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Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Affordable air travel for all

1 crore 30 lakh people benefited by affordable air travel under UDAN scheme

Govt to provide ₹ 3 cr to host KYF from 2025

Karbi Youth Festival promoting peace, amity and brotherhood: Himanta

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 17: Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) contributing towards promotion of peace, amity and brotherhood in Karbi Anglong Hills, said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday.

Sarma said this while attending the golden jubilee celebrations of Karbi Youth Festival as the chief guest held at Diphu.

"Karbi Youth Festival, since its inception, has been contributing greatly towards promoting a climate of unity, peace and brotherhood among members of various communities residing in Karbi Anglong," Sarma said.

Further addressing the event Sarma said it's a matter of great accomplishment for the Karbi society as Karbi Youth Festival completes 50 years of its long journey.

He also exuded confidence that the Karbi Youth Festival will aid



greatly in dissemination and spread of Karbi culture and heritage within the perimeter of the county and beyond.

Referring to Karbi Youth Festival as the oldest festival in the Northeast dedicated to promotion

of folk culture, the chief minister Sarma said the aim now should be to take the festival to the next level by transforming it into a leading youth festival not only in the Northeast but in the entire country.

"With this motive in mind, from next year onwards the Department of Culture of Government of Assam shall be providing an amount of ₹ 3 crore every year for organising the festival," the chief minister declared.

Referring to the cancellation of the scheduled visit of President of India Draupadi Murmu to Karbi Youth Festival on Wednesday owing to inclement weather conditions, Sarma said all attempts will be made to see that the President is present in the next Karbi Youth Festival to be held next year.

"In future, the possibility of inviting the Prime Minister to the Karbi Youth Festival shall also be explored," he added.

Today's event was attended by deputy speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly Dr Nual Momin, ministers of Assam cabinet Jogen Mohan and Nandita Gorlosa, chief executive (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

CBI charges 5 including suspected terrorist for looting police armoury

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: The CBI, which is probing cases related to the ethnic clashes in Manipur, has filed a charge-sheet against five people in a case of looting of arms and ammunition from police personnel in May 2023, an official spokesman said on Wednesday.

More than 180 people have lost their lives in the violence that broke out in the northeastern state following a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised on May 3 last year in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mostly in the hill districts.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said that those named in the charge-sheet are Moirangthem Anand Singh, alleged to be a former member of the proscribed People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur and the Kangleipak Communist Party (Noyon), Keisham Johnson, Konhoujam Romojit Meitei, Loukrakpam Michael Mangangcha and Aathokpam Kajit.

They had earlier been arrested by the Manipur Police in September last year when they were allegedly extorting money by wearing police uniform and carrying sophisticated weapons, the officials said. Their



arrest had sparked off a protest that continued for two days.

The five were released following a court order but Singh was picked up the National Investigation Agency (NIA), placed under arrest and brought to the national capital.

Singh was arrested for allegedly having links with Myanmar-based rebel groups and conspiring to wage war against India by exploiting the current ethnic unrest in Manipur.

The case was registered suo moto by the NIA on July 19 last year and investigations have revealed that in furtherance of a conspiracy, the proscribed terror organisations were recruiting (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Meghalaya media team embarks on press tour to Odisha

SHILLONG, Jan 17: A ten-member media team from Meghalaya has reached Bhubaneswar as part of a Press Tour to Odisha under the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra (VBSY) programme.

Officials from PIB Bhubaneswar warmly welcomed the Meghalaya journalists upon their arrival.

The primary objective of the Press Tour is to offer the media an opportunity to gain insights into the ground realities regarding the impact of central government schemes in Odisha.

The tour aims to allow journalists to witness firsthand the development resulting from these schemes in the state.

Additionally, the tour seeks to understand how the Information, Education, Communication (IEC) vans, deployed under the ongoing VBSY, convey messages to ensure 100% saturation of government schemes in Odisha.

Over the four-day stay in Odisha, the team will visit notable sites such as the Netaji Birth Museum and Maritime Museum. The itinerary also includes a visit to the ICAR-Central Institute for Women in Agriculture (ICAR-CIWA), focusing on gender-related research in agriculture.

Furthermore, the media team will explore the CSIR - Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in Bhubaneswar, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Himanta engages in collaborative talks with Nagaland CM in Dimapur

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 17: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma held a significant meeting with Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio on Wednesday in Dimapur.

Sharing insights into the discussions, CM Sarma took to social media platform X to post a photo of the meeting, highlighting the focus on deepening collaboration and sustaining peace between the two states.

In his social media post, CM Sarma stated, "Had an excellent meeting with the Hon'ble chief minister of Nagaland Shri Neiphiu Rio ji at Dimapur. We discussed

Prez Murmu's visit to Karbi Anglong for KYF cancelled due to bad weather

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 17: The anticipated presence of the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, at the golden jubilee celebration of the Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) turned into disappointment due to adverse weather conditions.

Organised by the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), the festival held at Taralango faced challenges as the President's chopper could not land at the venue helipad, redirecting to Guwahati airport.

Despite sunny weather turning gloomy and rain setting in, thousands gathered at Diphu sports complex and Taralango to witness



the President's arrival. At 1:30 PM, confirmation came that the President would not be attending, leaving the crowd disheartened.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, expressed regret for the unfortunate incident but assured the

audience of inviting the President to the next KYF.

Amidst the disappointment, CM Sarma announced a significant annual budget allocation of ₹ 3 crore from the state government for future KYF celebrations. He further emphasised the festival's role in promoting Karbi identity internationally, labeling it as the oldest ethnic festival in Northeast India.

Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang also expressed regret over the missed opportunity but pledged (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Amit Shah to visit Assam, Meghalaya from Jan 18-20

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: Union home minister Amit Shah will undertake a three-day visit to Assam and Meghalaya beginning January 18 during which he will attend the plenary session of the North Eastern Council, the passing out parade of Assam Police commandos and inaugurate a cyber security operational centre, sources said on Wednesday.

Shah will also take part in the 61st Raising Day celebrations of the Sashstra Seema Bal (SSB) in Tezpur, Assam.

After arriving in Shillong on Thursday, the home minister will inaugurate a cyber security operational centre of the Assam Rifles on the premises of the paramilitary force's headquarters in the capital of Meghalaya.

On Friday, Shah will attend the 71st plenary session of the NEC at the state convention centre in Shillong and subsequently review the functioning of the North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) at the same venue.

On Saturday, the home minister will attend the 61st Raising Day celebrations of the SSB at the SSB complex in Tezpur.

In the afternoon, he will attend the 13th triennial conference of the All Bathou Mahasabha at Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur district.

In the evening, Shah will attend the passing out parade of 2,551 Assam Police commandos at Sarusajai (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Indian Navy is aggressively going after piracy: Admiral Hari Kumar

PUNE, Jan 17: Chief of Naval Staff Admiral R Hari Kumar on Wednesday said the Indian Navy is tackling piracy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) aggressively, and has increased the deployment of warships in the area. Speaking to the media at INS Shivaji after the inauguration of a CO2 based air-conditioning plant built indigenously in collaboration with IISc Bangalore, he also said the anti-piracy act has been helpful for the Navy.

The Indian Navy has two operations going on in the IOR and one of them is an anti-piracy operation, Kumar said to a question.

"The anti-piracy operation has been going on since 2008 with constant deployment of herd ships to combat piracy. The presence of warships deters the pirates. Last year, we thought that piracy was almost over, but recently hijacking of an Indian vessel and Indian crew

took place. We have increased the deployment and we are now aggressively going after them," said the Navy chief. The Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022, has strengthened the Navy's hands and India is among the few countries that have enacted such a legislation, he added.

Multi-pronged efforts are underway on the indigenization front, Kumar said to a question about the push for 'Atmanirbharta' or self-reliance in defence procurement.

"I have given a commitment to the national leadership that by 2047, when we aspire to be a developed nation, the Indian Navy will be completely Atmanirbhara. That is the target we have set for ourselves. We have given this commitment and we are working towards it. This implies that all our platforms will largely be indigenous," he said. (PTI)

Ajanta Neog launches ration card distribution in Jorhat

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Jan 17: The minister of finance, women and child development, who is also the guardian minister of Jorhat district, Ajanta Neog, inaugurated the ceremonial distribution of ration cards to new beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act 2013 in the Titabar Assembly constituency.

The event, held at Bokahola Playground, showcased the BJP-led Assam Government's commitment to all-round development, emphasising the 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' mantra.

Minister Neog outlined chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's vision to propel Assam among the top five developed states, highlighting various socio-economic initiatives for backward communities, women's empowerment, self-employment, job creation, and advancements in education and health sectors.

Over 42 lakh beneficiaries across the state are set to receive ration cards.

At the Bokahola Gaon Panchayat, 188 beneficiaries received ration cards during the program, attended (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

The band successfully delivered an electrifying performance to the thrilled audience

Scottish band 'Nazareth' rocks Karbi Youth Festival amidst rain

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 17: The Diphu Sports Complex witnessed a spectacular gathering of rock music enthusiasts and devoted fans of the Scottish rock band Nazareth on the evening of January 16 i.e. on Tuesday.

Despite the rain creating a temporary setback, the band successfully delivered an electrifying performance to the thrilled audience.

The Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) added fervor to the golden jubilee celebration of the Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) by inviting the renowned Scottish rock band Nazareth. With a musical journey dating back to the 70s, the band gained popularity with hit numbers



like 'Dream On,' 'Love Hurts,' and 'Where R U Now.'

The four-member band includes Peter Agnew on bass, Lee Agnew on drums, James (Jimmy) Morrison on guitar, and Carl Sentance as the vocalist.

The event kicked off with a promising start featuring Nise Meruno, a pianist from Dimapur, Nagaland, who presented captivating piano pieces from Bollywood songs.

After them there was a sound from the hills, a musical band from

Mizoram. However, a sudden downpour halted the performance temporarily. Despite the rain and cold winds, the resilient crowd, including individuals aged 50 and 60, eagerly awaited the resumption of the show, demonstrating their unwavering dedication to Nazareth's nostalgic tunes.

After overcoming technical issues and a rain delay, the Scottish band took the stage for a mesmerising performance that lasted over two hours. The setlist included iconic rock singles like 'Miss Misery,' 'Razamanaz,' 'Shanghai D,' 'Madness,' 'Holiday,' 'Receiver,' 'Sunshine,' 'Change Time,' and timeless classics 'Dream On,' 'Love Hurts,' and 'Where (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Pakistan recalls ambassador to Iran over missile attack on terror bases in Balochistan



ISLAMABAD, Jan 17: Pakistan on Wednesday recalled its ambassador to Iran and suspended all high-level planned bilateral visits in the coming days, hours after Tehran launched an unprecedented missile and drone strikes on what it said were terrorist bases of a Sunni militant group in the restive Balochistan province.

Foreign Office spokesperson Muntaz Baloch in a statement read out to the media also said that the Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan who is currently visiting Iran may not return to Islamabad for the time being. Pakistan also reserves the right to retaliate to the provocation by Iran, she said.

Two bases of Balochi militant

group Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan were targeted by missiles and drones on Tuesday, Iranian state media reported, a day after Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards attacked targets in Iraq and Syria with missiles.

"We have also informed them (Iran) that Pakistan has decided to recall its ambassador from Iran and that the Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan, now on a visit to Iran, may not return for the time being. We have also decided to suspend all high-level visits which were ongoing or were planned between Pakistan and Iran in coming days," Baloch said.

She said that last night's "unprovoked and blatant breach of Pakistan's sovereignty by Iran is a violation of international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations". "This illegal (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

India has outpaced several developed nations in ship-turnaround time: PM

KOCHI, Jan 17: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday highlighted that India has outpaced several developed nations in ship-turnaround time, emphasising the country's proven potential and standing in global trade.

The prime minister made these remarks while dedicating projects worth ₹ 4,000 crore to the nation, including crucial strategic initiatives at Cochin Shipyard Limited. He mentioned that these projects would accelerate the development of the southern region of the country.

"The world is recognising India's potential and position in global trade," Modi said, shedding light on the agreements made during India's G20 Presidency regarding the Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

Modi said that the Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor will further strengthen the creation of 'Viksit Bharat' by providing a boost to the coastal economy of India.

Reflecting on the past, the prime minister recalled that just a decade ago, ships had to wait for a considerable amount of time at the ports, and unloading took a very long time.

"Today, the situation has changed," Modi said, informing that India has surpassed many developed nations in terms of ship-turnaround time.

Emphasising the role of every state in the journey of making India 'Viksit Bharat' during the Amrit Kaal, Modi recalled the historical significance of ports in India's prosperity in earlier times and envisioned a similar role for ports in the current era as the country takes new strides, becoming a major centre of global trade.

In such a scenario, the prime minister said that the government is engaged in enhancing the strength of port cities like Kochi.

He listed an increase in port capacity, investment in port infrastructure, and improved connectivity of ports under the Sagarmala Project.

Speaking on the country's largest dry dock that Kochi received on Wednesday, he mentioned, "Other projects like shipbuilding, ship repairing,



and the LPG import terminal will also give momentum to development in Kerala and the southern region of the country."

Acknowledging the honour of building the 'Made in India' aircraft carrier INS Vikrant with the Cochin Shipyard, Modi said, "New facilities will enhance the capabilities of the shipyard many times". The prime minister spoke about changes in the ports, shipping, and waterways sector over the past decade, mentioning how they attracted new investments and generated job opportunities.

He said that rule reforms for Indian Seafarers resulted in a 140 per cent increase in their numbers. Additionally, the prime minister highlighted that using inland waterways significantly boosted passenger and cargo transport within the country.

Modi further said that in the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Kaal', each state plays a vital role in India's journey toward development.

"When everyone works together, the results are much better," he said. The prime minister also congratulated Keralites for being the recipients of

projects worth ₹ 4,000 crore.

Modi said that the new dry dock is a source of national pride for India.

"It not only allows large vessels to dock but also facilitates shipbuilding and repair work, reducing reliance on foreign countries and saving foreign exchange," he said.

Referring to the opening of the International Ship Repair Facility, the prime minister said that it will transform Kochi into the largest ship repair center in India and Asia.

Drawing parallels with multiple small businesses collaborating in the manufacturing of INS Vikrant, he expressed confidence in creating a new ecosystem of small businesses with the launch of such extensive shipbuilding and repair facilities. He also highlighted that the new LPG Import Terminal will cater to the LPG needs of Kochi, Coimbatore, Erode, Salem, Calicut, Madurai, and Trichy.

It will also support industries, promote economic development, and generate new jobs in these areas, the prime minister added.

Prior to the inauguration, Union Minister Sarbanand Sonowal shared details of the project in his welcome address.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who also spoke at the event, conveyed the state's thanks to the PM.

"We are delighted to have Prime Minister Narendra Modi in our midst. At the outset, let me extend a warm welcome to him and reaffirm Kerala's commitment to the overall development of our country by playing a supportive role as the host state in mega projects such as this," he said.

The CM, in his brief speech, also highlighted the role of state-run Keltron and various other Kerala-based companies in the Chandrayaan-3 and Aditya L1 projects.

The Central government anticipates that with the dedication of these projects, Cochin Shipyard Limited is poised to double its turnover within the next four years to ₹ 7,000 crore. (PTI)

Sensex tanks 1,628 pts on sharp losses in banking, oil shares

MUMBAI, Jan 17: Benchmark Sensex nosedived 1,628 points or 2.23 per cent on Wednesday, marking its biggest single-day slide in more than one-and-a-half years following an intense sell-off in banking, metal and oil shares triggered by weak global trends.

The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 1,628.01 points or 2.23 per cent to settle at 71,500.76 with 24 of its constituents ending in the red. During the day, it plummeted 1,699.47 points or 2.32 per cent to a low of 71,429.30.

The Nifty tanked 460.35 points or 2.09 per cent to settle at 21,571.95, falling for the second day in a row.

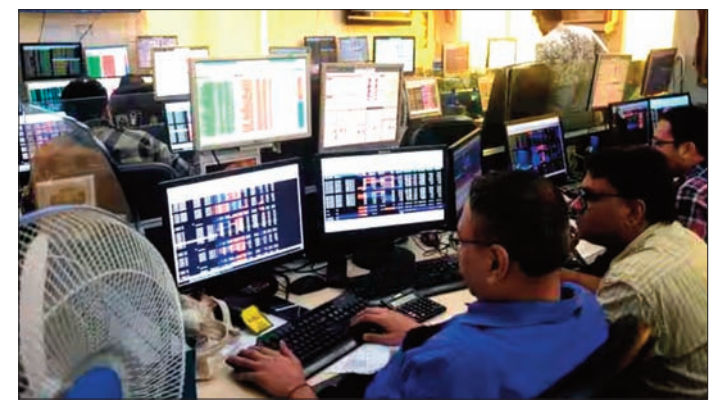
Key stock indices suffered their worst single-day losses in percentage terms since June 13, 2022.

The heavy fall in the markets comes on the back of a recent record-breaking rally. The BSE benchmark hit its all-time high of 73,427.59 on Tuesday, and the Nifty also reached its lifetime peak of 22,124.15 on the previous day.

Among the Sensex firms, HDFC Bank fell over 8 per cent after its December quarter earnings failed to cheer investors.

HDFC Bank on Tuesday reported a 2.65 per cent rise in consolidated net profit of ₹ 17,258 crore for the October-December period against ₹ 16,811 crore in the preceding September quarter.

Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Maruti, IndusInd Bank and State Bank of India were among the other major



laggards. HCL Technologies, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Nestle and Larsen & Toubro were the gainers.

"A nosedive correction in banking stocks, along with concerns over delays in US FED rate cuts, impacted market sentiments. Given the elevated valuations, coupled with the fact that optimism regarding earnings and GDP growth for FY24 is already reflected in the market, triggered the correction," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were also trading with sharp cuts. The US markets ended in negative territory on Tuesday.

"Today's market fall is led by banks on the back of HDFC Bank results, showing heightened levels of credit/deposit (CD) ratio beyond RBI's comfort levels. This is the case with most other banks as well.

Thus, the markets expect either margin pressure, in case banks go in for aggressive deposit mobilization, a slowdown in lending growth, or both. This development can lead to some de-rating of the sector.

"After the significant up move we have witnessed recently, markets are taking a breather, especially since market valuations are higher than historical multiples," said Naveen Kulkarni, Chief Investment Officer, Axis Securities PMS.

Snapping its five-day winning run, the BSE benchmark declined 199.17 points, or 0.27 per cent, to settle at 73,128.77 on Tuesday. The Nifty ended lower by 65.15 points, or 0.29 per cent, at 22,032.30.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.84 per cent to USD 76.85 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 656.57 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Rupee settles 1 paisa lower at 83.13 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Jan 17: The rupee slipped 1 paisa to settle at 83.13 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday amid massive selling in domestic equity markets and a strong greenback overseas.

However, renewed foreign capital inflows and a sharp fall in crude oil prices in the international markets supported the local currency and capped the losses, forex dealers said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened at 83.13 and traded in the range of 83.07 to 83.17 against the dollar.

The unit finally settled at 83.13 (provisional) against the greenback, down 1 paisa from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee declined 26 paise to settle at 83.12 against the US dollar.

"The rupee traded flat...with the dollar index rising and sell off in capital markets rupee weakness can continue towards 83.25-83.30.

"US retail data will be in focus in the evening, which can give dollar new triggers. The range for rupee can be seen between 82.90-83.30," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, LKP Securities, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 103.05 on Wednesday.

Analysts attributed gains in the US dollar to safe-haven demands amid concern over disruption in global trade through the Red Sea route.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 2.09 per cent to USD 76.65 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex fell 1,628.01 points, or 2.23 per cent, to settle at 71,500.76 points. The Nifty also declined 460.35 points, or 2.09 per cent, to 21,571.95 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the equity market on Tuesday as they bought shares worth ₹ 656.57 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Deloitte India unveils initiative to cut emissions attributed to software

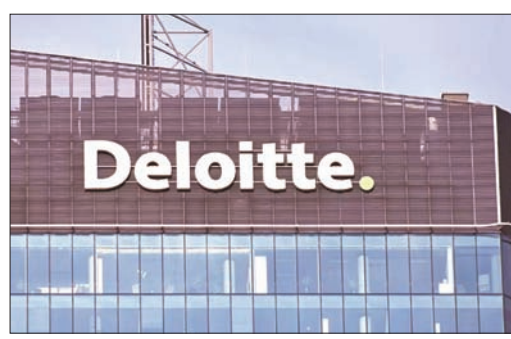
DAVOS, Jan 17: Deloitte India on Wednesday unveiled an Enterprise Conscious Code initiative for sustainable, inclusive, and accessible software development that aims to cut up to 30 per cent of the emissions attributed to software alone.

Launching the Code here on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2024, Deloitte India said this initiative marks a significant leap towards sustainable and responsible software development, supporting global efforts to reduce carbon footprint, increase energy consciousness, and ensure accessibility for everyone.

"The Enterprise Conscious Code (ECC) combines everything a company needs - the triple Ps of the bottom line - people, planet, and profits," it said.

The Code offers ways to build eco-friendly software, promoting the use of techniques that contribute to a greener planet. Currently, about 3 per cent of the world's carbon emissions are attributed to the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, equivalent to roughly 1.58 billion tonnes per year.

Within this 3 per cent, ECC has the potential to reduce up to 30 per cent of the emissions attributed solely to software, which is a significant reduction in power consumption and storage, leading to direct cost savings, Deloitte said. Romal Shetty, CEO, Deloitte South Asia said, "We are proud to introduce this new initiative, as a testament to our commitment towards



sustainable growth of the technology industry." "Innovation must go hand in hand with our responsibility to minimise the environmental impact of technology. By embracing such conscious practices, we aim to lead the way in creating software solutions that not only meet the highest standards of performance but also contribute to a greener and more inclusive future," he added. Deloitte said emissions from core software often go unnoticed, quietly adding to greenhouse gases. Globally, for example, there are over 1 billion active websites, with 200 million in India alone.

Deloitte India said it analysed popular Indian websites, revealing that each website emits, on an average, CO2 equivalent to a petrol car covering 10km per user, assuming all pages are viewed. (PTI)

Britain's unexpected inflation increase in Dec is unlikely to worry the Bank of England

LONDON, Jan 17: Inflation across the United Kingdom increased unexpectedly last month as a result of sharp hikes in tobacco and alcohol prices, according to official figures released Wednesday. Economists said it was unlikely to prompt concern at the Bank of England, which recently ended nearly two years of interest rate increases.

The Office for National Statistics said inflation, as measured by the consumer prices index, was 4 per cent in December, up from 3.9 per cent the month before, the first increase in 10 months.

Most economists had expected the rate to edge lower to 3.8 per cent.

Despite the increase, inflation remains sharply lower at the end of 2023 than at the start of last year, when it stood above 10 per cent.

The increase is unlikely to cause too much concern among rate-set-

ters at the Bank of England as inflation is below where it expected it to be. "This serves as a reminder that bumps in the lower inflation road are inevitable, but does not change the big picture that price rises are coming in much lower than the Bank of England expected as recently as November," said Lalitha Try, economist at the Resolution Foundation.

After the Bank of England in August left its main interest rate unchanged at a 15-year high of 5.25 per cent, speculation mounted it could soon start cutting borrowing rates in light of recent sharp falls in inflation.

The Bank of England has managed to get inflation down from a four-decade high of more than 11 per cent, but there's still a way to go to get to its target of 2 per cent. But with food and energy prices trending lower, there are hopes it could meet the target this year, and

start reducing interest rates.

Higher interest rates targeted a surge in inflation, first stoked by supply chain issues during the coronavirus pandemic and then Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which pushed up food and energy costs. While the interest rate increases have helped in the battle against inflation, the squeeze on consumer spending, primarily through higher mortgage rates, has weighed on the British economy, which is barely growing.

Whatever happens on the interest rate front in the coming months, it's very likely that relatively high borrowing rates and low economic growth will be the backdrop for the general election, which has to take place within a year. That's also a concern for the governing Conservative Party, which opinion polls say is way behind the main opposition Labour Party ahead of the vote. (AP)

Adani raises stake in IANS to take full control

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: Billionaire Gautam Adani's group has raised its stake in IANS India Pvt Ltd to take full control of the news agency as it consolidates its media presence.

Adani Group had last month picked up a 50.50 per cent stake in IANS and now it has raised the shareholding to 76 per cent with voting rights and to 99.26 per cent without voting rights, according to a regulatory filing.

The cash outgo is ₹ 5 crore, it said.

"In continuation to our earlier intimation dated December 15, 2023, we would like to inform that AMG Media Networks Ltd (AMNL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company has increased its stake in IANS India Private Limited, by subscribing to fresh shares issued by IANS," Adani Enterprises Ltd - the group's flagship firm - said in the filing.

The allotment of the shares was approved by the board of IANS at its meeting held on January 16, 2024, it said.

Adani Group had on December 15 last year acquired 50.50 per cent stake in IANS for an undisclosed sum of money. It has now acquired an additional 25.50 per cent equity shares, taking total

stake with voting rights to 76 per cent. It has acquired additional 48.76 per cent equity shares to take stake without voting rights to 99.26 per cent, it said.

IANS has an authorised share capital of ₹ 11 crore, and a revenue of ₹ 11.86 crore in FY23.

"IANS is a subsidiary of AMNL," the filing said. "The acquisition is of strategic nature in the interest of AMNL."

Adani forayed into media business in March last year when it acquired Quintillion Business Media, which operates business and financial news digital media platform BQ Prime. It thereafter in December took nearly 65 per cent stake in broadcaster NDTV.

AMNL was the vehicle for these acquisitions as well.

A first-generation entrepreneur, Adani started off as a commodities trader in 1988 and expanded his business interests to become India's largest private player in infrastructure, with 13 ports and eight airports. Over the years it diversified into producing coal, energy distribution, data centres and more recently into cement and copper. It even bid and acquired 5G telecom spectrum to set up a private network. (PTI)

Firestone launches Roadhawk 2z Tyre

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 17: Firestone, a global brand with a 120-year legacy, on Wednesday launched its - the Firestone Roadhawk 2z, next-generation tyre meticulously crafted with precision and advanced technical features. Backed by a 5-year warranty, this tyre is designed to set new industry benchmarks by delivering unparalleled performance, enhanced safety, superior mileage, and excellent braking capabilities.

Firestone's Roadhawk 2z Tyre will cater Hatchbacks, sedans and CUVs market. The Firestone's Roadhawk 2z Tyre is compatible to 12 to 16-inch rim coverage.

Govt's fertiliser subsidy bill likely to fall up to 34 pc to ₹ 1.8 lakh cr this fiscal: Mansukh

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: The government's fertiliser subsidy bill is likely to decline 30-34 per cent to ₹ 1.7-1.8 lakh crore this fiscal due to fall in global prices and lower imports of urea. Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Wednesday.

Asked about any adverse impact on imports due to problems in Red Sea, the minister asserted "there is no shortage of fertilisers in the country". Addressing a press conference, chemicals and fertilizers minister Mansukh Mandaviya highlighted that the urea imports are estimated at 40-50 lakh tonnes this fiscal, lower from around 75 lakh tonnes imported in the previous year, helped by higher domestic production and increased use of nano liquid urea.

"Ministry of External Affairs is making necessary interventions and our Navy is giving protection to In-



dian cargo vessels," Mandaviya told reporters.

According to exporters, freight rates have skyrocketed by up to 600 per cent due to the Red Sea crisis which would hurt the world trade.

The geopolitical tension around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial shipping route connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, has escalated due to recent attacks by Yemen-based

Houthi militants. The minister also spoke about his new book 'FERTILISING THE FUTURE: Bharat's March Towards Fertiliser Self-Sufficiency'. Mandaviya said there is sufficient availability of fertilisers in the country to meet the requirements of the kharif (summer sown) season.

At present, the country has stocks of 70 lakh tonnes of urea, 20 lakh tonnes of DAP, 10 lakh tonnes of MoP (Muriate of Potash), 40 lakh tonnes of NPK and 20 lakh tonnes of SSP (single super phosphate).

Mandaviya highlighted that the government has taken several steps since 2014 to boost domestic production of fertilisers and reduce import dependence. He said four urea plants have already been revived and the fifth one would also start production soon. The minister said the Centre is also promoting alternate

fertilisers line -- nano liquid urea and nano liquid DAP. Besides, it has launched a scheme to incentivise states that curb use of chemical fertilisers.

India has entered into long-term supply agreements with global suppliers for assured imports of fertilisers and its raw materials at pre-determined prices, he added. Asked about fertiliser subsidy, Mandaviya said the subsidy bill is estimated at around ₹ 1.7-1.8 lakh crore. "Subsidy is expected to be lower this year because of fall in global prices. We have not increased retail prices to reduce subsidy," he said.

When the global rates skyrocketed during last fiscal, he said, the government increased subsidy and kept the retail prices of urea, di ammonium phosphate (DAP) and other fertilisers to protect farmers interest. (PTI)

Form No. 3	
[See Regulation-15 (1)(a)] / 16(3)	
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL GUWAHATI	
Suvarna Bhawan, House No. 12, New Town Path, Near Hanuman Mandir, G.S. Road, Ulabari, Guwahati-781007 (Assam)	
Case No.: OA/346/2023	
Summons under sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, read with sub-rule (2A) of rule 5 of the Debt Recovery Tribunal (Procedure) Rules, 1993. Exh. No.: 3965	
YES BANK	
VS	
MD AJJUR RAHMAN AND Anr	
To:	
(1)	MD AJJUR RAHMAN C/O RAUSHAN ALI ISLAMPUR PACHIM DADORA NEAR DADORA MASZID KAMRUP 781104
(2)	MRS AFZAL BEGUM C/O AFZAL RAHMAN DADARA PACHIM DADORA NEAR DADORA MASZID KAMRUP -781104
SUMMONS	
WHEREAS, OA/346/2023 was listed before Hon'ble Presiding Officer/Registrar on 03/01/2024.	
WHEREAS this Hon'ble Tribunal is pleased to issue summons/ notice on the said Application under section 19(4) of the Act, (OA) filed against you for recovery of debts of Rs. 3031361.37/- (application along with copies of documents etc. annexed).	
In accordance with sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, you, the defendants are directed as under:-	
(i) to show cause within thirty days of the service of summons, Publication thereof as to why relief prayed for should not be granted.	
(ii) to disclose particulars of properties or assets other than properties and assets specified by the applicant under serial number 3A of the original application;	
(iii) you are restrained from dealing with or disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application, pending hearing and disposal of the application for attachment of properties;	
(iv) you shall not transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, except in the ordinary course of his business any of the assets over which security interest is created and / or other assets and properties specified or disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application without the prior approval of the Tribunal;	
(v) you shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds realised by sale of secured assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of business and deposit such sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank or financial institutions holding security interest over such assets.	
You are also directed to file the written statement with a copy thereof furnished to the applicant and to appear before Registrar on 12/02/2024 at 10:30 A.M. Failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence.	
Given under my hand and the seal of this Tribunal on this date: 04/01/2024.	
Signature of the Officer Authorised to issue summons.	
Registrar Debts Recovery Tribunal Guwahati	
Note: Strike out whichever is not applicable	

17 minors rescued, one trafficker arrested by RPF of NFR

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 17: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of NF Railway conducted successful operations leading to the rescue of 17 minors and the arrest of one trafficker during checks and drives conducted from January 9 to January 16, 2024, at various trains and railway stations across NF Railway. In December 2023, a total of 43 minors and 03 women were rescued by RPF of NFR and handed over to respective Child Line/NGOs, parents, and GRP for safe custody.

On January 9, 2024, a team of RPF/Kishanganj, along with members of Bal Bachao Andolan/Katihah, conducted a check at Kishanganj Railway Station. During the check, they rescued 6 minors and apprehended one human trafficker. The rescued minors and the trafficker were later handed over to OC/GRP/Kishanganj for safe custody and further legal action.

On January 16, 2024, RPF staff at Jalpaiguri Road Post rescued a runaway minor girl at Jalpaiguri Road railway station. Simultaneously, RPF staff at New Bongaigaon Post rescued another runaway minor girl at New Bongaigaon railway station. Both rescued minors were handed over to the Child Welfare Committee, Jalpaiguri, and Bongaigaon for safe custody.

Additionally, the RPF team of 'Meri Saheli' of NF Railway provides assistance to women passengers traveling alone in trains. In December 2023, about 1958 women passengers were assisted by this team of RPF.

RPF continues to take preventive measures and actions in cases where children in need of care and protection are found in trains and railway premises. The force remains vigilant against suspected persons involved in human trafficking and monitors the movement of children in a suspicious manner, especially those traveling alone without proper guardianship. The relentless fight against criminals aims to protect railway passengers and ensure the safety and well-being of minors.

Suklabaidya launches NFSA cards distribution program in Cachar



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 17: The state government, committed to providing essential support to the needy and ensuring access to subsidised food grains and other benefits under the Public Distribution System (PDS), launched a program for the distribution of ration cards as part of the state-wide National Food Security Act (NFSA) distribution initiative.

Minister for Excise, Transport & Fisheries, Parimal Suklabaidya, inaugurated the program at an event

organised by the Cachar administration at PWD ground, Dholai in Cachar district. Silchar MP, Dr Rajdeep Roy, district commissioner Rohan Kumar Jha, and other dignitaries were present at the ceremony. More than 7,672 beneficiaries from 27 Gaon Panchayats in Dholai constituency received new ration cards under the State Food Protection Act. Across the entire state, 42,85,745 new ration card beneficiaries are being included. Minister Suklabaidya officially handed over ration cards to 10 beneficiaries during the event.

Addressing the gathering, minister Parimal Suklabaidya highlighted the various developmental schemes initiated by the central and state governments. He mentioned that 7,672 families, covering 29,799 people, have been newly included in the ration card under the Dholai constituency. The minister underscored the developmental activities initiated by the state government under the leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. He also mentioned

the benefits of the Ayushman card that comes with food security initiatives.

Silchar MP, Dr Rajdeep Roy, spoke about various developmental schemes at both the central and state levels aimed at addressing the needs of economically disadvantaged and marginalised sections of society. Cachar DC, Rohan Kumar Jha, and BJP district president, Bimalendu Roy, also addressed the gathering. Additionally, a road safety awareness program was organised at the same venue where minister Suklabaidya highlighted the importance of road safety guidelines. As part of the Road Safety Month, a bike rally was conducted to make people aware of the need for safe road practices. The minister paid tribute to the 3296 people who lost their lives in road accidents and advised participants to prioritise safety measures such as wearing helmets, using seat belts, avoiding drunk driving, and controlling speed to prevent accidents.

The program was attended by various officials, including Silchar MP Dr Rajdeep Roy, district commissioner Rohan Kumar Jha, BJP district president Bimalendu Roy, Gaon Panchayat president Bhushan Pal, and others.

Silchar MLA inaugurates district level competition of Assam Sanskritik Mahasangram



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 17: Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty inaugurated the district-level competition of Assam Sanskritik Mahasangram 2023-24 at Bongo Bhaban in Silchar on Wednesday. The event included competitions in Jyoti Sangeet, Rabha Sangeet, and Bhupendra Sangeet.

As the chief guest, MLA Dipayan Chakraborty said that January 17 is celebrated as 'Silpi Divas' across the state, marking the death anniversary of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. He expressed gratitude to district commissioner Rohan Kumar Jha for organising the first day of the competition on 'Silpi Divas'.

During the inauguration, Chakraborty paid tribute to poets and artists such as Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore, Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwal, and Dr Bhupen Hazarika. He encouraged the future generations to follow the path of these great personalities to enrich the culture and art of the district.

MLA Dipayan Chakraborty also thanked chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for his initiatives and efforts to develop the state in various areas, including art, culture, sports, education, health, and infrastructure.

Chakraborty likened Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a popular global leader and credited him for promoting India's development, allowing the country to achieve a special place in the world economy. He also urged people to light five lamps in every house on January 22, marking the auspicious occasion of the establishment of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

District commissioner Rohan Kumar Jha explained the purpose of the event, mentioning that around 8,500 participants took part in the competition at the Gaon Panchayat level in Cachar. The district-level competition marked the culmination of group-based competitions, and winners at this level can progress to the state-level competition. Cash prizes will be awarded to winners in each category.

Other dignitaries, including Cachar superintendent of police Numa Mahatto, district BJP president Bimalendu Roy, APDCL director Nitya Bhushan Dey, Lakhipur Municipality chairman Mrinal Kanti Das, and officials of the district administration, attended the event. The district-level competition commenced after the inauguration, with participants competing in Jyoti Sangeet, Bhupendra Sangeet, and Rabha Sangeet categories.

MYM to organise 'Apne Apne Ram' prog from Feb 2 Awareness event conducted

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 17: Marwari Yuva Manch (MYM), a voluntary youth organisation, founded on October 10, 1977, in Guwahati, is organising a motivational program titled 'Apne Apne Ram'. The event is set to take place from February 2 to 4, 2024, at Gauhati Gaushala, Athgaon.

MYM Guwahati Greater branch, established in 2010, has been actively involved in various social activities to contribute to individual and societal development. Ram Bhattar, the branch president, highlighted the organisation's initiatives, including free artificial limb and caliper camps, permanent water projects, blood donation camps, and personality development workshops.

Rahul Agarwal, the project chairman, mentioned that 'Apne Apne Ram' is a mega event featuring motivational speaker Dr Kumar Vishwas. The 3-day program aims to impart teachings inspired by the

of Lord Ram, illustrating how these teachings can guide individuals in leading better lives in today's world. Manish Agarwal, the project co-chairman, emphasised that the event's goal is to motivate people, especially the youth, to contribute to society and the country's development.

Ritesh Khater, the welcome president, informed that entry to the event will be allowed through passes only, and videography is not permitted during the program. The event is supported by Nilesh Samukha from iElevate and co-supported by Ajay Verma from Amul Sporto and Binod Soni from Manik Chand Jewellers. The project aims to enhance the spirit of national and social integration in society.

Hitesh Kumar Chopra, the branch secretary, acknowledged the efforts of treasurer Ravi Surekha, the organising committee, and branch members working tirelessly to ensure the success of the event.

Awareness event conducted

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 17: The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) at West Guwahati College of Education conducted an awareness event focused on digitalisation among the community members of Pandu and Templeghat areas in Guwahati. The event, held recently, aimed to educate and familiarise the community with the digital world. The student trainees took various initiatives to raise awareness about the benefits and challenges of digitalisation. The event featured hands-on activities, allowing trainees to demonstrate how to install various applications on mobile devices, enabling access to the advantages of the digital world in education, business, and other aspects of daily life. Additionally, the trainees discussed the potential negative effects of digitalisation.

Poetry circle held at Biswanath

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 17: A poetry circle convened by Freedom Fighter Prasad Singh Subba Memorial Academy on the auspicious occasion of 'Silpi Divas' was held at Milanpur here with Chhatraman Subba, president of the academy in the chair. The day-long programme began with the illumination of ceremonial lamps in front of the portraits of Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and freedom fighter Prasad Singh Subba, and offering floral tributes by Homeswar Nath, a social worker, and Madan Thapa, chief secretary of Assam Nepali Sahitya Sabha respectively, followed by a Jyoti Sangeet performed by Purnima Devi and Rupa Devi jointly.

Prakash Subba, vice president of the memorial academy, forwarded a welcome address while Dr Chintia Mani Sharma, principal of Biswanath College, inaugurated the poetry circle as a chief guest.

Mahakavi Mohan Dukhun graced the occasion as a distinguished guest. Earlier, Purna Kumar Sarma presented an introductory note on the renowned literary figure Mahakavi Mohan Dukhun. Poets, including Dr Chintia Mani Sharma, Arjun Nirola, Anup Sarma, Siya Sati, Purna Kumar Sarma, Ram Dahal, Prem Biswakarma, Laxman Pradhan, Krishna Neel Karki, Purnima Devi, Parishmita Bastola, Writik Sarma, Madhab Subedi, read out their self-composed poems. Mahakavi Mohan Dukhun addressed the session and briefly presented the literary journey of Indian poetry and the role of literary creators in paving the right way for society. Anal Rai offered a vote of thanks while Anjan Baskota, chief secretary of the academy, conducted the proceedings of the poetry circle. The program was attended by Tika Maya Rai, Usha Subba, Hem Kumar Goutam, Prem Biswakarma, Bishnu Devi as guests.

1000 kilograms of lablab beans exported to London

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, Jan 17: In the first month of January 2024, positive news emerged from the farmers in Nitaipukhuri near Demow in Sivasagar district under the Thowra Constituency. For the second time, 1000 kilograms of lablab beans produced by the farmers of Dihingparia FPC in Nitaipukhuri of Sivasagar district were exported to London on the first day of Magh.

Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Atul Bora shared the news on Tuesday night through his social media on X, stating, "Good news for Assam's agriculture sector on the first day of Magh! 1,000 kg of Lablab Beans (Urohi) produced by the farmers of Dihingparia FPC in Nitaipukhuri, Sivasagar district was exported to London. This is the second consignment exported by the FPC as 500 kg of Urohi was exported recently.



My heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to the officials of Horticulture Department of Govt of Assam, concerned officials of Sivasagar District Agriculture Department, APART and every farmer involved in the production of Urohi. We are confident that under the strong leadership of Hon'ble CM Dr

@himantabiswa, we will be able to initiate a new revolution in the agricultural economy of Assam by further increasing this trend of crop exports in the coming days." Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, on Wednesday, expressed his satisfaction through his social media on X, stating, "Glad to learn about the export of 1,000 kg of Lablab Beans, locally known as Urohi to London. The demand of Assam's agri products in the international market speaks volumes about the hard work put by our farmers and our Govt's commitment to overhaul our agriculture sector."

NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati celebrates 19th Raising Day



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 17: NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati marked its 19th Raising Day at its plant premises in Salakati, Kokrajhar district, on Tuesday with a fitting program. Karunakar Das, the chief general manager (CGM) of NTPC Bongaigaon, hoisted the NTPC flag at the administrative building premises, followed by the NTPC Geet and cutting of the cake. Balloons in NTPC colours were released by Das in the presence of Sanjay Pande, GM (Project), Induri S Reddy, GM (Maintenance), Asutosh Biswas, GM (Operation), GM Thangzom, commandant, CISF, departmental heads, employees from various departments, unions and associations, members of the Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, and CISF.

NTPC Bongaigaon's foundation stone laid on January 16, 2006, has opened the gates of development in the entire BTR area. He also highlighted various achievements of the station. The station achieved the highest power generation in FY 22-23 of 5026.88 MU and a PLF of 76.51% in FY 22-23, surpassing the previous generation of 4201.45 MU in FY 21-22. The Unit II of the power station achieved the longest continuous run of 236 days, and the station recorded the lowest monthly Auxiliary Power Consumption (APC) of 8.08% in February 2023, showcasing exceptional operational efficiency. NTPC Bongaigaon also achieved a single day highest generation of 17.773 MU on June 9, 2023, at a PLF of 98.73%.

Das emphasized that the core strength of NTPC Bongaigaon lies in the rich pool of experienced professionals with a vibrant group of young executives. He urged all to work, think, and strategise on projecting NTPC Bongaigaon as a professionally driven and value-based organisation. Das also outlined the initiatives taken in NTPC Bongaigaon on the O&M, environment, and ash utilisation fronts. As part of corporate social responsibility, a blanket distribution for more than 30 senior citizens of nearby villages below the poverty line was organised in association with the district administration, Salakati Acchalik Senior Citizens Mancha, and Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, NTPC Bongaigaon. A friendly cricket match between NTPC Bongaigaon and CISF Unit of NTPC Bongaigaon was held, where CISF won by 40 runs. Ashish Kumar, deputy commandant, CISF Unit of NTPC Bongaigaon, was awarded the 'Man of the Match'.

No.GMB.3/2023/204 Dated the Goreswar 12th January, 2024

TENDER NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing non refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and twenty five paise) only with validity period of 180 days, which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in F-2 form are invite from APWD registered contractors of class-I (A), (B) & (C), class-II and class-III (Roads and Building) category of Assam PWD (Roads and Building) BTC, Irrigation Engineering Department Class-I (A), (B), (C), Class-II and class-III And registered contractor of Goreswar Municipal Board Class-I (A), (B), (C) and Class-II and class-III according to their eligibility for submitting tender of the works given below. The tender will be received by the undersigned at his office up to 1.00 PM. Of 24th January, 2024 and will be opened on the same day at 2.00PM. in presence of the intending Bidders or their authorized agents. If the office of the undersigned happens to be closed on the date of receipt of tenders, the tenders will be received and open in the same venue and time on the next working day. Earnest money as shown below in the form of NSC/D.D/FDR duly pledged to the Chairperson, Goreswar Municipal Board will have to be deposited along with each tender. In case of SC, ST, OBC or unemployed Graduate Engineer (Proof to be enclosed along with the tender) bidders, the earnest money will be 50% of the earnest money specified below. The detailed tender document may be obtained from the office of the undersigned by the intending bidders, on written request and payments of As per chart which is non refundable, during office on before 4.00PM, of 23rd January, 2024. The Bidders have to quote percentage based rate corrected to two digits (Both on figures & works) after decimal points only. The tender must be accompanied with copy of valid registration under APWD Bldg/Rds., Irrigation Engineering Department And GMB As applicable, GST registration, up-to-date labour license, PAN Card, Income Tax Return, detail information and proof on past experience of works of similar nature, list of construction tools and machineries owned by the Bidders, Technical Person to be engaged, Financial soundness Certificate, Cast Certificate etc. And other information in the prescribed format given in the tender Document.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Estimated cost in Rs. (Approx)/ Tender Value	E.M.D @ 2% of ESTIMATED cost (Amount in Rs.)	Time of Completion	Cost of Bid Documents (Amount in Rs.)
1	Construction of remaining part of RCC Drain from END Chowk to Goreswar Circle Office under W/No-7	Estimate cost Rs. 19,50,000.00 Tender Value Rs. 19,30,693.00	Gen Rs.39,000.00 ST, SC, OBC Rs. 19,500.00	2 months	600.00
2	Installation of hand pump at various location of Goreswar M.B.	Estimate cost Rs. 19,50,186.00 Tender Value Rs. 19,30,163.00	Gen Rs.39,004.00 ST, SC, OBC Rs. 19,502.00	2 months	600.00

The tender must be delivered in the name of the Chairperson, Goreswar Municipal Board, Goreswar, Baksa within the specified date and time above. Unsealed tender will be summarily rejected. No postal tender will be entertained. Time of completion of the works is 2 (Two) months from the date of issue of formal Work Order. All other details terms and conditions can be seen in the tender document for the work. The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason thereof and does not bind him to accept the lowest rate.

Sd/-
Chairman
Goreswar Municipal Board

Sd/-
Executive Officer
Goreswar Municipal Board

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1161

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Truth can be stated in a thousand different ways, yet each one can be true. -Swami Vivekananda

SC's Mathura Idgah Decision

In a recent development, the Supreme Court has temporarily halted the Allahabad High Court's decision to appoint an advocate commission for a survey of the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah complex in Mathura. While this order may seem to pivot on technicalities rather than substantive issues, it aligns with the broader judicial trend favoring faith over other considerations in disputes over places of worship. Crucially, the court's decision does not challenge the Places of Worship Act of 1991, which has been a subject of contention. This act, once considered inviolable, has faced challenges, notably in the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute in Ayodhya. The Ayodhya verdict has set a precedent likely to shape future cases, emphasising a nuanced approach. Importantly, the Supreme Court's stay pertains only to the appointment of a commission for a survey, not the ongoing proceedings in the main suit. The core issue remains whether the 1991 Act prevents any alterations to claims by rival parties. Numerous petitions are pending, with Hindu claimants asserting that the mosque at the disputed site was built by demolishing a temple. Critically, the Supreme Court scrutinised the Hindu side's application for a commission, raising reservations about its clarity and specificity. Justice Sanjiv Khanna, leading the bench, questioned the vagueness of the prayer, emphasizing the need for precision in such applications.

Last year, the Allahabad High Court transferred all suits related to the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid dispute to itself. The mosque committee contested this transfer in the Supreme Court, arguing that interim relief should not have been granted to the other side while the suits were pending. The Supreme Court upheld this argument, leaving other issues unresolved pending a final decision. The broader context highlights a significant setback for Muslims in cases involving disputes over places of worship. A pivotal moment occurred when a bench led by former Chief Justice Dipak Misra concluded that praying in a mosque is not an essential part of Islam, allowing namaz to be offered even in the open. This decision heavily influenced the Ayodhya land dispute resolution in 2010, when the disputed site was partitioned among Hindus, Muslims, and the Nirmohi Akhara. This legal norm, established over time, has implications for cases where the ownership of places of worship is disputed due to alleged construction on the ruins of temples. However, the political wrangling over such issues persists, as seen in the ongoing debate surrounding the new Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

While the primary focus of the controversy lies in the utilisation of consecration events for political gains by the BJP, the demolished Babri Masjid retains its symbolic significance for secularism. Despite the diminishing prominence of secularism in the current political climate, the historical structures carry weight in these disputes. The recent Supreme Court order on the Mathura Idgah complex maintains the judiciary's emphasis on procedural precision. However, it leaves untouched the larger question of the Places of Worship Act and the ongoing dispute over the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah complex. As legal battles continue, the intersection of faith, historical precedents, and political considerations remains a complex terrain for the Indian judiciary to navigate. The Supreme Court's temporary stay on appointing an advocate commission for the Mathura Idgah survey underscores a broader judicial trend favoring faith. However, key questions around the Places of Worship Act and the underlying dispute persist.

Culture's big role in West Bengal during Lok Sabha 2024 elections

By: Tirthankar Mitra

Even as battle lines are being drawn up for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections all over the country, culture is poised to play a significant role in this polls in West Bengal. Though the state is no longer in the preeminent position it once occupied in the cultural field, Trinamool Congress, BJP and CPI(M) are readying their culture brigade to give them an intellectual dominance numerical superiority over their political rivals.

Being the ruling party, the TMC seems to have a leg up over its rivals. Realising that people's grievances right from 2011, the year it came to power cannot be fully addressed overnight, it embarked on a series of festivals and fairs which are a very big draw for the populace.

Knowing well it may not have the traction of actor-playwrights like Utpal Dutt and film makers like Mrinal Sen, the TMC think tank have deployed this fair festival formula to keep people in good humour. Mati Utsav held in Burdwan is a case in point. If the theatre of Dutt and films of Sen were for the discerning public, a rural household visiting the Mati Utsav will never feel bored.

Moreover, Mati Utsav gels with the heady slogan of TMC "Ma, Mati Manush". Besides having a good time at the fair ground, the party faithful can propagate its ideology to the people visiting the fair. Unwilling to be tagged with the label of only catering for the rural populace, the TMC has devised sophisticated entertainment fare for the urban voters too. These are the NatyaMela, Sangeet Mela and the Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF).

Though Amitabh Bachchan or the Big B makes a regular appearance at KIFF ensuring a large turnout, it has been alleged that this film festival has lost its international character owing to the paucity of the participation of overseas films.

The ruling dispensation is not too much worried over this. It helps it to shed the label of elitism and strengthen its connect with the masses whose support will make or mar a nominee's fate in the coming elections. Our party has a mix of offerings in the cultural field, which caters to the intellectuals and common people alike, state agriculture department minister, Sovande

Chattopadhyay said. After all, our chief minister Mamata Banerjee is a poet and a litterateur.

There are book fairs in Kolkata and the districts, the minister said. Baul Fakir Utsav at Kenduli in Birbhum, Children's Film Festival and Pithe Puli Utsav comprise this mix bridging the urban-rural divide, he said.

What he left unsaid that a battery of performers from Tollygunge, the hub of film studios in Kolkata including Mimi Chakraborty and Nusrat Jahan, TMC MPs both and other actors will take the field addressing election rallies. It is the size of the crowd that TMC is aiming at to swing this crucial election on its favour.

It is the dwindling crowd at the cultural programmes of the Left read CPI(M) that is reassuring the ruling dispensation in the state. But though the CPI(M) is no longer the popular outfit that it used to be, its leadership feels it is owing to TMC's machinations. We are not given big auditoriums to stage plays depicting the problems plaguing the people, a senior leader of CPI(M)'s cultural front, Sudip Sengupta said.

So as improvisation we are organising short term duration street theatre about the present regime's misdeeds, Sengupta elaborated. Come January 20, at Ranu Chaya Mancha, Academy of Fine Arts a protest programme of short plays and recitation interspersed with speeches will be delivered opposing the inauguration of the Ayodhya Ram temple on January 22, he added. Gone are the days when the Left poll campaign drew crowds staging Dutt's popular play "Dudhapaner Nogori" or City of Nightmares. Admitting this Sengupta said that one has to move with the times.

Addressing the culture issue, the BJP is likely to bring in speakers whose connect with the film world is widely known. Jishnu Basu, a party ideologue pointed with Mithun Chakraborty campaigning for the saffron camp in 2021 Assembly elections and on mouthing dialogues from his films had thrown the TMC into a tizzy.

The saffron party may field several top actors from Hindi films. There is always an undercurrent of support for us who h can be whipped up by the campaigning of these crowd pullers to translate their presence into support for the BJP nominees in the Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, Basu said. (IPA Service)

Jonbeel Mela: Bridging ancient traditions with modern influences in Assam

The Jonbeel Mela stands as a distinctive marketplace in Assam, diverging from conventional trade practices. Instead of the typical buying and selling, this fair revolves around the ancient tradition of bartering. Delve into the narrative of this bazaar, an enduring legacy from the era of the Ahom Kings, and unravel its intricate socio-political significance within the kingdom.

In a quaint village situated 65 kilometers away from Guwahati, a collective effort is underway, with everyone lending a hand to erect makeshift bamboo huts in anticipation of an extraordinary mela or fair. This annual event takes place in mid-January, becoming a focal point for the community's vibrant activities. Beneath vibrant canopies, carefully arranged on swatches of hessian or simple cloth, a diverse array of goods and delectable edibles awaits. Traditional apparel, including shawls, sarongs, and other indigenous garments, are meticulously displayed on expansive sheets and thoughtfully packaged for the festivities.

From the hillside abodes, tribal communities descend bearing a rich bounty of spices, herbs, zesty ginger, and a medley of fruits. Simultaneously, their counterparts from the plains contribute essentials such as rice, an assortment of 'pithas' (sweet rice cakes), and the freshest catch of fish. T

The vibrant display extends to encompass an eclectic range of offerings, featuring betel leaves, areca nuts, zesty lime, piquant black pepper, mustard seeds, alongside the rustic charm of earthenware and ironware. Remarkably, even livestock makes its presence felt in this diverse showcase of regional abundance. Within the three-day extravaganza of the Jonbeel Mela, the concept of commerce diverges from conventional norms. It's a place where goods don't exchange hands through typical transactions; instead, they engage in a centuries-old tradition of barter. For half a millennium, this haat, or traditional bazaar, has been the stage for this unique practice. Here, the creator of the goods and the prospective owner engage directly, fostering a collaborative atmosphere where they negotiate and determine a mutually satisfactory exchange. Set in the picturesque village of Dayang Belguri, nestled in the Morigaon District of Assam, the Jonbeel Mela perfectly aligns its schedule with the vibrant celebration of Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu, marking the grand harvest festival in the region.

In the local vernacular, 'jon' and 'beel' resonate with the Assamese language, translating to 'moon' and 'wetland', respectively. This choice of nomenclature is not arbitrary; rather, it mirrors the fair's enchanting location along the banks of a

water body that gracefully mirrors the crescent moon's shape, adding an ethereal touch to the festivities. Uninterruptedly orchestrated since the 15th century CE, the Jonbeel Mela, inaugurated by the Ahom monarch Swargadeo Rudra Singha (reigning from 1696 to 1714), stands as a unique testament to historical continuity.

In an era where several fairs dotted the landscape, tracing their origins to the Ahom Kingdom of Assam, Jonbeel Mela emerges as the sole surviving representative of its genre. Beyond the realm of barter, these traditional fairs, including Jonbeel, served a broader purpose centuries ago. Their objectives extended beyond commerce, encompassing a profound political dimension aimed at uniting tribal chiefs. These gatherings became vital forums for these leaders to remain informed and engaged in the unfolding socio-political landscape of their time.

These gatherings provided an invaluable platform for the tribal communities in the region to forge connections and embrace a sense of unity and brotherhood. As tribal leaders delved into political discussions and state affairs, the common folk engaged in the lively exchange of news, information, and good-natured gossip. This communal interaction held particular significance in the context of North-East India, where the rugged mountainous terrain, interspersed with rivers and deep gorges, often acted as a natural barrier, isolating small communities from one another.

Delving into epigraphic and literary records, including the diverse Buranjis chronicling the reigns of the Ahom kings, a rich historical tapestry unfolds. Dating back to the 13th century, the Ahom Kingdom actively participated in both internal and external trade, dealing in textiles, minerals, and a bounty of forest products.

Extending their economic reach, the kingdom established trade routes connecting with neighboring nations such as Burma, China, and Tibet, threading through mountain passes and rivers. The transportation of goods took a remarkable journey, navigating the waters of the Brahmaputra in sizable vessels before continuing their maritime voyage to coastal ports like Tamralipti in ancient Bengal, positioned along the Bay of Bengal.

During the medieval era, the dynamics of domestic trade were rooted in the practice of barter, with the utilization of currency remaining significantly restricted. In his work, "A Comprehensive History of Assam" (1985), the esteemed Assamese historian S L Baruah sheds light on the monetary system prevalent in the Ahom



Kingdom. The currency of the time encompassed cowries - a flattened, yellowish shell distinguished by its glossy dome and slender aperture - as well as gold coins. Historical records reveal the existence of various denominations such as mohar (coins), sicca (rupee), adhali (half rupee), and others, which played a crucial role in facilitating trade beyond the borders of the Kingdom.

The economic landscape of the time was predominantly rural, with villages operating as self-sufficient entities. Shihabuddin Talish, the Mughal chronicler who accompanied Mir Jumla during the 1662 CE invasion of Assam, offers a glimpse into this agrarian society in his work 'Tarikh-i-Assam'. According to him, the prevailing custom in Assam diverged from the norm, as the locals refrained from purchasing food items in markets. Talish notes that each household meticulously stored a year's worth of diverse provisions, rendering them independent from the need to engage in buying or selling edible goods. This practice, as documented in 'A Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol III' by H K Barpujari, highlights the self-sufficiency ingrained in the daily lives of Assamese inhabitants during that period. Fascinatingly, certain locales earned their names based on the distinctive crops cultivated in their vicinity. Instances include Tamulbari, reminiscent of the flourishing garden of areca nuts; Panbari, where the cultivation of betel leaves prevails; Kamalabari, adorned with orchards yielding bountiful oranges; Benganabari, characterized by fields producing Rabi crops like brinjal; and Banbari, a haven where bamboo thrives abundantly. This nomenclature reflects the intimate connection between the geography and the diverse cultivation practices, encapsulating the essence of each place through its agricultural prowess.

Historical accounts documented in multiple Buranjis shed light on a noteworthy practice of the Ahom kings. These monarchs frequently instituted local markets or haats

across diverse locations, serving a dual purpose of fostering internal trade and maintaining harmony among the myriad tribes inhabiting the hills and plains. This strategic initiative not only stimulated economic activity but also functioned as a mechanism for the rulers to stay well-informed about the unfolding events within the Kingdom and its neighboring regions.

The establishment of these markets emerged as a prudent strategy, intertwining economic development with the imperative of maintaining peace and vigilance over the ever-evolving socio-political landscape. In an illustrative example, the Ahom ruler Swargadeo Pratap Singha (reigning from 1603 to 1641) strategically instituted two bustling markets, Dopdar and Borhat. The purpose behind these endeavors was to foster a dynamic exchange of goods with the Nagas, hailing from the Kachari Kingdom. Similarly, Swargadeo Sutyunpha (reigning from 1714 to 1744) took a diplomatic stance by establishing a market at Marangi. This proactive measure aimed to cultivate and maintain amicable relations with the King of Cachar, showcasing the Ahom monarch's adept navigation of political and economic strategies.

Among the array of haats, the most pivotal hub unfolded in Sadiya, nestled in the eastern extremity of Assam. This vibrant town served as the epicenter of commerce for the hill tribes scattered across the furthest reaches of the North-East. Within this bustling market, the Khamtis and the Singphos, representing the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, showcased a fascinating array of goods - from swords and spears to medicinal plants and ivory, along with copper and silver sourced from China. On the flip side, the Adis and the Hill Miris contributed to the exchange with their offerings of vegetables, wax, and cotton blankets, seeking a reciprocal trade with the plains' produce.

The Nagas and the Garos specialized in vending salt and cotton, while the Khasis and Jaintias displayed their wares, including iron implements and honey. This dynamic marketplace encapsulated a vibrant tapestry of trade, where di-

verse cultures converged in a harmonious exchange of commodities.

An impactful endeavor credited to Swargadeo Rudra Singha was the inception of the Jonbeel Mela. This innovative initiative took root in the Gobha Kingdom, spanning the contemporary territories of Morigaon, Nagaon, and Kamrup. Its primary objective was the systematic collection of revenue from the diverse tribes dwelling in and around the region, as detailed in 'A Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol III' by H K Borpujari. Notably, this mela has weathered the tides of time and shifting political landscapes, remaining a steadfast institution. Astonishingly, it clings to the time-honored barter system as its modus operandi for trade, maintaining a link to the ancient practices that defined its inception.

In a time-honored tradition, the commencement of the Jonbeel Mela is graced by the inauguration conducted by the Gobha Raja, the eminent leader of the Tiwa tribe. This tribe, comprising both the Hills Tiwa and the Plains Tiwa, is under the regal stewardship of the Gobha Raja. It is noteworthy that the location of this vibrant fair, Morigaon, has a historical affiliation with the Plains Tiwa, adding a distinct regional flavor to the festivities.

With a solemn ritual, the Gobha Raja formally inaugurates the fair following the Agni Puja, a sacred worship dedicated to the Fire God. Subsequently, a communal fishing event unfolds in the expansive beel (wetland), characterized by men venturing into the waters. Armed with traditional bamboo fishing apparatus such as julki, jakoi, and khola, they skillfully engage in the age-old practice of catching fish, adding a cultural and traditional flair to the proceedings.

In the contemporary era, the Gobha Raja upholds the age-old tradition by gracing the fair with his presence and, even if merely symbolically, collecting taxes from his 'subjects'. This symbolic act serves as a poignant link to the enduring legacy of his forebears. The King, alongside his entourage, seamlessly blends with the diverse gathering of visitors. Engaging in camaraderie, they actively participate in the communal feasting along the picturesque banks of the beel, fostering a sense of unity and shared celebration.

While the Jonbeel Mela has not remained untouched by contemporary influences - evident in the allure of a colossal Ferris wheel that captivates today's audience - its core essence remains resolute. Beyond the superficial infusion of modern elements, the mela proudly preserves its intrinsic identity, serving as a living testament to the foresight of the Ahom Kings. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

A new beginning, or is Taiwan sitting at cusp of TSAI 3.0?



By: Girish Linganna

Once dubbed 'troublemaker' and a 'dangerous separatist' by Beijing for his views on Taiwan's sovereignty, 64-year-old vice-president, son of a miner and doctor-politician William Lai Ching-wei has now been chosen Taiwan's next president. His immediate task on hand is to navigate Taiwan's tenuous relationship with China despite Beijing's exhortations not to vote for him since he will bring "severe danger" to cross-strait relations, as quoted by a Washington Post report.

Although China has repeatedly warned against voting for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), millions of Taiwanese headed to the polls on Saturday to give the DPP - a party China has red-flagged for its 'questionable' flirting with the issue of 'Taiwanese independence' - an unprecedented third term. Lai garnered around 40% of the total votes that were cast in more than 90% of the polling stations in the island by the last count on Saturday evening. Two of his other rival candidates were Hou Yu-ih of the conservative Kuomintang (KMT) party and ex-Mayor of Taipei, Ko Wen-je, of the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), founded as recently as in 2019. Lai will formally be installed as the next president on May 20. Speaking to reporters after his win, Lai said, "I have an im-

portant responsibility... that is maintaining the peace and stability in the Strait of Taiwan." He did not elaborate on how he proposed to do it, but said he was bent on safeguarding Taiwan from China's "aggressive threats and intimidation".

The US has congratulated Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen and President-elect Lai at meetings with an unofficial Washington delegation, angering Beijing at the overseas government extending its support for Taiwan following the election result. President Tsai Ing-wen, who has already served two terms, was deemed ineligible to run for re-election. Red-flagging 'independence': China's has staked claims over Taiwan for many years now and considers the island its 'home territory'. Chinese President Xi Jinping has set "reunification" as a non-negotiable target.

China has not only spoken in no uncertain terms of a long-term "peaceful reunification" goal to woo Taiwan's populace through 'soft power' and a Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-sponsored propaganda blitz that shows "reunification" as a positive factor, but also taken recourse to veiled - and not so veiled - threats that have grown more strident over the past year. President Xi has even gone on record to state that the "reunification has a deadline" that cannot be missed.

China sees self-ruled Taiwan as a breakaway province to eventually be brought

under Beijing's control and has not ruled out the use of force to take over the island. But Taiwan prides itself as distinct from the Chinese mainland, complete with its own constitution and democratically chosen leaders.

With every election held in the island, China gets more upset by the assertion of a Taiwanese identity that thwarts the chances of its stated goal of a "peaceful reunification" with the mainland. But, in the event of a military faceoff, China's 2,035,000 total active forces would overwhelm Taiwan's 169,000 (Source: The Military Balance 2023, IISS) many times over.

Background to China's claims: According to historical sources, says a BBC report, Taiwan first came under the full control of a Chinese empire in the 17th Century. In 1895, the country became a Japanese colony, after the Qing empire lost the first Sino-Japanese war. Then, in 1945, after Japan lost World War II, China took the island but, now, a nationalist government, led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, was in power.

This was at the height of a decades-long conflict between General Chiang's forces and Mao Zedong's Communist Party, adds the BBC report. In 1949, when the communists won, Chiang and the remaining nationalist party, known as the Kuomintang or KMT, fled mainland China to Taiwan, escaping impending defeat in the civil war at the hands of Mao Zedong's communist forces, and ruled the land for decades. They named it the Republic of China (RoC), a name Taiwan has retained. The mainland, ruled by Mao and the CCP, became the People's Republic of China. Both laid claim to the other's territory. Neither Chiang, nor Mao, conceived of Taiwan as a separate entity with a separate people. But that is what has now transpired. China has never demurred in staking its claim on the island. But, other than that, all else seems to have changed on either side of the 100-mile strait. China is now more economically prosperous, militarily stronger and unmistakably the 'Big Brother'

challenger. Taiwan, on the other hand, is now a healthy democracy with yet another successfully completed election where its ties with Beijing are being tested. Irrespective of the result of Saturday's referendum, Taiwan's independence is a real danger to the CCP's "reunification" goal.

Strategic importance of Taiwan: Taiwan, with its close links to China, is its largest trade partner. In the early-1960s, Taiwan experienced a high growth trajectory of its economy and industrialization, termed 'Taiwan Miracle'. In the late-1980s/early-1990s, the RoC morphed from a one-party state under military rule to a multi-party democracy, with presidents chosen by ballot since 1996. Taiwan, a developed country, has an export-driven industrial infrastructure which is the twenty-first-largest in the world by nominal GDP and the twentieth-largest by PPP measures, focusing on machinery, steel, electronics and chemicals manufacturing. Taiwan's economy is another factor. Most of the world's electronic products - from mobile phones to electric vehicles - are powered by Taiwan-made computer chips. By one measure, a single Taiwanese company - the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) holds more than 50% of the world's market.

The island sits in the so-called 'first island chain', which includes a list of US-friendly territories crucial to Washington's foreign policy in the region. China's increasingly aggressive aspirations in the South China Sea have also made Taiwan more significant to US calculations. So, if China annexes the nation, it could spread its clout in the western Pacific region, challenging US ambitions. Beijing would also hold the key to a thriving industry that spurs the world economy.

But China has its own version of its hegemonic goals, claiming that its intentions are peaceful, all the while berating the US for surrounding Taiwan with its military bases stretching from Japan in its north to Australia in the south. (IPA Service)

Amazon basin is in transition to an anthropogenic disturbance-dominated regime, mainly driven by globalisation

By: Jochen Schöngart

The Amazon basin is facing its worst drought for the last 122 years. Extreme high air and water temperatures, large-scale fires, extreme low water levels in rivers and floodplains and strongly reduced rainfall cause severe impacts with complex environmental, social and economic dimensions. This challenges the society and public policies in the largest hydrobasin on Earth, which is undergoing an intensification of the hydrological cycle during the last decades, mainly driven by climate change.

The Amazon basin represents the largest hydrobasin on Earth (about 6,87 million sq km) with 16-18 per cent of the global freshwater discharge to the oceans. It is the largest and most intense terrestrial convective centre in the Earth system, coupled to global atmospheric circulations.

About 150-200 billion tonnes of carbon is stored in biomass and soils and Amazonia is home to about 10 per cent of the known global biodiversity which is intrinsically related to the hydrological and biogeochemical cycles providing essential ecosystem services. These numbers underlie the global importance of the largest tropical rainforest on Earth, composed by different ecosystems, among them the large river floodplains (about 750,000 sq km), regionally called várzea (nutrient-rich) and igapó (nutrient-poor), which are connected to the large rivers by the annual, regular and predictable flood pulse.

This phenomenon is the main driver of geomorphological processes and biogeochemical cycles in the floodplain ecosystems, triggering life cycles and growth rhythms of the adapted biota, but also economic activities of the indigenous and traditional populations, such as fishery, livestock production, agriculture and the use of timber and non-timber forest products. Since Pre-Columbian times, the Amazonian floodplains are occupied by a dense population

due to the easy accessibility, richness in natural resources and, especially in the várzea, the fertile alluvial soils.

In the Central Amazon region, the flood pulse regime is characterised by one regular and predictable high-water (May-July) and low-water period (October/November) with a mean amplitude (difference of the annual minimum and maximum water level) of about 10 metres. Since September 1902, the water level is daily monitored at the Port of Manaus, reflecting the rainfall conditions of the Negro and Solimões river catchments with an area of about 3 million sq km.

Several extreme flood and drought events have been recorded on this 122-year-long instrumental record. The hydrological regime in the Central Amazon region is undergoing an intensification in this century, especially driven by the increasing magnitude and frequency of extreme flood events. Nine severe flood events have been recorded in this century, the same number as in the last century. However, the emergency situation caused by the recent extreme floods during the period 2009-2022 is already 29 per cent higher compared to the entire 20th century.

Over the last 120 years, the mean water level in the Central Amazon region increased by about 1 metre, much more than the rise of the sea level during this period. After the record flood in June 2021, reaching the gauge of 30.02 metres at the Port of Manaus, nobody expected the occurrence of a historical drought, which reached on October 26, 2023 the lowest water level on record with 12.70 metres in Manaus; a difference of more the 17.3 metres, corresponding to the height of a building with five floors. This raises the question as to what caused this severe drought.

Causes of the drought

Several mechanisms with synergies and feedback loops are causing the severe drought condition affecting almost the entire Amazon basin. One factor is El Niño (the warm phase of the El



Niño-Southern Oscillation — ENSO), the largest interannual climate variation in the Earth system. This climate phenomenon is characterised by anomalous warm surface waters in the east-central portion of the Equatorial Pacific, determining the upward branch of the Walker Cell. This results in descending branches of dry air masses localised over northern South America and the Indo-Pacific region, which suppress cloud convection and generate dry and hot weather conditions.

El Niños which have their magnitude of anomalous warm sea surface waters in the eastern Equatorial Pacific (EP), such as the current El Niño event, have stronger impacts on the Amazonian climate in time and space compared to those events which have their magnitude in the central region of the Equatorial Pacific. In general, EP El Niños reduce the amount of rainfall in the trimestral period of June-August onwards, affecting the northeastern part of the Amazon basin, extending toward the southeastern, central and northwestern sections along the El Niño evolution, reaching its peak in the period December-February.

As a result of the subsidence of dry air masses over the Amazon basin, the Hadley Cell inverts and causes an increase in rainfall and flooding in the subtropical region of South America (parts of south-eastern and southern Brazil, Uruguay and northern Argentina).

What differentiates this severe drought from former ones, is the

simultaneous heating of the Tropical North Atlantic (TNA), characterising the warm phase of the Atlantic Meridional Mode (AMM). This leads to a position of the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITZC) at higher latitudes in the northern hemisphere, compared to normal conditions. The water vapour generated by the warm surface of the TNA is no longer imported by the trade winds into the Amazon basin, causing severe meteorological droughts especially in the southern and southwestern section, intensifying the dry season (July-September).

A third mechanism is the warm phase of the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO). This low frequency oscillation is characterised by a cyclical variation of the large-scale oceanic and atmospheric conditions in the TNA that increases (warm phase) and decreases (cold phase) the sea surface temperature (SST) with cycles of 60 to 80 years as a result of variability in the thermohaline circulation.

The majority (80 per cent) of the historical severe hydrological droughts in the Amazon basin coincides with the warm phase of AMO which is dominating since the mid 1990s. The warm phases of AMM and AMO, further favour the formation of cyclones and hurricanes by the warm surface waters of the TNA, transporting moisture from the ITCZ to higher latitudes in the northern hemisphere (Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico).

High deforestation rates and/or large-scale fires locally and regionally affect the hydro-

logical cycle in the Amazon basin in addition creating feedback loops. Deforestation reduces the latent heat loss (evapotranspiration) and increases the sensible heat loss, contributing to the heating of the lower atmosphere and reducing the amount of water vapour in the atmosphere. The hot and dry conditions favour the occurrence of anthropogenic large-scale fires. This leads to the emission of large amounts of aerosols, which function in the atmosphere as cloud condensation nuclei.

However, in consequence of the reduced water recycling by the forest vegetation, especially in regions undergoing high deforestation and landscape fragmentation, and the meteorological drought conditions the relative air humidity is low, suppressing cloud formation in the atmospheric boundary layer. Cloud formation occurs at higher altitudes leading to heavy, strong and isolated precipitation events of cold rain or even hail, as observed during this extreme drought event, accompanied by strong winds and lightning.

Overall, the synergies and feedback loops of these mechanisms induced a severe hydroclimatic drought covering almost the entire Amazon basin leading to extremely low water levels of rivers and floodplains. In addition, global warming leads to continuously increasing temperatures in the Amazon and under the current severe drought conditions, temperatures are exceeding 40°C of the air and even of water in floodplain lakes, with

strongly reduced water volumes.

Impacts of severe drought

The severe drought conditions lead to the isolation of communities of traditional and indigenous populations and municipalities which historically have been implemented along rivers and floodplain lakes and channels. Besides the risk for fluvial navigation by the extreme low water levels and appearing sandbars and rocks, the isolation causes massive problems to supply the population with drinking water, food, medicines and to provide essential public services (health, education).

Populations in isolated regions must face long walkways under extreme hot conditions to access essential goods and services. The limited fluvial navigations cause further huge economic losses for commerce and many industrial sectors, as goods and materials are not timely delivered. The hot climate and severe drought result in losses of agricultural crops and livestock production. The extreme warm water in the floodplains cause massive mortality of fishes, aquatic mammals (manatees and the iconic river dolphins) and other aquatic organisms.

Health conditions of the affected populations is impacted by air pollution in urban and rural regions caused by large-scale fires, extreme hot weather conditions and, especially in the floodplains, by illness caused by the consumption of contaminated water and food. Further observed and registered impacts are landslides (regionally called 'terra caída') as the extreme low water levels destabilise the alluvial soils, leading to death, loss of houses, communities and large infrastructures of industrial ports. These massive and complex impacts challenge various socioeconomic sectors, public policies and the society in general.

The historical drought in the Amazon basin must be seen in the context of increasing extreme hydroclimatic events and global climate change scenarios. The two strongest hydrological

droughts (2023, 2010) and the four highest flood events (2009, 2012, 2021, 2022) of the 122-year long record occurred all during the last 15 years (12.3 per cent of the instrumental record). The annual amplitude in the Central Amazon region increased by 1.5 metres during the last 30 years, compared to the period before. This period is also characterised by a continuously increasing temperature.

Overall, these rapidly intensifying changes are result of decadal climate variability, increasing extreme hydroclimatic events, synergisms and feedback loops between land-use and climate change which are unprecedented for the Amazon region. This has massive impacts on biodiversity, ecosystem services, food webs and the livelihood and food security of hundreds of thousands of people in the floodplains and society in general.

The Amazon basin is in transition to an anthropogenic disturbance-dominated regime, mainly driven by globalisation (climate change and economic interests). Therefore, international support is urgently needed to strengthen national efforts to increase conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, for large-scale ecological restoration and to promote a sustainable development for the Amazon region.

Strengthening science and education is of high relevance under this scenario to provide new innovative technologies to adapt management systems and the livelihood of vulnerable populations and to mitigate the impacts on biodiversity and the services and functioning of ecosystems which are approaching more and more to critical points of no return. Compared to other massive climate shifts along Earth's history, the ongoing climate change is caused by a species and occurs much more fast. But this species also has the knowledge to mitigate and even impede this process, but time is running out. It depends on us what legacy we want to leave for the next and future generations. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

A heatwave in Antarctica totally blew the minds of scientists. What they deciphered is alarming

By: Dana M. Bergstrom

Climate scientists don't like surprises. It means our deep understanding of how the climate works isn't quite as complete as we need. But unfortunately, as climate change worsens, surprises and unprecedented events keep happening.

In March 2022, Antarctica experienced an extraordinary heatwave. Large swathes of East Antarctica experienced temperatures up to 40°C (72°F) above normal, shattering temperature records. It was the most intense heatwave ever recorded anywhere in the world.

So shocking and rare was the event, it blew the minds of the Antarctic climate science community. A major global research project was launched to unravel the reasons behind it and the damage it caused. A team of 54 researchers, including me, delved into the intricacies of the phenomenon. The team was led by Swiss climatologist Jonathan Wille, and involved experts from 14 countries. The collaboration resulted in two groundbreaking papers published today.

The results are alarming. But they provide scientists a deeper understanding of the links between the tropics and Antarctica — and give the global community a chance to prepare for what a warmer world may bring.

Head-hurting complexity

The papers tell a complex story that began half a world away from Antarctica. Under La Niña conditions, tropical heat near Indonesia poured into the skies above the Indian Ocean. At the same time, repeated weather troughs pulsing eastwards were generating from southern Africa. These factors combined into a late, Indian Ocean tropical cyclone season.

Between late February and late March 2022, 12 tropical storms had brewed. Five storms revved up to become tropical cyclones, and heat and moisture from some of these cyclones mashed together. A meandering jet stream picked up this air and swiftly

transported it vast distances across the planet to Antarctica.

Below Australia, this jet stream also contributed to blocking the eastward passage of a high pressure system. When the tropical air collided with this so-called "blocking high", it caused the most intense atmospheric river ever observed over East Antarctica. This propelled the tropical heat and moisture southward into the heart of the Antarctic continent.

Luck was on Antarctica's side. The event caused the vulnerable Conger Ice Shelf to finally collapse. But the impacts were otherwise not as bad as they could have been. That's because the heatwave struck in March, the month when Antarctica transitions to its dark, extremely cold winter. If a future heatwave arrives in summer — which is more likely under climate change — the results could be catastrophic.

Despite the heatwave, most inland temperatures stayed below zero. The spike included a new all-time temperature high of -9.4°C (15.1°F) on March 18 near Antarctica's Concordia Research Station. To understand the immensity of this, consider that the previous March maximum temperature at this location was -27.6°C (-17.68°F). At the heatwave's peak, 3.3 million square kilometres in East Antarctica — an area about the size of India — was affected by the heatwave.

The impacts included widespread rain and surface melt along coastal areas. But inland, the tropical moisture fell as snow — lots and lots of snow. Interestingly, the weight of the snow offset ice loss in Antarctica for the year. This delivered a temporary reprieve from Antarctica's contribution to global sea-level rise.

These images, acquired by the Copernicus Sentinel-2 satellites on January 30 2022 (left) and March 21 2022 (right), show the Conger ice shelf before and after the collapse, which was triggered by a shocking heatwave. European Union, Copernicus Sentinel-2 satellite imagery, CC BY 4.0

Deed.

Learning from the results

So what are the lessons here? Let's begin with the nice bit. The study was made possible by international collaboration across Antarctica's scientific community, including the open sharing of datasets. This collaboration is a touchstone of the Antarctic Treaty. It serves as a testament to the significance of peaceful international cooperation and should be celebrated.

Less heartwarming, the extraordinary heatwave shows how compounding weather events in the tropics can affect the vast Antarctic ice sheet. The heatwave further reduced the extent of sea ice, which was already at record lows. This loss of sea ice exacerbated this year resulting in the lowest summer and winter sea ice ever recorded. It shows how disturbances in one year can compound in later years.

The event also demonstrated how tropical heat can trigger the collapse of unstable ice shelves. Floating ice shelves don't contribute to global sea-level rise, but they act as dams to the ice sheets behind them, which do contribute.

This research calculated that such temperature anomalies occur in Antarctica about once a century, but concluded that under climate change, they will occur more frequently.

The findings enable the global community to improve its planning for various scenarios. For example, if a heatwave of similar magnitude hit in summer, how much ice melt would there be? If an atmospheric river hit the DooDooms glacier in the West Antarctic, what rate of sea level rise would that trigger? And how can governments across the world prepare coastal communities for sea level rise greater than currently calculated?

This research contributes another piece to the complex jigsaw puzzle of climate change. And reminds us all, that delays to action on climate change will raise the price we pay. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Another looming crisis in the Middle East: Climate change

By: Yossi Mann

Southern Iraq, once known as the Garden of Eden, is poised to become a scorching wasteland in the forthcoming decades. A study, led by this author in collaboration with the chief researcher of the Israel Meteorological Service, Dr Yoav Levi, projects that in the not-too-distant future, residents of this region will endure hours daily with temperatures soaring above 55°C. While this grim forecast is for the future, the ominous uptick in temperatures isn't speculative but already a reality in Iraq.

Measurements conducted between 2012 and 2019 have seen temperatures spike to a staggering 54°C on several occasions. Last year, we witnessed heatwaves exceeding 50°C, causing recurrent power blackouts, dwindling levels of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers — Iraq's lifelines — coupled with food shortages, plummeting labour productivity due to unbearable heat, and an increase in sandstorms, which obstruct oil tankers' access to the southern ports. These challenges have incited not just socio-economic turmoil but also severe security disturbances, as evidenced by the violent protests of 2018 in southern Iraq.

The impact of climate change on the stability of the Middle East is now being felt in Libya as well. After enduring a decade-long devastating civil war, the nation showed signs of recovery in recent years, with oil production climbing from a mere 315,000 barrels per day in 2018 to 1.2 million just last month. Yet, a catastrophic cyclone in September 2023 submerged significant parts of Libya, shutting down four crucial sea ports and jeopardising its oil exports. Just as in Iraq, a climatic calamity ignited violence after the government faced backlash for its inadequate flood response, which resulted in over 5,000 casualties.

In contrast to Iraq and Libya, where riots seen in the wake of climate disasters were relatively short-term, in Syria, the onset of the 2011 civil war can be partly attributed to a climatic disaster. The country suffered its worst drought in nearly a millennium in 2010, wiping out the livelihoods of

800,000 people and decimating 85 percent of the country's agriculture. This prompted 1.5 million individuals to migrate to already congested cities, brewing discontent and unrest.

Another country in the region that has experienced a series of riots in recent years related to climate crises is Iran. Once the Middle East's (West Asia) wheat breadbasket, Iran has been rocked by climate-induced protests. In 2018 and again in 2021, severe droughts triggered mass demonstrations, demanding better water management and expressing broader regime disapproval. By August 2023, another wave of protests erupted in southern Iran due to prolonged droughts affecting agriculture and regular water supply.

In October 2019, violent riots broke out in Lebanon following the government's intentions to cut gasoline subsidies to raise taxes. However, this is not the first time that angry demonstrations have broken out in a country saturated with bloody civil wars. But the background to the riots is also rooted in climate change. A few weeks before the demonstrations, a severe heat wave broke out, resulting in huge fires in the Shuf Mountains. As a result, the air was polluted, and some of the water sources were deemed unfit for drinking. These fires broke out in the land known as the "Land of the Trees of Lebanon," which is reflected in the country's flag. This means that the country that for thousands of years preserved the unique identity of its high Cedar trees, experienced a wave of fires that damaged what it is most associated with it. The fact that the area is full of cedar trees poses a fire hazard that could consume whole villages and even cities. Therefore, although in the eyes of many,

the immediate threats of access to water and electricity are more serious, in Lebanon, climate change has proven to be an immediate threat here as well.

Yemen epitomises the complex challenges of the Middle East. It is suffering from extreme poverty, unemployment estimated at 13.59 percent, alarming levels of illiteracy, and minimal access to fresh water. It also serves as a hub for radical Islamist groups from both Shia and Sunni sects. On top of all this, Yemen is among the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change, ranked 171st out of 181 countries in the ND-GAIN Index. Similar to the civil war in

Syria, a connection between climate change and the ongoing war in Yemen — the population's dire need for water

crisis, made worse due to climate change, is a critical factor underlying the country's unrest, and as such can potentially prolong and worsen the ongoing conflict. Fuel prices, which in Yemen are closely related to the price of water, helped ignite protests in 2014. Yemen, one of the world's hottest countries, is already bearing the brunt of regional droughts and an extremely dry climate. While it is unclear to what extent the water crisis was a catalyst to the current war, a 2011 report had already highlighted factors that could potentially lead to civil unrest in the country — including, a water shortage so severe that it threatens people's survival and their livelihood, predominantly based on agriculture. Furthermore, reports from February 2016 revealed that Saudi planes bombed and destroyed a reservoir that held the drinking water for over 30,000 Yemenis, with approximately 5,000 cubic meters of water, which caused another flare-up of fighting near the

area of the attack. Such incidents underscore the connection between climate change, civil unrest, and sustained regional instability.

In a region traditionally linked more with security challenges, the climate crisis has become a leading concern. It ignites the very sparks of violence, poverty, inequality, and migration, exacerbating regional instability. Food scarcity in a region marked by high birth rates and consumption, migration from unbearably hot zones to cooler territories, and threats to an agriculture sector still employing 40 percent of the Middle East's population, underscore the monumental challenges posed to the region by the climate crisis. This upheaval threatens not just regional stability but that of the world.

The upcoming COP28 climate conference in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) serves as a wake-up call for the international community and Middle Eastern countries to join forces in addressing this pressing threat. Amid growing escalation following the brutal attack by Hamas on Israel, the unfolding Israeli response, and the looming potential for violence to spread in the region, the conference can serve as an important show of regional and international action aimed at promoting regional stability and problem-solving.

Middle Eastern nations, despite historical and current animosities and conflicts, and faced with rapid regional changes, need to recognise the shared threat of climate change. There is potential for regional cooperation in terms of knowledge-sharing, disaster response strategies, and investment in renewable energy sources.

Hosted by a nation with proven transformative domestic policies and growing regional sway, the COP28 conference is taking place amid growing acknowledgement that issues like climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, and indeed war, necessitate international and regional solutions. Given these circumstances, the UAE is in a particularly fitting position to spearhead efforts to tackle what is already understood by many as an immediate and existential threat to the region. (Courtesy: ORF)

Russian missiles hit Ukrainian apartment buildings and injure 17 in latest strikes on civilian areas



KYIV, Jan 17: Russia fired two missiles at Kharkiv city in north-eastern Ukraine during the night, hitting apartment buildings and a medical center and injuring 17 people, officials said on Wednesday, in Moscow's latest strikes on civilian areas in the almost two-year war.

The S-300 missiles landed after dark Tuesday, Kharkiv regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said on Telegram. The surface-to-air missiles have been adapted by Russia to hit land targets and are cheaper to produce than ballistic or cruise missiles. However, they are inaccurate and have a shorter range, analysts say.

Both sides are looking to replenish their weapons stockpiles as fighting along the 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line is largely bogged down by winter weather and the war's focus turns to long-range missile, drone and artillery strikes. Russia's intense aerial attacks across Ukraine in recent weeks sharply increased civilian casualties in December, with over 100 killed and nearly 500 injured, according to the United Nations.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been making a diplomatic push for Kyiv's Western allies to keep supplying weaponry. He recently visited three Baltic countries and was at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to make his

case on Tuesday.

The night-time attack on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, struck 20 residential buildings and a medical center, authorities said. Deeper inside the region of the same name, areas close to the front line came under artillery fire, according to officials.

Ukraine's air force said it intercepted 19 out of 20 Shahed-type drones fired by Russia overnight, though regional officials reported that other drones made it through air defenses.

In the southern city of Odesa, three people were injured in a drone attack that forced the evacuation of about 130 people from an apartment building, regional Gov. Oleh Kiper said. In Kherson, another southern city, artillery fire injured three people and damaged residential districts overnight, according to regional chief Oleksandr Prokudin.

The missile attacks on Kharkiv came from the Russian border region of Belgorod, Ukrainian officials said. That area has experienced a recent increase of cross-border attacks by Ukraine.

The Russian defense ministry said Wednesday that two winged Ukrainian drones and four missiles were shot down over the Belgorod region overnight and another around noon local time on Wednesday. It provided no details about damage or injuries. (AP)

India an extraordinary success story US Secretary of State Blinken

DAVOS, Jan 17: Describing India as an "extraordinary success story", US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday said the policies and programmes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi have been very beneficial to the people of India.

Speaking here at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2024, he also said US President Joe Biden and Modi enjoy excellent relations and their conversations cover all aspects, including US-India relations.

Hailing the expansion of bilateral ties between the two countries, Blinken said the US and India are always in constant conversations and those cover all aspects, including on democracy and fundamental rights. "It's part of very sustained and very real conversation we have always had," he said.

He was replying to a question on whether the rise of Hindu nationalism concerns India despite the country's robust economic growth and infrastructure building under the Modi regime. (PTI)

Top NATO military officer urges allies and leaders to plan for the unexpected in Ukraine

BRUSSELS, Jan 17: Ukraine is locked in an existential battle for its survival almost two years into its war with Russia and Western armies and political leaders must drastically change the way they help it fend off invading forces, a top NATO military officer said on Wednesday.

At a meeting of the 31-nation alliance's top brass, the chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, also said that behind President Vladimir Putin's rationale for the war is a fear of democracy, in a year marked by elections around the world.

Over two days of talks in Brussels, NATO's top officers are expected to detail plans for what are set to be the biggest military exercises in Europe since the Cold War later this year. The wargames are meant as a fresh show of strength from NATO and its commitment to defend all al-

lied nations from attack.

As the war bogs down, and with U.S. and European Union funding for Ukraine's conflict-ravaged economy held up by political infighting, Bauer appealed for a "whole of society approach" to the challenge that goes beyond military planning.

"We need public and private actors to change their mindset for an era in which everything was plannable, foreseeable, controllable and focused on efficiency to an era in which anything can happen at any time. An era in which we need to expect the unexpected," he said as he opened the meeting.

"In order to be fully effective, also in the future, we need a warfighting transformation of NATO," Bauer added.

On Monday, U.K. Defense Secretary Grant Shapps announced that his government would send 20,000 troops to

take part in the NATO military exercises — known as "Steadfast Defender" — with many deployed in eastern Europe from February to June.

The U.K. will also send advanced fighter jets and surveillance planes, plus warships and submarines.

With ammunition stockpiles diminishing as allies send military materiel to Ukraine, the Norwegian government said Wednesday it was earmarking 2 billion kroner (\$192 million) to boost defense industry production capacity, saying there is "a need for large quantities of ammunition."

Norway's Defense Minister Bjørn Arild Gram said that "increasing capacity in the defense industry is important, both for Ukraine, but also to safeguard our own security."

Half the funds will go to Nammo, a Norway-based aerospace and defense group that specializes in the produc-

tion of ammunition, rocket engines and space applications, "to increase the production of artillery ammunition," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said.

In Brussels, Bauer said NATO would continue to support Ukraine long-term.

"Today is the 693rd day of what Russia thought would be a three-day war. Ukraine will have our support for every day that is to come because the outcome of this war will determine the fate of the world," he said.

"This war has never been about any real security threat to Russia coming from either Ukraine or NATO," Bauer added.

"This war is about Russia fearing something much more powerful than any physical weapon on earth — democracy. If people in Ukraine can have democratic rights, then people in Russia will soon crave them too." (AP)

Hamis has said it will not release any more hostages until there is a permanent cease-fire

Qatar and France send medicine for hostages in Gaza as war rages on and regional tensions spike

RAFAH, Jan 17: A shipment of medicine for dozens of hostages held by Hamas was en route to Gaza on Wednesday after France and Qatar mediated the first agreement between Israel and the militant group since a weeklong cease-fire in November.

The medicines arrived in Egypt and were to be delivered to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which will then hand them over to Hamas. Qatar said the deal also includes the delivery of additional medicine and humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the besieged coastal enclave.

The deal came more than 100 days into a conflict that shows no sign of ending and which has sparked tensions across the Middle East, with a dizzying array of strikes and counterstrikes in recent days from northern Iraq to the Red Sea and from southern Lebanon to Pakistan.

In Gaza, Palestinian militants are still putting up resistance across the narrow coastal strip in the face of one of the deadliest military campaigns in recent history. Some 85% of the territory's population of 2.3 million people have fled their homes and the United Nations says a quarter of the population is starving.

Israel has vowed to dismantle Hamas' military and governing abilities to ensure that it can never repeat the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war. Militants burst through Israel's border defenses and stormed through several communities, killing some 1,200 people,

mostly civilians, and capturing around 250. Israel has also vowed to return the more than 100 hostages still held inside Gaza after Hamas released most of the rest in November in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel. Israel says only military pressure will bring about the release of more captives, but as the fighting grinds on they are at increased

risk of being killed in Israeli strikes or during rescue operations. Hamas has said it will not release any more hostages until there is a permanent cease-fire, something Israel and the United States, its top ally, have ruled out.

In just the past few days, a U.S.-led coalition has carried out strikes against Iran-backed Houthis rebels in Yemen; Iran has struck what it described as an Israeli spy headquarters in northern Iraq and anti-Iran militants in Pakistan and Syria; and Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have escalated the intensity of their fighting across the border. Iran's militant allies across the region say they are striking U.S. and Israeli targets to pressure them to halt the Gaza offensive. Iran

itself has encouraged the attacks while avoiding direct involvement, but appeared to be flexing its muscles with the strikes in Syria and Pakistan.

The Houthis have vowed to continue attacking international shipping in the Red Sea in what they say is a blockade of Israel, with repercussions for global trade.

Each party appears to be seeking some form of deterrence against its adversaries. But the longer the war in Gaza lasts, the more likely it is that one of them goes a step too far, potentially triggering another war.

The biggest risk is along the Israel-Lebanon border, where Israel has vowed to halt Hezbollah attacks so that tens of thousands of Israelis can return to their homes in communities evacuated in October. Hezbollah hopes to take the pressure off Gaza by tying down Israeli troops in the north.

Tensions are also soaring in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces have conducted near-daily arrest raids that often trigger shootouts with Palestinian militants.



Sunak tries to quell Conservative revolt over his Rwanda plan for migrants

LONDON, Jan 17: U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces a test of his authority and his nerve on Wednesday as he tries to subdue a Conservative Party rebellion and win parliamentary approval for his stalled plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda.

Lawmakers are due to vote on a bill that aims to overcome a U.K. Supreme Court block on the Rwanda plan, a day after some 60 members of Sunak's governing Conservatives rebelled in an effort to make the legislation tougher. The dissent cost Sunak two party deputy chairmen, who quit in order to vote against the government on the amendments. A junior ministerial aide also resigned.

A similar rebellion on Wednesday would doom the Safety of Rwanda Bill, and potentially Sunak's 15-month-old government.

Sunak has made the controversial — and expensive — immigration policy central to his attempt to win an election this year. To do that he needs to unite the Conservatives, who trail far behind the Labour opposition in opinion polls. But the liberal and law-and-order wings of the Conservatives — always uneasy allies — are at loggerheads over the Rwanda plan.

Moderates worry the policy is too extreme, concerns underscored when the United Nations' refugee agency said this week the Rwanda plan "is not compatible with international refugee law." However, many on the party's powerful right wing think the bill doesn't go far enough in deterring migration to the



U.K. Hard-liners' attempts to toughen the bill by closing down avenues of appeal for asylum-seekers failed Tuesday, and some of the Conservative rebels say they will oppose the legislation as a whole if it is not strengthened. If about 30 Tory lawmakers oppose the bill, it could be enough, along with opposition votes, to kill the legislation.

But many Conservative lawmakers may hesitate to take the nuclear option of killing Sunak's signature policy, a move that could trigger panicky moves to replace him or even spark a snap election. The government has to call a national election by the end of the year. Sunak insists the bill goes as far as the government can because Rwanda will pull out of its agreement to rehouse asylum-seekers if the U.K. breaks international law.

Illegal Immigration Minister Michael Tomlinson said there was only an "inch of difference" between the government and its Conservative critics, and "actually we all want

the same thing." He said he was confident the bill "is going to get through tonight."

The Rwanda policy is key to Sunak's pledge to "stop the boats" bringing unauthorized migrants to the U.K. across the English Channel from France. More than 29,000 people made the perilous journey in 2023, down from 42,000 the year before. Five people died during the weekend while trying to launch a boat from northern France in the dark and winter cold.

London and Kigali made a deal almost two years ago under which migrants who reach Britain across the Channel would be sent to Rwanda, where they would stay permanently. Britain has paid Rwanda at least 240 million pounds (\$305 million) under the agreement, but no one has yet been sent to the East African country. The plan has been criticized as inhumane and unworkable by human rights groups and challenged in British courts.

In November the U.K. Supreme Court ruled the policy is illegal because Rwanda isn't a safe country for refugees. In response to the court ruling, Britain and Rwanda signed a treaty pledging to strengthen protections for migrants. Sunak's government argues that the treaty allows it to pass a law declaring Rwanda a safe destination. If approved by Parliament, the law would allow the government to "disapply" sections of U.K. human rights law when it comes to Rwanda-related asylum claims and make it harder to challenge the deportations in court. (AP)

Fireworks factory explodes in central Thailand

BANGKOK, Jan 17: An explosion at a fireworks factory in central Thailand killed at least 15 people on Wednesday, a rescue worker said.

The exact death toll was not immediately clear, but Kritsada Manee-In, a rescue worker with the Samerkun Suphan Buri Rescue Foundation, estimated that around 15 to 17 people had been killed.

Local media offered varying death tolls. Photos posted online by local rescue workers in Suphan Buri province showed the site, in an otherwise unoccupied rice field, leveled flat aside from debris and body parts.

The blast, whose cause was not immediately clear, came less than a month before Chinese New Year in February, when demand for fireworks is strong. In July last year, a large explosion at a fireworks warehouse in southern Thailand killed at least 10 people and wounded more than 100, according to officials.

That explosion in Narathiwat province was in a residential area, damaging about 100 houses within a radius of about 500 meters (1,640 feet), according to the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation. (AP)

Pak's EC warns of election delay due to 'symbol dispute'

ISLAMABAD, Jan 17: Pakistan's election commission has warned that the general elections may have to be delayed if the process of changing electoral symbols does not stop, asserting that it could not keep making alterations with the February 8 polls just around the corner.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said in a statement on Tuesday that after the allotment of the election symbols, political actors are "having them changed through various forums", the Dawn newspaper reported.

Asserting that despite having issued repeated instructions to relevant authorities that election symbols should remain unchanged once the printing starts, the ECP said that if the trend of changing the election symbols did not stop, there would be no other option but to postpone the polls in such constituencies.

"If the process of changing the election symbols continues in the same way, there is a fear of election delay because the ballot papers will have to be reprinted, for which time is already limited, and on the other hand, the special paper available for the ballot papers will also be lost," the ECP statement said.

The electoral watchdog said that following the allotment of election symbols, it had already ordered the printing of ballot papers to the three printing cor-



porations, and the printing work had commenced.

According to The Express Tribune newspaper, the ECP's statement came in response to the requests made by political parties and candidates to change their electoral symbols and the applications pending before the higher courts.

Recently, the Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) central polls in charge, Senator Taj Haider, wrote to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), urging the ECP to change the electoral symbols of at least seven of its candidates as they had not been allotted the party's "arrow" symbol. He added that the returning officers declared the party's candidates independent.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Secretary General Nanyar Hussain Bukhari raised the issue, saying the mat-

ter would be taken to court.

Similarly, a petition of jailed former prime minister and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's founding chairman Imran Khan against the rejection of his nomination papers is still pending with the Lahore High Court, the report said.

Stressing the wastage of paper, the ECP estimated that 2,070 tonnes would be used for printing the ballot papers in the 2024 polls, a multifold increase from the 800 tonnes of paper used in the 2018 elections, the report said. It added that while 220 million ballot papers were printed in 2018, a total of 260 million are being printed this year.

According to the report, cash-strapped Pakistan, which is already facing an acute balance of payment crisis, imports paper. The ECP hands out electoral symbols to political parties and candidates ahead of elections. The symbols appear on ballot papers along with names, but over 40 per cent of Pakistan's 241 million population are illiterate, making the pictures extra important for recognition, the report said.

Imran Khan's PTI party was denied the cricket bat symbol that had become synonymous with the former international cricketer. Pakistan's election commission has rejected his and his party leaders' nomination papers. (PTI)

The number of deaths rose by 690,000 to 11.1 million, more than double last year's increase

China's population dropped for a second straight year as deaths jumped after COVID lockdowns ended

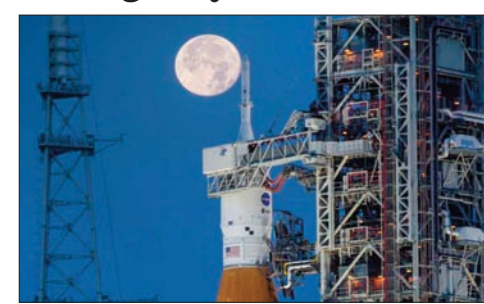
BELJING, Jan 17: China's population dropped by 2 million people in 2023 in the second straight annual drop as births fell and deaths jumped after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, the government said on Wednesday.

The number of deaths rose by 690,000 to 11.1 million, more than double last year's increase. Demographers were expecting a sharp rise in deaths because of COVID-19 outbreaks that started at the end of the previous year and continued through February of last year. The total population stood at 1.4 billion, the statistics bureau said. China, long the most populated country in the world, dropped into second place behind India in 2023, according to U.N. estimates. The number of births fell for the seventh year, reflecting a fall in the birth rate that is a long-running economic and societal challenge for China. The population is aging

steadily, which could slow economic growth over time and challenge the nation's ability to provide for a larger elderly population with fewer workers. The number of births fell by 540,000, which was less than in previous years. About 9 million babies were born in 2023, half of the total in 2016. All the figures are estimates based on surveys and do not include Hong Kong and Macao. China conducts a full census every 10 years.

China, which once sought to control population growth with its one-child policy, is now facing the opposite problem. The government has sought to encourage births since gradually easing the policy over 2014 to 2016 to allow a second child and then a third child in 2021, but with little success.

People are marrying later and sometimes choosing not to have children. Even those who do often have only one child because of the high cost of ed-



ucating children in cities in a highly competitive academic environment. The population of women of child-bearing age has also fallen.

President Xi Jinping told the new leadership of the All-China Women's Federation last October that it is necessary to strengthen guidance for

young people's views on marriage, parenthood and the family, and to promote policies that support parenthood and actively cope with the aging of the population, according to a report on a government website.

"We must tell good stories about family customs, guide women to play a unique role in promoting the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation and establishing good family customs, and create a new culture of family civilization," he was quoted as saying.

The working-age population, defined as those between 16 and 59 years old, fell to 61% of the total population, continuing a gradual decline. The proportion of those aged 60 and older ticked up to 21%. The official retirement age in China is 60 years old for men and 50 or 55 for women.

It is not clear how many people died from

COVID-19 because of the sudden end to China's "zero-COVID" restrictions in December 2022. The government has reported about 80,000 COVID-related deaths from December to February but experts believe it is much higher. Studies have estimated it could have reached 1.4 million or 1.9 million deaths. The drop in population is expected to be less this year, because of the waning effects of the pandemic and the fact that it is the year of the dragon, considered an auspicious year to have children, an expert said at a forum earlier this week, according to the China Daily, an English-language state-owned newspaper.

But Yuan Xin, a professor at Nankai University and vice-president of the China Population Association, added that "the downward trend in China's total population is bound to be long-term and become an inherent characteristic." (AP)

Solution to Naga issue possible only by winning faith of Naga people, through discussion

Modi did nothing to find solution for Naga political issue: Rahul

KOHIMA, Jan 17: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of doing nothing to bring about a solution to the Naga political issue for nine years after the Framework Agreement was signed in 2015.

Addressing a public rally during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra led by him at Nagaland's Mokokchung town, Gandhi said a solution to the problem cannot be brought without having the trust of the Naga people, and without a discussion with them.

Gandhi said, "If you don't have a solution, you should not lie and say you have a solution. You can say that we have to work towards the solution and we will work towards the solution but you must not lie to the Naga people."

He said that the Congress understands that the issue is serious and a solution is required.

Referring to the Framework Agreement, the former Congress president said, "What the Prime Minister promised nine years ago is an empty vow to the Naga people."

During a press conference at Chiephobozou on Tuesday, Gandhi asserted his party is committed to a solution to the decades-old Naga Political Issue. The Naga insurgency began in 1947. To find a solution to the decades-old problem, the Centre has been holding separate negotiations with NSCN-IM since 1997 and the Working Committee of Naga National Political Group (NNPG), comprising at least seven



groups, since 2017.

The Modi government inked a Framework Agreement with NSCN-IM in 2015 and Agreed Position with PGs in 2017. However, the final solution is yet to be attained with NSCN-IM remaining adamant on its demand for a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas.

After travelling almost 180 km from Khuzama village in Kohima district to Mokokchung by road, Gandhi said he observed the bumpy road condition and the erratic power supply. He said, "How can young Nagas compete with the rest of the young people in the country who have better facilities? It is a betrayal to the people of Nagaland. How can we expect to bring a positive future to the people of Nagaland with these roads?"

Claiming that an ideological war is going on in India, the Congress leader alleged that the RSS and BJP are attacking various cultures and religions in the country.

"As Indians, everyone should respect each other's tradition, culture, food habits and religious practices, but the RSS and BJP are attacking them and disrespecting them," he claimed.

Gandhi also attacked the Prime Minister for not visiting Manipur despite months of ethnic strife in the state.

"As an Indian, I am ashamed that the Prime Minister has not been to Manipur yet after what happened there," he said.

Gandhi visited Manipur for two days in June last year, weeks after the violence broke out in the state, and met the affected people lodged in relief camps in several districts.

He asserted that the idea of the Yatra is to bring the attention of the entire country to the people of Manipur, Nagaland and other northeastern states.

Gandhi said that after completing the Yatra, he would come back to Nagaland and spend more days with the people to interact with the youngsters on their aspirations.

The Congress leader declared that henceforth, Nagas have a soldier in New Delhi named Rahul Gandhi. He said, "If you need me to raise any issue in Parliament I will be happy to do it."

He also encouraged young people, especially girls, to enter politics and give Nagaland a new vision for the future.

Gandhi will halt for the night at Tuli and enter Assam on Thursday morning for his onward Yatra. (PTI)

Death toll in Moreh gunfight rises to two, women block road to Imphal airport

IMPHAL, Jan 17: The death toll in the gunfight between state security forces and militants at Moreh in Manipur's Tengnoupal district rose to two after another security personnel was shot dead on Wednesday evening, officials said.

The deceased has been identified as Takhelambam Saileshwore from Lamshang in Imphal West district, they said.

Earlier in the day during an ambush near Ima Kondong Lairembi Devi temple, 32-year-old Wangkhem Somorjit, a Manipur police personnel, died after being hit by bullets. He succumbed to injuries during treatment at Key Location Point (KLP) of Assam Rifles.

Two more Manipur Police personnel were injured in the exchange of fire between security forces and militants, officials added.

The militants had also fired RPG shells at the temporary commando post damaging several vehicles parked in the vicinity.

Meanwhile, large number of women from Malom in Imphal West district blocked the road to



the airport in protest against the killing of the policemen in Moreh.

Spokesperson L Premchand of the Joint Action Committee (JAC) formed in connection with the killing of Somorjit told reporters that "the body of the deceased personnel will not be accepted by the family members till the culprits are arrested and brought to justice."

Wearing traditional mourning dress, women sat on the middle of road to prevent all forms of vehicular movement on the route.

In another development, a large number of Meira Paibis from Imphal's main market of

Khairamband Keithel took out a rally demanding reinforcement of state forces at Moreh. They marched towards the CM's bungalow but were stopped by police.

Moreh has been experiencing regular exchanges of fire between security forces and militants over the past few days. The latest firing incident took place just 48 hours after the arrest of two suspects involved in the killing of a police officer by the state's forces.

Earlier this month, Singh had said there were high chances of involvement of foreign mercenaries from Myanmar in the gun and bomb attacks. (PTI)

Arunachal CM discusses key issues facing Rumgong constituency

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 17: Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday met Rumgong MLA Talem Taboh and members of the BJP mandal team to discuss issues related to the Rumgong constituency.

During the meeting at the CM office in Itanagar, MLA Taboh informed Khandu about the various issues facing his constituency. The chief minister took stock of the pace of development in the Rumgong constituency in the Siang district and discussed strategies to facilitate development for the welfare of the people of the region.

"Pleasure meeting BJP Mandal team of Rumgong constituency led by Hon. MLA Shri Talem Taboh ji," said Arunachal CM in a post on 'X'. "We discussed key issues and strategies for the region's development," he further said.

During the meeting the CM assured the mandal team that his government would take the necessary measures to ensure development in the particular constituency.

Mizoram CM visits Sentinel Centre at Zokhawsang

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 17: Mizoram chief minister Pu Lalduhoma on Wednesday visited the Sentinel Centre of Educational Excellence and Skilling at Zokhawsang on the outskirts of Aizawl.

The Sentinel Centre of Educational Excellence and Skilling has been established by the 23 sector Assam Rifles in collaboration with the National Integrity and Educational Development Organisation and Axiz Bank.

The CM also interacted with Assam Rifles personnel and staff of the educational institution on the occasion. "Chief Minister Pu Lalduhoma visits Sentinel Centre of Educational Excellence and Skilling, Zokhawsang, today. A noble initiative by 23 sector Assam Rifles, in collaboration with National Integrity & Educational Development Organisation (NIEDO) and Axiz Bank," the Mizoram CM office said in a post on their official handle on 'X'.

Moreh remains tense, CM holds meeting to discuss situation

IMPHAL, Jan 17: The situation in Manipur's Moreh continues to remain tense following multiple gun and bomb attacks on policemen by militants and a face-off between locals and central forces, officials said on Wednesday.

According to an official, the gunfight began after militants fired a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) at a temporary police unit near SBI Moreh. This was followed by multiple attacks by militants on security forces at Ward No. 7 and Chikim village, which are located near the town's border with Myanmar.

During an ambush near

Ima Kondong Lairembi Devi temple, 32-year-old Wangkhem Somorjit, a Manipur police personnel, sustained gunshot wounds and died during treatment at Key Location Point (KLP) of Assam Rifles. Two more IRB personnel were injured in the exchange of fire, officials added.

A top official said the body of Somorjit and the two injured personnel have been airlifted by a helicopter to Imphal.

N Bhem (35), who sustained injuries on his left leg, and ASI Sidharth Thokchom (35), who sustained injuries on his face

and ears, have been admitted to the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal for treatment, the official added.

In a related development, a woman was critically injured after being accidentally hit by a vehicle of the central forces when she tried to stop it, according to officials.

Despite curfew, a large number of women came out on the streets and blocked the road to restrict the movement of Assam Rifles and army personnel who were rushing to contain the situation.

A top-level meeting to discuss the situation was

held at the CM's secretariat, attended by chief minister N Biren Singh, ministers, and MLAs, an official told PTI.

Moreh has been experiencing regular exchanges of fire between security forces and militants over the past few days. The latest firing incident took place just 48 hours after the arrest of two suspects involved in the killing of a police officer by the state's forces.

Earlier this month, Singh had said there were high chances of involvement of foreign mercenaries from Myanmar in the gun and bomb attacks. (PTI)

Gauhati HC acting Chief Justice Jamir inaugurates district court complex

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 17: Acting Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court, Justice Lanusangkum Jamir has inaugurated the Tuensang district court complex.

Inaugurating the court complex on Tuesday, Justice Jamir said adequacy of judicial infrastructures is a prerequisite for reduction in pendency and backlog of cases and for better justice delivery system.

He recalled that in the chief justices conference held in 2016, it was decided that the Chief Justice must adopt proactive steps to identify the judi-

ciary infrastructures, ensure timely completion of the projects of the court complexes, constitute a committee to monitor the timely completion of projects and to ascertain the coordination between the district official and decision authority of the state government for the development of the judicial infrastructures.

He added that the district court complex of Tuensang was completed on time following the guidelines of the chief justices conference.

Justice Jamir appreciated the support and cooperation of the state government and involvement of every stakeholder for a robust justice delivery system in Nagaland. Adviser to law and justice

and land revenue departments TN Mannen stressed on the need to revamp customary laws, saying that they might become irrelevant without improvement.

In the technical report, Er. Sungtiba Amer, assistant chief engineer, CAWD, Nagaland, said the project was completed at an expenditure of ₹ 672.59 lakh.

The construction, carried out by Saramati Construction, began in April 2017 and was completed in November 2023. The new building is a G+6 storied RCC structure with a total Plinth Area of 18,578 sq ft. The inauguration ceremony was also attended by Justice Kakheto Sema, judge of the Gauhati High Court.

Manipur govt seeks helicopters from MHA

IMPHAL, Jan 17: The Manipur government has requested the Union ministry of home affairs for helicopters from Wednesday to meet emergency requirements in the wake of the law and order situation in the border town of Moreh, an official said.

Commissioner of the state home department, T Ranjit Singh in a letter to additional secretary (Police II Division), Union ministry of home affairs, said: "The law and order situation in the border town of Moreh has become a matter of serious concern as there has been continuous exchange of fire and this has resulted in the death of one IRB personnel this morning."

"In view of the prevalent situation in Moreh, medical emergency may arise anytime," the letter stated.

The Manipur government has requested for helicopters from MHA for at least seven days as Moreh town witnessed heavy exchange of fire between se-



curity forces and suspected Kuki militants armed with sophisticated weapons at more than three different locations on Wednesday morning.

Moreh is located 105 km from the state capital Imphal. Due to the volatile law and order situation in Tengnoupal district and threat of ambush from Kuki militants and high-way blockade by tribal women, helicopter services have become the only convenient way for airlifting injured personnel.

The letter also informed that MHA had asked to in-

form about the specific period and specify the requirement of MHA Air assets (helicopter) on January 4, as it cannot be possible to provide MHA Air Asset continuously in one place for a longer period due to limited resources in the Northeast region.

One state police personnel had been killed when suspected Kuki militants attacked a security forces' vehicle in Moreh town on Wednesday, police said. (PTI)

The security forces exchanged fire with suspected Kuki militants in three different locations in Moreh town on Wednesday morning, police said. (PTI)

Govt accords top priority to farmers, says Mizoram CM

AIZWAL, Jan 17: Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma on Wednesday said his government gives top priority to farmers, but will not support those who solely seek financial assistance.

During a meeting with leaders of the All Mizoram Farmers' Union (AMFU), the chief minister highlighted the government's efforts to provide facilities for farmers.

Lalduhoma expressed, "We will prioritise farmers, but we will not support individuals who only desire financial aid without putting in the necessary effort to succeed in life."

He mentioned that the government has not fully implemented its policies as the new annual budget is yet to be placed.

Earlier, Lalduhoma had announced that his government would purchase four local agricultural products, from farmers as part of the government's priority programmes to be executed within 100 days. These agricultural products are ginger, turmeric, chili, and broomsticks.

The Mizoram government has recently allocated ₹ 110 crore for the purchase of these four agricultural

products. Lalduhoma said his government would establish a minimum support price for agricultural products and introduce crop insurance to assist farmers of the state.

The government will strive to build paddy fields using modern technologies, he said, adding that forest areas with slopes will be designated for gardening and jhum cultivation, while hill-sides with steep inclines will be preserved for green forest areas to promote biodiversity and water resource development. (PTI)

President unveils busts of freedom fighters at Raj Bhawan

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 17: President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday unveiled the busts of three freedom fighters of Meghalaya at the Raj Bhawan in Shillong ahead of her departure from the capital city. Meghalaya Governor Phagu Chauhan and chief minister Conrad Sangma were also present on the occasion. The President paid tributes to the three freedom fighters, U Tirot Sing, U Kiang Nangbah and Pa Togan Sangma and unveiled their busts. She also planted a tree inside the premises of the Raj Bhawan on the occasion.

Murmu was on a two-day maiden visit to the state, during which she attended the inau-

guration ceremony of the Meghalaya Games, 2024 in Tura. She also virtually laid the foundation of two tourism projects and inaugurated two crucial road projects during her stay in the state. Meanwhile, Conrad Sangma also took the occasion to thank the President for her visit to the state and hoped to host her again in the near future. "Before her departure from Shillong, Hon'ble President of India, Smti. Droupadi Murmu ji planted a tree at Raj Bhawan. We are immensely grateful to her for her gracious presence in our State, joining us for the Meghalaya Games and meeting our people and we look forward to hosting her again," said Conrad Sangma in a post on 'X'

PETTY REPAIRING AND MAINTENANCE OF ELECTRICAL ASSETS

NIT Tender No. EL-GH-946 of 2023-24 Dated: 11-01-2024. Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No. EL-GH-946 of 2023-24. Name of work: At Pandu - Petty repairing and maintenance of electrical Assets under SSE/CP/Pandu including Amingon and Agthori for a period of one year". Tender Value: ₹42.94,738/- Earnest Money: ₹85,900/- Date & Time of Closing of Tender: 15.00 hrs. on 02-02-2024. For details please visit www.ireps.gov.in

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Tripura set to get first tea auction centre

In absence of tea auction centre, tea planters sell products at Guwahati, Kolkata auction centres

AGARTALA, Jan 17: The century-old tea industry in Tripura is set to get a shot in the arm, with the state government deciding to establish an auction centre to help fetch better prices of finished products, a senior official said on Wednesday.

At present, tea planters have to sell products at the Guwahati or Kolkata auction centre.

A NITI Aayog team, which visited the state recently, gave the green signal to set up the auction centre in West Tripura's Durgabari Tea estate, the official said.

"Chief Minister Manik Saha, who held the first meeting of Tripura Institution for Transformation (TIFT) on Tuesday, revealed the decision of setting up a tea auction centre," he said.

This will fulfill the long-



pending demand of tea planters of the state, which produces 90 lakh kg tea annually, he said.

The Tripura Tea Development Corporation (TTDC)

Limited has welcomed the state government's decision to set up the auction centre.

"It will help the tea planters to sell their products at a rea-

sonable price," TTDC chairman Samir Ghosh told PTI.

He said the TTDC will now press for subsidies in transportation and state GST to attract buyers from even outside the state.

"We have to provide some extra benefits to the tea buyers to bring them to the proposed auction centre," Ghosh said.

Tripura has 60 tea estates out of which 42 are owned by private players, 13 operated by co-operative societies and the remaining belong to the TTDC.

Around 80,000 people are directly and indirectly associated with the tea industry in the northeastern state, officials said. The tea produced in the state got its logo and brand, 'Tripureswari Tea' in 2018. (PTI)

No. FA/TR/Tender/2023-24/1524 Dated, December 30, 2023

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed Tenders are invited affixing a non-refundable Court Fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and paise Twenty Five) only are invited from the interested Bidders which will be received by the undersigned through email/speed post/courier/registered post/ tender box till 20.01.2024 up to 3 PM (I.S.T.) and will be opened on 20.01.2024 at 3:30 P.M. (I.S.T.) in the O/o the Field Director, Manas Tiger Reserve, Barpeta Road for the following items as stated below:

Sl. No.	Particulars	Unit	Location	Estimated Amount	Earnest Money
1	Emergent measurement de-siltation of channel near Naryanguri Forest Camp of River Beki under Bansbari Range of Manas Tiger Reserve	1 (one)	Naryanguri Forest Camp under Bansbari Range of MTR	Rs. 1539000.00	Rs. 30780/- for Gen & Rs. 15390/- for SC/ST/OBC

In the event of any unusual occurrence due to strike, bandh, holiday etc. the same will be received and opened on the next working day at same place and same time.

The sealed Tender to be super cribbed in bold letters "TENDER FOR EMERGENT MEASUREMENT DE-SILTATION OF CHANNEL NEAR NARYANGURI FOREST CAMP OF RIVER BEKI UNDER BANSBARI RANGE OF MANAS TIGER RESERVE".

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. The Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent from 11.00 Hrs. to 17.00 Hrs. on all working days from 05.01.2024 to 19.01.2024.

The Tenderer should submit attested copy of up to date Contractor's Registration Certificate, Labour License, Registration of GST, Annual Turnover, PAN Card, Previous Experience Certificate, Financial Soundness Certificate, Income Tax return minimum 3 (three) years, previous experience of similar works etc. along with the tenders.

The Earnest Money should be deposited along with the filled up tender documents in the form of **Fixed Deposit pledged to Field Director, Manas Tiger Reserve, Barpeta Road, Assam** from any Nationalized Bank.

The works need to be completed within 60 (sixty) days from the date of award of contract and payment will be made only after completion of the works as per prescribed Plan & Estimate and subject to availability of fund

Sd/-
Field Director,
Manas Tiger Reserve, Barpeta Road

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1158

ED accuses J'khand govt of trying to 'usurp' Centre's power

Development comes after a top bureaucrat of Jharkhand wrote to an ED investigator seeking reasons to summon an IAS officer and some others as part of a probe



RANCHI, Jan 17: The Enforcement Directorate has written to the Jharkhand government alleging it is trying to "usurp" the powers of the Centre and saying that it has no "locus standi" in money laundering investigations.

The development comes after a top bureaucrat of Jharkhand wrote to an ED investigator seeking reasons to summon an IAS officer and some others as part of a probe.

The federal agency's terse letter to Vandana Dalel, the principal secretary (cabinet secretariat and vigilance) of the Jharkhand government, was sent on Wednesday in response to a letter she sent to the investigating officer based at its zonal office in state capital Ranchi.

Dalel had sought information from the ED's investigating officer (IO) about a money laundering case in which the agency has summoned IAS officer and Sahibganj deputy commissioner Ram Nivas Yadav and some others. The agency had raided these people in connection with an alleged illegal mining case early this month.

Dalel's letter to the ED was sent in the wake of the Jharkhand cabinet approving guidelines last week making it mandatory for Jharkhand bureaucrats to inform the state cabinet secretariat and vigilance department through departmental heads about notices and summons received from central government agencies like the ED, the CBI and the Income-Tax department.

The decision came at a time when the ED is investigating multiple money laundering investigations against high-profile bureaucrats and politicians including chief minister Hemant Soren.

The ED IO, as per contents accessed by PTI, wrote to the principal secretary saying the order passed by the state cabinet and communicated to the agency by her was "beyond the legal competence of state government".

It warned her that the agency "will not hesitate" to file a criminal case against anyone who abets or

conspires to abet the offence of disobedience of summons.

The IO informed Dalel that the summons were not issued "personally" to her but to the named persons and wondered why was she "interfering" in the issue.

"It is pertinent to mention here that the investigating officer is not legally allowed to share any information about ongoing investigation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act with your office as you are not authorised under the provisions of the PMLA either to intervene in ongoing investigation or to obtain details of ongoing investigation," the IO wrote.

He said any order or administrative instruction was "not applicable or binding to the probe officer who derived its powers to investigate the offence of money laundering under the PMLA, an Act enacted by the Parliament of India."

"It is amply clear from provisions of section 52 and section 73 of PMLA that the state government has no locus standi to either issue any direction of frame any rule either to carry out investigation under the PMLA or to interfere in the scope of PMLA," the IO wrote.

The ED officer told Dalel that it was "sincerely hoped and expected that wiser counsel shall prevail upon you so that you may refrain from taking any illegal action as discussed above thereby leaving no option for the authorised officer under the PMLA to institute appropriate proceedings including criminal proceedings as stated above."

The IO also asked the top bureaucrat to intimate him the name of authority who authorised her to send this communication to the agency and obtain sensitive information about an ongoing investigation.

"It is amply clear from the content of your communication that you are trying to usurp power of the central government under section 52 (of PMLA) as per which the central government can issue directions for proper administration of the PMLA..." the IO stated.

The ED officer told Dalel that while the agency will not share any information with her or the state government, she may "like to educate the IO about the legal provisions which allow her to issue directions for administration of PMLA as well as to influence the statement and submission of documents by the persons summoned..." (PTI)

Focus on voters at booth-level for electoral success, PM tells BJP workers in Kerala

KOCHI, Jan 17: Prime Minister Narendra Modi provided guidance to party workers on Wednesday on winning over voters in Kerala, where the BJP has not made any major gains in elections till now.

Addressing a gathering of around 6,000 in-charges of 'Shakti Kendras', each comprising two to three booth-level areas, at Marine Drive, the prime minister said that Kerala has the potential to influence who will be in power in Delhi.

He urged the BJP workers to ensure victory in their respective booths.

"If we win our booths, we will win Kerala. For that you (party workers) have to focus your attention on every voter in every booth-level area and work hard."

"You should have a list of every beneficiary in your booth, meet them, get to know their names, meet their families; that should be the first priority," Modi said.

He further advised his party workers to include in the ongoing Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra in Kerala those who have not yet benefited from the central government's development and welfare schemes.

"You have to bring them to the vehicle of 'Modi ki guarantee'. Modi ki guarantee means a commitment to fulfilling promises. I believe each one of you can convey this message to the people," Modi said.

Claiming that the BJP is the only party in India with a proven track record of speedy development and a clear vision for the future, he urged the functionaries to make use of the My Bharat initiative, Namu app, as well as social media platforms to attract youth and spread positivity about the party and the schemes of the central government.

Speaking about the upcoming consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22, the PM called upon party workers to initiate cleanliness campaigns in temples across villages and cities.

Modi noted that Kerala is a state



where the Ramayana month is celebrated and exhorted party workers to disseminate the message to every household in their area, encouraging them to illuminate the 'Ram Jyoti' on the evening of January 22 and ensure widespread participation in the event.

Among the responsibilities assigned to party workers, the prime minister emphasised the importance of regularly engaging with constituents in their designated 'Shakti Kendras.'

He appealed to them to comprehend public opinions and identify schemes that could address prevalent issues.

Furthermore, every worker should take the responsibility of a

fixed number of people, be it 10 families or 15 families, at their booth levels, the PM said.

"This way, right from now, the duties of every worker would be fixed. They will know what they have to do," he said.

The prime minister also directed the party workers to ensure no person is left out of the voter list.

In his speech, Modi also highlighted the diverse initiatives like free ration, free medical treatment and free gas connection for the poor, implemented by his government to enhance the well-being of citizens.

Citing a recent report, he said in the last nine years around 25 crore people have been pulled out of poverty in India.

"This indicates that the direction that we have taken for a developed nation is the correct one," he said. "The BJP is the only party in India with a proven track record of speedy development and clear vision for the future," he added.

The prime minister also asked party workers to point out to people that the track record of the LDF and UDF in Kerala was "synonymous with a history of corruption". Modi also referred to the welcome he received on Tuesday on his arrival in the state and said that he was overawed by the love and affection the people of Kerala.

He said that people blessed him

on his arrival at Kochi on Tuesday and also on the route to the Thiruvapravur Sree Ramaswamy temple this morning.

The PM, who arrived on a two-day visit to Kerala, the second one in a span of two weeks, led a massive roadshow in this port city a day ago.

Thereafter, on Wednesday morning he offered prayers at Kerala's famous Lord Krishna temple in Guruvayur and attended the wedding of actor-politician Suresh Gopi's daughter, where top stars of Malayalam cinema were in attendance.

Later, he offered prayers at the Thiruvapravur Sree Ramaswamy temple situated on the bank of the Karuvannur river, also known as Theevra river, in Thrissur district.

This visit by Prime Minister Modi follows his recent remarks in Ayodhya about Kerala's famous Nalambalam yatra ceremony, a pilgrimage to the abode of Lord Ram and his brothers Bharat, Lakshman, and Shatrughan during the Malayalam month of Karkidakam.

By afternoon, the PM returned to Kochi where he inaugurated projects worth ₹ 4,000 crore, including key strategic initiatives at Cochin Shipyard Ltd.

He returned to Delhi after addressing the meeting of the BJP party workers. (PTI)

Congress launches website to seek people's suggestions for LS poll manifesto

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: The Congress launched a website and an email ID on Wednesday, inviting suggestions from the public for its manifesto for this year's Lok Sabha polls. Addressing a press conference here, P Chidambaram, who heads the Manifesto Committee of the Congress, said the party is holding consultations and seeking suggestions from the public for the manifesto.

He said the manifesto for the Lok Sabha election will be a "people's manifesto".

"The present exercise is to receive suggestions from the members of the public. This will be a people's manifesto. So it is important to gather as many suggestions as possible in the few weeks available to us," Chidambaram said.

"We want to involve the people of India in making the manifesto. We hope people from every walk of life will give their suggestions. We appeal and invite you to give suggestions you would like to be incorporated in the manifesto to make it a people's manifesto," he added.

The former Union minister said at least one

consultation will be held in each state. "The idea is to hold at least one consultation in each state. In some states, more than one public consultations may be held," he said. Asked if their INDIA bloc allies will also be consulted, the Congress leader said anyone who wishes to attend the consultation is welcome, but a decision on holding discussions with allies on the manifesto will be taken by the party chief.

"If the ally parties of the INDIA group wish to attend the consultation, they are most welcome... Whether there will be higher-level consultation will be for the Congress president to decide," Chidambaram said. Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said the suggestions can be given on the website -- awaazbharatki.in -- or by emailing to awaazbharatki@inc.in.

Convener of the party's Manifesto Committee T S Singh Deo said the exercise is being carried out to ensure that the voice of people is reflected in the document.

"It is important to seek the suggestions of the stakeholders so that it does not remain merely an academic exercise," he said. (PTI)

CCTV cameras installed around TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh's house post HC order

KOLKATA, Jan 17: The West Bengal government on Wednesday informed the Calcutta High Court that it installed 10 CCTV cameras in surrounding areas of the residence of absconding TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh, an accused in an alleged ration distribution scam.

The court had on Tuesday asked the state to ensure that CCTV cameras are installed immediately around the house of Sheikh. A lookout notice has also been issued against him by the ED.

Advocate General Kishore Dutta informed the court of Justice Jay Sengupta that 10 CCTV cameras have been installed in the areas surrounding the premises of Sheikh at Sandeshkhali, which is a few kilometres from the Bangladesh border.

Earlier in the day, Sheikh's brother told reporters he came to know about the installation of CCTV cameras when police "approached him for help" about power connection to run the devices.

"I have also installed such cameras in my

home for security reasons," his brother, who lives close by, said.

On a query by the high court, it was told that the Trinamool Congress leader is yet to be traced.

On January 5, three Enforcement Department (ED) officers were assaulted and their vehicles damaged allegedly by supporters of Sheikh, when they tried to raid his residence in North 24 Parganas district.

The ED has said the probe into the money trail in the alleged ration distribution scam in which it has arrested West Bengal minister Jyoti Priya Mallick, has led the central agency to Sheikh.

The probe agency has also prayed for transfer of investigation to the CBI into the assault on its officers.

The West Bengal government submitted before Justice Sengupta that an application has been made before the lower court concerned, for inclusion of attempt to murder and dacoity sections of IPC against the accused in the attack on the ED officers. (PTI)

Good show in LS polls will allow Siddaramaiah to continue as CM for 5 years, says his son

BENGALURU, Jan 17: A good show by the ruling Congress in the coming Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka would enable Siddaramaiah to continue as chief minister for a full term of five years without any hindrance, his son Yathindra said on Wednesday, sparking a debate on the vexed leadership issue.

After the Congress swept the Assembly elections in May last year, Siddaramaiah was chosen to lead the government, capping a stiff competition with senior party leader D K Shivakumar for the Chief Minister's post. Shivakumar was made the lone deputy chief minister and he also continued in the post of President of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee.

It was rumoured at the time within a section of the party that a power-sharing formula was struck under which Shivakumar would take over the reins from Siddaramaiah after two-and-a-half-years. There was no official word on this with speculation

over the leadership issue refusing to die down. Reacting to his son's statement, the chief minister told reporters at Belagavi in north Karnataka that only the Congress high command decides whether one should continue for five years or not.

"Neither he (Yathindra), nor I decide," Siddaramaiah added. Speaking at a function in the district headquarters town of Hassan, Yathindra appealed to the people to continue their support to Siddaramaiah. The Congress will have to face the Lok Sabha election in Karnataka under the leadership of Siddaramaiah. "In that election, under Siddaramaiah's leadership, if we win a maximum number of seats, we will gain moral support (strength)," the former MLA said.

He said the Congress government is spending about ₹ 56,000 crore annually for implementation of 'guarantee schemes' for social welfare. Perhaps no other government in the history of Karnataka took up welfare

measures aimed at the common man and the poor on such a scale, according to him.

"We indeed have public support but you have to show that this government has people's backing in the Lok Sabha election by winning maximum seats for Congress and strengthening Siddaramaiah's hands. With this strength, it will be possible for Siddaramaiah to continue to offer these guarantee schemes for the next five years and continue to be chief minister for five years without any hindrance", Yathindra said. In his response, Shivakumar said the government will remain strong for the next five years and no one can shake it.

"Now our chief minister is Siddaramaiah. Under his leadership I am the Congress Karnataka unit president. We are fighting the election together and there is no doubt that under his leadership the elections are taking place," the deputy chief minister said. (PTI)

Chandigarh MC polls: Cong leaders meet councillor Bunty after moving HC

CHANDIGARH, Jan 17: Chandigarh Congress leaders on Wednesday met party councillor Jasbir Singh Bunty at his home here after the Congress moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court with a habeas corpus petition, accusing police of not allowing them to meet him.

The development came a day after a scuffle broke out between BJP and Congress-AAP workers when Bunty came to withdraw his nomination papers from the post of mayor at the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation office. The mayoral polls of the civic body will be held on Thursday.

President of the Congress' Chandigarh unit H S Lucky had alleged that BJP workers had tried to take Bunty away forcibly from the corporation's office. The Congress had also accused the BJP of misusing police to poach him.

Lucky said he was allowed to meet Bunty at his residence here by police. Senior Congress leader Pawan Kumar Bansal also met the councillor.

During the meeting, Bunty reiterated that he was with the Congress, Lucky said. Bunty and his father also posed for a photo with Bansal and Lucky.

Lucky said he had moved the high court on Tuesday night against the Chandigarh Police for not allowing Congress leaders to meet Bunty, alleging he had been "detained" at his residence.

The BJP has rejected the allegations, saying it was Bunty's father who had alleged that he was not allowed to meet his son by the Congress.

In the habeas corpus, the petitioner's counsel submitted before justice Alok Jain that police authorities were not letting Bunty

move freely which is a violation of his fundamental rights.

Following the scuffle between BJP and Congress-AAP workers, police had brought Bunty to his residence in Attawa here from the municipal corporation's office. Several policemen have been deployed outside the Bunty's residence.

Bunty was initially the Congress' candidate for the post of mayor.

But after the Congress and the AAP sealed an alliance for the mayoral posts, a decision was taken that the AAP will fight for the post of mayor and the Congress nominees will contest the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor.

The AAP and the Congress forged an alliance on Monday for the upcoming Chandigarh mayoral polls. (PTI)

Violence has never generated unity; peace has never led to divisions: Dhankhar

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday said Lord Buddha's message of peace, harmony and co-existence stands stark against forces of hate and terror and asserted that his teachings are not relics of the past, but a compass for our future. He also said that in an age of ethical uncertainty, Gautam Buddha's teachings offer a path of sustainability.

He urged people to follow the light of tolerance, justice, and a shared commitment to peace, paving the way for a future where all flourish.

Addressing the inaugural session of the 12th general assembly of the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace here, he said Bharat as a nation has been guided by the principles of Buddha.

Buddhism was born in India and spread to the diverse corners of the world, he said and cited a statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that we proudly belong to a nation that gave Buddha and not 'yudh' (war).

"World today faces challenges that are universal and call for concerted efforts -- be it climate change, conflict, terrorism or poverty...These challenges to humanity are existential and can be addressed by common resolve and collaborative and collective approach," he said at the event.

Dhankhar felt that as technology races ahead, Buddha's Middle Path -- a tapestry of friendship, moderation, and reverence for all life -- offers a sustainable path for people.

The principles of Lord Buddha, the vice president said, are no less than a beacon of hope and light to catalyse convergence of all stakeholders on a common platform.

The vice president also said that violence has never generated unity and peace has never led to divisions.

He noted that the Indian Constitution's artwork reflects 5,000 years of history and referred to Part V, where Lord Buddha graces the section on Union governance. (PTI)

Over 86.8% in 14-18 age group enrolled, but 25% of them can't read class-2 text fluently: ASER

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: More than 86.8 per cent youngsters in the age group of 14-18 years are enrolled in educational institutions but one-fourth of them cannot read a Class-2 level text fluently in their regional languages, according to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) released on Wednesday.

The report also said that more than 32 per cent of those aged 18 or above are not enrolled in educational institutions, while more than half of Class 11 and 12 students opt for humanities stream.

The report also asserted that the fear that several older students dropped out of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic due to a loss of livelihood was unfounded.

While the report noted small gender gaps in enrolment, it flagged notable differences between age groups.

The ASER 2023 'Beyond Basics' report puts the spotlight on youths aged 14 to 18 years in rural India, an age group that was also the focus of ASER 2017.

"There are small gender gaps in enrolment, but notable differences are visible by age. Older youth are more likely to be not enrolled. The percentage of youth not

enrolled is 3.9 pc for 14-year-old youth and is 32.6 pc for 18-year-olds," the report said.

"Overall, 86.8 per cent of 14-18-year-olds are enrolled in an educational institution," the 2023 report said. It, however, underlined that 25 per cent of them cannot read a Class-2 level text fluently in their regional languages.

The report said more than 55 per cent students of Classes 11-12 opt for humanities, followed by science and commerce.

It also pointed out that females are less likely to be enrolled in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) streams than males.

"Most of the young people in this age group were enrolled in the arts and humanities stream. In class 11 or higher, more than half are enrolled in the Arts and Humanities stream (55.7 pc) Females are less likely to be enrolled in the STEM stream (28.1 pc) than males (36.3 pc)," it added.

Last year's report showed that the enrolment levels of children in the age bracket of six to 14 years had gone up marginally from 96.6 per cent in 2010 to 96.7 per cent in 2014 and from 97.2 per



cent in 2018 to 98.4 per cent in 2022.

According to the report, only 5.6 per cent youngsters in the country are currently undergoing vocational training or have been enrolled in other related courses.

"Only 5.6 pc of surveyed youth report taking vocational training or other related courses currently. Youth at the college level are the most likely to be taking vocational training (16.2 pc).

"Most youth are taking short duration courses (of 6 months or less). A higher percentage of males (40.3 per cent) than females (28 per cent) report doing work other than household work for at least 15 days during the preceding month," it added.

The report pointed out that among both males and females, most youth who are working in activities other than household work tend to be working on family farms.

ASER is a nationwide citizen-led household survey that provides a snapshot of the status of children's schooling and learning in rural India.

First implemented in 2005, the 'basic' ASER survey was conducted annually until 2014 and switched to an alternate-year cycle in 2016.

The 'basic' ASER collects information about enrolment in pre-school and school for children in the age group of three to 16, and assesses children aged five to 16 one-on-one to understand their foundational reading and arithmetic abilities. In the intervening years, ASER dives deeper into different aspects of children's schooling and learning in

rural India.

The ASER 2023 'Beyond Basics' survey was conducted in 28 districts across 26 states, reaching a total of 34,745 youth in the age group 14-18 years. One rural district was surveyed in each major state, with the exception of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where two rural districts were surveyed.

The 2023 survey explored the following domains -- What activities are India's youth currently engaged in, Do they have basic and applied reading and math abilities, digital awareness and skills, do they have access to smartphones, what do they use smartphones for, and can they do simple tasks on their smartphones?

"Surveyed youth were given five types of tasks -- basic reading, math and English abilities; application of basic skills to everyday calculations; reading and understanding written instructions; and financial calculations that need to be done in real life. Youths' performance on digital tasks was summarised taking into account digital awareness and aptitude," it said. (PTI)

Shashi Tharoor, Jyotiraditya Scindia in war of words over flight delays, airport chaos

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: Shashi Tharoor and civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia engaged in a war of words over flight delays due to fog and the ensuing chaos at the Delhi airport, with the Congress leader terming it a "Modi Government-made disaster" and the minister hitting back at him with the "arm-chair critic" jibe.

Scindia claimed Tharoor is "lost in his esoteric world of thesaurus", and for him "data mining of selective press articles from the internet qualifies as 'research'".

The minister's caustic response came after Tharoor alleged in a series of six posts on X that the chaos at the Delhi airport is a result of the "neglect and incompetence" of the Ministry of Civil Aviation which has failed to put in place modern facilities like at other international airports of the world. Tharoor alleged India's aviation sector is in a sorry state and that the ministry has not been able to ensure airports in Delhi and other Indian cities are of such global standard that aircraft can land there even in zero visibility.

The ministry has also not made sure trained pilots are deployed during winter months who can land in lower visibility, he claimed.

"Delhi Airport has been in chaos recently. The young professional wanting to go home for Makar Sankranti. The Army officer was ex-



cited to visit his ancestral village for Lohri. The anxious son trying to get home to take care of an unwell parent. Thousands of peoples' lives and schedules have been disrupted by a regular, predictable, foggy winter day. It's a Modi Government-made disaster, a result of the Ministry of Civil Aviation's neglect and incompetence," Tharoor said in one of the posts. Sharing news reports, Tharoor said that Delhi's IGI Airport got a brand-new CAT III-B (Category III) compliant runway, an advanced landing system that allows pilots to land even when there is fog or the visibility is as low as 50 metres, in 2008 at a cost of ₹ 1,000 crore.

"In total, Delhi has four runways, two of which are CAT III-B compliant. In all its wisdom, the Modi government began maintenance work on one of the two CAT III-B runways in September 2023, fully aware that it would not be ready for the winter!"

"Even worse, a crane from some other construction work was block-

ing operation of CAT III-B on one runway, even after repairs were complete. Delhi Airport flagged this over 10 days ago, on January 5, but no action was taken," he said.

"In addition to runways, pilots must be trained to land with CAT III-B instrument landing. The Ministry of Civil Aviation and the DGCA failed to ensure that airlines have sufficiently trained pilots. Further, it did not even ensure that pilots planning to fly to Delhi during fog conditions were CAT III-B trained. Therefore, multiple flights were diverted to cities like Jaipur and Ahmedabad," the Congress leader said. The aviation minister gave a point-by-point rebuttal in an equal number of posts.

"It is for someone who is lost in his esoteric world of thesaurus that data mining of selective press articles from the internet qualifies as 'research'. Here are some actual facts for arm-chair critic Shashi Tharoor and the Congress IT Cell that might help tackle their lack of depth in understanding of technical sectors like civil aviation.

"Runway maintenance work is a critical safety element for aviation operations, and any compromise with runway conditions directly jeopardizes passenger safety. As a result, the maintenance was taken on top priority to be completed by 15th December before the onset of

the fog season. However, due to pollution incidents and enforcement of GRAP-IV in Delhi, the recarpeting got delayed, resulting in a delay of one month in its commissioning. The revamped RWY is getting operational this week," the aviation minister claimed.

He said the crane was being used for the construction of another critical infrastructure project - the Dwarka Expressway.

However, in view of its impact on the runway, it has now been decided that the crane operation shall be allowed only on non-fog days, he said.

"On sufficiently trained pilots, your claim is incorrect and baseless, as usual! As compared to only 2416 CAT II/CAT III trained pilots in 2014, today we have 6191 CAT II/CAT III trained pilots which is a jump of 2.5 times in the last 9 years. Further, in preparation for the fog season of 2023-24, due to our efforts, the number of CAT II/CAT III trained pilots have grown by 16% in the last three months alone from 5332 to 6191.

"Also, the DGCA mandates airlines to deploy CAT IIIB compliant aircraft only with qualified crew during the winter season. Any violations are strictly dealt with by the regulator, DGCA. For instance, show cause notices were issued to Spicejet and Air India," he said. (PTI)

Navy to showcase rising combat prowess, 'Atmanirbharta', Nari-Shakti at R-Day parade

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: The Indian Navy will project its military might and firm resolve to safeguard the nation's strategic interests in the maritime domain at the Republic Day parade, amid growing global concerns over the escalating tensions in the Red Sea.

The naval tableau at the parade at Kartavya Path on January 26 will also showcase the Navy's "unwavering" commitment to 'Nari Shakti' with an overarching focus on women in all roles and across all ranks, officials said on Wednesday.

The contingent of the Indian Navy will have three women platoon commanders - Lt Mudita Goyal, Lt Sharvani Supreya and Lt Devika H. For the first time, the Navy will have a mixed composition with 144 young men and women marching down the historic Kartavya path reflecting its commitment towards gender neutrality, the officials said.

The naval tableau will depict the first fully indigenous Carrier Battle Group, comprising aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, her highly capable escort ships Delhi, Kolkata, Shivalik, and Kalvari class submarine besides light combat aircraft as well as advanced light helicopter.

The tableau will also feature multi-band military communications satellite GSAT-7 and Rukmani satellite. Vice Admiral Gurcharan Singh, the Navy's controller of personnel services, said the naval contingent's participation at the parade would not just be a display of military might, but "would also reflect a resolve to safeguard the nation's strategic interests".

The Vice Admiral told journalists that the tableau will also display the Navy's commitment to 'Atmanirbharta' (self-reliance) in defence as well as its focus on gender neutrality.

At present, the Navy has 680 women officers and it has recruited 1,119 women Agniveers so far. "Our tableau this year encapsulates the narrative of a Navy that is not only safeguarding the maritime frontiers but also shaping a future where self-reliance and the empowerment of every individual irrespective of gender, are paramount," Singh said.

"It stands as a resounding affirmation of India's

maritime prowess and the inclusive strides taken in the journey towards a self-reliant and equitable nation," he said.

The Navy has already deployed 10-12 warships in the strategic waters including the Arabian Sea following a spate of attacks on commercial vessels in the region as well as Houthi militants targeting various ships.

Singh said the central theme of the naval tableau revolves around 'Atmanirbharta' showcasing indigenous milestones achieved by 'Bharat'. As on date, out of 66 ships and submarines currently under construction, 64 are being built at Indian shipyards.

"The main portion of the tableau features the first ever completely indigenous carrier battle group (CBG), with INS Vikrant being the strongest symbol of our nation's vision, forming the core," the Vice Admiral said.

"As you are aware, the CBG is meant to project maritime power in our area of interest. INS Vikrant would be supported by powerful combatants like Kolkata, Delhi and Shivalik class of ships which are capable of dealing with multi-dimensional threats," he said.

"Kalvari class submarine would be operating in tandem. This CBG would be supported by ISRO's Rukmani satellite. Kolkata class ships INS Kolkata, INS Kochi and INS Chennai are now deployed in the Arabian Sea for anti-piracy operations," he said.

INS Chennai was recently involved in an operation that foiled the piracy attack on merchant vessel MV Lila Norfolk off the Somali coast.

"In the marching contingent, the Navy is parading a mixed composition platoon for the first time, wherein 144 young men and women will be marching down the historic Kartavya Path, shoulder to shoulder epitomising Navy's commitment towards gender neutrality," he said.

The naval contingent will be led by Lt Prajwal. "The front portion of the tableau depicts Nari Shakti, emphasising the role of women in the Indian Navy with progressive induction in all ranks and all roles which is unique among all the services," Vice Admiral Singh said. (PTI)

ISRO develops second-generation distress alert transmitter for fishermen

BENGALURU, Jan 17: ISRO has developed a second-generation 'Distress Alert Transmitter' (DAT), incorporating advanced satellite communication and navigation capabilities that allow fishermen at sea to send emergency messages from fishing boats and get acknowledgement in real time. The DAT has been operational since 2010 and more than 20,000 of them are currently in use, the space agency said. The messages are sent through a communication satellite and received at a central control station (INMCC: Indian Mission Control Centre) where the alert signals are decoded for the identity and location of the fishing boat, according to an ISRO statement. The extracted information is forwarded to Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centres (MRCCs) under the Indian Coast Guard (ICG). "Using this information the MRCC undertakes Search and Rescue operations to save the fishermen in distress," it said. Taking advantage of technological developments in satellite communication and satellite navigation, ISRO has improvised DAT with advanced capabilities and features, evolving to Second Generation DAT (DAT-SG). The DAT-SG has the facility to send back acknowledgement to the fishermen who activate the distress alert from the sea.

"This gives him an assurance that rescue (team) is coming to him. Apart from transmitting distress signals from the sea, DAT-SG has the capability to receive messages from the control centre," ISRO said. Using this, advance alert messages can be sent to the fishermen at sea whenever there are events of bad weather, cyclone, tsunami or any other emergencies. Thus, the fishermen will be able to sail back home or go to safe places. Further, the information about Potential Fishing Zones (PFZs) are also transmitted to fishermen using DAT-SG on regular intervals. This helps fishermen get good catch and savings in terms of time and fuel. DAT-SG can be connected to mobile phones using Bluetooth interface and the messages can be read in native language using an app on the mobile. (PTI)

Odisha ex-CM Giridhar Gamang rejoins Congress along with wife, son

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: Former Odisha chief minister Giridhar Gamang on Wednesday joined the Congress along with his wife and son almost nine years after he quit the party.

Congress is the only party in the country that does principled politics, said the former nine-time MP from Koraput who had joined the BJP in 2015 and switched to the BRS in January 2023.

Gamang asserted that he never left the Congress party's thoughts and ideology.

He along with his wife Hema Gamang and son Shishir Gamang and another BJP leader Sanjay Bhoi, also a former MP, formally joined the party at the AICC headquarters here in the presence of party treasurer Ajay Maken along with AICC in-charge for Odisha Ajoy Kumar.

Giridhar Gamang was elected for the first time to the fifth Lok Sabha from Koraput in 1972 and he subsequently was re-elected to

the Lok Sabha in 1977, 1980, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998 and 2004. He was the chief minister of Odisha from February 17, 1999 to December 6, 1999.

His wife Hema Gamang won from Koraput constituency in the 1999 elections to the 13th Lok Sabha, while he was serving as the Chief Minister of Odisha.

Sanjay Bhoi was a former MP from the Bargarh Lok Sabha constituency in Odisha on the Congress ticket in 2009.

"We are happy that today Giridhar Gamang, Hema Gamang ji, Sanjay Bhoi ji and Shishir Gamang ji are rejoining the Congress Party family. These leaders have contributed significantly to the development of Orissa.

"Their return to Congress will strengthen the party and its ideology. On behalf of the Congress Party, we welcome all of them," Maken said after welcoming the leaders.

He also said that these leaders

have played a crucial role in the development of Odisha and their return to the party will strengthen the state party unit and our ideology.

"Giridhar ji is popular not only in the tribal society but also in every community," Ajoy Kumar said.

Gamang said only the Congress can give respect to its leaders.

"The Congress gave me a ticket 11 times, which no other party can do. I remained in another party, but only Congress can give respect," he said.

"There is no particular reason. I will live where I was born. I never left the party, its thoughts and ideology," he said when asked why he left the party and has now returned.

Asked about Rahul Gandhi's Nyay Yatra, he said, "The step taken by Rahul Gandhi is not political but constitutional. We will continue to fight for social, economic and political justice." (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Govt to provide ₹ 3 cr to host

of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Tuliram Ronghang, members of Legislative Assembly Bidya Sing Engeng, Dorsing Ronghang, chief executive of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council Debolal Gorlosa, along with a host of dignitaries.

Himanta engages in collaborative talks

revolved around the issue of oil exploration in the border areas of Assam and Nagaland. Sarma, serving as the NEDA convenor, has been actively involved in engaging with stakeholders of the Naga peace process. These consistent interactions underline the commitment of both states to fostering collaboration and resolving outstanding matters for the mutual benefit of Assam and Nagaland.

Prez Murmu's visit to Karbi Anglong

to extend an invitation to the President for the next event. Chandrasing Kro, president of KCS, affirmed the organisation's commitment to promoting and developing Karbi culture, language, and tradition.

However, despite the setback, the festival continued with a performance of the Nimso Kerung dance involving 60 dancers, 8 drummers, and 4 lunsepo (folk singers). The event saw dignitaries such as deputy speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly Dr Numal Momin, mines and minerals minister Nandita Garlosa, guardian minister for hills areas Jugen Mohan, and chairman of KAAC Raju Tisso gracing the occasion.

CBI charges 5 including suspected

people as over ground workers, members and sympathisers to augment their strength to carry out attacks on security forces and opposing ethnic groups by exploiting the unrest in the state.

They were collecting arms, ammunition and explosives by unlawful means, including plunder and pillage of government facilities and resources, a spokesperson of the NIA had said.

The police armoury at the Manipur Police Training Centre (MPTC) at Pangei in Imphal was looted on May 4, the day ethnic clashes between majority Meitei community and tribal Kuki's broke out in the state.

As alleged in the FIR, a mob stormed into the MPTC complex and looted a huge number of arms and ammunition from the armoury, the CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The charge-sheet was submitted recently before the chief judicial magistrate, Kamrup (Metro), Guwahati, Assam. The Supreme Court in August last year had transferred all CBI cases from Manipur to Assam.

While Singh is in judicial custody, the fate of the other four was not immediately known.

The top court's direction came during a hearing of a batch of petitions related to the clashes in Manipur. Among the petitioners were two Kuki women whose assault by a mob was recorded on video which went viral later. Among the slew of measures announced by the Supreme Court were ensuring recording of statements of the victims through video conferencing and also directing the chief justice of the Gauhati High Court to nominate judicial officers above the rank of judicial magistrate (first class) and sessions judge to deal with cases related to violence in Manipur. (PTI)

Ajanta Neog launches ration

by senior district and Titabar Sub-divisional administration officials, and former MLA Hemanta Kalita. Simultaneously, Minister Atul Bora inaugurated the distribution ceremony in Teok Assembly constituency at Kajojan Kalakrishni Kendra. Bora emphasised the state government's initiatives for progress and prosperity in Assam. Jorhat MP Topon Kumar Gogoi and senior district administration officials were present at the event.

Amit Shah to visit Assam, Meghalaya

Stadium in Guwahati. Later, he will launch a book, 'Assam's Braveheart Lachit Barphukan', at Srimanta Sankardeva International Auditorium in the city. The home minister will also inaugurate the Brahmaputra Riverfront in Guwahati before returning to Delhi.

Pakistan recalls ambassador to Iran

act is completely unacceptable and has no justification whatsoever. Pakistan reserves the right to respond to this illegal act. The responsibility for the consequences will lie squarely with Iran," Baloch said, adding that Pakistan has conveyed this message to the Iranian Government.

Separately, Balochistan information minister Jan Achakzai in his reaction to the attack by Iran said that he was "disappointed". "We are extremely disappointed, as the Foreign Office has already said terrorism is a common threat to all countries in the region that requires coordinated action. Such acts of air space violations by #Iran undermine neighbourly relation, trust and renewed trade linkages established with #Balochistan," he said in a statement of X. According to the Foreign office, the Iranian charge d'affaires here was summoned to the foreign ministry and issued a strongly-worded condemnation of Iran's "violation of its airspace".

Pakistan condemned the overnight attack which killed two children and injured three girls.

Iran's attack could potentially raise tensions in the Middle East, already roiled by Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. "Two key strongholds of the Jaish al-Dhulm (Jaish al-Adl) terrorist group in Pakistan" were "specifically targeted and successfully demolished," Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency said.

Earlier, former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif said he was shocked by the Iranian attack on his country.

Shehbaz in his reaction said that the attack was against the spirit of friendship between the two countries.

"I am shocked at the Iranian breach of Pakistani sovereignty. This missile attack is against the spirit of our friendship and principles of good neighbourliness, especially as it undermines the historic relationship between our two countries," he said.

"Sincere dialogue and meaningful cooperation between our two countries is the need of the hour. My condolences to the families who lost their loved ones in the attack," he added.

His response came when Pakistan was apparently struggling to come up with a plausible response to the unexpected Iranian attack against militants' hideouts in its remote south-western region of Balochistan, bordering Iran. Tehran has repeatedly warned that the Jaish al-Adl militant group is using Pakistani soil in the border town of Panjgur in Balochistan to launch terror attacks on Iranian security forces.

The strikes were launched the day Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar met with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland. Jaish al-Adl, or the "Army of Justice", is a Sunni militant group founded in 2012 that largely operates in Pakistan. Iran has fought in border areas against the militants, but a missile-and-drone attack on Pakistan would be unprecedented for Iran.

Jaish al-Adl is the "most active and influential" Sunni militant group operating in Sistan-Baluchestan, according to the Office of the US Director of National Intelligence.

Last month, at least 11 Iranian police officers were killed in an attack overnight on a police station in the southeastern province of Sistan-Balochistan, according to Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi, who blamed the Jaish al-Adl for the incident. He claimed the Jaish militants had entered Sistan from the Pakistan side near Panjgur. On July 23 last year, four Iranian policemen were killed while on patrol near the border in an attack claimed by the Jaish Al Adl. In May, five Iranian border guards died in clashes with an armed group in Saravan, southeast of Zahedan, the provincial capital of Sistan-Balochistan. (PTI)

Meghalaya media team embarks on

known for its expertise in conducting research and technology-oriented programs related to mining, minerals, and metals industries. During the tour, the media team will interact with beneficiaries of various central government schemes in Odisha, visiting sites of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra. The itinerary also includes visits to Dhauligiri and the Konark Sun Temple. This Press Tour is organised by the Press Information Bureau, Shillong, in collaboration with the Press Information Bureau, Bhubaneswar, under the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India. (NNN)

Scottish band 'Nazareth' rocks Karbi

R U Now.' Expressing gratitude, Nazareth took to their Facebook page, stating, "Thanks to this wonderful audience at Karbi Youth Festival 2024. Last night's performance was all about warmth, great music, and a beautiful connection. Still feeling the energy, and we are not going to be over it anytime soon!"

Elderly patients skipping regular check-ups due to biting cold in Delhi, say city doctors

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: As Delhi continues to reel under severe cold conditions, city doctors have said that the elderly residents are skipping their regular appointments, which may have a long-term adverse impact on their health.

Dr Sushila Kataria, senior director of Internal Medicine at Medanta, Gurugram, said it is common for elderly individuals, especially those with chronic conditions like diabetes, heart problems, or tuberculosis, to skip their regular health check-ups during winter months.

"While these patients typically adhere to their appointments throughout the year, the colder months witness a noticeable shift in behaviour, resulting in delayed appointments and missed opportunities to fine-tune medication regimens, potentially leading to complications and more severe health problems," she told PTI.

Delhi has been seeing a drop in minimum temperatures since the beginning of January.

On Tuesday, the national capital recorded a low of 3.5 degrees Celsius. The season's coldest morning was registered here on Monday with a low of 3.3 degrees Celsius, four notches below the average.

Paras Hospital in Gurugram has been seeing a five to 10 per cent rise in the frequency of senior patients missing their visits in the past month.

"The start of the cold wave has coincided with a noticeable rise in the number of senior citizens skipping their routine health examinations over the past few weeks. The impact is seen across various specialties, but particularly in general medicine," Dr RR Dutta, Head of Department, Internal Medicine at the Paras hospital, said.

Talking about the vulnerability of the elderly



during the winter months, Dr. Mukesh Mehra, director, Internal Medicine, Max Super Speciality Hospital, Patparganj, Delhi, said due to their compromised immune systems, they are more vulnerable to seasonal illnesses.

These seasonal illnesses are further aggravated by long-term ailments including respiratory issues, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and hypertension, which frequently get worse in the winter because of the body's adaptations to thermoregulation, he explained.

Kataria said a common reason among these patients missing health check-ups is a lack of concern for their own well-being.

"The introduction of teleconsultations has partially addressed this issue, allowing patients to seek advice from home without the need for transportation or time off from work," she said.

However, the long-term impacts of missing regular appointments are substantial, she noted.

For instance, patients with well-compensated blood pressure and heart disease may neglect crucial instructions on diet and fluid intake, po-

tentially leading to decompensation and heart failure, she said.

"Habitual neglect of follow-up appointments for conditions like diabetes and hypertension heightens the risk of poor control and increased susceptibility to infections," she added.

Dutta said that not only are elderly missing their scheduled appointments, they are not even coming to hospitals in case they have fever or common cold.

The senior doctor said when common illnesses like the seasonal flu go untreated, problems can arise, especially in the elderly.

"These side effects could include worsening pre-existing illnesses, breathing difficulties, and heightened susceptibility to further infections. The early detection and prevention of such issues are helped by routine health check-ups, hence it is alarming to observe that attendance is declining," he added.

Mehra advised the patients to follow dietary regulations and medication routine.

For hypertensive individuals, dosage adjustments may be necessary due to vasoconstriction during winter, he said.

"Regular cardiac check-ups are essential, particularly for those who have undergone cardiac procedures, as winter tends to exacerbate cardiac problems. Diabetic individuals should intensify and modify their treatment plans to accommodate changes in diet and activity levels," he said.

The minimum temperature on Wednesday was recorded at 5.7 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average. This was a slight respite from the last few days, since the temperatures were being recorded below 5 degrees Celsius. (PTI)

Twinkle Khanna graduates from UK's Goldsmith College, husband Akshay calls her 'super woman'



MUMBAI, Jan 17: Twinkle Khanna has completed a master's programme in fiction writing from Goldsmiths, University of London, and the actor-turned-author has said her graduation ceremony was "even more perfect" than she ever imagined.

Khanna, who recently came out with the novel "Welcome To Paradise", shared a video from the event on her official Instagram account on Tuesday.

"And it's here. Graduation day. My first day at Goldsmiths feels like it was both yesterday and years ago. A sunny day, a pretty sari, and having my family with me make this day even more perfect than I ever imagined," she wrote.

Khanna, a former actor known for films such as "Barsaat", "Baadshah", "Jodi No.1" and "Mela", enrolled at the UK-based college in 2022.

"There comes a stage when the easiest way to grow is horizontally,

but we have to push ourselves to grow in myriad other ways," she further said in the post. Khanna's husband, actor Akshay Kumar accompanied her to the graduation ceremony.

He shared a note and a picture with his wife on Instagram and wrote- "Two years ago when you told me you wanted to take up studies all over again, I wondered if you meant it. But the day I saw you work so hard and perfectly manage a full-fledged student life along with home, career, me and kids, I knew I had married a super woman."

He added, "Today on your graduation, I also wish I had studied a bit more to know enough words to tell you how proud you make me, Tina. Congratulations and all my love."

Khanna, 50, and Kumar, 56, are celebrating their 23rd wedding anniversary on Wednesday. The couple are parents to son Aarav and daughter Nitara. (PTI)

Mohit Raina, Roshan Mathew, Sarah Jane Dias to star in 'Kan Khajura'



MUMBAI, Jan 17: Streaming platform Sony LIV on Wednesday announced its new series "Kan Khajura", starring Mohit Raina, Roshan Mathew, and Sarah Jane Dias.

According to the makers, the upcoming show is the Hindi adaptation of the globally acclaimed Israeli crime thriller drama "Magpie".

"Kan Khajura" is directed by Chandan Arora and produced by Ajay Rai.

Raina, best known for the popular TV show "Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev" and web series "Mumbai Diaries", said being part of a thriller is always exciting yet demanding for any actor.

"My character has various shades associated with it and that has been a great responsibility to portray. To get into the skin of the character, we tried on various looks that brought out a well-etched character. 'Magpie', a global sensation, was always a story

waiting to cross borders and be adapted for the Indian audience.

"I am glad to be part of this story with filmmakers like Chandan at the helm, backed by a stellar cast, and talented writing, creative, and production teams. It's a collective endeavour to honour the show's legacy and ensure an unforgettable journey for our audience," the actor said in a statement.

Mahesh Shetty, Ninad Kamat, Trinetra Haldar, Heeba Shah, and Usha Nadkarni also round out the cast of "Kan Khajura".

The series is in the original format under a license granted by Yes Studios. Created by Adam Bizanski, Omri Shenhar, and Dana Eden, the show skillfully explores the complexities of fractured familial ties, touching on themes of betrayal, redemption, and the resilience of the human spirit, the makers further said. (PTI)

SRIRAM RAGHAVAN'S 'MERRY CHRISTMAS' EARNS ₹ 12.68 CRORE IN FIVE DAYS

MUMBAI, Jan 17: Filmmaker Sriram Raghavan's "Merry Christmas" has earned ₹ 12.68 crore net at the domestic box office, according to industry tracker Sacnilk.

Starring Katrina Kaif and Vijay Sethupathi in the lead roles, the suspense drama was released in theatres on January 12. According to Sacnilk, the movie earned ₹ 2.45 crore on day one, followed by ₹ 3.45 crore and ₹ 3.83 crore on day two and three, respectively. On Monday, the film witnessed a dip as it raked in ₹ 1.65 crore, followed by ₹ 1.3 crore on Tuesday, taking its five-day total to ₹ 12.68 crore. Presented by Tips Films and Matchbox Pictures, "Merry Christmas" is billed as "a genre-defying tale" shot in Hindi and Tamil with a different set of supporting actors. While the Hindi version of "Merry Christmas" co-stars Sanjay Kapoor, Vinay Pathak, Pratima Kannan, and Tinnu Anand, the Tamil iteration has Radhika Sarathkumar, Shanmugaraja, Kevin Jay Babu, and Rajesh Williams in the same roles. (PTI)



'INDIAN 2', 'THANGALAN': NETFLIX UNVEILS POST-THEATRICAL TAMIL FILM SLATE



MUMBAI, Jan 17: Netflix on Wednesday announced that nine Tamil movies, including Ajith's "Vidaa Muyarchi", Kamal Haasan's "Indian 2" and Vikram's "Thangalaan", will stream on its platform in 2024 after their theatrical exhibition.

The titles also include Vijay Sethupathi's "Maharaja", Keerthy Suresh's "Kannivedi" and "Revolver Reeta", actor Sivakarthikeyan's next feature, RJ Balaji's "Sorga Vaasal" and horror comedy "Conjuring Kannappan", a press release said.

All the films will be available dubbed in Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. The streamer will be providing Hindi dubbed versions of four marquee titles -- "Maharaja", "Sivakarthikeyan 21", "Thangalaan" and "Indian 2".

"Adding to the festive cheer of Pongal, we are excited to share a promising lineup of blockbuster entertainment from the finest makers of the Tamil industry," said Monika Shergill, VP - Content at Netflix. According to her, the company's subscribers liked Thalapathy Vijay's "Leo", Ajith's "Thunivu" and political drama "Maamannan" after their streaming debut on Netflix in 2023. "The viewing of South content on Netflix has increased by 50 per cent YoY (year-on-year), and with the addition of these new films, we promise to make every night a blockbuster night for our members," she added.

Haasan's "Indian 2" and Vikram's "Thangalaan" are some of the most anticipated Tamil titles of 2024. (PTI)

I still visit the lanes from my childhood: Avinash Arun on 'Three of Us'

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: All major OTT platforms rejected "Three of Us" that was released in theatres without any promotions before being finally bought by Netflix, says director Avinash Arun of his ode to childhood, relationships and memories.

Arun, whose film is winning plaudits for its loving portrayal of childhood and connections, says the story about a woman slowly descending into dementia, her husband and her school sweetheart is deeply personal for him and he lived with it for more than five years.

"All these years, I had this idea about building a film around a person whose memory is fading. My childhood was very close to me and I still visit those lanes, the village and the town. I keep wondering about the lives my friends are leading because these are important memories of your life," Arun told PTI.

"The cinematographer-director, Arun, a film graduate, is counted among the most interesting voices to have emerged in cinema in recent times.

Childhood is a recurring theme in the filmmaker's work. His streaming show, "School of Lies," is set in a boarding school, while his 2015 Marathi debut, "Ishq," is a story told through the eyes of a young boy.

"Three of Us" revolves around Shaila, who returns to her childhood home in Maharashtra's picturesque Vengurla town. Accompanied by her husband, the journey also leads her to her old school, classmates, and dance teacher.

Arun, who directed the first season of the massively popular series "School of Lies" as well as its upcoming second season, said there is a reason

why he keeps returning to this theme.

"There is an emotional high you feel in childhood because your mind and senses are like a sponge. That's why the experience is so intensified."

"We don't understand it at that time, but these moments shape us throughout our life. We try to reach out to that level of excitement, experience, and feeling. That's why we get so nostalgic about the past because the intensity of memory is directly proportional to the intensity of an experience," he said.

"Three of Us" was released in theaters in November before making its way to the streaming service Netflix. Arun, who was concerned about how the movie would be received, went through a period of struggle during its release.

"All major OTT platforms rejected the film. I was quite heartbroken. I knew that it would do well on OTT as it was dubbed as an arthouse film. In my opinion, it wasn't because I knew that the audience is evolved, and they will appreciate a film like this," he said.

The director said he is not new to such a struggle.

"Killa" was also in the same space. I had to wait for the film's release for a long time. 'School of Lies' helped me mount this film. You have to repeat yourself with success; then the probability of your next work happening increases," he said, praising producers Matchbox Shots for trusting his vision with "Three of Us."

Actor Shefali Shah was the star of the movie. She had worked with Jaideep Ahlawat, her senior in "Paatal Lok," but his name didn't immediately click." (PTI)

Winter of despair for Kashmir's line producers, artists

SRINAGAR, Jan 17: As snowfall continues to elude the picturesque valley of Kashmir, local line producers and others associated with the Indian film industry are in a state of despair as shooting requests are drying up due to a snowless winter.

The mighty mountains of Pir Panjal region, which are draped in a thick white blanket of snow during this time of the season, are bare, highlighting the climatic changes gradually sweeping the Himalayan region.

"The dry spell in Kashmir has significantly impacted us. We've three projects lined up but they hang in balance. If snowfall doesn't occur, these projects may either get canceled, postponed, or relocated to places with snow. Snow holds immense importance for Kashmir, and we are fervently praying and hoping for it," Abid Hussain, casting manager at KG Production, told PTI.

The snowless winter and the extended dry

spell, Hussain said, has even led some people associated with the industry to experience depression due lack of work. He said the people associated with the film industry in Mumbai are also eagerly awaiting the snowfall in Kashmir to commence film shootings.

"Kashmir's fame is intricately linked to snow, and there's a substantial adverse effect on line producers this time due to absence of snow," he added.

Bismah Masoodi, a Line Producer, said some scheduled shoots have already been postponed due to the lack of snow in the valley. However, she expressed optimism that once snowfall occurs, filmmakers will travel to Kashmir for shooting.

"Our projects require meticulous planning, and we are optimistic that snowfall will happen, allowing filmmakers to come for shoots and enabling us to continue our work," she said.

Bismah, who has worked with famous

celebrities like Karan Kundra, Amaan Malik and others and has contributed to various ad films and biopics, said the dry spell not only stalls movie shootings but also hits locals offering catering services, transportation and hotels as well.

"The entire Kashmir region suffers due to this extended dry spell. The absence of snowfall has adversely affected our work, but we remain hopeful for snowfall to fulfill the plans of filmmakers visiting and shooting in Kashmir," she added.

Mir Sarwar, a popular filmmaker and actor from Kashmir, is also concerned with the unusual weather pattern as the valley is witnessing warm days in the harshest 40-day period of winter, locally called Chilai Kallan.

"I had plans for a short film requiring snow, but the dry conditions prevail. Nature's will is a factor, but human responsibility for climate change can't be ignored. Kashmir's aura is syn-

onymous with snow, attracting numerous filmmakers and tourists. Despite several projects being delayed, I believe some are exploring alternatives like Himachal," he said.

Bhawani Bashir Yasir, who played roles in movies like "Haider", "Bajrangi Bhaijaan", "Kesar", and "Jehad", said snowfall is important for many tourist activities.

"There is a huge impact of climate change in Kashmir, primarily affecting the economy and various professions, including the tourism industry. Film shootings in Kashmir benefit not only actors but also other sectors like transporters and hoteliers. When shootings are canceled, the entire system is crippled," he said.

Despite no snowfall and the persistent cold weather conditions, there is a glimmer of hope within the people associated with the valley's tourism sector, including the hoteliers.

Though Kashmir's main winter tourist attractions like Gulmarg, Sonamarg and Pahalgam

have been left without snow this season, the tourism players are optimistic that the falling snowflakes will draw a large number of tourists from India and abroad.

"The absence of snow does impact business but compared to last year, we are performing well. Tourists are visiting, albeit with some disappointment due to the lack of snow. However, looking at the positive side, it provides them a reason to return. Some scheduled shootings have been postponed, not necessarily cancelled, as filmmakers often adjust their schedules based on the landscape and snow conditions. We remain hopeful that they will return," said Asif Iqbal Burza, a prominent hotelier.

Last year, he said, Pahalgam was a prime location for film shootings, witnessing back-to-back big-budget films from mid-January to March.

"This year, we are in talks with many production houses, and once snowfall begins, they plan to shoot accordingly," Burza said. (PTI)

India eye win against Germany to seal Paris Games ticket

RANCHI, Jan 17: Just one win away from securing a Paris Olympics berth, a resilient Indian women's hockey team will need to produce its 'A' game against higher-ranked Germany in the semifinals of the FIH Olympic Qualifiers here on Thursday.

The Indians bounced back from a 0-1 loss to USA in their tournament-opener to outclass New Zealand and Italy to seal their semifinal spot as the second-placed team from Pool B.

It was a near-perfect perform-

ance in the last two matches with all departments clicking in unison and the Savita Punia-led side would look to continue the same way in the business end of the tournament.

The top three teams from here will qualify for this year's Olympics and a win on Thursday will guarantee India a ticket to Paris. In case they fail to do so, the Indians will get another shot in the third-fourth place match against the other losing semi-finalists on Friday.

But the home side needs to approach the match against Germany with a positive mindset.

The best aspect of India's performance in the last two matches was their backline. The Indian defenders dished out a superlative effort to keep their opponents at bay. The defence led by skipper Savita and comprising Udita, Monika and Nikki Pradhan didn't put a foot wrong in the last two matches, clearing any loose balls inside their circle at the first opportunity.

The midfield too has been resourceful. Salima Tete has been phenomenal with her quick running, along with Neha Goyal. The two combined well to create chances for the forwardline.

At the front, Lalremsiami, Sangita Kumari, Beauty Dung Dung and Navneet Kaur have also lived up to the team's expectations with their fine display.

Penalty corner conversion has been a thorny issue for the Indians but in the last match against Italy, Udita Duhan, playing her 100th

international, came as a saviour for India, converting two set pieces with her trademark slap shots. But Udita alone won't be enough for India against a strong side like Germany.

"Udita is at par with her skill, which is slap shot and we saw that against Italy. But we need more variation from penalty corners. Deepika is a very good drag-flicker but in most of the PCs we got yesterday she was not in the field. The one time she was there we miss-trapped the push," coach

Janneke Schopman said. "We also have Neha and Monika who have got good hits."

The Germans finished on top of Pool A with seven points, similar as second placed Japan, but had a better goal difference.

Going by world rankings, there is hardly anything to separate the two sides as India are placed sixth in the world against Germany's fifth position. Since 2006, India have played Germany seven times, winning just two and losing five games. So, the odds are

against India going into Thursday's match. But in modern day hockey rankings and past results are just numbers as the gulf between teams is very slim and what matters is performance on the day.

"We know Germany well, we have played them in the summer and we have played them in Spain recently. They have some good individual players but if we remain ourselves, we can rip them a little," Schopman said. In the other semifinal, USA will take on Japan. (PTI)

Error-prone Srikanth goes down in India Open opener

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: Kidambi Srikanth bowed out of the India Open Super 750 tournament with a straight-game loss to Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu after yet another erratic performance here on Wednesday.

Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu greet each other at the end of the men's singles badminton match. | Photo Credit: PTI

Kidambi Srikanth bowed out of the India Open Super 750 tournament with a straight-game loss to Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu after yet another erratic performance here on Wednesday.

A flurry of brilliant shots was sandwiched between a series of unforced errors during the 47-minute opening round clash as Srikanth went down 22-24 13-21 to World No. 18 Lee.

Srikanth made a good start in the opening game, playing some fine strokes from the back court to keep his nose ahead. But Lee kept breathing down his neck and slowly came back to the groove and, following a tight battle, moved ahead from 17-17 to grab three game points.

Srikanth managed to claw back at 20-20 before taking a one-point

lead, but then, sprayed a shot wide, as Lee sealed the game with a crisp drop in the end.

While he looked good in the first game, Srikanth fell 2-11 behind at the break after the change of ends. He recovered to 6-12, but the damage was already done as the gap was too big to be bridged by the Indian.

"I know I have been making unforced errors for sometimes and I am working on it," said Srikanth after the match.

"I don't play safe, that's my game. I try to earn points."

Hopefully, things will be better in next few tournaments. Parupalli K. S. (Kashyap) has a few things on his mind, so let's see. If I win a few tournaments, I will qualify for Olympics.

"I am not thinking about it as I just don't want to qualify only, I want to be a medal contender too." Earlier, World No. 20 Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who had won the Guwahati Masters Super 100 last December, went down fighting to World No. 10 Thai pair of Jongkolphan Kittharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai 5-21 21-18 11-21 in their women's doubles opener. (PTI)



WE ARE LOOKING FOR MORE ATTACK-MINDED PLAYERS, SAYS STIMAC

DOHA, Jan 17: India head coach Igor Stimac on Wednesday said his team has a "couple of players" with few injury issues but that will not stop them from going all out in an attempt to secure full points against Uzbekistan in the AFC Asian Cup here on Thursday.

India lost their opening game against tournament favourites Australia 0-2 after a spirited performance, while higher-ranked Uzbekistan are coming off a goalless draw with Syria.

Blue Tigers head coach Igor Stimac said, "It is a huge match for us. The first game was an experience for the boys, and now we face another difficult match. Uzbekistan are a very competitive side, and since they did not gain a victory in their last game, we expect them to put a lot of pressure on us."

"But our boys are ready for the challenge. We are happy for this opportunity that lies ahead of us, and our mentality will be to win the game and get three points."

India currently occupy the bottom spot in the group while Syria

and Uzbekistan are second and third respectively.

The race for the top three spots, however, remains wide open in Group B.

The top two teams from each group, along with the four best third-placed teams from the six groups, will book a spot in the Round of 16, which leaves the doors for qualification wide open. While India (ranked 102) gave a good account of themselves against a higher-ranked Australian side (ranked 25), Stimac left the door open for changes to the starting XI. "We do have a couple of players with some issues after the Australia game, so we will see what team we will go with against Uzbekistan," said Stimac.

"Uzbekistan dominated Syria with 65 percent possession in their last game and had many shots on goal, but Syria are also a physical side and played a 4-4-2 formation with strong counterattacks. But this game will be different."

Stimac outlined the importance of playing with an attacking mindset.

"What we are looking for are more attack-minded players. We also saw against Australia that instead of just clearing the ball, we could find the flanks."

"We did that in the first half, but there was no intent to do the same in the second," said Stimac. "If that happens, they will keep coming and you keep getting tired."

India custodian Amrinder Singh, who last featured in the World Cup Qualifier against Qatar, said, "It's a big game for us tomorrow, and we are looking forward to it. We have studied what Uzbekistan did in the game against Syria, prepared our own strategies, and are ready for the game."

The gloveman, who is always in competition for the number one shirt with Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, feels that they feed off the competition between each other to remain at the top level.

"Of course, there can only be one spot, but Gurpreet and I share a healthy competition, which motivates both of us to keep improving," said Amrinder. (PTI)



Red Stars sign national team star Mallory Swanson to record 5-year contract

ORLANDO, Jan 17: The Chicago Red Stars have signed U.S. team forward Mallory Swanson to a historic four-year contract with an option for a fifth year, a record for the National Women's Soccer League.

Financial terms of the deal announced Tuesday were not made public, although the team called it the "most lucrative agreement" in league history. CBS Sports reported it was worth some \$400,000 per year for nearly \$2 million over the length of the contract.

Swanson, who was a free agent this season, has been with the Red Stars since 2021. She has scored 18 goals with 10 assists in 51 games with the team. "These last few years have been such a blessing in Chicago, even with the ups and downs, and I can't wait to be back," Swanson said in a statement. "I am looking forward to getting to work and helping the team win championships."

Swanson, 25, was one of the United States' strongest players in early 2023, but her year was cut short when she injured a tendon in her left knee during an exhibition match against Ireland in April.

Heading into the match, Swanson

was the national team's leading scorer with seven goals and a six-game scoring streak, tied for fourth-longest in team history. Overall she has 32 goals and 27 assists in 88 appearances for the United States.

The injury required surgery and Swanson was not able to play for the U.S. last summer at the Women's World Cup. She worked out with the Red Stars in October.

Swanson returns to a Red Stars team that looks vastly different. Chicago Cubs co-owner Laura Ricketts bought the Red Stars last September and the team hired Lorne Donaldson, coach of the Jamaican national team at the World Cup. Swanson played for a youth team coached by Donaldson when she was growing up in Colorado.

The contract also keeps Swanson closer to husband Dansby Swanson, who plays for the Chicago Cubs.

"The Red Stars could not be more excited that Mallory Swanson has decided to extend her career with us here in Chicago," Red Stars President Karen Leetow said. "Mallory exemplifies the grit, focus and resiliency of our franchise and is an anchor for this team. (AP)

Sevilla, Athletic Bilbao and Mallorca advance to quarterfinals of Copa del Rey



MADRID, Jan 17: Sevilla left behind its Spanish league struggles on Tuesday, defeating Getafe 3-1 to reach the quarterfinals of the Copa del Rey.

Athletic Bilbao also advanced, beating Alaves 2-0 to make it to the last-eight for the fifth straight season. Sergio Ramos scored once and Isaac Romero twice to give Sevilla the road victory and put the southern Spanish club in the quarterfinals for the second consecutive year. Sevilla will try to make it to last-four for the first time since 2021.

Sevilla won its last four Copa matches but has only one victory in its last 14 league games. The team coached by Quique Sanchez Flores has 16 points from 20 league matches and sits only one point outside the relegation zone.

Ramos opened the scoring with a header in the eighth minute, but he failed to fully clear a cross that led to Jaime Mata's equalizer from inside the area in the 23rd. Romero put Sevilla ahead again in the 48th and sealed the victory in the 55th. Sevilla was eliminated by eventual runner-up Osasuna in

extra time in last year's quarterfinals. It lost to Barcelona in the semifinals in 2021.

Getafe, which is 10th in the Spanish league, was trying to reach the Copa quarterfinals for the first time since 2019. It hadn't advanced past the third round since that season.

Sevilla's next match is at Spanish league leader Girona on Sunday, while Getafe visits Osasuna. Athletic defeated Alaves at home with striker Asier Villalibre scoring goals in the 28th and 60th minutes. Athletic, sitting third in the Spanish league standings, reached the Copa semifinals the last two seasons, and was runner-up both in 2020 and 2021.

Alaves, 13th in the league, was trying to make it to the Copa's last-eight for the first time since 2018. Also Tuesday, Mallorca defeated second-division club Tenerife 1-0 in extra time with a goal by Canada striker Cyle Larin in the 120th minute, reaching the quarterfinals for the second time in three seasons. Tenerife was playing in the round of 16 for the first time since 2020. (AP)

Mental conditioning coach Peter Harberl key to India's turnaround in FIH Olympic Qualifiers

RANCHI, Jan 17: Seeking the services of American psychologist and mental conditioning coach Peter Harberl, following a disappointing Asian Games, has played a significant role in the Indian women's hockey team's turnaround in the ongoing FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers.

Harberl, from Colorado Springs in the United States of America has been working with India's chief coach Janneke Schopman since last October on a part-time basis.

According to India captain Savita Punia, hiring Harberl was a masterstroke. "It was really helpful because during the Asian Champions Trophy we noticed how much his (Harberl) sessions were beneficial for us as an individual and as a team," Savita said on the eve of India's semifinal against Germany.

"In the Asian Games, we went with a lot of positive mindset and the team deserved to book Paris ticket from there. The chances were there. The team is a mix of senior and junior players and when you expect something, and it goes out of your hand, it feels disappointing.

"After the Asian Games, Peter has worked a lot in developing a positive mindset of the players, individually and as a team. Whenever we needed to talk to him he was available online. The best part about him is his calm personality. His message to us is that 'life won't stop, life moves on' and that's what we have learnt from him," she added.

A retired professional ice hockey player, Harberl began his coaching career with the US women's ice hockey team as a sports psychology consultant from 1996 to 2006, and has since worked for the US Olympic Committee from 2001 to 2005 and a senior sports psychologist with the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee from 2005 to 2023.

India's chief coach Schopman, who worked with Harberl for the US women's team, too acknowledged the contribution of Harberl.

"After the US match the girls had their own meeting and then I had a meeting with Peter, and he came up with a plan. He was instrumental in that (turnaround) I think. After that our vision was a lot positive. We did



a bit of individual reflection and from that moment on they were ready. "Mental health is the most important thing and it is something I am trying to be mindful. It is important for me what is going on. If they want to share it is fine, if not, it's okay, but the ability to express is important," she said.

"Of course, it's not always easy, there are going to be tough times and struggles but they have overcome a lot. I think sports is a

metaphor for life, which means every skill you learn on and off the field will help you in the rest of your life." With World No. 5 Germany standing between India and an Olympic berth, Schopman asked her players to play to their strengths on Thursday. "Yesterday we had a tough game, Italy put us to work and we responded well. We are getting ready, we know Germany well. In summer we played them in Spain. They have very good individual

players, they have got very good individual skills.

"They defend really well, but if we play to our strengths and focus on ourselves, we can also hurt them a little bit," she said.

"There were eight teams vying for top three spots but now we have four teams fighting for that opportunity. I think we just have to show up. Germany is good we know that, we have played them. We need to defend really well, if we can play to our strengths, that is attacking hockey, let's see what happens."

Schopman was full of praise for the Indian defence's performances against New Zealand and Italy. "They did a very good job. But if our strikers and defenders can play to their strengths, we can cause some problems for Germany," Schopman said.

"Our defence needs to be on par, we can and we have been practising a lot. They have very good threats on top of the circle. Germany loves to have the ball and what is important for us is to pressurise them a lot, keep the ball and threaten them a little bit," the Dutch said. (PTI)

West Ham and Brentford ousted from FA Cup

LONDON, Jan 17: Premier League teams West Ham and Brentford exited the FA Cup on Tuesday as fifth-tier Eastleigh's dream of hosting the mighty Manchester United in the fourth round was extinguished.

West Ham lost 1-0 at second-tier Bristol City in one of five

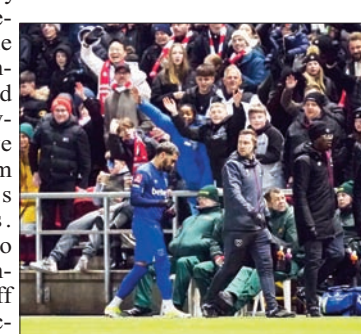
third-round replays, with the only goal coming in the third minute following a defensive mistake from Konstantinos Mavropanos. The visitors also had Said Benrahma sent off early in the second half for kicking out at an opponent.

Brentford was beaten 3-2 after extra time by Wolverhampton in an all-Premier League matchup at Molineux. Brazil striker Matheus Cunha scored the clinching goal from the penalty spot in first-half stoppage time in extra time, with the match finish-

ing 2-2 in regulation.

Wolves will play local rival West Bromwich Albion next.

Luton was the other top-flight team in action and had to come from behind to win 2-1 at third-tier Bolton. Tahith Chong and Chiedozie Ogbene scored for Luton.



Eastleigh, which is in 11th place in the National League, was looking to set up a lucrative meeting with Man United and one of the most mismatched games in the recent history of the competition.

However, a 3-1 home loss to Newport County means it will be the fourth-tier club from Wales taking on Erik ten Hag's team on Jan. 28. Newport, which is in 17th place in League Two, lost to Tottenham in the fourth round in 2018 and Manchester City in the fifth round in 2019. (AP)

After fighting show against Australia, India gear up for tough match against Uzbekistan



AL RAYYAN (QATAR), Jan 17: After a gritty performance against formidable Australia, India face Uzbekistan in their second group match of the Asian Cup here on Thursday, aiming to assert themselves better than what they managed in the opening game.

India lost to title-contenders Australia 0-2 in the opening match on January 13 after denying the Socceroos any success for 50 minutes. The Australians were at their attacking best but Sunil Chhetri's men managed to avoid a bigger margin of defeat.

The defensive compactness, especially in the first half, would be something that the Indians would like to continue against the

Uzbeks, who are a bit disappointed after playing out a 0-0 draw against Syria in their opening match.

Chhetri made the point that the Central Asian side, ranked 68th in the world as against 102nd of India, would not be as menacing as the Australians, and his thoughts could be a pointer to his side's game-plan.

"Uzbekistan are not Australia, but they're a good side nonetheless. So, it will be a big challenge in this game too," said Chhetri who missed a scoring chance against Australia.

Chhetri had earlier conceded that Uzbekistan as well as Australia are of World Cup level but he and his team will not be too

scared of the former, popularly known as 'White Wolves', after their fighting show against the Socceroos.

For sure, India will not sit back too deep against Uzbekistan. Instead, they would look to play their own game and press for counter-attacks with quick transition. The likes of Chhetri, Manvir Singh and other forwards could be looking for chances which were almost non-existent against the Australians.

Sandesh Jhingan will, as usual, be the key man in the deep defence. A true warrior on the pitch, Jhingan led a fine Indian defensive effort against Australia.

He soldiered on with a bandaged forehead and stitched-up

cuts above each eyebrow.

Uzbekistan are a side who have beaten the likes of China, Oman and Bolivia while drawing with Iran and Mexico in the past one year. They are currently at ninth spot among the Asian countries in the FIFA rankings.

Uzbekistan dominated against Syria but failed to find the target from around a dozen shots. Syria also got enough shots and that will encourage the Indians to try and score.

Uzbek captain Jaloliddin Masharipov, who plies his trade in the Greek Super League, was Uzbekistan's most impressive player in the match against Syria and he could be the man to watch for the Indians.

Historically, India and Uzbekistan have played eight times against each other with the Blue Tigers having won just one. Uzbekistan were the victors five times while two matches had ended in draws.

The last match between the two sides had also gone in favour of the Uzbeks who won 2-1 in the 2001 Merdeka Cup in Kuala Lumpur.

The 'White Wolves' have not lost to India in their six earlier meetings. They erased a 2-1 deficit with two goals in the final 13 minutes to win their only Asian Cup qualification round match 3-2 in 1999.

This will be Uzbekistan's eighth appearance in the AFC Asian Cup and they reached the knock-out round in each of the previous five editions (2004-2019), and the semifinals in 2011.

They lost to Australia in the round of 16 in the last edition in 2019.

A win against the Uzbeks may be far-fetched but taking a point from the match is a possibility, just like the Syrians have done, and that could be valuable for India as far as knock-out qualification is concerned. (PTI)

Only National Championship organised by us will be genuine: Ad-hoc panel

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: A day after suspended WFI asserted that only the national federation has the mandate to organise the National Championships, the IOA-appointed ad-hoc panel said only the tournament organised by it will be considered "genuine".

The ad-hoc panel also made it clear that only the wrestlers who participate in competition conducted by it will get the "benefits".

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) had on Tuesday announced that it will go ahead with the Nationals on Pune from January 29 after its first Executive Committee meeting post the elections.

WFI contended that its constitution mandates only the Federation to host the Nationals and the ad-hoc panel has no authority to conduct the National Championships.

The Sports Ministry, which had suspended WFI citing rules violation, had also said that WFI-organised events will not be recognised.

"It is clarified that only Sr. National Free Style, Greco Roman Style & Women National Wrestling Championships 2023, organised by RSPB is genuine, sanctioned and recognised championship by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports and all government benefits will only accrue to the sportspersons participating in such National Championships," Panel head Bhupendra Singh Bajwa said in a press release.

WFI President Sanjay Singh had said on Tuesday that they will seek a dialogue with the ministry to get the suspension revoked.

The fight for authority between ad-hoc panel and the WFI has only created confusion among the wrestlers.

"The sport has become a joke. Where do we go? This whole mess should be cleared for the benefit of wrestlers and the sport," said a woman wrestler who did not wish to be named. (PTI)

Praggnanandhaa stuns world champion Liren in Tata Steel tourney; surpasses Anand as No 1 Indian



WIJK AAN ZEE (THE NETHERLANDS), Jan 17: Teenaged Indian chess superstar R Praggnanandhaa defeated world champion Ding Liren of China in the fourth round of the Tata Steel Chess Tournament here, a win which also helped him surpass the legendary Viswanathan Anand as the top-rated Indian player.

After the victory late on Tuesday night, the 18-year-old Praggnanandhaa has 2748.3 points as against 2748 of five-time world champion Anand in the FIDE live ratings. The world chess body publishes the ratings at the start of each month.

With the 62-move win with black pieces, Praggnanandhaa became the second Indian after Anand to defeat a reigning world champion in classical chess.

Praggnanandhaa had also beaten Liren at the 2023 Tata Steel tournament.

He is now third in the standings with 2.5 points in the Masters event.

"That feels good!" Praggnanandhaa said after the win.

Explaining his game strategy, Praggnanandhaa said, "From the opening itself, I was the one pushing. I got a pawn early on and I felt just pushing without any risk in a position, which is a bonus with black."

His focus at the moment is to

just give his best.

"My personal goals in this tournament would be to give my best. It is a very tough tournament. Usually tournaments have nine rounds but this one has 13 rounds. So it's like playing one tournament more. I want to give my best and see how it goes," said Praggnanandhaa.

The teenaged Indian GM has been in good form in recent times, having finished runner-up in the World Cup to Magnus Carlsen last year to qualify for the Candidates tournament to be held in April to identify the challenger to Liren.

The Masters group saw Dutch player Anish Giri emerge as the sole leader heading into the first rest day. Giri's endgame prowess secured him victory against teenaged Indian GM D Gukesh to take him to 3.5 points.

Alireza Firouzja is half a point behind the leader on 3 points.

The third Indian player in the fray, Vidit Santosh Gujrathi was held to a draw by Jorden Van Foreest in round four. He has 2 points from four rounds.

In the fifth round on Thursday, Praggnanandhaa runs into the leader Anish Giri while his compatriots Gukesh and Gujrathi will take on Ian Nepomniachtchi and Max Warmerdam respectively. (PTI)

Axar Patel, Yashasvi Jaiswal break into top 10 of ICC T20I rankings

DUBAI, Jan 17: Riding on two excellent outings against Afghanistan in the ongoing series, India left-arm spinner Axar Patel on Wednesday leaped to his career-best fifth place, while opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal rose to the sixth spot in the latest ICC men's T20I player rankings.

Patel's hauls of two for 23 and two for 16 in India's identical six-wicket wins over Afghanistan in the first two T20Is of their three-match series have also lifted him two places to 16th among all-rounders.

Jaiswal's 34-ball 68 in the first T20I in Indore lifted him seven places to a career-best sixth position, while other left-hander Shivam Dube's successive unbeaten knocks of 60 and 63 have helped him shoot up from 265th to 58th.

Batter Shubman Gill moved up seven places to 60th while left-handed batsman Tilak Verma gained three places to joint-61st while left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh jumped four places

to 21st spot.

Among the Afghans, Najibullah Zadran (up one place to 46th) and Mohammad Nabi (up two places to 54th) moved up in the batting rankings.

New Zealand's Finn Allen, whose two innings of 34 off 15 and 74 off 41 against Pakistan helped him to reach 16th among batters. His teammate Tim Southee, who took six wickets in the first two matches, is up eight places to 18th in the bowlers' list.

Pakistan's star batter Babar Azam is up one place to fourth after notching two consecutive half-centuries against New Zealand.

The bowling rankings saw Sri Lanka spinners Wanindu Hasaranga and Maheesh Theekshana take joint-third position.

Pakistan fast bowler Haris Rauf's haul of five wickets in two matches against the Kiwis have lifted him two places to joint 14th. (PTI)

Brison Fernandes's late goal propels FC Goa to second win in row



BHUBANESWAR, Jan 17: An injury-time goal by Brison Fernandes saw FC Goa beat Bengaluru FC 1-0 in their Group D clash of the Super Cup here on Wednesday, giving the Gaurs their second successive win in the competition.

While the loss effectively knocked last season's finalists Bengaluru out of the tournament, FC Goa are sitting strong in the table with six points from two matches.

The game was marked by the lack of cutting edge in both sides, evidenced by the dearth of chances in the first half.

And when the chances did fall, they were squandered away. The first fell to Carlos Martinez, who volleyed towards

goal from Noah Sadaoui's brilliantly worked cross.

An acrobatic Sahil tipped the ball over the bar. Bengaluru were guilty of a glaring miss soon after, a mistake from Seriton Fernandes gifting Javi Hernandez the ball inside the box and a gaping goal to shoot at. He shot over the bar.

After an initial period of dominance, Goa lacked urgency in the second half and Bengaluru capitalised, pushing forward in numbers to create a few chances of their own.

Lalremliuanga's shot from a Shivaldo Singh cutback was deflected off target and Carl McHugh was forced to clear off the line from the subsequent corner.

Shivaldo, introduced as a substitute, continued to be the biggest positive for Bengaluru in their second half, the architect of their best moments.

And yet his teammates proved to remain ineffective and incapable of finishing off his chances. The last of those fell to Ashish Jha, who dinked over Dheeraj Singh after Shivaldo's brilliant ball had set him through on goal. His effort went wide.

Late in injury time Goa made Bengaluru pay for their missed chances when Fernandes (90+4) headed Muhammed Nemil's cross from a tight angle into the far corner to spark the celebrations. For Bengaluru, the cup run is over. (PTI)

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