pakistan Army, a move that could echo the ill-fated decisions made in the 1970s. Just

two years after the humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US and its Western allies seem to be repeating history by interfering in the affairs of Bangladesh without learning from their past mistakes. The US and its Western allies need to reassess their approach to Bangladesh and consider the potential consequences of their interference.

Instead of repeating the same blunders from the past, it is essential to take into account the complexities of the region and form a more nuanced and strategic approach. It is crucial for the US and its allies to learn from history and avoid making the same mistakes that led to disastrous outcomes in the past. (The author can be reached at shashankadas0007@gmail.com)



The recent actions of the US and its Western allies with regards to Bangladesh are reminiscent of their ill-fated intervention in Pakistan in 1971. As genocide unfolded in what is now Bangladesh, the US and its allies intervened and ended up making a mistake that led to catastrophic consequences. It seems that history may be repeating itself with their interference in the upcoming elections in Bangladesh.

The US is pressuring Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to concede space to the opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Khaleda Zia.

However, this move could potentially prop up a regime in Dhaka that could be detrimental not only to human rights but also to regional security dynamics.

Indian officials have expressed their concerns to their US counterparts about the repercussions of undue pressure on Bangladesh.

However, it seems that their warnings have not been heeded by the US. The potential rise of the Zia-led BNP, along with its significant impact on the security of the region, it could also result in pushing Bangladesh closer to China, thereby creating further problems for India.

The US and its Western allies are advocating for the upcoming elections in Bangladesh to be

held under a neutral caretaker government, something that Zia and her allies have been pushing for as well.

Additionally, they have threatened to impose sanctions on key Bangladeshi government employees and politicians if their demands are not met. This interference could ultimately result in giving the opposition party an electoral advantage, all in the name of championing democracy.

# Hindi imposition or harmless symbolism? Why BJP has renamed India's criminal laws

By: Tara Krishnaswamy

Three bills, allegedly overhauling India's criminal laws, have been passed in the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session – and they are baptised solely in mouthfuls of Hindi. The bills had earlier sparked a clamour against Hindi imposition, although the bills' contents were in English, bearing over 80 percent of British legacy verbiage.

The bills – the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, and Bharatiya Sakshya Bill – would replace the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Indian Evidence Act.

**Does their naming warrant an outrage or is it harmless symbolism?**

In politics, nothing happens in a vacuum and every move must be examined in context. Why were these bills tabled in the Monsoon Session of Parliament after nine years of government, that too at the end of the session, with errors, without wide consultations, and in the absence of the opposition? Were they a distraction from the Manipur crisis and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's absence in Parliament then?

BJP's sustained Hindi push This is not the first time that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the centre has waved the red flag that is Hindi to divert the bulls charging at its mistakes – and opposition leaders have recognised as such in the past too. However, there has been an ac-

celerated and relentless push for Hindi domination by the BJP since 2014. This is over and above the special status accorded to it in articles 343-351 of the constitution, and exclusive budgetary allowances for its promotions that predate the BJP.

Ministries in the current government, with disciplined consistency, have been raising the Hindi petard throughout their nine years in power: a parliamentary panel recommending that Hindi be made compulsory in all institutions, the National Education Policy (NEP) prescribing a three-language formula defaulting to Hindi until it was resisted and an erring clause was censored, announcements that Hindi must be accepted as the national language sooner than later, CRPF exams mandating Hindi for 25 marks, and Hindi-only forms and receipts in national public services like railways and banks among others.

**All of this has faced backlash and angered sizeable sections of the public, so why does the BJP keep poking the language bear?**

Indeed, daily administration was and is, linguistically, a solved problem in India. Bureaucracy is constructed for sub-national integration. IAS officers posted to states have been learning alien tongues quite seamlessly, while state administrative services are naturally language-aligned. Printing of forms and conducting examinations in state-specific official languages, in addition to English, is no rocket science either.

Plus, the political bureaucracy at the ministerial levels are not the ones communicating with people in the states. Their interactions are primarily with state administrative units, in the official languages. Of all the myriad complex problems plaguing our executive, no one has complained about language barriers in administration. So what is the Modi government's motive here? The underlying reason is entirely political. It always has been.

**Hindi and its political implications**

Until the heyday of the British Empire and subsequently the first elections of independent India in 1952, no empire had ever encompassed all of today's India. The Mauryas, Guptas, Marathas – none had the reach into the deep south and the far east, even at their tallest, while they daily reigned over North India and Pakistan, a cultural continuum.

The peoples, especially of the deep south and the far east, were not quite acclimated to Hindi until post-independence and Bollywood, while English has fallen on their ears much more since the 1960s. For many in these states, Hindi is more alien than English, not to mention its relatively low aspirational and economic capital for the effort extracted.

However, there are grave political implications to Hindi. National parties, essentially Hindi parties, have been capturing power over a land that is 43 percent Hindi (including Urdu and Punjabi) speaking (population wise), by seeking direct vote in a



language only remotely familiar to some and entirely alien to the rest of the 57 percent. That brings us to the campaign machinery of parties and their linguistic challenges thereof.

While the Congress has a reputation for a centralised high command, its model is regional satraps raking in votes in the name of the supreme leader de jure. Today's Siddaramiah, Gehlot, Bhagel etc, have amassed their own mass base, which they exploit for votes in their own languages, as did yesterday's YS Rajasekhara Reddy in Telugu, and Oomen Chandy in Malayalam, even if in the name of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

In fact, the Congress central leadership is restricted to Hindi campaigns, mitigated with live translation. The BJP should not have it worse except that their regional leadership, especially in the non-Hindi states, has frayed into party high-command appointees, which means that they command no mass loyalty. The Congress is a bottom-up structure

in states; the BJP a top-down hierarchy.

Election campaigns for vote mobilisation are not only in Modi's name, they are by Modi, only in Gujarati and Hindi.

This is even more wicked than what alleviates with live translation. Leaving aside potentially damaging gaffes by translators – like when Amit Shah's drip irrigation was translated as "urine irrigation" by the BJP Tamil Nadu's H Raja – cultural references do not carry. There is no maa-beti or colloquial Lakshman Rekha phrasing in most languages, usages that Modi tends to favour. Instead, Akka/Thangai-Akka/Thangi/Akka-Chelli (elder and younger sister) or the "do-not-cross line," are equivalents shorn of the same cultural context. "Cheddham-Chooddam" is unique to Telugu, as "Eduthom-Kavuthom" is to Tamil. They don't travel across state borders either! Pakistan is not as inimical, as there isn't a locus in the south. And pre-British history is more different than common, between

the north and the east or the north and south. As things stand, the BJP's power fades in states away from the Hindi heartland, other than in Modi's home state of Gujarat. They find it difficult to muster an absolute majority beyond where Hindi is able to be spoken, in many cases forming the government against the popular vote by luring defectors.

This means that Modi's appeal loses in translation beyond Gujarat and Hindi; and worse, forces him into competition with local orature, an act deeply infraction to his Vishwaguru sensibilities.

**A prerequisite for cultural propagation**

Ensuring Hindi across states is not just about a language for electoral communication. It is a prerequisite for cultural propagation, without which metaphors fall flat, exhortations render as comic translations, and impassioned pleas fall on befuddled ears.

There is no political orature unyoked to lingual literature, and Modi himself recognises that in inserting small cultural references in other languages during his Hindi speech.

But that only goes so far. Local rhetoric (hence state parties) cannot be superseded with a culture that is alien to the locals, and so, sub-national sovereign cultures must submit to Hindi, and ultimately efface for communication to carry compellingly.

It has already occurred with the myriad languages across Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana etc., making Hindi's culture the dominant

hegemon while secluding and erasing other linguistic cultures like Magahi, Awadhi, Bagheli, Bhojpuri, Bundeli, Chhattisgarhi, Garhwali, Haryanawi, Kanauiji etc. Hindi becomes the medium that can overlay cultural values of north India – the Lakshman Rekhas and the Lal Ankhs – atop sub-national cultures. This metamorphosis fits well with BJP/RSS's ethos for the long game of homogeneity, ably assisted via policy changes like the National Education Policy, revision of syllabi, overhauling the intellectual capital of universities, renaming of criminal laws etc.

The route to the Indian vote market is cultural, and Hindi imposition is not just desirable for the BJP but imperative for them. Hindi is what shifts the balance of power, without which the BJP, with its political sub-units as a top-down hierarchical structure, is but a regional entity.

However, in all the hyper-emotional arguments against the linguistic imperialism of Hindi and for the diversity of the various languages and cultures in India, what one forgets is just how emotive Hindi is for Hindutva. So much so that he calls out MK Gandhi's "sophistry" and "perverse attitude on the question of the national language of India" against "the charm and the purity of" Hindi, as a reason for shooting him dead.

So, as far as the three bills go, the rose by any other name isn't just a rose, it is an assimilationist and colonising superstructure. (Courtesy: The Quint)

## Pangs of unemployment: Why India's youth is turning to Bhagat Singh

By: Ram Punivani

The parliament breach on December 13 was the result of a plot hatched between four individuals who were aiming to air their plight because of unemployment in the country. Among the four, there was an e-rickshaw driver, a farmer, a government job aspirant and a daily wage worker. They were given the visitors' pass by Pratap Simha, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP from Karnataka. The two of them who entered the parliament had hidden the spray bottle used in the break inside their shoes. The breach occurred on the 21st anniversary of the 2001 terror attack on the parliament.

Around the same time, a man and a woman – Amol Shinde and Neelam Azad – sprayed coloured gas from canisters while also shouting slogans like "tana shahi nahi chalegi" outside the parliament premises. Azad is from Haryana's Jind and has many degrees to her credit, M.A., M.Ed., M.Phil and has also cleared the National Eligibility Test. Yet, she could not get any job. Slogans shouted by them were against dictatorship, for protection of the constitution and rising unemployment. They also shouted 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and 'Vande Mataram'.

These individuals were part of a social media group, 'Bhagat Singh Fans Club', where they came in contact with each other. Their inspiration for these actions stemmed from socialist revolutionary Bhagat Singh's similar actions in the central assembly hall in 1929. Bhagat Singh with his friend Batukeshwar Dutt had thrown a bomb from the visitors' gallery while making sure that nobody was hurt. They also threw leaflets in the assembly against British colonial rule.

While the four people have been booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), this incident is the most powerful attempt to bring the issue of rising unemployment to national attention.

As a recall, Bhagat Singh and his comrades

had resorted to this method as they knew that their voice would not be carried by the media. There is an uncanny similarity to the current situation where the 'mainstream' media, appropriately called 'Godi media', is totally apathetic to the concerns of the common people. The problems of rising prices, poverty and unemployment has not been its concern at all.

When Modi was campaigning in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) promised that they would be creating 20 million (two crore) jobs per year. The real picture has been the complete opposite. The first major blow to employment came with demonetisation when crores of workers lost their jobs in the small-scale rural sector. In most of the unorganised sectors, working hours have gone up from eight to 12 hours per day. Meanwhile, the founder of Infosys, N.R. Narayana Murthy, advocated for 70-hour work weeks.

A report in the Economic Times pointed out that "the overall rate (of unemployment) rose to 10.05% in October from 7.09% in September and [it was] the highest since May 2021. Rural unemployment jumped to 10.82% from 6.2%, while the urban rate eased slightly to 8.44%".

"Last month, Indian tech-services outsourcing firms, including Infosys and Wipro, announced plans to halt hiring of college graduates, potentially leaving thousands of fresh engineering students without jobs," the newspaper reported.

This is taking place against the backdrop of shrinking democratic spaces for protest; the universities are preventing the student unions' elections and blocking the seminars which may be critical of government policies.

While it is an open-and-shut case of frustrated students or youth expressing their anguish, albeit through wrong means, the government has levied the draconian charge of UAPA against them.

Rahul Gandhi attributed the attack to rising unemployment and inflation while the home minister has not made any statement in parlia-

ment, despite the opposition demanding it. Prime Minister Modi, rather than seeing the obvious, said that this act is a "serious breach" and there is a need to find the elements behind it.

It is true that the chink in the armour of the security system in parliament has been exposed; it's vulnerable to even minor attempts like that of these young individuals. On the other hand, it has highlighted the need to address the issue of unemployment rather than seeing it as some sort of a conspiracy.

It is clear these individuals are not part of any terror group. Mercifully, none of the involved youth is a Muslim; neither do they belong to any terror-related organisation. The latter would have given an unfortunate boost to the efforts of those out to intensify Islamophobia.

The incident should serve as a reminder that it is not enough to just pay lip service to Bhagat Singh. Singh's concern for the deprived sections of society needs to be highlighted. Let us remember that mass movements were central to his ideology. The path of violence was abandoned by him. He had come to the conclusion that we can achieve independence only through mass mobilisation.

In 1929, his attack was intended solely to make the 'deaf hear,' not to harm anyone. It is heartening to note that our youth are turning to Bhagat Singh for guidance in the current troubled times and that many groups in the name of Bhagat Singh have sprung up.

The entire episode should be approached with the right spirit, unlike the attempts by Godi media to portray them as villains. The aim of the youth is crystal clear; their inspiration is not from any ideology of terror but from the greatest revolutionary of our freedom struggle.

While there's no doubt that the four adopted a wrong method, their anguish should be recognised. Their aim of revising our 'employment generation' policy needs to be given a serious look, rather than searching for a conspiracy. (Courtesy: The Wire)

By: Kabir Taneja

The terror attack by Hamas against Israel on 7 October arguably ended a rose-tinted overview of undercurrents of security in West Asia (Middle East) amidst the euphoria of normalisation processes being undertaken in the region. Although not exclusively by design, the attacks and the ensuing hostage crisis did work well in casting a shadow over what a "new" Middle East would and should look like. In short, two messages were delivered in the most gruesome manner. First, tall, gleaming glass buildings and large infrastructure projects cannot substitute for long-term and sustainable processes for building peace. And second, intra-regional normalisation processes now cannot brush the Palestine issue under the rug.

With Israel's intended strategy in the fallout of 7 October—that of annihilation of Hamas in Gaza—the conflict is all set to go well into 2024. The Israeli state and its people will prioritise the conflict over any other regional diplomatic architecture. For this, Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, despite his lack of popularity and calls for his removal, will see the country's actions through the coming months. And these few months will also determine how the Arab states will manoeuvre their relationship with Israel, the United States (US), and by association, their partner states both in the West and East alike.

**The Israel-Palestine trajectory** 7/10 attacks changed multiple things for both Israeli geopolitics and domestic politics. To begin with, Israel is tasked to rebuild a fundamental institution it had cultivated over decades, so much so its successes and invincibility were enshrined in facts, fables, and Hollywood storytelling. From the Israel Defence Force and famed technologies such as Iron Dome to its agencies from Mossad to Shin Bet, Israel's perception of water-tight securitisation lies in tatters. Rebuilding this would be critical for the state to reinstall a sense of security within its population.

Simultaneously, regional Islamic powers would also need to review how they hope to move forward on the Palestine issue. The fact that states such as Egypt and Jordan have refused to host Palestinian refugees attempting to flee Gaza highlights the complexities that go beyond just the Arab-Jews narrative. Along with the population, the Palestinian geography holds equal equity. Any displacement means that soon, Palestinians will have less of a say on the future of both Gaza and the West Bank. What Israel plans to do regarding a political track along with its current military operations will be a critical aspect of how this conflict evolves in 2024. Finally, regionally, there is no monolithic 'Arab' view on the Palestine issue.

While many regional states agree that the crisis needs a long-term, viable, and acceptable resolution, most within this block first look at the issue from the lens of their individual strategic interests. With Israel's publicly stated aim of 'destroying' Hamas as the primary policy, the war may continue well into the coming year even if Hamas hierarchy, such as the organisation's Gaza military (Qassam Brigades) chief Yahya Sinwar, are eliminated. Beyond Gaza, Hezbollah's presence in Lebanon and Syria also risks an extension of the conflict into other territories.

**Regional and international concerns** While the process of diplomatic normalisation in the Middle East has been celebrated over the past years, from the Abraham Accords signed in 2021 to the

more recent Saudi-Iran détente brokered by China, it is the Israel-Iran conflagration which has no resolution in sight. Tehran looks upon Israel from a 'Huntingtonian' view[1], that is, as a clash of civilisations, and not merely about geography, borders, or strategic one-upmanship. This is further exacerbated by the fact that both Israel and Iran as of today stand against a two-state solution.

From a regional and international level, there are multiple areas where concerns spill well beyond the Middle East's geographic interests. Recent attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea, including those sailing to and from India, by Houthi militants in Yemen who have vowed to act in favour of Hamas, bring in an international dimension of protecting these vital waterways.

While the Strait of Hormuz has always been a flashpoint, the Bab al-Mandeb Strait leading into the Red Sea and the Suez Canal which carries around 12 percent of all global trade raises the stakes for regional and international actors to protect and maintain the sanctity of these waterways. As India's economic stakes also grow, the share of Indian seafarers is also expected to rise drastically over the coming decade, from the current 8 percent to 20 percent of the total global strength.

The above scenario is particularly critical for large Asian economies such as India, Japan, South Korea, and China, all being net importers of oil and gas and relying heavily on supplies from the Middle East for their energy security. The US has also now called upon partners to build a multinational task force to protect these shipping lanes from sophisticated attacks being conducted by militias such as the Houthis.

**Multilateralism and Global South** The US veto for a ceasefire in Gaza at the United Nations Security Council laid further ground for debate on the future of post-World War II multilateralism, its veracity in the current climate, and how a rising Global South views these West-centric institutions. It also feeds into a larger US-China competition currently fermenting globally.

The Palestinian cause does raise significant support in the Global South, specifically when seen from a 'de-colonisation' perspective. However, again, like the Arab world, the 'Global South' is not a monolith. Countries like India (amongst others) that seek reforms of the UNSC and place themselves in leadership roles to represent the Global South will have to balance between prevailing realities and their own realpolitik. These challenges will see an increase in 2024, with 2023 witnessing a total of 183 regional and local conflicts underway, the highest number in the last three decades. Beyond bilateral and regional diplomacy, the war in Gaza also spills over into a challenging global order where states like India and China are looking to carve out more space for themselves and their individual interests as traditional multilateral mechanisms to address the Middle East's conflicts appear in a derelict state.

Between regional and international intricacies, the impact of the war in Gaza may dilute as Israel continues a long-term military campaign, but fundamentally it will continue to challenge global security as a long-standing flashpoint. It may also force a level of recalculation of how the economic evolution of the region is tied to addressing the region's poor track record of addressing conflict and maintaining long-term stability by delivering sustainable security. (Courtesy: ORF)

## Ahead of Bangladesh election next year, Sheikh Hasina regime doubles down on propaganda

By: Jyoti Rahman

A general election is scheduled in Bangladesh for January 7, but if it is anything like the last two elections, most people in the country are not expected to cast their ballots.

The election in January 2014 was boycotted by the main opposition, which feared widespread rigging. The ruling Awami League attained a majority: even before Election Day, 153 of 300 seats were declared uncontested.

Fears of rigging notwithstanding, the opposition did participate in the December 2018 polls. Perhaps they should not have. Across the country, ballot boxes were stuffed the night before Election Day.

The government of Sheikh Hasina, which has been in power since 2008, has swapped democratic affirmation by voters with a reliance on security agencies that carry out rampant human rights violations – extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and suchlike. Dissenters and human rights activists – Adilur Rahman Khan, among them – have been jailed on trumped-up charges.

Hasina shows every intention of staying in power come what may, describing her party in an interview

with The Economist earlier this year as the only legitimate one in Bangladesh. One wrinkle in her plans, however, is the fact that the world has started to take notice of the situation.

In December 2021, the Biden administration slapped sanctions against senior officers of police and paramilitary forces for human rights violations. This has been followed with visa bans that will apply to anyone trying to impede a free and fair election in Bangladesh.

Legislatures and the executive branches from Brussels to Canberra have discussed Bangladesh's democratic backsliding in general and the worsening human rights situation in particular. The European Parliament, for example, adopted a resolution in September that specifically criticised the prison sentences against Adilur Rahman Khan and his colleague.

Meanwhile, Russia, China, and Iran have come out in favour of the Hasina regime, claiming that the concerns expressed by liberal democracies about human rights abuses in Bangladesh constitute "meddling in internal affairs".

The Hasina regime is not unaware of the drubbing its global image is taking and has singled out human rights organisations in Bangladesh as

one of the primary culprits for creating such humiliations.

As part of its strategy to counter the critiques, the government has over the past year reportedly sought out writers, academics and content creators to drum up favourable opinion pieces and events that could be reported in global media.

For example, a seminar in Brussels on October 11, attended by high-profile Members of the European Parliament and European Commission officials, featured a robust defence of the regime's governance record and strong arguments that the accusation of human rights abuses are propaganda.

The event, titled "Human Rights Situation and Democracy in Bangladesh: The Fight against Disinformation and False Narratives" in a European Union building would presumably have supported the regime's counteroffensive against human rights groups in Bangladesh quite effectively.

Except it didn't quite go right. The event was hosted and helmed by MEP Maximilian Krah, who belongs to the notorious far-right Alternative for Germany or AfD party, and has been accused of fraud and influence peddling from Beijing. Krah's case on contract fraud has been trans-

ferred to the European Public Prosecutor's Office and is under criminal investigation.

The event was sparsely attended, as demonstrated by photos of the audience. As it happens, the Hasina regime seems to have a penchant for getting suckered by propaganda that backfires. For example, hundreds of articles popped up in the English-language global media praising the Bangladesh government in the past year, but the authors were subsequently found to be completely fictitious. It was a massive disinformation campaign by fake experts and authors to fool the world and the country – except the campaign was so incompetent that the non-existence of these authors was discovered quite easily by AFP.

Undaunted by the exposes and debacles, the regime is proceeding with a programme to train 600,000 activists to counter what they claim is Opposition propaganda.

In this age of social media, election campaigns in even mature democracies are plagued by disinformation and propaganda. Bangladeshi democracy has been described as "being on life support", with the government clamping down on the Opposition ahead of the election. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

# Ukraine ends year disappointed by stalemate with Russia, and anxious about aid from allies

**KYIV, Dec 21:** The year started with high hopes for Ukrainian troops planning a counteroffensive against Russia. It ended with disappointment on the battlefield, an increasingly somber mood among troops and anxiety about the future of Western aid for Ukraine's war effort. In between, there was a short-lived rebellion in Russia, a dam collapse in Ukraine, and the spilling of much blood on both sides of the conflict.

Twenty-two months since it invaded, Russia has about one-fifth of Ukraine in its grip, and the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line has barely budged

this year.

A crunch has come away from the battlefield. In Western countries that have championed Ukraine's struggle against its much bigger adversary, political deliberations over billions in financial aid are increasingly strained.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is playing a waiting game two years into a war that proved to be a costly miscalculation by the Kremlin. He is wagering that the West's support will gradually crumble, fractured by political divisions, eroded by war fatigue and distracted by other demands, such as China's menacing of Taiwan and

war in the Middle East.

The international political outlook could turn sharply in Putin's favour after next November's elections in the United States — by far Ukraine's biggest military supplier and where some Republican candidates are pushing to wind down support for its war.

Nearly half of the US public believes the country is spending too

much on Ukraine, according to polling published in November by The Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research.



Washington DC. "Transatlantic solidarity has been steady. But I don't think it will remain steady

forever."

The shifting sentiment could benefit Putin, analysts say, as he seeks at least to keep Ukraine in limbo and eventually compel it to accept a bad deal to end the war. Putin announced in early December that he will run for reelection in March, all but guaranteeing he keeps his repressive grip on Russia for at least another six years.

"It's been a good year, I would even actually call it a great year" for Putin, says Mathieu Boulegue, a consulting fellow for the Russia-Eurasia programme at Chatham House think tank in London.

Western sanctions are biting but

not crippling the Russian economy. Russian forces are still dictating much of what happens on the battlefield, where its defensive lines feature minefields up to 20 kilometres (12 miles) deep that have largely held back Ukraine's month-long counteroffensive.

The counteroffensive was launched before Ukraine's forces were fully ready, a hurried political attempt to demonstrate that Western aid could alter the course of the war, said Marina Miron of the Defense Studies Department of King's College London.

"The expectations (for the counteroffensive) were unrealistic," she

said. "It turned out to be a failure." Putin got a victory he desperately wanted in May in the fight for the bombed-out city of Bakhmut, the longest and bloodiest battle of the war. It was a trophy to show Russians after his army's winter offensive failed to take other Ukrainian cities and towns along the front line.

A mutiny in June by the Wagner mercenary group was the biggest challenge to Putin's authority in his more than two decades in power. But it backfired. Putin defused the revolt and kept the allegiance of his armed forces, reasserting his hold on the Kremlin. (AP)

*The offensive has devastated much of northern Gaza, killed nearly 20,000 Palestinians, and driven some 1.9 million people - nearly 85% of the population - from their homes*

## Israel uncovers major Hamas command center in Gaza City as cease-fire talks gain momentum

**JERUSALEM, Dec 21:** The Israeli military on Wednesday said it had uncovered a major Hamas command center in the heart of Gaza City, inflicting what it described as a serious blow to the Islamic militant group as pressure grows on Israel to scale back its devastating military offensive in the coastal enclave.

The army said it had exposed the center of a vast underground network used by Hamas to move weapons, militants and supplies throughout the Gaza Strip. Israel has said destroying the tunnels is a major objective of the offensive. The announcement came as Hamas' top leader arrived in Egypt for talks aimed at brokering a temporary cease-fire and a new deal for Hamas to swap Israeli hostages for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Israeli leaders have vowed to press ahead with the two-month-old offensive, launched in response to a bloody cross-border attack by Hamas in October that killed some 1,200 people and saw 240 others taken hostage.

The offensive has devastated

much of northern Gaza, killed nearly 20,000 Palestinians, and driven some 1.9 million people — nearly 85% of the population — from their homes. The widespread destruction and heavy civilian death toll has drawn increasing international calls for a cease-fire. Hamas militants have put up stiff resistance lately against Israeli ground troops, and its forces appear to remain largely intact in southern Gaza. It also continues to fire rockets into Israel every day.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has continued to support Israel's right to defend itself while also urging greater effort to protect Gaza's civilians.

But in some of the toughest American language yet, Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday called on Israel to scale back its operation.

"It's clear that the conflict will move and needs to move to a lower intensity phase," Blinken said. He said the U.S. wants to see "more targeted operations" with smaller levels of forces focused on specific targets, such as



Hamas' leaders and the group's tunnel network.

"As that happens, I think you'll see as well, the harm done to civilians also decrease significantly," he said.

His comments were more pointed than statements by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who in a visit to Israel this week said the U.S. would not dictate any timeframes to its ally.

The Israeli military escorted Israeli reporters into Palestine Square in the heart of Gaza City to show off what it described as the center of Hamas' tunnel network. Military commanders boasted that they had uncovered offices, tunnels and elevators

used by Hamas' top leaders. The military released videos of underground offices and claimed to have found a wheelchair belonging to Hamas' shadowy military commander, Mohammed Deif, who has not been seen in public in years.

The army's chief spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said the army had located a vast underground complex. "They all used this infrastructure routinely, during emergencies and also at the beginning of the war on Oct. 7," he said. He said the tunnels stretched across Gaza and into major hospitals. The claims could not be independently verified. Hagari also indicated that

## 'We've deepened our partnership with India through Quad': Blinken

**NEW YORK, Dec 21:** The US has deepened its partnership with India in 2023 and elevated cooperation with it through the Quad along with Japan and Australia, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said.

Blinken's remarks came at his end-of-year press availability at the State Department in Washington on Wednesday. "We've deepened our partnership with India. We've elevated cooperation through the Quad with India, Japan, and Australia," he said. The US, Japan, India and Australia had in 2017 given shape to the long-pending proposal of setting up the Quad or the Quadrilateral coalition to counter China's aggressive behaviour in the resource-rich Indo-Pacific region.

US President Joe Biden hosted Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a State Visit in Washington in June this year and the US leader had then travelled to Delhi for the G20 Leaders' Summit hosted by PM Modi under India's presidency of the grouping.

Blinken said that Washington's partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region have never been stronger and the US will continue to engage with China from a position of strength.

He noted that in 2023, Biden held his historic summit at Camp David with Japan and South Korea, cementing a new era of trilateral cooperation.

The US is working with the United Kingdom and Australia to produce nuclear-powered submarines. Washington

launched new comprehensive strategic partnerships with Vietnam and Indonesia, a new Defence Cooperation Agreement with the Philippines, new trilateral initiatives with the Philippines and Japan, and new embassies in the Solomon Islands and Tonga, he said.

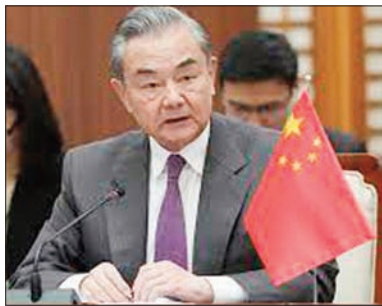
"The United States is more closely aligned, more closely aligned than ever, with the G7, with the EU, with other allies and partners on the challenges presented by Beijing. And we're working together to address them," he said, adding that the US is deepening cooperation and coordination between NATO and its Indo-Pacific allies.

"These efforts have allowed us to engage more effectively when tackling areas of concern, like China's coercive trade and economic practices, peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the East and South China Seas, and human rights," he said.

Blinken noted that Washington's efforts to restore high-level diplomacy, starting with his trip to Beijing in July, "have allowed us to take practical steps to reduce the risk that competition veers into conflict, as well as to make progress on issues that matter in the lives of our fellow citizens."

"That was on full display when President Biden met with President Xi (Jinping) last month and made tangible progress on issues that matter, that matter to Americans as well as to people around the world," he said. (PTI)

## China vows to keep up military pressure against the Philippines as territorial disputes grow tenser



**BEIJING, Dec 21:** China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi says the country will maintain military pressure on the Philippines amid a dispute over sovereignty in the South China Sea that could involve US forces defending their treaty partner.

In a phone conversation on Wednesday with his Philippine counterpart, Enrique A. Manalo, Wang "warned that if the Philippine side misjudges the situation, goes its own way, or even concludes with ill-intentioned external forces to continue to stir up troubles, China will defend its rights in accordance with law and respond resolutely," the official Xinhua News Agency reported. Wang's comments follow China's mobilization of its coast guard and maritime militia to block Philippine supply missions to support its soldiers and fishermen.

China claims sovereignty over virtu-

ally the entire South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping, putting it at odds with the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei, who all maintain claims over islands, reefs and undersea resources in the region. In particularly sharp comments, Wang was quoted as accusing the Philippines of having "changed its policy stance so far, reneged on the promises it has made, provoked troubles at sea, and undermined China's legitimate and lawful rights."

"Noting that the bilateral relationship now stands at a crossroads, with its future yet to be decided, Wang said the Philippine side must act with caution," Xinhua reported Thursday.

"Instead of continuing in the wrong direction, the Philippine side should return to the right path as soon as possible, with properly handling and managing the current maritime situation as a top priority," Wang was quoted as saying. Wang gave no details on what agreements Manila had allegedly abandoned.

Manalo's office described the conversation as a "frank and candid exchange," saying the sides had reached a "clearer understanding of our respective positions on a number of issues."

Territorial disputes have grown tenser as China seeks to cement its territorial claims in defiance of the US and its allies, the Philippines, Japan,

South Korea and close partner Taiwan, which China claims as a breakaway province and threatens to annex by military force. The head of the Philippine military was with his forces aboard a supply boat when it was blasted with a water cannon, surrounded and bumped by Chinese coast guard ships earlier this month in the disputed South China Sea. China, meanwhile, accused the United States of encouraging the Philippines, its treaty ally, to provoke China for its own purposes, though it provided no direct evidence.

Along with using water cannons, Philippines officials said that Chinese coast guard ships used a military-grade laser that caused Filipino crew members temporary blindness and engaged in dangerous blocking and shadowing maneuvers that caused minor collisions. Washington is bound by a 1951 treaty to help defend the Philippines from attack. That pledge has grown stronger with the election of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who recently said that the situation in the South China Sea "has become more dire" as China expands its presence.

China has showed interest in atolls and shoals that are "closer and closer" to the coast of the Philippines, with the nearest atoll about 60 nautical miles (111 kilometers) away, Marcos said during a visit to the US state of Hawaii last month. (AP)

## NKorea's Kim again threatens use of nukes as he praises troops for long-range missile launch

**SEOUL, Dec 21:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country has a policy of not hesitating to launch a nuclear strike on a rival if provoked, as he praised troops involved in its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, state media reported on Thursday.

Since adopting an escalatory nuclear doctrine last year, Kim has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons pre-emptively. But many foreign experts say North Korea has yet to obtain functioning nuclear missiles and is also unlikely to use its nukes first because it's outgunned by the U.S. and its allied forces.

North Korea on Monday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, calling the drill a warning over confrontational U.S. and South Korean moves. North Korea cited a recent U.S.-South Korean meeting on boosting their nuclear deterrence plans.

The North's Korean Central News Agency said Kim met troops at the General Missile Bureau on Wednesday to congratulate them on the launch of the developmental solid-fueled Hwasong-18 missile, the North's newest and most powerful ICBM.

During the meeting, Kim said the launch demonstrated the evolution of the North's nuclear doctrine and strategy "not to hesitate even with a nuclear attack when the enemy provokes it with nukes," KCNA said.

Kim said peace is guaranteed by a war posture of being willing to launch preemptive strikes on the enemy anywhere to make it feel fear, KCNA said.

Last year, North Korea adopted a law that stipulates a broad range of situations in which it can use nuclear weapons. Since the beginning of 2022, it has also test-fired about 100 ballistic missiles, many of them nuclear-capable weapons targeting the U.S. and South Korea. Monday's Hwasong-18 launch was the weapon's third test-flight this year.

The U.S. and South Korean governments have repeatedly warned that any attempt by North Korea to use nuclear weapons would result in the end of the Kim Jong Un government. The allies have also expanded their military training, which Kim views as invasion rehearsals.

After the North's latest ICBM launch, the U.S., South Korea and Japan began sharing real-time missile warning data on North Korea and established details of their trilateral exercises in the coming years. On Wednesday, the US flew long-range B-1B bombers for joint aerial training with South Korea and Japanese warplanes in a demonstration of strength against North Korea.

In an emergency UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday, the US, South Korea and their partners maintained that North Korea's repeated missile launches threatened international peace and violated Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by North Korea.

Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, said in a statement on Thursday she "feels very unpleasant" over the UN council meeting, which she said was held at "the brigandish demand of the US and its satellite countries."

She said the UN council must hold the US and South Korea accountable for heightened tensions as they stage "all sorts of military provocations all year round."

The North's latest ICBM launch won't likely earn the country fresh international sanctions. China and Russia — locked in separate confrontations with the US — have repeatedly blocked any UN Security Council responses to the North's banned ballistic missile tests since last year. (AP)

## Australia to send military personnel to help protect Red Sea shipping but no warship

**CANBERRA, Dec 21:** Australia will send 11 military personnel to support a US-led mission to protect cargo shipping in the Red Sea, but it will not send a warship or plane, the defense minister said on Thursday.

Defense Minister Richard Marles said Australia's military needs to keep focused on the Pacific region. The United States announced this week that several nations are creating a force to protect commercial shipping from attack by drones and ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

Marles said 11 military personnel will be sent in January to Operation Prosperity Guardian's headquarters in Bahrain, where five Australians are already posted.

"We won't be sending a ship or a plane," he told Sky News television. "That said, we will be almost tripling our contribution to the combined maritime force."

"We need to be really clear around our strategic focus, and our strategic focus is our region: the northeast Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Pacific," Marles added. The US and its allies are concerned by China's growing assertiveness in the region. Australia is one of the

United States' closest military allies. The US Congress last week passed legislation allowing the sale of Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines to Australia under a security pact that includes Britain. Marles rejected opposition lawmakers' criticism that a failure to send a warship as the United States had requested made Australia a less reliable partner and ally.

"That's patently ridiculous," Marles said. The United States is aware of the scale of the Australian defense force and the need to maintain its focus on the Asia-Pacific region, he said. "It is to state the obvious that to take a major asset and put it in the Middle East is to take a major asset away from what we're doing in the immediate region," Marles said.

Opposition defense spokesman Andrew Hastie called on Australia to send a warship. "It's in our national interest to contribute.

If we want others to help us in a time of need, we need to step up and reciprocate now," Hastie said. Several cargo ships in the Red Sea have been damaged by the attacks. Multiple shipping companies have ordered their ships not enter the Bab el-Mandeb Strait until security is improved. (AP)

## US, Venezuela swap prisoners: Maduro ally for 10 Americans, plus fugitive contractor 'Fat Leonard'

**MIAMI, Dec 21:** The United States freed a close ally of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in exchange for the release of 10 Americans imprisoned in the South American country and the return of a fugitive defense contractor known as "Fat Leonard" who is at the center of a massive Pentagon bribery scandal, the Biden administration announced on Wednesday.

The American detainees were back on U.S. soil on late Wednesday, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said. Six of them arrived at Kelly Airfield Annex in San Antonio.

Savo Wright, a Californian who had been arrested in Venezuela in October, said, "Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, free at last" after disembarking the plane.

The deal represents the Biden administration's boldest move yet to improve relations with the major oil-producing nation and extract concessions from the self-proclaimed socialist leader. The largest release of American prisoners in Venezuela's his-



tory comes weeks after the White House agreed to suspend some sanctions, following a commitment by Maduro to work toward free and fair conditions for the 2024 presidential election.

Maduro celebrated the return of Alex Saab as a "triumph for truth" over what he called a U.S.-led campaign of lies, threats and torture against someone he considers a Venezuelan diplomat illegally arrested on a U.S. warrant.

"President Biden, we won't be anyone's colony," a defiant Maduro said with Saab at his side for a hero's welcome at the presidential palace.

The release of Saab, long regarded by Washington as a bagman for Maduro, is a significant concession to the Venezuelan leader. Former President Donald Trump's administration held out Saab as a trophy, spending millions of dollars pursuing the Colombian-born businessman, at one point even deploying a Navy warship to the coast of West Africa following his arrest in Cape Verde to ward off a possible escape.

U.S. officials said Biden's decision to grant him clemency was difficult but essential in order to bring home jailed Americans, a core administrative objective that in recent years has resulted in the release of criminals once seen as untouchable.

"These individuals have lost far too much precious time with their loved ones, and their families have suffered every day in their absence. I am grateful that their ordeal is finally over," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

The agreement also resulted in the

return to U.S. custody of Leonard Glenn Francis, the Malaysian owner of a ship-servicing company who is the central character in one of the largest bribery scandals in Pentagon history.

But the exchange angered many in the Venezuelan opposition who have criticized the White House for standing by as Maduro has repeatedly outmaneuvered Washington after the Trump administration's campaign to topple him failed.

Eyvyn Hernandez, a Los Angeles County public defender arrested almost two years ago along the Colombia-Venezuela border, was one of the U.S. detainees. After arriving in Texas Wednesday night, he thanked Biden "because I know he made a difficult decision that will have a lot of pressure on him on Capitol Hill. But he got us home and we're with our families. And so we're incredibly grateful, all of us."

Hernandez added, "Honestly, all you think about when you're in prison is how you didn't appreciate being free while you were free." (AP)

# Tripura BJP deliberates on strategy ahead of LS polls

BJP national general secretary BL Santosh holds meeting with state BJP leaders



AGARTALA, Dec 21: BJP national general secretary BL Santosh held separate meetings with party leaders in Tripura to check organisational preparedness ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, a party leader said on Thursday.

During a meeting with party functionaries at the BJP state headquarters here, Santosh asked them to ensure that people get benefits of all government schemes, party's media in-charge Sunit Sarkar told PTI.

Later, he met BJP state president Rajib Bhattacharjee and senior leaders to discuss the party's strategy for the parliamentary elections, he said.

Sarkar said Santosh asked leaders to make the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra and PM Viswakarma Scheme a grand success in the northeastern state.

On Wednesday, Santosh had called upon Tripura chief minister Manik Saha and discussed various issues related to the state's welfare activities. (PTI)

# Sikkim CM announces job for 1 in each household ahead of polls



GANGTOK, Dec 21: Sikkim chief minister Prem Singh Tamang on Thursday said that his government will provide employment to one member of each household in the state before the assembly elections due in 2024.

Tamang, also the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) president, also announced several sops to woo women and state government personnel.

"We will provide employment to one member of each household before the assembly polls in 2024," he said while addressing a gathering at Rolu in Namchi district.

The chief minister said that the Old Pension Scheme

(OPS) will be restored in the state, a move which is likely to benefit about 50,000 serving and retired state government employees and officers.

Under the OPS, a government staff does not need to contribute any portion of his salary, unlike the New Pension Scheme. Employees of a number of states are demanding restoration of the old system.

In another sop aimed at wooing women voters, Tamang said that "mothers of all households" will be provided one free LPG cylinders every quarter starting from next year.

He also announced a 100 per cent hike in the financial assistance to women upto ₹ 40,000 a year under 'Aama Scheme', which is for non-working mothers.

The chief minister was addressing a gathering at Rolu, a picnic spot located on Jorethang-Melli highway.

It is the place where Tamang, then a rebel Sikkim Democratic Front MLA, had given a call for 'change' in the northeastern state on this day in 2009, at a picnic party with his supporters after being denied a berth in the government by the former chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling.

The ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) observes the day as 'Rolu Diwas' and hosts a picnic party for the party leaders, workers and supporters every year.

Meanwhile, former international footballer Nirmal Chhetri joined the SKM in the presence of Tamang.

The 33-year-old Chhetri said that he was impressed by the transformation taking place in Sikkim under Tamang's leadership. (PTI)

## NCC training camp concludes in Dimapur

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: The 1 Nagaland National Cadet Corps (NCC) Girls Battalion, Kohima has organized a 10-day combined annual training camp (CATC-102) at Dimapur in Nagaland.

The camp that began at the Greenwood School in Dimapur on December 11 concluded on December 20. Over 550 cadets of the senior and junior divisions from the affiliated institutions from across the state participated in the camp. During the camp, the cadets were trained and tested in various military subjects and groomed to have a good bearing and discipline in life. Experts from various fields also delivered lectures on various contemporary subjects of interest including SSB selection procedure, new recruitment policy of Indian Army, cyber security, health, hygiene and nutrition. Military equipment display and handling followed by band display also featured during the training camp. Officials of the State Disaster Relief Force (SDRF) also delivered a lecture on fire-fighting and disaster management and gave a demonstration of the same during the programme. The skills of participating NCC cadets were also tested in different areas like small arm firing, tent pitching, extempore elocution, drill and other military subject as per the curriculum.

## Nagaland consumers' body urges consumers to be aware of their rights

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 21: The Nagaland Voluntary Consumers' Organisation (NVCO) urged all consumers to remember the National Consumers' Day to exercise and also be aware of their rights. NVCO president Kezhokhoto Savi on Thursday appealed to every citizen to remain alert while buying goods and availing services at all times keeping in mind the slogan 'An alert consumer is an asset to the Nation'.

Savi further exhorted every consumer to take proper care to check weights, read and understand the information provided on the goods, obtain cash memos or receipts and check the quality and quantity, ISI mark, AGMARK, MRP, etc.

He said the National Consumers' Day provides an opportunity to highlight the importance of the consumer movement and the need to make the consumer more aware of their rights and responsibilities. Savi, who is a national award recipient for consumer protection and advocate by profession, said the National Consumers'

Day observed every year on December 24 is considered a historic milestone in the consumer movement in the country.

"Today the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 has completely replaced the Consumer Protection Act, 1986," he added.

Savi stressed that the need to create awareness of consumer rights and duties is very important, especially in rural areas, and that the responsibility of this rests with each one of us and also the various government agencies.

He added that the state government has to play a vital role in promoting the welfare of consumers and protection of their rights.

"The practices in our society such as fund-raising by way of selling lottery tickets/raffle draw/ cooked packed food/buffet tickets/calendar, unfair means of practices in weights and measures, selling expiry goods, removal of original price tag like motor parts and students text/exercises books etc. amounts to consumer rights exploitation," he pointed out.

## ECI team reviews poll preparedness in Arunachal



ITANAGAR, Dec 21: A team from the Election Commission of India (ECI) headed by deputy election commissioner Manoj Kumar Sahoo arrived in Arunachal Pradesh's Namsai district on Thursday to assess the state's poll preparedness ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha and assembly elections.

Sahoo was accompanied by ECI director Pankaj Srivastava, principal secretary Arvind Anand, secretary NT Bhutia and section officer Niraj Dwivedi, an official communiqué stated.

Speaking on the occasion, Sahoo advised all the district election officers (DEOs) to be actively involved in the electioneering process.

He said a full-fledged meeting by the ECI will be held in the state in January.

Sahoo focused on the importance of imparting periodic training to officials for error-free conduct of

elections and advised the district election officers to analyse the law and order preparedness with the enforcement agencies in the district.

Presence of a strong room in the district, stand-alone or combined with counting centres, was also discussed during the meeting.

Srivastava urged the district election officers to tighten the election expenditure monitoring mechanism of their respective districts and suggested to go through the latest compendium.

The review meeting was attended by chief electoral officer Pawan Kumar Sain, officer on special duty to chief electoral officer Ira Singhal, joint chief electoral officer Liken Koyu, state deputy chief electoral officer Shania Kayem Mize and all the district election officers of the 25 districts. (PTI)

## Naga Women Union protests against harassment of women in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 21: The Naga Women Union (NWU) has come up strongly against harassment of women in Manipur, especially by armed miscreants. Ch. Priscilla Thumai, president of NWU said that the unbridled and unchecked prevalence of indulgence to coercive behavior by armed miscreants in various localities of Manipur disguised as taxation which is no less than extortion.

The NWU said that, in the guise of the status quo, a rmed malefactors and miscreants creating chaos in the valley and hills have not spared the ladies belonging to Naga community.

They are physically harassed, abducted and taken to unknown locations by armed miscreants, which is unacceptable by human right agencies and global communities." "The instances of demands, threats, abductions of innocent civilians, especially women are villainous acts that will not serve the larger aspiration of the state and the nationwide. This notoriety will lead to nowhere, but give rise to deep prejudices against whatever community the armed miscreants belong," Thumai said.

The armed miscreants operating in groups or units, as reported, are undertaking a serious yet unwarranted route to calamitous doom for the state of Manipur, the Naga Women Union stated. It is not good to be forgotten that a thing which seems good for one is harming the other. In the like manner, extortions and abductions taking place is not a sign of civilized society, it added.

The NWU further appealed to put an end to those acts of breaching the human rights immediately.

"Our silence doesn't mean that we are weak. The offensive conduct of interference in work, a threat impacting the victim's self-esteem and mental health is punishable under certain sections of IPC.

We have been accommodating for a long time considering the situation of confronting parties. The brunt of using women in conflict is costly," the NWU said in a statement.

The NWU also appealed to all the Naga civil societies to be more sober in negotiation of all types of crime against women.

"It is always good to remember that women are not commodities or stuff which can be compensated with money. The lasting solution is to give room for judicial expedition and punish the offenders legally according to the degree of their crime," the NWU stated. (NNN)

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## Over 4,71,000 rural households gets piped water connection in Meghalaya

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma on Thursday said that 72.37 per cent coverage of functional household tap connections has been achieved in the state. Under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Meghalaya piped water connections are now available in a total of 4,71,444 rural households in the state. This is higher than the national average of functional household tap connections coverage of 72.1 per cent.

"Happy to share that Meghalaya has reached 4,71,544 (72.37%) Functional Household Tap Connections which is above the national average of 72.1%. Congratulations to team @jjmmeghalaya who continues to work diligently to ensure Meghalaya reaches its target of 100% FHTCs," tweeted Conrad Sangma on X on Thursday.

Moreover, rural households in the West Khasi Hills district have the maximum number of functional household tap connections with a coverage of 75 per cent, which is also higher than the state and national average.

"4,71,544 rural households in the state have access to clean and safe water in the comfort of their homes now. The maximum number of households in the West Khasi Hills district has piped water connections now. 75 per cent functional household tap connections coverage has been achieved in the district," said an official of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Meghalaya.

Meanwhile, Marcuse N. Marak, state minister of the public health engineering department (PHED), along with mission director of JJM Meghalaya, Syed Md. A. Razi, chief engineer of PHED, B.M. Lyndem and other officials recently reviewed the implementation of the scheme in districts of Garo hills.

The PHED minister also inspected the on-site progress of the implementation of scheme.

## M'laya CM lays foundation of stadium in Phulbari

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad sangma on Thursday laid the foundation of an outdoor stadium at Shyamnagar Playground in Phulbari and an indoor stadium at JP Higher Secondary School in Bholarbita in West Garo Hills district. While speaking on the occasion, the chief minister highlighted the need to develop the sports infrastructure in the state so as to provide young sportsmen with the right platform to develop their sporting skills. He said that his government is dedicated to provide all opportunities to youths of the state so that they can make a mark in the field of sports in the national and international levels. "Laid foundations for the Outdoor Stadium at Shyamnagar Playground in Phulbari and the Indoor Stadium at J P Hr. Sec. School in Bholarbita, West Garo Hills District," Conrad Sangma tweeted on X on Thursday.

## Arunachal districts win JRD Tata Memorial Awards

Lower Dibang Valley adjudged best-performing district in reproductive and child health, gender equity, family planning and women's empowerment categories

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: The Lower Dibang Valley district in Arunachal Pradesh has been adjudged the best performing district under the 'High Focus North East States-High Wealth Level' category for the 7th JRD Tata Memorial Awards.

East Kameng district also bagged the award as the best-performing district in the 'High Focus NE State category.'

Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu made this announcement on 'X' on Thursday.

The Lower Dibang Valley district won the coveted award in the categories of reproductive and child health, gender equity, family planning and women's empowerment.

"So pleasing to see Lower Dibang Valley clinching JRD Tata Memorial Awards 2023 under High Focus North-East States in Reproductive & Child Health, Gender Equity, Family Planning & Women's Empowerment. Congratulations to @DC\_Roing and the entire Team for this recognition. Wish



you continued success," the chief minister tweeted on X on Thursday.

"Proud moment for Arunachal Pradesh! East Kameng District shines as the best-performing district in the High Focus NE State category at the 7th JRD Tata Memorial Award ceremony. Congratulations to the community for their dedication and commitment to progress! @ArunachalCMO," Khandu

pealed the people of the country to visit explore the state endowed with its picturesque beauty.

The chief minister tweeted, "Arunachal Pradesh is named 'Best Offbeat Destination in India' at Outlook Traveller Awards, 2023. This prestigious recognition further reaffirms our potential as an exceptional travel destination. I extend a warm invitation to all citizens to visit our State and witness firsthand how nature has blessed the Land of the Rising Sun. We are here to welcome you! Yet another glowing feather in our cap!"

"Arunachal Pradesh is named 'Best Offbeat Destination in India' at Outlook Traveller Awards, 2023. This prestigious recognition further reaffirms our potential as an exceptional travel destination. I extend a warm invitation to all citizens to visit our State and witness firsthand how nature has blessed the Land of the Rising Sun.

We are here to welcome you!" he further tweeted.

On the other hand, the state has also been won the as the Outlook Traveller Awards, 2023. It has been adjudged the 'Best Offbeat Destination in India'.

CM Khandu said that the state is endowed with exceptional natural beauty and abundance in varied forms of flora and fauna. He said that the state has huge potential as a tourist destination. He ap-

No.DPRD/BTC/(6<sup>th</sup> ASFC)/KC/Ud-01/2023/25, Dated Kokrajhar the 20<sup>th</sup> Dec., 2023

### SHORT NOTICER INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders with a validity period of 180 (One hundred eighty) days from the date of receipt in prescribed from affixing non-refundable court fee stamps of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed F-2 form are hereby invited from the Govt. registered PWD (Roads/ Building), Irrigation, Water Resources, PHE others Govt. Contractor's under Class-I (A, B, C), Class-II and Class-III category from approved firm/ suppliers of 2020-21/2021-22 according to tender limit of eligibility for the following works and will be received in the office of the undersigned up to 2.00 pm on 15-01-2024 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2.30 pm in the presence of willing contractors or their authorized agents.

| Sl. No | Name of Dev. Block | Name of Scheme                                                                    | Tender Amount (in Rs. lakh) | Tender Amount (in Rs.) | Earnest Money (SI, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen 2%) | Cost of Tender | Time for completion in days |
|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 01     | Bhergaon           | Const. of Bineswar Brahma Memorial Bodoland Knowledge Centre at Bhakatpara VCDC   | 10.00                       | 954368.00              | 1% - Rs. 10,000/-<br>2% - Rs. 20,000/-   | @ 300/-        | 6 months                    |
| 02     | Bhergaon           | Const. of Bineswar Brahma Memorial Bodoland Knowledge Centre at Mwdwbari VCDC     | 10.00                       | 954368.00              | 1% - Rs. 10,000/-<br>2% - Rs. 20,000/-   | @ 300/-        | 6 months                    |
| 03     | Bhergaon           | Const. of Bineswar Brahma Memorial Bodoland Knowledge Centre at Gema VCDC         | 10.00                       | 954368.00              | 1% - Rs. 10,000/-<br>2% - Rs. 20,000/-   | @ 300/-        | 6 months                    |
| 04     | Udalguri           | Const. of Bineswar Brahma Memorial Bodoland Knowledge Centre at Niz Kalaigam VCDC | 10.00                       | 954368.00              | 1% - Rs. 10,000/-<br>2% - Rs. 20,000/-   | @ 300/-        | 6 months                    |
| 05     | Udalguri           | Const. of Bineswar Brahma Memorial Bodoland Knowledge Centre at Bahpara VCDC      | 10.00                       | 954368.00              | 1% - Rs. 10,000/-<br>2% - Rs. 20,000/-   | @ 300/-        | 6 months                    |

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent up to 12.00 Noon on all working days from 21-12-2023 to 15-01-2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment of in the form of Banker cheque/ Demand draft of any nationalized Bank (Preferable SBI) duly pledged to the Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar. The Cost of tender (Non-Refundable) must be in the form of Demand Draft/ Banker Cheque of a Nationalized Bank drawn in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar and payable at SBI, Kokrajhar to be deposited 0.03%. The Contractor should submit valid Registration certificate, GSTIN, PAN Card, Voter Card, Aadhar Card, Caste Certificate and Labour License along with the tender. In case the office remain closed in tender receiving/ opening day the same will be received/ opened on the next working day.

Note :-

- The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar does not bind himself to accept the lowest tender and also reserves the right to reject all tenders without assigning any reason.
- Payment will be made subject to availability of fund under appropriate Head of Account No claim what so ever in this regard will be entertained.
- Taxes will be deducted as per relevant provision of Act.
- Contractors will have to submit their tender with upto date registration certificate and item of annexure should be enclosed with the tender otherwise tender will be treated as cancelled.
- The tenderer should submit their tender with up to date GSTIN certificate and PAN Card failing which the tender may be treated as cancelled.

Sd/-Director,  
Panchayat & Rural Development,  
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/993

# Parliament passes Telecommunications Bill

Bill seeks to allow the government to temporarily take control of telecom services in the interest of national security

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Parliament on Thursday passed a bill that seeks to allow the government to temporarily take control of telecom services in the interest of national security, and provide a non-auction route for the allocation of satellite spectrum.

The Telecommunications Bill, 2023, was approved by the Rajya Sabha through a voice vote. It was passed by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday after a short debate.

The Bill seeks to allow the government to temporarily take control of telecom services in the interest of national security, and provide a non-auction route for the allocation of satellite spectrum.

It also allows the Centre to take possession of a telecom network in case of any public emergency or in the interest of public safety.

Besides, it provides for stopping transmission and intercepting mes-



sages in case of public emergency, in the interest of the public, to prevent incitement for committing offence.

According to the bill, the press messages of correspondents ac-

credited to the Centre or state governments shall not be intercepted or detained unless their transmission has been prohibited under rules applicable to public emergency, and public order.

Replying to the debate, communications minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the Telecommunications Bill 2023 is being brought keeping in mind the aspirations of the new India to replace two colonial-era laws.

"In the last nine-and-half-years, India's telecom sector has emerged from a very difficult period marred by scams to become a sunrise sector," the minister asserted.

He also said during the same period, the number of telecom towers has increased to 25 lakh at present from just 6 lakh in 2014 and the number of internet broadband users has increased to 85 crore today from just 1.5 crore before.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India made the fastest rollout of 5G technology in the world with the maximum equipment made in India, he said. (PTI)

## 3 more opposition MPs suspended from Lok Sabha, total number now 100



**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Three Congress MPs were suspended from the Lok Sabha on Thursday for the remainder of the Winter session for unruly behaviour, taking the total number of members of the lower House against whom such action has been taken to 100.

Parliamentary affairs minister Pralhad Joshi moved a motion for the suspension of D K Suresh, Deepak Baij and Nakul Nath.

"This House having taken serious note of misconduct of Deepak Baij, D K Suresh, Nakul Nath in utter disregard to the House and authority of the Chair through display of placards, entering into the

Well of the House...may be suspended from the House for remaining session," Joshi said.

Earlier in the day, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had warned the three MPs against protesting in the House.

As the House met this morning, opposition MPs continued their protest against suspension of a large number of MPs from the House, and demanded a discussion on the Parliament security breach issue and a statement by home minister Amit Shah.

Opposition MPs could be heard raising slogans as the Question Hour was taken up. (PTI)

## Deve Gowda, Kumaraswamy meet PM Modi

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday met former prime minister and Janata Dal (Secular) president H D Deve Gowda and lauded his "exemplary" contribution to the nation's progress.

Deve Gowda's two sons, former Karnataka chief minister H D Kumaraswamy and MLA H D Revanna, as well as grandson Prajwal Revanna, who is an MP from Hassan, accompanied him for the meeting with Modi at his residence here.

It is always a delight to meet them, the prime minister said in a post on X.

"India greatly cherishes Deve Gowda Ji's exemplary contribution to the nation's progress. His thoughts on diverse policy matters are insightful and futuristic," Modi said.

The BJP and the JD(S) have announced an alliance in Karnataka following the Congress victory in the assembly polls earlier this year. (PTI)

## Opposition protests mass suspension of MPs

Kharge asks govt to 'behave democratically'



**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** INDIA bloc MPs on Thursday marched from Parliament to Vijay Chowk here to protest the suspension of opposition lawmakers, with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge asserting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had violated parliamentary privilege by not speaking on the security breach issue inside the House.

Carrying a huge 'Save Democracy' banner and placards with messages like 'Opposition MPs Suspended', 'Parliament Caged' and 'Democracy Expelled' written on them, the lawmakers took out the march.

Speaking with reporters at Vijay Chowk, Kharge said it is the right of the opposition to speak in a democracy and as representatives of people it is the legislators' responsibility to convey the sentiments of the people in Parliament.

The opposition wanted to speak on the issue but Prime Minister Modi and Home minister Shah did not turn up either in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha, even as the PM continued to make speeches elsewhere, Kharge said.

"We wanted to raise Parliament

security breach issue as to why it happened and who is responsible," Kharge said.

"Parliament is a big Panchayat. If one will not speak in Parliament where would one speak. It is unfortunate that Home Minister Shah and Prime Minister Modi did not come to the House to apprise about the security breach. They spoke about issues which should be spoken in the House, outside it."

"He (Modi) talks in Varanasi, Ahmedabad, on TV but not in Parliament. They have disrespected the House. He should come and speak in the House first, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Instead of that he was speaking outside. This is condemnable and it was a violation of privilege (of House)," Kharge alleged.

Opposition MPs are repeatedly requesting Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to allow the lawmakers to speak on the security breach issue, Kharge said, alleging that the ruling party members were disturbing proceedings.

This shows that the BJP does not have faith in democracy and does not want discussion and debate, the

Congress chief alleged. Kharge urged the government to "behave democratically".

INDIA bloc leaders will protest at Jantar Mantar Friday against suspension of MPs and nationwide protests will also be held in all district headquarters against the government's "immoral and illegal" behaviour of this government, the Leader of the opposition in Rajya Sabha said.

Congress' leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Congress general secretary K C Venugopal, National Conference's Hasnain Masoodi, JMM's Mahua Maji, Samajwadi Party's ST Hasan, flanked Kharge as he made his remarks at Vijay Chowk.

In an apparent reference to the mimicry issue and Dhankhar's remarks on it, Kharge said, "I am sorry to say that the Rajya Sabha Chairman has in a way brought casteism to Parliament by raising an issue."

A political row broke out on Tuesday after Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee derisively mimicked Dhankhar during the opposition's protest on the stairs of Parliament against the MPs' suspension, drawing strong condemnation from the ruling BJP.

Dhankhar had given vent to his anguish in Rajya Sabha, saying he was personally hurt as his farmer and Jat backgrounds were targeted.

In a post on X after the protest march, Kharge said, "We, the people of India need to Save Democracy. Passing important legislations by suspending Opposition MPs is not Democracy. It is the worst kind of authoritarianism." (PTI)

## Parliament gives nod to bill on appointment, service conditions of CEC, ECs



**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** The Lok Sabha on Thursday passed after a brief discussion a Bill which seeks to establish a mechanism to appoint the chief election commissioner and election commissioners.

The Rajya Sabha has already given its nod to the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023.

Responding to the debate, law minister Arjun Ram Meghwal said the 1991 Act on the service conditions of the CEC and the ECs was a half-baked attempt and the present Bill covers the areas left out by the previous legislations.

The Bill was then passed by a voice vote. (PTI)

## Kejriwal skips ED questioning again

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday skipped the second summons issued by the ED, alleging they were issued at the behest of political rivals who wish to silence the voice of the opposition.

Kejriwal was summoned by the Enforcement Directorate for questioning in the excise policy-linked money laundering case on Thursday. The chief minister left for an undisclosed location for a 10-day Vipassana meditation course on Wednesday.

Kejriwal sent his reply to the ED on Wednesday in which he said the summons do not specify whether he was being called as "a witness or a suspect" or as the "chief minister, Delhi or the Aam Aadmi Party's national convener". He said the fresh summons -- issued on December 18 -- should be revoked, withdrawn, and recalled.

"The timing of your summons leaves much to desire and strengthens my belief that the summons being sent to me are not based upon any objective or rational yardstick but for extraneous considerations at the behest of political rivals who wish to silence the voice

of opposition to the ruling dispensation at the Centre to create sensational news in the final few months leading up to the Parliamentary elections in early to mid 2024," read the reply. Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party is part of the INDIA opposition bloc.

Earlier, Kejriwal was summoned by the ED on November 2 but he skipped the questioning alleging the notice was illegal and politically motivated.

He said the ED served the fresh summons without responding to the issues raised by him in his previous reply.

"Your summons appears to be a fishing and roving enquiry. In similar circumstances, where individuals are neither informed about the case details nor the capacity in which they are being summoned by the Enforcement Directorate, High courts have declared such summons of Enforcement Directorate invalid and quashed the summons," the reply said.

The AAP national convener stressed that he is "holding a sensitive constitutional post as an elected leader and incumbent Chief Minister of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi". (PTI)

## CWC meeting: Cong top brass discusses plans for 2024 LS polls



**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Top Congress leaders met here on Thursday to discuss the party's plans on seat-sharing with INDIA bloc partners and strategy for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls as well as assess the reasons for its defeat in assembly elections in three states.

The discussions took place at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), which was attended by party president Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi and senior leader Rahul Gandhi among others.

The meeting of the Congress' highest decision-making body is the first after the party lost Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh to the BJP.

The Congress has maintained that its morale is not down, even though the results of the assembly polls have been very disappointing and not according to expectations. The party has held one round of analysis of the poll results, and the CWC is likely to hold further discussions on the issue.

Sources said the top brass of the party is likely to evolve a new agenda to take on the BJP as its key thrust on caste census has failed to click with voters in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhat-

tisgarh. The meeting is being held at a time when the challenge before the Congress is to come out with an alternative positive agenda to counter the BJP in the general elections, as its issues of caste census and Adani have not caught the public attention in these states.

Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday told MPs at the parliamentary party meeting that the assembly election results being very disappointing is an understatement as she urged them to channel their disappointment into positivity for the Lok Sabha polls.

This was the first time that Sonia Gandhi had spoken on the recent assembly poll results.

"To say that the assembly election results in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have been very disappointing for our party is an understatement. The Congress president has already had a first round of reviews to understand the reasons for our poor performance and draw the needed lessons for our organisation," she told the MPs.

Sonia Gandhi also said that the Lok Sabha elections will be held in the next few months and "we have our task cut out both as a party in our own right and also as a member of the INDIA bloc." (PTI)

## Caste census should be used for overall development of society: RSS

**NAGPUR, Dec 21:** Days after one of its functionaries opposed caste census, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Thursday said such an exercise should be used to achieve "overall development of society" while ensuring that no harm is caused to social harmony and unity.

The organisation is continuously striving for the creation of a Hindu society based on harmony and social justice without any discrimination and disparity, publicity head of the RSS Sunil Ambekar said in a statement on X.

A discussion on caste-based census

has started again, the statement said, adding, "We are of the opinion that it should be used for the overall development of society and while doing it, all the parties should ensure that social harmony and unity are not broken for any reason."

It was true that because of various historical reasons many sections of society remained economically, socially and educationally backward, Ambekar said.

Various governments have introduced schemes and special provisions for the development and empowerment of such

sections from time to time, and the RSS fully supports such measures, he said.

Notably, the Congress and some other opposition parties have been demanding a caste census, and the demand had also become a poll issue during the last month's assembly elections.

Two days ago, Sangh functionary Shridhar Gadge had said at an RSS function here that a caste census may benefit some people politically as it will provide data about the population of a certain caste, but it would not be desirable socially and in terms of national unity. (PTI)

## 4 die of suffocation in Jharkhand

**HAZARIBAG (JHARKHAND), Dec 21:** Four persons, including a teenager, died of suffocation after they lit charcoal in their room to get respite from severe cold in Jharkhand's Sirshi village, police said on Thursday.

The deceased were identified as Rahul Kumar (20), Akhilesh Kumar (21), Prince Kumar (20) and Armaan Ali (19), a senior police officer said.

All of them hailed from Buxar district of Bihar, and were pursuing a computer course at an institute in Sirshi, he said. They had lit charcoal in their rented accommodation on Wednesday to beat the cold, and prima facie, the deaths occurred due to suffocation after inhaling the smoke, Deputy SP (HQ) Rajiv Kumar said.

A cold wave has been sweeping parts of the state, including Hazaribag, since the last 10 days, the Met Department said. (PTI)

## CISF to provide comprehensive security to Parliament complex

Earlier, frisking of visitors to Parliament complex was done by Delhi Police personnel

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21 (PTI)** The government has decided to hand over "comprehensive" security of the Parliament building complex to the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) in the wake of the recent breach of the safety ring, official sources said Thursday.

The CISF will render access control to the new and old Parliament complex in an airport security-like fashion where body frisking of persons will be done through hand-held detectors and their belongings will be checked through X-ray machines, with a provision to even scan shoes, heavy jackets and belts by putting them on a tray and passing them through the scanner, the sources said.

Earlier, frisking of visitors to Parliament complex was done by Delhi Police personnel.

In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack on December 13, two persons jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour, released yellow smoke from canisters and shouted slogans before being overpowered by the MPs. One of the accused had hidden a canister in his shoes.

The sources told PTI that the Union home ministry on Wednesday directed for a survey of the Parliament building complex so that a "regular deployment of the CISF security and fire wing on a comprehensive pattern"



could be done.

This was done after an "in principle" approval was accorded by the ministry of home affairs (MHA) to hand over the overall security of the Parliament building to the CISF.

Members of the Parliament watch and ward security will also be sent in batches to train for human and goods frisking at a CISF centre, they said.

Experts drawn from the government

building security (GBS) unit of the CISF, that guards central government ministries, and fire combat and response officers of the force along with officials from the current Parliament security team will undertake the survey beginning later this week.

The survey will draw the exact number of CISF personnel required for this new task and also clearly define the role of what each security agency engaged in Parliament security will do, they said.

Both the new and the old Parliament complex and their allied buildings will be brought under a comprehensive security cover of the CISF which will also have the existing elements of Parliament Security Service (PSS), the Delhi Police and the Parliament Duty Group (PDG) of the CRPF, the sources said.

Following this Parliament security breach incident, a committee under the chairmanship of CRPF director general Anish Dayal Singh is looking into the overall security issues of the Parliament complex and will make recommendations to the Union home ministry for improvement.

It was after the 2001 terrorist attack on Parliament that the CISF GBS came into being and it was entrusted with security of central government buildings in the national capital like the North and South blocks, Cabinet Secretariat, Vigyan Bhawan, CBI head-quarters, UPSC building and the CGO complex.

The charter of the GBS is to "maintain high level of security, including contingency response, access control and conduct of anti-sabotage checks."

The CISF is a central armed police force (CAPF) that currently guards many central government ministry buildings in Delhi apart from installations in the nuclear and aerospace domain, 67 civil airports and the Delhi Metro. (PTI)

# India aiming for new research station in Antarctica by 2029: Kiren Rijiju

*Dakshin Gangotri, India's first research station in Antarctica, was commissioned in 1983*

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** India aims to set up a new research station in Antarctica near the Maitri station in the eastern part of the icy continent by 2029, Union earth sciences minister Kiren Rijiju said on Thursday.

In a written reply in the Rajya Sabha, Rijiju said the site for the new research station -- Maitri-II -- has been identified and a preliminary topographical survey for the approach road is underway.

The existing Indian research station -- Maitri -- is very old, the minister said, adding that it is imperative to build a new research station. The proposed project envisages adherence to environmental protocols for Antarctica and improving the quality of Indian scientific research in the southernmost continent.

India has been operating the



Bharati research station in the Larseman Hills area -- a 40 square kilometre ice-free region along the south-eastern shore of the continent -- since 2012. Bharati is about 3,000 kilometres away from

Maitri, which was commissioned in 1989.

Sharing the different stages for building the new research station, Rijiju said the development of the master plan, hiring of a consultant

and designing will require the drafting of tender and tendering, award and signing of contracts, site survey by consultants, road cutting and formations at the site.

This will be followed by prefabrication/procurement on the mainland, transportation to Cape Town/Antarctica/Indian Barrier to the site and preparation for construction in Antarctica by the construction company; transportation of final components from the Indian Barrier to the site and construction in Antarctica by the construction company.

The completion of construction is targeted by January 2029.

Dakshin Gangotri, India's first research station in Antarctica, was commissioned in 1983. However, it had to be abandoned in 1989 after being submerged in snow. (PTI)

## States fined ₹ 79,098 Cr over solid waste management rules non-compliance: Govt

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has imposed fines totalling ₹ 79,098 crore on states and Union territories for non-compliance with municipal solid waste management rules and other environmental violations in 2022-23, the government informed Parliament on Thursday.

According to the data provided by Union minister of state for environment Ashwini Kumar Choubey in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Tamil Nadu faces the highest fine of ₹ 15,419 crore, followed by Maharashtra (₹ 12,000 crore) and Madhya

Pradesh (₹ 9,688 crore). The NGT directed Uttar Pradesh to pay ₹ 5,000 crore, Bihar ₹ 4,000 crore, Telangana ₹ 3,800 crore, West Bengal ₹ 3,500 crore, Karnataka ₹ 3,400 crore and Delhi ₹ 3,132 crore for not complying with the Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 and other environmental violations. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) monitors the water quality of aquatic resources at 4,703 locations in 28 states and eight Union territories under the National Water Quality Monitoring Programme (NWMP). (PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Sarba predicts tourism

estates of AYCL which will be collected for undertaking necessary lab research. Further to this, the AIIA will perform detailed analysis of various teas as provided by AYCL from the perspectives of Ayurveda and its benefits on human health. AIIA to carry out experiments on Tea for its health and Ayurvedic importance and usage in Ayurvedic medicines, cosmetics, etc. It is to be noted that AYCL has seven tea estates in Assam, including one in Khowang, flagship garden of the company, in Dibrugarh district; Hoolungoree tea estate in Jorhat district; Tingkhong tea estate in Dibrugarh district, Basmatia tea estate in Dibrugarh, Rajgarh tea estate in Dibrugarh district, Desam tea estate in Dibrugarh district and Murphulani tea estate in Golaghat district.

Both AIIA and AYCL agreed to work on examining the health benefits of tea and its importance for humans from an Ayurvedic perspective. AIIA may provide technical recommendations to change compositions and processes to enhance health benefits and utility.

## Over 11 lakh farmers

Nidhi, among others. Referring to Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana, the chief minister said it is one of the cherished dreams of the Prime Minister to see every individual having a pucca house for habitation. "It is important for every person eligible for a pucca house under PMAY to come forward with necessary documents so that necessary works in this regard can be initiated by the government," he added.

Speaking about the Ayushman Bharat scheme, Sarma said all ration-card holders are eligible for inclusion into this social sector scheme that guarantees free treatment up to ₹ 5 lakh in hospitals. He also appealed to the eligible beneficiaries to make the best use of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra rally so that they are able to enjoy all benefits under the various schemes meant for them through the on-spot registration facilities, etc.

Prime Modi had launched the "My Bharat App" with the aim of channelling the untapped potential of the country's youth, he said, adding those who register themselves under it would be in a position to contribute towards the process of nation-building in future. The event was also attended by environment & forest minister Chandramohan Patowary, members of Legislative Assembly Hemanga Thakuria, along with a host of dignitaries.

## 500 Channa Barca fish

Sources highlighted an ongoing trend of smuggling these fishes due to their high market demand.

"Wildlife smugglers are targeting aquatic animals due to their significant demand in the international market. They capture these rare species from water bodies or rivers and clandestinely export them to other states and countries," revealed an insider. It is worth mentioning that the Barca snakehead fish, scientifically known as Channa barca, is an uncommon species native to the upper Brahmaputra river basin in northeastern India and Bangladesh. Despite its rarity and ornamental appeal, this fish faces a high demand in the global market, making it vulnerable to illegal trade. Unfortunately, it lacks substantial legal protection at present. It commonly resides in a vertical tunnel, typically measuring about one meter (3.3 ft) in length, extending down to the water table. Found predominantly in wetland areas, often near margins, this species also thrives in riverine habitats. Its adaptability to significant variations in water temperature and oxygen levels allows it to endure seasonal changes in flood levels.

## No plan to make Covid

In July, India had issued revised guidelines, dropping the requirement for RT-PCR based testing of a random 2 per cent of travellers entering India. In view of the recent surge in Covid-19 cases and the detection of the first case of the JN.1 variant in the country, the Centre has urged states and union territories to maintain constant vigil.

In a letter to states and union territories, Union Health secretary Sudhanshu Pant on Monday underlined the critical Covid-19 control and management strategies considering the upcoming festive season and advised them to put in place requisite public health measures to minimise the risk of increase in transmission of the disease.

States have been urged to ensure effective compliance of the detailed operational guidelines for revised surveillance strategy for Covid-19 shared by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. They have asked to monitor and report district-wise cases of Influenza-like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) in all health facilities regularly for early detection of rising trend of cases. It is not currently known whether the JN.1 infection produces symptoms different from other variants, the ministry had said. In general, symptoms of Covid-19 tend to be similar across variants.

There is also no indication of increased severity from JN.1. At this time, there is no evidence that JN.1 presents an increased risk to public health compared to other currently circulating variants, according to the ministry.

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

## 'Unity, Victory, and

via Baithalangso, Tika and Hamren, the ₹ 300 crore road constructions to connect Rongmongve and Balijuri from Dokmoka town. Road from Rajapathar to Jerikindeng via Dalimburi is under progress. As demanded by the people of Nilip, construction of a road from Chokihola to Borpung has been sanctioned." He also thanked the people for participating in the 'Unity, Victory and Prosperity Rally'. Interestingly, in the rally opposition party workers and supporters of Congress, All Party Hills Leaders Conference and regional parties have merged with BJP. CEM Ronghang further said the works will be completed two years before the state Assembly election.

"Executive Members (EMs) and MACs, CEM will meet the Sarkari Gaon Buras (SGBs) and Gaon Buras (traditional village headmen) and will ask them how many families or individuals in their jurisdiction have TET passed candidates and government employees. How many families have got ration cards, Ayushman Bharat health cards, Arunodhoi, PMAY houses, subsidised LPG gas under Randhan Jyoti scheme, PM Kisan card to farmers and rural pipe water connections in their villages," he said. Commenting on the bill payments to contractors, the CEM said, "We have made payments to those contractors who have completed works with Work Orders. But those contractors who have done the work without a work order will not get bills."

## Burmese supari worth

Station in Karbi Anglong. In this connection driver Boktar Ali (38), a resident of Gosaigaon has been arrested. Both the contraband and truck have been seized.

## KYF's golden jubilee

The distribution function was attended by sub-divisional veterinary officer (SDVO) Diphu, Dr P R Laskar; SDVO, Hamren, Dr K K Das; manager, cattle farm, Manja, Dr Anthony Phangcho; Fodder Demonstration Farm, Manja, Dr Larsika Hansepi, and Manager, Pig Farm, Dongkamukam, Dr H Terang.

## Space given to anti-India

to be in a situation of having a fight with India right now over this," Trudeau said. "We want to be working on that trade deal. We want to be advancing the Indo-Pacific strategy. But it is foundational for Canada to stand up for people's rights, for people's safety and for the rule of law. And that is what we are going to do," he told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Last month, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta with working with an Indian government employee in a foiled plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh extremist, on American soil. Pannun, wanted in India on terror charges, holds dual citizenship of the United States and Canada.

On December 7, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said in Parliament that India has instituted an inquiry committee to look into the inputs received from the US in the case as the matter has a bearing on national security. At the same time, he said there will be "no equitable treatment" to Canada's allegations as no specific evidence or inputs were provided to India by Ottawa. (PTI)

## Transport officers in vigilance

Saleh Md Zakaria, the enforcement checker of the same office demanded ₹ 16,000 as bribe from the complainant for allowing free movement of the vehicles of the complainant," the statement added.

Later, the aforementioned public servants reduced the amount of bribe to ₹ 10,000. However, unwilling to pay the bribe, the complainant approached the DVAC for taking necessary legal action against the above-mentioned public servants.

"Accordingly, a trap was laid on Wednesday by a team from the DVAC in the office of the District Transport Officer & Secretary Regional Transport Authority. Abu Saleh Md Zakaria was caught red handed in the office, immediately after he accepted ₹ 10,000 as demanded bribe from the complainant. The tainted bribe money has been recovered from his possession and has been seized accordingly, in presence of independent witnesses," the statement added. Tapadar, the enforcement inspector was also apprehended for demanding bribe from the complainant and accepting it through Abu Saleh Md Zakaria, in conspiracy with him.

"Finding sufficient evidence against both the accused public servants, they have been arrested by the investigating officer of the Directorate of Vigilance & Anti-Corruption, Assam. In this connection, a case has been registered in ACB Police Station on Wednesday under section 120(B) IPC, read with section 7(a) of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018). Necessary legal follow up action are underway.

## Assam can borrow

-- has been pegged at ₹ 2,204 crore," the statement added. Potential to borrow in the housing and education sectors was projected at ₹ 2,239 crore, NABARD said. The State Focus Paper was brought out with an objective to assess the exploitable potential through credit dispensation by banks.

"As a credit planning document, it has been focusing on mapping of the sector-wise, activity-wise, overall potential for the absorption of credit and providing an overview of the agricultural economy of all the districts," the statement said. The State Focus Paper is expected to act as an input for the credit and infrastructure planning by bankers and the state government to prioritise the allocation of funds for development, it added. (PTI)

## 594 fresh Covid cases in India



**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** India on Thursday recorded 594 fresh Covid-19 infections while the number of active cases increased to 2,669 from 2,311 the previous day, according to Union health ministry data.

The country's Covid-19 tally stands at 4.50 crore (4,50,06,572). The death toll climbed to 5,33,327 with six more people -- three from Kerala, two from Karnataka and one from Punjab -- succumbing to the viral disease, the data updated at 8 am stated.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has increased to 4,44,70,576. The national recovery rate stands at 98.81 per cent, according to the health ministry's website.

The case fatality rate stands at 1.19 per cent.

According to the ministry's website, 220.67 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine have been administered in the country so far. (PTI)

## Climate change impact on agriculture discussed at COP28: Bhupender Yadav

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** The issue of the impact of climate change on agriculture was raised at the recent COP28 conference held in Dubai and all nations are working on it, environment, forest and climate change minister Bhupender Yadav told the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Replying to a supplementary during the Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha, that agriculture is the most affected area due to climate change.

"This is true that a big impact happens due to climate change on agriculture. We can see the impact of change in temperature on agriculture. An adaptation programme has been created to look into this issue.

Raising a supplementary, BJP member Maharaja Sanajaoba Leishemba said that due to mass poppy plantations in the hilly areas of Manipur and other neighboring Northeastern states, drastic climate change is happening now.

He asked what effective measures or steps are taken to stop mass poppy plantations and to save climatic change in the Northeastern states, especially in Manipur.

The minister explained about the talking the issue and said that under the adaptation pro-



gramme, changes are made in the adaptation plan based on the impact, vulnerability and risk assessment of locally sown crops due to climate change.

Government implements schemes for that adaptation plan, he added.

It is also admitted at the international forum that agriculture is the most affected area due to climate change, he pointed out.

"This was also emphasised in COP28 (conference held in Dubai) how can we take forward their monitoring, evaluation and learning. All nations are working on the issue and this is also included in the National Climate Action Programme includes these subjects," he said. (PTI)

## Opening of ASI survey report on Gyanvapi complex postponed to Jan 3

**VARANASI (UP), Dec 21:** A Varanasi district court on Thursday postponed to January 3 the opening of an ASI survey report of the Gyanvapi mosque complex and sharing of its copies with the petitioners concerned.

Advocate Madan Mohan Yadav, who is representing the Hindu petitioners, said, "District Judge A K Vishvesha put off the matter of opening the sealed survey report and providing its copies to the parties to January 3 on the plea of Muslim side advocate Akhlaq Ahmed."

Akhlaq Ahmed told the court that lawyers were busy with Bar Council elections slated for Friday and were not attending to court work.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) submitted the survey report in a sealed cover to the district court on December 18. The survey was ordered by the court after the petitioners claimed the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing temple.

The court had fixed December 21 to open the sealed report and shared its copies with the advocates. The Muslim side had on that day appealed to the court to not make the survey report public. The Hindu side had sought that the report be made public.

The ASI carried out the scientific survey of the Gyanvapi premises, located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, to determine



whether the mosque was constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple.

The survey was carried out following the district court's July 21 order that mentioned the need to survey beneath the mosque's domes, the cellars and the western wall.

It said the ASI should also examine the plinth and pillars to determine the age and nature of the building. The court had asked the ASI to ensure that there was no damage to the structure standing on the disputed land.

The court had also ordered the Director of ASI to conduct a detailed scientific investigation by using GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) survey, dating method and other modern techniques.

The July 21 direction was on a plea filed by a group of women seeking the right of regular worship of sculptures of Hindu deities on the mosque's outer wall.

The mosque's 'wazu khana' (used by Muslims for ritual ablutions before offering namaz), where a structure claimed by Hindu litigants

to be a 'Shivling' exists, will not be part of the survey, the lower court had said, following an earlier Supreme Court order protecting the spot.

The Anjuman Intezamia Masjid committee had challenged the district court's order in the Allahabad High Court and the Supreme Court. The appeal was dismissed by both the courts paying way for the survey to begin on August 4. The Supreme Court, however, had asked the ASI not to carry out any invasive act during the survey, thus ruling out any excavation.

On December 11, the Varanasi district court gave one more week to the ASI to submit a scientific survey report of the Gyanvapi mosque complex. This was the sixth time that the court had granted an extension to the ASI to file its survey report.

Earlier, extension were granted on September 6, October 5, November 2, November 17 and November 30.

The ASI started the survey in the barricaded area of the Gyanvapi premises, excluding its sealed section, on August 4.

The survey had begun after the Allahabad High Court upheld the Varanasi district court order and ruled that the step was "necessary in the interest of justice" and would benefit both the Hindu and Muslim sides in the dispute. (PTI)

## Central team assesses flood damages in TN's Tirunelveli district

**TIRUNELVELI (TN), Dec 21:** An inter-ministerial central team visited the inundated areas in Tirunelveli district on Thursday to assess the extent of damage caused due to the torrential rain on December 17 and 18 in the four southern districts of Tamil Nadu. The team under National Disaster Management Authority (Operation and Communication) Advisor K P Singh visited the waterlogged area at the Tirunelveli junction bus stand and interacted with the officials.

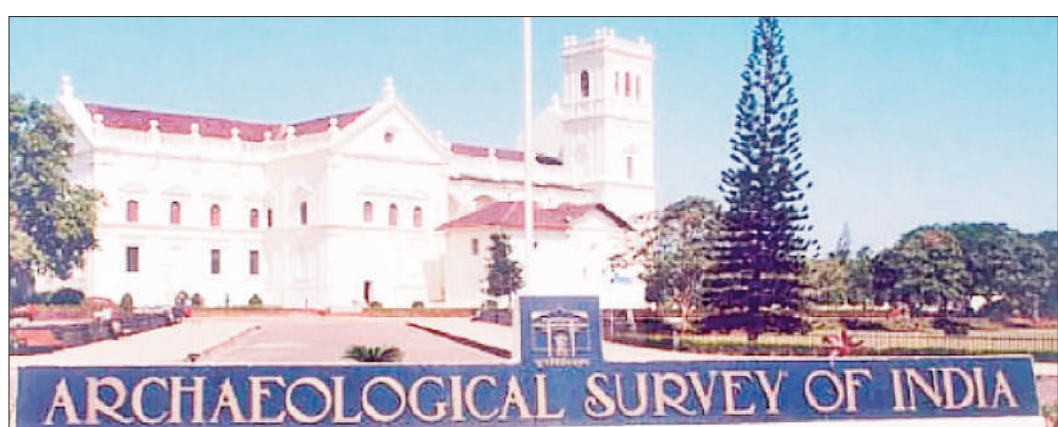
During the team's interaction with the affected residents, a victim of a house collapse became emotional while narrating her horrifying experience and almost fell at Singh's feet pleading for help.

Singh, who stopped the sobbing lady from touching his feet, assured her of appropriate financial assistance.

According to Tirunelveli district collector K P Karthikeyan ahead of the rains, the administration shifted about 696 pregnant women to safety as a precaution. As many as 142 were admitted to various hospitals and of them, 91 pregnant women including 14 in Primary Health Centre, 13 in Government Hospital, 21 in Tirunelveli Medical College Hospital, and 43 in private hospitals, delivered babies in the last two days. (PTI)

## ASI to explore possibility of ancient city underneath Uttarakhand's Gevad valley

*The area houses temples dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries*



**DEHRADUN, Dec 21:** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will soon begin a survey of the Gevad valley in Uttarakhand's Almora district to find out if an an-

cient city lies underneath the flat land along the Ramganga river, an official said on Thursday.

"A team of ASI experts will visit the site spread over a 10-km area

in the first or second week of January to explore the possibility," Manoj Saxena, Superintending Archaeologist of ASI's Dehradun Circle, told PTI.

The assumption about the existence of the remains of an ancient city beneath the soil in the Gevad valley is based on the presence of a number of temples in the area dating back to the 9th, 10th, 14th and 15th centuries, he said.

The presence of so many temples in the area could not have been possible without human habitation, he added.

Another basis of the assumption is the location of the site. Most ancient civilisations grew close to rivers, Saxena said.

"If our team of experts finds concrete evidence of a potential site there in the course of its exploration, then we will apply for a licence from the top ASI authorities to begin the excavation for the lost city," he said. (PTI)

## AKSHAY KUMAR MARKS 16 YEARS OF 'WELCOME'

**MUMBAI, Dec 21:**

Superstar Akshay Kumar on Thursday marked the 16th anniversary of hit movie "Welcome" and announced that Sanjay Dutt has joined the franchise's upcoming third part.

Kumar posted a photo from the sets of the movie, which is titled "Welcome To The Jungle" and is being directed by Ahmed Khan.

"What a lovely coincidence that we celebrate 16 years of #Welcome today while I am shooting for the franchise's third part #Welcome To The Jungle. And it's wonderful to welcome Sanju Baba in this one. What do you think? @duttssanjay #Welcome3," the 56-year-old actor wrote.

"Welcome", released on December 21, 2007, became a huge hit at the

domestic box office. It also featured Katrina Kaif, Anil Kapoor, Nana Patekar, Paresh Rawal and late Feroz Khan. The second movie, called "Welcome Back", came out in 2015.

Both the movies were directed by Anees Bazmee.

"Welcome To The Jungle" will feature an ensemble cast which also includes Suniel Shetty, Raveena Tandon, Johnny Lever, Paresh Rawal, Lara Dutta, Rajpal Yadav, Arshad Warsi, Jacqueline Fernandez, Shreyas Talpade, Tusshar Kapoor, Disha Patani, Kiku Sharada and Krushna Abhishek. Singers Daler Mehndi and Mika Singh round out the cast.

The movie is scheduled to be released in theatres on December 20, 2024. (PTI)



## Jason Statham's 'The Beekeeper' to debut in Indian theatres in January 2024

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Actor Jason Statham's action thriller "The Beekeeper" will be released in Indian theatres on January 19, 2024. PVR INOX Pictures announced on Thursday.

Filmmaker David Ayer, known for movies "Street Kings", "End of Watch", "Suicide Squad", "Bright" and "Fury", has directed the movie from a script by Kurt Wimmer.

Kamal Gianchandani, CEO PVR INOX Pictures Ltd, said the company is excited to bring the

movie for Indian audiences.

"We at PVR INOX Pictures are equally delighted and excited to announce the Indian premiere of 'The Beekeeper', featuring the widely acclaimed Jason Statham.

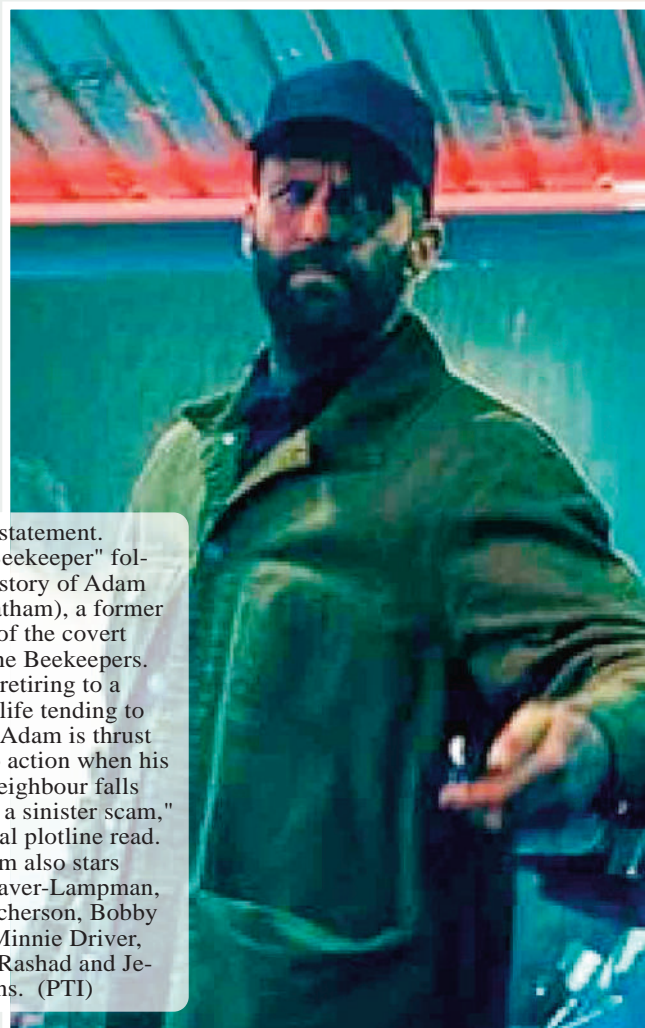
"Following his superhit work in films like 'Fast and Furious' series, 'Operation Fortune', 'The Meg 2', the much-anticipated release of 'The Beekeeper' promises a movie experience like no other, with screenings in theatres and IMAX," Gianchandani

said in a statement.

"The Beekeeper" follows the story of Adam Clay (Statham), a former member of the covert group 'The Beekeepers'.

"After retiring to a peaceful life tending to his bees, Adam is thrust back into action when his elderly neighbour falls victim to a sinister scam," the official plotline read.

The film also stars Emmy Raver-Lampman, Josh Hutcherson, Bobby Naderi, Minnie Driver, Phyllicia Rashad and Jeremy Irons. (PTI)



## Dhoad band to perform at Udaipur's Shilpgram Utsav



**JAIPUR, Dec 21:** Rajasthan's famous folk artiste Rahis Bharti and his band Dhoad will perform during the crafts and folk festival Shilpgram Utsav, being held at the West Zone Cultural Centre in Udaipur. The ten-day event, organised by the Ministry of Culture, kickstarted on Thursday and prom-

ises to showcase mesmerizing performances, including a live concert with French rock star Yaron Popo, a statement said. Bharti's band will perform at the festival for three days, starting from December 30. "Our entire focus is on Rajasthan's music, and that's why we are recognized as the Cultural Ambassador of

Rajasthan at the global level," Bharti said. Hailing from Dhod village in Sikar district of Rajasthan, Bharti set up Dhoad band 20 years ago. He took the Rajasthani folk music across the world and also gave opportunities to local artists from the state to perform at the international level. (PTI)

## 'Dunki' opens to mixed reviews and high excitement from SRK fans



**MUMBAI, Dec 21:** There were drumbeats and dancing, early morning queues and some confetti too as Shah Rukh Khan starrer "Dunki" opened on Thursday to tepid reviews from critics and much excitement from his fandom.

"Dunki", Shah Rukh's third film in the year after blockbuster hits "Pathaan" and "Jawan", is directed by Rakulmar Hirani and the big question is whether it will be a box office hat-trick for the star.

That several critics were

underwhelmed by the much-discussed film, described as a comedy drama centred on illegal immigration, and the frenzy didn't quite reach the fever pitch of Shah Rukh's earlier two releases didn't matter much to his die-hard fans. (PTI)

## Idea behind 'Ga Mere Man Ga' to mobilise youth to bring about change: producer Ina Sathe

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** The youth can foster change if they put their mind and energy to a cause, says producer Ina Sathe, who hopes her Hindi film "Ga Mere Man Ga" inspires the younger generation to save the rivers of the country.

The story of "Ga Mere Man Ga", set against the backdrop of Ganga river, revolves around a struggling rock band in search of purpose.

The film is directed by Abhijit Das and was screened at the Films Division Auditorium here on Wednesday. It features Arpit William Samuel Massey, Jaya Banerjee, Anil Vishwakarma, Yuvraj Vikram Singh, TripTea, Upma Chaturvedi, Swami Chidanand Saraswati and Ma Bhagwati.

Sathe, who has backed the movie through the banner Shri Gurukripa Productions, said she would feel disheartened whenever she would

come across news reports of pollution in the holy river.

"We are a family of Ganga lovers. We used to bathe in the river every month. Then we saw the river getting polluted and it made headlines all over the country. I would feel really bad about it.

"When the government announced grants for the cleaning up of Ganga, I thought the situation would improve. But sadly that didn't happen. But youth can do wonders as they have the stamina, intelligence and time. The idea behind the film was to mobilise the youth to bring about a change," the 67-year-old filmmaker told PTI.

The Delhi-based producer hopes people would come together to do their bit to save the rivers across the country after watching her film.

"The government is doing its part and spending a lot of money, but I hope after watching this film people ask what they are doing to save

our rivers. We should invest our time and energy. A change will come if youth mobilises itself to keep the Ganga clean," she added.

Sathe said she had thought about making the film back in 2013.

"I had to wait so long because I had no money. We kept trying to gather funds through investors but nothing really materialised for a long time."

"We had just finished production on the film when the pandemic happened. We wasted one whole year due to the pandemic. The film is currently with the Uttar Pradesh government, but they are yet to release it," she said.

According to the makers, the script of the film has been approved by Uttar Pradesh government's nodal agency Film Bandhu for subsidy.

Sathe said she would like to release the movie on a digital platform soon. (PTI)

## No pressure but it was difficult to decide on approach for playing Atalji: Pankaj Tripathi

**MUMBAI, Dec 21:** Actor Pankaj Tripathi, who essays the role of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the upcoming film, "Main Atal Hoon", said it was difficult for him to get into the skin of the character.

The biopic is based on the life and times of Vajpayee, the first prime minister from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is directed by filmmaker Ravi Jadhav of "Natarang" and "Balgandharva" fame.

At the trailer launch event of the film on Wednesday, the 47-year-old actor said the challenge was to decide on the approach for playing the part as authentically as possible.

"There is no extra pressure. But it was difficult to decide how much we should imitate or do mimicry or to not have that (approach) and just present his ideas and opinions out there. There's so much material about him already out there, so what else should you do?

"If people want to see him then they can see his speeches on YouTube. So, this was a difficult task for me and you will see what we have attempted when you see the film, and how much we have succeeded in that experiment," the National Award-winning actor told reporters.

Tripathi, known for films "Gangs of Wasseypur", "Masaan", "Stree" and web series "Mirzapur" and "Criminal Justice", said the intention to make the biopic is to inspire the younger generation.

"A biopic is made so that we can inform and inspire the younger generation about the person and their extraordinary life. The purpose of the biopic is to provide entertainment and at the same time, it serves as an inspiration about the person, the challenges that they faced, and their journey forward," he added.



Vajpayee is credited with popularising the party beyond its base and running a coalition government successfully for six years (1998

to 2004), during which he pushed reforms and boosted infrastructure. He died in 2018 at the age of 93. The actor recalled attending political rallies of Vajpayee as an admirer.

"I've been to two political rallies in Patna's Gandhi Maidan to listen to him. In that crowd of lakhs of people, I was a 20-year-old listening to Atal ji. I had no clue that I'll become an actor and get the opportunity to play his role. I liked him a lot, I would go to listen to his speeches," he said.

Jadhav said the film will not only focus on Atal Bihari Vajpayee's life journey but also shed light on the changes that happened in Indian politics over the years.

"Our idea was to show what all have happened from the year 1940 to 2000, what all changes have happened in politics, the changes in political campaigns, and how people have changed...along with the story of

Atal ji. "So, you will get to see all of these things. We are making a 60-year reel in two hours, in which you will see how India has changed with Atal ji," he added.

Since the story spans six decades, Tripathi said he also had to work on the physical aspects of the character.

"I've done theatre and training at National School of Drama, so I've learnt a few things like body language on my own. In this film, my character goes from the age of 25 to 85, so I had to keep in mind what body language I should have as per the year.

"But we want the audience to understand Atal ji from his thought process and not just from his body language," he added.

On a query about the film being an advertising campaign for the upcoming elections, producer Vinod Bhanushali said it was an incorrect assumption. (PTI)

# Protesting wrestlers will not face vendetta politics: Brij Bhushan

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** The protesting wrestlers will not face any sort of vendetta politics and they will get the required support from the new federation, outgoing WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh said on Thursday after the panel backed by him emerged victorious in the keenly-followed elections. Brij Bhushan, who is facing sexual harassment charges from women wrestlers, assured that the new dispensation will work impartially.

Rio Olympics medallist Sakshi

Malik, though, announced her retirement from the sport, saying she won't compete under the presidency of a man, who is backed by the former WFI boss.

Vinesh Phogat and Bajrang Punia are still active and hope to qualify for the 2024 Paris Games. The two wrestlers also expressed disappointment that Brij Bhushan loyalist Sanjay Singh had become the new WFI chief but did not follow Sakshi in quitting the sport.

The three top wrestlers had launched an agitation against Brij

Bhushan accusing him of sexually exploiting several women wrestlers, early this year.

"All wrestlers will get support from the WFI. There will be no partiality. A lot of wrestlers, new and established ones, had sat on dharna on the first day of the protest (January 2023). No one will be singled out on that basis," Brij Bhushan told PTI when asked if the federation will support the wrestlers who had protested against him.

"We have to look after the game

and not the mistakes of the wrestlers. If they will suffer due to their mistakes, then the federation will not be impartial."

Asked if he will continue to call the shots in the day-to-day running of the federation, Brij Bhushan said he won't interfere but if his help is sought he will offer suggestions.

"They (new body) will control wrestling, if they want to take suggestions I am open to give," he said. It is also expected that the new body may change a few pol-

icy decisions that the ad-hoc panel had taken.

The Bhopender Singh Bajwal ad-hoc body had recently announced that the Olympic quota won by the wrestlers will not belong to that particular wrestler but to the country and the quota-winning wrestler will also have to undergo selection trials to book his or her place in the national team for the 2024 Paris Game. "Whatever decision the ad-hoc panel has taken, if they are for the good of wrestling we will continue with

that," he said.

The BJP MP, interestingly, claimed that they have swept the posts even as the new secretary-general and senior vice-president emerged from the rival camp, led by CWG gold medallist wrestler Anita Sheoran.

"The entire panel is ours. Whoever has won, has won from our votes." Former Railways Sports Promotion Board secretary Prem Chand Lochab is the new secretary-general while Devender Kadian, who was seen with the

wrestlers during their media address at Press Club of India after the WFI polls, grabbed the post of senior vice-president.

The former WFI boss, who had a 12-year run in the federation, said the last 11 months were very unfortunate not only for him but also for the sport. "It was a very sad time for me personally as well for the wrestling fraternity and in a way for the country since the country's image was dented (due to allegations against him)." (PTI)

## Vastrakar, Rana pack a punch as India bundle out Aussies for 219



**MUMBAI, Dec 21:** Seamer Pooja Vastrakar and off-spinner Sneha Rana showed enough craft to exploit a pitch offering variable bounce to bundle out Australia for a modest 219 in their first innings on the opening day of the one-off Test here Thursday.

In their first essay, India raced to 98 for 1 at stumps as openers Smriti Mandhana (43 not out, 49 balls, 8x4) and Shafali Verma (40, 59 balls, 8x4) added 90 runs.

But India's march to ascendancy began through Vastrakar (4/53) who teamed up with Sneha Rana (3/56) and Deepti Sharma (2/45) to snap Aussies' innings in 77.4 overs despite an even fifty by Tahlia McGrath. However, Australia made a poor start as they lost opener Phoebe Litchfield in the first over itself after a mix-up with her partner Beth Mooney at the Wankhede Stadium. Four deliveries later, Vastrakar produced a jaffa to remove Ellyse Perry (4) and reduced Australia to 7/2 inside the first two overs. Vastrakar beat the defence of star all-rounder Perry by getting the ball move into her to disturb the stumps.

But McGrath (50 off 56 balls, 8x4s) came out firing on all cylinders to put pressure back on India, making most of the errors in line and in the field.

McGrath was severe on anything that had width, racing to her third fifty in five Tests with eight fours while also utilising two lifelines in the form of dropped catches when she was on 18 and 45.

While making the bulk of runs during her 80-run stand with Mooney for the second wicket, McGrath also set herself up for a big

score. But an error in judgement made her pay heavily, and it also opened the floodgates.

Having got her runs fluently up until then, the Australian vice-captain chipped Rana straight to Rajeshwari Gayakwad at midwicket who timed her jump well to collect the ball over her head.

Mooney (40) batted well despite her struggles early on against spin and pace to get close to a half-century, but Vastrakar surprised the left-hander with a sharp bouncer that shot off the surface.

The resultant edge lobbed towards Rana at first slip after deflecting off the gloves of Yastika Bhatia.

Having lost a chunk of batting to reach 103/4 at lunch, both Alyssa Healy (38) and Annabel Sutherland (16) showed impressive footwork during their 40-run association which ended abruptly.

Australia skipper Healy could not do much when a delivery from Deepti kept very low to crash onto her stumps, after which Vastrakar pinned Sutherland in front of the wicket for her third scalp.

Ashleigh Gardner (11) was Vastrakar's fourth victim as she meekly played one outside the off stump to be caught behind. But Australia's tail produced a good fightback to take them past 200. A stubborn 30-run association between Jess Jonassen (19) and Kim Garth (28 not out) did frustrate India, who were made to work hard for the breakthrough on either side of the tea break. Jonassen and Garth took their time collecting runs as their partnership came off 93 balls, while Lauren Cheatle (6) also hung around to ensure Australia put a reasonable total on the board. (PTI)

## PATIDAR EXHIBITED WONDERFUL BATTING DURING HIS 16-BALL 22

# SAMSON'S TON GUIDES INDIA TO 296/8 AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA

**PAARL (SOUTH AFRICA), Dec 21:** Sanju Samson carved a well-measured maiden ODI hundred as India posted a challenging 296 for eight against South Africa in the series-deciding third match here on Thursday. Samson (108 off 114 balls) found a perfect sidekick in the patient Tilak Varma, who struck his first ODI fifty (52 off 77 balls), as they milked 116 precious runs for the fourth-wicket to place India in a position to win this series.

Samson and Varma came together when India were slightly wobbling at 101 for three after being asked to bat first.

But the pair showed excellent situational awareness.

Their partnership was all about pragmatism without letting go of any opportunity to unfurl any big shot. Usually a free-flowing hitter, Samson shelved his macho intentions for a large part of his innings, concentrating on singles

and twos as the Boland Park pitch also had this slight bite on it. But the right-hander intermittently brought out his T20 avatar into play like when he smashed pacer Nandre Burger for a big six over mid-wicket or while executing an exquisite inside-out loft over cover off left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj for a four.

His fifty came off 66 balls with a single to third man off pacer Beuran Hendricks.

But at the other end, Varma generally struggled for flow as he could find a boundary only in his 39th ball, a scratchy pull off Hendricks. However, the left-hander gave company to Samson to take India out of the woods.

Finally, Varma fell in his venture to accelerate, a miss-timed sweep off Maharaj ending in the hands of Wiaan Mulder in the deep. But Samson carried on and was not to be denied a hundred this time. The landmark moment for him came when he pushed

Maharaj to long-off for a single as the dressing room went on its feet to applaud a fine dig.

Samson was dismissed as he tried to up the ante as a skier off pacer Lizaad Williams was snafled by Reeza Hendricks inside the rings.

However, a good cameo by Rinku Singh (38 off 27 balls) helped India motor on in the end phase of the innings.

But before India made that good fightback, the Proteas bowlers had them on the ropes taking three wickets.

Debutant Rajat Patidar, who stepped in for an injured opener Ruturaj Gaikwad was a treat to watch during his 16-ball 22, exhibiting wonderful eye-hand coordination. But Burger's lovely in-dipper that disturbed the stumps snapped his stay and Hendricks trapped Sai Sudharsan in front of the wicket with a delivery that was angled into him from over the wicket. (PTI)



## Gukesh beats Erigaisi for Chennai Grand Masters title

**CHENNAI, Dec 21:** Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh won the Chennai Grand Masters Chess Championship title here on Thursday, edging out compatriot Arjun Erigaisi on the tie-break after they finished equal on points.

The Chennai GM, who finished with a score of 4.5 points from seven rounds after a draw against fellow Indian GM P Harikrishna in the final round, improved his chances of qualifying for next year's Candidates tournament.

Erigaisi tied Gukesh for first place with 4.5 points after he defeated Hungarian Sanan Sjugirov in the final round, but the latter came up trumps on the basis of a better tie-break score.

The top three places were taken by the Indians, with Harikrishna finishing in the third place.

The tournament win puts Gukesh in the lead in the Fide Circuit standings and greatly improves his qualification chances for the Candidates tournament.

The Fide Circuit ends with the World Rapid Championship to be held in Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

from December 25-31.

Gukesh remained unbeaten through the seven rounds, scoring two wins to go with five draws while Erigaisi, who began with a loss to Harikrishna posted three wins.

Harikrishna and Aronian, who drew all their seven matches, were unbeaten.

Iranian GM Maghsoodloo, who was also in contention for the Candidates and required a tournament win here, had a modest run and could only finish sixth (with 3.5 points).

Results after Round 7: D Gukesh drew P Harikrishna, Arjun Erigaisi beat Sanan Sjugirov (Hungary), Parham Maghsoodloo (Iran) beat Alexandr Predke (Serbia), Pavel Eljanov (Ukraine) drew Levon Aronian (USA).

Final Standings: 1. D Gukesh 4.5 points, 2. Arjun Erigaisi 4.5 points, 3. P Harikrishna 4 points, 4. Pavel Eljanov 4 points, 5. Levon Aronian 3.5 points, 6. Parham Maghsoodloo 3.5 points, 7. Sanan Sjugirov 2.5 points, 8. Alexandr Predke 1.5. (PTI)



**GUWAHATI, Dec 21:** Commonwealth Games gold medallist and top seed Lakshya Sen and top-billed Aakarshi Kashyap reached the men's and women's singles third round respectively in the 85th Senior National Badminton Championships here on Thursday.

Sen warmed off T Sidarth 21-8, 21-5, while Aakarshi was made to sweat by Rituparna Das before emerging a 21-18, 21-11 winner in 32 minutes.

Sen and Sidarth were cautious in the first game as the players fought for each point until they reached a tie at 5-5. He then accelerated to secure the first game at 21-8.

The ace shuttler totally dominated the second game to win it 21-5 and wrapped the match in just 25 minutes.

Later, BWF 2023 World Junior Championships bronze medallist Ayush Shetty faced a tough challenge from Neer Nehwal but

emerged victorious 23-25, 21-18, 21-12.

He will face seventh-seeded Alap Mishra in the next round. Second-seeded Ashmita Chahla defeated Suzen Burhagohain 21-13, 21-10 to set up a face-off with Delhi's Rishika Nandi.

Unnati Hooda, the 2023 Abu Dhabi Masters champion, triumphed over Manisha Rani Tirkey of Jharkhand 21-11, 21-17, setting up a third-round clash with Tanvi Sharma.

Sharma, the silver medallist in Badminton Asia's U17 and U15 Junior Championships in 2023, faced a tough time against Shreya Lele, ultimately securing a 21-18, 22-24, 21-13 victory in 56 minutes.

Defending champion and former Junior world No. 1 Anupama Upadhyaya defeated Taneesha Singh 21-5, 21-12.

In the mixed doubles, Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto cruised to a 21-5, 21-14 win over Abdul Rahman Syed and Mamaikya Lanka.

The duo is set to face Chayanit Joshi and Kavya Gupta in the next round. (PTI)

## Our plan was to move the ball into Aussie batters using wobble seam: Pooja Vastrakar

**MUMBAI, Dec 21:** Pacer Pooja Vastrakar, who wrecked Aussies with a four-wicket haul in their first innings of the one-off Test, said on Thursday that the Indian Women's plan was to exploit the visitors' vulnerability against incoming deliveries bowled with a wobble seam.

Vastrakar's four for 53 was instrumental in India restricting Australia to a mere 219 in their first innings. "Naturally, I have out-swing, but while watching the videos of both these teams (Australia and England), they had some difficulty in facing incoming deliveries," Vastrakar told the media here after the first day's play.

"We practiced during the training to try and get the ball moving in with the wobble seam, since the ball cuts well with the wobble seam and batters face difficulty," she added.

Among her victims on the day was star all-rounder Ellyse Perry, who was cleaned up after the ball nipped back to crash onto her

stumps.

"With Perry coming in, I wanted to bring the ball back in sharply and I was able to execute it properly," Vastrakar said.

She credited India bowling coach Troy Cooley's role in instilling some key values and focus points.

"Got a lot of help with him coming in. He is a very positive person and even when we have not done well he talks about the better deliveries that we would have bowled in that session," she said.

Despite taking a four-for, Vastrakar said the surface against Australia proved more challenging to bowl on than the one against England.

"It did not appear to be an easy wicket like at DY Patil (Stadium) when we trained. We felt we would have to work hard here and hit the surface (hard) while bowling," she said.

"The bowling coach told us that we would have to bowl wicket-to-

wicket and hit the deck and try to get the ball coming back in. The first delivery I bowled to Perry was an in-swing and she got out," the right-arm seamer added.

Australia vice-captain Tahlia McGrath praised Indian bowlers Vastrakar and Sneha Rana (3/56) for their relentlessness. But she hoped the visitors would be able to fight back on the second day.

"India bowled really well, they kept their plans simple, attacked the stumps and it was hard to score at times," she said.

"(I am) a little bit disappointed I could not go on to get a big partnership with Moons (Beth Mooney) and a big score myself," said McGrath, who top-scored for the Australians with 50 while adding 80 runs for the third wicket with Mooney (40).

"I struggled a lot with her (Sneha Rana); Moons looked slightly more comfortable. I constantly felt on edge against Sneha and she got me in the end," McGrath added. (PTI)



## Kiyana, Harsh win Gold in Asian Youth Chess Championships

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Two Indian youngsters, Kiyana Parihar (U-8 Girls) and Harsh Suresh (U-16 open) won gold medals in the 25th Asian Youth Chess Championships (Classical), held at Al Ain Convention Centre in UAE.

Kiyana had also bagged the silver medal in the Asian U-8 Girls rapid chess championship held last week.

Three Indians, AS Sharvaanica (U-8 Girls), Aarit Kapil (U-8 Open) and G Tejaswini (U-18 Girls), won silver medals in their respective classical championships, while Aadya Ranganath won a bronze in the U-10 girls category.

AS Sharvaanica, who had bagged two gold medals earlier in the 25th Asian Youth festival in U-8 Girls rapid and U-8 girls blitz categories, became the only player to win medals in all

three (blitz, classical and rapid) categories.

The Soviet players, who played under the FIDE flag, reigned supreme by winning four gold, four silver and two bronze medals while China bagged two gold, one silver and one bronze medals.

India had bagged nine medals, including four gold (Bhagyashree Patil U-18 girls, Sapariya Ghosh U-14 girls, A S Sharvaanica U-8 girls and Muhammad Shyan Ibrahim U-8 Open), in the Asian Youth Rapid Chess Championships held December 13.

The Asian Blitz Chess Championships held on December 17 saw three Indian girls -- V C Nivedita (U-12 girls), Pratibha Bordoloi (U-10 girls) and A S Sharvaanica -- win the gold medals for the country. (PTI)

# Birj Bhushan loyalist Sanjay Singh becomes new WFI President



**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Sanjay Singh on Thursday became the new President of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) with his panel comfortably winning most of the posts in the delayed polls as outgoing chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh gained indirect control over the sports body.

Sanjay, who is a Brij Bhushan loyalist and UP Wrestling Association Vice President, secured 40 votes as against seven that his rival Anita Sheoran got. RSS-affiliate Sanjay hails from Varanasi and is a very close associate of Brij Bhushan. Given the tremendous interest the outgoing chief has in the sport, it is expected that Sanjay will consult him in policy decisions.

"It's triumph for thousands of wrestlers in the country who suffered in the past 7-8 months," Sanjay Singh told reporters after his huge win.

"We will respond to politics with politics and wrestling with wrestling," Sanjay replied when asked about the politics being played within federation.

The panel of Sheoran, a CWG gold medallist, though managed to win the key post of secretary general as Prem Chand

Lochab, a former RSPB secretary, beat Darshan Lal 27-19.

Devender Singh Kadian, who runs a chain of food joints on National Highways and is considered to be close to protesting wrestlers, claimed the senior vice president's post, beating ID Nanavati 32-15.

The Brij Bhushan camp The Brij Bhushan camp won 13 of the 15 posts. It swept all the four posts of Vice Presidents with Delhi's Jai Prakash (37), West Bengal's Asit Kumar Saha (42), Punjab's Kartar Singh (44) and Manipur's N Phoni (38) winning the elections. The new Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav, who did not turn up for the polls, got only five votes in the VP election.

Uttarakhand's Satyapal Singh Deshwal, who is also from Brij Bhushan camp, is the new treasurer. He beat Jammu and Kashmir's Dushyant Sharma 34-12.

All five executive committee members were also from the outgoing chief's camp. "The wrestlers who have been protesting over the last one year should leave the path and concentrate on their sport. That will only give them success and fame,"

two-time Asian games champion Kartar Singh said.

"The sport has suffered a lot in the last one year due to the protest by wrestlers and no national competition at any level has taken place depriving sub-juniors, juniors and seniors of jobs, promotions etc," he added.

The outcome of the polls would give top wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik the feeling that their protest against Brij Bhushan has come to naught as they could not get the fraternity behind them despite aggressively pushing for a change of guard. A close associate of the BJP MP is now at the helm.

They had accused Brij Bhushan of sexually harassing women wrestlers, including juniors, and managed to mobilise huge support from different sections of society but the protest fizzled out the day they planned a march towards new Parliament building on May 28 when Delhi police removed all the protesters from Jantar Mantar for rioting. The wrestlers had officially called off their protest on June 7 when Sports Minister.

Anurag Thakur assured them that none of the family members or close associates of Brij Bhushan will be allowed to enter the WFI election fray.

The election of the new executive council will also pave the way for lifting the UWW ban on WFI. The world governing body of the game had banned WFI for not conducting election on time, forcing Indian wrestlers to compete as neutral athletes at the 2023 World Championships.

The election process was set in motion in July but was delayed because of court cases. The Supreme Court recently set aside the stay imposed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court, paving the way for the process to elect the new WFI governing body. (PTI)

## Olympic medallist Sakshi quits wrestling

**NEW DELHI, Dec 21:** Rio Olympic bronze medallist Sakshi Malik on Thursday announced her retirement from the sport, protesting against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh loyalist Sanjay Singh winning the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) election for the top job, here.

Sanjay, a close associate of outgoing WFI chief Brij Bhushan became the new WFI president with his panel winning 13 of the 15 posts in the elections here on Thursday.

"We fought from our heart but if a man like Brij Bhushan, his business partner and a close aide is elected as the president of WFI, I quit wrestling," said a teary-eyed Sakshi, and kept her shoes on the table in a dramatic announcement.

"We wanted a female president but that did not happen," the

31-year-old, who is also a CWG gold medallist, added.

Ahead of the elections, Olympic medal winning grapplers Bajrang Punia and Sakshi had repeatedly requested Sports Minister Anurag Thakur to stop anyone associated with Brij Bhushan from contesting the WFI polls.

Consequently, neither Brij Bhushan's son Prateek nor son-in-law Vishal Singh entered the fray.

Bajrang and Vinesh Phogat, who addressed the media after elections, did not say whether they will retire from the sport.

"It's unfortunate that government did not stand by its word that no Brij Bhushan loyalist will contest WFI election," Bajrang said.

"Upcoming women wrestlers will also face exploitation," Vinesh added. (PTI)




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