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● Heavy fighting across Gaza halts most aid delivery

● At least 85 civilians killed by a Nigerian army drone attack

● 2022 saw over 31 pc rise in offences promoting enmity between groups: NCRB

● DMK MP expresses regret for north-south divide remark

Sec 6A of Citizenship Act

SC: Govt must be given latitude to make adjustments necessary to save nation

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Observing that several northeastern states are affected by insurgency and violence, the Supreme Court Wednesday said the government must be given "latitude and leeway" to make adjustments necessary to save the nation.

Referring to section 6A of the Citizenship Act applicable exclusively to Assam, a five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said governments have to make compromises for the overall well-being of the nation. "We must also give the government that latitude. Even today there are parts of North East, we may not name them, but there are states affected by insurgency, affected by violence. We have to give the government that leeway to make adjustments necessary to save the nation," Chandrachud said.



He made the observation after senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for the petitioners, submitted that section 6A operates in a "blanket manner" and rewards illegal immigrants who continue to stay in Assam in violation of the citizenship law.

"Assam and other immediate neighbouring border states form a homogeneous single class. Singling out Assam is impermissible," Divan said. The bench, also comprising Justices Surya Kant, M M Sundresh, J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, is hearing 17 petitions to examine the constitutional validity of section 6A of the Citizenship Act relating to illegal immigrants in Assam.

Section 6A was inserted in the Citizenship Act as a special provision to deal with the citizenship of people covered under the Assam Accord. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

CM pats police for drop in crime rate

'Developmental activities and providing jobs to youths paid dividends'

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma Wednesday said "strong and uncompromising policing" has been the key to decline in incidents of crime, asserting that the state will become a "paradise" within three years if law and order is maintained in a similar manner.

Sarma's comments came after the latest report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) showed that the total number of cognisable offences in Assam fell by 48.26 per cent to nearly 69,000 cases in 2022 as against the previous year.

He also said the crime rate has seen a decline in the state in 2023 as well.

"Strong and uncompromising policing is the reason for this decline in crime rate; there is no alternative to strong policing. If we can maintain this robust policing for three years, Assam will be a paradise," Sarma said.

The chief minister said this is the first time Assam has witnessed a fall in overall crimes since 1979, and the gov-



ernment hopes to continue this trend in the coming years.

"Assam was at ninth position in 2021 in India in terms of the number of crimes taking place. As per NCRB data, we are now at 20th position and this is real good news," he said. Sarma said developmental activities and providing

marriage from Assam. After the next assembly session, we will also end polygamy," the CM said without elaborating.

Asked about the low conviction rate in Assam, he said one of the main reasons is filing of marital discord cases under IPC 498(A), which is eventually withdrawn by many complainants after settlement. "In Assam, the highest number of cases are filed under this section and these continue for years. By the time the case goes to court, the wife and husband settle their differences," Sarma said.

The conviction rate in 2022 stood at 13.56 per cent as against 6.13 per cent in the previous year.

"We have been taking several measures, including creation of the Directorate of Prosecution and regular prosecution service cadre. We expect a huge improvement very soon," he said. At present, around 32,000 cases are pending in police stations without filing of chargesheets, he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

HT BRIEFS

Protest

DEMOW: The activists of All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA), Demow regional committee had on Wednesday staged a protest programme in front of the Demow circle office against illegal land digging. They alleged that rampant illegal land digging is taking place in Demow and its surrounding areas. The AASAA also submitted a memorandum addressed to the Sivasagar district commissioner, before the Demow circle officer. It demanded an investigation into such illegal land digging by the district administration.

National award

GUWAHATI: In a proud moment for the education sector in Assam, the state's education minister, Ranaj Pegu, has extended heartfelt congratulations to Dipika Choudhury, inspector of schools, Kamrup (M) and deputy director of secondary education. Choudhury was honored with the prestigious National Award for Innovation and Good Practices in Education by the union education minister Dharma Pradhan. Taking to micro-blogging site X, Pegu expressed his joy and pride in Dipika Choudhury's achievement, highlighting her dedication to enhancing the educational landscape in Assam. "Congratulations to Smt Dipika Choudhury, Inspector of Schools, Kamrup (M) and Dy. Director of Secondary Education for receiving the National Awards for Innovations and Good Practices in Educational Administration. Hon'ble Education Minister of GoI Sri @dpradhanji Ji conferred her the award last evening. @CMOfficeAssam @SchoolEdnAssam". The National Award for Innovation and Good Practices in Education is a recognition of outstanding contributions to the field of education, acknowledging individuals who have demonstrated innovative practices and made a significant impact on the learning environment.

Kashmir suffered due to Jawaharlal Nehru's two major blunders: Shah

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Union home minister Amit Shah on Wednesday blamed India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's 'two major blunders' for the sufferings of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. He cited the 'two blunders' as declaring a ceasefire without winning the entire Kashmir and taking the issue to the United Nations.

Replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, Shah said if Nehru had taken the right steps, a large chunk of territory would not have been ceded and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir would have been part of India.

"I support the word that was used here -- Nehruvian blunder. Because of the blunder that was committed

during the time of Nehru, Kashmir had to suffer. With responsibility, I want to say that the two big blunders that happened during the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru, happened due to his decisions, because of which Kashmir had to suffer for years," Shah said.

"Kashmir had to suffer due to Nehruvian blunders. One was that when our Army was winning and as soon as Punjab area was reached, ceasefire was declared and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was born. If the ceasefire would have been (declared) three days later, PoK would have been part of India," the home minister said.

The ceasefire made without winning the entire Kashmir was one 'blunder' and the other was taking the issue to the UN. There was an uproar by (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

UK's Family Visa crackdown to impact Indian families

LONDON, Dec 6: The UK government's latest set of visa crackdowns to cut immigration figures includes a major hike in the minimum salary threshold for British nationals and permanent residents applying to bring family members to join them in the UK, a move expected to impact several Indian families.

The Family Visa category, under which long-term UK residents are able to bring their spouses and partners to join them, until now required the applicant to be earning at least GBP 18,600 annually.

From March/April next year, this threshold will jump to GBP 38,700, inevitably set to have a significant impact on applicants from the Indian subcontinent -- with Indians making up the second-highest cohort under the Family Visa in the past year (5,870) after Pakistanis (15,038), as per official Home Office statistics. "We will ensure that people bring only dependants whom they can support financially, by raising the minimum income for Family Visas to the same thresh-

old as the minimum salary threshold for skilled workers, which is GBP 38,700," UK Home Secretary James Cleverly told Parliament earlier this week.

"The minimum income requirement is currently GBP 18,600 and has not been increased since 2012. This package of measures will take effect from next spring," he said.

Analysts have flagged that this steep hike will have a wide-ranging impact on the family plans of those on lower incomes. Dr Madeleine Sumption, Director of the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, said the decision to raise the family income threshold was the "biggest surprise of the day" and one of the parts of the latest visa package that could have the "most significant impacts on individuals".

Sumption notes: "This threshold determines whether British citizens can bring a foreign partner to live with them in the UK, and the level has been more than doubled. Family migration makes up a small share of the total, but those who are affected (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Japan in favour of strengthening ties with Nagaland



KOHIAMA, Dec 6: Japanese Ambassador to India, Hiroshi Suzuki, on Wednesday said his country is in favour of strengthening and expanding ties with Nagaland.

Japan and Nagaland have longstanding historical ties that go back to World War II, Suzuki said.

He was speaking as the chief guest of the sixth day of 'Cultural Connect', a cultural extravaganza of the tribes of Nagaland at the Hornbill Festival in Naga Heritage village Kisama here.

Suzuki expressed gratitude for the generosity the Nagas extended to the Japanese people, who came here to collect the remains of their families after the war.

"We are grateful for the warmest support to the Japanese by the Naga people," he said. Suzuki said, "We want to strengthen and expand our cooperation and the friendship that we enjoy between Nagaland and Japan." Impressed by the beautiful dances and songs of the people of Nagaland, he said this is a testament of how to preserve one's tradition and culture that were handed down by the forefathers. Suzuki said he wants more Japanese people to visit Nagaland and be bowed by the Naga culture.

Stating that he is also in favour of more people of the state going to Japan, Suzuki said that Nagaland University and Japan have inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in Kohima on Tuesday. The MoU seeks to provide Japanese language education to enable Naga students to go to Japan to study and work there, he said. The diplomat hoped that through such an initiative, people-to-people exchange would expand in the future. (PTI)

SILKY PROCESS!



Woman prepares muga silkworms to be released on a Som tree at Dhakuakhana. UB Photos

Digital India Act unlikely to be passed before LS polls

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: The central government may not be able to put in place the Digital India Act, which aims to replace the over 23 years old IT Act 2000, before the next general election, as there is not much time left for extensive consultation, Union minister of state for electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said on Wednesday.

While speaking at the Global Technology Summit 2023, the Union minister, however, said that the rules for Digital Personal Data Protection Act will be out later this month for consultation and are expected to be notified by the end of December or early January next year. Chandrasekhar said, the existing IT Act doesn't even have the word internet and there is a consensus that it can be safely superseded and replaced.

"The successor act to that is something called the Digital India Act, which is a work in progress. We have the draft ready and a lot of work has gone into it.

"I suspect that before the next elections, we will not be able to legislate it because one of the things that the Prime Minister insists on is that we need every digital legislation to be extensively consulted. Therefore, I don't think we have enough time to get that done," Chandrasekhar said. The proposed Digital India Act has a lot of focus on the online segment.

The proposed Digital India Act will focus on making the internet open with rules to check on dominance of certain players, focus on online safety and user harm with provisions like age-gating by regulating addictive technology, discretionary moderation of fake news by social media, define and regulate emerging technologies etc.

The DIA also proposed stringent regulation for privacy invasive devices such as spy camera glasses, wearable tech by adding know your customer rules for retail sales backed by appropriate criminal law sanctions. (PTI)

Visitors witnessed cultural performances by 18 tribes of Nagaland during festival

Nagaland's Hornbill Festival attracts more than 78k visitors in first 5 days



KOHIAMA, Dec 6: Termed as the 'Festival of Festivals', the ongoing Hornbill Festival of Nagaland has given visitors from across the globe a glimpse into the rich Naga cultural heritage along with wholesome entertainment and scrumptious traditional food and drink.

The footfall of visitors during this annual tourism event of the Nagaland government is only increasing with more than 78,000 visitors including 1,621 foreigners arriving at the venue during the first five days of the festival, according to official data. The 10-day-long festival that began on December 1 is being held at the picturesque Naga heritage village, Kisama.

Besides 1,621 foreigners, 20,659 domestic tourists and 56,115 locals have witnessed cultural perform-

ances of the 18 Naga tribes till Tuesday, according to data provided by the state tourism department.

The highest turnout so far was recorded on Sunday, the third day, with 18,002 visitors witnessing the festivities. This includes 12,578 locals, 5,001 domestic tourists and 423 foreigners.

Meanwhile, most of the visitors to the Hornbill Festival, which has been billed as the Festival of Festivals by the state government, have expressed happiness to witness the programmes while several others also made some constructive suggestions. "I brought good wishes to the beautiful people of Nagaland from the people of Colombia. Congratulations for such a colourful festival Hornbill," said Victor E from Colombia. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Over 100 websites blocked for facilitating organised illegal investments

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: The Centre has blocked over 100 websites involved in facilitating organised illegal investments related to economic crimes and task-based part-time job frauds.

According to an official statement, these websites were being operated by overseas actors and targets were mostly retired employees, women and unemployed youth looking for part time jobs.

The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), a wing of the Union home ministry, through its vertical National Cybercrime Threat Analytics Unit had last week identified and recommended that these websites be blocked.

Following this, the Union ministry of electronics and information technology, invoking its power under the Information Technology Act, 2000, has blocked these websites, the statement said.

These websites, which facilitated task-based organised illegal investment related to economic crimes, were learnt to be operated by overseas actors and were using digital advertisement, chat messengers and mule and rented accounts.

The proceeds from the large scale economic frauds were seen to be laundered out of India using card network, crypto currency, overseas ATM withdrawals and international Fintech companies, the statement said. The



I4C is an initiative of the home ministry to deal with cyber crimes in the country in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

Citizens have been advised to promptly report phone numbers and social media handles used by such fraudsters to the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP), the statement said. It said several complaints have been received through 1930 helpline and the NCRP and these offences were posing significant threat to the citizens and also involved data security concerns.

These frauds, typically, involve a number of steps that include targeted digital advertisements launched on platforms like Google and Meta using key words like "Ghar baithe job" (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

RBI's MPC meet begins amid expectations of status quo on interest rate

MUMBAI, Dec 6: The RBI's high-powered rate setting panel on Wednesday began its 3-day brainstorming on the next set of bi-monthly monetary policy amid expectation of continued pause on the short-term key lending rate as GDP growth is gaining momentum, and inflation manageable.

RBI left the benchmark policy rate (repo) unchanged in its past four bi-monthly monetary policies. It had last increased the repo rate in February to 6.5 per cent, thus ending the interest rate hike cycle which began in May 2022 in the aftermath of Russia-Ukraine war and subsequent disruptions in the global supply chain resulting in high inflation in the country.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das would unveil the decision of the

six-member MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) on December 8. On expectations from the MPC, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA said with the GDP data for the second quarter of 2023-24 appreciably higher than the MPC's last forecast, and continuing concerns on various aspects of food inflation, "we expect the MPC to pause in its December 2023 review, amidst a fairly hawkish tone of the policy document".

According to Deutsche Bank Research, RBI will likely increase 2023-24 GDP forecast to 6.8 per cent year-on-year, from 6.5 per cent earlier, while holding the CPI forecast unchanged at 5.4 per cent. "RBI will likely keep repo rate and stance unchanged, persist with tight liquidity and ensure that

short-term rates remain around 6.85-6.90 per cent, resulting in an 'effective rate hike'," it said.

India retained the tag of the world's fastest-growing major economy, with its GDP expanding by a faster-than-expected rate of 7.6 per cent in the September quarter on booster shots from government spending and manufacturing. Director of Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI) Sanjay Bhutani, said the central bank's recent MPC meetings have kept the policy rate unchanged, aligning with market expectations.

"We anticipate a similar outcome for this upcoming meeting. However, with inflation on a downward trend, an easing of interest rates could be on the cards, potentially occurring as early as



February-March 2024," he said, and added this would be a positive development for all sectors, particularly capital and research-intensive

industries like the medical technology sector. The government has mandated the central government to ensure that the retail inflation based

on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stays at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

Retail inflation eased to a four-month low of 4.87 per cent in October, mainly due to cooling prices of food items. The Reserve Bank's MPC, in its October meeting, projected CPI inflation at 5.4 per cent for 2023-24, a moderation from 6.7 per cent in 2022-23. H S Bhatia, Managing Director of Kelwon Electronics and Appliances, manufacturing partner for Daewoo India, said RBI's monetary policy decisions will have a significant impact on the consumer durable industry.

"The industry is hoping that RBI will keep interest rates stable or even reduce them slightly in the upcoming review so that consumers get enough purchasing

power," he said. Parijat Agrawal, Head - Fixed Income, Union Asset Management Company said the US 10-year bond has corrected meaningfully from the peak in line with the incoming data and the central bank narrative, and concerns around oil prices too have reduced. "Although MPC will emphasise on bringing inflation to the 4 per cent target, we expect MPC to remain on pause on rates and stance," Agrawal said. The MPC comprises three external members and three officials of RBI. The external members on the panel are Shashanka Bhide, Ashima Goyal, and Jayanth R Varma. Besides Guv Das, the other RBI officials in MPC are Rajiv Ranjan (Executive Director) and Michael Debabrata Patra (Deputy Governor). (PTI)

Markets scale fresh lifetime highs; Nifty nears 21k-level



MUMBAI, Dec 6: Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty rallied for the seventh straight session to hit fresh lifetime highs on Wednesday, driven by gains in index majors Reliance Industries, ITC and L&T amid persistent foreign fund inflows.

Besides, receding crude oil prices in international markets also boosted sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 357.59 points, or 0.52 per cent, to settle at a new record of 69,653.73. The barometer rose to 69,744.62 during intra-day.

The broader index Nifty also climbed 82.60 points, or 0.40 per cent, to hit its fresh peak of 20,937.70.

"Post-state elections, market optimism thrives, confirming policy continuity and meeting investor expectations. A robust FII reversal is fuelled by receding inflation and dropping yields in US and Indian markets. The allure of Indian market gains post-China credit rating downgrade and decline in oil prices was followed by ease in geopolitical tensions," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

As many as 20 shares of the BSE benchmark index closed the session with gains, while 30 stocks in the Nifty ended in positive territory.

Among major Sensex movers, Wipro closed with the maximum gain of 3.85 per cent, followed by ITC -2.51 per cent higher. L&T and TCS gained 2.31 per cent and 2.13 per cent, respectively. Tata Motors, Nestle India, Infosys and Bajaj Finance were other gainers. On the other hand, NTPC, Axis Bank, UltraTech Cement and ICICI Bank ended the session with a loss of up to 1.58 per cent.

In the broader market, the BSE largecap index rose 0.61 per cent, the midcap gauge gained 0.19 per cent, and smallcap advanced by 0.18 per cent. "A strong rebound in IT, driven by reduced US recession risks and

in anticipation of robust summer demand, fuels the momentum in the power sector," Nair said.

However, he cautioned that short-term profit booking may occur due to domestic premium valuation concerns. "Further, lingering El Nino risks, a drop in reservoir levels, and reduced sowing may hold RBI to profoundly upgrade H2 FY24 growth and reduce future inflation estimates."

Among sectoral indices, utilities surged 3 per cent, followed by power (2.41 per cent). While oil & gas jumped 1.96 per cent, the IT index went up 1.48 per cent, capital goods advanced by 1.25 per cent, and tech rose by 1.18 per cent.

In contrast, healthcare declined by 0.64 per cent, telecommunications slipped 0.58 per cent and bankex fell 0.50 per cent.

Analysts said the sustained equity buying by foreign institutional investors was attributed to declining US bond yields, while the domestic players were betting big on favourable macroeconomic data and expectations of longer political stability in the country.

Besides, investors are also expecting the Reserve Bank to maintain the status quo on the interest rate in its bi-monthly monetary policy decision to be announced on Friday, they added.

Foreign institutional investors purchased shares worth ₹ 5,223.51 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, in Asian markets, Hang Seng and Nikkei 225 finished with gains of 0.90 per cent and 2.04 per cent, respectively, while China's Shanghai Composite lost 0.11 per cent.

European markets were broadly higher, led by France's CAC 40, rising 1.08 per cent. London's FTSE 100 gained 0.29 per cent, and Germany's DAX was 0.7 per cent higher. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Tuesday, with the S&P 500 registering a marginal loss of 0.06 per cent. On Wednesday, global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.31 per cent lower to USD 76.96 a barrel.

"The bearish formation around the crucial resistance of 21,000 (Nifty) amplifies the bearish sentiment. The support lies at 20,850, below which the market may witness a healthy correction in the short term. On the other hand, a move above 21,000 might trigger a resumption of the bullish trend," Rupak De, Senior Technical analyst at LKP Securities, said. On Tuesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 431.02 points, or 0.63 per cent, to close at a record high of 69,296.14. Nifty also climbed 168.50 points, or 0.81 per cent to hit its lifetime peak of 20,855.30. (PTI)

Investors' wealth rises by ₹ 2.17 lakh crore in morning deals as markets scale new peaks

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Investors turned wealthier by ₹ 2.17 lakh crore on Wednesday, as benchmark indices raced to scale new peaks, lifted by gains in blue chip stocks on the back of strong institutional inflows. Benchmark sensitive indices Sensex and Nifty touched record highs in initial trade on Wednesday, with Nifty nearing the psychologically-important level of 21,000.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 303.25 points, or 0.44 per cent, to a new record high of 69,599.39 in the morning trade. The broader index Nifty also climbed 100.05 points, or 0.48 per cent to hit its fresh lifetime high of 20,955.15.

The market rally added ₹ 2.17 lakh crore wealth to investors' kitty. The market capitalisation of

BSE-listed companies surged to ₹ 348.64 lakh crore in initial deals on Wednesday, from ₹ 346.47 lakh crore in the previous trading session.

Analysts said foreign institutional investors have reversed their selling strategy and have been consistent buyers during the last seven days.

This momentum is a reflection of institutional confidence in the Indian market, they said.

Among major Sensex movers, ITC rose the most by 1.70 per cent, Wipro by 1.43 per cent, Tech Mahindra by 1.36 per cent and Nestle India by 1.27 per cent. Other gainers included HCL Tech, Asian Paints and Reliance.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge and the smallcap index jumped 0.21 per cent each.



The combined market valuation of all listed companies on the BSE reached the USD 4 trillion-milestone for the first time ever on November 29.

The market capitalisation of listed companies on the NSE has surpassed the USD 4 trillion (₹ 334.72 trillion) mark for the first time ever on Friday. (PTI)

KFC launches 1000th restaurant in the country

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 6: Ever since the launch of the first KFC restaurant in India in 1995, the brand has been deeply embedded in the country and committed to serving finger-lickin' good food at scale through inclusive, equitable and sustainable business practices. As testament to the belief of growing purposefully with India, KFC has launched its 1000th restaurant in the country, a significant milestone in a journey of over 25 years.

Over the decades, KFC has evolved dynamically with the changing consumer landscape. The brand has been focused on deepening its relevance in India while retaining the distinctiveness and craveable taste it is known for globally. KFC India's menu is a strong mix of universally loved products like the iconic Hot & Crispy Bucket, Zinger Burger, Popcorn as well as innovative limited time offerings that are rooted in local flavours such as the KFC Chizza, Rice Bowlz, Chicken Roll, Veg and Tandoori Zinger amongst others. All of KFC India's food is freshly prepared from locally sourced, high-quality ingredients.

The brand has also been at the forefront of tech disruptions in the QSR industry, across operations and offerings. KFC currently has 20+ all-digital Smart Restaurants, which are powered by state-of-the-art technology, making consumer access much easier & faster; in addition to the installation of self-ordering digital kiosks and App ordering across its restaurants.

KFC's growth is fueled by its strong commitment to people and the planet. KFC Kshamata, the brand's flagship Diversity and Inclusivity program is focused on bridging the gender & ability gap by increasing its women workforce by 2X and doubling the number of Special KFCs (restaurants operated by speech & hearing-impaired employees) it operates. Over the past decade, KFC has grown to 42 Special KFCs and a team of 220+ speech & hearing-impaired employees. In 2021, the brand launched KFC's India



Sahyog - its focused efforts to support 1000 local restaurants & food joints post the COVID-19 pandemic in a bid to help them revive business.

To mark the opening of the 1000th restaurant, KFC has pledged to support 1000 underprivileged families across India with food rations.

KFC's franchise partners Devyani International Limited and Sapphire Foods India Limited (SFIL) have played an integral part in fueling the brand's growth. In the next phase of the India journey, KFC is optimistic about further fueling over 1 lac jobs across the country, adding to the positive growth outlook of the Indian economy.

Ravi Jaipuria, non-executive chairman, Devyani International Limited said, "Congratulations to KFC India on achieving this incredible milestone. At Devyani International, we are extremely proud to have been a part of the brand's journey since it entered India in 1995. We wholly support KFC's ambitions to grow inclusively with India and contribute to the economy along the way. We look forward to unlocking this next phase of growth, together."

Sanjay Purohit, Group CEO, Sapphire Foods India Ltd (SFIL), said, "1000 restaurants in India is such a big milestone for the KFC brand, and Sapphire Foods is proud to be a part of that journey.

KFC's focus on consistently high quality, tasty food, exceptional customer service and inclusive and purposeful growth has made it among the most loved restaurant brands in the country. Sapphire Foods believes that this is just the start of many years of growth, and we are excited to be a part of the next chapter of KFC in India. We look forward to a sustained and fruitful partnership with Yum and KFC for many decades to come."

Commenting on the milestone, Moksh Chopra, general manager, KFC India & Partner Countries said, "KFC is proud to be a part of the India growth story along with our franchise partners. KFC is a global brand with a local heart, committed to growing together with the nation and we are especially proud of our restaurant teams, including the specially abled teams, who have played a pivotal part in our journey. We are grateful to the people of the country for their love and look forward to the next chapter of continued growth for and with India."

KFC is committed to driving meaningful change and pioneering sustainable development in India. With an aim to make a positive impact on the planet, KFC has launched 20+ sustainable restaurants in the country. The design and operations of these sustainable restaurants integrates energy efficiency, usage of responsible materials and waste diversion.

Axiscades acquires Epcogen for ₹ 26 cr



NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Axiscades Technologies (Axiscades) on Wednesday said it has acquired 100 per cent stake in Hyderabad-based Epcogen.

Epcogen specialises in engineering design and providing solutions for the energy sector, Axiscades said in a statement.

Axiscades has acquired Epcogen for ₹ 26.25 crore to fortify its position in the energy markets of the Middle East and North America, it said.

"This acquisition marks a pivotal moment for both companies. Axiscades acquiring Epcogen at ₹ 26.25 crore, with an additional 3-year earn-out of ₹ 7 crore based on performance. The move underscores the company's commitment to driving engineering excellence and innovation in the energy sector," the statement said.

Axiscades CEO and MD Arun Krishnamurthy said Epcogen has significant operations in the North American and Middle East geographies.

"This strategic move not only augments our competency but also propels our expansion as a service provider into the global energy industries," he said.

Bengaluru-based Axiscades is a leading end-to-end engineering and technology solutions provider, catering to sectors such as aerospace, defence, heavy engineering, automotive and energy, among others.

It also provides engineering services for product design for all aircraft programmes of global aerospace leader Airbus. (PTI)

ICSI to prepare international standards on sustainability

KOLKATA, Dec 6: The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) is working on international standards on sustainability and will unveil them soon, its president Manish Gupta said on Wednesday.

Speaking at the inauguration of the institute's third centre of corporate governance, research, and training in Kolkata, he said the decision to develop such international standards is in line with the growing global emphasis on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting.

The centre, spread over 1.5 acres in New Town and built for ₹ 35 crore, was inaugurated by West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose.

It aims at serving as a hub for company secretaries' education, research, and training for professionals and businesses in the region.

"We have begun the process to prepare international standards on sustainability and expect that it will take about six months to come out with the standards for reporting and audit. It will be exhaustive. Discussions will be held with the regulators and government for ESG reporting," Gupta told PTI.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has mandated filings under the Business Reporting and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework from the financial year 2022-23. The mandate applies to the top 1,000 listed companies by market capitalisation.

Gupta also announced that ICSI has signed an MoU with the West Bengal government to offer a dedicated desk to support MSMEs of the state for registration, compliance, and fund-raising activities.

ICSI is the largest professional body of company secretaries in the world with over 1.05 lakh members, he claimed. It has decided to introduce a 100 per cent fee waiver scheme for defence personnel, Agniveers, and families of martyrs. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the government in this regard will be signed shortly, Gupta added. (PTI)

Maruti, Mahindra, Audi, Hyundai extend support to customers in cyclone-hit areas of Tamil Nadu, Andhra

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Maruti Suzuki India, Mahindra & Mahindra, Hyundai Motor and luxury car maker Audi have extended support to customers in cyclone and flood affected regions of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

In a statement, Maruti Suzuki India said it has collaborated with its dealer partners and made several arrangements at its workshops.

As soon as the news about the cyclone 'Michaung' was reported, the company proactively sent out 7 lakh SMS alerts containing precautionary steps to its customers to ensure that even before the cyclone hits, customers could take precautionary measures to safeguard their

cars against potential damage, it said in a statement.

The company said it mobilised 46 tow trucks from neighbouring cities and activated 34 roadside assistance vehicles for quick response, augmented spare parts inventory for ready availability, and collaborated with insurance firms for faster claim processing and settlement.

Mahindra & Mahindra said it has initiated complimentary roadside assistance, no-cost inspection and damage assessment and financial relief through special discount to its customers in the affected areas.

Audi has announced 24x7 complimentary roadside assistance for



customer cars impacted by the floods caused by the ongoing cyclone Michaung in Chennai.

"In light of the unprecedented

challenges faced by the city of Chennai, we are making every possible effort to assist our customers in the city," Audi India Head Balbir Singh Dhillon said.

Hyundai Motor India Foundation (HMIF), the CSR arm of Hyundai Motor India, has announced a financial support of ₹3 crore to help communities affected by the Michaung cyclone in Tamil Nadu.

The company's onsite teams are working along with state government authorities to deliver emergency relief, including food, water, shelter, medical assistance and other essential commodities to affected communities, it added. (PTI)

RIVER TRAINING & BANK PROTECTION WORKS AT LUMDING DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/116 of 2023, dtd. 04-12-2023. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Brief Description of Item:** River training and bank protection works at KM 67/9-68/1 near important bridge No. 133 between Jamira and Ramnathpur section under the jurisdiction of DEN/IL/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹ 4,20,23,087/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹ 3,60,100/-; **Date & time of Closing of above tender at 15:00 hrs. on 28-12-2023 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 29-12-2023.** The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 28-12-2023 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>.

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

State journalist joins ULFA-I, sparks concerns

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 6: In a concerning development, a journalist from Assam, identified as Bidyut Mahanta from Naharkatia in Dibrugarh, has reportedly joined the proscribed United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I). Mahanta shared a detailed post in Assamese on Facebook, expressing his decision to join the banned militant outfit.

The news of Mahanta's association with ULFA-I has raised alarms in the region, adding to the growing trend of local youth joining militant outfits. The motive behind Mahanta's decision to join ULFA-I remains unknown at this time. His announcement on social media has triggered widespread concern and discussions.

This incident follows a similar case on November 4, when Manash Borgohain from Golaghat district publicly declared his allegiance to ULFA-I through a video on social media. The trend of youths, especially from upper Assam, showing an inclination to join militant outfits has become a matter of concern for authorities.

Reports suggest that ULFA-I has initiated a recruitment process, tar-



geting educated youths. The region has witnessed instances of youth joining such outfits, with some choosing to return home later. Bidyut Mahanta, previously recognised for his work as a journalist and having won awards, has not provided details regarding his decision to join ULFA-I.

The situation highlights the challenges authorities face in preventing radicalisation and addressing the root causes that lead individuals, including educated youths, to join insurgent groups.

Himanta takes action against land-related scams

CM visits Kamrup Metropolitan district commissioner's office

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: In view of the forgeries relate to land sale deed, land mutation and related activities that were recently unearthed in the office of the Dispur Revenue Circle, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday visited the office of the district commissioner for Kamrup Metropolitan district and inspected the "Record Room for Land Related Documents" there.

This apart, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma chaired a meeting that was attended by additional chief secretary to chief minister Samir Kumar Sinha, Guwahati commissioner of police Diganta Barah, the new district commissioner Sumit Sattawan, the outgoing DC Pallab Gopal Jha and other senior officials of the office of the district commissioner.

Addressing the officials present, chief minister Sarma instructed the DC and the circle officers of the revenue circles to ensure all land related scams being clandestinely practised by some unscrupulous elements in their respective offices and brokers are brought to end with immediate effect. The chief minister warned of stern actions on



the concerned officials for failing to comply with his instructions.

Chief minister Sarma said land sharks and land brokers forcefully grabbing land from genuine owners by conniving with certain unscrupulous government officials is a blot on the government

and all measures necessary to break this nexus shall be taken by authority.

During his visit, chief minister Sarma also interacted with members of the general public who were visiting the DC's office and enquired about the reasons for

their visits. CM Sarma asked the district commissioner to see that application's for various approvals, certificates, etc., by members of the public are disposed off at the earliest so that the latter don't have to unnecessarily make rounds of the former's office.

Dreaded dacoit injured in police encounter

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 6: In a late-night operation on Tuesday near the Begluri area, a police team from Rupahihat PS engaged in a fierce encounter with a notorious dacoit identified as Omar Farooq from Dakshin Khatowal Tarabari under Rupahihat PS. The operation resulted in the injury of the dacoit due to police firing.

Swiftly responding to the situation, the police admitted Omar Farooq to Nagaon Medical College and Hospital. After receiving preliminary treatment, he was subsequently referred to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital. Sources indicate that the injured dacoit sustained bullet injuries in both legs. During the operation, the police seized a handmade pistol and three rounds of live ammunition from his possession.

Authorities have arrested Omar Farooq in connection with a case registered under Sections 120(B)/326/307/R/W Section 25(1-A)/27 of the Arms Act, 1959 at Rupahihat PS.

CPI observes Communal Harmony Day in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 6: The CPI Sivasagar committee marked Communal Harmony Day in Hathkhol under Dopdar GP, with a meeting presided over by veteran CPI leader Atul Gogoi. Senior party worker Padmeswar Gogoi conducted the proceedings, and district secretary Moni Gogoi highlighted the significance of the day.

During the event, CPI state secretary Kanak Gogoi expressed concerns about the erosion of communal harmony under the ruling BJP. Gogoi urged all opposition parties to unite against the divisive politics and communal polarisation promoted by the BJP. Senior party leaders, including Dharma Barua, Jayanta Gogoi, and Cheniram Borgohain, also addressed the gathering, emphasizing the need for collective efforts to preserve communal harmony in the state.

Over 77,000 houses completed

Successful implementation of PMAY-G in Morigaon



HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Dec 6: A press meet was organised at the office of the District Rural Development Authority in Morigaon to discuss the success and progress of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G) Scheme in the district since its launch in 2016. The CEO of Morigaon Zilla Parishad, Lakhi Nandan Sohar, addressed media persons and provided updates on the scheme's implementation.

Soharia revealed that a total of 98,393 houses have been allocated in Morigaon district since the inception

of the scheme. By May 10, 2021, 15,400 houses were completed in the district, and as of December 5, 2023, a remarkable 77,473 houses have been constructed. This signifies the completion of 62,073 houses from May 10, 2021, to December 5, 2023. The remaining 20,920 houses are targeted to be completed by the end of December this year.

The distribution of houses across different development blocks is as follows: 37 houses for Batradaba Development block; 3,570 houses for Bhurbandha Development block; 572 houses for Dalanghat; 1,655 houses for Kapili; 5,341 houses for Laharighat; 8,812 houses for Mayang; and 933 houses for Moirabari Development block.

CEO Soharia acknowledged the challenge of completing 20,000 houses in a short period but assured that every effort would be made to achieve the target. He emphasised the importance of field visits, creating awareness, and urged people to report any middlemen or irregularities in the allocation or construction process. Furthermore, he warned that action would be taken against beneficiaries who deliberately do not complete the construction of houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin.

NFR announces additional one-way special trains

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: The North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced the introduction of several one-way special trains to accommodate the increased demand for passenger services. These special trains will operate on specific routes, including Silchar-Gomti Nagar, Alipurduar Jn.-Kamrup Central, Guwahati-SMVT Bengaluru, and Rangapara North-Rani Kamalapati railway stations. The one-way special trains are scheduled to run between December 8th and December 10th, 2023.

Silchar - Gomti Nagar (Train No. 05612):
Departure from Silchar: 18:45 hours on December 8th, 2023.
Arrival at Gomti Nagar: 12:00 hours on December 10th, 2023.
Route: Silchar, Badarpur Jn., New Haflong, Lumding Jn., Guwahati, Goalpara Town, New Bongaigaon, New Jalpaiguri, Kati-

har Jn., Barauni Jn., Hajipur, Gorakhpur Jn., and more.

Alipurduar Jn. - Kamrup Central (Train No. 05458):
Departure from Alipurduar Jn.: 23:00 hours on December 9th, 2023.

Arrival at Kamrup Central: 04:05 hours on December 11th, 2023.
Route: Alipurduar Jn., Dalgaoon, New Jalpaiguri Jn., Kishanganj, Katihar Jn., Barauni Jn., Samstipur Jn., Hajipur, Gorakhpur Jn., Ayodhya Cantt, and more.

Guwahati - SMVT Bengaluru (Train No. 05670):
Departure from Guwahati: 06:00 hours on December 9th, 2023.

Arrival at SMVT Bengaluru: 09:10 hours on December 11th, 2023.

Route: Guwahati, Goalpara Town, New Bongaigaon, New Jalpaiguri, Kishanganj, Malda Town, Burdhaman, Kharagpur Jn.,

Bhubaneswar, Vizianagaram Jn., Vijayawada Jn., Katpadi Jn., and more.

Rangapara North - Rani Kamalapati (Train No. 05866):

Departure from Rangapara North: 08:00 hours on December 10th, 2023.

Arrival at Rani Kamalapati: 04:30 hours on December 12th, 2023.

Route: Rangapara North, Rangiya Jn., Bongaigaon, New Coochbehar, New Jalpaiguri Jn., Kishanganj, Barauni Jn., Gorakhpur Jn., Kamrup Central, Bhopal, and more.

These special trains provide an opportunity for waitlisted passengers on other routes to travel comfortably. The details of these special trains are available on NFR's social media platforms, and passengers are advised to verify the information before planning their journeys.

Eminent scientist Dr Dinanath Bordoloi passes away

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 6: Dr Dinanath Bordoloi, a distinguished scientist and retired additional director of Regional Research Laboratory (now CSIR-NEIST) in Jorhat, breathed his last at his residence in Bordoloi Nagar, Jail Road, on Wednesday. At the age of 92, Dr Bordoloi leaves behind his wife, two sons, and a daughter.

Dr Bordoloi made significant contributions to the field of medicinal and aromatic plants, with over 100 research papers published in national and international scientific journals. His work earned him invitations to participate in various conferences, seminars, and symposiums at scientific research institutes worldwide.

Born in Na-Ali Dhekiajuli, Titabar, Dr Bordoloi's expertise extended to the Research Council of the UNDP/UNIDO-established Fragrance and Flavour Development Centre in Kanauj, UP. In 1989, he received the Rohini Kanta Barua Memorial Award from the Assam Science Society. Besides his scientific pursuits, he served as a lecturer at JB College, Jorhat.

Dr Dinanath Bordoloi's influence reached beyond the scientific realm, as he actively participated in socio-cultural organisations. His demise is mourned widely, marking the end of an era in scientific excellence and community engagement.

KVK, Golaghat innovates with eri pupa value-added products

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 6: The Krishi Vigyan Kendra Golaghat has achieved success in developing value-added products from the nutritious eri pupa (leta) under the on-farm trials (OFT) initiative on "Value addition of eri silkworm pupa to increase consumer acceptability." The innovative products include eri pupa pickle, eri pupa cake, and eri pupa biscuits.

The products were showcased during the farmers' fair at SMARS, Buralikson, Golaghat, on December 4, drawing the attention of dignitaries, scientists, and farmers. The attendees praised the efforts of KVK, Golaghat, in diversifying and adding value to eri pupa.

Eri pupa, known for its rich content of protein, fat, fiber, iron, and calcium, holds significant potential for contributing to nutritional security.

92nd biennial session of Nagaon District Land Revenue Assistants and Supervisors Association

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 6: The Nagaon Sadar Revenue Circle's Land Revenue Assistant and Supervisors Association, in collaboration with its district unit, are gearing up for the 92nd Biennial Session of the Nagaon District Land Revenue Assistants and Supervisors Association. The two-day event is scheduled to take place on December 9 and December 10 at the office premises of Nagaon Sadar Revenue Circle.

Organised by Haren Bora and

Khirodd Hazarika, the president and secretary of the organising committee, the program will kick off with the unfurling of the flag on Saturday morning and conclude with a cultural program on Sunday evening.

The open session on Saturday will feature the presence of local MLA Rupak Sarma, district commissioner Narendra Kr Shah, Professor Arindam Borkotoki, and Dr Milan Neog as special invitees, adding significance to the event.

Malow Ali Higher Secondary School celebrates annual day

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 6: Malow Ali Higher Secondary School, a government institution, joyously celebrated its annual day at Gyanjoyoti Kola Kristi Ranga Mancha of Monaimazi with a day-long program on Wednesday. The event commenced with a melodious school chorus performed by the students.

The inaugural session was graced by Santanu Puzari, chairman of Assam Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation. Shyamolima Bora, the principal of Malow Ali Higher Secondary School, presided over the meeting. The gathering honored veteran social worker and organizer Hem Chandra Neog, educationist Dr Saumitra Puzari, Dr Bhaskor Jyoti Sarma, president of 43 Dhekgorah Gaon Panchayat Lakhimi Goswami, and social worker Konokeswar Bora.

As part of the event, prizes were distributed to the best performers in various events during the school weeks and activities. The celebration also featured cultural programs performed by students, adding vibrancy to the festive occasion.

DCB Girls' College students embark on eco-tourism expedition

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: A group of 5th-semester students from the Department of Geography at Devi Charan Baruah (DCB) Girls' College, Jorhat, recently undertook a three-day 'Journey for Learning' (J4L) exploring the Kohora River Basin. The community-based eco-cultural tourism initiative was organised under the Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) initiative by Aaranyak. Aaranyak subsidised the fees for the program and fully sponsored two students from the department to ensure their participation.

Conducted from December 1 to December 3 at the Community Resource Center in Chandrasing Rongpi Village, Kohora, Karbi Anglong, the exposure trip aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the traditional village landscape from the perspective of disaster risk and management under a participatory and experiential learning approach.

The program, designed to promote sustainable use of natural resources, expanded the students' understanding of the social capacities required in a cultural landscape for disaster risk mitigation.

The activities included an orientation session by Dr Jayanta Kumar Sarma, academic coordinator of J4L, explaining the significance of fieldwork in geography. The students participated in a 'village walk' divided into two teams to understand the village landscape in the context of disaster risk.

Throughout the trip, students engaged in activities such as learning the application of GPS and GIS, conducting field exercises on mapping, water discharge, and water quality assessment. They also interacted with villagers, participated in focused group discussions, and explored disaster memory, perception, and experiences.

On the third day, the students conducted Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)



methodology, engaging in fieldwork, interactive sessions with the community, and thematic map presentations on natural and man-made disasters. The program con-

cluded with a quiz, feedback session, and a vote of thanks by Dr Jayanta Kr Roy.

The initiative was praised for providing practical experience to students and pro-

moting collaboration between educational institutions and organizations like Aaranyak, fostering an enduring connection with nature and community.

Governor evaluates development initiatives in state's autonomous councils

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria conducted a comprehensive review of the activities of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC). The briefing, attended by hills areas department minister Jogen Mohan, covered various departments such as Health and Family Welfare, PWD, and Agriculture. The discussions focused on the effective implementation of key initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and PM-KISAN.

Principal secretary Mukul Kumar Saikia provided insights into departmental endeavours, emphasising the council's notable practices for the welfare of the people. The Governor highlighted the importance of digital services to enhance the accessibility of government schemes.

In a separate session, the Governor reviewed the initiatives of the Bodoland Welfare Department in collaboration with the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Minister UG Brahma and CEM BTC Pramod Boro were present during the discussions. The meet-



ing covered budgetary discussions and the council's efforts in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The principal secretary presented an overview of the SDG Rankings for 2021, highlighting the performance of districts within the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

Governor Kataria acknowledged the positive impact of the councils on tourism and encouraged the exploration of the unique products and crops in the regions for national recognition. He appreciated the councils' efforts in governance, economic development, and cultural vibrancy.

The Governor's engagement underscored the commitment to collaborative development and effective utilization of resources for the welfare of the regions.

Crackdown on traffic violations yields ₹ 45 lakh in fines

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 6: In an extensive campaign against traffic violations, the Dibrugarh district transport department has accumulated a substantial amount of ₹ 45 lakh in fines from offenders over the past eight months. Focused on various traffic offenses such as drunken driving, speeding, helmetless biking, and seat belt violations, the department recorded a total of 17,792 offenses

from April to November. The breakdown of the fines collected includes ₹ 35.03 lakh for 7,737 cases of speeding, ₹ 65.7 lakh for 8,275 helmetless biking offenses, and ₹ 34.6 lakh for 1,699 seat belt violations. Additionally, 81 cases of drunken driving were reported.

Dibrugarh DTO Hirakjyoti Deka stated, "In the last eight months, the transport department in Dibrugarh district has collected revenue amount-

ing to ₹ 50.79 crore, which is a 64.5% increase compared to last year." He emphasized that the ongoing drive against traffic violations will be intensified in the coming days.

Deka urged citizens to adhere to traffic rules, highlighting the department's commitment to raising awareness about road safety. The tough stance against traffic violations aims to create a safer environment on the roads.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings.
- William Blake

Cong: Future tense

In the aftermath of the recent state elections, the discourse around a perceived North-South political divide in India has gained traction. The influence of social media, notably Musk's 'X' (formerly Dorsey's 'Twitter'), has played a role in exacerbating tensions, with online comments reflecting regional stereotypes. However, it is crucial for Congress to focus on corrective measures rather than perpetuating divisive narratives ahead of the 2024 elections. The election results in five states saw the Congress securing more popular votes than the BJP, reminiscent of the 2016 US election dynamics between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. While Udayanidhi Stalin and Balaji Senthil contributed significantly to the DMK's success, the Congress must not overlook the potential harm caused by taking their support for granted. Some leaders within the INDI-Alliance suggest that the BJP's victories were confined to what they refer to as "Gaumutra states." It's essential to recognize that Ayurveda acknowledges the medicinal properties of 'gaumutra', and 'gaumata' holds cultural significance across India. Speculation also arises about the Congress benefiting from a surge in Muslim votes, akin to what occurred in Karnataka. There is a concern that DMK politicians might be underestimating the Congress, as seen in statements by Udayanidhi Stalin and Priyank Kharage. While Rahul Gandhi's move to secure a Lok Sabha seat in the south has been compared to his grandmother Indira Gandhi, who similarly ventured south, it is essential to avoid making assumptions based on regional stereotypes.

The historical context of the north-south divide goes beyond recent events, with Maharashtra considering itself as much a part of the north as Uttar Pradesh. Dismissing entire states as 'gaumutra states' oversimplifies the complex dynamics that determine electoral outcomes. Balaji Senthil's remarks have become a contentious issue for Rahul Gandhi, who may need to address the controversy with a strategic approach. MK Stalin, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and DMK supremo, faces questions about the recent changes in perception regarding his candidacy for Prime Minister. The landscape has shifted since the time of his father, MK Karunanidhi, with the INDI-Alliance grappling with the challenge of projecting a unifying "PM's face." The north-south divide has become more pronounced, exacerbated by recent statements targeting the north. The DMK and similar parties now wield influence over the narrative of Hindutva, a departure from the traditional dominance of the Sangh Parivar. It is crucial for these parties to understand the evolving dynamics of Hindu sentiments in the north since 2014. The weakening of the Congress and the rise of the BJP have contributed to the evolving political landscape. The DMK's apparent lack of awareness regarding the extent of "Hindutvaisation" in the north raises concerns about their ability to connect with voters beyond their regional base. The Prime Minister is ultimately elected by a diverse range of states, and the INDI-Alliance must acknowledge this reality to secure success in the 2024 General Elections.

As the Congress grapples with internal challenges and external perceptions, a strategic and inclusive approach is necessary. The party must address the recent controversies, dispel regional stereotypes, and focus on policies that resonate with voters across the diverse landscape of India. Bridging the north-south political gap requires a nuanced understanding of the evolving political dynamics in the country. Congress must unite, dispel stereotypes, and embrace inclusivity to navigate India's diverse political landscape successfully.

Homen Borgohain: Crafting Assamese narratives in literature and journalism

Homen Borgohain is acknowledged and esteemed as one of the most brilliant astrologers of contemporary Assamese literature. His literary persona is distinguished by its unmatched singularity, owing to the versatility of his talents. He excels as a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, and preeminent journalist. He is a diligent and astute intellectual, whose erudition is widely recognized.

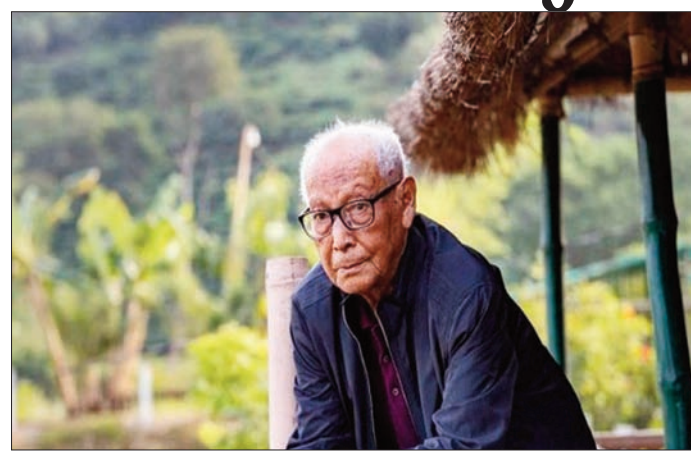
In the latter half of the 1960s, Homen Borgohain assumed the editorship of the weekly newspaper Nilachal, which prompted him to delve deeper into the sociopolitical, economic, and educational concerns of Assam. He expressed his viewpoints on various significant issues of national importance, and succeeded in involving people from diverse backgrounds to participate in the discourse. He also managed to inspire the youth of Assam to engage with the intellectual world, emerging as a 'new man' in the 1960s and facilitating discussions on various topics during a challenging period in the country's history. Despite the lack of financial security that came with leaving his job as a senior officer of the Environmental Public Service Commission of Assam to pursue a career in journalism, Homen Borgohain chose the path less traveled, driven by a noble purpose and ideal. The Weekly Nilachal broke away from convention and brought innovation to the field of journalism in Assam, appealing to readers with diverse interests and shining a new light on issues related to society, politics, economy, culture, and education.

It is crucial to recognize the significance of societal issues in the advancement of a country. Homen Borgohain's remarkable contribution lies in his ability to stimulate and motivate the younger generation to think and act. Nevertheless, he speaks of his disinterest in journalism during his early career, stating that he continued in the field without any satisfaction as it was not his primary source of livelihood. However, the people of Assam may question this claim. After leaving Nilachal, he went on to edit several newspapers and magazines, and everywhere he went, he left a lasting impression, with each publication becoming a voice for people from all walks of life in Assam. His journalistic principles are unconventional and entirely his own. In his editorials, he presents issues related to the state with such force and conviction that he captures the attention of all concerned parties.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT By: Dipak Kurmi

Moreover, his readers express significant interest and involvement in the news articles published or written by him. Homen Borgohain's journalism and newspaper do not solely rely on political events or sensational news stories of violence and terrorism, but instead serve as a medium to cater to the cultural sensibilities and preferences of his readership.

Through his newspaper, Homen Borgohain brings to our attention a wide range of topics, from a special book by an author from somewhere in the world to the life story of an unknown person in a remote village in Assam, and from issues of violence and terror to the presence of a few trees in the middle of a city. He possesses the ability to engage people from all walks of life, be it ordinary readers or expert writers, in deep and meaningful debates on various issues that span a long-term period in the newspaper. Typically, newspapers tend to fill their pages with current problems or events, but our societal indifference is evident as soon as another newsworthy event arises, causing the previous one to fade from our memories. However, by raising public awareness, Homen Borgohain is able to bring the issues to the



forefront in a profound manner.

During his extensive career as a journalist, Homen Borgohain has had his fair share of conflicts with others. His unflinching clarity, fearlessness, and rational approach have often led to clashes with the majority over several critical issues of national importance. One such instance was during the deportation movement, where his stance and statements resulted in his expulsion. Even during the movement, the newspapers that Borgohain edited were only accessible to a handful of his loyal readers. It is noteworthy that reading the weekly newspapers Nagari and Janakranti, edited by Homen Borgohain, during those tumultuous times was considered an act of courage.

But now, as time has passed, it is widely accepted that the arguments put forth by Homen Borgohain during the Assam Movement were indeed correct. Although his articles were limited in number, they served as a guiding light for a small number of admirers during the dark days of the movement.

Despite living among people, Homen Borgohain is not a passive observer of his surroundings. He actively observes and analyzes the daily events in society, seeking to understand their origins and impact on people at all levels, particularly the disadvantaged and young. He voices his opinions on various issues in

a timely manner, without resorting to street protests. From his early days as a student at Cotton College, Borgohain has maintained an uncompromising stance, which he carries into his current work as a journalist.

Homen Borgohain's newspapers were a platform for discussing and debating various issues, including the promotion of the Assamese language and the timely provision of appropriate textbooks for school students. He was always eager to facilitate these efforts and ensure their success.

Homen Borgohain's concern lies in the well-being and future prospects of children, adolescents, and young people, enabling them to become responsible citizens of a beautiful, unspoiled world. He believes that the elders of society, including parents, teachers, writers, journalists, social scientists, and naturalists, all have a role to play in shaping their future. As an editor of several newspapers and magazines, he has actively worked towards nurturing the creative talents of teenagers and young people.

Homen Borgohain stands out from his contemporaries as a writer, and can be considered in a league of his own. From the moment he first began writing as a student at Cotton, it was clear that he possessed a unique talent. He has a distinct style as a poet, short story writer, essayist, nov-

elist, critic, and more. His character as a writer is unconventional, and sets him apart from others in his field.

Homen Borgohain is a distinguished literary figure and a responsible journalist who faces the challenges of both creative writing and uncovering the truth of society's everyday life. It is worth noting that he entered journalism only after establishing himself as a writer. However, he has shown rare and intricate examples of balance thus far. He is no longer a half-hearted journalist like many of us. The demands of journalism are specific to a particular time, while the demands of literature are timeless, and he understands that. As a journalist, I notice a marked difference between his views on current political news and his cultural views. His genuine sensitivity to the character and qualities of Assam's limited and restrained cultural works is distinct and nuanced compared to that of many gifted and intelligent individuals. (A letter in search of Homen Borgohain).

The phrase "man for man" holds value only when a person dedicates their life to the betterment of humanity in all its forms, and to the progress and development of their country and nation. It requires a deep inner strength and unwavering self-confidence. Such individuals are resolute and possess the ability to provide a precise vision of the future. They approach every problem from an analytical perspective and do not easily succumb to the opinions of others. There are numerous ways to enhance one's self-confidence and ability to confront life's challenges. Homen Borgohain was a selfless, intrepid journalist and a distinguished writer. The ideals he instilled in our national life through his devotion and sacrifice, particularly as a journalist, will forever serve as a source of inspiration for the nation. (*The writer is a journalist and commentator based in Guwahati, can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com*)

Congress has performed much better in state polls compared to 2019

By: Dipankar Bhattacharva

The outcome of the five Assembly elections held in November has proved almost all opinion polls and ground reports wrong. Even the few exit polls that predicted a thumping BJP victory in Madhya Pradesh gave the Congress a comfortable majority in neighbouring Chhattisgarh. The clean BJP sweep of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh has therefore come as a major surprise after the BJP's recent losses in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka and given the signs of a popular yearning for change in Madhya Pradesh after eighteen years of BJP rule and no such visible anti-incumbency against the Congress governments of Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

For the Congress, which was perceived to be on the ascendant after its Himachal and Karnataka victories, the only win has come in Telangana. The Telangana developments of course mark a significant change for this newly created state and also in the larger context of political balance in south India, but the Telangana victory of the Congress cannot but be overshadowed by the party's loss in the three big states in central and western India.

Before looking at the factors that led to this surprising outcome, let us take a closer look at the changes in vote share in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. It will appear that in terms of vote share, the Congress has not suffered any major decline - its vote share has decreased by 0.6% in Madhya Pradesh (41 to 40.4), 0.9% in Chhattisgarh (43.1 to 42.2) and even registered a very marginal increase of 0.2% in Rajasthan (39.3 to 39.5). What dramatically changed the outcome is a major increase in the BJP's vote share - by 7.45% in Madhya Pradesh (41.1 to 48.55), 13.27% in Chhattisgarh (33 to 46.27) and 2.9% in Rajasthan (38.8 to 41.7). On the face of it, the increase in the BJP's vote share has therefore happened not so much at the cost of the Congress as other non-BJP parties, but we clearly need to look beyond the figures at the actual social and electoral shifts on the ground.

Having suffered defeats in Himachal and Karnataka, the BJP was of course desperate to retain Madhya Pradesh and wrest Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh from the Congress. The elections witnessed brazen use of the ED all through the election period; double standards adopted by the EC in dealing with alleged violations of the model code of conduct and reported administrative manipulations at different levels and stages

of the election process. But fair elections cannot really be expected in today's India. For non-BJP forces to succeed in elections, an election campaign must turn into a veritable people's movement full of energy, mass participation and meticulous booth-level mobilisation. The victorious Congress election campaigns in Karnataka and Telangana exhibited considerable mass dynamism and energy, but the campaigns in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and even Rajasthan, the best fought among the three, lacked this dynamism and energy.

In Karnataka, the Congress had won by exposing the corruption and all-round failure of the incumbent BJP government led by Bommai. But learning from Karnataka, the BJP in Madhya Pradesh tried to defuse the anti-incumbency factor by fielding several ministers and MPs as MLA candidates even as CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan ran a hectic personalised campaign focusing on the flagship schemes of his government. To counter the appeal of the promises made by the Congress, the BJP made similar offers and termed them 'Modi's Guarantee'. The fusion of the Modi cult and the model of targeted direct transfer-based 'welfare economics' aimed at converting 'beneficiaries' into bonded voters seems to have once again worked as a complement to communal polarisation and aggressive Hindutva. The BJP had successfully applied this formula earlier this year in UP elections and now once again in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

In the wake of its impressive Karnataka victory, the Congress centrally focused on two issues - the Adani-Modi nexus and caste census. For the Congress, which has never been a known votary of caste census and expanded reservation, the focus on OBC representation and caste census is a welcome new direction, but how far has the message percolated to the entire organisation and become an integral part of its political articulation? While the central leaders of Congress raised this issue, in Madhya Pradesh Kamal Nath was busy seeking the blessings of Hindu Rashtra champion Bageshwar Baba (Dhirendra Shastri). Similarly the issue of Adani-Modi nexus does not just represent institutionalized corruption, it represents the most brazen face of corporate aggression. The farmers' movement successfully challenged this arrogant corporate power and any effective political campaign against the Modi-Adani nexus will have to forge organic ties with the growing unity of farmers and workers for a reorientation of India's economic policy

towards people's welfare and the rights of India's real producers.

Another major weakness of the Congress campaign in these elections was the complete absence of any will or plan to harness the potential of the INDIA alliance. On the contrary, we saw a totally unwarranted war of words between the Congress and Samajwadi Party in Madhya Pradesh. In Telangana, the Congress has effectively channelised the accumulated anti-incumbency against the BRS government into a significant victory for the Congress, but we must remember that the BJP too has succeeded in doubling its vote share from 7% to 13.9% and the seat tally from the lone seat in the outgoing Assembly to eight seats. Any serious attempt at seat adjustment with the Left, SP, the newly formed Bhartiya Adivasi Party and at harnessing the INDIA potential in the campaign could have made significant differences in all states and even further improved the Congress tally in Telangana.

There has often been a North-South divide in India's electoral outcomes; most notably we had witnessed a sharp contrast in the post-Emergency 1977 election when the Congress was wiped out from North India even as it did fairly well in the southern states. The doors being shut on the BJP in the south certainly marks a major blow to the BJP's ambitions to dominate India for decades, but the decisive defeat of the party in 2024 will have to be shaped north of the Vindhyas. In Mizoram, the ZPM has swept the polls dislodging the NDA-affiliated MNF from power, but here too the BJP has increased its tally from 1 to 2 while the Congress tally has gone down from 5 to 1.

The concluding round of 2023 elections has certainly been a big morale-booster for the BJP, and the Modi regime has already started talking of scoring a 'hat trick' in 2024. This is nothing but psychological warfare. The fact is that the Assembly results in the four states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Telangana are seen in Lok Sabha terms, the Congress actually improves its tally from its 2019 strength of 6 to 28 and BJP tally actually goes down from 65 to 46. The Assembly elections have certainly not settled the outcome of 2024 in the BJP's favour and if we draw proper lessons it is still perfectly possible to dislodge the BJP from power in 2024. The onus is of course on INDIA to get its act together without any further delay and launch an energetic mass campaign on the burning issues of the day to galvanise the people towards a decisive victory in 2024. (IPA Service)

Israel and Hamas have different objectives about what to achieve during truce

By: Girish Linganna

Israel has conflicting goals of neutralizing Hamas and rescuing its civilians kidnapped during the October 7 storming of its territory in a surprise - and vicious - attack after they broke through the heavily guarded perimeter fence, landing by sea and using paragliders, killing about 1,200 people and taking 240 hostage. In order to achieve both objectives, Israel opted to halt its military operation against Hamas in exchange for the release of some of those hostages. The truce is off now as Israel has started pounding Gaza localities saying Hamas did not honour the conditions.

There is a significant threat to Israel's I right to defend itself that needs to be considered. It is referred to as the 'terrorist veto'. And, as time goes by, Israel's chances of overcoming this threat is becoming increasingly slim, despite the resumption of hostilities on Friday. The term, 'terrorist veto', refers to the tactic employed by Hamas groups to hinder, or prevent, a country's ability to defend itself by exploiting international pressure and humanitarian concerns.

Many believe that the underlying purpose of these hostage negotiations as far as Hamas is concerned is to divert international attention and evoke strong emotions in order to indefinitely halt hostilities, restrict Israel's military actions and regroup to lick their wounds of war. Regardless of the label given to this pause - truce, ceasefire, or whatever term may apply - the strategic consequences undeniably favour Hamas. By using innocent people as bargaining tools and using fellow Gazans for shielding themselves, Hamas seeks to prevent Israel from eliminating the terrorist threat it poses.

If Hamas manages to maintain a limited presence in Gaza and rebuild it to its pre-October 7 state, it can be considered a success for the group. However, this outcome essentially acts as a veto by them regardless of whether those in favour of the military pause try to downplay its significance. This result is labelled as a 'veto' since it enables terrorists to dictate terms and hinder progress towards a resolution.

"Regardless of whether those in favour of the military pause try to downplay its significance" implies that the military pause contradicts the goals of its supporters. This is evident in Hamas's success in surviving and rebuilding Gaza, which goes against the intended outcome of neutralizing the terrorist threat posed by Hamas through the temporary halt in military operations.

If the Hamas veto prevails, other groups like Hezbollah and the mullahs in Tehran (the main adversaries here) can shield themselves from the consequences of their terrorist acts. What is even worse is that this



veto could be adopted by nations with aggressive tendencies, leaving victims unable to defend their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Taiwan can be considered a potential victim in this new scenario.

US President Joe Biden and others claim they are not attempting to hinder further military action, but their policies are having precisely that impact. According to CNN on Wednesday last week, Biden's approach is based on three pillars: release of hostages, increase in aid to Gaza and planning for post-war scenarios. Notably, there is no mention of eliminating Hamas. Meanwhile, some Democratic senators are pushing for conditions on aid to Israel, aiming to limit its military operations - a stance Biden has supported.

The heads of major UN agencies have termed an "outrage" the cutting off of essential supplies to 2.2 million Palestinians and, time and again, called for a permanent ceasefire on humanitarian grounds. Following the October 7 attack, Israel had closed its border crossings with Gaza, blocking off food, water and medicine supplies from the territory. All fuel deliveries to the territory were cut off until late-November, arguing it could be stolen by Hamas and used for military purposes.

Regardless of the arguments supporting the extension of the initial or subsequent pauses, Israel could face three potential negative outcomes if it stops, or restricts its military campaign.

First, despite strong statements from many Israelis, both in and out of the government, the country's determination is waning. Right after October 7, Jerusalem may have been open to hearing US military advisers warn that pacifying resistance in Mosul and Fallujah - cities in Iraq that experienced significant resistance and conflict, particularly during the Iraq War - took between nine months and a year.

This would serve as a comparison or benchmark for the potential challenges that Israel may have faced in achieving its objectives. Initially, Israelis may have been ready for a prolonged struggle, but it seems

unlikely after this initial pause. A decline in Israeli resolve makes it unlikely that Hamas will be completely eliminated.

Those supporting a ceasefire argue that, when Israel convinced a million Gazans to relocate south before their initial campaign, it set the stage for higher 'civilian' casualties in subsequent operations. While Hamas and Iran were responsible for placing Gazans in danger initially, unfair blame from the international community is likely to weigh on Israel, weakening their determination.

Second, because Hamas, Iran and their allies stand to benefit more militarily from the pause than Israel, the human toll on the Israeli military will increase. This, in turn, may lead to growing domestic opposition against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's objectives. Quantifying the exact number of Israel Defense Forces casualties resulting from the pause might be challenging, but it could surpass the count of released hostages.

And third, if there are more pauses or restrictions, it gives Hamas's allies around the world more time to pressure their governments to oppose Israel. As a result, many governments may push Israel to accept much less than what Netanyahu has stated as his goals. After the conflict, the White House is suggesting that the Palestinian Authority take control of Gaza. However, this overlooks the poor track record of the authority in the West Bank, where it has been ineffective, corrupt and secretly supportive of terrorism. Some sources even claim that Hamas is now more popular in the West Bank than in Gaza.

If Palestinian Authority control is extended, Israel could face the same threat that intensified on October 7. Israel Defence Force (IDF) views that every prolongation of the truce gives leeway to Hamas to consolidate in Gaza strip which Israel is not ready to allow. This contrast in the objective of the two contending groups is the main reason why the truce could not be prolonged. For bringing about any lasting solution, the present status on the objectives has to be changed. (IPA Service)

Soil matters

By: Shagun

In 400 BC, Greek physician Hippocrates is said to have provided a list of things that should be considered during a proper medical evaluation. The list included the properties of local ground. Modern science recognises the distinct influence of soils on human health, but few studies have examined the connection outside Africa. In August 2023, researchers from the US and Australia published a study in the journal *Scientific Reports*, which for the first time conducts a large-scale evaluation of the relationship between the availability of micronutrients in the soil and nutritional status of people in India. Their findings hold clues for the country to not only improve soil health but also to address the long-standing challenge of malnutrition among children and women.

The researchers conducted a large-scale evaluation in which they analysed over 27 million soil tests, drawn from a nationwide government programme on soil health called Soil Health Card, and the health data of 0.3 million children and 1 million women from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). The study focuses on two key minerals—zinc, which plays a role in the growth of cells, building proteins and supporting a healthy immune system, and iron, which is used by the body to make haemoglobin that carries oxygen from the lungs to all parts of the body.

The researchers found that districts where soil zinc availability was low had significantly higher rates of stunting (when a child has low height for their age) and underweight conditions (low weight per age). The zinc-stunting relationship was the strongest even in wealthier households. The researchers also found clear association between soil iron availability and anaemia.

At places where the availability of soil nutrients were satisfactory, they found a positive correlation with the height and haemoglobin levels of children and women. A one-standard deviation increase in soil zinc (equivalent to 24.3 per cent increase in the proportion of zinc tests) is associated with a reduction in stunting by 10.8 per cent, 1,000 children and with a reduction in underweight conditions by 11.7 per 1,000 children, notes the study.

Similarly, a one-standard deviation increase in soil iron is associated with a 0.29 cm increase in women's heights. And, a one-standard deviation increase in iron (equivalent to a 26.8 per cent increase in the proportion of iron tests) is associated with a 0.38 gram per decilitre (g/dl) increase in haemoglobin for children and 0.037 g/dl increase in haemoglobin for women, the report states.

The findings hold significance for India for two reasons. One, India is home to one-third of the 2 billion global population suffering from micronutrient deficiency. Though NFHS data shows a decline in child stunting between 2015-16 and 2019-21, the rate is still significantly high at 35 per cent among children under five years of age. In 161 districts, more than 40 per cent children under five years of age suffer from stunting.

Scientific Reports, August 21, 2023Two, micronutrient deficiency in Indian soils has increased at a rapid scale in recent decades. "Initially, the country's soil was more deficient in nitrogen and phosphorous. It then developed potassium-deficiency, followed by sulphur-deficiency in the 1990s and 2000s. Now our soils are greatly deficient in zinc and other micronutrients," says Arvind Shukla, who led the All India Co-ordinated Research Project on Micro- and Secondary Nutrients and Pollutant Elements in Soils and Plants (AICRP-MSPE) under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research from 2011 to 2022.

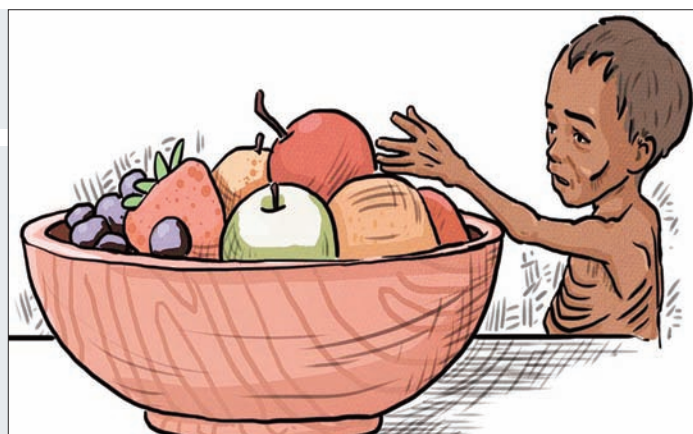
The project was launched in 1967 to analyse micronutrient deficiency in soil across the country. An analysis of 0.2 million soil samples from 28 states by scientists associated with AICRP-MSPE shows that 36.5 per cent of the country's soil is deficient in zinc and 12.8 per cent is deficient in iron.

Other micronutrients like boron is deficient in 23.4 per cent of soils, copper in 4.20 per cent and manganese in 7.10 per cent of soils. Since 2014, the project has shifted focus to analysing the link between soil health and human health.

"Factors like women's nutrition and household wealth hold more importance when we look at child or adolescent stunting, and rightly so. But there is a need to simultaneously work on establishing a clear understanding of how soil health affects human health," Leah Bevis, associate professor at the Department of Agricultural, Environmental and Developmental Economics, Ohio State University, US, tells Down To Earth. Bevis is also co-author of the Scientific Reports study.

To aid Studies are already underway to explore if the challenge of malnutrition can be addressed by improving the availability of micronutrients in soil and in plants.

In 2021, Bevis, along with two other researchers from the World Bank and The Alliance of



Biodiversity International Center for Tropical Agriculture, US, conducted a study in Nepal's Terai region, and found that a 1 ppm (parts per million) increase in soil zinc availability seems to increase child height by 7.5-25 per cent of a standard deviation, and decreases child stunting by 2-7.5 per cent.

In 2014, the AICRP-MSPE scientists also conducted a laboratory experiment in which they fed rats with zinc-biofortified wheat (cultivated using foliar application of zinc) produced on zinc-deficient soil. They found that rats fed low-zinc wheat had low zinc in their blood serum as compared to the rats fed high-zinc wheat. In 2016, AICRP-MSPE along with doctors from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bhopal, carried out a study in Samanpur, a tribal village in Madhya Pradesh's Mandla district.

Some 15 families with teenagers were selected for biometric observations. For three years, the researchers surveyed the families for dietary recall, animal food intake, access to the food and fodder through external sources and use of inputs, especially zinc fertilisers, in their agricultural fields. Their blood samples were collected and analysed. "Analysis of zinc content in soil, grain, straw-feed, animal and human blood serum established a strong correlation and interdependence among the soil-plant-animal-human continuum," says Shukla.

A research, published in the journal *Applied Geochemistry* in March 2000, also analysed the impact of selenium concentrations in soil on human health. It studied the distribution of selenium in samples of soil, grain and human hair collected from the Keshan disease belt of Hebei Province, China, and found that villages with highest incidence of Keshan disease had the lowest selenium concentration in soil.

Economic, effective Though limited, study results indicate that it is possible to address malnutrition and micronutrient deficiency among people by improving soil health. This can also be an economic and effective way of addressing malnutrition in the country.

Consider this. In August 2022, the Union government approved fortification of the key staple

rice in all government food schemes and entitlements under the National Food Security Act 2013. Since then, iron-fortified rice is being supplied as a pilot programme in 15 states.

However, food and agriculture experts have time and again highlighted concerns regarding the indiscriminate distribution of fortified rice to even those suffering from thalassemia and sickle cell disease.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's statutory regulations have warned patients with thalassemia and sickle cell anaemia against consuming iron-fortified food or using it only under strict medical supervision. Such concerns can be avoided by improving soil micronutrient availability.

The Scientific Reports study from August 2023 states that foliar and soil application of minerals like zinc, iron, boron and sulphur to wheat and rice has also been shown to increase crop yields. In India, application of zinc to crops on zinc-deficient soils increases yields of rice, wheat, maize, and oats by over 75 per cent more than application of only nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium fertiliser. Zinc-enriched fertilisers can enhance soil zinc for three to four years after application, which means that it could be an effective long-term intervention, requiring less short-term maintenance than other solutions.

The study, however, calls for more studies to consider the costs of such an intervention and the human nutrition impacts of agronomic fortification. Shukla says doctors often prescribe zinc tablets or multi-vitamins or minerals for different health issues. One should compare spending on such multi-vitamins with the expenses involved in making the soil healthy.

Both Shukla and Bevis call for government initiated experimental research on a large scale in which zinc-enriched fertilisers or foliar application of zinc are promoted during sowing and then zinc levels in the blood are compared with a control group. "Research done by us and other scientists is the first step and an effective entry point for the governments to conduct their own experiments and develop policies," says Bevis. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Empowering forests: A blueprint for sustainable restoration & climate resilience

By: Anjal Prakash

Restoration of forest landscapes is becoming more widely acknowledged as an essential method of storing carbon in the atmosphere, protecting biodiversity, and fostering co-benefits for indigenous people regarding livelihood.

A recent research appeared in the scientific journal *Nature Climate Change* entitled *Community Forest Governance and Synergies among Carbon, Biodiversity and Livelihoods*, examined 314 forest commons in 15 tropical African, Asian, and Latin American countries and provided insight into the complex interactions that exist between carbon sequestration, species diversity of trees, and forest livelihoods.

The results indicate that formal community management associations and their local engagement in rule-making and empowered local forest governance are reliable predictors of favourable outcomes in various contexts.

The findings of this research have special relevance for India, a nation with a wide variety of ecosystems and a sizeable rural populace that depends on forests for subsistence. A global focus on nature-based solutions has resulted from the urgency of addressing climate change and biodiversity loss.

Rural tropical landscapes are frequently the focus of these solutions because of their rich biodiversity and potential for sequestering carbon. But these landscapes also support a significant human presence; some 1.8 billion people live in places important for achieving global biodiversity goals.

Harmonising forest goals: A holistic perspective

The research emphasises how important it is to comprehend the interconnected systems of rural livelihoods, biodiversity protection, and carbon sequestration. It asks for a comprehensive strategy that considers the advantages and disadvantages of each of these goals to guide successful interventions for multifunctional tropical forests. Examining the connections between contributions to regional livelihoods, biomass as a stand-in for carbon storage, and species richness of trees highlights the significance of this viewpoint.

Three important variables significantly predict forest outcomes: formal inclusion, involvement, and tree plantations.

Formal inclusion and local engagement in regulation are essential components of forest governance to ensure the effectiveness of restoration efforts. On the other hand, the research raises concerns about the prevalent focus on planting trees as the main strategy for restoring forests, pointing out the possible negative effects of this method on society and the environment.

Sustainable forest governance: A path for India's future

In India, where a significant proportion of the populace depends on forest resources for fundamental livelihood advantages, the results emphasise the necessity of transcending oversimplified notions of mutually beneficial outcomes. According to the research, having effective governance is essential to getting many benefits from forests. Establishing formal community forest management organisations and local participation in rule-making as indicators of empowered local governance is emerging as a critical success factor for attaining positive effects for carbon, biodiversity, and rural livelihoods concurrently.

The research's conclusions are consistent with the international demand that indigenous peoples and local communities be given equal rights and be included in efforts to mitigate climate change and restore the environment. It highlights how crucial it is to have formalised local forest institutions, with local management authority legally recognised and significant local influence over decision-making. The research questions accepted ideas about stakeholder participation and promoted stronger, more capable local institutions with the long-term capacity to catalyse socio-ecological advantages.

As India struggles with climate change and biodiversity loss, a key element of forest policy interventions should be promoting empowered local governance. In human-dominated settings, where it is impossible to ignore the requirements of rural inhabitants, it is critical to acknowledge the multifunctional nature of forests. Forest commons, when well managed by rural and indigenous people can substantially contribute to various environmental and human objectives.

As a result, the research offers insightful information about the structure of Indian forest policy, highlighting the significance of governance conditions for attaining sustainable results. India can concurrently address climate change, biodiversity protection, and the welfare of rural communities while maximising the benefits of its forest restoration operations by prioritising the official acknowledgement of local management authority and fostering meaningful local engagement.

Local governance for sustainable forest restoration and climate resilience

The research highlights four main policy proposals that can be deciphered for India's forest management as outlined below:

1. Formalized Local Governance for Holistic Forest Management: The research emphasises how important formal community forest management groups are in predicting successful outcomes in forest restoration and how important local participation in rulemaking is. The official state recognition of local management authority should be India's top priority to implement this strategy. Implementing well-defined legal frameworks that enable indigenous groups to oversee and decide on managing forest resources will guarantee a more efficient and long-lasting restoration strategy. This entails establishing open channels for national technical assistance, guaranteeing local autonomy, and putting clear guidelines for choosing and dismissing local officials in place. By formalising local governance, India may promote socio-ecological benefits such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and rural livelihoods.

2. Rethinking the Emphasis on Tree Planting: The research questions the widespread belief that planting trees is the primary strategy for restoring forests worldwide. This necessitates a careful strategy for India, considering the environmental and social hazards connected to extensive tree plantations. Planting trees may help reduce carbon emissions, but the policy should prioritise local forest users' needs and response behaviours. This entails concentrating on the social and environmental effects rather than just meeting quantifiable goals for the number of trees planted. India should carefully consider the context-specific effects of tree plantations to ensure they complement the area's biological circumstances and support sustainable and subsistence forests instead of having a detrimental effect on carbon sequestration and conservation forests.

3. Building Durable and Empowered Local Institutions: The research emphasises the necessity for strong and independent local institutions and pushes for going beyond project-based participatory forums and organised stakeholder meetings. India ought to allocate resources towards institutional reforms that facilitate efficient management of local resources, considering the distinct socio-ecological dynamics of various areas. This entails identifying and formalising different local forest organisations to guarantee that communities have a meaningful say in managing forests. India should prioritise the creation of favourable conditions through empowered local institutions to achieve just climate action and other forest restoration goals. In the long run, this will advance several benefits for humans and the environment.

4. Climate-Resilient Policies: A Pillar of Sustainable Transformation: The research emphasises how important it is to implement climate-resilient methods and recognise the critical role of forests in reducing climate change. Through smoothly incorporating climate considerations into restoration programs, India can fortify its landscapes against the harmful consequences of climate change. This proactive strategy fosters resilience in nearby communities while guaranteeing ecosystems' sustainability. Adopting climate-resilient policies is a crucial first step to sustainable transformation in India. It provides a comprehensive and well-thought-out solution to the interrelated problems of declining biodiversity, rural livelihoods, and the growing dangers of climate change.

By implementing these policy changes, India can steer towards sustainable forest restoration that tackles the pressing issues of climate change and biodiversity loss while improving the welfare of its rural populations. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Why safe roads are good for the environment

By: Piyush Tewari

The impact of road safety goes far beyond its direct effect on preserving life and limb. In addition to ensuring an easier, comfortable and more secure commute, safer roads also have a tremendous positive impact on the environment.

In 2021, India reported 4,03,116 crashes, each of which may have affected the environment to different degrees and in various ways. Most vehicles contain toxic metals such as lead, mercury, cadmium or hexavalent chromium, which are highly detrimental for the environment.

One of the first things witnessed at any road crash site is fuel and fluid leaks that emit harmful chemicals leading to air, water and soil pollution. The massive number of road crashes registered in India, year after year, have a significant negative effect on the environment.

Severe road crashes also lead to automobile wrecks that become a part of the unusable end-of-life vehicles, giving rise to scrapage. India is estimated to have about 22.5 million end-of-life vehicles by 2025. Despite being one of the largest car and light commercial vehicle markets in the world, India's National Automobile Scrapage Policy, launched in August 2021, is still in its nascent stages.

With the absence of widespread, systematic facilities dedicated to proper recycling, abandoned road crash vehicles and old end-of-life automobiles left to rot by the wayside are a common sight across cities.

Some of them end up at landfills or informal recycling facilities where rudimentary hand tools are used to unscientifically dismantle them, leading to the leakage of hazardous constituents such as oils, coolants, glass wool and more. Vehicle landfills turn into automobile graveyards, a wasteful and sub-optimal use of land that also causes prolonged water and soil pollution stretching over decades.

Road safety and environmental sustainability are intertwined. Being cognisant of the latter while working on the former is the need of the hour, along with action geared towards long-term environmental preservation and sustenance.

One of the biggest causes of road crashes is speeding. In 2020 alone, speeding was responsible for 91,239 road crash fatalities, comprising 69.3% of all such deaths registered. Speeding has consistently been responsible for over 60% of all

road crash fatalities in India during the past five years.

Simulation exercises conducted in Europe have demonstrated that cutting motorway speed limits even by 10 km/hour can deliver 12%-18% fuel savings for current passenger cars, along with a significant reduction in pollutant emissions, particularly NOx and particulate matter (PM) output from diesel vehicles.

A similar study conducted in Amsterdam showed that where the speed limit was lowered from 100 kmph to 80 kmph, particulate matter reduced by up to 15% significantly improving air quality. Studies also show that 96.5 kmph of highway speed limits are 25% more efficient than 120 kmph, in which case wind resistance leads to more fuel consumption.

Consequently, several governments globally have reduced speed limits to prevent crashes and lower air pollution. For instance, the Wales government brought in 80 kmph speed limits at five locations to reduce outdoor pollution and improve public health. In India, the "Zero-Fatality Corridor" solution for road safety by the SaveLIFE Foundation, of which this author is a part of, focuses on reducing speeding through engineering and enforcement technologies.

Vegetation on or very close to the road stretches often falls prey to road widening initiatives. From the Mumbai-Pune Expressway and the Old Mumbai-Pune Highway, or National Highway 48, the Zero-Fatality Corridor programme has helped bring down road crash fatalities by 52% and 61%, respectively.

The recommendations have been environment-friendly and include guarding natural hard structures like trees using crash barriers to prevent direct collisions, and installing retro reflective signage on the trees to make them more visible. The Union government, too, is now building green corridors to go over forests and animal paths instead of through them. Sealing the same will have a profound impact on preserving the environment while ensuring better road connectivity.

Roads and the environment are shared, democratic spaces that are also our joint responsibility. Safer roads and a sustainable environment can be ensured only through the joint efforts of road managing agencies, enforcement officials as well as the public. Each effort in this direction, no matter how small, can save lives through safer roads and a better environment. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

New Zealand's quest to save its rotund, flightless parrots

By: Rina Diane Caballar

Kākāpō are avid walkers, wandering on strong legs for miles at a time and hiking up mountains to find mates. They're keen climbers too, clambering up New Zealand's 65-foot-high rimu trees on large claws to forage for red berries on the tips of the conifer's branches.

But there's one thing that the world's heaviest parrot species can't do: fly. With their bulky frames — males weigh up to nine pounds — and waddling gait, they have little chance of outrunning predators like stoats and feral cats. When threatened, the nocturnal parrots freeze, relying on their moss-green feathers to act as camouflage.

New Zealand was once a land of flightless birds like the extinct moa — no terrestrial mammalian predators in sight. That changed in the 13th century, when Māori voyagers brought rats and dogs, and again in the 19th century, when European settlers brought more rats, cats and mustelids like weasels, stoats and ferrets. These predators have played a major role in putting at risk some 300 native species on New Zealand's two main islands and smaller offshore islands, taking an especially heavy toll on flightless birds like kākāpō.

Now listed as critically endangered, the kākāpō teetered on the edge of extinction in the mid-1900s due to hunting, predators and land clearance. From the 1970s, conservation efforts focused on managing the remaining kākāpō on the country's offshore islands, where predators are systematically eradicated. Due to those ongoing efforts, which include breeding programs, veterinary treatment and supplementary food, parrot numbers have grown from fewer than 60 in 1995 to more than 200 today.

That success, plus lack of space in offshore islands, led New Zealand's Department of Conservation and Ngāi Tahu, the Māori tribe whose people serve as traditional guardians of the kākāpō, to find a new habitat for the parrots. Starting in July 2023, relocations began to the 8,400-acre Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari, a predator-free haven enclosed by one of the world's longest pest-proof fences.



So far, 10 male parrots have moved to the reserve — the first time the species is living back on the mainland in almost half a century. Researchers are tracking their locations and conducting regular health checkups to assess whether the birds can thrive there.

If male parrots start hiking to the ridgetops, serenading female kākāpō with deep "booms" and high-pitched "chings," they might be in shape to breed, says conservation biologist Andrew Digby, science advisor for kākāpō at the Department of Conservation. "We might start looking at bringing females in."

Kākāpō have much lower fertility than other parrots. Since the 1980s, fewer than half their eggs have hatched, which is thought to be partly due to inbreeding. Left to their own devices, they breed only when rimu trees bear masses of fruit, every two to four years, with females laying one to four eggs.

Recently, researchers have started to explore how genomic data can contribute to kākāpō survival. Such studies can help wildlife managers boost genetic diversity and resilience in threatened species, says evolutionary biologist Cynthia Steiner of the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance.

In one important study published in 2023, researchers analysed whole-genome sequence data for 169 parrots — nearly all of

those living when the research began in 2018. That work yielded crucial insights, including genetic variations affecting aspects of kākāpō chick development, like height and growth rate. This could help scientists predict how quickly baby birds will grow, and initiate veterinary interventions should the growth rates deviate, says Joseph Guhlin, a genomicist with Genomics Aotearoa at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Scientists also found that some kākāpō have genetic resistance to aspergillosis, a fungal respiratory disease. In 2019, an outbreak affected 21 birds and killed nine. If another outbreak occurs, vulnerable parrots could be isolated and treated ahead of time, Guhlin says.

As of October 2023, all parrots in the sanctuary were doing well, although the first four arrivals lost a bit of weight. Thanks to GPS trackers attached to each bird, "we can see that they've been bouncing around all over the place," Digby says. But the survival of kākāpō beyond fenced-in sanctuaries depends on the success of Predator Free 2050, an ambitious initiative to eradicate some of the introduced predators most harmful to New Zealand's native wildlife by 2050.

"Eradications are a high-cost, high-risk, high-reward strategy," says ecologist Stephen Hartley of Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington. Hartley thinks it may be possible to get rid of possums, because they breed slowly and are easy to detect, but that rats and mustelids will be nearly impossible to eliminate without introducing some form of genetic or biological control, such as gene editing or introducing a parasite to prevent them from reproducing.

If all goes as planned, people across New Zealand may one day be able to see and hear the parrots from their own backyards. For now, they can traipse through the forest sanctuary the parrots now call home. "Transferring them to Maungatautari is a good first step," Digby says. "It brings kākāpō back to where people are." (Courtesy: The Wire)

Under Putin, the uber-wealthy Russians known as 'oligarchs' are still rich but far less powerful

TALLINN, Dec 6: When Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the outside world viewed those Russians known as "oligarchs" as men who whose vast wealth, ruthlessly amassed, made them almost shadow rulers. A "government of the few," in the word's etymology.

The term has persisted well into Putin's rule, broadening in popular usage to refer to almost any Russian with a substantial fortune.

How much political power any of Russia's uber-rich now wield, however, is doubtful.

A few hours after Putin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, a televised meeting he held in the Kremlin with top industrialists and entrepreneurs showed how the dynamics had changed: Putin simply told them he had no choice

but to invade. Despite the harsh consequences to their wealth that the tycoons could expect from the war, they had to accept it; the power was his, not theirs.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, astute businessmen who had already begun building operations as government controls loosened under Mikhail Gorbachev's "perestroika" reform policies took advantage of the privatizing of state industries to quickly establish vast holdings. Fast-talking mathematician Boris Berezovsky epitomized the breed, becoming the largest dealer for Russia's largest automaker and managing to buy the vehicles at a loss to the manufacturer. He took over the management of the Sibneft oil company, the national airline Aeroflot and



gained control of Russia's biggest TV channel, then known as ORT.

Somewhat less colorful than Berezovsky but still prominent figures from the era included media mogul Vladimir Gusinsky, whose NTV channel made him highly influential, and oil tycoons Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Roman Abramovich.

Upon taking office, Putin was well aware of the widespread resentment ordinary Russians felt for the ultra-wealthy who thrived while millions struggled through the economic changes. In the summer of 2000, Putin met in the Kremlin with about two dozen of the men regarded as the top oligarchs. The meeting was closed,

but reports later said he made them a sternly clear deal: Stay out of politics and your wealth won't be touched.

"The guarantee ... was that all the riches amassed before his presidency could be kept by their owners, and this has never changed," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace analyst Alexandra Prokopenko wrote in a commentary this year. "Loyalty is what Putin values above all else."

By then, Berezovsky had already begun criticizing Putin. Within months, he left Russia for the United Kingdom and was granted asylum in 2003. Ten years later, he was found dead in his home; a disputed post-mortem examination said he appeared to have hanged himself. Gusinsky, whose media

holdings were critical of Putin and even satirized him, was hauled into jail amid an investigation of misappropriated funds; within weeks, he agreed to sell his holdings to an arm of Russia's state natural gas monopoly, and he left the country.

Khodorkovsky, regarded as Russia's richest man at the time, lasted longer, establishing the Open Society reformist group and showing increased political ambitions. But he was arrested in 2003 when Special Forces stormed onto his private plane and spent a decade in prison on convictions of tax evasion and embezzlement before Putin pardoned him and he left Russia.

Putin tolerated the 2012 presidential run against him by Mikhail Prokhorov, who made a fortune in metals, but the bid was widely seen

as a Kremlin-supported red herring aimed at creating the impression of genuine political pluralism in Russia. Despite the blows to their assets as a result of the Ukraine war, most of Russia's ultra-wealthy have stayed quiet about the conflict or offered only mild, token criticism.

Banking and brewing entrepreneur Oleg Tinkov was a rare exception, denouncing the war and calling its supporters "morons." He left the country in late 2022 and later renounced his citizenship.

Mikhail Fridman, a co-founder of Russia's largest private bank, called the war a tragedy and for the "bloodshed" to end. He holds Israeli citizenship and had lived in Britain, but reportedly returned to Moscow after fighting between Israel and Hamas began. (AP)

At least 85 civilians killed by a Nigerian army drone attack, in the latest such deadly mistake



ABUJA, Dec 6: At least 85 civilians were killed when an army drone attack erroneously targeted a religious gathering in northwest Nigeria, officials confirmed on Tuesday, as the president ordered an investigation into the latest in a series of such deadly mistakes in Nigeria's conflict zones.

The strike took place Sunday night in Kaduna state's Tudun Biri village while residents observed the Muslim holiday marking the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, government officials said. The military believed it was "targeting terrorists and bandits," officials said.

At least 66 people also were injured in the attack, the National Emergency Management Agency said in a statement. Eighty-five bodies, including of children, women and the elderly, have been buried so far, as a search continues for any additional victims, the agency said.

Nigeria's army chief, Lt. Gen. Taoreed Lagbaja, apologized for the drone strike during a visit to the village Tuesday and said it had been carried out "based on the observation of some tactics usually employed by bandits."

"Unfortunately, the reports we got revealed it was innocent civilians that the drone conducted a strike on," Lagbaja said.

Since 2017, some 400 civilians have been killed by airstrikes that the military said were targeting armed groups in the deadly security crisis in the country's north, according to the Lagos-based SBM Intelligence security firm.

"The incidence of miscalculated airstrikes is assuming a worrisome dimension in the country," said Atiku Abubakar, Nigeria's former vice-president and the main opposition presidential candidate in this year's election.

Nigerian President Bola Tinubu ordered "a thorough and full-fledged investigation into the incident." However, such investigations and their outcomes

are often shrouded in secrecy.

Nigeria's military often conducts air raids as it fights the extremist violence and rebel attacks that have destabilized Nigeria's north for more than a decade, often leaving civilian casualties in its wake, including in January when dozens were killed in Nasarawa state and in December 2022 when dozens also died in Zamfara state.

Maj. Gen. Edward Buba, a spokesman for Nigeria's Defense Headquarters, said in a statement Tuesday that terror suspects often "deliberately embed themselves within civilian population centers," though he wasn't speaking specifically about Sunday's holiday gathering.

Analysts have in the past raised concerns about the lack of collaboration among Nigerian security agencies as well as the absence of due diligence in some of their special operations in conflict zones.

One major concern has been the proliferation of drones within Nigerian security agencies such that "there is no guiding principle on when these can be used," according to Kabir Adamu, the founder of Beacon Consulting, a security firm based in Nigeria's capital, Abuja.

"The military sees itself as a little bit over and above civilian accountability as it were," Adamu said.

In the incident in Nasarawa in January, when 39 people were killed, the Nigerian air force "provided little information and no justice" over the incident, Human Rights Watch said.

Such incidents are enabled by a lack of punishment for erring officers or agencies, according to Isa Sanusi, Amnesty International's director in Nigeria.

"The Nigerian military is taking lightly the lack of consequences ... and the civilians they are supposed to protect are the ones paying the price of their incompetence and lack of due diligence," Sanusi told The Associated Press. (AP)

Taliban's abusive education policies harm boys as well as girls in Afghanistan, rights group says

ISLAMABAD, Dec 6: The Taliban's "abusive" educational policies are harming boys as well as girls in Afghanistan, according to a Human Rights Watch report published on Wednesday.

The Taliban have been globally condemned for banning girls and women from secondary school and university, but the rights group says there has been less attention to the deep harm inflicted on boys' education.

The departure of qualified teachers including women, regressive curriculum changes and the increase in corporal punishment have led to greater fear of going to school and falling attendance.

Because the Taliban have dismissed all female teachers from boys' schools, many boys are taught by unqualified people or sit in classrooms with no teachers at all.

Boys and parents told the rights group about a spike in the use of corporal punishment, including officials beating boys before the whole school for haircut or clothing infractions or for having a mobile phone. The group interviewed 22 boys along with five parents in Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Bamiyan and

other communities in eight provinces.

The Taliban have eliminated subjects like art, sports, English and civic education.

"The Taliban are causing irreversible damage to the Afghan education system for boys as well as girls," said Sahar Fetrat, who wrote the report. "By harming the whole school system in the country, they risk creating a lost generation deprived of a quality education."

Students told Human Rights Watch that there are hours during the school day when there are no lessons because there is a lack of replacement teachers. So they said they do nothing.

Taliban government spokesmen were not available for comment on the report. The Taliban are prioritizing Islamic knowledge over basic literacy and numeracy with their shift toward madrassas, or religious schools.

The Taliban have barred women from most areas of public life and work and stopped girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade as part of harsh measures they imposed after taking power in 2021.

According to the U.N. children's

agency, more than 1 million girls are affected by the ban, though it estimates 5 million were out of school before the Taliban takeover due to a lack of facilities and other reasons.

The ban remains the Taliban's biggest obstacle to gaining recognition as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan. But they have defied the backlash and gone further, excluding women and girls from higher education, public spaces like parks and most jobs.

The new report suggests that concerned governments and U.N. agencies should urge the Taliban to end their discriminatory ban on girls' and women's education and to stop violating boys' rights to safe and quality education. That includes rehiring all women teachers, reforming the curriculum in line with international human rights standards and ending corporal punishment.

"The Taliban's impact on the education system is harming children today and will haunt Afghanistan's future," Fetrat said. "An immediate and effective international response is desperately needed to address Afghanistan's education crisis." (AP)

The war has killed more than 16,200 people in Gaza - 70% of them women and children Heavy fighting across Gaza halts most aid delivery, leaves civilians with few places to seek safety

DEIR AL-BALAH, Dec 6: Israeli forces battled Hamas militants across Gaza on Wednesday after expanding their ground offensive to its second-largest city, further shrinking the area where Palestinians can seek safety and halting the distribution of vital aid across most of the territory.

The assault on the south threatens further mass displacement within the besieged coastal enclave, where the U.N. says some 1.87 million people — over 80% of the population — have already fled their homes.

Much of the north, including large parts of Gaza City, has been completely destroyed, and Palestinians fear the rest of Gaza could suffer a similar fate as Israel tries to dismantle Hamas, which has deep roots in the territory it has ruled for 16 years. Israel says it can no longer accept a Hamas military presence in Gaza after the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain open-ended security control over the territory, something opposed by the United States and much of the international community.

The Israeli military said on Tuesday that its troops were "in the heart" of the southern city of Khan Younis after what it described as "the most intense day" of fighting since the start of the ground operation five weeks ago, with heavy battles in the north as well.

For the past three days, aid distribution —



mainly just supplies of flour and water — has been possible only in and around the border city of Rafah, at Gaza's southern edge, because of fighting and road closures by Israeli forces, the U.N.'s humanitarian aid office said. The aid group Doctors Without Borders said fuel and medical supplies have reached "critically low levels" at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah, north of Khan Younis. Up to 200 wounded people have been brought in every day since Dec. 1, when a weeklong truce expired, it said.

"Without electricity, ventilators would cease to function, blood donations would have to stop, the sterilization of surgical instruments would be impossible," said Marie-Aure Perreaut Reval, the aid group's emergency coordinator in Gaza. She said the hospital is also running desperately low on

surgical supplies and external fixators to hold broken bones together. Gaza has been without electricity since early October, and Israel has severely limited fuel imports, forcing several hospitals to shut down because they cannot operate emergency generators.

The war has killed more than 16,200 people in Gaza — 70% of them women and children — and wounded more than 42,000, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which released new figures late Tuesday. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths, but its overall tally tracks with a figure released by the Israeli military this week. The ministry says hundreds more have been killed since the ceasefire ended Friday, and many still are trapped under rubble. The military accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields when the militants operate in residential areas. But Israel has not given detailed accounts of individual strikes, some of which have leveled entire city blocks.

Military Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said militants keep weapons in homes and other buildings so fighters in civilian clothes can use them to fire on troops.

"Striking them requires significant use of force, both to target the enemy but also to, of course, protect our forces," he said Tuesday.

Israel says it must remove Hamas from power to prevent a repeat of the Oct. 7 attack,

when Hamas and other militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took captive some 240 men, women and children after bursting through Israel's vaunted defenses. More than 100 hostages were released during last week's cease-fire, along with 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Family members of hostages held a tense meeting with Netanyahu and the war cabinet Tuesday in which some of them shouted at cabinet members, accusing them of having no plan to bring back the rest.

Five of the released hostages shared details of their experience during the meeting. One spoke of Hamas fighters "touching" female hostages, and another said militants shaved off a male hostage's body hair to humiliate him, according to a group representing the families. A doctor who treated some of the 110 released hostages told The Associated Press separately that at least 10 women and men were sexually assaulted or abused, without providing further details, adding to widespread allegations of rape and other atrocities committed during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

Hamas' continuing ability to fight in the north, where Israel entered with overwhelming force weeks ago, signals that eradicating the group without causing further mass casualties and displacement — as Israel's top ally, the U.S., has requested — could prove elusive. (AP)

Toshakhana corruption case: Pak court rejects Imran Khan's plea to withdraw appeal against disqualification

ISLAMABAD, Dec 6: A Pakistani high court on Wednesday rejected jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's plea seeking the withdrawal of his appeal against his disqualification in the Toshakhana corruption case.

Khan, 71, has been in jail since August 5, when he was arrested after a conviction in the Toshakhana case. He was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in the case for failing to disclose the proceeds from the sale of gifts he got from the Toshakhana (state repository).

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party leader approached the Islamabad High Court Chief (IHC) against the electoral body's decision, contending that he had purchased the assets legally; hence, there was no reason for him not to mention the gifts in his assets statement. However, on January 18, the PTI filed a fresh plea in the IHC to withdraw the petition, saying the cricketer-turned-politician wanted the Lahore High Court (LHC) to hear the matter. A separate petition

had been filed in the LHC against Khan's disqualification.

IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq on Wednesday announced the verdict which was reserved on September 13, rejecting Khan's request to withdraw his petition against disqualification in the case. According to The News International newspaper, the court will announce its reserved judgment later on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the ECP reserved its verdict on a petition seeking to remove the former premier as the head of the PTI party due to his conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case. In November last year, the ECP found Khan guilty of not submitting accurate details of the gifts he got from the Toshakhana and disqualified him from public office. Later, he was convicted in the same case.

Khan is currently jailed at the high-security Adiala prison in Rawalpindi since September 26 in the cipher case for allegedly leaking state secrets and violating the laws of the country. (PTI)

Russian Prez Vladimir Putin to visit Saudi Arabia and UAE, host of COP28 climate talks



DUBAI, Dec 6: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday will visit both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as Dubai hosts the United Nations' COP28 climate talks — despite facing an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court over the war in Ukraine.

Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE has signed the ICC founding treaty, meaning they don't face any obligation to detain Putin over the warrant accusing him of being personally responsible for the abductions of children from Ukraine during his war on the country.

However, the visit comes as armed UN police patrol a portion of Dubai's Expo City now considered international territory for the talks, again highlighting the Emi-

rates' expansive business ties to Russia that have exploded in the time since grinding Western sanctions have targeted Moscow.

A readout on Putin's trip from the state-run Tass news agency published early Wednesday offered no suggestion Putin might come to the COP28 site, instead quoting Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov saying he'd land and have a "meeting at the palace" and one-on-one talks with Emirati leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The visit comes after COP28 saw a parade of Western leaders including US Vice President Kamala Harris, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and others backing Ukraine speak at the summit. So did Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, long a Putin ally.

The UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change, which oversees COP summits, did not immediately respond to a request for comment about Putin's visit.

The Emirati organisation committee for COP28 and the Emirati Foreign Ministry similarly did not

immediately respond to questions. The UAE repeatedly feted the now-deposed Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir in the past despite an ICC warrant seeking his arrest over charges of genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Putin last visited the UAE in 2019, receiving a warm welcome from Sheikh Mohammed, then the crown prince of Abu Dhabi. In the time since, however, the world has greatly changed.

The Russian president isolated himself during the coronavirus pandemic. He launched an invasion targeting Ukraine in February 2022, a grinding war that continues on today and has been a topic for Ukrainian diplomats at the COP28 talks.

Meanwhile, the Israel-Hamas war remains a major concern for the Mideast, particularly the UAE, which reached a diplomatic recognition with Israel in 2020. Recent attacks by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthis rebels also threatens commercial shipping in the Red Sea as Iran's nuclear program continues its rapid advances since the collapse of the 2016 nuclear deal. (AP)

Scientists say November is 6th straight month to set heat record; 2023 a cinch as hottest year

DUBAI, Dec 6: For the sixth month in a row, Earth set a new monthly record for heat, and also added the hottest autumn to the litany of record-breaking heat this year, the European climate agency calculated.

And with only one month left, 2023 is on the way to smashing the record for hottest year.

November was nearly a third of a degree Celsius (0.57 degrees Fahrenheit) hotter than the previous hottest November, the European Space Agency's Copernicus Climate Change Service announced early Wednesday. November averaged 14.22 degrees Celsius (57.6 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial times, tying October and behind September, for the hottest above average for any month, the scientists said.

"The last half year has truly been shocking," said Copernicus Deputy Director Samantha Burgess. "Scientists are running out of adjectives to describe this."

November averaged 14.22 degrees Celsius (57.6 degrees Fahrenheit), which is 0.85 degrees Celsius (1.5 degrees

Fahrenheit) warmer than the average the last 30 years. Two days during the month were 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial times, something that hadn't happened before, according to Burgess.

So far this year is 1.46 degrees Celsius (2.6 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial times, about a seventh of a degree warmer than the previous warmest year of 2016, Copernicus scientists calculated.

That's very close to the international threshold the world set for climate change. The 2015 Paris climate agreement set a goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times over the long term and failing that at least 2 degrees (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit). Diplo-

mats, scientists, activists and others meeting at the United Nations climate conference in Dubai for nearly two weeks are trying to find ways to limit warming to those levels, but the planet isn't cooperating.

Scientists calculate with the

promises countries around the world have made and the actions they have taken, Earth is on track to warm 2.7 to 2.9 degrees Celsius (4.9 to 5.2 degrees) above pre-industrial times. The northern autumn is also the hottest fall the world has had on record, Copernicus calculated.

Copernicus records go back to 1850. United States government calculated records go back to 1850. Scientists using proxies such as ice cores, tree rings and corals have said this is the warmest decade Earth has seen in

about 125,000 years, dating back before human civilization. And the last several months have been the hottest of the last decade.

Scientists say there are two driving forces behind the six straight record hottest months in a row. One is human-caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas. That's like an escalator. But the natural El Nino-La Nina cycle is like jumping up or down on that escalator.

The world is in a potent El Nino, which is a temporary warming of parts of the tropical Pacific that changes weather worldwide, and that adds to global temperatures already spiked by climate change.

It's only going to get warmer as long as the world keeps pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, Burgess said. And she said that means "catastrophic floods, fires, heat waves, droughts will continue."

"2023 is very likely to be a cool year in the future unless we do something about our dependence on fossil fuels," Burgess said. (AP)

Mizoram registers third lowest murder cases in country: NCRB data

AIZAWL, Dec 6: Mizoram registered the third lowest murder cases in the country last year, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data.

The northeastern state recorded 31 murder cases in 2022, after Sikkim (9) and Nagaland (21).

The murder rate in the state was 2.5, while the chargesheet filing rate stood at 95.7, the NCRB data said. There were 14 blind murders or murders with no motive known and six murders due to dispute.

The state reported 28 murder cases in 2020 and 24 in 2021.

A total of 28,522 FIRs of murder were registered in 2022 across the country, the NCRB data said.

Uttar Pradesh saw the highest number of such FIRs at 3,491 followed by Bihar (2,930) and Maharashtra (2,295). (PTI)

Me Gong festival in Meghalaya from today

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: The second edition of Me Gong festival is all set to enthral the audience yet again and this time it will be held inside the Baljek Airport, at the picturesque village of Jengjal, West Garo Hills from December 7-December 9.

Late '90s pop band Vengaboys will get the people grooving to some of their popular songs that are hit with the people in the state of Meghalaya. Popular Indian rock band Parikrama famous since 1991, and Armaan Malik will also be part of the line-up.

The inaugural programme will be held on December 7 and the audiences will be treated to live shows and a fashion show. The artists' line-up on the first day are Never End, Wann Manda, Da Suraka, Colours, RipRap, Parikrama, Street Stories, Silbirth, Markush, DJ Kamz, Brian.

The second day will have performances from Eh Rngiew, Snam X Kohobodi, G-Hills finest, Saldorik, Trance Effect, When Chai met Toast, Armaan Malik, Velly-born, Ricky, Jitupan, DJ Static, DBryn.

The closing ceremony will be held on December 9. Audiences will be treated to performances from Crack Gang, Chegim Durama, The Do.Pos, Avora Records, Nokpante, Vengaboys, DJ Favian, Amva, Lening, DJ Dino, Cyco.

Meghalaya speaker sets deadline to complete new Assembly building

SHILLONG, Dec 6: Meghalaya Assembly Speaker Thomas A Sangma recently reviewed the construction of the new Assembly building at Mawdiangdiang near here and set July-August 2024 as the deadline for its completion.

Sangma has asked all line departments to complete their respective tasks within the stipulated time and assured that the next autumn session will be held at the new assembly building.

"We have set the deadline for the inauguration by next July/August. The time may be very tight but we will try our best that the work will be done," Sangma told PTI after chairing a review meeting with several line departments.

"It is my desire that this project is completed at the earliest," he said.

Sangma said that the DoNER ministry has assured in principle sanction to the second phase of the construction. "We are in the process of prepar-

ing the DPR. Hopefully we will be able to get the sanction within March 2024," he said.

Work to set up the new Assembly building had commenced in 2019 with an initial fund of over ₹ 120 crore. It was scheduled to be completed by July last year but the central 70-ton steel dome crashed in May last year. The debris has been cleared and work for the new dome with fabricated steel has begun and is being vetted by IIT-Guwahati.

The pre-fabricated structure will be arriving shortly and the installation will begin by February and will be completed by April, he said.

The construction of the new Meghalaya Assembly building was taken up after a fire broke out in it in 2001 destroying most of it.

The Assembly sessions are currently held in an auditorium of the arts and culture department in Rilbong area of Shillong. (PTI)

Will meet Shah, Jaishankar over refugee issue: Mizoram CM designate Lalduhoma

Around 44,000 people from the two neighbouring countries and state have taken shelter in Mizoram

AIZAWL, Dec 6: Lalduhoma, chief minister-designate of Mizoram, on Wednesday said he will soon meet Union home minister Amit Shah and Union external affairs minister S Jaishankar to discuss the issue of refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh, and internally displaced people from Manipur.

Around 44,000 people from the two neighbouring countries and state have taken shelter in Mizoram due to several problems including ethnic strife.

Lalduhoma, the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) leader, called on Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati at Raj Bhavan and staked claim to form the new government following his party's victory in the assembly polls. His government is likely to take oath on Friday.

"I have telephonic conversations with the Home minister and external affairs minister on Tuesday. I will soon meet them in Delhi to discuss how the Centre and the state government can work together to



look after the refugees and displaced people," Lalduhoma told reporters after meeting the governor.

The 73-year ZPM leader said his government will continue to provide shelter to

the refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh and displaced people from Manipur on humanitarian grounds.

He said that his government will also see if it can provide better relief to them

compared to that by the outgoing MNF government.

The ZPM dethroned Zoramthanga-led Mizo National Front (MNF) on Monday, bagging 27 of the total 40 assembly seats.

Lalduhoma, an ex-IPS officer who had served as the security in charge of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, said that he would discuss the country's policy towards refugees from Myanmar with Jaishankar, who is his civil service batchmate.

He expressed hope that the Centre will extend help to the state government to look after the Myanmar refugees as it is a humanitarian issue.

More than 31,300 Myanmar nationals and over 1,100 Bangladeshi nationals are currently in Mizoram, according to the state home department.

These Myanmar nationals belonging to the Chin community, who share ethnic ties with Mizos, have taken shelter since February 2021 following a military coup in the neighbouring country. The Bawm or

Mizo community from Bangladesh's Chitragong Hill Tracts, who fled gunfights between the Bangladesh army and an ethnic insurgent group, fled to the northeastern state from November last year.

Besides, nearly 12,000 internally displaced people from Manipur have taken refuge in different parts of Mizoram since May this year due to ethnic clashes.

The outgoing MNF government had in May urged the Centre to provide financial assistance to the tune of ₹ 10 crore for the internally displaced people from Manipur. In September, the Centre told the state government that it would assist it in kind.

However, no assistance has come till now, according to a home department official.

The official said that the state government disbursed ₹ 5 crore from its exchequer and received over ₹ 80 lakh from donations by government employees for assisting the internally displaced people. (PTI)

ZPM leader Lalduhoma to take oath as Mizoram CM tomorrow



AIZAWL, Dec 6: Zoram People's Movement leader Lalduhoma will take oath as Mizoram chief minister on Friday, Raj Bhavan sources said.

Lalduhoma called on Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati on Wednesday to stake a claim to form the government.

"Lalduhoma will be sworn in as the chief minister on Friday at a function to be held at Raj Bhavan at 11 am," the sources said.

ZPM emerged victorious in the assembly polls on Monday, bagging 27 of the total 40 seats.

Lalduhoma, an ex-IPS officer who had served as the security in charge of former Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi, held a meeting with the newly elected party candidates on Tuesday evening and discussed about formation of the council of ministers and distribution of portfolios, a party leader said.

The ZPM swept the state assembly polls, dethroning the incumbent Mizo National Front (MNF) which got only 10 seats.

The BJP trailed far behind with just two seats and the Congress just one.

Polling for the 40-member assembly polls was held on November 7, where more than 82 per cent of over 8.57 lakh voters exercised their franchise. (PTI)

ZPM leader Lalduhoma meets Guv to stake claim to form govt

AIZAWL, Dec 6: Zoram People's Movement leader Lalduhoma on Wednesday met Mizoram Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati to stake claim to form the government.

ZPM emerged victorious in the assembly polls on Monday, bagging 27 of the total 40 seats.

Lalduhoma, an ex-IPS officer who had served as the security in charge of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, held a meeting with the newly elected party candidates on Tuesday evening and discussed about formation of the council of ministers and distribution of portfolios, a party leader said.

"Lalduhoma is likely to be sworn in as the chief minister on Friday," a ZPM source said. Lalduhoma had expressed satisfaction with his party winning a majority of the seats in the House and emphasised the importance of building strong ties with the Union government. (PTI)

MNF rejects Zoramthanga's resignation

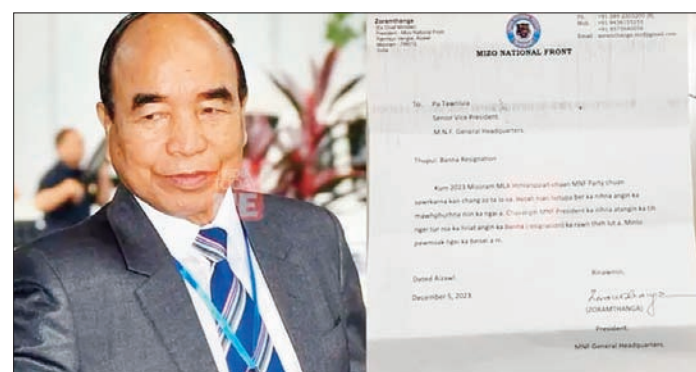
AIZAWL, Dec 6: The MNF, which was trounced in the Mizoram Assembly election, Wednesday rejected the resignation of its president Zoramthanga and agreed that he will continue in the post, party sources said.

The national core committee and political affairs committee of MNF rejected Zoramthanga's resignation and lauded his gesture of taking the moral responsibility of his defeat, MNF senior vice-president Tawnluia said.

The meeting felt that the election outcome is the collective responsibility of the party and not of the president alone, he said.

Zoramthanga, who served as chief minister of the state for 30 long years, had put in his papers following the party's debacle in the election. The counting of votes was held on Monday.

"The MNF failed to win the state assembly polls. In this regard, I take moral responsibility as the party chief. Considering that it is my obligation as the



MNF president, I do hereby tender resignation from the president post and request you to accept the same," Zoramthanga said in his resignation letter to Tawnluia on Tuesday.

In a major setback the MNF lost to opposition Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), which won 27 seats in the 40-member state assembly.

MNF managed to secure only 10 seats reducing its tally from 26 in 2018 assembly polls, while Zo-

ramthanga himself also lost his Aizawl East-I seat to ZPM vice-president Lalthansanga by a margin of 2,101 votes.

Zoramthanga has been the MNF president since the death of Laldenga in 1990.

The 79-year-old MNF chief has so far successfully contested assembly polls for six times in 1987, 1989, 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2018. He served as chief minister between 1998 and 2008 and 2018 and 2023. (PTI)

ZPM high command to meet Lalduhoma over formation of Mizoram cabinet

AIZAWL, Dec 6: ZPM leader legislature party leader Lalduhoma will be sworn in as the new chief minister of Mizoram on Friday, a Raj Bhavan official said.

Besides Lalduhoma other members of his council of ministers will also be sworn in on Friday at 11 am in a function at the Raj Bhavan, the official said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day Lalduhoma met Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati at the Raj Bhavan and staked claim to form the government.

The governor invited him to form the government.

ZPM won 27 of the 40 seats of the Mizoram Assembly, election to which was held on November 7. The party emerged victorious on Monday trouncing Mizo National Front (MNF) headed by Zoramthanga.

The ZPM advisory body will meet Lalduhoma on Thursday to discuss the structure of the new government, the general secretary of the ZPM media cell, Eddy Zosangliana Colney said. (PTI)

Volunteers apprise Manipur Guv of initiatives for children



IMPHAL, Dec 6: A group of volunteers consisting of teachers, doctors, paramedics, social workers from Vishwagaram called on Governor of Manipur, Anusuiya Uiquey at Raj Bhavan here recently and highlighted the activities taken up by their organisation for the children taking shelter in various relief camps in Manipur and for rendering medical checkup of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), a statement from the Raj Bhavan said.

They informed that they have already visited 16 relief camps and

engaged with children in creative activities like drawing, card making, toy making, origami, games, music etc. to bring them out from trauma. They informed that their teams checked up IDPs with any health issues and provided medicines too and if they come across a patient with serious health issues, they contacted a local medical officer for further examination. The team visited four districts- Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur and Thoubal. They have initiated a campaign for collection of books

for children in relief camps from Gujarat.

The team further expressed that during their discussion with IDPs, they learnt that many of them would like to take up vocational training to earn their livelihood. As such, the team explored training facilities in various fields in Gujarat and may enroll around 40-50 inmates, for free of cost training for three-four months in Gujarat.

The Governor, while expressing her appreciation and gratitude to the team for their humanitarian services, stated that healing and mental peace for the children is the need of the hour and encouraged them to take up more such activities that will bring out the children from the trauma experienced from the strife. She reiterated her initiative of extending various relief materials for the displaced people in relief camps. She also encouraged the team to continue their humanitarian services in the strife-hit Manipur. (NNN)

Stakeholders sign Community Accord to unite against drug addiction in M'laya

DREAM project is a significant moment and is an important part of the government's larger policy focused on the youth



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 6: In an effort to combat drug abuse and foster unity among stakeholders, the social welfare department of Meghalaya, as part of the recently launched Dream Drug Reduction Elimination & Action Mission (DREAM), organised a programme in an attempt to bring unity amongst community stakeholders in the fight against drugs recently, at the U Soso Tham Auditorium, Shillong.

Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma graced the event as the chief guest, alongside social welfare minister Paul Lyngdoh, chief secretary DP Wahlang, IAS, health minister Amparen

Lyngdoh among others.

As an integral aspect of the community-state led initiative among stakeholders to combat the drug menace, community members including faith based leaders and Rangbah Shnongs, Lympung Ki Seng Kynthel along with Synjuk Ki Dorbar united in a symbolic gesture by signing the Community Accord. This important moment also witnessed the participation of two young individuals currently on the path to recovery, embodying the shared commitment to overcoming challenges posed by drug addiction in the region. During the Programme, the State government also extended financial support to the Mawlai Dorbar, contributing 6 lakh rupees towards the rehabilitation camp, initiated by the Dorbar, in an attempt to encourage such initiatives from other Dorbars and areas across the State.

Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma stated that youth are the greatest resource of the state and that the governance system is centered around youth to foster a regenerative economy. He emphasised that the state has adopted a lifecycle approach whereby interventions are being implemented right from the stage of pre-conception stage to the early childhood and adolescent phase to ensure a holistic and all round development of children, adolescent and youth for them to grow up into well rounded adults, and become an asset to the economy.

He went on to cite the examples of the on-going government programmes like the grassroots music programme, CM-Elevate

Programme as well as the PRIME entrepreneurship programme are all aimed at creating opportunities for the youth. He said the launch of the DREAM project is a significant moment and is an important part of the government's larger policy focused on the youth. He went on to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the community led organisations as well as faith based organisations for actively being part of the state's vision of making Meghalaya a drug free State. He added that the DREAM mission is a collaborative endeavor whereby the police department, the social welfare department, the health and family welfare department along with the community and faith based organisations are working together to implement a collective vision.

He also appreciated the tireless efforts of the NGOs, religious organisations as well as community organisations for their dedication and commitment and extended all support on behalf of the government to curb the menace of drugs among youth of the State.

Further, the chief minister also announced that the upcoming Meghalaya games will be aligned in a manner so as to keep the youth engaged. He said that apart from just hosting games, the traditional sports of khasi Jaintia and Garos will be included so that the youth can learn and revive old tribal sports and be reminded that tribals were always linked to sports.

Addressing the gathering, Dr LR Bishnoi, director general of police (DGP), Meghalaya expressed the police force's commitment to community engagement and highlighted the

severity of the drug-related challenges faced by Meghalaya. Referring to a nationwide survey conducted by the Ministry of social justice in 2019, he shared alarming statistics, revealing that the number of drug users in India had surged from 7.5 crores to an estimated 10 crores. He emphasised chief minister Conrad K Sangma's deep concern for addressing the drug-related issues prevalent in the state. He highlighted Meghalaya's geographical proximity to the notorious Golden Triangle, a region known for the production and trafficking of opium and heroin, making the state particularly vulnerable.

While addressing the gathering, state social welfare minister Paul Lyngdoh stated that the government had been actively pursuing the DREAM Mission together with the social welfare department and other line departments. On the signing of the accord, the minister stated that this is a unique accord that is being signed by people who have come together, to dream together and to share the ideal of pulling Meghalaya out of the nightmare of drug addiction and a state of slumber.

He also states that the state poses a challenge of falling under the influence and periphery of the Golden Triangle, and sought the collaborative support of all stakeholders to make Meghalaya drug free at the earliest. He expressed his gratitude to faith leaders, Rangbahs, NGOs, and the collaborative efforts of the Mawlai Dorbar, while appreciating the role of various stakeholders in building a society where individuals, especially the youth are viewed as assets.

Agartala-Jorhat flight service shortly



AGARTALA, Dec 6: To boost regional air connectivity, private carrier SpiceJet will soon introduce direct flights on Agartala-Jorhat route, an official said here on Thursday.

The development comes after Tripura transport minister Sushanta Chowdhury sought Union civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's intervention for the introduction of flight services on two routes- Agartala (Tripura)-Jorhat (Assam) and Agartala-Hyderabad (Telangana).

"In a letter addressed to Chowdhury, the union minister on November 30 said Jorhat-Agartala and Agartala-Jorhat flight service has been awarded to Spicejet under the UDAN scheme. The flight operation on

the route will be starting shortly," said the official quoting the letter.

The regional connectivity scheme - UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik) - is a government-backed initiative to improve infrastructure and connectivity in India, especially in remote and underserved regions.

In response to the letter, Scindia also said the Hyderabad-Agartala-Hyderabad flight service was awarded to private carrier IndiGo and the matter will be taken up again with the airline for introducing the service, the official added.

Flight services to cities like Kolkata, Bengaluru, Delhi, Guwahati, Imphal and Shillong are now available from Maharaja Bir Bikram Airport here. (PTI)

2022 saw over 31 pc rise in offences promoting enmity between groups: NCRB

In 2022, nine states registered over 100 cases under IPC sections 153A, while in 2021 there were just two states

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: More than 1,500 cases were registered under IPC section 153A that penalises promoting enmity between different groups, including offences of hate speech, across India in 2022, a 31.25 per cent increase from 2021 but a 15.57 per cent decline from 2020, according to the NCRB.

Last year, the maximum of these 1,523 cases were lodged in Uttar Pradesh (217) followed by Rajasthan (191), Maharashtra (178), Tamil Nadu (146), Telangana (119), Andhra Pradesh (109), and Madhya Pradesh (108), the data showed.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), which functions under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, is tasked with collection and analysis of crime data from all states and union territories, the figures of which are published annually in its report.

In 2022, nine states registered over 100 cases under IPC sections 153A, while in 2021 there were just two states - Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh - with such offences in three-digits. Both Andhra



Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh had reported 108 IPC 153A offences in 2021, according to the data.

In 2020, there were seven states with over 100 such cases each - Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh. The maximum 303 cases were reported in Tamil Nadu in 2020, the NCRB data from corresponding year showed.

In 2022, the number of such offences nearly-tripled to 108 in Madhya Pradesh from 38 in 2021. The state had recorded 73 such

cases in 2020, official figures showed.

In some states the figures increased to more than double in 2022 from 2021, like Uttar Pradesh (217 and 108), Maharashtra (178 and 75), Rajasthan (191 and 83), Gujarat (40 and 11).

Assam, which had reported 147 offences under IPC 153A in 2020, registered 75 cases in 2021 and last year the figure came down to 44, according to the NCRB report.

National capital Delhi recorded 26 cases in 2022, 17 in 2021 and 36 in 2020. Jammu and Kashmir

showed 16 such offences in 2022, 28 in 2021 and 22 in 2020, the official data revealed.

In a note of caution about the annual report, the NCRB said the primary presumption that the upward swing in police data indicates an increase in crime and thus a reflection of the ineffectiveness of the police is fallacious.

"Rise in crime" and "increase in registration of crime by police" are clearly two different things, a fact which requires better understanding. Thus an oft-repeated expectation from certain quarters that an effective police administration will be able to keep the crime figures low is misplaced," it stated.

Increase in crime numbers in a state police data may in fact be on account of certain citizen-centric police initiatives, like launching of e-FIR facility or women helpdesks," it said.

"The increase or decrease in crime numbers, however, does call for a professional investigation of underlying factors pertaining to the local communities to suitably address the pertinent issues," it added. (PTI)

DMK MP expresses regret for north-south divide remark

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: DMK MP N V Senthil Kumar on Wednesday apologised in the Lok Sabha for his controversial 'north-south divide' remark which had sparked a backlash.

Kumar had on Tuesday used a pejorative to describe Hindi heartland states while attacking the ruling BJP. His comments led to ruckus and adjournment in the House, and were expunged by Speaker Om Birla later. MPs from the ruling BJP on Wednesday also created a ruckus over the issue, and the House witnessed a brief adjournment during the Question Hour over the issue.

At 12 noon, when the House re-assembled for the Zero Hour, Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal raised the issue, and asked if DMK leader TR Baalu, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi agree with the comments.

Demanding an apology, he said, "Is TR Baalu standing with him? Is Rahul Gandhi standing with him? Voters have made BJP victorious in three states, and this is what they say. This is the thinking of dividing India in north and south. We will not allow it," he said.

Baalu, who raised the issue of floods caused by Cyclone Michaung in Tamil Nadu and demanded that the Centre declare it as a national calamity, said the remarks made by Kumar were not correct. "Statement made by Senthil

Kumar was not correct. MK Stalin has warned the particular member," Baalu said.

Soon after, Kumar expressed regret over the comment.

Kumar said the remarks were made "inadvertently" and if they have hurt the sentiments of people, he withdraws them. The DMK MP had earlier tendered an apology for his comments on Tuesday.

"Commenting on the results of the five recent state assembly elections, I have used a word in an inappropriate way. Not using that term with any intent, I apologise for sending the wrong meaning across," he said in a post on X.

While participating in a discussion on J&K Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill in the House on Tuesday, Kumar had said the BJP can win elections only in the Hindi heartland states and not in south India.

BJP leaders termed Kumar's remarks as "hate speech" and said the voters will "wipe out" the India bloc from southern India as well in the next elections.

"Very unfortunate choice of words. Unparliamentary. Senthil Kumar must forthwith apologize and withdraw his comments," Congress Lok Sabha member Karti Chidambaram had said on X.

"Very unfortunate to witness an Indian MP making derogatory statements against GauMata &

SanatanaDharma culture revered by over one billion Indians. Many, including myself, consider ourselves Sanatanis," former Union minister Milind Deora had said on X.

"DMK must realise that its reckless remarks only weaken INDIA Alliance's efforts in challenging BJP in the Hindi heartland. India is one, and there is no place for a north-south divide," Deora had said.

Kumar's comments come in the backdrop of some referring to the recent assembly election results as reflective of the 'north-south divide' after the BJP trounced the Congress in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and the Congress won in Telangana.

"This is another example of hate speech. This reflects the frustration of INDIA constituents. Gomutra and Gomata are revered not only in northern states but also in the South. If they keep insulting Indian culture and traditions then leave aside north India, the INDIA bloc will also be wiped out from southern India," BJP Rajya Sabha member G V L Narasimha Rao told PTI.

Senior BJP leader Sanjay Jaiswal said the BJP will even form the government in Tamil Nadu in the next five years by defeating the DMK.

"Senthil Kumar is scared because he knows that the BJP will win big in Tamil Nadu. Defeating the DMK is the only goal of the BJP in Tamil Nadu," he had said. (PTI)

JK Reservation (Amendment) Bill passed by Lok Sabha



NEW DELHI, Dec 6: The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, which seeks to nominate two members from the Kashmiri migrant community and one representing the displaced persons from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) to the legislative assembly.

The House also passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, which seeks to change the nomenclature of a section of people who are eligible for quota in appointment and admission.

The bills were passed after more than six hours of debate spanning over two days and a spirited reply by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

The home minister said the two bills related to Jammu and Kashmir brought by the government will give justice to those deprived of their rights for the last 70 years and asserted that reservation to the displaced people will give them a voice in the legislature.

He said that Jammu and Kashmir has suffered due to two blunders committed by the country's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru - first announcing ceasefire and then taking the Kashmir issue to the United Nations.

"Had Jawaharlal Nehru taken right steps, PoK would have been part of India now. It was a historic blunder," he said.

The home minister said a plan to have zero terror incident in Jammu and Kashmir has been in force for the last three years and it will be successful by 2026 when there will be no violence. (PTI)

Parts of city suffer from inundation, relief work expedited

CHENNAI, Dec 6: Residents grappled with stagnant water and power disruption in parts of the city and its suburbs on Wednesday, two days after Cyclone 'Michaung' wreaked havoc in the metropolis and neighbouring districts, even as civic agency personnel were involved in relief and rehabilitation efforts. The government said power was kept suspended in some areas as a "preventive measure" as the cables were under water, while asserting all efforts were being taken to restore normalcy.

Another day's holiday was declared for schools and colleges in Chennai on December 7.

The cyclone-triggered heavy rainfall had led to inundation in localities including Velachery and Tambaram. On Wednesday too, people were seen leaving their homes in the areas surrounded with water to safer zones, carrying their children and wading through the stagnant water. They called for help, including pressing more boats to ferry people to higher ground. Chief minister M K Stalin visited some of the affected areas and distributed food and essential commodities to people put up at a relief centre in the city. He inspected activities undertaken by the city civic body to drain water.

He also wrote to the Centre seeking an interim flood relief of ₹ 5,060 crore to tide over the situation. Many users on social media site 'X' shared videos of residential localities still being surrounded by stagnant water, claiming many residents were stuck inside. The hashtag #Velachery was trending on the microblogging site. A user lamented that her relatives were stuck in their home for the last three days without power, drinking water and milk.

There were complaints of delay in supply of milk in many affected parts including Velachery and Tambaram and residents alleged it was being sold for extra price. Power supply had not resumed in parts of the city including Kilpauk and Kat-



tupakkam. The state government said relief activities were on in full swing and that people in many of the affected areas were being rescued through inflatable boats even during the midnight.

Senior officials of the Greater Chennai Corporation were overseeing the rescue and relief activities, the civic agency said.

The Greater Chennai Police also announced helpline numbers for citizens to contact them for rescue and relief activities.

An update from the city police on Wednesday said six rain-related deaths were reported while many persons in need were rescued by police personnel in different parts of the city. Among the rescued were aged persons and a number of pregnant women, and a woman and her newborn, an official release said.

Further, 11 subways in the metro remained closed for vehicular movement due to water-logging. There were no disruptions in operations at the airport while the Southern Railway announced cancelling a number of services and diversion of many others.

However, it announced resumption of the suburban services on the Chennai Egmore-Chengalpattu and Chennai Beach-Arakkonam routes with fre-

quency of 30 and 45 minutes, respectively. Services on the Tiruvottiyur-Sullurpeta line will be operated in a hourly frequency, it said in an update.

State Chief Secretary Shiv Das Meena told reporters that water was draining in many parts of the city. Where water has cleared, cleaning of roads was being done, while supply of drinking water was also being ensured.

A number of personnel, including those from NDRF and SDRF were involved in relief and rehabilitation activities, he told reporters here.

"Food packets, bread and milk are being supplied in waterlogged areas while boats have been deputed to severely affected areas in Perumbakkam and Varadarajapuram, with senior officials monitoring the efforts," he said. Over 200 boats have been pressed into service in different areas. On power supply yet to be restored in some areas, the official said it was done as a "preventive step" to avert any untoward incident as the government wants nobody to get hurt.

"We are ready to provide power but there should be no loss of life, nobody should be affected, there should be no accident. Wherever the power cables are under water, as a preventive step, there is delay in (resuming) power supply," he said.

Only 95 of the 1,812 feeders in the city are yet to be switched on. The situation will be better as water recedes, the top official added.

Later, addressing a press conference, he said around 41,400 persons have been accommodated in 372 relief centres in different districts and that they were being provided with food. In the 4 worst districts of Chennai, Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu, there were a little over 800 locations with inundation and about 19,000 persons have been evacuated from there and moved to relief camps. (PTI)

BJP makes false promises before elections: Mamata

KOLKATA, Dec 6: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Wednesday lashed out at BJP calling it the "biggest pickpocket" in the country and for bluffing voters before elections.

Talking to reporters at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport here before leaving for north Bengal, she said central agencies repeatedly visit the state to get "political food" for the saffron party.

"They (BJP) are the biggest pickpockets in the country and people have suffered the most due to this. Their promises to transfer ₹ 15 lakh to each person's account, then demonetisation, and then the sudden stop to free ration during the pandemic. They bluff people making false promises before the elections," Banerjee said.

"We (TMC) are unlike them," she asserted.

Referring to Uttar Pradesh getting funds even after the deletion of a large number of fake job cards, Banerjee wondered why the Centre was not disbursing dues for 100 days' work scheme to West Bengal.

On Giriraj Singh's advice to her to meet Narendra Modi to get the dues of West Bengal, the chief minister said that she has already met the prime minister thrice and has sought time for another appointment. (PTI)

BJP MPs, including Union ministers, elected to assemblies quit Parl; likely to join state govt

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Union ministers Narendra Singh Tomar and Prahlad Singh Patel resigned from Lok Sabha on Wednesday as the BJP decided that all of its 12 MPs recently elected to state assemblies will quit Parliament, amid strong indications that they may join the new governments in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. The move has given rise to the view that the party leadership may bring in new faces at the helm in all the three states. Senior leaders, however, declined to comment on such a development.

BJP president J P Nadra accompanied 10 of them as they tendered their resignations from Parliament. Two others, Union minister Renuka Singh and Mahant Balaknath, will also be quitting, party leaders said. Other MPs who quit are Rakesh

Singh, Uday Pratap Singh and Riti Pathak from Madhya Pradesh; Kirodi Lal Meena, Diya Kumari and Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore from Rajasthan and Gomati Sai and Arun Sao from Chhattisgarh.

All except Meena are Lok Sabha members. Meena is a Rajya Sabha member.

Patel said they took Prime Minister Narendra Singh's blessings before tendering their resignations.

All three Union ministers will also be quitting the Modi government as a procedural formality. Tomar is a Cabinet minister handling the crucial agriculture portfolio, and their departure have sparked a fresh buzz within the party on whether Modi will induct new members in his council of ministers ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Tomar, a seasoned organisation man, and Patel, who comes from politically significant Other Backward Classes, are seen as possible chief ministerial choices in Madhya Pradesh along with the incumbent Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who has been at the helm in Madhya Pradesh since 2005 except for five months when Kamal Nath headed a Congress government after the 2018 assembly polls.

Amid speculation within the party that its leadership may pick one of the outgoing MPs as the new chief minister of Rajasthan, where veteran leader Vasundhara Raje is also in race, its senior functionaries said political factors involving social equation will be a key consideration in naming three chief ministers.

Raje (70) is a two-term former chief

minister but her equation with the party's national leadership has not been very smooth.

Sao, an OBC, and Sai, who comes Scheduled Tribes, are seen as serious contenders due to their social background, image and relatively young profile. Raman Singh (71), a three-term former chief minister, is also being talked about but there is a view that the BJP leadership is looking for a generational change in leadership.

A party leader noted the prime minister's recent exhortations that women, youth, poor and farmers are the four biggest castes for him, adding that this may play a role in final decision.

With Lok Sabha elections less than five months away, the party is likely to send a larger message about its social agenda with its chief ministerial choices. (PTI)

Saudi Arabia taking measures to ensure fulfilling journey for Indian Hajj, Umrah pilgrims

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Saudi Arabia has rolled out a series of "transformative" measures like improving visa processing, accessibility and logistical support to ensure a more enriching experience for Indian pilgrims undertaking the journey to Mecca, Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah said on Wednesday.

In an interview to PTI, Al-Rabiah said the initiatives are specifically designed to provide Indian pilgrims with enhanced flexibility throughout their journey, particularly benefiting women embarking on independent Umrah trips. The new steps like extension of the Umrah visa to 90 days and introduction of a four-day transit visa are tailored to accommodate the growing influx of Indian pilgrims.

"By promoting gender equality and cultivating a safer, more embracing environment, these changes collectively aim to ensure a more fulfilling and secure pilgrimage experience for all travellers," he said.

Al-Rabiah, currently on a visit to India, held talks with Union Ministry Affairs Minister Smriti Irani and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday. The influential minister said the aim of the new initiatives was to ensure "warmth and convenience" to the overall experience of the pilgrims.

"My first official visit to India as Minister of Hajj and Umrah is important in our ongoing efforts to showcase Saudi Arabia's unwavering commitment to serving Umrah performers and visitors," he said.

Millions of Muslims from across the world travel to Mecca every year to perform Hajj as well as Umrah, an Islamic pilgrimage. Highlighting steps to enrich the experience of the pilgrims, Al-Rabiah said the Saudi government allows Umrah participation for all individuals travelling to the country on various visa types, aligning seamlessly with the objectives of the pilgrims experience programme, a fundamental component of the Saudi Vision 2030 initiative. (PTI)

Gujarat's Garba dance gets included in UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list

AHMEDABAD, Dec 6: UNESCO has approved the inclusion of Gujarat's traditional Garba dance in its 'Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity', Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel announced here on Wednesday.

India had nominated Garba, performed across Gujarat and in many other parts of the country during the Navratri festival, for inclusion in the list.

"The age-old tradition of devotion to Goddess Mother in the form of Garba is alive and growing. Garba which has become the identity of Gujarat has been approved by UNESCO under its intangible cultural heritage list," Patel said in a post on X.

"This is a moment of pride for Gujaratis spread all over the world. This is a result of importance being given to the heritage of the country under prime minister Narendra Modi's leadership and such heritage being taken to the world. Congratulations to the people of Gujarat," Patel further said.

The inclusion was made under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage during the 18th meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which began in Kasane, Botswana, on Tuesday.

"Garba of Gujarat is the 15th ICH element from India to join this list. This inscription underscores Garba's pivotal role as a unifying force that fosters social and gender inclusivity. Garba

as a dance form is entrenched deeply in ritualistic and devotional roots, involving people from all walks of life and it continues to thrive as a vibrant living tradition bringing communities together," an official release said.

Garba is a "ritualistic and devotional dance" that is performed on the occasion of the festival of Navratri which is dedicated to the worship of the feminine energy or 'Shakti', the UNESCO website said.

The dance takes place around a perforated earthenware pot lit with an oil lamp, or an image of the mother goddess Amba. The dancers move around the centre in a counter-clockwise circle, using simple movements while singing and clapping their hands in unison, it further said.

Starting with slow circular movements, the tempo slowly builds up to a frenzied whirling. The practitioners and bearers of Garba are broad and inclusive, from the dancers to the musicians, social groups, craftspeople and religious figures involved in the festivities and preparations, it said.

Garba fosters social equality by diluting socio-economic, gender and religious structures. It continues to be inclusive of diverse and marginalized communities, thus strengthening social bonds, it said.

Traditions or cultural phenomena from India such as Ramlila, Vedic Chants, Kumbh Mela and Durga Puja have already been recognised by the UNESCO list. (PTI)



No.KOK/BLDG/Tech-210/2023-24/4034

Date 4/12/23

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

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

Sl. No.	Name of work	(Approx.) Estimated value of work	Earnest money 2% for GNL & 1% for ST/SC/OBC/MOBC	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
1	Construction of Aluminium Cabinet Chambers (Cubicals) for office rooms of the DLR & surveys, BTC Kokrajhar	Rs. 3,11,348 /-	Rs.6,300/- & Rs.3,200/-	Rs. 200/-	2 (two) month
2	Repair/Renovation of office Room at Sidi Circle, in Chirang District BTC Assam	Rs. 4,38,647/-	Rs. 8,800/- & Rs.4,400/-	Rs. 200/-	2 (two) month
3	Construction of Community Hall at Athiabari Unit Gudi Bathou Afat Kheraisali at Athiabari Tinali in Kokrajhar District	Rs. 11,51,000/-	Rs. 23,100/- & Rs. 11,600/-	Rs. 1000/-	4 (four) month

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up-to 1-30pm in all working days from 11-12-2023 to 12-12-2023 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker cheque/Bank draft/Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary BTC, Kokrajhar. The contractor should submit up-to date Registration Certificate of contractor, latest clearance certificate of Income Tax and GST etc. along with the tender paper. In case the office is remain closed/bandh for any circumstances on tender receiving/opening date, then the same will be received/opened in the next working days.

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

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/895

Democratic nations must look at the 'internal forces': Tibetan leader on China

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Tibetan people are "dying a slow death" in the face of China's repression and the democratic nations must stand up to the Chinese belligerence, the president of Tibet's government-in-exile Penpa Tsering has said.

Tsering said democratic nations around the world must look at the "internal forces" such as the Tibetans, Uyghur leaders and pro-democratic activists in Hong Kong to put pressure on Beijing to reverse its aggressive approach and bring "positive changes" within that country.

He said there has not been much understanding in the world about the extent of China's strategic objectives and plans and that there is a need to create awareness on what Beijing's machinations are.

In an address at an awareness event on Panchen Lama, the Sikyong or political leader of the exiled Central Tibetan Administration accused China of destroying the historical basis of Tibet's existence.

I have been telling the world that "we are dying a slow death, we are being stricken by being squeezed out of our breath by the dragon", he said last night.

After a failed anti-Chinese uprising in 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama fled Tibet and came to India where he set up the government-in-exile. The Chinese government officials and the Dalai Lama or his representatives have not met in formal negotiations since 2010.

Beijing has in the past accused the Dalai Lama of indulging in "separatist" activities and trying to split Tibet and considers him as a divisive figure.

However, the Tibetan spiritual leader has insisted that he is not seeking independence but "genuine autonomy for all Tibetans living in the three traditional provinces of



Tibet" under the "Middle-Way approach".

Speaking to PTI, Tsering said that the Chinese government is facing various domestic challenges including in the economic and political fronts and there has to be a "union of internal and external forces" to bring "positive changes" within that country.

He identified Tibetans, Uyghur leaders and pro-democratic activists in Hong Kong as internal forces that have deep insights into China and its Communist government.

The Tibet's government-in-exile based in Himachal Pradesh's Dharamshala represents over one lakh Tibetans living in around 30 countries.

In his remarks on the internal situation in China, Tsering claimed it is the only country that spends more financial resources on internal security than external security as the Communist regime has been facing anger from the people.

Listing challenges that Beijing has been facing, he named economic downturn, unemployment

and housing problems, which constitute about 30 percent of China's GDP, as the main vulnerabilities.

"We are the internal forces. There has to be a union of internal and external forces to bring about positive change. That is why I ask governments, please don't look at us from the perspective of victims of communism that you can just pity on," he said. The Tibetan leader said even India can take inputs from Tibetans for its China strategy.

He also underlined the need for democracies including India, to speak more clearly on issues related to China.

"When we reach out, we can reach out only to the democratic free world. We cannot reach out to other authoritarian regimes, as they follow the same practise as what China does so. One thing that we have been saying is that democracies around the world should come together when it comes to China," he said.

"It's important to fight against authoritarian regimes and their

ideology and their ambitions," he added.

Referring to the eastern Ladakh border row, Tsering complimented New Delhi for taking a "very strong position" on disengagement from all quarters" for normalisation of ties.

"One has to be very, very strategic when you deal with China. I think the Indian government so far has taken a very strong position that unless there's disengagement from all quarters, there won't be normalisation of relations," he said.

Asked about expectations from India on the issue of the successor to the 14th Dalai Lama, Tsering said a statement from New Delhi would be very helpful.

The Tibetan leadership has been maintaining that China cannot decide the next Dalai Lama.

He also referred to the US law on Tibet that said the issue about the reincarnation will be decided by the Dalai Lama.

Tsering said if the Indian Parliament or the government can come out with a statement, it will help the Tibetans because many people look at India's leadership when it comes to Tibet.

The US and several democratic countries have been consistently supporting the Tibetan cause notwithstanding China's strong objection.

In 2020, the US came out with legislation reaffirming the absolute right of Tibetan people to choose a successor to the Dalai Lama and the preservation of Tibet's environment.

"It is really important that we create more awareness on what China is doing, not only to Tibet but also to the region, countries in the region and internationally," Tsering said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

CM pats police for drop

The chief minister attributed the surrender of thousands of cadres of different militant groups to the drop in cases registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. Sarma also stated that the state police in association with the National Investigation Agency (NIA) recently busted a cartel, which was using Tripura and Assam as a transit route to send illegal Rohingya immigrants to rest of India.

According to the NCRB report, Assam recorded a total of 68,937 crime cases last year, down from 1,33,239 in 2021. Additional DGP of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Assam Police, Munna Prasad Gupta, said altogether 56,202 cases have been registered this year till October. A total of 6,171 cases of crime against children, including 5,370 cases of child marriage, were registered in the first 10 months of 2023, he added. (PTI)

Kashmir suffered due

the opposition benches over the remarks on Nehru and they staged a walkout but returned later. After their walkout, BJD leader Bhartuhari Mahtab said the home minister should also talk about the 'Himalayan blunder', a reference to Nehru's actions leading up to the war with China in 1962. Shah quipped that his talking about two blunders had upset the opposition benches and if he had used the phrase 'Himalayan blunder', they would have resigned. Lok Sabha speaker Om Birla said the remarks made were not an insult to anyone and were only made to put things in context. In his remarks, Shah also alleged that the Kashmir matter was taken to the UN in a hurry. "If at all it had to be taken to the UN, it should have been sent under Article 51 rather than Article 35 of the UN Charter," he said, asserting that he of course believes that the issue should not have been taken to the UN in the first place. Shah also quoted Nehru as saying later that the ceasefire was a 'mistake'. Shah added that it was not Nehru's mistake but a blunder.

"So much land of this country was lost, it was a historic blunder," the home minister added. Talking about the abrogation of Article 370, Shah said it had nothing to do with going back on promise as it was a temporary article and had to go. "You did not have the courage, PM Narendra Modi showed courage and did away with it," he said, referring to the opposition benches.

Shah pointed out that the two bills on Jammu and Kashmir seek to nominate two Kashmiri migrant community members, including a woman, to the assembly. One seat in the Jammu and Kashmir assembly will be set aside for people displaced from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the home minister said. More than 45,000 people have lost their lives due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir so far, he said. Shah said the government's focus was on ending the terror ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir. He said a plan to have zero terror incident in Jammu and Kashmir is in force for three years and it will be successful by 2026.

"I believe Modi government will return to power in 2024 and by 2026, I hope there will be no terror incident in Jammu and Kashmir," he said. Shah said the two bills will give justice to those deprived of their rights for the last 70 years and asserted that reservation to the displaced people will give them a voice in the legislature. He said that had terrorism been tackled at the beginning without considering vote-bank politics, Kashmiri pandits would not have had to leave Kashmir Valley.

He said one of the bills seeks to give representation in the assembly to those who had to leave Kashmir due to terrorism. Shah also lashed out at the Congress for talking about backward classes, saying that if any party has harmed backward classes and come in the way of their growth, it is the Congress.

He said Narendra Modi was born into a poor family and became the Prime Minister and he knows the pain of the backward classes and the poor. The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill were passed by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. (PTI)

UK's Family Visa

by it can be affected very significantly. "The largest impacts will fall on lower-income British citizens, and particularly women and younger people who tend to earn lower wages. The income threshold will also affect people more if they live outside of London and the south east [England], in areas of the country where earnings are lower." An analysis she co-authored with fellow researcher Dr Ben Brindle reflects that it is unclear why the proposed thresholds for family migration and skilled work migration are the same.

"The income threshold will affect some groups more than others. For example, whereas around 60 per cent of men earn less than the new income requirement, this rises to more than 75 per cent for women," they note. The Opposition Labour's shadow home secretary, Yvette Cooper, has also raised the prospect of many rushed weddings between now and spring 2024 by those desperate to circumvent the new rules.

"What we're asking for is the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to look at this. It looks as though the committee hasn't actually been asked to look at this for over 10 years," Cooper told the BBC. "So, they should be asked to look at this very swiftly, and to look at what the best way to approach this is, because at the moment this seems to have come out of thin air with no plan at all and because there's a possibility that actually what this will lead to is a big increase in rushed marriages and so on in the next few months because of the changes," she said.

Meanwhile, the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) – the UK's largest representative body for nearly 80,000 doctors and 55,000 nurses of Indian origin – has written to the Home Secretary on Wednesday demanding clarity on exactly how the new clampdown on overseas care workers will operate.

The letter reads: "It was very concerning and distressing to our members to read about the plans to prevent overseas care workers from bringing their dependents to the UK. "Stopping their spouses and children from accompanying them to the UK will have a significant detrimental impact on their mental and physical wellbeing resulting in a lower quality of care for patients and a reluctance for these skilled workers to either continue working or start new positions in the UK."

Under the new immigration crackdown, overseas care workers will be banned from bringing family members and skilled professionals must meet an annual salary threshold of GBP 38,700, up from the current GBP 26,200.

Indian industry and student groups have warned the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak led government of "unintended consequences" of the new measures aimed at curbing migration figures, which would lead to skilled Indians choosing alternate economies. (PTI)

Nagaland's Hornbill Festival

It was an extraordinary experience, said Sylvie Ouhdhi from France. A domestic tourist from Chandigarh, Jitarjit Singh Sahi, said he felt great to witness 'one of the best festivities in the world'. A local visitor from Dimapur, Moon suggested that the organisers arrange WiFi facilities for online transactions and set up mobile phone charging points. Capt Eddy Arsh, trader and YouTuber, said, "The experience was fantastic. However, the parking space should have been more."

Sohan from Bangalore, who has plans to spend all 10 days, said food is 'slightly expensive'.

Heval Upadhyaya from Assam's Golaghat said, "Such festivals let us know about the Naga tradition and their ethnic culture." (PTI)

Over 100 websites

(Do jobs sitting at home), "Ghar baithe kamai kaise karen" (How to earn by sitting at home) etc. in multiple languages from overseas advertisers. Upon clicking the advertisement, an agent using WhatsApp or Telegram starts conversation with the potential victim, who convinces him or her to perform some tasks like video likes and subscribe, maps rating, etc. Upon completion of task, the victim is given some commission, initially and is asked to invest more to get more returns against given task.

After gaining confidence, when victim deposits larger sum, deposits are frozen and thus the victim is duped.

As precautionary measure, it is advised to exercise due diligence before investing in any such very high commission paying online schemes sponsored over internet. If an unknown person contacts anyone over WhatsApp or Telegram, refrain from performing financial transactions without verification, the statement said. Verify the name of receiver mentioned in UPI App. If receiver is any random person, it may be a mule account and scheme may be fraudulent. Similarly, check the source from where initial commission is received, it said. Citizens should refrain from doing transactions with unknown accounts, as these could be involved in money laundering and even terror financing and lead to blocking of accounts by police and other legal action, the statement said. (PTI)

SC: Govt must be

It says those who came to Assam on or after January 1, 1966 but before March 25, 1971 from specified territories, including Bangladesh, in accordance with the Citizenship Act amended in 1985, and since then are residents of the northeastern state, must register themselves under section 18 for acquiring Indian citizenship. As a result, the provision fixes March 25, 1971 as the cut-off date for granting citizenship to Bangladeshi migrants in Assam. Seeking declaration of the provision as invalid, Divan had on Tuesday sought a direction to the Centre to frame a policy in consultation with States/UTs for settlement and rehabilitation of all people of Indian origin who came to Assam after January 6, 1951 proportionally across the country. Responding to his submission, the bench asked if Parliament could let the "strife" continue in Assam on the ground that the law will discriminate among states. "Can Parliament say that we are doing this to bring about peace in a strife-ridden State? Or should we continue that strife merely because we will be discriminating between states? ... The situation of Assam in 1985, there was so much violence. Any solution they would have found is bound to be an inexact solution," the bench said. At the outset, Divan said illegal migrants in Assam who are required to be processed under Section 3 of the Foreigners Act are rewarded with citizenship.

"The very existence of section 6A operates even today as a beacon to persons to migrate illegally into Assam and then gain the system in the manner they want and make claim to citizenship. "My submission is that Assam and other immediate neighbouring border states form a homogeneous single class. Singling out Assam is impermissible. The next point is that a violent or any type of political agitation resulting in a political settlement is not a sufficient basis for classification," he said. Divan said allowing huge illegal immigrant regularisation with potentially future generations also making a claim without any time frame undermines economic, social, and political aspirations, which are facets of Article 21, of the people of Assam. Opposing section 6A, senior advocate KN Choudhury, representing one of the petitioners, claimed that out of the state's 126 assembly constituencies, indigenous people can win elections only in 57. "That is the state of affairs. Can we ever conceive a situation where the Government of India wants to protect immigrants at the cost of indigenous people?"

This is a legislation brought by a regime who had a brute force of 400 plus MPs. It is a parliamentary joke to have this legislation. Instead of protecting indigenous people, people living in the state, they're protecting illegal immigrants for the sake of politics," Choudhury said. The hearing remained inconclusive and will resume on Thursday. The top court had on Tuesday sought data on the beneficiaries of section 6A of the Citizenship Act in Assam, saying there was no material before it which could indicate that the effect of granting Indian citizenship to Bangladeshi immigrants between 1966 and 1971 was so great that it impacted the demographic and cultural identity of the border state. While acknowledging the problem of cross-border infiltration in Assam, the constitution bench had referred to the humanitarian aspect of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war for liberation of Bangladesh which also led to influx of immigrants.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta had referred to data produced by an MP in the Rajya Sabha earlier and said 5.45 lakh illegal immigrants had come to Assam between 1966 and 1971. From 1951 to 1966, the figure was 15 lakhs, he added. As many as 17 petitions, including the one filed by NGO Assam Public Works in 2009, are pending in the apex court. Under the Assam Accord signed by the All Assam Students Union, Assam government and the Government of India on August 15, 1985, to detect and deport foreigners, Section 6A was inserted into the Citizenship Act to grant citizenship to people who have migrated to the state.

A two-judge bench had referred the matter to the Constitution bench in 2014. (PTI)

Amid tight fiscal, Revanth Reddy, as Telangana CM, tasked with delivering 'six' guarantees

HYDERABAD, Dec 6: Telangana PCC President A Revanth Reddy who is set to take over the reins of the state from Thursday will have a daunting task of making the bleak coffers ring to be able to fulfill the "six guarantees" that the Congress party gave during the run up to the recently concluded assembly polls. Besides, he also has many political challenges to confront.

The Congress's robust campaign highlighting the six guarantees is said to have been one of the reasons for the party to mark its victory in the state. However finding the funds to fulfill them will be a herculean task.

The most attractive among the "six" is free travel for women in Telangana State Road Transport Corporation buses.

Sources in the state government told PTI that according to a rough estimate, the RTC earns ₹ 2,500 crore annually through women passengers. If the scheme is to be implemented, the Congress dispensation will have to replenish the same amount to the corporation which is reeling under accumulated losses of ₹ 6,000 crore.

The RTC, which was limping with a debt burden, started booking operational profits after the present managing director VC Sajjanar took over in August 2021. The party promised to waive up to ₹ two lakh farm loan. The BRS government had budgeted ₹ 21,000 lakh crore to waive up to ₹ one lakh. As per the calculation, the Congress government needs to allot at least 35,000 lakh crore for the next five years to implement the farm loan waiver.

According to the state government statistics, as many as 42 lakh farmers were identified as beneficiaries during the previous regime for the crop loan waiver.

Similarly the grand old party promised to give ₹ 15,000 to farmers and ₹ 12,000 to farm workers under the Rythu Bharosa guarantee scheme per acre annually. Under the BRS government's Rythu Bandhu, farmers were paid ₹ 10,000 annually.

The previous BRS government has paid ₹ 72,000 crore under a similar scheme as Rythu Bandhu during the past five and half years, with 70 lakh farmers benefitting. The latest installment could not be released due to poll code.

If the Congress party has to implement its scheme under similar parameters, it needs nearly ₹ one lakh crore in the next five years.

Senior journalist and political analyst S Nagesh Kumar said the first challenge that Revanth Reddy will face is the implementation of the "six guarantees" and political challenges as unlike the previous government, the Congress government will have stronger opposition in terms of numbers.

Congress is forming the government after getting 64 seats in the November 30 polls. BRS won 39, BJP-8, MIM-7 and CPI-1.

"The first challenge that he is going to face is the implementation of six guarantees. Karnataka also said the same thing that they will implement immediately...The state is reeling under a debt of ₹ 5 lakh crore. The Centre has steadfastly refused to increase the borrowing limits under FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003).

Nagesh Kumar further said Reddy will face strong opposition within the congress party as well from the opposition on fulfilling the poll promises.

According to the Telangana budget 2023-24, the total revenue was pegged at ₹ 2.16 lakh crore while the revenue expenditure was at ₹ 2.12 lakh crore. (PTI)

Int'l conference on nephrology to be held in Kolkata from Dec 14

KOLKATA, Dec 6: A four-day international conference on nephrology will be held in Kolkata from December 14 in a bid to address challenges faced by patients suffering from kidney-related ailments in the country and overseas, an official said on Wednesday.

Around 200 nephrologists, including 12 experts - presidents of the International Society of Nephrology, American Society of Nephrology, besides former presidents of the UK Renal Association and Canadian Society of Nephrology, will participate in the programme.

Representatives of SAARC countries and the Indian Society of Nephrology will also take part in the Indian Society of Nephrology Conference.

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are SAARC countries.

The Indian Society of Nephrology will hold the 53rd annual conference in Kolkata from December 14, the official said.

"This conference aims at highlighting the importance of nephrologists to address the problem of chronic kidney diseases at the grassroots level, and to ensure that scientific advances reach patients in remote areas," Dr Saubhik Surai, organising secretary of the body, said.

The 52nd edition of the conference was held in Pune. (PTI)

Rare artworks of Indian modernists to go under hammer at AstaGuru's auction

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Featuring over 200 artworks by iconic Indian modernists, an upcoming 'Modern Odyssey' auction by AstaGuru offers a rare collection reflecting the diverse and ever-changing artistic landscape in India over decades.

The online auction, to be held on December 11 and 12, will present bidders with masterpieces of some of the finest Indian modernists including Jamini Roy, MF Husain, SH Raza, KH Ara, FN Souza, Krishen Khanna, Ram

Kumar, Manjit Bawa, Ganesh Pyne, Jogen Chowdhury, GR Santosh, Manu Parekh and J Swaminathan.

Leading the auction line-up is a 1992 oil on canvas work by artist Manjit Bawa. The work features a central figure strongly reminiscent of Krishna against a striking red backdrop. An ode to the artist's profound connection to Indian mythology, the painting is estimated to be acquired at ₹ 6-8 crore.

Two works by historic Bengal school vision-

aries Rabindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose are also being showcased.

"From the vibrant symbolism in Manjit Bawa's masterpiece to the historical narrative captured in Raja Raja Varma's painting, the auction promises a journey through the soul of Indian art.

"The carefully selected works, including those by luminaries of the PAG generation, reflect the diverse and dynamic artistic landscape that has shaped our cultural narrative," said Sunny Chandramani, vice-president (client relations) at AstaGuru auction house.

Highlight of the auction is also a 1974 artwork of NS Bendre exploring the theme of mother and child. It captures the enduring beauty of the maternal bond, inviting viewers to connect with the timeless and universal emotions embodied in the tender relationship between a mother and her child.

It is estimated to sell at ₹ 1-1.5 crore.

Three important works of Souza are also on offer in the upcoming auction.

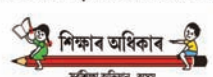
While two works, executed in 1959 and 1968, showcasing Souza's fascination with the motif of the head are estimated at ₹ 60-80 lakh and ₹ 4-6 crore, respectively; the third work based on biblical imagery is estimated at ₹ 37.80-42 lakh.

Up for grabs is also a majestic creation by the renowned artist Thota Vaikuntam. Executed with acrylic on canvas, and estimated to sell at ₹ 90 lakh-1.2 crore, the work encapsulates the core of his artistic philosophy influenced by the profound yet simple moments that define life in rural Andhra Pradesh. (PTI)

PUBLIC NOTICE

No. SSA-14040(11)/1/2022-MIS-SSA/1/357599/2023

In pursuant to the advertisement published vide SSA 12020/10/2023-MIS- SSA-SSA/1/254606/2023 Dated 19.08.2023, this is for information to all concerned that the Selection Test for the post of Education Executives under Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK) will be held on 10.12.2023 from 10 AM onwards in Computer Lab, 2nd floor Assam Administrative Staff College, Khanapara, Guwahati-22. The list of shortlisted candidates are available on the official website of Samagra Shiksha Axiom (<https://ssa.assam.gov.in>). The admit cards of the shortlisted candidates are also available in the official website of Samagra Shiksha Axiom (<https://ssa.assam.gov.in>) and can be downloaded from the website. All shortlisted candidates are requested to bring copy of admit card to attend the on-line test.



Sd/-Mission Director
Samagra Shiksha Axiom
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/DG/2041/ 23/7-Dec-23

WELCOME TO THE MOVIES: Abhishek Bachchan to Agastya post 'The Archies' premiere

MUMBAI, Dec 6: With his debut in "The Archies", Agastya Nanda is set to become a third generation actor of the Bachchan family and his maternal uncle Abhishek Bachchan on Wednesday said he would be there to handhold the newcomer whenever he would reach out for help.

Grandson of veteran stars Amitabh Bachchan and Jaya Bachchan, Agastya plays Archie Andrews in "The Archies", set to arrive on Netflix on December 7.

The Bachchan family appeared on the red carpet of the

film's premiere on Tuesday night at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) to support Agastya, son of Shweta Bachchan Nanda and Nikhil Nanda.

Abhishek Bachchan shared a black-and-white picture with his nephew from the premiere on X.

"All you have to do is reach out and I'll be there to hold your hand. Welcome to the movies my dearest Agastya! #TheArchies #TheArchiesOnNetflix #ProudMamu," he captioned the post.

Directed by Zoya Akhtar, "The Archies" is an Indian



adaptation of the comic series set in the fictional town of Riverdale that the self-confessed fan grew up reading. The 1960s-set movie brings to life the characters of Archie, Veronica, Betty, Reggie, Dilton, Jughead

and Big Ethel.

A proud mother, Shweta Bachchan shared a before and after photograph of Amitabh Bachchan, Abhishek Bachchan and Agastya Nanda on her official Instagram account. "How it started

-> How it's going," she wrote in the caption.

As per videos circulating on social media, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan even teased Agastya when the paparazzi asked the newcomer to pose solo at the premiere. (PTI)

ANGELINA JOLIE SAYS SHE WOULDN'T BE AN ACTRESS TODAY



NEW YORK, Dec 6: Oscar winner Angelina Jolie says she probably wouldn't pursue acting as a career if she was just starting out in the industry today.

Born to actor parents Jon Voight and Marcheline Bertrand, the 48-year-old said she really doesn't have a social life in Los Angeles since every time she leaves her house, she

is subjected to unwanted attention by the paparazzi, which is also one of the reasons why she eventually wants to move from Hollywood.

"I wouldn't be an actress today. When I was starting out, it wasn't as much of an expectation to be as public, to share so much," Jolie told the Wall Street Journal Magazine. (PTI)

Ranbir Kapoor-starrer 'Animal' nearing ₹ 500 crore-mark



MUMBAI, Dec 6: Action drama film "Animal" has earned ₹ 481 crore gross at the worldwide box office within five days of the release, the makers said on Wednesday.

Fronted by Ranbir Kapoor and directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, the film released on December 1 in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.

Production house T-Series shared the collection update of "Animal" on X.

"He is the Box Office #Animal #AnimalHuntBegins," the banner captioned the post which read that the film had smashed "box office records 5-day worldwide gross" by earning ₹ 481 crore.

While it is running successfully in theatres, a section of

critics and viewers have slammed "Animal", calling it misogynistic and graphically violent.

The pan-India movie, which was given A certificate by the CBFC ahead of its release, also features Anil Kapoor, Bobby Deol, Rashmika Mandanna, Triptii Dimri, Suresh Oberoi and Prem Chopra.

"Animal" showcases a violent world set against the backdrop of a troubled relationship between Ranbir's Ranvijay Singh and his father Balbir Singh, played by Anil Kapoor.

The movie is produced by Bhushan Kumar and Krishan Kumar's T-Series, Murad Khetani's Cine1 Studios and Pranay Reddy Vanga's Bhadrakali Pictures. (PTI)

SUNNY DEOL PUTS END TO RUMOURS, SAYS VIRAL 'DRUNK' VIDEO PART OF FILM SHOOTING



MUMBAI, Dec 6: After a video in which Sunny Deol appeared to be roaming drunk on the streets at night went viral on social media, the actor on Wednesday put rumours to rest by saying that it was from the shoot of his upcoming movie "Safar".

A section of microblogging site X users had slammed the actor, also a BJP MP, for the alleged misbehaviour in public.

Later in the day, Deol, 66, shared the video in question, shot from a different angle and in which a set of cameras can be seen in the frame.

"Afwaahon ka 'Safar' bas yahin tak (The 'Safar (journey)' of rumours ends

here) #Shooting #BTS," Deol captioned the 17-second clip on X.

Vishal Rana of Echeleon Productions, the banner behind "Safar", also cleared the air around the viral video.

"It was a scene from our forthcoming tentatively titled film 'Safar' for which Sunny Paaji was shooting a night schedule. Request all the fans not to spread fake news around this video that is going viral on the internet," Rana said in a statement. Deol was most recently seen in "Gadar 2", one of the highest grossing Hindi films of 2023. (PTI)

'Chamak' explores Punjabi music industry roots, politics and crime: Rohit Jugraj

MUMBAI, Dec 6: Fame and crime are interlinked in the Punjabi music industry, says writer-director Rohit Jugraj, who is exploring this dynamic in his OTT debut series "Chamak".

The musical thriller follows Kaala (Paramvir Singh Cheema), a young aspiring rapper who comes back to Punjab from Canada to unravel the death of Taara Singh, a legendary singer who was shot dead during a packed performance.

"All of us groove to Punjabi music and beats during all kinds of occasions from a cricket match, marriage to concerts. It is high time we know the roots of that industry, the politics, the people and the human emotions behind it. We need to get a low angle to Punjabi music," Jugraj, known for films such as "Jatt James Bond", and "Sardaar Ji", told PTI in an interview.

"The reach of Punjabi music is wide, so there's money and crime. It's an interesting world to explore. The audiences are going to love this world," he added.

Noted Punjabi artists such as Amar Singh Chamkila and Sidhu Moosewala were killed in the state. Chamkila was gunned down in 1988 and Moosewala in 2022.

The director said insecurity among artists in Punjabi music industry often leads to incidents of crime and "Chamak" is a deep dive. The series starts streaming on SonyLIV from December 7.

"There were a lot of things that I saw up close and personal. Like, a very famous rapper in an interview said, 'I'm the Rolls Royce of rappers, everyone else is a Nano. Then, the other rapper went and bought a Rolls Royce... These

things happen in which industry?"

"I loved looking at this competitive spirit. I've always felt this could be an interesting story. The jealousy, the insecurity in the Punjabi music scene run high because there's immense talent. There are incidents in our series which are true."

While "Chamak" was inspired by many true incidents, Jugraj said he has added a personal touch by creating a fictional story and imaginary characters.

"It is a father-son story, where the son realises that his father was a legendary singer and he was killed. It is tied together in the modern times with the entire Punjabi music industry and there are many true incidents which we have touched upon. It is my interpretation of those events," he said.

The show boasts of many cameo ap-

pearances including Gippy Grewal, Mika Singh, Malkit Singh, MC Square, Afsana Khan, Asees Kaur, Sunidhi Chauhan, Kanwar Grewal, Shashwat Singh, and Harjot Kaur.

Jugraj said that he had approached Moosewala for a guest appearance in "Chamak".

"I had approached him to play a cameo in the second episode, his name is still written on my script, and the good people of SonyLIV have retained that as a mark of respect. It was very generous of him (to say yes).

"I've spoken to him over the phone, this was last year in the beginning, he said, 'Paaji, we will work together'. I feel everyone in Punjab feels so much for music. When you asked Param if he has prepared anything or not, I think half the prep is done by being born in Punjab," he said. (PTI)



INDIA(W) VS ENGLAND(W): THREE-MATCH T20 SERIES

Fifties by Wyatt, Sciver-Brunt fire England Women to 197/6



MUMBAI, Dec 6: Marauding fifties by Danni Wyatt (75) and Natalie Sciver-Brunt (77) powered England Women to 197 for six after early stuttering against India in their first T20I of the three-match series here on Wednesday.

Wyatt and Sciver-Brunt put on a record 138 runs for the third wicket for England, which was also their first century stand against India in T20Is, after they were asked to bat first.

India seamer Renuka Singh Thakur (4-0-27-3) was the pick among the bowlers as she struck twice in a row in the first over to dismiss Sophie Dunkley (1) and Alice Capsey (0).

But Wyatt and Sciver-Brunt's counter-attack saw England dominating the remainder of the first innings.

The hosts also appeared to have lost the steam soon after the early breakthroughs, failing to drive home the advantage as they were guilty of bowling and fielding poorly.

Wyatt, who took charge of the recovery after the early blows, stroked her way to a 47-ball 75 studded with eight fours and two sixes to record her third fifty against India in the format.

She also got a lifeline when Pooja Vastrakar spilled a catch at long-on off Shreyanka Patil (2/44).

On the other hand, Sciver-Brunt smacked as many as 13 fours to make 77 off only 53 balls, unleashing powerful hits on both the sides — particularly sweep shots — for her fifth T20I half-century against India.

The two batters were successful not only in leading England's strong recovery but also made the most of Indian spinners' ordinary effort, who struggled with their line and lengths.

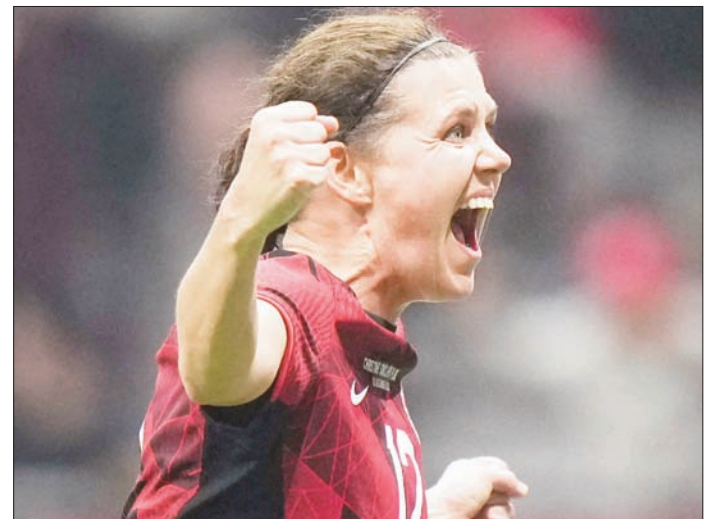
The experienced Deepti Sharma returned 3-0-28-0 whereas one of the debutants Saika Ishaque was hit for 38 runs in her four overs.

To her credit, the left-arm spinner Ishaque did break the third-wicket stand to get Wyatt stumped in the 16th over, but the visitors had done enough damage by then.

At one stage, India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur even summoned Kanika Ahuja for a breakthrough but the spinner was smacked for 12 runs in her only over.

Patil, who spilled a sharp return catch off Sciver-Brunt when she was on 45, got Amy Jones (23, 9 balls, 3x4s, 1x6s) off the last ball of the innings. (PTI)

Sinclair ends her storied 23-year career with the Canadian women



VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, Dec 6: Christine Sinclair, the world's top international goal scorer among both women and men, played her final match with the Canadian national team on Tuesday night.

Sinclair, 40, ended her 23-year national team career with a 1-0 victory against Australia at Vancouver's BC Place — renamed Christine Sinclair Place for the occasion.

Sinclair has scored 190 goals since she made her national team debut in 2000. Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, the game's top scorer among men, has 128 international goals.

It was Sinclair's 331st appearance for Canada, second only to retired U.S. star Kristine Lilly, who played in 354 games.

"To see the growth of the game, see where it's at now, and the opportunities that are available, whether it's in the national team or playing pro. Honestly I never thought in my career that this was going to happen. And I just feel fortunate to be a part of that growth and it's incredible to experience the change," she said before the match.

More than 45,000 fans were on hand for the game. In addition to Sinclair, the team also honored midfielder Sophie Schmidt, who played in her final game after a 19-year national team career, and former goalkeeper Erin McLeod, who retired in January.

"Tonight, the world's greatest goalscorer — Christine Sinclair — is stepping onto the pitch with Team Canada for the last time. @Sincy12, thank you for inspiring all of us. Your impact on the game, and on sports in Canada, is something we'll be celebrating for quite some time," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau posted to social media.

When Sinclair was subbed out in the second half, Schmidt took her place on the field after an emotional embrace.

With Sinclair, Canada won the gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics. She won bronze medals at both the 2012 and 2016 Games.

Sinclair is also among just five players to appear in six Women's World Cups, and one of just three players to score in five. But a World Cup trophy eluded her.

She was asked what advice she would give young players looking at a career in soccer.

"All the players on the national team, we were once that young kid that had aspirations and dreams of playing professionally, and representing Canada at World Cups and Olympics," Sinclair said. "There's no secret. It's a lot of work but man it's the best job in the world. Just go for it. Anything's possible."

Sinclair plans to play one more season for her club team, the Portland Thorns in the National Women's Soccer League. (AP)

Bayern Munich to sign Bryan Zaragoza from Granada at the end of the season

MUNICH, Dec 6: Bayern Munich is signing Spain winger Bryan Zaragoza from struggling La Liga team Granada, with the deal set to go through in July.

The German champion said Wednesday that the 22-year-old Zaragoza would sign a five-year contract running through to 2029 when he joins Bayern at the end of the season.

No fee was disclosed but German magazine Kicker reported the deal involved an initial fee of 13 million euros (\$14 million) plus possible add-on fees.

Bayern sporting director Christoph Freund praised Zaragoza as an "explosive, very quick and extremely nimble winger" and highlighted his potential to improve and his ability to play on either side of the field.

Zaragoza was influential in Granada being promoted last season, with goals in each of the last three games of the campaign. He leads the Spanish league in dribbling this season despite Zaragoza's lowly league position of 19th, and has five goals and two assists in 14 games.

Zaragoza has played once for Spain after making his debut in a 2-0 win over Scotland in European Championship qualifying in October. (AP)

Lazio beat Genoa 1-0 to set up potential Italian Cup match against city rival Roma

ROME, Dec 6: Matteo Guendouzi's first goal for Lazio helped the capital team to a 1-0 win over Genoa and into the Italian Cup quarterfinals and a potential derby against city rival Roma.

Guendouzi netted in the fifth minute on Tuesday after Luca Pellegrini won back possession and raced down the left before putting in a low cross for the France midfielder to fire into the far bottom corner.

The 24-year-old Guendouzi joined Lazio on loan from Marseille at the end of August, on transfer deadline day.

Matteo Retegui came close to leveling for Genoa including with one opportunity that had the Italy forward applauding Lazio defender Mario Gila for his block at point-blank range.

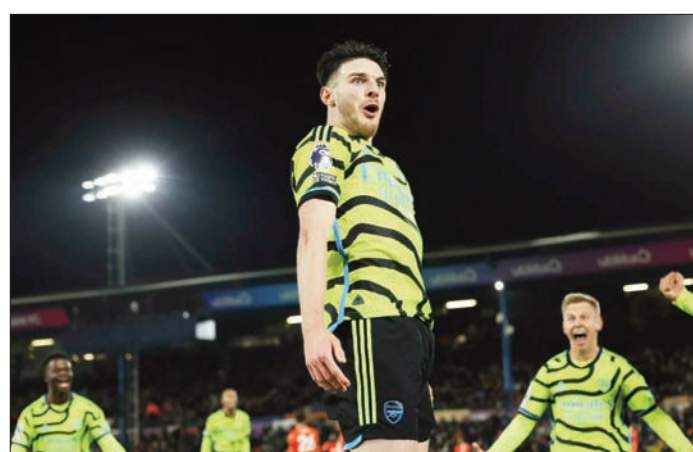
However, Lazio held on for the victory and could next face Roma if Jose Mourinho's team beats Cremonese next month. (AP)

Arsenal move 5 points clear in Premier League after last-gasp win

LUTON, ENGLAND, Dec 6: As soon as the ball hit the back of the net, Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya sprinted the length of the field to celebrate the last-gasp winner with his jubilant teammates.

No player will have been more relieved than Raya to see Declan Rice's glancing header creep into the corner and seal a chaotic 4-3 victory over Luton in the Premier League on Tuesday. While Rice is proving value for money after his club-record signing in July, Raya — another offseason recruit — remains an issue for Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta as the team bids to win the league title after last season's near miss.

Arsenal moved five points clear with its fourth straight victory in the league, overcoming errors from Raya that led to two



goals for Luton by netting in the seventh minute of stoppage time through Rice at Kenilworth Road. "The spirit of the team — how we fought, showed our quality in the right moments and never gave up," Arteta said.

The team was leading 2-1 in the 49th minute when the Span-

ish goalkeeper was beaten in the air at a corner by Elijah Adebayo, who powered in a header for an equalizer.

Eight minutes later, Raya allowed a shot by Ross Barkley to go under his body as he dived to his left.

Luton, a promoted team likely to be battling relegation this season, was suddenly 3-2 ahead and Raya didn't know where to look.

Kai Havertz scored an equalizer almost immediately, though, and incessant pressure in the final minutes ended with Martin Odegaard whipping in a cross and Rice rising to flick a header into the bottom corner, sparking wild celebrations in the away end and jeers from Luton fans. The goal came after the six allotted minutes of stoppage time had expired. (AP)

Botafogo squander a 13-point lead to lose national league title

SAO PAULO, Dec 6: There's an old saying in Brazilian soccer: some things only happen to Botafogo. The reference to the club's historic lack of luck has never rung more true than this year.

The club of World Cup winning greats like Mané Garrincha, Jairzinho and Mário Zagallo squandered a 13-point lead in the Brazilian league and now Palmeiras is very likely to defend its title on Wednesday. It's the first time a team has lost such a big advantage in the South American nation's top flight.

The last round will take place without any hopes for Botafogo fans at Internacional but to finish in fourth position, which would be enough to secure a direct spot at the next Copa Libertadores. The Rio de Janeiro club is currently fifth. Botafogo was on the top of the

standings for 31 of 38 rounds, giving long-suffering supporters confidence their club would lift its first national title since 1995.

But now Palmeiras is in a position where it doesn't necessarily have to win its last game to secure another title. Even with a loss at Cruzeiro, Palmeiras can clinch the league as long as Atletico Mineiro doesn't erase a differential of eight goals. Flamengo has a slim title chance, but that depends on an even more unlikely combination of results involving other teams.

Botafogo's title hopes vanished for the season after a 0-0 draw with Cruzeiro on Sunday, a match that ended with some supporters hurling insults at players and burning team shirts at the Nilton Santos Stadium.

Only a few seasons ago the fans would have been excited just to fin-

ish near the top. But after American businessman John Texor bought the club's soccer division last year, expectations rose dramatically. "We needed to be a little bit more humble. We needed to read every match, read the moment of the club," veteran striker Diego Costa, who arrived in the middle of the season, told journalists on Sunday. "We needed to leave our ego outside so we could achieve better results. I hope this is a good teaching for all those who are here. Soccer makes you pay." It was against Wednesday's rival, Internacional, that Botafogo achieved its 13-point advantage on Aug. 12. By then, some fans had tattooed the Brasileirao trophy on their bodies, laughed at rivals losing points to relegation contenders and started debating what round the team would be crowned. (AP)



Arsenal's slew of late winners highlights resilience and boosts belief in Premier League title bid

team has got there.

Scoring late goals — a trait demonstrating resilience and character — has become the norm for Arsenal. Dare it be said, it's a sign of a champion team.

Just in the first 15 league games of this season, Arsenal has scored in the 96th and 101st minutes to beat Manchester United 3-1; in the 86th minute to beat Man City 1-0; in the 84th minute to draw 2-2 at Chelsea; in the 89th minute to beat Brentford 1-0; and, on Tuesday, in the seventh minute of stoppage time to win 4-3 at Luton.

That's nine points gained with goals scored from the 84th minute or later. Maybe that late rally in the Community Shield was a portent for how this season will go.

"We don't want a draw, we want to win," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "That drive, that energy, that risk and emotion that we put in the pitch, you can sense it." The seeds of these comeback wins were sown last

season when Arteta's teams produced a number of late recoveries in games to snatch crucial points in the title race.

The most memorable was Reiss Nelson's winning goal against Bournemouth that sent Arsenal fans wild at Emirates Stadium. That was in the 97th minute and gave Arsenal a five-point lead in the league, just like Declan Rice did with his winner against Luton.

Arsenal again looks to be the team most likely to stop City winning the Premier League.

Last season, its title bid imploded in the final two months, weighed down by injuries to key players — William Saliba, in particular — and a naivety in dealing with holding off a fast-finishing juggernaut like City.

Could this season be different?

Arsenal has a few things going in its favor. Rice, a club-record signing for \$138 million in July, is an upgrade in central midfield and has already contributed crucial

goals against United and Luton.

There's better strength in depth across the squad, in terms of numbers and experience.

Arteta's approach also appears to be different this season, going for more control than chaos — before the Luton game, anyway — to help the team better last the distance in a grueling campaign that also includes playing in the Champions League. In this respect, Arteta seems to be using the playbook of City manager Pep Guardiola from last season.

"Playing every three days and you have to win every game and every game, the demands are there," Arteta said. "It's the way they go about it, how much they want it." After the pain of the end of last season, Arsenal's players might want it even more.

There are questions marks about the wisdom of Arteta's decision to bring in goalkeeper David Raya and promote him above Ramsdale, last year's first-

choice keeper. Raya was at fault for two goals against Luton and has looked shaky in other games, notably in the draw at Chelsea.

Whether Kai Havertz, another summer signing, is an upgrade on the departed Granit Xhaka is also up for debate. Playing Havertz as a central attacking midfielder might be making Arsenal more brittle, though he has come through with crucial goals against Brentford and Luton over the past two weeks.

"He's getting better and better," Arteta said of Havertz.

Arsenal's season may yet be derailed by injuries or going deep in the Champions League — in which the team has already qualified for the round of 16 — or another typically relentless finish to the campaign from City.

Yet it appears that, on a psychological level, the Gunners are in a good place to have another go at winning a first league title since 2004. (AP)

Injured Newcastle goalkeeper Pope set to miss around 4 months

NEWCASTLE, ENGLAND, Dec 6: Newcastle goalkeeper Nick Pope will be out for "around four months" after dislocating his left shoulder, manager Eddie Howe said Wednesday, in the latest injury to hit the Premier League team.

It leaves Pope in a race against time to make England's squad for the European Championship, which starts in June.

The 31-year-old Pope sustained the injury as he dove to his left in an attempt to save a shot by Manchester United defender Sergio Reguilon that was blocked in front of the Newcastle keeper.

Howe said Pope will require surgery.

"The operation hasn't happened yet," Howe said, "but we're thinking roughly around four months so it's a big blow to us but one that we expected after the game."

"He's naturally down because at this stage of the season where we have so many games, huge games coming up — he's got, obviously, the Euros ahead of him as well, which he was determined to try to be involved in, and there's still chance of that for him."

Slovakia international Martin Dubravka will replace Pope, with Howe also having former Liverpool goalkeeper Loris Karius in the squad.

Newcastle have been linked with a move for former Manchester United keeper David de Gea, who is currently without a club, but Howe said no approaches have been made.

"We have not made any inquiries or any decisions about our recruitment leading into January," Howe said.

"This is a chance for the goalkeepers we have at the football club to consolidate their positions, and that will be the same for every other position at the club." (AP)

Too much cricket is affecting development of all-rounders: Kallis

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Jacques Kallis, one of the last multi-skilled legends, says quality all-rounders have become a scarcity in modern-day cricket, especially in Test cricket, because of "too much cricket across formats".

While Sir Garfield Sobers (8032 runs and 235 wickets) is considered "greatest of 'em all" across generations, Kallis (25,000-plus runs and nearly 600 wickets in three formats) is arguably one of the legendary all-rounders the modern era has seen.

In the 1980s, there were four great all-rounders in Imran Khan, Richard Hadlee, Ian Botham and Kapil Dev while the new millennium saw emergence of Kallis and Andrew Flintoff.

But with advent of T20 cricket and mushrooming leagues across the globe with new rules have actually discouraged development of multi-skilled cricketers.

"It is a tough question to answer, all-rounders don't come around every day. There aren't many throughout the history. Lot of things, amount of cricket that is played certainly plays a role," Kallis told PTI during an exclusive interview.

The former Proteas captain is in India to play the Legends League Cricket.

While he didn't name Indian Premier League but the former KKR coach isn't a great fan of 'Impact Player' rule where a team can change one player during its batting or bowling innings as per need.

"A few T20 competitions have substitutes (IPL) and I am not a big fan of that as it takes away the all-rounder out of your team. The teams that do not have good all-rounders are now playing with 12 men. I am not a huge fan of that."

"There are lot of little things that add up on to why there aren't too many all-rounders at the moment, as it is surprising as they add so much value to the game. But it's a whole lot of little things coming together," Kallis said.

The Indian team would be embarking on a tough away tour of South Africa, the only major Test playing nation where it hasn't



won a single Test series in 31 years.

The focus will be on the two Test matches, which is a part of World Test Championship (WTC) cycle even as ODIs and T20s are part of the full tour.

The stars from both sides (Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, Kagiso Rabada) will only be playing the traditional format during the series.

"This is a good Indian team but South Africa is tough to beat in South Africa. Centurion will probably suit South Africa and Newlands will probably suit India. It will be a good series and it will come down to one

or two sessions that one team might play better than the other. It would be a closely-fought contest," said Kallis.

The Indian team's average age is in mid-30s. Skipper Rohit is 36 and main batter Virat Kohli is 35. Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are 37 and 35 respectively while Mohammed Shami 33.

There would be a transition sooner or later in another couple of years and Kallis feels that if talented youngsters are groomed by keeping them with senior team, the handing of baton becomes easier.

"Older players obviously have got the

knowledge and you would combine that with younger players. That's the job of coaches and selectors to make sure so that even if younger players might not be playing, they are in that environment where they can learn from the older players," said Kallis, who scored 45 Test hundreds in his illustrious 18-year career in which he played 166 Tests.

It is imperative that youngsters are travelling to unfamiliar territories and soaking in all knowledge available watching those who have been there and done that.

"(They should) travel to these parts of the world that they are probably not used to and learn from sitting on the side, try to pick up as much knowledge as possible and play those warm-up games where big players are resting for. Picking up knowledge helps a lot and transition when a few players are retiring, it becomes little bit easier," he elaborated.

Having started his career in mid-90s just when players like Kepler Wessels, Peter Kirsten, Andrew Hudson had all retired or were on verge of retirement, Kallis felt that back in the day, Proteas had a good system of changeover in place.

"Certainly, when I started, South Africa were very good at transitioning younger players into good international players and that obviously needs to be done when senior players retire."

A part of the South African side that had to bear the label of "chokers" for not winning big-ticket events, Kallis understands the pain of the current Indian team that has now lost nine semi-finals or finals at marquee ICC competitions.

"You need a little bit of luck in these tournaments to go your way. You could end up being at the wrong end of the toss or bad end of the conditions, you need little bit of luck as players certainly don't go out there to lose."

"From that point of view, you can get beaten by a better team on the day and you have got to put your hand up and accept it. Try to learn from those things," he said. (PTI)

Kerala footballer Viknesh's appeal challenging two-year ban rejected by NADA panel



NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Kerala footballer M Viknesh's appeal challenging a two-year ban, imposed on him by disciplinary committee of the NADA for failing a dope test, has been rejected by the appeal panel in a rare doping case relating to the 'beautiful game' in the country.

Viknesh was handed a two-year ban by the NADA Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel starting from November 12, 2022 after his dope sample collected during the National Games in Gujarat in September-October 2022 was found to contain banned 'Terbutaline', a common substance found in cough syrup.

In an order passed on December 2, the appeal panel of the NADA upheld the disciplinary committee's decision but changed the date of its operation.

The appeal panel of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) held that Viknesh's two-year ban will start from April 5, 2023, the date of decision of the disciplinary committee as the Kerala footballer was not provisionally suspended after he failed the dope test.

Very few footballers have been handed bans by the NADA panels for failing dope tests in the history of the sport in the country.

East Bengal defender Arun Malhotra was found positive for a banned substance in a test conducted before the national team's departure for the 2022 Asian Games. The All India Football Federation (AIFF) slapped Malhotra a ban of 60 days. NADA was non-existent then as it was established in 2009.

Mumbai FC player Nishant

Mehra had failed a dope test conducted after an I-League match in 2011 and was handed a two-year ban by the NADA. He was the first Indian footballer to be banned by the NADA for doping.

Another Mumbai FC player Dane Pereira was banned for one year in 2025 after testing positive for an anabolic steroid.

In 2017, former India goalkeeper Subrata Paul was let off with a warning after he tested positive for banned Terbutaline. He was able to prove before the disciplinary panel of the NADA that he had taken a banned drug unintentionally.

Viknesh had submitted that on account of fever and cough he consulted a doctor who prescribed Ascoril syrup which "contained the prohibited substance". He submitted that he was completely unaware that the said syrup contained prohibited substance and that was why he did not mention any medical prescription in the doping control form.

Viknesh also relied upon the case of Subrata Paul but the NADA appeal panel said "the appellant has neither filed any copy of the decision nor media report or provided any citation/date of the decision ..."

"We are of the considered opinion that the Appellant has committed an ADRV

(Anti-Doping Rule Violation) ... Therefore, the Order dated 05.04.2023 ... passed by Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel is upheld and the Appellant shall undergo ineligibility period of two (2) years from the decision of Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel which is 05.04.2023," the appeal panel of the NADA headed by Abhinav Mukerji ruled. (PTI)

All Assam Men and Women Prize Money Marathon competition organised

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Dec 6: On December 6, 1998, a final football match was organised in Bezapathar Gaon, located in the Dibrugarh District. Tragically, following the match, a devastating accident occurred as the winning team's players were returning to their residences. Regrettably, 10 players from the victorious team lost their lives in this unfortunate incident. These players hailed from Demow Barua Changmai Gaon.

As December 6, 2023, marks the 25th anniversary of the incident, an annual football competition is organized in memory of the departed players by the Barua Changmai Nabaprabhati Yuba Sangha. To commemorate the 25 years since the tragedy, an All Assam Men and Women prize money Marathon competition was held on Wednesday morning, spanning from Sivasagar Darika to Demow Barua Changmai Playground. Participants from various locations took part in the marathon.

In the Boys category, Tikheshwar Kurmi of Golaghat secured the first prize, followed by Bishal Urang of Dibrugarh in the second position and Surjya Das of Morigaon in the third position. A total of 10 players were selected for recognition in the competition.

This marathon event not only serves as a competitive platform but also as a heartfelt tribute to the 10 players who lost their lives 25 years ago in the tragic accident.

ICC Rankings: Ravi Bishnoi becomes world's No 1 T20I bowler



DUBAI, Dec 6: Young Indian leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi on Wednesday rose to the top spot in the ICC T20I bowling chart on the back of his recent player of the series-winning performance against Australia.

The 23-year-old was India's go-to bowler in the just-concluded series against Australia, taking nine wickets from five games.

Bishnoi, who is on 699 rating points, has jumped five places to displace Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan (692) from the top slot.

Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and England's Adil Rashid, who both have 679 points, are in joint third.

Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana (677) completes the top five.

Bishnoi is the only Indian bowler in the top 10 in the shortest format even as Axar Patel climbed nine spots to be 18th.

Meanwhile, the swashbuckling Suryakumar Yadav, who captained India during their 4-1 T20I series win against Australia, held on to the top spot among batters, while opener Ruturaj Gaikwad dropped a place to be seventh.

Hardik Pandya retained the third spot in the all-rounders' list, despite missing the series against Australia due to injury. (PTI)

LeBron leads Lakers to In-Season Tournament Sfs

LOS ANGELES, Dec 6: LeBron James scored 15 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter, and the Los Angeles Lakers secured the last semifinal spot in the inaugural NBA In-Season Tournament with a 106-103 victory over the Phoenix Suns on Tuesday night.

Anthony Davis had 27 points and 15 rebounds and Austin Reaves scored 20 for the top-seeded Lakers, who will face New Orleans on Thursday in Las Vegas. Milwaukee plays Indiana in the East semifinal.

"You've got some of the most alpha male competitors in the world, and if you give us an opportunity to play for something meaningful or an incentive, then you get what you're getting," said James, who also racked up 11 assists, eight rebounds and five steals. (AP)

Rahim becomes first Bangla batter to be dismissed obstructing field; first in Test after 22 years

MIRPUR (BANGLADESH), Dec 6: Bangladesh wicket-keeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim on Wednesday became only the 11th player in Test cricket history, and first in 22 years, to be given out for "obstructing the field" on the opening day of the second match against New Zealand here.

Rahim, who became the first Bangladesh batter to be dismissed in this way, blocked a climbing delivery from New Zealand pacer Kyle Jamieson in the fourth ball of the 41st over, and then tried to keep the ball away with his right hand even though it was far from the off-stump.

The Kiwis quickly appealed and the on-field umpires referred the matter to the TV umpire Ahsan Raza who gave Rahim out. He made 35.

Bangladesh, who lead the series 1-0, were bundled out for 172 in their first innings but later reduced NZ to 55 for 5 at close of play.

The last player to be given out in Test cricket in a similar fashion was former England captain Michael Vaughan in the Bengaluru match against India in 2001. Vaughan had made 64 then.

"It happened in the flow of the game. A batter has to take a split-second decision while at the crease," said Bangladesh player Mehidy Hasan Miraz after the day's play.

His hand probably went in the



flow of his batting. Mushfiqur bhai didn't do it intentionally." Legendary England batter Len

Hutton was the first player to be given out for "obstructing the field" during a Test match

Junior Hockey WC: India need to guard against complacency against Spain

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 6: Their campaign has started off positively, but India must guard against complacency when they face Spain in their second Pool C match of the FIH junior men's hockey World Cup here on Thursday.

Vice-captain Arajjeet Singh Hundal came out to be India's saviour, scoring a hat-trick as India overcame some anxious moments to beat Korea 4-2 in their opener on Tuesday.

But India's coach C R Kumar was not too satisfied with the performance and said his side needs to be more clinical and avoid conceding unnecessary penalty corners.

India conceded six penalty corners, while earned just two against Korea.

"We are very happy that we got the three points and that's the positive side. But we have to be more clinical in both circles. We conceded two goals in penalty corners which we need to pay attention to," Kumar said after the Korea match.

"We gave away too many penalty corners, six in the whole game where we had just two. We need to be more cautious."

India are striving to secure their fourth podium finish in the event after having won the tournament twice in 2001 (Hobart) and Lucknow (2016).



The country had clinched a silver medal way back in 1997 in Milton Keynes, Eng-

land. Skipper Uttam Singh and his deputy

Hundal are the only two players who have experience of the big event, having fea-

tured in the last edition of the tournament, where India finished fourth in Bhubaneswar, losing to France in the bronze medal play-off match.

The Spaniards, who have a bronze medal in their kitty at the 2005 edition in Rotterdam, are India's toughest opponent in the pool, comprising Canada as the other side.

But going by form, India will start as favourites against Spain on Thursday.

India's last pool match is against Canada on Saturday.

Pool A consists of defending champions Argentina, Australia, Chile, and Malaysia, while Pool B has Egypt, France, Germany and South Africa. Pool D is the toughest of the lot as Belgium, Netherlands, New Zealand and Pakistan will be vying for a quarterfinal berth.

The top two teams from each pool will qualify for the quarterfinals.

The Indians played an attacking game from the onset on Tuesday and would look to continue in the same vein but their defence will have to be cautious against counter-attacks which the Koreans used to great effect to earn penalty corners.

Spain too would be looking to exploit that weakness against the Indians. (PTI)