idding adieu to the bygone year we heartily welcome the New Year with hope and aspirations. We, at *The Hills Times* would like to take this opportunity to wish our advertisers, readers, hawkers, well-wishers and contributors a wonderful New Year ahead. Your valuable insights and suggestions have always been our strength to deliver facts to you every morning. We have put in our best efforts to bring news from different regions of the globe to our readers in the past year and rectified our flaws by considering the suggestions of our valuable readers and well wishers. We continue to seek blessings from each one of you in the upcoming year. Your blessings will keep us motivated in our future endeavours.



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PRICE ₹8

Curb on child marriage, law to end polygamy major highlights

Himanta pushes BJP's core political agenda emphatically

down on child marriage with most arrests made in minority-dominated districts, an initiative to enact a law in the assembly to end the practice of polygamy and a socio-economic survey of five indigenous Muslim communities dominated the headlines in Assam in 2023.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's initiatives kept him in the Assam: 2023 Rewind

him being the campaigner for the BJP in the states that maternal mortalities have dewent to the polls, as he pushed the party's core political agenda emphatically while continuing to consolidate its base among the majority indigenous population in

his state. The Assam government's crackdown, in two phases, on child marriage in February and October led to nearly 5,500 arrests, mostly in districts dominated by the minority women (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: A crack- community, with Sarma claiming that the social menace would be completely eliminated by 2026 and all gram panchayat secretaries would be designated as child marriage prevention officers.

Opposition parties, however, maintained that child marriage cannot be forcibly stopped by police intervention but would need a sustained campaign, involving all stakeholders.

serted that

creased by over 33 per cent and child deaths by nearly 15 per cent in the state since the launch of the crackdown. The state government also planned to bring a law to ban the practice of polygamy among Muslims as during the crackdown, it was found that many elderly men had married multiple times and their wives were mostly young

Peace accord 'shameful', political settlement not possible when ideals given up: ULFA(I)

(We) will not betray people of Assam: Paresh Barua

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: Paresh Barua, leader of the anti-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom or ULFA (Independent), has termed the tripartite peace agreement signed with the protalks faction of the outfit as "shameful", asserting that "political settlement is not possible when revolutionaries give up their goals and ideals".

"We are not surprised, concerned or angry but ashamed of the pact. We were aware of the outcome as when revolutionaries give up their goals, ideals and ideology, a political settlement is not possible," Barua told an Assamese television channel during a telephonic interview.

Asked about chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's conversation with him on possible talks with his faction, the rebel leader said, "Yes,



he did speak to me. He is a catalyst for negotiations. We will not sit for talks just for the sake of it. We have demanded a political settlement and will not waver from this goal

and betray the people of the state. "If political demands are not met and only a package is given, it is not acceptable. We have been say- discussed, with the faction engag- people (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

ing from the beginning that they (pro-talks faction) are proceeding on the wrong path of a so-called arrangement," he added

The hardliner ULFA(I), led by Barua, was unwilling to come to the negotiating table unless the issue of 'Assam's sovereignty' was

Peace accord with ULFA will expedite

ing in sporadic incidents of violence as security forces intensified operations.

Asked whether he had discussed these issues with his former comrades-in-arms, the ULFA(I) leader said the outfit's general secretary Anup Chetia had spoken to him and he tried to convince Chetia about a political settlement but Chetia informed him that this demand was turned down by the negotiators stating "there was no such provision in the Indian Constitution"

"Did they go for talks without knowing what was in the Constitution? Talks will have to be held outside the ambit of the Constitution," he said. Barua claimed that Chetia had told him they had no other option. "If there was no other option, they should tell the

B'deshi national held in Morigaon

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, Dec 31: In a significant development, the Morigaon Police apprehended a Bangladeshi national, living illegally in the state under deceptive circumstances in Morigaon district, said an official on Sunday. As per the official, the individual had allegedly been living in India using a counterfeit Indian voter ID card. Acting on a tip-off, the Morigaon Police conducted a raid in Dakhin Chenimari village under Lahorighat police station on Saturday night, leading to the arrest of a person along with a child carrying a Bangladeshi passport. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Three drug peddlers held [']in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Dec 31: Assam

police on Sunday apprehended three drug peddlers with for allegedly carrying drugs with them here in Dibrugarh.

The drug peddlers has been identified as- Wasim Hussain, Nazir Ali and Sonu Ali.

Police have recovered 28.57 gm (with container) and 7.87 gm (without container), one blue colour empty plastic soap container, six empty plastic tobacco container, two small plastic vials, Rs 36000 cash and three mobiles phones from their possession.

Meanwhile, Dibrugarh police have launched a massive crackdown against drugs.

"We have arrested three drug peddlers and seized 36.44 grams of drugs from their possession. We have sent three of them in jail," said a police official while speaking on the matter.

India brimming with self-confidence, we should maintain momentum in 2024: Modi

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: Asserting that India is brimming with selfconfidence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the country is imbued with the spirit of 'Viksit Bharat' and self-reliance, and urged people to maintain the momentum in 2024 as well.

In the 108th episode of Mann Ki Baat radio broadcast, Prime Minister Modi also emphasised on physical and mental health and

highlighted several unique efforts for 'Fit India'.

During the broadcast, Isha Foundation head Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, Indian women's cricket team captain Harmanpreet Kaur, chess legend Vishwanathan Anand and actor Akshay Kumar shared their fitness tips.

In his remarks, Modi said. 'Today, every corner of India is brimming with self-confidence, imbued with the spirit of a developed India; the spirit of self-reliance. We have to maintain the same spirit and momentum in 2024

Noting that 2024 was just hours away, Modi said India's achievements are the achievements of every Indian and "we have to continuously work for the development of India keeping in mind the Panch Pran". (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

development works in Assam: AGP

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) president Atul Bora on Sunday said the peace pact with the pro-talk faction of ULFA will expedite the ongoing developmental works in the state.

Bora, who is also a minister in the BJP-led government in the state, said the attitude of the Centre towards Assam and the region as a whole has changed after Prime Minister Narendra Modi took charge.

"Developmental works have been going on in the Northeast since 2014. The earlier step-motherly treatment to this region is no longer there. Peace and development have taken centre stage now," he said at a

press conference here.

Thanking Union home minister Amit Shah, in whose presence the peace pact with ULFA was inked, Bora said the agreement will speed up the ongoing developmental works in the state.

The ULFA's pro-talks faction on December 29 signed a peace accord with the Centre and the Assam government, agreeing to shun violence, surrender all arms, disband the organisation and join the democratic process. Talking about the coming year, the AGP chief said that the party will work towards strengthening its base in all 35 districts of the state. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



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Gold likely to touch ₹ 70,000 in 2024, say experts

MUMBAI, Dec 31: Continuing to glitter in 2024 as well, gold price is likely to touch Rs 70,000 per 10 grams in the domestic market on the back of a stable rupee, geopolitical uncertainties and slowing global economic growth, according to experts. Currently, the yellow metal price is hovering at ₹ 63,060 per 10 grams on the commodity stock exchange MCX and around USD 2,058 an ounce in the international market at a time when the rupee is trading above 83 against the US dollar.

In early December, prices skyrocketed again on global tensions in the Middle East, and emerging market participants anticipated that the rate hike cycle has more or less

While the gold price remained volatile this year, it reached a new high of ₹ 61,845 per 10 grams on May 4 in the domestic market and USD 2,083 an ounce in the global markets. Later, the yellow metal touched a record high of ₹ 61,914 per 10 grams on November 16, Commtrendz Research Director Gnanasekar Thiagarajan told PTI.

In a reflection of its safe-haven appeal, he said, gold touched an all-time high of ₹ 64,063 per 10 grams and USD 2,140 an ounce on

Purabi Dairy receives prestigious NCDFI e-Market Awards, 2023

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Dec 31: The West Assam Milk Producers' Co-operative Union Ltd. (WAMUL) has been awarded by Union home minister and minister of cooperation, Amit Shah for its outstanding performance in the National Cooperative Dairy Federation of India (NCDFI) Limited e-Market Awards 2023. The accolade was received by Meenesh Shah, chairman of WAMUL's management committee, and SB Bose, managing director of WAMUL, during a ceremony held at Gandhinagar in Gujarat on Saturday

The award ceremony held in conjunction with the foundation stone laying event for NCDFI Limited's headquarters, saw the presence of eminent dignitaries like Guiarat chief minister Bhupendra Patel, Gujarat legislative assembly speaker Shankar Choudhary, IFFCO chairman Dilip Sanghani and NCDFI chairman Mangal Rai. Union minister Amit Shah, in his address lauded the pivotal role of the cooperative dairy sector in achieving multi-dimensional goals for the nation. "The importance of cooperative milk trading has several comprehensive benefits on society, agriculture, villages, milk producers, and the country at large. All cooperatives should transition to 100 per cent bank transfers, which incidentally has already been achieved by WAMUL. It has been at the forefront in helping provide livelihood to around 30,000 dairy farmers under 700 dairy cooperatives from nine districts of the state" said Amit Shah

Underlining India's global leadership in milk production with a 24 per cent share, Shah credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for the remarkable 51 per cent increase in milk production over the past eight years, the highest in the world. Managing director of WAMUL, SB Bose, said, "It is an honour for the dairy farmers of the state that WAMUL and their own brand 'Purabi' is being recognised and facilitated with the prestigious NCDFI e-market Award 2022-23 by Union minister of cooperation Amit Shah, for its active participation and superlative performance in the development of dairy cooperative eco-system in the state.



"We expect an eventual rise to USD 2,400 in 2024, and if the rupee is to be stable, gold is likely to reach around ₹ 70,000 levels. As India faces elections, the rupee could weaken as Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) are expected to lighten up their portfolios, which could further bolster domestic prices for gold," he said.

Kotak Securities Vice President Head Commodity Research Ravindra Rao said retail jewellery buying might face headwinds from higher domestic prices in India and China while central banks' demand might exceed last year's record if the current momentum continues.

AHMEDABAD, Dec 31: Gujarat's industry-

friendly policies have played a key role in at-

tracting investments across sectors and

underscore the state government's commitment

to drive India's economic growth, officials said.

Global Summits held over the last two decades,

the 10th edition of the summit, to be organised

in Gandhinagar between January 10 and 12,

2024, will serve as a platform to showcase the

state's commitment to promote business-

of 'Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat' through

'Atmanirbhar Gujarat,' and measures an-

nounced to attract businesses are aimed towards

Modi's vision for economic development be-

hind the state's progressive policies.

They credited Prime Minister Narendra

"The Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit has

played a key role in attracting an impressive

USD 55 billion in foreign investments over the

past two decades. It has contributed to more

The state aims to support the Centre's vision

friendly policies, they said.

the same, the officials said.

Like the previous nine Vibrant Gujarat

bank buying alongside solid bar and coin demand helped gold prices amid surging bond yields and a strong US dollar throughout the year, as the US Federal Reserve raised the interest rates to a 22-year high

"The central banks' buying has turned out to be a major demand driver for physical gold since the last few quarters. Record high domestic prices and uneven monsoon weighed on Indian jewellery consumption while the Chinese economic downturn led to an increase in the iewellery demand from the top consumer nation," he said.

On the price front, Rao said

said in a statement.

Pro-industry policies have helped Gujarat

attract investments across sectors: Officials

the highest in the country," the government

"Proactive measures and investor-friendly

In 2022, the 'Aatmanirbhar Gujarat' scheme

policies underscore Gujarat's commitment to

becoming a global hub for investments," it said.

was unveiled, projected as a testament to the

It was a response to PM Modi's call for 'Aat-

manirbhar Bharat' by 2047, the year India will

Launched on October 5, 2022, the 'Aat-

manirbhar Gujarat Scheme for Assistance to In-

dustries' will be instrumental in providing

special assistance needed by industries to en-

able them to become a part of global supply

chains, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has

said."The scheme will prove to be an important

initiative to support the small and big industries

of Guiarat," Patel said. The Industrial Policy of

2022 further solidifies Gujarat's position as an

As part of the scheme, the state government

aims to provide financial support to promote

attractive investment destination.

state's commitment to self-reliance.

celebrate 100 years of its independence.

resistance near USD 2,080-2,090. Even though rates might stay higher for some time, the current geopolitical environment, slowing global growth, and economic uncertainties further increase the ap-

peal of the yellow metal, he added. All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) Chairman Saiyam Mehra said the volatility in gold prices impacted sales, and in spite of 30-35 lakh weddings, the business will be the same as in 2022

"With the US Fed reducing rates, and continuing geopolitical tensions, the weak rupee will further boost gold prices, which is likely to touch USD 2,250-2,300 and ₹ 68,000-70,000 in 2024. The high prices will impact sales further in 2024, and the business is likely to remain at the same level as 2023," he said.

World Gold Council Regional CEO Somasundaram PR said gold prices touched historic highs globally during the year due to various factors that accentuated its role as a safe haven and hedge against inflation. In the September quarter. gold price was 12 per cent below

However, demand for 2023 will be marginally below the last year at 700-750 tonnes, though the value of investments in gold will be higher, he said.

According to him, the redemption of the first tranche of sovereign gold bonds in November at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) in excess of 12 per cent has also added to the attraction of gold among the investor community and strengthened conversations around gold as a portfolio diversifier in these uncertain times. "In 2024, apart from the economic developments, the trajectory of gold prices will be largely dependent on the dollar index and geopolitical situation," he said.

Gem Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) Chairman Vipul Shah said 2023 was a tough year for the exporters, mainly due to a decline in demand in the key markets following a rise in interest cost, geopolitical issues and China continuing to remain closed even after Covid.

"However, the situation has started to improve, and we expect things to improve in 2024, as interest rates are expected to come down, and we hope geopolitical issues will be resolved, boosting the global economy. We also expect the China market to open after remaining closed for a long period,"

subsidy, interest subsidy, power charges exemp-

tion etc, Gujarat Industrial Development Cor-

poration (GIDC) Vice Chairman and Managing

Director Rahul Gupta said. Unlike the earlier

policies, this time a lot of emphasis has been

mean the entire ecosystem surrounding green

hydrogen manufacturing, the ecosystem sur-

rounding electric vehicle manufacturing, drone-

manufacturing, space-related manufacturing,'

Further elaborating on the state's new indus-

trial policy, Swapnil Anil, the executive director

and head of advisory services at Colliers India,

said that through this, Gujarat has allocated ap-

proximately 34.7 per cent of incentives and

benefits specifically for the manufacturing sec-

tor. "This percentage is exclusively designated

for manufacturing, which boasts of the lowest

average set up cost among all states. As a result,

Gujarat has attracted investments exceeding ₹

30,000 crore in 2023 from domestic and foreign

manufacturing, aviation-related

"When I talk about the emerging sectors, I

given on emerging sectors, he said.

Gupta said

International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) may be eligible for a permit to access liquor, which can only be obtained from the designated wine-and-dine area within the facility, for two years, a gazette notification stated

As per the notification issued by the state home department on Saturday, a person visiting GIFT City may also obtain a temporary permit, which can be issued only for a day, and an employee holding a liquor access permit needs to accompany him in the designated

rary permits as and when required,

announced lifting the ban on liquor in GIFT City to provide a "global business ecosystem" there. Under the new system, existing and upcoming hotels, restaurants, and clubs in the GIFT City area will be given permits for wine-and-dine

ing officer," the notification said. The permit holder must have attained the age of 21 years, and the permit shall be issued for two years and can be renewed for two

Gujarat govt issues gazette notification for GIFT City liquor permits, sale



AHMEDABAD, Dec 31: Emloyees working in units in Gujarat

wine-and-dine area.

Visitors can avail fresh tempo-

The government had last week

"The recommending officer shall prepare a list of employee(s) desiring to obtain liquor access permit and shall send the same to the authorised officer. The authorised officer shall issue liquor access permit cards based on the approved list of employees and send the same to the recommend-

annum and if a person ceases to be an employee of the company/organisation/unit at GIFT City, the permit will stand cancelled, it

A unit situated in GIFT City desiring to obtain a liquor licence will have to apply to the Superintendent of Prohibition and Excise, Gandhinagar, and the licence will be issued after due verification and decision of the GIFT facilitation committee, which is the final authority regarding interpretation of

After approval by the Committee, the Superintendent of Prohibition and Excise will issue the licence, and the unit will serve liquor for consumption "in the approved wine and dine facility area only," the notification stated.

The licence can be issued initially for a period of one to five years, and subsequently renewed up to five years at a time, it said.

The licence will cost ₹ 1 lakh per annum and the security deposit will be ₹ 2 lakh, it said.

"The licensee can purchase liquor from any licence in the state or from outside the state as per Gujarat Foreign Liquor (Import and Export) Rules, 1965 and Bombay Foreign Liquor Rules, 1953," the order stated, adding that the permit holder has to comply with the provisions of the Gujarat Prohibition Act, 1949. Gujarat has a law in force that proscribes the manufacture, storage, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. The law invites seven to 10 years jail term to a person found dealing in alcohol and the death penalty if the

MSMEs and other sectors by way of capital **Property registration in Mumbai city rises 4** pc to record 1,26,907 units in 2023: Report

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: Property registration in the year to an all-time high of 1,26,907 units in 2023 on the back of better demand, according to Knight Frank.

The registration number hit a record in 2023, beating the previous high of 1,22,035 units in the previous year, real estate consultant Knight Frank India data showed. The state government collected a revenue of ₹ 10,869 crore as stamp duty in 2023, up 22 per cent from the previous year.

In December, 12,255 units were registered in Mumbai city (an area under BMC jurisdiction), up 31 per cent from 9,367 units in the year-ago period. Knight Frank has compiled the data on the registration of properties from the Department of Registrations and Stamps, Maharashtra government. The data includes sales in primary (fresh) and secondary (re-sale) markets.

Of the overall registered properties, residential units

Knight Frank CMD Shishir Baijal said the demand has been driven by rising income levels, better affordability and a positive homeownership outlook.

'Notably, a 57 per cent increase in the share of high-value property registrations attests to the robustness of the market," he said. Supported by stable interest rates and an increasing preference for bigger and better homes, homebuyer confidence continues to fuel Mumbai's real estate momentum, Baijal said.

Akhil Saraf, founder of Proptech startup Reloy, said, "People have understood that real estate is the safest asset class along with gold. Gold has liquidity, but real estate has utility". Economies around the world have collapsed, but the houses people own over there are safe, he added. (PTI)

Demand uptick, easing inflation in developed mkts to provide silver lining for exports in 2024 **NEW DELHI, Dec 31:** Easing inflation in developed countries, softening interest rates, a gradual pick up in new destinations to give push to exports of goods and

global demand and other factors will provide a silver services. lining for the country's exports and the overall outbound shipments are expected to be more than USD 900 billion in 2024.

International trade experts have expressed hope that the services sector would perform better than merchandise and the country's overall outbound shipments may touch over USD 900 billion in 2024 against an estimated USD 764 billion in 2023.

A stable rupee against the US dollar, focus on new markets like Latin America and Africa, new items like mobiles and fresh fruits, focus on promoting e-commerce exports, free trade agreements with the UAE and Australia would also help the country register healthy growth in outbound shipments next year.

Despite various challenges, including geopolitical tensions and China's subdued post-pandemic recovery, impacting exports this year, India's goods and services exporters have managed to tap opportunities in developed as well developing economies.

The current year started with negative growth in exports, with the decline touching about 19 per cent in June but the decline narrowed down to 2.83 per cent in November 2023. An official said goods exports rose 6.21 per cent in October "and going forward, this trend will continue in 2024 also and along with goods, services exports too are growing"

Electrical and electronics, machinery, automobile and auto components, high tech products, pharmaceuticals, medical and diagnostic equipment exports are likely to go further in 2024.

Experts suggested focusing on new products and

"India's trade performance in 2024 will be influenced by a blend of domestic and international factors. set against a backdrop of global economic uncertainties. But as India's share in world trade is just 2 per cent, focus on enhancing sectoral competitiveness in labour intensive sectors and diversification of services sectors can surprise us with some good export performance," think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He said India's trade scenario in 2023 mirrored the global trend, experiencing a 5.3 per cent fall in merchandise exports, aligned with a global 5 per cent decline as per UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). This decrease was notable despite the rupee's depreciation against the US dollar, which generally aids export competitiveness.

"The decline was particularly evident in labour-intensive sectors like textiles and leather. India's overall trade in 2023 remained at the same level as the previous year, indicating a need for strategic efforts to improve in 2024," Srivastava added.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Director General Ajay Sahai said since inflation is moderating globally and after a pause in key rates by most of the central banks, interest rates are likely to move southward thus pushing demand.

"New orders with large volumes are expected in 2024, thus pushing our exports. We should look at goods and services exports of USD 900 billion plus in

Govt appoints Arvind Panagariya as 16th FCC **NEW DELHI, Dec 31:** The gov-Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog and ernment on Sunday appointed for-Professor, Columbia University, as the Chairman, Members of the

mer Niti Aayog vice chairman Arvind Panagariya as the Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission. Joint Secretary in the finance ministry Ritvik Ranjanam Pandey will be the secretary to the commission, the government said in a notification.

"The President is pleased to constitute a Finance Commission with Dr Arvind Panagariya, former

Commission will be notified separately," it said. The commission will submit its report for the fiveyear period (2026-27 to 2030-31) to the President by October 31, 2025. The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, last month approved the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the 16th Fi-

Besides suggesting tax devolution between the Centre and states and revenue augmentation measures, the commission would review the present arrangements for financing disaster management initiatives with reference to the funds constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

The Finance Commission is a constitutional body that gives suggestions on centre-state financial

2024: Equity market set for eventful journey on LS polls, interest rate trajectory **NEW DELHI, Dec 31:** With tailfor the new year. eral Reserve about three prospecmediate focus would be on thirdements are poised to facilitate In-As political stability plays a sigtive rate cuts next year and heavy quarter earnings, and any deviation

winds of a remarkable year and handsome investor returns, Indian equities are set for an eventful journey in 2024, with a slew of local and global cues -- varying from interest rates to Lok Sabha polls to geopolitical happenings.

Analysts are of the view that the bull run in the domestic equity market will continue, and over the next 3-6 months, the benchmark indices -- Sensex and Nifty -could climb up to 7 per cent.

In 2023, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 11,399.52 points or 18.73 per cent, and the NSE Nifty climbed 3,626.1 points or 20 per cent. Lok Sabha elections, the US Presidential polls, the trajectory of interest rates, particularly in the US and India, inflation trends and geopolitical situation will be the key factors for the stock market,

analysts opined. Experts said the return of the BJP government with a majority in the 2024 general elections is a pivotal factor on the market's wishlist

nificant role in shaping market dynamics, the market's optimism hinges on a smooth and decisive outcome in the upcoming elections, fostering an environment conducive to sustained economic growth and prosperity in 2024, an expert said. A note by Motilal Oswal Broking and Distribution said that Lok Sabha elections and the first budget post-election would be most important on the domestic front.

"We expect market sentiment to strengthen further as the ongoing pre-election rally is likely to continue. Any rate cut would provide an additional boost to the market." it said. Dalal Street investors added a whopping ₹ 81.90 lakh crore to their wealth in 2023 amid a raft of positive factors, including strong domestic macroeconomic fundamentals, political stability owing to the BJP's success in recent elections, optimistic corporate earnings outlook, signals from the US Fedretail investors participation.

"India continues to be the fastest growing economy in the world, and BJP's win in recently-held state elections has further boosted investors' sentiment. With macroeconomic factors beginning to turn positive, falling US bond yields have once again fuelled robust foreign fund inflows into the Indian market.

"Along with that, sliding crude oil prices are likely to keep inflation under check, all of which should augur well for Indian equity markets going ahead. Hence, the rally in the market is likely to further continue over the next 3-6 months, and Sensex and Nifty could see another 5-7 per cent appreciation, while midcap and smallcap indices may witness another 10-15 per cent jump," said Rakeshh Mehta, Chairman of Mehta Equities Ltd.

Parth Nyati, the founder of the stock trading platform Tradingo,



vestors took the lead, steering the market to success. "As we transition into 2024, there is anticipation that foreign investors will join the momentum, particularly with the decline in US bond yields and weakening of the dollar index. The prevailing expectation of a cut in nterest rates in the USA further

bolsters this shift," Nyati said. On the market wishlist for the next year, Nyati said the market fervently hopes for the absence of any negative surprises from the global markets that could potentially disrupt the optimistic sentiment among Indian investors.

There is a collective expectation for foreign investors to re-enter the Indian equity market with renewed vigour, contributing to the overall positive trajectory, Nyati added.

The experts said investors' im-

in earnings would be a reason for markets to go into profit-booking zone. Mukesh Kochar, National Head of Wealth at AUM Capital, said the US interest rates and FII flows will be crucial and added that stability of crude prices will also be important. The market will also look forward to the stability of geopolitical factors, and any settlement in war can bring a major boost to infrastructure-led development, he added.

"In 2024, the Indian economy will continue to stand out, especially against the challenging backdrop of other emerging economies. We firmly believe that India will continue its growth momentum in the year ahead and remain the land of stability against the backdrop of a volatile global economy. "The bolstered balance sheet strength of corporate India and the significantly enhanced health of the Indian banking system are positive factors. These eldian equities in achieving doubledigit returns over the next two to three years, supported by robust double-digit earnings growth," said Pranav Haridasan, MD and CEO of Axis Securities.

Indian equities had a dream run this year where the benchmark indices reached many milestones. The combined market valuation of all listed companies on the leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE reached the USD 4 trillion milestone for the first time on November 29 and December 1, respectively, this year.

"The outlook for the Indian equity market in 2024 is optimistic yet cautious. Anticipated 6.5 per cent economic growth in fiscal years 2024-25 positions India among the fastest-growing economies globally. While the Fed is expected to implement three interest rate cuts, the RBI may hold rates at 6.5 per cent," said Palka Arora Chopra, Director of Master Capital Services Ltd. (PTI)

New India adopts a 'let's do it' approach: Rajnath Singh Correspondent Dec 31: During his adne chief guest at Tezpur Correspondent Dec 31: During his adne chief guest at Tezpur Correspondent Dec 31: During his adne chief guest at Tezpur

TEZPUR, Dec 31: During his address as the chief guest at Tezpur University's 21st Convocation, Union Defence minister Rajnath Singh highlighted a transformative shift in India's mindset, distinguishing the old from the new. Singh stated, "The difference between new India and old India is about new thinking. Earlier it was 'Let it be' mindset vs now it is

MONDAY, JANUARY 1, 2024

'let's do it' approach." Commending Tezpur University for its dedication to providing quality education, Singh elucidated the meaning of convocation, known as 'Dikshyant', where students are equipped with life skills and values to navigate life's challenges. He urged students to focus on practical knowledge and character development.

Quoting Swami Vivekananda. Singh emphasised the role of character in shaping individuals, stating, "In the Western countries, a tailor makes a gentleman, but in



youth in achieving the vision of a

developed India, Singh noted, "To

empower the youth and enhance

their capabilities, our government

has promoted a start-up culture and

In response to a proposal to es-

tablish a Centre for Defence Stud-

ies named after Ahom General

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: As the

year 2023 draws to a close, min-

ister of Agriculture, Animal Hus-

mittee VPs, GSs, and other func-

tionaries. The agenda primarily

focused on outlining plans and

strategies for the party in the up-

coming year, given the nearing

Bora urged his party colleagues

to intensify public outreach initia-

tives and organisational activities

passes away at 82 in Hojai

Lok Sabha elections.

innovation ecosystem.

ours (Bharat), character makes a gentleman." He expanded the discourse to encompass India's multifaceted development, including economic growth, medical advancements, and the government's initiative to boost domestic defense manufacturing

Addressing the significance of

versity, Singh directed the university authorities to submit a proposal.

Presiding over the ceremony, Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, vice chancellor of Tezpur University, urged graduating students to be proud representatives of the institution. He highlighted the university's achievements, collaborative efforts, and inclusive approach to education, celebrating its diverse student body

A total of 1355 students received degrees and diplomas during the convocation, with 110 earning PhDs, 785 completing postgraduate programs, and 432 receiving undergraduate degrees. Additionally, 5 obtained PG diplomas, and 23 achieved degrees/diplomas through distance/open learning mode. Forty-six program toppers qualified for Gold medals. State Education minister Dr Ranoj Pegu and other dignitaries were present

AGP leaders convene at party HQ

Suspected Bangladeshi citizen arrested

HT Correspondent JAGIROAD, Dec 31: In a recent development, the Morigaon Police apprehended a Bangladeshi citizen residing in the state under deceptive circumstances. The individual had allegedly been living in India using a counterfeit Indian Voter ID card.

Acting on a tip-off, the Morigaon Police conducted a raid in Dakhin Chenimari village under Lahorighat PS on Saturday night, leading to the arrest of a person along with a child carrying a Bangladeshi passport. The police had received information indicating that the accused had sought refuge in a woman's house in the village. The arrested individual has been identified as Islam Mandal, who is also under suspicion of having Jihadi connections, as per Morigaon superintendent of police Hemanta Kumar Das. It was further revealed that the accused's name had been falsely recorded as Noor Mandal in the voter list under the Lahorighat assembly constituency in the Morigaon district. The police are currently investigating the case to ascertain the full extent of the individual's activities and connec-

NLFB urges govt to address financial assistance for cadres' rehabilitation



HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Dec 31: The National Liberation Force of Bengali (NLFB) convened a press conference at the Gossaigaon Press Club, appealing to the state government for financial support to rehabilitate its cadres. The NLFB, which initially took up arms to address issues faced by the Bengali community in the state, particularly concerning NRC, D Voter, and foreigners' tribunal notices. sought intervention for the remaining cadres.

Ranjan Chandra Sarkar, the founder president of NLFB, marked the 11th foundation day of the organisation by accentuating its formation in 2011 to provide a lasting solution to the challenges faced by the Bengali community. After a prolonged struggle, the NLFB transitioned into the mainstream and surrendered following the state people of the state.

Sarkar revealed that while 303 cadres received rehabilitation funds in the initial phase, the remaining members have yet to receive financial assistance. He urged the state government to fulfill the commitments made during the surrender and facilitate the rehabilitation of the remaining cadres. Despite their dedication to

societal responsibilities post-sur-

render, the lack of financial sup-

port has resulted in hardship for

these individuals.

The press conference, attended by NLFB chief secretary Mithun Ghosh, chief advisor Gautam Roy, and other organisation members. emphasised the necessity for the state government's assistance. As the year concluded, the NLFB leaders extended warm wishes for a prosperous New Year 2024 to the

KAAC distributes traditional props for Karbi folk dance

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 31: The Art and Culture Department of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) organised a distribution ceremony for traditional props used in Karbi folk dances, including hand hoes, swords, and shields. The event, held at the Rangsina Sarpo Auditorium in Diphu, aimed to provide these accessories to various zones of the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) in preparation for the golden jubilee celebrations of the

Karbi Youth Festival scheduled for January next year. Surya Rongphar, executive member of KAAC's Art and Culture Department, expressed that despite budget constraints, the initiative continued this year, following a similar distribution last year. He highlighted the positive developments in Taralangso under the leadership of chief executive member Tuliram Ronghang. Addressing concerns about the collaboration between KCS and KAAC, Rongphar stated that, despite skepticism, both entities have stayed true to their roles, demonstrating

cluding presidents and functionaries, as well as dedicated karmakartas, actively participated in the strategic discussions held that working together can yield positive results. Sajjan Kumar Sharma

Kiren Rijiju participates in Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 31: Kiren Rijiju, Union minister of Earth Sciences, attended a Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra (VBSY) program at Ambagan Gaon Panchayat in the Laokhuwa development block of Nagaon district. Addressing a public meeting at the Ambagan Higher Secondary School Playground, the minister highlighted the government's commitment to the development and upliftment of all sections of society.

Minister Rijiju urged the public to familiarise themselves with various welfare schemes, including Matru Vandana Yojana, Ayushman Bharat Yojana, Poshan Yojana, and Old Age Pension, among others. He stressed that these schemes are not bound by caste, colour, or religious differences and called on everyone to come forward and benefit from them. Highlighting the training of women for operating drones in agriculture, minister Rijiju underscored the role of government officials in ensuring the speedy delivery of services and the development of the people. He expressed his intention to assess the reach of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra and expressed his affection for the state

Ananta Gogoi, CEO of Nagaon Zilla Parishad, explained the primary aims and objectives of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra program, urging the audience to take advantage of government welfare schemes. Jefrin Mehjabin, a governing body member in the Ministry of Minority Affairs, discussed government initiatives for women's empowerment.

Ashok Bhattarai, a social worker and former chairperson of Assam State Transport Corporation, stated the need for government schemes to reach every eligible citizen. The event was attended by district officials, Gaon Panchayat representatives, and members of various line

State govt signs MoU with ASDMA

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 31: The Department of School Education of the state government has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the project implementation unit of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) for the Assam Integrated River Basin Management Project (AIRBMP). The agreement aims to retrofit 30 schools in areas most affected by floods across the state.

The MoU was officially signed by Gyanendra Dev Tripathi, the CEO of ASDMA, and Narayan Konwar, secretary to the state government's Department of School Education. Under this initiative, 30 schools will be retrofitted to serve as designated temporary flood shelters equipped with modern amenities. These retrofitted schools will play a crucial role in providing shelter to flood-affected individuals during times of need without disrupting regular academic activities.

The signing ceremony witnessed the presence of Gaurav Upadhyay, the project officer of AIRBMP, Alakananda Medhi, state project coordinator, Bibha Medak, joint secretary, Aditi Barman, deputy secretary, and other officials from ASDMA and the Education Department.

Earlier, on December 20, another MoU was signed between the project implementation department of ASDMA for AIRBMP and the Civil Defence Department. This collaboration focuses on the development of the Central Training Institute for Civil Defence and Home Guards, intending to utilise it as a training institute under AIRBMP. The institute will undergo construction, including barracks with modern amenities and smart classrooms. Additionally, it will be equipped with modern tools, electric vehicles, and other resources to effectively handle situations arising from floods and other disasters.

People's Linguistic Survey launched in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 31: Assam Women's University and Jorhat College (Amalgamated) have jointly initiated the People's Linguistic Survey, marking a significant step in documenting and preserving the linguistic diversity of the region. The launch took place at the university auditorium in Jorhat, where a preparatory workshop on the 'Methodology of Linguistic Data Collection' was conducted to equip students for active participation in the survey.

The inaugural event was graced by Ajanta Borgohain Rajkonwar, vice-chancellor of Assam Women's University, who highlighted the importance of inclusive participation from various communities across the state. The survey, slated to commence from January 1, is expected to be a landmark initiative in Assam's history.

Prashanta Puzari, head of the department of English and university coordinator of the survey, welcomed participants and expressed anticipation for the active involvement of all societal stakeholders. Devabrata Sharma, principal of Jorhat College (Amalgamated) and the workshop's resource person, provided insights into the historical context of linguistic surveys in the state and highlighted the essential methodology for linguistic data collection, emphasising sociological aspects. This People's Linguistic Survey aims to capture and document the rich linguistic tapestry of Assam, contributing to the preservation and understanding of the diverse languages spoken in the

CM Himanta announces job milestone for youth in 2023

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma took to the social media platform X to share a major achievement in job creation for the youth of the state in the year 2023.

Highlighting the significant progress, the chief minister revealed that in a historic move, over 44,000 appointment letters were distributed in a single day, with Home minister Amit Shah overseeing the process in May. Furthermore, a commendable total of over 88,000 positions have already been successfully filled.

Building on this success, the chief minister announced that an additional 26,000 new job opportunities are in the pipeline, reinforcing the commitment to generating employment and fostering economic growth in the state. This milestone reflects the government's dedicated efforts to address unemployment challenges and create a more prosperous future for the youth of the state.

bandry & Veterinary, and president of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Atul Bora, attended a central office bearers meeting at the party headquarters in Ambari, Guwahati. The meeting, presided over by AGP working president & minister Keshab Mahanta, saw the participation of senior leader Phani Bhusan Choudhury, central com-

strengthen the party's base at the grassroots level, ensuring a robust presence in the run-up to the elections. The meeting also provided an opportunity for the exchange of New Year greetings among

communities he served.

Various leaders from AGP's brother-sister organisations, in-

Patkai Hills gravely threatened by unchecked coal mining



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Dec 31: The Patkai Hills in Margherita are under severe threat due to rampant illegal coal mining, raising international concerns. Green Bud Society's general secretary, Debojit Moran, expresses worry over the unscientific methods employed by coal mafias, turning the once-vibrant coalfields into an environmental disaster.

Established in 1882, the Patkai Hills is now facing degradation. Margherita's coal reserve areas have become hotspots for illegal mining, causing substantial revenue losses for the state and the Union govern-

As the ULFA engages in peace talks, Moran stresses the need for the Pro Talks Faction to address the illegal coal mining crisis in Margherita. International intervention is increasingly viewed as crucial to preserving the historical and environmental integrity of the Patkai

JFA condemns tragic demise of young journalist

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Dec 31: The Jour-

nalists' Forum Assam (JFA) expresses deep shock and sorrow over the untimely demise of young journalist Parthajyoti Das in a tragic road accident on the outskirts of the city on Saturday. The JFA urges the relevant authorities to thoroughly investigate the circumstances leading to the incident. Parthajyoti, a 35-year-old resident of Mirza, was traveling from Guwahati when a speeding

in the Dharapur area. Despite immediate medical attention, the promising and soft-spoken journalist succumbed to his injuries. Three others involved in the accident are currently hospitalised with serious injuries. Parthajyoti is survived by his ailing father, mother, and a sister.

The JFA calls for a fair and comprehensive inquiry into the accident and demands adequate compensation for the bereaved

dumper truck collided with his car family. Local residents have frequently raised concerns about dumpers in the Mirza locality of south Kamrup, alleging that they operate without following traffic rules, posing a significant risk to public safety. The JFA appeals to chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to personally intervene in the matter promptly, addressing the pressing issues surrounding road safety in the region. JFA president Rupam Barua and Secretary Nava Thakuria issued the statement.

Rescuer Saurabh Borkotoky safely retrieves Russell's Viper

Bhakat Mandal, Adarsh Durga

Puja Samity, Marwari Durgoutsav

Samity, Akhil Bharatiya Marwari

Mahila Samellan, Bharatiya Atal

Sena Mahila Morcha, and others.

Floral tributes were paid, and

prayers were offered for the eternal

Bhootnath Cremation Ground.

where Sajjan Kumar Sharma's eld-

est son, Manoj Sharma, performed

the cremation with tearful eyes. He

is survived by his wife, two sons,

two daughters, and numerous rela-

The last rites were performed at

peace of the departed soul.

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Dec 31: In a remark-

HOJAI, Dec 31: Noted social

worker Sajjan Kumar Sharma, ho-

noured with the prestigious

'Saakha Ratna' title in 2022 by

Marwari Samellan, Hojai branch,

for his significant social contribu-

tions, breathed his last at his resi-

dence on JK Kedia Road, Hojai, on

Friday evening. Aged 82, Sharma

succumbed to age-related ailments,

leaving behind a legacy of dedi-

Known for his humility, faith,

honesty, and friendly nature,

Sharma was actively associated

with numerous social organisa-

tions. He served as a lifetime mem-

cated social service.

able incident, Sarpabandhab Saurabh Borkotoky successfully rescued a Russell's Viper (Daboia Russelii), one of the deadliest snakes globally, near Besseria Bogabora Chuburi, Tezpur. This event marks the first time in Sonitpur district that the most venomous snake has been safely retrieved following the tragic death of Tanmoy Keot earlier this month due to a suspected Russell's Viper bite.

Local residents spotted the snake in a crop field and promptly informed Borkotoky, who quickly arrived at the scene. After an extensive three-hour search, Borkotoky safely captured the Russell's Viper and handed it over to forest personnel for necessary treatment at the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation under Kaziranga National Park.

Speaking to the correspondent, Sarpabandhab Saurabh Borkotoky stated the importance of taking proper precautions, such as wearing gum boots and hand gloves,



when working or moving around in such areas to avoid panic. Rather than releasing the snake into a forest, he, along with the local community, urged authorities to preserve it in a government zoo for public awareness, facilitating easier identification for people en-

countering the snake. Russell's Viper, known for its potent venom, is not confined to

specific habitats but is commonly found in open, grassy, or bushy areas. It tends to avoid dense forests and humid environments, favouring plains, coastal lowlands, and suitable hills. Experts note that Russell's Viper venom is a hemotoxin, causing severe pain, swelling, bleeding, and potential organ damage, leading to fatalities if not treated promptly.

14 cadets from 5 ASSAM Bn NCC to illuminate Republic Day Camp 2024

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 31: The 5 ASSAM Battalion National Cadet Corps (NCC) is basking in pride as 14 cadets from their unit have secured a coveted spot at the Annual Republic Day Camp 2024 in New Delhi. These accomplished cadets, representing the NCC North Eastern Directorate, form part of a larger contingent

of 126 cadets. Out of the 14 cadets, 11 will spotlight the cultural richness of their state through diverse cultural events, while the remaining 3 will showcase their exceptional drill skills. Selected after rigorous training and evaluation, these cadets have exhibited unwavering determination and enthusiasm. Under the guidance of skilled NCC instructors and subject specialists, they have undergone intensive training, covering aspects such as physical fitness, drill routines, and refining their cultural tal-

The cultural team plans to present a captivating display of Assamese dance forms, music, and traditional attire. Si-

multaneously, the drill team will demonstrate synchronised movements and impeccable discipline during the Republic Day Camp—an annual celebration that aims to foster unity, discipline, and a sense of national pride among NCC cadets nationwide. The event encompasses various competitions, cultural performances, and the prestigious Prime Minister's rally.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The beginning is the most important part of the work. - Plato

India's Economic Outlook 2024

s India approaches a crucial election year, the nation's robust economic performance takes center stage. However, a footnote of caution underscores the potential risks associated with freebies and subsidy politics, which could impact growth in the latter part of the year. The government's indication of increased allocations for food support programs, cooking gas subsidies, and rural employment plans sets the stage for economic pressures. Nevertheless, amidst these challenges, India is poised to achieve the highest growth rate among major economies globally. Goldman Sachs Research's 2024 global outlook places India at the forefront with a projected growth rate of 6.2 percent, surpassing China at 4.8 percent. This news is a reason for celebration on the global economic stage, especially considering the ongoing scrutiny of China's post-pandemic recovery. While government capital expenditure is anticipated to slow down, optimism resonates as Sachs economists' express confidence in the conditions for private investment acceleration. Indian companies are seen as wellpositioned for such endeavours, benefiting from well-capitalized bank balance sheets and manufacturing balance sheets undergoing deleveraging. Recent statements from industry bodies like Assocham reflect expectations of increased investment across various sectors, including construction, hospitality, and infrastructure. Sectors such as financials, construction, hotels, aviation, automobiles, and electronics are poised for enhanced performance in the coming year. The trajectory is further supported by low crude oil prices, keeping inflation in check and positively impacting raw material costs. Despite a recent slowdown in the growth numbers for key infrastructure sectors in November, the overall economic landscape remains promising. The decline in growth for sectors like cement, coal, crude oil, electricity, fertilizers, natural gas, refinery products, and steel from 12.1 percent to 7.8 percent is noted. These sectors collectively contribute significantly to the Index of Industrial Production.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) echoes this optimism in its outlook for the Indian economy. The Fund applauds India's robust growth, moderate headline inflation, and the surpassing of pre-pandemic employment levels. The IMF projects a strong growth rate of 6.3 percent in the financial years 2023-24 and '24-25, with a gradual decline in headline inflation. The current account deficit is expected to improve to 1.8 percent of GDP, driven by resilient services exports and lower oil import costs. While recognizing the stability of the financial sector, the IMF emphasises the need for continued supervision and prudential tools to maintain financial stability. The Fund encourages public banks to build capital buffers and highlights potential risks, including a global growth slowdown affecting India through trade and financial channels. Domestically, weather shocks and food export restrictions could pose

India's economic outlook is one of promise, underscored by positive projections and resilient sectors. However, vigilance and proactive measures are essential to navigate potential challenges and ensure sustained growth. As the nation stands at the cusp of a new year, it must leverage its economic strengths while addressing vulnerabilities to foster a robust and inclusive growth trajectory.

New Year 2024: Building a better tomorrow

ime to wave goodbye to the old and say hello to the new. Our hearts are filled with hopes and dreams as we eagerly await New Year 2024. It's a day full of excitement, hope, and joy. Let's greet the New Year with our wishes and desires. Celebrate life with all your heart, and remember, life is truly unique.

People are naturally hopeful, and their feelings - whether happy, sad, or unhappy - are often influenced by their optimism. Hope has a special power. With hope, people explore new possibilities and create surprises. The ultimate aim of human thoughts, efforts, and activities is to find happiness.

Seeking happiness is a constant trait of human beings, and this pursuit creates optimism. In simpler terms, happiness and optimism go hand in hand. Expressing our optimism, we eagerly welcome the new year. It's a chance to chase dreams, fulfill hopes, and find happiness.

We embrace the new year with the excitement of making wishes come true. Even though we know the new will eventually become old, we keep eagerly welcoming the new, maybe because life is full of illusions.

Life is short and passes quickly. It's important to live knowing this truth. To fill the emptiness and incompleteness of life, we should celebrate it. Celebration brings life to its fullest. However, celebration doesn't mean being loud or chaotic. It's about understanding and appreciating the true beauty of life

Clear your mind of impurities and negative thoughts. Good thoughts and a positive mind, along with taking time for good deeds, bring the joy of celebrating life. The real happiness comes from celebrating the joy within your heart.

We all have the power to make our lives happier with a bit of planning and interest. As we enter the New Year, let's promise to celebrate life. By putting in some effort, we can bring happiness not



only to ourselves but also to many others. Let's sincerely work towards this in the coming year.

As we welcome the New Year, let's make a commitment to give our lives meaning. In the coming year, let's promise to focus on positive thoughts and avoid negativity. We can do

small things each DEGREE OF THOUGHT day to make someone happy it doesn't have to be big or expensive.

A simple smile, treating colleagues well, respecting seniors, or showing love to juniors can bring joy. Paying attention to others' feelings contributes to happiness. True happiness is in experiencing the little pleasures of life. Make a commitment to notice and appreciate these small joys in the New Year.

Life is short, and tomorrow is uncertain, so live beautifully. Being honest with oneself and leading a simple, peaceful life brings true happiness. Avoid unnecessary desires and fears that complicate life. Let's strive for a simple and content life in the New Year, where we can find pure hap-

Time keeps moving, and a valuable year has just passed, leaving

riences. Now, a new year has started, bringing fresh opportunities. Let's embrace the upcoming days with open hearts. Wishing everyone a promising, joyful, and inspiring New Year. May happiness, prosperity, and joy fill everyone's lives.

recognize a specific day as the By: Dipak Kurmi New Year; it follows the changing seasons. Each day is like a New Year in nature, as it dresses up in

Nature doesn't

different seasons Every day carries the timeless

message of creation. Time flows like a river, and I've often marked it by specific days, bars, dates, and years.

However, these markers don't bring anything new or precious. The New Year comes, and calendar pages turn quickly. A year passes in the blink of an eye, and as time goes on, we move step by step towards the end of our lives.

When we think about death, it reminds us that there's a lot to do in life. Taking action in the limited time we have can leave a lasting impact.

Our actions define our legacy after death. Making good use of our time can make life meaningful

Time keeps moving, and if we don't make the most of it, we'll be

left behind Life brings many challenges and unexpected problems. Some challenges come on their own, and we need to face them with expectations. But it's tough when we struggle with the pain of not achieving what we want.

Let's aim for a successful new year by pushing away the pain and working towards abundance. While it's good to remember the past, if it brings hurt, try to leave it behind in the new year.

Recall past memories only if they inspire you to do good. Like time, we need to accept reality, and life is a mix of happiness and sorrow. Success in life doesn't mean a life without problems; it's about succeeding despite challenges

Suffering is a part of life, and it adds sweetness to happiness. Learn to live with a smile, and you'll become an inspiration for

The year 2023 brought a lot of problems, like conflicts, issues with Bangladesh, the NRC, and high prices of goods that affected everyone. Some people spreading superstitions added to the troubles

Can we just watch society de-

cline like this? In the upcoming New Year, let's commit to changing ourselves and helping each other by reflecting on our actions.

A big problem nowadays is people being too focused on themselves. This self-centeredness has affected both the minds and souls of individuals.

The rush of modern life leaves little time to think about others or society. Many are busy gaining wealth by any means to establish themselves in society, leading to an increase in violence, injustice, and corruption. Human values have declined in this materialistic, consumer-driven society. It often feels like everyone is falling

How long will this continue? Can't we take on the challenge of creating something new in the coming year? Of course, we can. So, the first step is to purify ourselves.

Life is like a mountain of unique experiences, and every day brings something new. We should embrace these experiences and create a path for the new generation. The older generation has contributed a lot, helping us live happily and prosperously. Now, it's our turn to do things for the upcoming generation, ensuring their lives are filled with happiness and peace, leading to a bright

As we enter the New Year, may the unfulfilled hopes, failures, troubles, and sorrows of the past year be replaced with new beginnings. Let's revive hearts that were dried up by the deceptions of

To achieve this, it's important to end all forms of exploitation and injustice in society and work towards progress.

May the joy of new victories fill our lives. In the coming year, let's move forward with pure hearts and dreams, leaving behind sadness, pain, laziness, and indifference. Together, let's break down the walls of selfishness. Wishing everyone a Happy New Year. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Is democracy squeezed between religion and politics?

By: M.R.Lalu

wo significant events in 2024 would go into the annals of history. Understandably, their impact is going to be long lasting. We will witness them generate a cultural churn and would also see them alter into a political storm. Both are deeply interconnected. It is predicted that the rightwing conservative Hindutva forces in politics will hugely benefit from their impact. What are these events and why would they become defining moments in 2024? The present political scenario in India is

ripe and intense for its nationalistic upsurge which is an obvious outcome of meaningfully woven narratives and initiatives manifested in an ideological setting named 'Nation First and Party Next'. This ideological articulation was absent in Indian politics for decades. This has helped the present government at the centre for creating a distinctive image of nationalistic identity. Evidently, the clout of the government led by Narendra Modi has pushed him through an unprecedentedly growing popularity, which has gone beyond the boundaries of the country and gained international accolades. His ascent for the third time will have a pronounced meaning and impact on his global popularity. Modi's frequent prediction about his hat-trick comeback would be seen as a massive strategy kicked off with the omnipotent support of the beneficiaries of the schemes that he launched.

But the two events I earnestly indicated in the beginning would become remarkably instrumental in the Modi rise in its third term. First is the Ram Temple which is going to throw its golden doors open for the public in January in Ayodhya and the second is the year long centenary festivities of the RSS to commemorate its wrapping up of a century. Ever since its inception, the BJP gained consistent support from the RSS and the saffron outfit with its century long initiatives has had golden moments of success to brighten its cultural identity. Both these events are equally important for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Its prospects depend on, though not totally; on the impact of the activities that the RSS takes up on the ground and the temple in Ayodhya is deeply connected with its existence and its inauguration a reason for elation.

It is not only inaccurate but also immature to make predictions on anything in advance. But for the opposition of Modi, the ferocity of their attacks on the Prime Minister doesn't turn you clueless about their desperation. A visible downsizing of the meaning of their existence is apparently active and their relentlessly inaccurate involvement in badmouthing the man of the moment has

dwarfed their political eminence further. Now what happens in disgust and disappointment is mere shadowboxing. The dilemma of the Congress and some of the parties in the INDIA block would alarmingly intensify their heartbeat. This is mostly due to their historic stand on the temple movement which was totally pessimistic and their ill-conceived notions on the existence of



Lord Ram. Whatever, they seem to have failed to pass a justifiable reason behind their negation. The after-effect of the temple inauguration would help the Modi government to increase its power and also to personally magnify Modi's spiritual persona. The government's decision to invite leaders from various political parties deserves appreciation. This indeed, is a calculative move from a trickster's perspective. The move probably would help the BJP to expose the parties that remained fortune-sellers of the religious minorities making minority appeasement their familial enterprise. The BJP and its leaders would come out hammer and tongs to publicly expose the list of parties that turned their faces away in denial to the goodwill gesture of the ruling regime for the temple inaugura-

Ram Madhav, an RSS veteran brings a remarkable perspective to what the social reach of the RSS should mean to Indians. The organization will have completed its activities for a century by 2025 and it would certainly set its agenda for an ideological overhauling. Though criticisms are showered on it frequently, its efforts to reframe its Hindutya narratives with critical ideological changes were evident. Look at the statement of RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat. Probably opposite to its early stand, Bhagwat brought out the vision of oneness that he thinks would only fructify with the religious minorities, especially the Muslims being taken to the fold. This has been the change, says Ram Madhav which was both intellectual and complex. When Bhagwat says "No Hindu Rashtra without Muslims", what he literally indicates is a compulsion, a necessary accommodation of the minority feelings that its political affiliate the BJP would require to keep for its sustainable winning spree. And for the RSS, it is sure to gain a remodeled reputation, consciously diluting its notorious envy for the Muslim minority, a permanent stance it is accused of.

Stretching its hands further the organization is understood to have taken up outreaching activities to further fill the electoral casket of the BJP and bring its man back to the throne for a third consecutive term. But it is doubtful if this cultural shift in the ideological framework of the RSS would help the BJP to inflate its fortunes. This is because the RSS traditionally believed that it is an organization which is meant to unite the Hindus and the Hindus alone. But the Bhagwat philosophy turns its traditional view down. If his words are to be believed, all those who are born in India are Hindus. Perplexity holds you tighter as you fail to comprehend this ideological hotchpotch. The RSS is appreciative of a culturally inclusive scenario in India viewing all religious factions being consolidated under one Hindu umbrella. Ultimately. it needs various religions to assemble for a single nationalist cause. But its fight against the conversion menace and various forms of Jihad gains it a ruthless enemy status among the minority congregation. As the date of the inauguration is drawing

closer, the CPI (M) has formally declined the government's invitation to the event citing its strict disagreement on the BJP's strategy of mixing politics with religion. The Congress is undecided and its response is awaited. But it has a solid reason to not to damage its already broken prestige further. It is known for its diminished self-respect and lost credibility and taking the Marxist line on the temple inauguration would again deteriorate its prospects in the Hindi heartlands. The blemish on its questioning the relevance and existence of Lord Ram had gone deeper, doing irreversible damage to the party.

Historically Nehru's stand on the Hindu cause was not different. The resurrection of Somnath temple had stumbled on some occasions as Nehru was bitter about a state assisted revival of a temple. But for Sardar Patel, the resurrection of Somnath was akin to a major surgery that was performed to remove the cancerous memories of barbarity on a peaceful civilization. This is a labyrinthine situation for all parties that existed on the plank of habitual appeasement. Their secular activism by denouncing Hindutva and its renowned symbols of cultural expression would extensively pull their chances.

Enormous complexities in the judicial processes had not only dragged the problem from gaining a solution for long but also consistently dampened down the patience of multiple generations of believers that venerated Lord Ram in essence and ethics. Presumably, the year 2024 would be the year of prospects for the BJP and perils for its opposition. (The author is a freelance journalist based in Kerala & can be reached at mrlalu30@gmail.com)

New year 2024 may witness far more turmoil in global economy

By: Anjan Roy

✓ in the current scenario. There dawned. are always any number of uncertainties about the future. But currently these are multifarious. No one really knows, including the dramatis personae, what will happen in the next week, let alone in course of the coming year.

Take a sample. It is no way possible to divine how the Gaza War will shape. Will it erupt more generally over the Middle East theatre or the present war will lead finally to a permanent solution.

Similarly, uncertain is the drift in Ukraine war. Russia has suddenly stepped up its air raid on Ukraine. Maybe, this was prompted by the devastating attack on naval installations in Crimea by Ukraine which sank one of the warships of Russia. At the same time, the ground war is going nowhere and neither Russia nor Ukraine is making any significant progress.

The Chinese economy is showing clear signs of deceleration. The economy is in the throes of a crisis over the extensive stalling of its housing and real estates sector. There is fear that the massive systemically important housing finance companies would default.

As if to add to the Chinese worries, the fear over Taiwan is mounting. China is stepping up its campaign and making every effort to influence the poll outcomes. Encouraged by the latest Russian successes in bamboozling Ukraine, China might also play its threats to Taiwan, involving American responses and involvement.

Any of these black swan events can trigger forces that could upset the current balance and pace of growth of the global economy. That is the prime worry for the central banks as well as the policy makers.

The first victim of a wider war in the Middle East would be a consequent turmoil in the oil markets. In case, any of the major oil producers get sucked into the Israel-Hamas it will have a ripple effect on oil production and supplies. Disruptions in the oil production and supplies will jam up prices and influence overall price levels.

In many ways a fresh upswing in inflation will be the most potent blow to the global economic prospect. Inflation has been rising, particularly, in the United States

after almost a decade of stable and low prices. Many economists had conomic forecasting is al-spoken of inflation as a past worry ways hazardous. It is more so and that low inflation age had

> American inflation was rising and the US Federal Reserve had started a rising rate cycle in the face of define inflation trends. Inflation in US had inched up to 5%plus and for a while it had touched 8%. Such levels of inflation were not seen since the end of war. Then, with rising rate cycles and some other factors, inflation began abating.

> So much so, that the Federal had initiated talks about reversing the rising cycle and start easing up a bit. Any inflation reversal at this point of time will mean the Federal Reserve could again start its inflation

> fight with a hike in interest rate. For some time now, the talk among economists had been whether with rising inflation and Fed's anti-inflationary package, American can escape a recession. In fact, it is the recession word that is the most widely used word among economists now. Will the US be able to avoid a recession following the fight against inflation.

It has been seen that monetary tightening cycles for anti-inflation purposes is invariable followed by a recession after a gap of fifteen to eighteen months. As such, the Federal Reserve had started tightening cycles, which is now seeing moderate inflation. But will a recession

A recession in American would invariably rip the prospects for the global economy and big to sell everybody would be affected in an interconnected world. Fortunately, so far, USA had avoided a recession and labour unemployment is even now at a very low level. Economists are trying to define how US had avoided recession and yet interest rates have been raised.

The explanation being offered that the US might in the end avoid and hard landing with a recession on hand. The US would achieve a soft landing, which has not happened since post war. That would be a miracle in policy formulation and economic management.

The second threat for the global economy is from China. Chinese economy is slowing down. Forget those days of sing along Chinese enemy growth of 8% and above. Now the Chinese economy is estimated to grow by less than 5%.

Far worse, China had so far flour-

ished and grown on an economic model which had factored constantly rising investment. Whenever the Chinese economy sagged, the authorities let loose a spate of large scale investment which then crated fresh demand for everything from steel to household goods.

That model has seen the end of its run. It is no longer possible to kick up investment into capacity creation as huge capacities have already been created over the years. There are new towns on fresh areas which remain unoccupied. Entire housing colonies have remained deserted and often the promoter companies are in deep debts which they are no longer able to service.

To add to a worries, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Xi Jinping is reassuring party authority over everything, including now the corporates. Entrepreneurs have been threatened an in many cases chief executives of key Chinese companies have simply disappeared.

These official moves have throttled the entrepreneurship spirit in China. The moves have worst affect the Chinese technology sector where some of the key promoters have been cut down and their initiatives stalled.

What we see now, is that both the economic super-powers are facing some serious structural problems which are not going to go away easily. Their combined economic impact mean a lot for the global economy and the prospects of growth in 2024 and beyond.

Any of these black swan events might set in reactions in the financial markets and result in large scale flow of funds. Uncertainty in US would invariably result in withdrawal of funds from the emerging and developing economies. Such capital flights could have multiplier effects in the developing economies through foreign exchange markets. End result would be economic meltdown.

Hopefully, such fear mongering should be merely kite flying. These would never come to pass. But then, it is better to be informed of the challenges and threats than be complacent and smug.

After all, laxity resulted in the worsening and compounding of the woes of the pandemic. Let us think hard how the emerging economies can be ring fenced from the worst slippages in the two economic giants. (IPA Service)

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Causes of dry eyes in winter and how to treat them



If a person does not have access to

These ointments, which are an alter-

native to eye drops, are available ei-

ther over the counter or with a

drops and can, therefore, cause blurry

vision in some cases. So, it may be

A person can also use specially de-

signed silicon or gel plugs called

punctal plugs to prevent tears from

draining away too quickly. This can

Another home remedy that a person

To use a warm compress, a person

In some rare cases, a person may

have lower eyelids that are too loose,

which can cause the tears to drain too

quickly. In these cases, a doctor may

recommend that they undergo surgery

In some cases, the doctor may rec-

There are some lifestyle changes

and other methods that a person can

try to help prevent dry eyes in winter.

make sure that they are blinking regu-

larly to ensure that their tears are thor-

hairdryers can increase the likelihood

Using indoor heating less often:

People should try to keep their home

as cool as they can bear so that the

Avoiding smoking: People may

wish to consider quitting smoking and

trying to avoid being around people

who smoke, as smoke from cigarettes

can irritate the eyes and cause them to

wraparound glasses or goggles can

help protect the eyes from the wind

people spend a long time looking at

screens, they may blink less. This can

helps keep people hydrated and, there-

Drinking plenty of water: This

There are many things that a person

However, a person should visit a

have tried home remedies

have any worrisome changes

have dry eyes that are inter-

suspect that they have an un-

can do at home to help relieve dry

eyes without requiring medical inter-

for a few weeks and still do not expe-

to their vision, such as loss of vision

fering with their day-to-day life

derlying reason for their dry eyes

There are many underlying reasons

that can cause a person to experience

dry eyes. Some of these may include:

vitamin A deficiency

certain medications

any underlying causes and prescribe

stronger treatments that may be able

to resolve a person's dry eye symp-

It is quite common for people to ex-

There are many things that can

Most of the time, people are able to

perience dry eyes in the winter

cause this, including a lack of humid-

use home remedies to help treat their

dry eye symptoms. Occasionally,

however, medical intervention may be

necessary. (Courtesy: Medical News

ity, warm indoor air, and the wind.

The doctor will be able to look into

some eye infections, such as

Sjögren disease

thyroid disease

meibomianitis

Limiting screen time: Often, when

and other winter weather.

cause the eyes to dry out.

doctor if they:

rience relief

blepharitis

Summary

fore, helps prevent dry eyes.

When to contact a doctor

Wearing eye protection: Wearing

heating does not dry out their eyes.

oughly lubricating the eyes.

Avoiding hairdryers:

of a person's eyes becoming dry.

Blinking often: People should

ommend surgery to close the person's

should soak a clean washcloth in

warm, not hot, water and apply it to

the eye area for 10 minutes or so.

can try to relieve their dry eye symp-

help keep the eyes moist for longer.

best to apply them at nighttime.

Eye ointments are thicker than eye

a humidifier, the American Academy

of Ophthalmology recommends putting a pan of water near a heater or ra-

diator for a similar effect.

Eye ointments

Tear duct plugs

Warm compresses

toms is a warm compress.

to adjust the eyelids.

tear ducts permanently.

Prevention

These include:

dry out.

prescription.

By: Hana Ames

old or windy weather and indoor heating may cause people to experience dry eyes more often in the winter months. Depending on the severity of their symptoms and any medications they may be taking, a person can use either over-thecounter (OTC) or prescription medications to treat their dry eyes.

Dry eye is a common condition that can negatively affect a person's quality of life. According to the National Eye Institute, nearly 16 million people in the United States have dry eye.

There is some evidence to suggest that the seasons may impact the occur-

Dry eyes in winter are common, but people can usually treat them with home remedies and self-care. Sometimes, however, dry eyes may require medical intervention.

Read on to learn about what people can do to treat symptoms of dry eyes at home. This article also covers when to contact a doctor.

Causes of dry eyes in winter

There are many reasons that a person may experience dry eyes throughout the year. However, some reasons are specific to the winter months.

These include factors such as weather and heating. For example, cold and high winds blowing in a person's face may cause their eyes to dry out. Indoor heating may also be a cause of dry eyes, and it is likely that people will use their heating more often in the colder months.

Some symptoms of dry eyes may include eyes that feel:

- itchy
- sore
- gritty
- sensitive to light

A person with dry eyes may also experience blurry vision and eyes that are more watery than usual.

Some general reasons that a person may experience dry eyes in-

their glands not producing enough tears to keep the eyes moist

their tears drying too fast

their tears not keeping their

eyes wet effectively enough Medications

Some medications may cause dry eyes. However, it is important that people do not stop taking their prescribed medications without medical

There may be alternatives that may not cause a person to experience dry eyes. Alternatively, it could be that it is more beneficial to treat dry eyes than to change medications.

Regardless, people should speak with the doctor who prescribed their medication regarding any side effects they may be experiencing.

Treatment

There are a variety of treatment options that doctors may recommend, depending on the cause and severity

of a person's dry eyes. Treatments may also vary depending on whether or not the dry eyes have a connection to a person's aller-

OTC medications

A doctor may suggest OTC medications such as artificial tears. People can get these eye drops, which mimic natural tears to help lubricate the eyes, without a prescription.

There are many different types of eye drops that a person can buy, and people should try a variety to determine which option works best for

There are also specific options for people who use contact lenses and for people who need to use eye drops very frequently throughout the day.

Prescription medications

If a person finds themselves needing to use eye drops more frequently than the directions on the label of OTC eye drops recommend, they may require prescription eye drops.

A doctor or pharmacist can recommend the right prescription eye drops for an individual's situation.

Indoor humidifiers

Sometimes, people may find that their dry eyes are due to the lack of humidity in the air. Using a humidifier may help with this. However, people who use humidifiers should ensure that they clean them regularly to avoid bacteria building up, as this can cause irritation to the eyes.

Do 'hypochondriacs' die earlier? The condition's links with anxiety explain this paradox

By: Stephen Hughes

eople who worry excessively about their health tend to die earlier than those who don't, a recent study from Sweden has found. It seems strange that hypochondriacs who, by definition, worry yet have nothing wrong with them, should enjoy shorter lifespans than the rest of us. Let's find out more.

First, a word about terminology. The term "hypochondriac" is fast becoming pejorative. Instead, we medical professionals are encouraged to use the term illness anxiety disorder, or IAD. So, to avoid triggering our more sensitive readership, we ought to use this term.

We can define IAD as a mental health condition characterised by excessive worry about health, often with an unfounded belief that a serious medical condition is present. It may be associated with frequent visits to a doctor, or it may involve avoiding them altogether on the grounds that a real and quite possibly fatal condition might be diagnosed.

The latter variant strikes me as quite rational. A hospital is a dangerous place and you can die in a place

IAD can be quite debilitating. A person with the condition will spend a lot of time worrying and visiting clinics and hospitals. It is costly to health systems because of time and diagnostic resources used and is quite stigmatising.

Busy healthcare professionals would much rather spend time treating people with "real conditions" and can often be quite dismissive. So can



Now, about that study

The Swedish researchers tracked around 42,000 people (of whom 1,000 had IAD) over two decades. During that period, people with the disorder had an increased risk of death. (On average, worriers died five years younger than those who worried less.) Furthermore, the risk of death was increased from both natural and unnatural causes. Perhaps people with IAD have something wrong with them after all.

People with IAD dying of natural causes had increased mortality from cardiovascular causes, respiratory causes and unknown causes. Interestingly, they did not have an increased mortality from cancer.

This seems odd because cancer anxiety is rife in this population. The principal cause of unnatural death in the IAD cohort was from suicide, with at least a fourfold increase over those without IAD.

So how do we explain these curi-

IAD is known to have a strong association with psychiatric disorders. As suicide risk is increased by psychiatric illness, then this finding seems

quite reasonable. If we add in the fact

that people with IAD may feel stig-

matised and dismissed, then it follows

that this may contribute to anxiety and depression, leading ultimately to sui-

cide in some cases.

The increased risk of death from natural causes seems less easy to explain. There may be lifestyle factors. Alcohol, smoking and drug use are more common in anxious people and those with a psychiatric disorder. It is known that such vices can limit one's longevity and so they may contribute

to the increased mortality from IAD. IAD is known to be more common in those who have had a family member with a serious illness. Since many serious illnesses have a genetic component, there may be good constitutional causes for this increase in mortality: lifespan is shortened by What can we learn

Doctors need to be alert to the underlying health problems of patients and must listen with greater care. When we are dismissive of our patients, we can often be badly caught

People with IAD may well have a hidden underlying disorder - an unpopular conclusion, I accept.

Perhaps we can illustrate this point with the case of the French novelist, Marcel Proust. Proust is often described by his biographers as a hypochondriac, yet he died in 1922 at the age of 51 at a time when the life expectancy of a Frenchman was 63.

During his life, he complained of numerous gastrointestinal symptoms such as fullness, bloating and vomiting, yet his medical attendants could find little wrong. In fact, what he described is consistent with gastropare-

This is a condition in which motility of the stomach is reduced and it empties more slowly than it should, causing it to overfill. This can lead to vomiting and with that comes a risk of inhaling vomit, leading to aspiration pneumonia and Proust is known to have died of complications of pneumonia.

Finally, a word of caution: writing about IAD can be quite risky. The French playwright Molière wrote Le Malade Imaginaire (The Imaginary Invalid), a play about a hypochondriac called Argan who tries to get his daughter to marry a doctor in order to reduce his medical bills. As for Molière, he died at the fourth performance of his work. Mock hypochondriacs at your peril. (Cour-

Navigating the winter blues: Strategies to illuminate the shadows of seasonal affective disorder



By: Dr. Gorav Gupta

s winter descends upon us, bringing with it the crisp chill and the festive cheer, it also casts a shadow that many individuals find challenging to shake off. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a form of depression that typically occurs during the winter months, affects a significant number of people worldwide. Understanding the intricacies of SAD, recognizing its symptoms, and exploring effective remedies and therapies is crucial for those grappling with

the winter blues. The Winter Blues Phenomenon

Winter is often synonymous with shorter days, longer nights, and decreased exposure to natural sunlight. These changes can disrupt the body's internal clock, leading to alterations in mood and energy levels. Seasonal Affective Disorder is characterized by a recurrent pattern of depressive symptoms during a specific season, most commonly in winter. **Recognizing the Symptoms**

Individuals experiencing SAD may find themselves grappling with a range of symptoms, including per-

sistent low mood, lack of interest or pleasure in activities, changes in sleep patterns, increased fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and even changes in appetite. It's important to note that while the symptoms are similar to major depressive disorder, they occur seasonally and tend to alleviate with the arrival of spring.

Unravelling the Causes and Contributing Fac-

The exact cause of Seasonal Affective Disorder remains unclear, but several factors are believed to contribute to its onset. Reduced exposure to sunlight can disrupt the body's internal clock (circadian rhythm) and lead to imbalances in neurotransmitters such as serotonin and melatonin. Additionally, genetics, hormonal fluctuations, and pre-existing mental health conditions may amplify the risk of developing SAD. **Shedding Light on Remedies**

Thankfully, there are various strategies individuals can employ to alleviate the symptoms of SAD and embrace the winter months with resilience:

Light Therapy (Phototherapy): Exposure to bright light, mimicking natural sunlight, can help regulate circadian rhythms and alleviate symptoms.

Therapies for Treatment

non-invasive, effective treatment option.

Mind-Body Practices: Practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and deep-breathing exercises can help manage stress and improve overall mental

Embrace the Outdoors: Even on cold

Physical Exercise: Engaging in regular

days, spending time outdoors during daylight hours

can be beneficial. Natural sunlight stimulates the pro-

duction of serotonin, a neurotransmitter associated

physical activity has been proven to boost mood and

reduce symptoms of depression. Whether it's a brisk

walk, yoga, or a workout routine, staying active is es-

with mood regulation.

For those seeking professional support, psychotherapy, particularly cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), has shown effectiveness in treating SAD. CBT helps individuals identify and change negative thought patterns, fostering healthier coping mechanisms. In severe cases, where symptoms significantly im-

pact daily functioning, medication such as antidepressants may be prescribed. It's crucial to consult with a healthcare professional to determine the most appropriate course of action. As winter unfolds its icy embrace, understanding

Seasonal Affective Disorder is the first step towards managing its impact. By incorporating lifestyle changes, embracing natural light, and seeking therapeutic interventions when needed, individuals can navigate the winter blues with resilience and regain control over their mental well-being.

Remember, the sun always rises, and with it comes the promise of brighter days ahead. (The author is the Founder and Director of Tulasi Healthcare)

Celebrate a mindful New Year without falling into the alcohol binging trap celebration and negatively impact in weight gain; this can affect body

By: Dr. Gorav Gupta

s we usher in the New Year with enthusiasm and resolutions, it's essential to address a common challenge that many face during this celebratory season – the tendency to indulge in excessive drinking. While festivities are a time to rejoice. it's crucial to strike a balance between enjoyment and maintaining our mental and physical well-being. Let us shed light on the psychological consequences of New Year alcohol binging and offer practical tips to help you steer clear of this unhealthy habit.

The Psychological Impact: 1. Emotional Triggers: Alcohol binging often stems from emotional triggers, such as stress, loneliness, or even excitement. Understanding and addressing these triggers can help in developing healthier coping mecha-

2. Temporary Gratification: Alcohol binging may provide temporary pleasure, but it is often followed by feelings of guilt and remorse. This cycle can contribute to the development of unhealthy relationship with

mental health.

3. Social Influences: Social gatherings during the New Year can inadvertently encourage overindulgence. Peer pressure and societal expectations may contribute to unhealthy behaviours that, in the long run, can have detri-

mental effects on both mental and physical health. The Body-**Mind Connec-**

tion: 1. Digestive Discomfort: Excessive drinking can lead to digestive issues, causing discomfort, bloat-

fatigue. This physical discomfort can further exacerbate stress and negatively impact your mental state.

2. Weight Gain and Body Image: Alcohol binging can also lead to an increase in appetite, which often results image and self-esteem. This, in turn, may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and impact overall mental 3. Disrupted Sleep Patterns: Ex-

cessive consumption of alcohol can disrupt sleep patterns. Quality sleep is essential for cognitive function emotional well-being, and

> heightened stress and anxiety. Strategies for Healthier New Year Celebra-

its disruption can

contribute to

tion: 1. Set Realistic Goals: Instead of setting rigid resolutions, establish realistic and achievable goals

for the New Year. This approach reduces the likelihood of feeling overwhelmed and resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

2. Seek Support: Reach out to

friends or family members for support. Having a strong support system can help you navigate emotional challenges and reduce the risk of turning to unhealthy behaviours.

3. Stay Active: Incorporate physical activity into your routine. Exercise not only contributes to physical well-being but also has positive effects on mental health, helping to alleviate stress and

4. Limit Alcohol Intake: Monitor your alcohol consumption and choose lighter alternatives. Excessive drinking not only affects your liver but also disrupts your sleep and can contribute to mood swings.

As we step into the New Year, let's prioritize our mental and physical health. By understanding the psychological consequences of alcohol binging and adopting practical strategies, we can celebrate responsibly, ensuring a positive start to the year. Remember, a healthier mind and body pave the way for a more fulfilling and joyous life. Cheers to a happy and balanced New Year! (The author is a Psychiatrist, Founder and Director at Tulasi Healthcare)



India press for dialogue, diplomacy, reformed multilateralism as conflicts raged around world in 2023

around the world this year, India pressed for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve them and gave a consistent clarion call for reformed multilateralism amid failures by a polarised UN Security Council to maintain international peace.

India, which became the world's most populous country in 2023, emerged as the voice of the Global South as it presided over the G20, the grouping of the world's largest economies, throughout the year.

At a time when the world, as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar pointed out, was witnessing sharp East-West polarisation and deep North-South divides, India brought its G20 thematic message of 'One Earth, One family, One Future' to the global stage, including at the United Nations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leading an unprecedented Yoga Day celebration at the UN headquarters on June 21, urged the international community to "use the power of Yoga to build bridges of friendship", a peaceful world, and a cleaner, greener

"Let us join hands together to realise the goal of - 'One Earth, One family, One Future'," Modi said as he led the historic yoga session at the expansive North Lawn in the UN headquarters, nine years after he had first proposed from the UN General Assembly podium to mark International Yoga Day as an annual

India's call for unity and adherence to diplomacy and dialogue to find effective solutions to crises was also reiterated by Jaishankar at the annual high-level UN General Assembly session in September.

Greeting global leaders from the iconic UNGA lectern with 'Namaste from Bharat', Jaishankar said the world was witnessing an exceptional period of turmoil and stresses have been aggravated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and repercussions of ongoing conflicts, tensions and disputes.

"At this juncture, it was with a sense of exceptional responsibility that India took up the Presidency of the G20. Our vision of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' sought to focus on the key concerns of the many, not just the narrow interests of a few," Jaishankar said.

The G20 Summit in Delhi affirmed that "diplomacy and dialogue are the only effective solutions. The international order is diverse and we must cater for divergences, if not differences. The days when a few nations set the agenda and expected others to fall in line are over," Jaishankar told world leaders.

Jaishankar highlighted that the Summit of the Future to be hosted in September next year by the United Nations should serve as a "serious opportunity to drive change, champion fairness and reform multilateralism, including the expansion of the Security Council memberships

The calls for reforming multilateral institutions such as the UN and particularly the Security Council came from the highest echelons of the world body when Secretary-General Antonio Guterres gave a clarion call to reform the powerful 15-nation UN organ "in line with the world of today" and based on eq-

The UN chief told world leaders at the high-level UNGA session that the Council reflects the political and economic realities of 1945 and risks becoming part of the problem instead of solv-

"Our world is becoming unhinged. Geopolitical tensions are rising. Global challenges are mounting. And we seem incapable of coming together to respond," Guterres said.

"I have no illusions. Reforms are a question of power. I know there are many competing interests and agendas. But the alternative to reform is not the status quo. The alternative to reform is further fragmentation. It's reform or rupture," he said.

The failure of the Security Council to act in times of global crises was sharply evident during the Ukraine conflict and yet again in the aftermath of the October 7 terror attacks in Israel

India voiced deep concern over the deteriorating security situation and large-scale loss of civilian life in the latest Israel-Palestine conflict and urged the parties to work towards creating conditions necessary for peace and restarting direct negotiations through de-escalation and ending violence.

The Council's failure to act on multiple occasions towards achieving a humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza war, due to vetoes cast by permanent members, again raised concerns and questions about its effectiveness in dealing with crises and underlined the need for urgent reforms.

Guterres invoked Article 99, a rare and "dramatic constitu-

tional move" under the United Nations Charter to appeal to the Security Council for a humanitarian ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict and to avert a "humanitarian catastrophe,' which he said has potentially irreversible implications for Palestinians and peace and security in the region.

This was the first time that Guterres invoked Article 99 of the Charter since he became UN Secretary-General in 2017. Article 99 states that "the Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador

Ruchira Kamboj said that as a member of the Global South, India shares "its collective angst that on issues of core concern to the South, we have no voice at the high table. In a scathing criticism of the present composition of the UN's top organ, Kamboj said the Security Council of yesterday is "al-

ways late today" and questioned whether 1945's "security plumbing" will work in the year 2023. "If the trillion dollar question is to ensure peace, do we have a peace infrastructure representative of the current times and

contemporary realities?" Kamboj said. Kamboj questioned whether 2023 is the new 1945, referring

to the year when the powerful UN body came into existence.

She said that during the annual high-level UNGA session in September this year, there were "unequivocal calls" for comprehensive and meaningful reforms from more than 85 global leaders. (PTI)

Netanyahu thanks US for new weapons sales

GAZA STRIP, Dec 31: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saturday that Israel's war on Hamas in Gaza will continue for "many more months", pushing back against persistent international ceasefire calls after mounting civilian deaths, hunger and mass displacement in the besieged enclave.

Netanyahu thanked the Biden administration for its continued backing, including approval for a new emergency weapons sale, the second this month, and prevention of a UN Security Council resolution seeking an immediate cease-fire. Israel argues that ending the war now would mean victory for Hamas, a stance shared by the Biden administration, which at the same time urged Israel to do more to avoid harm to Palestin-

In new fighting, Israeli warplanes struck the urban refugee camps of Nuseirat and Bureij in the center of the territory Saturday as ground forces pushed deeper into the southern city of Khan Younis.

The Health Ministry in Gaza said Saturday that more than 21,600 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's unprecedented air and ground offensive since the deadly October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel. The ministry, which does not distinguish between the deaths of civilians and combatants, said 165 Palestinians were killed over the past 24 hours. It has said about 70 per cent of those killed have been women and children.

The number of Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza combat rose to 170, after the military announced two more deaths Saturday.

The war has displaced some 85 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million residents, sending swells of people seeking shelter in Israeli-designated safe areas that the military has nevertheless bombed. Palestinians are left with a sense that nowhere is safe in the tiny enclave.

With Israeli forces expanding their ground offensive this week, tens of thousands more Palestinians



southernmost end of Gaza.

Thousands of tents and makeshift shacks have sprung up on Rafah's outskirts next to UN warehouses. Displaced people arrived in Rafah on foot or on trucks and carts piled high with mattresses. Those who did not find space in overwhelmed shelters pitched tents on roadsides.

"We don't have water. We don't have enough food," Nour Daher, a displaced woman, said Saturday from the sprawling tent camp. "The kids wake up in the morning wanting to eat, wanting to drink. It took us one hour to find water for them. We couldn't bring them flour. Even when we wanted to take them to toilets, it took us one hour to walk.'

In the Nuseirat camp, resident Mustafa Abu Wawee said a strike hit the home of one of his relatives, killing two people.

"The (Israeli) occupation is doing everything to force people to leave," he said over the phone while helping to search for four people missing under the rubble. "They want to break our spirit and will, but they will fail. We are here to stay.

MORE US WEAPONS FOR ISRAEL

The State Department said Friday that Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Congress he approved a USD 147.5 million sale for equipment, including fuses, charges and primers, that is needed for 155 mm shells

Israel bought previously. It marked the second time this month that the Biden administration is bypassing Congress to approve an emergency weapons sale to Israel. Blinken made a similar decision on December 9 to approve the sale to Israel of nearly 14,000 rounds of tank ammunition worth more than USD 106 million.

Both moves have come as President Joe Biden's request for a nearly USD 106 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other national security needs remains stalled in Congress, caught up in a debate over US immigration policy and border security. Some Democratic lawmakers have spoken of making the proposed USD 14.3 billion in American assistance to its Mideast ally contingent on concrete steps by Netanyahu's government to reduce civilian casualties in Gaza during the war with Hamas.

THE WAR'S TIMELINE

Blinken, who has repeatedly traveled to the Middle East during the war, was expected back in Israel and other countries in the region in January. US officials have urged Israel to start shifting from high intensity combat to more targeted operations, but said they were not imposing a deadline.

Netanyahu said Israel needs more time.

"As the chief of staff said this week, the war will continue many more months," he told a televised news conference Saturday. "My policy is clear. We will continue to fight until we have achieved all the objectives of the war, first and foremost the annihilation of Hamas and the release of all the hostages.

More than 120 hostages remain in Gaza, after militants seized more than 240 in the October 7 assault that also killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians. (PTI)

Kim Jong Un vows to launch 3 more spy satellites and produce more nuclear materials in 2024

SEOUL, Dec 31: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to launch three additional military spy satellites, produce more nuclear materials and introduce modern attack drones in 2024, as he called for "overwhelming" war readiness to cope with US-led confrontational moves, state media reported Sunday.

Kim's comments, made during a key ruling Workers' Party meeting to set state goals for next year, suggest he'll intensify a run of weapons tests ahead of the US presidential elections in November. Observers say Kim believes a boosted nuclear capability would give him another chance to launch high-stakes summit diplomacy with the US to win sanctions relief if former President Donald Trump returns to the White House.

During the five-day meeting that ended Saturday, Kim said anti-North Korea moves by the United States and its followers have been unprecedented this year, pushing the Korean Peninsula to the brink of a nuclear war, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. Kim cited the expansion of US-South Korean military exercises and the temporary deployment of powerful US military assets such as bombers and a nuclear-armed submarine in South Korea - steps the allies have taken in response to the North's weapons testing spree since last year.

"The grave situation requires us to accelerate works to acquire overwhelming war response capabilities and thorough and perfect military readiness to suppress any types of provocations by the enemies at a stroke," Kim said, according

to KCNA Kim set forth plans to launch three more military spy satellites next year in addition to the country's first reconnaissance satellite

launched in November.

He underscored the need to establish "a reliable foundation" to build more nuclear weapons, an apparent reference to facilities to produce fissile materials like weapons-grade plutonium and highly enriched uranium.

Kim also ordered authorities to enhance submarine capabilities and develop various types of modern unmanned combat equipment such as armed drones, according to KCNA.

"Pyongyang might be waiting out the US presidential election to see what its provocations can buy it with the next administration," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "The Kim regime has closed the political

door on denuclearization negotiations but could offer rhetorical restraint and a testing freeze in exchange for sanctions relief." Easley

"Although North Korea has no intention of giving up nuclear weapons, it might try to extract payment for acting like a so-called responsible nuclear power."

Kim has been focusing on modernizing his nuclear arsenal since his diplomacy with Trump, then the US president, broke down in 2019 due to wrangling over how much sanctions relief the North could be given for a partial surrender of its nuclear program. Experts say Kim likely thinks that Trump, if elected for a second term, could make concessions as the US is preoccupied with the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas fighting.

Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University in South Korea, said if President Joe Biden is reelected, North Korea won't get what it wants. But he predicted a Trump win could revive summit diplomacy between the two countries, saying Trump will likely say during his campaign that he can convince North Korea

to suspend intimidating weapons tests. He said Kim's vow to ramp up production of plutonium and uranium is meant to add to his negotiating cards in potential diplomacy with the Americans

Nam said North Korea will also test-launch more intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the continental US this year.

"North Korea will act to the fullest extent under its timetable for provocation until the US election day," Nam said.

During his speech at the party meeting, Kim used bellicose, derisive rhetoric against South Korea, calling it "a half-paralyzed, deformed US colony" with "Yankee culture." He said South Korea must not be considered as a partner for reconciliation or unification. He ordered the military to use all available capabilities including nuclear to conquer South Korea in the

event of a potential conflict. Some analysts have speculated that limited armed clashes between the Koreas along their tense land and sea border could happen in the coming year. South Korea's spy agency said last week that North Korea will likely launch military provocations and cyberattacks ahead of South Korean parliamentary elections in April and the US presidential election in

November. Kim also maintained that North Korea must solidify cooperation with "anti-imperialist, independent" countries that he said oppose US-led Western hegemony.

Kim didn't mention those countries by name. But North Korea has been seeking to beef up its cooperation with Russia and China, which have repeatedly blocked the US and others' attempts to toughen UN sanctions on the North over its banned missile tests. The US and South Korea accuse North Korea of supplying conventional arms like artillery and ammunition to Russia in return for high-tech Russian technologies to boost its own military pro-

Julianne Smith, US permanent representative to NATO, said earlier this month the US assessed that the suspected Russian technologies North Korea seeks are related to fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, armored vehicles, ballistic missile production equipment or materials of that kind. Smith said US intelligence indicates that North Korea has provided Russia with more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions.

South Korean officials said Russian support likely enabled North Korea to put its spy satellite into orbit for the first time on November 21. Many foreign experts are skeptical about the satellite's ability to take militarily meaningful high-resolution images. But South Korean Defense Minister Shin Wonsik said in November that Russia could help North Korea produce higher-resolution satellite photos. (AP)

on Ukraine after promising retaliation for Belgorod attack

KYIV, Dec 31: Russia launched a fresh drone assault on Ukraine on Saturday night, after promising that strikes on the Russian border city of Belgorod earlier in the day "would not go unpunished".

The Ukrainian Air Force said Sunday that it had shot down 21 of 49 drones launched by Russian forces overnight.

Twenty-eight people were wounded in an attack on the eastern city of Kharkiv, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said Sunday. A central hotel, apartment buildings, kindergarten, shops and administrative buildings sustained damage, according to the regional prosecutor's office. In the Kyiv region that surrounds the capital, a Russian drone attack caused a fire to break out at a critical infrastructure facility, local officials said. They did not identify the facility further.

The Russian attacks came after shelling in the center of the Russian border city of Belgorod Saturday killed 24 people, including three children.

A further 108 people were wounded in the strike, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said liest attacks on Russian soil since the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine 22 months ago.

Russian authorities accused Kyiv of carrying out the attack, which took place the day after an 18-hour Russian aerial bombardment across Ukraine killed at least 41 civilians.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it identified the ammunition used in the strike as Czech-made Vampire rockets and Olkha missiles fitwith cluster-munition warheads. It provided no additional information, and The Associated Press was unable to verify

"This crime will not go unpunished," the ministry said in a statement on social media.

In an emergency meeting at the UN Security Council demanded by Russia Saturday night, envoy Vasily Nebenzya accused Kyiv of a "terrorist attack." In comments carried by Russian state media, Nebenzya claimed Ukraine had launched "a deliberate act of terrorism directed against civil-

Russia launches fresh drone strikes 1.89 lakh policemen deployed across Bangladesh ahead of polls: Report

and order ahead of the January 7 general election being boycotted by the main opposition BNP, media reports said on

Presently, the country's police force has around 2.13 lakh personnel, including civil staff, The Daily Star newspaper reported. A total of 1,89,000 police

personnel have been deployed nationwide, who will be on election duty with magistrates on the voting day, besides patrolling and working in the strike teams, Deputy Inspector General (operation) at Police Headquarters, Anowar Hossain was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

According to the bdnews24 news portal, 1,74,000 police personnel will be on duty without any leave, while the remaining 15,000 policemen will be engaged in routine work. Additional policemen and plainclothesmen have been deployed to the areas vulnerable to violence or irregularities, Hossain told the

DHAKA, Dec 31: Bangladesh Since October 29, the ailing tion, urging people not to pay has deployed more than 1.89 former premier Khaleda Zia's taxes and utility bills to press lakh policemen to ensure law Bangladesh Nationalist Party its demand for a non-party in-(BNP) has held intermittent nationwide strikes and transport blockades. The BNP is boycotting the general elections after the government rejected its demand for an interim non-party neutral government to organise the vot-

> According to a media tally, 11 people died, 386 vehicles were torched, and four trains were derailed from tracks in the past two months in political violence. Police arrested thousands of opposition activists and figures, including de-facto BNP leader and party secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, over

> charges of violence. The BNP is carrying out an anti-election street campaign, calling for intermittent strikes and transport blockades, saving no election under the incumbent government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would be fair or neutral.

> It has also called for civil disobedience against the ruling Awami Party-led dispensa

terim government for election oversight by amending the country's Constitution. The BNP had boycotted the

take, alleging that the voting was marred with widespread rigging and intimidation. On Friday, Bangladesh deployed 1,151 platoons of paramilitary border guards across the country to ensure that the

general election is held in a

2014 election but took part in

the 2018 polls, which party

leaders later said was a mis-

free, fair and peaceful manner. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel will work in tandem with the police, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and armed forces for 13 days surrounding the January 7 polls.

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

Australian and New Zealand preparing to be among first nations to ring in 2024 with fireworks

CANBERRA, Dec 31: Australians and New Zealanders are making final preparations on New Year's Eve to become among the first nations to ring in 2024 as ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza cast a pall over celebrations and heightened

tensions across parts of the world. Rain in New Zealand's largest city Auckland is expected to ease by midnight when downtown Sky Tower, the country's tallest structure, erupts with fireworks as the centrepiece of a spectacular annual light show. Two hours later in neighbouring Australia, the Sydney Harbor Bridge will become the focal point of a renowned midnight fireworks display and light show viewed annually by around 425 million people worldwide, according to city authorities.

More police than ever have been deployed throughout Sydney to ensure safety as more than 1 million people — equivalent to one in five of the city's population — converge on the harbour waterfront for the best available views, state government authorities said in a statement. Many revellers have been camping at the best vantage points since

Sunday morning. The waterfront has been the scene of heated pro-Palestinian protests after the sails of the Sydney Opera House were illuminated in the colours of the Israeli flag in response to the October 7 attack by Palestinian militant group Hamas that triggered the war.

In New York's Times Square, officials and party organisers say they are prepared to welcome crowds of revellers and ensure their safety.

At a security briefing Friday, New York City Mayor Eric Adams said there were "no specific threats" to the annual New Year's Eve bash, which is expected to draw tens of thousands of people to the heart of midtown Manhattan.

clude live performances from Flo Rida, Megan Thee Stallion and LL Cool J, as well as televised appearances from Cardi B and others. Organisers said in-person attendance is expected to return to pre-COVID levels, even as foot traffic around Times Square remains down slightly since the pandemic.

Amid near-daily protests in New York sparked by the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, police said they would expand the security perimeter around the party, creating a "buffer zone" that will allow them to head off potential demonstrations.

"We will be out here with our canines, on horseback, our helicopters, our boats," Adams said. Officials will also monitor protests with drones, he said. "But as we saw last year, after having no specific threats, we get a threat.

During last year's New Year's Eve party, a machete-wielding man



attacked three police officers a few blocks from Times Square.

Security will also be heightened across France on Sunday, with 90,000 law enforcement officers set to be deployed, domestic intelligence chief Céline Berthon said on Friday. Of those, 6,000 will be in Paris, where French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said over 1.5

million people are expected to attend celebrations on the Champs-Elysees. Speaking at a press conference, Darmanin cited a "very high terrorist threat" because, in part, of "what is happening in Israel and Palestine," referring to the Israel-Hamas war.

Darmanin said that police for the first time will be able to use drones

as part of security work and that tens of thousands of firefighters and 5.000 soldiers would also be deployed.

New Year's Eve celebrations in the French capital will center on the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, including DJ sets, fireworks and video projections on the Arc de Triomphe, highlighting "changes in the city and faces of the Games," according to the press service of the City of Paris. Other planned events include "the largest Mexican wave ever performed" and a "giant karaoke." Local authorities have instituted a ban on the sale of alcohol on and around the Champs Elysees on New Year's Eve, and the public will not be able to access the area with glass bottles and flasks.

The security challenge ahead of the Olympics was highlighted when a tourist was killed in a knife attack near the Eiffel Tower on December 2. Large-scale attacks — such as that at the Bataclan in 2015, when Islamic extremists invaded the music hall and shot up cafe terraces. killing 130 people — also loom in

The knife attack raised concern in

France and abroad about security for the Games that begin July 26, in just under seven months. But law enforcement officials appear eager to show off a security-ready Paris.

In Muslim-majority Pakistan, the government has banned all New Year's Eve celebrations as an act of solidarity with the Palestinians.

In an overnight televised message, caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar urged Pakistanis to "show solidarity with the oppressed people of Gaza" by beginning the new year with simplicity.

Kakar said Muslims across the world were saddened over Israel's attacks on Gaza that resulted in the killings of thousands of innocent people. (AP)

Tiwa Mathonlai

Tokhra unveils 18 new

books in grand release

event in Morigaon

Solution to decades-old Naga Political Issue

3 Naga groups come together for talks with Centre

DIMAPUR, Dec 31: Three Naga groups have come together and decided to pursue negotiations for a solution to the decades-old Naga Political Issue with the Centre jointly.

MONDAY, JANUARY 1, 2024

The decision was taken on Saturday during a meeting attended by leaders of the three groups -- National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) led by Akato Chophy, NSCN led by Khango and Naga National Council (NNC) led by Z Royim. All three are splinter groups.

"The three groups have come together to have a joint political venture in 2024," said Akato, while addressing journalists after the meeting here in the presence of leaders of the other two groups.

Asked if they have already approached the Centre with their decision to hold a dialogue, he said, "We have made separate approaches in the past but now we will make a joint effort on the Naga issue.'

Akato also affirmed that they would be holding a dialogue separate from the negotiations being held by the Working Committee of Naga National Political Groups (WC-NNPGs) with the Centre.

The NNPG is composed of only seven



groups while other Naga groups have been left out, he said, announcing that the three groups welcome like-minded organisations

to join them for the cause of Nagas. Stating that there is no nomenclature for the three groups who have come together, (PTI)

Akato said they will approach the Centre for political talks.

The Naga Political Issue is considered the longest-running insurgency in the country. The Centre has been holding separate negotiations with NSCN-IM since 1997 and the WC NNPGs since 2017.

Eight years have passed since the signing of the acclaimed Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015 with NSCN-IM and another six years have gone by following the inking of Agreed Position on November 17, 2017 with WC NNPGs.

The NSCN-IM has remained adamant on its demand for a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas as well as integration of Naga-inhabited areas spread over four states of India -- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, and also Myanmar.

On the other hand, the WC of NNPGs has expressed its willingness to accept whatever is granted for now and continue with the

Nonetheless, as of now, there is no significant development in the political negotiations between Centre and the Naga groups.

body, has released 18 books penned by various writers and pub-The 18 books released include lished by TMT in a book release function at Pobitora Auditorium in Morigaon. Among the 18 released, the

book 'Tiwa Mat Sigaina Naw'an approach to learning the Tiwa language, written by D Uphing Maslai, executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), was also un-

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 31: The Tiwa Math-

onlai Tokhra (TMT), a literary

The book release function was organised by TMT's Central Com-

MLA Morigaon, Rama Kanta Deuri, released the books in the presence of chief executive member of Tiwa Autonomous Council, Jivan Chandra Konwar; EM, KAAC, D Uphing Maslai; District Commissioner of Morigaon district, Devashis Sarma; former president, TMT, Alsing Madar, and noted writer Rupkrishna Pator.

Participating in the function, EM Maslai said, "It is a historic day for the Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra for being able to publish such a number of valuable books in the Tiwa language. Many Tiwas living in the plain districts of Assam have already lost their language several years back. The books released today will be part of a movement for the development of the Tiwa

Clear pending bills, tribal council urges Tripura Governor

language. Tiwa and other tribal languages are being lost due to its speakers feeling awkward in speaking it."

'Aikhore mung' by Pranjit Deuri; 'Mikhli' and 'Gonesh Senapatir Lekhoni Hongkolon' written and published by TMT; Tiwa Philology written by Bijoysing Maslai and Brito Kholar; Tiwa history by Horot Chandra Pator; 'Phanshunga' written by Lalsing Madar; 'Tiwa Mathonlai Tokrar Mukh Patro Mirbasit Prabandho' written by Jugeshor Bordoloi; Mekdo Tiwa Matkhop Phera written by Dipendro Nath Bordoloi; 'Phukul khume Maha' written by Mrinal Chandra Kalita; 'Bukul Phulor Dore' translated into Tiwa language by Niloti Maslai; 'Tiwa None mal-murja' written by Horsing Kholar; 'Tiwa Mat Šigaina Naw' written by D Uphing Maslai; 'Bejor Mayajal' written by Rotneshor Bordoloi; 'Omahar' a collection of TMT selected articles compiled by Mrinal Kumar Deoraja; Tiwa Mat Polan written by Pranjit Deuri; 'Ayushot' a collection of poems composed by Jayanta Kumar Manta, Rupantor Senapati, Moitri Pator, and Gonesh Sepanapati; Rosona by Dr Jyotismoi Bordoloi; 'Awthe Khorong' by Janardan Pator and Dr Bhupen

Tripura to provide social pension to 29,410 more people from January

AGARTALA, Dec 31: The Tripura government has decided to bring 29,410 more poor people under the state's social pension scheme from January 2024, said a minister.

At present 3,80,668 people are receiving Rs 2,000 pension under 34 pension schemes of the Centre and state government.



"The state government has decided to provide 29,410 poor people with the 'Mukhyamantri' social pension scheme from January 2024. Each will get Rs 2,000 pension per month", Social Welfare and Social Education Minister Tinku Roy said on Saturday.

Roy claimed that Tripura has the highest number of people receiving social pensions among northeastern states in terms of population. While the Centre provides social pension to 1,51,348 people under three schemes, the state government gives pension to 2,29,320 people

BJP state spokesperson Nabendu Bhattacharjee on Sunday thanked the state government for the inclusion of more persons in the Mukhyamantri

ULFA pro-talks faction defends peace pact

Northeast/Region

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: Facing widespread flak over its peace accord, the leadership of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) pro-talks faction on Sunday defended the pact saying they received more than expected from the government.

Addressing a press conference here after returning from New Delhi, ULFA (pro-talks) chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa said the integrity of Assam has been guaranteed through the agreement and the government of India has also committed to protect it.

"We have got more than what we sought from the government of India regarding the development of Assam. However, many people are making fun of it saying it is just a package," he added. With the help of the peace agreement, the interests of the indigenous people have been protected, Rajkhowa said.

The militant leader also apologised to the people of the state for killing thousands of innocent citizens during the 44-year long armed insurgency.

"I have gone to the houses of many people who lost their lives due to the struggle of ULFA and apologised to them. We also wholeheartedly apologise for the Dhemaji blast and the families of the victims," he added. The 2004 blast at Dhemaji College Ground on 13 children. A day after the blast, Rajkhowa said in a statement that security forces had used schoolchildren as shields to defy the outfit's boycott call.

ULFA (pro-talks) general secretary Anup Chetia said they have accepted the public criticism of the peace accord as people's blessings and will review it with the citizens of the state.

"We never stuck to one stand and accepted various suggestions. We stuck to one main point of reservation of indigenous people in Assam assembly. It was done through delimitation and that is why we supported the exercise," he added.

The ULFA (pro-talks) leaders felicitated scores of people at a function here for helping and guiding them in its journey till signing of the agreement.

The outfit's foreign secretary Sasadhar Choudhury said the ULFA will be disbanded within 10-20 days as per the agreement with the government.

We took up arms as we did not have faith in the democratic process, but we failed. However, we will not be involved in politics. We will only work for the people," he added.

Choudhury also expressed his desire of bringing ULFA (Independent) chief Paresh Barua to the dialogue table for permanent peace in Assam. (PTI)

Nagaland tattoo artist assaulted in Pune

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: A group of miscreants allegedly assaulted a 26-year-old freelance tattoo artist from Nagaland and his friends at Kondhwa in Maharashtra's Pune. According to reports, the incident took place on Thursday when tattoo artist Benrushen Menthing Lemo was enjoying tea with his friends, Chingthu Pom and Boto Sumi, at Achin's hotel near his residence around 8:30 PM. Lemo stays at Shivneragar under Kondhwa police station in Pun

Without any provocation, three unidentified boys on a scooter approached the group and slapped Chingthu on the cheek, triggering a verbal altercation. The situation escalated quickly as more of the as-

sailants' friends arrived. They verbally abused and physically assaulted Lemo and his friends, with one wielding a wooden stick. Chingthu sustained a blow to the forehead, and Boto was struck on the cheek by a thrown stone, causing a wound and bleeding. Amidst the chaos, a local resident, K Lal Dampuri,

came to their aid. However, facing the threat of further violence, the group was forced to flee the scene, losing their mobile phones in the process.

der town of Moreh in Manipur.

night, disrupting the town's usual tranquillity.

working to ascertain their affiliations.

Assam Rifles in Moreh.

Mate were fatally wounded.

sonnel sustained injuries.

Two militants killed in

Manipur, 13 injured

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: Two suspected Kuki National Army (KNA) mil-

itants reported dead and 13 injured, including 9 security personnel at bor-

The incident stretched from Saturday afternoon to the early hours of

The clashes began around 3:30 pm on Saturday when militants targeted

This ignited a series of fierce gun battles that continued through the

In the ensuing firefight, two militants identified as J Haokip and K

Additionally, four other suspected militants and nine state forces per-

The injured state forces, identified as J Kamson, M Priyokumar, N Bor-

jao, M Sunil, and G. Ponkhamlung, received initial treatment at the Assam Rifles camp before being evacuated to hospitals in Imphal. The identities of the injured militants remain unknown, and police are

Extension of periodicity of special train for the

benefit of passengers

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: To clear extra rush of passengers, it has been de-

cided to continue the services of special train no. 01666/01665 (Agartala

- Rani Kamalapati - Agartala) upto March, 2024. This train will run with

Accordingly, the service of the train no 01665 (Rani Kamalapati -

Agartala) special has been extended upto March 28, 2024 to run on every

Thursday. In return direction, the service of the train no 01666 (Agartala

- Rani Kamalapati) special has been extended upto March 31, 2024 to

run on every Sunday. In both the directions, the train will run via Am-

bassa, Dharmanagar, New Haflong, Guwahati, Rangiya, Kishanganj, Ba-

The extension of this train service will benefit wait listed passengers

of other trains in this route. The details of stoppages and timings of these

trains are available at IRCTC website and through NTES. Passengers are

requested to verify the details before undertaking their journey.

the existing days of service, timings, stoppages and composition.

Manipur police commandos stationed at the Key Location Point of the

'Mann Ki Baat' more

Alerted by locals, the police soon arrived and identified the primary assailant as Umar Shaikh. The victims, accompanied by the police, went to Kondhwa Police Station to file a complaint after receiving med-

ical treatment at Sassoon Hospital. The police have registered a case against Umar Shaikh and unidentified accomplices under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including unlawful assembly, rioting, voluntarily causing hurt (with and without weapon), intentional insult, mischief causing damage, and assault.

Arunachal constitutes new commission for protection of child rights

ITANAGAR, Dec 31: The Arunachal Pradesh government has constituted a new commission for protection of child rights, with Ratan Anya as its chairperson, of-

Anya assumed charge of the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (APSCPCR) at its office in Naharlagun on Friday, they said.

She will lead a six-member team of the commission. (PTI)

popular than 'Mahabharat', 'Ramayan' of 1980s: CM Saha

AGARŤALA, Dec 31: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Sunday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme was more popular among the masses than 'Mahabharat and 'Ramayan' mega TV serials of the 1980s.

His assertion came after listening to the 108th episode of 'Mann Ki Baat' at his home constituency Town Bardowali along with party leaders and workers.

"We used to see our mothers and sisters rushing towards TV screens to watch episodes of 'Mahabharat' and 'Ramayan' soaps on Doordarshan every Sunday. Nowadays, we see our mothers and sisters rushing to listen to PM's 'Mann Ki Baat' on the last Sunday of every month. This programme is more popular than the soaps of the 1980s," he said, while addressing the gathering.

"In the 1980s too, people criticised women rushing to watch TV soaps and even now many criticise those who listen to 'Mann Ki Baat'. But it makes no difference as people know what is what," he

'Mahabharat' (1988) and 'Ramayan' (1987), two epic serials created by BR Chopra and Ramananda Sagar respectively, were telecast on Doordarshan and were widely popular. (PTI)

AGARTALA, Dec 31: Tipra Motha-run Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has sought Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu's intervention to clear bills awaiting approval at the Raj Bhavan.

There are currently six bills including some customary laws passed by the state's lone tribal council awaiting approval from the Raj Bhavan, officials said.

'We had a productive meeting today with the governor at the TTAADC conference. This was his first visit to the autonomous district council headquarters, and

sues with him," chief executive member (CEM) Purna Chandra Jamatia told PTI on Saturday.

Iamatia said the executive council urged upon the governor to clear the pending bills. "We urged the governor to expedite the approval process so that the tribal council can make progress," he

"We also raised the issue of financial constraints faced by the autonomous district council, which covers two-thirds of the state's geographical area," he added

"The council had approved a budget of ₹ 1,135 crore for the we discussed some important is- year 2023-24, but we only re-

ceived ₹ 450 crore from the state government, leading to financial constraints," he added.

Hazarika geet translated by Dr

Bidyut Bika Senapati.

Asserting that the TTAADC spends ₹ 689 crore annually to cover employee and pensioner expenses, the CEM said the council has requested the governor's intervention to secure an additional ₹ 450 crore to cover expenses for the remaining months of the current fiscal. "We also requested the gover-

nor to allocate funds to the tribal council under two separate categories: Committed expenditure and development activities. Insufficient funds have negatively impacted development projects in the tribal council," he explained

Jamatia mentioned that the executive council urged the governor to hand over nine departments to the TTAADC administration for effective functioning and monitoring.

During the meeting, the council demanded immediate elections to village committees (similar to gram panchayats) as the absence of elected bodies is hindering development work.

Jamatia added that the governor attentively listened to the issues raised by the executive council and assured them that he would address the matters with the ap-

'ARUNACHAL ACHIEVES MILESTONE'

98 per cent households get potable tap water: CM Khandu

ITANAGAR, Dec 31: Arunachal Pradesh has achieved a historic milestone of connecting 98 per cent of households with potable tap water under the Jal Jeevan Mission, chief minister Pema Khandu has announced.

Khandu also said his government has resolved to provide a functional tap water connection to every household to ensure that everyone in Arunachal Pradesh has access to clean water.

"A historic milestone achieved. Arunachal Pradesh crosses 98 per cent functional household tap connection coverage under Jal Jeevan Mission. It reflects our shared commitment to community well-being. As we move forward, we will achieve the 100 per cent mark soon," he said here on Saturday.

The chief minister said it was his government's resolve to provide functional tap connection to every household to ensure that



everyone in the state has access to clean

"Glad to share that the determined efforts

of Team Arunachal have helped us to log a remarkable accomplishment. The gap of 2 per cent will soon be addressed," he said.

Together, Khandu said, the BJP government is creating a ripple of positive change for a brighter tomorrow.

"Congratulations to all for their sincerity and hard work, and the best wishes for future efforts," he added.

Jal Jeevan Mission, a centrally sponsored scheme, is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.

Under the programme, source sustainability measures are being implemented as mandatory elements. These include recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, rainwater harvesting.

The Jal Jeevan Mission is based on a community approach to water and includes extensive information, education and communication as key components of the mission. (PTI)

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rauni Jn., Danapur, Mirzapur, Katni, Itarsi Jn.



3,000 CAPF troops to move from Odisha to Chhattisgarh as part of plan to end Naxalism

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: Three battalions of the BSF comprising more than 3,000 personnel will move across the border from Odisha to Chhattisgarh and an equal number of ITRP units will further move into the Naxal stronghold of Abujhmad as part of a strategy to intensify anti-Maoist operations in their last bastions, official sources said.

The new operational blueprint is part of a plan under which Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently made a declaration that India was "on the verge of" eliminating Left Wing Extremism (LWE).

"The last strike against LWE by forces such as the BSF, the CRPF and the ITBP is in the process. We are determined to end Naxalism in the country," Shah said on December 1 in Hazaribag, Jharkhand while addressing BSF troops on their 59th raising day.

These forces are called as central armed police force (CAPFs).

Sources in the security establishment told PTI that the Border Security Force (BSF) has been directed to create six new COBs or company operating bases in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district by initially moving one of its battalion based in Odisha's Malkangiri, just across the inter-state border.

A BSF battalion has a strength of over 1.000 personnel.

(ITBP), which currently has about eight battalions located in Narayanpur, Rajnandgaon and Kondagaon districts of Chhattisgarh, has been asked to move one unit further inside the core area of Abuihmad

This is an about 4,000 sq km forest area in Narayanpur district and considered a stronghold of armed Naxal cadres.

The uncharted Abhujmad or 'madh' forests are host to a population of about 35,000 people, mainly tribals, residing in around 237 villages. The area, at present, has no permanent central or state police base and armed Maoist cadres are stated to be operating, training and moving here from across the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border in south Bastar region of the

The Bastar region comprising districts like Dantewada, Sukma and Bijapur up to Narayanpur and Kondagaon and Kanker district further north is the last bastion and corridor where Maoists have some strength and can spring surprises against the security forces and the administration.

The security forces are building their new strength and infrastructure here to demolish the Maoist network and hold the area so that development works can be initiated by the state government, a senior officer said. (PTI)

Centre rejects as 'baseless' Bhagwant Mann's criticism for excluding Punjab tableau from R-Day parade

CHANDIGARH, Dec 31: The Centre on Sunday rejected as "baseless" Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's criticism of the BJP-led government for not including the state's tableau in the Republic Day parade 2024 and his allegations of discrimination.

The AAP leader recently attacked the central government for allegedly discriminating against Punjab and said that both Punjab and Delhi were excluded from the list of states whose tableaux have been selected for the parade on January 26.

In its response, the Ministry of Defence issued a statement saying tableaux proposals from states and Union territories and central ministries or departments are evaluated by an "expert committee" comprising eminent persons in the fields of art, culture, painting, sculpture, music, architecture and choreography among others.

"The tableau proposal of Punjab was considered in first three rounds of meeting of the Expert Committee. After the third round of meeting, the tableau of Punjab could not be taken forward by the Expert Committee for further consideration for not aligning to the broader themes of this year's



The defence ministry also said that states and UTs not selected for the Republic Day parade 2024 were being invited to showcase their tableaux in Bharat Parv at the Red Fort from January 23-31 in accordance with an MoU signed with the states and UTs.

However, Mann categorically stated that Punjab would not showcase its tableaux in Bharat Parv. In a post in Punjabi on 'X', Mann said the state's tableau, which was

freedom fighters such as Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev and Lala Lajpat Rai, will not be sent to 're-

jected categories'. The defence ministry further said that due to the time allotted for tableaux in the overall duration of the parade, shortlisting is done by the expert committee to ensure the participation of the best ones.

For the Republic Day parade 2024, 30 states and UTs had shown willingness to participate, including Punjab and West Bengal, it

"Out of these 30 States/UTs, like every year, only 15-16 States/UTs will be finally selected to present their tableaux in the Republic Day Parade 2024," the statement added.

The statement further stated that as per the MoU Punjab and Delhi have signed with the government of India, states have agreed to display their tableau in the Republic Day parade in one of the three years starting from January 26,

being selected this year (2024) is not objective and unfounded," it said. The ministry added that the tableau of Punjab was shortlisted for the Republic Day Parade from 2017 to 2022, six times in the last eight years.

'As states have to be treated equally, it is essential that states should be given the opportunity to display their tableaus as per a formula. Government of India is preparing a three-year programme covering all states/UTs which will be shared with all the States/UTs. Hence, the criticism by these states is baseless," it asserted.

The defence ministry also referred to West Bengal in the state-

"The tableau proposal of West Bengal was considered in first two rounds of meeting of the Expert Committee. After the second round of meeting, the tableau of West Bengal could not be taken forward by the Expert Committee for further consideration for not aligning to the broader themes of this year's tableau," it said.

The statement added that West Bengal's tableau was shortlisted in 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021 and 2023 – five times in the last eight

Amrit Bharat Express impresses monk, patient and migrant labourers in its inaugural run

KHARAGPUR, Dec 31: A sadhu (monk), a patient, and some migrant laborers were among people who enjoyed a joyride to different destinations on the inaugural run of the Malda-SMVT Bengaluru Amrit Bharat Express.

Divyanath, a septuagenarian monk, who was on his way to Kamakhya, boarded the Amrit Bharat Express on way to Puri Jagannath Temple when he saw the train at Bardhaman station in West Bengal.

"I was at Bardhaman to take a train to Guwahati to visit the Kamakhya temple there, but when I saw this new train heading south, I decided to board it and visit the Jagannath Temple in Puri," the monk told this correspondent while sitting in one of the gleaming new bogies of the new rake on Saturday

evening Divyanath said he had embarked on this path of spiritualism when he was in his teens. His guru's ashram is located in Panipat, Haryana. He said he has been traveling across the country from Himachal to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Nagaland for several decades.

by steam engines, and now I am in district.

things will continue to evolve as

time passes," he said. With only a small sack and a wooden stick as his belongings, Divyanath emphasised there should be no differences among people based

on religion, caste, or creed. "We all belong to Bharat, whether Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh. We are all of the same country. Why should there be any conflict between any of us?" he said.

Motor mechanic Amit Bairagi, accompanying his wife, was heading to Bengaluru for a medical reason. He considered himself lucky to have obtained permission to board the Amrit Bharat Express since it would have been difficult to get a reservation on such a short notice.

"My wife had a medical condition in 2019, and after receiving treatment at a hospital in Bengaluru, she was fine. However, a recurrence occurred suddenly the day before yesterday, and we need to reach the hospital soon," Bairagi said. He explained that they only learned about the inaugural run of the train on Friday and managed to obtain a pass just in time to travel I used to travel by trains drawn from Rampurhat station in Birbhum

Tony Mondal, who works as an compartment of some other trains. Chowdhury added. (PTI)

unskilled laborer at a construction firm in Bengaluru, was among around 20 others of the same profession who received a free pass to travel to the Karnataka capital from

After working as a migrant labourer in Bengaluru for three years, Tony had returned home to Baishnabnagar in Malda district for

"We came to Malda station after learning about the inaugural run of the train, and we were given free passes to travel on it," said his companion Sujan Mondal, who saw the ticket price savings as a blessing.

tickets are not sold on the inaugural run of a train. The train, which is scheduled to take approximately 42 hours to complete its journey, will start its

According to a railway official,

commercial run on January 7. These migrant workers, who travel between their homes and workplaces every six months or so, described it as a magnificent experience to travel on the new train with its ergonomically designed toilets, snazzy upholstery, and other facilities, compared to the "night-

The train's rakes have radium-illuminated flooring strips, CCTV surveillance for safe travel, mobile charging points, standalone passenger announcements, and public information systems. The public address system is operated by the train guard, according to South Eastern Railway spokesperson Aditya Kumar Chaudhary.

Several school students were also given joyrides for short durations on the train, one of the two Amrit Bharat Express trains inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday "After assessing passenger de-

mand, the appropriate authorities will consider increasing the frequency of the train and introducing AC coaches," Chowdhury said.

The Amrit Bharat Express consists of 22 non-AC coaches, including 12 sleeper class coaches, eight general coaches, and two luggage

It will have two WAP-5 locomotives manufactured by Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) at the front and rear ends in a push-pull configuration to ensure faster acceleration and eliminate the need to mare" of traveling in the general switch locomotives at stations,

Indian Navy enhances surveillance in Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: The Indian Navy has significantly enhanced its surveillance apparatus in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden by deploying frontline destroyers and frigates in view of recent incidents of attacks on merchant vessels.

Liberian-flagged cargo vessel MV Chem Pluto, with 21 Indian crew members, was the target of a drone attack off India's west coast on December 23, triggering security concerns as the incident came amid Iran-backed Houthi militants launching strikes on several commercial ships. Another commercial crude oil tanker, MV Sai Baba, that was on the way to India came under a suspected drone strike in the Southern Red Sea on the same

nessed increased maritime security incidents on merchant vessels transiting through international shipping lanes in Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Central/ North Arabian Sea," the Navy said.

"The last few weeks have wit-

It also referred to a recent piracy incident on merchant ship MV Ruen approximately 700 nautical miles from the Indian coast.

cent drone attack on MV Chem Pluto, approximately 220 nautical miles South West of Porbandar, indicate a shift in maritime incidents closer to Indian EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone)," the Navy said in

"In response to these incidents, Indian Navy has substantially enhanced maritime surveillance efforts in Central/North Arabian Sea and augmented force levels," it

"Task Groups comprising destroyers and frigates have been deployed to undertake maritime security operations and render assistance to merchant vessels in case of any incident," the Navy said. It said aerial surveillance by longrange maritime patrol aircraft and remotely piloted aircraft has been enhanced to have a complete maritime domain awareness.

Towards effective surveillance of EEZ, the Indian Navy is operating in close coordination with the Coast Guard, it said.

"The overall situation is being closely monitored by Indian Navy in coordination with national maritime agencies. Indian Navv re-"The piracy incident on MV mains committed to ensuring safety Ruen, approximately 700 nautical of merchant shipping in the re-

CBI issues notice to Jaihind Channel

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: The CBI has issued a notice to Kerala-based Jaihind channel seeking details of the investments made in the channel by Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in connection with a disproportionate assets case against the Congress leader, officials said Sunday. The Bengaluru unit of the agency, which is probing the case against Shivakumar, had asked the Managing Director of Jaihind Communications Pvt Ltd to appear before it on January 11, 2024, along with all the requisite documents sought by the investigation officer.

In its notice issued under Section 91 of the CrPC, the agency has asked the channel to furnish details of investments made by Shivakumar and is wife Usha Shivakumar, dividends paid to them, share transactions, financial transactions along with bank details through which they were made, statement of holdings, their ledger accounts, contract notes and transactions for all share transactions among other details.

The CrPC section 91 empowers a police investigation officer to summon documents pertaining to a case probed by him. The CBI has also asked it to present the details of investments made by Shivakumar's son and other family members in the channel. Jaihind Managing Director B S Shiju said they have received the CBI notice and will provide all the documents the agency has requested, asserting that all records are in their possession and no illegality is involved. He alleged that the CBI's action is a clear case of political vendetta by the BJP-led government at the Centre.

Shiju, who is also a Congress leader in Kerala, claimed that the case had been investigated and closed by the previous BJP-led Karnataka government due to the absence of any identified illegality.

Talking to PTI, he said the reopening of the case is an attempt to "harass" the Congress party and its

Rahul Gandhi an ordinary Congress MP, don't highlight him so much: Lakshman Singh

BHOPAL, Dec 31: Former Congress MP Lakshman Singh has said Rahul Gandhi is an ordinary party worker and parliamentarian and he should not be highlighted so

Lakshman Singh, the younger brother of Congress veteran Digvijaya Singh, was speaking to reporters at the Congress office in MP's Guna city on Saturday When reporters claimed Congress MP

Rahul Gandhi's face is shown less on TV when he makes a statement in the Lok Sabha, Lakshman Singh said, "Rahul Gandhi is an MP, he is not the (party) president and is a Congress worker. Apart from this Rahul

"You (media) people should not highlight Rahul Gandhi so much and neither should

Rahul Gandhi is only an MP and he is equal to the rest of the party's parliamentarians, said Lakshman Singh, who has been a five-time MP and three-term MLA.

"One does not become (big) by birth but by one's actions. Don't consider Rahul Gandhi such a big leader, I don't. He is an ordinary MP. It doesn't matter whether you highlight him or not," Lakshman Singh said. When contacted on Sunday, Lakshman Singh told PTI Rahul Gandhi himself has said he is a party worker.

"We all are party workers," Singh said without elaborating on his previous comment. In the Madhya Pradesh polls held last lightings on all the temples and buildings in month, BJP's Priyanka Penchi defeated Lakshman Singh by more than 61,000 votes from Chachoura Assembly seat in Guna dis-

Celebrate Diwali on Jan 22 to mark Ram temple inauguration: CM Shinde MUMBAI. Dec 31: Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday asked the Mumbai civic commissioner to illuminate temples and buildings here with decorative lights and "celebrate Diwali" on January 22, the day of

consecration of Lord Ram temple in Ayodhya. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and more than 6,000 people are expected to attend the consecration ceremony at Ayodhya in UP.

Speaking at a cleanliness drive in Mumbai, CM Shinde said, "The Ram temple will be inaugurated on January 22. I want to ask to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) commissioner to celebrate Diwali across Mumbai city. Let there be lots of decorative

"All parts of Maharashtra should celebrate on January 22 with Diwali-like enthusiasm,"

question. The chief minister said the Ram temple was a dream of (Shiv Sena founder) late Balasaheb Thackeray and several devotees of

"Modiji made the dream (of building the Ram temple) into a reality. What PM Modi speaks, he ensures to make it a reality. Be it the Railways or airports, he implements his promises. Everyone accepts Modi's guarantees," Shinde said. He thanked PM Modi for turning into reality the dream of crores of Indians and Balasaheb Thackeray's wish of a Ram temple

Shinde said the only guarantee that works in the country at present is PM Modi's guarantee. The results of the recent assembly elections in three states (Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh) have proved it, he added. Asked if the Ram temple inauguration was

being used for political gains, Shinde said, "The Ram temple is a matter of people's faith,

thus it cannot be a political issue.' Those who were known for working from

home, will sit permanently at home. They will get a strong message from voters, he said indirectly referring to his predecessor former chief minister Uddhay Thackeray. Such people should think properly before making any comment over the Ram temple, Shinde said. On Sunday, deep cleaning initia-

tives were undertaken at 10 places in Mumbai

as part of the government's ongoing drive to

bring down the air pollution in the state capital and make it clean. Shinde spoke about the importance of such a campaign in Mumbai and other parts of the state. "We use recycled water for deep cleaning. We have not used drinking water for this purpose," he told reporters. The cleaning of beaches, major

and small roads, public toilets and other places has been undertaken and the people, NGOs and

leaders ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. The CBI registered a case against Shivakumar in 2020, alleging that between 2013 and 2018, he had amassed assets worth over ₹ 74 crore, which are allegedly dispropor-

ISRO to usher in 2024 with launch of dedicated scientific satellite to study black holes

SRIHARIKOTA (AP), Dec 31: ISRO is set to welcome the new year with the launch of its first X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite that would offer insights into celestial objects like black holes, onboard a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle rocket on Monday.

The launch comes after the success of its Gaganyaan Test Vehicle D1 mission in October

The PSLV-C58 rocket, in its 60th mission, would carry primary payload XPoSat and 10 other satellites to be de-

ployed in low earth orbits. The 25-hour countdown commenced on Sunday for the lift-off scheduled at 9.10 am from the first launch pad at this spaceport, located about 135 kms east

of Chennai, on January 1. "The countdown commenced for PSLV-C58 at 8.10 am today," ISRO

sources said. The X-ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat) is aimed to investigate the polarisation of intense X-ray sources in

According to ISRO, it is the first dedicated scientific satellite from ISRO to carry out research in space-based polarisation measurements of X-ray emission from celestial sources.

Besides ISRO, the US-based National Aeronautics Space Agency (NASA) conducted a similar study -- the Imaging X-Ray Polarimetry Explorer mission in December 2021 on the remnants of supernova explosions, the particle streams emitted by black holes and other cosmic

While space-based X-ray astronomy has been established in India focusing on imaging, and time domain studies, Monday's mission marks a major valueaddition to the scientific fraternity, the space agency said.

The objective of the PSLV-C58 mission includes measuring polarisation of X-rays in the energy band 8-30 keV emanating from about 50 potential cosmic sources, to carry out long term spectral and temporal studies of cosmic x-ray



The X-Ray polarisation serves as a crucial diagnostic tool for examining the radiation mechanism and geometry of celestial sources.

The primary payload of XPoSat is POLIX (Polarimeter Instrument in X-Rays) which is designed to measure polarimetry parameters by Raman Research Institute and XSPECT (X-ray

Spectroscopy and Timing) built by the U R Rao Satellite Centre, Bengaluru. The Mission life is about 5 years.

The space-based study of X-Ray polarisation is gaining utmost importance internationally, and in this context, the XPoSat mission would play a significant role, ISRO added.

XPoSat is anticipated to bring sub-

stantial benefits to the Astronomy community globally. Apart from its capability of timing and spectroscopy-based observations, the insights derived from X-ray polarisation measurements on celestial objects like black holes, neutron stars, and active galactic nuclei, hold the potential to significantly improve the understanding of their physics.

The mission is poised to play a pivotal role in building expertise in X-Ray polarimetry in India, providing a foundation for future advancements and fostering a collaborative network within

the astronomy community. The 44.4-meter-tall PSLV rocket would first deploy the primary satellite into a 650 km Low Earth Orbit around 21 minutes after lift-off and later the scientists would bring the satellite to a lower altitude of about 350 km by restarting the fourth stage of the vehicle, for conducting the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-3 (POEM-3) experi-

It may be recalled that the space

agency conducted a similar scientific experiment using POEM-2 in the PSLV-C55 mission in April 2023.

The rocket that will fly is the PSLV-DL variant which has a lift-off mass of 260 tonnes. The fourth stage is configured as a 3-axis stabilized Orbital platform for conducting experiments. The payloads are Radiation Shield-

Experiment Module by TakeMe2Space, Women Engineered Satellite by LBS Institute of Technology for Women, BeliefSat (an amateur radio satellite) built by K J Somaiya Institute of Technology, Green Impulse Transmitter by Inspecity Space Labs Pvt Ltd, LEATTD -- Launching Expeditions for Aspiring Technologies Technology Demonstrator by Dhruva Space Pvt Ltd, RUDRA 0.3HPGP and ARKA 200 developed by Bellatrix Aerospace Pvt Ltd, Dust Experiment (DEX) built by PRL, ISRO and Fuel Cell Power System and Si based High Energy cell built by Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre. (PTI)

Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, once headed by Syed Ali Shah Geelani, banned by govt

In exercising powers conferred by UA(P)A, the central government officially declared the TeH, an unlawful association for the next five years, effective immediately

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: In a decisive step, the government on Sundeclared pro-Pakistan separatist group Tehreek-e-Hurriyat (TeH), founded by late hardline separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani, as a banned organisation for the next five years.

The action, announced by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, is a response to the group's involvement in fomenting terrorism and spreading anti-India sentiment within the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, Shah emphasised that any individual or organisation found engaged in anti-India activities would face strict meas-

"The Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, J&K (TeH), has been declared an 'Unlawful Association' under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The outfit is involved in forbidden activities to separate J&K from India and establish Islamic rule," Shah posted on 'X'.

The decision to ban the TeH was made under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, citing the group's propagation of anti-India messaging and its efforts to sustain terror activities, ultimately aiming to fuel secessionism in Jammu and Kashmir

The TeH, previously led by the late Syed Ali Shah Geelani and succeeded by Masarat Alam Bhat,

Air quality deteriorates

in many Bihar cities

PATNA, Dec 31: With a dip in tem-

perature, the air quality index (AQI)

of many cities in Bihar turned 'poor'

Bhagalpur recorded 'very poor'

air quality with an AQI of 324, while

Arrah, Sasaram, Saharsa, Araria,

Rajgir and Patna recorded 'poor' air

The Central Pollution Control

Board (CPCB) 'Air Quality Index'

(AQI) bulletin of December 30 till 4

pm of 238 cities stated that Bha-

galpur recorded an AQI of 324 (very

poor level). Six other Bihar districts

where the AQI was in the poor cat-

egory on December 30 were Arrah

(292), Sasaram (285), Saharsa

(262), Araria (259), Rajgir (245) and

Patna (208). The AQI is an assess-

ment of the air quality taking into

account eight pollutants – PM 2.5

(particulate matter less than 2.5 mi-

crons), PM 10 (particulate matter

less than 10 microns), nitrogen ox-

ides, sulphur dioxide, ozone, carbon

considered "good" (minimal im-

pact), 51 and 100 "satisfactory"

(minor breathing discomfort to sen-

sitive people), 101 and 200 "moder-

ate" (breathing discomfort to people

with lungs, asthma and heart dis-

eases), 201 and 300 "poor" (breath-

ing discomfort to most people on

prolonged exposure), 301 and 400

'very poor" (respiratory illness on

prolonged exposure), and 401 and

500 "severe" (affects healthy people

and seriously impacts those with ex-

An AQI between zero and 50 is

monoxide, ammonia and lead.

on Sunday



and pro-Pakistan stance. Bhat, currently incarcerated, also headed the organisation, Muslim League of Jammu and Kashmir, which was declared unlawful earlier in December.

The TeH was formed by Geelani in 2004 after he stepped out of the moderate Hurriyat faction led by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq.

Geelani, against whom several cases were registered, resigned from the Jamaat-e-Islami and formed this group, which later became a constituent of another faction of the Hurriyat, a separatist amalgam, led by the hardline separatist. Several of members of the hardline Hurriyat have been charge-sheeted by the National Investigation Agency for raising funds to support terror in Kashmir.

They include Farooq Ahmad Dar alias Bitta Karate, Altaf Ahmad Shah alias Fantoosh, Geelani's son-in-law and public relations officer of the TeH as well as secretary and strategist in the Hurriyat, Mohammad Akbar Khanday, spokesman of the Hurriyat and a fund-raiser for it, Raja Mehrajuddin Kalwal and Bashir Ahmad

Geelani died in September 2021 while his son-in-law in October

Bhat alias Peer Saifullah, personal

assistant of Geelani as well as sec-

retary of the TeH.

The Union home ministry, in a notification, highlighted the group's involvement in raising

activities such as sustaining terrorist acts and orchestrating stonepelting incidents against security forces in the region.

In addition, the notification underscored the group's disregard for constitutional authority and its repeated calls to boycott assembly elections, displaying a lack of belief in the democratic system of

The central government's decision to ban the Tehreek-e-Hurriyat for five years stems from its concern that the group, if left unchecked, would persist in advocating for the secession of Jammu and Kashmir from India while disputing its accession to the Union.

The group's activities were deemed prejudicial to the integrity, sovereignty, security, and communal harmony of the country, with a potential to perpetuate a false narrative and anti-national sentiments among the people of Jammu and Kashmir

In exercising powers conferred by the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, the central government officially declared the TeH. Jammu and Kashmir, as an unlawful association for the next five years, effective immediately.

This measure reflects the government's commitment to curbing activities that pose a threat to the territorial integrity, security, and sovereignty of the nation, aiming to maintain public order and discourage sentiments of disaffection

BJP claims attacks on Christians who joined party in Kerala; warns of retaliation

The saffron party, which has been actively courting the Christian community in the state, issued a warning of strong retaliation against those involved in the at-

This comes a day after a Christian priest and around 50 families from the minority community joined the saffron party in Kerala. A BJP spokesman claimed that members of the Christian community have been subjected to "brutal cyber attacks" since joining the

saffron party.

The BJP leader alleged that the Congress and the BJP were viewing the joining of the minority community in the party with ut-

The minority community members, including the priests who joined the BJP, were threatened,

cluding Fr Shaiju Kurien, Secretary of the Orthodox Church Ni-Bhadrasanam Pathanamthitta district in southern Kerala, joined the BJP in the pres-

In a Facebook post, the saffron party said many people from the Kerala Congress (Jacob) faction also joined the party in the presence of the state president Surendran in Thrissur district in central Kerala on Saturday.

to minorities joining its ranks to the visionary approach of development under the leadership of the Narendra Modi-led government. "Over the past decade, the Modi

The party attributed the appeal

government has shown a strong dedication to development. This is a significant factor motivating minorities to support and join the BJP," the party said.

The BJP also said that it is dispelling the notion that false propaganda can keep minorities away from the party.

This development comes shortly after the saffron party resumed its 'Sneha Yatra,' an outreach programme aimed at connecting with the Christian community in the

"The BJP can dispel misconceptions among minority groups through programmes like Sneha Yatra. It is certain that more people will join the BJP in the coming days to be a part of development

Responding to the development, the Congress alleged that "the Sangh Parivar is a movement that targets Christians across India."

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly V D Satheesan alleged that the BJP in Kerala is like "a wolf in sheep's clothing, infiltrating Chris-

Christians in Kerala have the wisdom to recognise their true intentions, he told reporters in Kochi. The Congress maintains a secular stance, a position consistent even

Resuming the Sneha Yatra last week, the BJP state chief had visited top priests of various churches in the state, including Cardinal George Alencherry, the former head of the prominent Syro-Malabar Church, and Archbishop Joseph Kalathiparbil of the Latin Archdiocese of Verapoly, to convey Christmas greetings from the

of various denominations have made pro-BJP statements on several occasions in the state in recent times, the alleged silence of the party-led Union government on the Manipur violence issue had created differences between

funds from various sources, including Pakistan and its proxy organisations, to support unlawful

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Dec 31: The BJP on Sunday alleged that members of the Christian community who recently joined the party in Kerala are facing online attacks from supporters

of the Congress and the CPI(M).

"We will protect them at any cost. We will fight tooth and nail against those who make any move against them. There will be a strong retaliation," BJP state president K Surendran told reporters.

most intolerance.

Surendran said. He said that individuals attempting to humiliate and attack them personally, through various means. will face severe consequences. Around 50 Christian families, inence of Union Minister V Muraleedharan on Saturday.

tian homes.

in Karnataka, Satheesan added.

Prime Minister. Although many senior bishops

The Congress party in the state has strongly criticised the BJP's initiative to reach out to the Christian community, stating that it is not a "Sneha Yatra," the journey of love, but rather the "kiss

Kashi Tamil Sangamama: Musical performances dedicated to Lord Ram

VARANASI, Dec 31: Musical performances at the ghats of the Ganga here in Uttar Pradesh enthralled those attending the Kashi Tamil Sangamam, with narrations celebrating the legacy of Lord Ram being the highlight of the programmes

The sangamam that was aimed at rediscovering the age-old links between Tamil Nadu and Kashi -two of the country's ancient seats of learning -- concluded on Saturday, weeks ahead of the "Pran Prartishtha", or the consecration ceremony, of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, around 218 km from

The 14-day event was attended by 1,400 delegates from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, besides people from Varanasi and culture enthusiasts from different parts of country.

Earlier this week, Pandit Devrat Mishra from the Banaras Gharana had dedicated a "bandish" to Lord Ram during his team's performance at the Namo ghat during the sangamam.

"I had composed the 'bandish' 10 years ago and I sung it on a public platform because the Ram temple is now a reality...the song is about birth of Lord Ram...'Awadh me kaisi dhoom machi hai, Ram



naam ne liye avtar' (there are celebrations in Awadh as Ram has taken birth)," Mishra told PTI.

Using three sitars, a dholak, a flute and the tabla, Mishra and his team presented several songs celebrating the legacy of Lord Ram, leaving the audience enthused.

"People in Varanasi are extremely excited about the consecration ceremony next month. We will be celebrating it on the ghats of Varanasi on January 22 when the grand celebrations will be going on in ayodhya," he said.

Trustee at the Kashi Vishwanath

temple here, K Venkata Ramana Ghanapati, echoed Pandit Mishra's views about the excitement in Varanasi about the consecration

"It is like an upcoming festival...there is excitement here too...generations have waited for this. I will also be travelling to Ayodhya during that time and will be participating in some rituals a few days ahead of the 'Pran Pratistha'," Ghanapati said.

ceremony.

The delgates who participated in the Kashi Tamil Sangamam also visited Ayodhya and the underconstruction temple there.

The 1,400 delegates were divided into groups named after seven sacred rivers of the country and each comprises 200 members -- students' group (Ganga), teachers' group (Yamuna), professionals' group (Godavari), spiritual group (Saraswati), group of farmers and artisans (Narmada), writers' group (Sindhu) and group of traders and businessmen (Kaveri).

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

Prime Minister Modi on Saturday unveiled a "new look old" city in Ayodhya with an airport, a revamped train station and projects worth ₹ 15,700 crore ahead of the consecration of the Ram temple

The first phase of the temple is nearing completion, and the prime minister will take part in the consecration ceremony on January 22.

The Supreme Court delivered a historic verdict in 2019, settling a temple-mosque dispute that went over a century back. The court backed the construction of the Ram temple at the disputed site, and ruled that an alternative fiveacre plot must be found for building a mosque. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Curb on child marriage.

belonging to the poorer sections of the society. Asserting that child marriage cannot be tackled completely unless there was a ban on polygamy, the government constituted a four-member expert committee of legal luminaries to scrutinise the legality of banning polygamy in the state by the assembly. The committee scrutinised the provisions of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Act, 1937 along with Article 25 of the Constitution in relation to the Directive Principles of State Policy for a Uniform Civil Code. The panel unanimously agreed that the state can frame its own laws to end polygamy, but the assent on the Bill has to be given by the President instead of the governor, who usually gives the final signature on state laws. The opposition parties, however, slammed the government's plans to enact a law on polygamy, describing it as a diversionary and communal move and alleged that the ruling BJP was carrying forward its agenda against the minority community. The chief minister, on the other hand, countered the opposition's allegations, stating that it is his government that has taken steps to improve the conditions of Muslims from both indigenous Assamese and Bengali-speaking communities.

He said that as a first step, a socio-economic survey of the state's five indigenous Muslim communities of Goria, Moria, Deshi, Syed and Jolha, will be conducted and its findings will guide the state government to take suitable measures for the comprehensive socio-political and educational uplift of the indigenous minorities.

Sarma said that for the remaining Muslims of migrant-origin, the state government has also taken steps to stop child marriage, along with setting up new schools, colleges and health institutions and improved connectivity to their habitations, besides ensuring electrification. Another major development in the state during the year was the delimitation exercise carried out by the Election Commission of India, based on the 2001 Census, with the final report published on August 11, keeping intact the number of assembly constituencies at 126 and Lok Sabha seats at 14, while revising the nomenclature of one parliamentary and 19 assembly constituencies. Altogether 19 assembly and two Lok Sabha constituencies have been reserved for scheduled tribes (STs), while one Lok Sabha and nine assembly constituencies have been reserved for scheduled castes (SCs). Sarma claimed that the insurgency problem in the state was "almost finished" with the signing of the peace accords with different militant outfits dominated by Bodo, Karbi and Dimasa tribes along with different Adivasi organizations, while talks were also in progress with the pro-peace faction of ULFA and Kuki and Hmar groups.

The chief minister had sent out an olive branch to the anti-talk ULFA (Independent) faction on assuming office and the outfit responded by declaring a ceasefire, but recently it carried out three blasts in Tinsukia, Sivasagar and Jorhat which the insurgent group claimed was in response to the "arrogant" attitude of director general of police G P Singh. Sarma said that with the return of peace, stringent laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers) Act or AFSPA are being gradually withdrawn and are now in force in only four districts, namely Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo and Sivasagar.

Assam, however, faced security concerns with Rohingya refugees from Myanmar reportedly using the state as a corridor to either go to Delhi or Jammu and Kashmir with the help of some brokers from Tripura. The Assam police have arrested several persons, including a few Bangladesh nationals, for allegedly facilitating the movement of the Rohingyas. Meanwhile, the crime rate in the state has decreased considerably with the total number of cognisable offences dipping by 48.26 per cent to nearly 69,000 cases in 2022, according to the latest report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Sarma claimed that strong and non-compromising policing along with development activities and providing jobs to the youth helped reduce the crime graph.

The state also created two Guinness World Records with over 11,304 dancers and drummers performing in the category of largest recital of Bihu dance and playing of 'Bihu dhol' at a single venue, with Prime minister Narendra Modi also witnessing the performance. The Assam government also received nine Guinness World Records certificates for a mega plantation drive in September and October under the 'Amrit Brikshya Andolan' campaign, with a total of 1,11,17,781 seedlings of commercially valuable tree species planted across the state on a single day on September 17. (PTI)

(We) will not betray people

that they have been deceived," Barua said. Barua further claimed Chetia said he was not there since the beginning of the dialogue process and it was "not possible to do a correction now". The ULFA general secretary had joined the talks process after he was released from a Bangladesh jail in 2015 after serving a term of 18 years since 1997. "We cannot cooperate with them (pro-talks faction) as we have not given up our ideals and ideology. We are not sitting at the negotiating table unless there is discussion on the lines of the Naga Framework Agreement, which includes control over resources, a separate constitution and flag," Barua said. Regarding missing ULFA leaders and cadres during security operations, including 'Operation All Clear' in Bhutan, the rebel leader said, "Those who have signed the accord had an opportunity to ask about them (the missing militants), whether they are dead or alive, and if so their whereabouts.'

"They should have firmly exerted their right to know the details... but when they do not have any ideals left, they will not have the courage to ask these questions," Barua added. Referring to a photograph taken after the signing of the accord where the pro-talks ULFA leaders, including its chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa and general secretary Anup Chetia, were seen standing behind Union home minister Amit Shah, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and senior officials, Barua alleged that "they were denied the basic respect which was insulting for the Assamese community, and this really hurt".

"During the signing of their respective accords, the Naga and the Bodo leaders were seen sitting with the ministers and officials but I don't know why the ULFA leaders were denied this basic respect," he added. A tripartite Memorandum of Settlement was signed between the ULFA (pro-talks) faction, central and state gov-

ernments in New Delhi on Friday in the presence Shah and Sarma. (PTI) India brimming with

"Whatever work we do, whatever decision we make, our first criterion should be what will the country get from it; what benefits it will bring to the country. 'Rashtra Pratham' - Nation First - there is no greater mantra than this," he asserted. "Adhering to this mantra, we Indians will make our country developed and self-reliant. May you all reach new heights of success in 2024, may you all stay healthy, stay fit, stay immensely happy this is my prayer. In 2024, we will once again discuss the new achievements of the people of the country, Modi said. During the broadcast, the prime minister listed several achievements and highs the country experienced in various spheres this year. He pointed out that the record business on Diwali proved that every Indian is giving importance to the mantra of 'vocal for local'. "Even today many people are sending me messages pertaining to the success of Chandrayaan-3. I am sure that, like me, you too feel proud of our scientists and esbecially women scientists," he said. "When 'Natu-Natu' won the Oscar, the whole country rejoiced with fervour, Who would not have been happy to hear about the honour accorded to the 'The Elephant Whisperers'? Through them the world saw the creativity of India and understood our bonding with the environment," Modi said. He pointed out that this year Indian athletes also performed marvellously in sports with Indian players winning 07 medals in Asian Games and 111 medals in Asian Para Games.

"Indian players won everyone's heart with their performance in the Cricket World Cup. The victory of our women's cricket team in the Under-19 T-20 World Cup is very inspiring. The achievements of players in many other sports added to the glory of the country," Modi said. Now Paris Olympics will be held in 2024, for which the whole country is encouraging its players, he added. "Whenever we made efforts together, it has had a very positive impact on the development journey of our country. "We experienced successful campaigns such as Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' and 'Meri Mati Mera Desh'. We are all witness to the participation of crores of people in them. Construction of 70,000 'Amrit Sarovars' is also our collective achievement," he said. Modi said he has always believed that the development of a country, which does not give importance to innovation, stops. "India becoming an innovation hub is a symbol of the fact that we are not going to stop. In 2015, we were ranked 81st in the Global Innovation Index, today our rank is 40th," he pointed out.

Modi also underlined that this year, the number of patents filed in India was high, of which about 60 per cent were from domestic funds. This time the highest number of Indian universities had been included in the QS Asia University Rankings, he said. "If we start making a list of these achievements, it can never be completed. This is just a glimpse of how effective India's potential is, we have to take inspiration from these successes of the country; these achievements of the people of the country; take pride in them, make new resolves," Modi said. He stressed that when India turns developed, the youth will benefit the most. "But the youth will benefit more when they are fit," he said.

"Nowadays we see how much talk there is about lifestyle-related diseases, it is a matter of great concern for all of us, especially the youth. For this 'Mann Ki Baat', I had requested all of you to send inputs related to Fit India. The response you people have given has filled me with enthusiasm," the prime minister said. A large number of startups have also sent suggestions on NaMo app and have discussed many of their unique efforts, Modi noted. Through India's efforts, 2023 was celebrated as the International Year of Millets, he said, adding that this has given a lot of opportunities to the startups working in this field. Modi also talked about at length the importance of physical and mental health.

"I am very happy to know that Mumbai-based startups like Infi-Heal and YOUR-Dost are working to improve mental health and wellbeing. Not only that, today a technology like Artificial Intelligence is also being used for this," he said. He urged listeners to heed the advice and experiences of well-known people who then talked about physical and mental health during the broadcast.

Chess grandmaster Anand said his fitness tip to all 'Mann Ki Baat' listeners would be to keep calm and focus on the task ahead. "The best fitness tip for me, absolutely the most important fitness tip, is to get a good night's sleep. I think seven or eight hours is an absolute minimum so we should try as hard as possible to get a good night's sleep because that is when the next day you are able to get through the day in calm fashion," he said. Actor Akshay Kumar advised listeners to avoid shortcuts for long-lasting fitness.

"You should change your lifestyle on the advice of doctors and not by looking at the body of a film star. Actors are often not what they look like on screen. Many types of filters and special effects are used and after seeing them, we start using wrong shortcuts to change our body.

'Nowadays, so many people take steroids and go for this six-pack or eight-pack," he said. With such shortcuts the body swells from the outside but remains hollow from the inside, Kumar asserted. "In this New Year, promise yourself: no chemicals, no shortcut. Exercise, yoga, good food, sleeping on time, some meditation and most importantly, happily accept the way you look. After today, don't live a filter life, live a fitter life," the actor

Peace accord with ULFA

"We will organise various programmes targetting the Lok Sabha elections and the panchayat polls. We do not have any member in Lok Sabha now, but we aim to send at least one after next year's elections," he added. As part of this plan, the AGP will organise a series of booth-level meetings in Barpeta, Karimganj, Jorhat, Sonitpur and other districts over the next two months, Bora said.

"We are a part of the NDA and will fight the next Lok Sabha elections in alliance with the BJP. We have

done a survey of all the 14 seats, but have not decided where we will contest," he added. (PTI) $B'deshi\ national\ held$

"The police had received information indicating that the accused had sought refuge in a woman's house in the village. The arrested individual has been identified as Islam Mandal, who is also under suspicion of having

Jihadi connections," said Morigaon superintendent of police Hemanta Kumar Das. During initial investigation, it was revealed that the accused's name was falsely recorded as Noor Mandal in the voter list under the Lahorighat assembly constituency in the Morigaon district. "The police are currently investigating the case to ascertain the full extent of the individual's activities and connections," the SP added.

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DUA LIPA FEELS 'BEYOND LUCKY' TO END 2023 IN INDIA

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: Pop singer Dua Lipa, who is on a vacation with her family in India, on Sunday penned a heartwarming note about ending 2023 in the country The Grammy winner, known for songs such as "Levitating" and "Houdini", also thanked the Indian people for extending their love and hospitality to her and her dear ones.

Lipa wrote about her India journey on Instagram.
"I feel so beyond lucky to end my year here in
India. Thank you to all the wonderful people here
who have shown us so much love, kindness, hospitality and generosity.

"This experience has been deeply meaningful. I feel lucky to be in and within the magic with my family where we have had the time to explore, regroup, recharge and restart. Ready for the year ahead. What a joy!!!" the 28-year-old said.

In the same post, the singer also shared a video montage of her enjoying the traditional Kalbelia dance in Rajasthan, posing in front of an elephant and zooming in on a tiger at a sanctuary.

She also shared a series of pictures visiting a temple with her family, going on a desert safari, and shaking a leg with folk dancers at a resort. Lipa ended her post with a video capturing her riding on a horseback on a street.

Earlier this week, the singer visited the Humayun's Tomb and Bangla Sahib Gurdwara in New Delhi along with her family.

She had also shared pictures from her stay in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. (PTI)



Faysal Quraishi calls for release of Indian films in

Pakistan

KARACHI, Dec 31: Faysal Quraishi, one of Pakistan's top actors and producers, has advocated for the release of Indian films in the country to revive the local cinema exhibition sector. Quraishi, who has starred in several hit serials and also produced many blockbuster series, said Pakistan needed to lift the ban on screening of Indian films to survive and grow.

"Being a Pakistani, I'm very patriotic. But if you have to run Pakistani cinemas, it's important that you exhibit Indian films. I'm being very selfish. But I know the audience in Pakistan wants to watch Indian films. You can't enforce your will on them. Let us work to improve relations," he said in an interview with a local channel.

There has been a complete ban on screen-

ing of Indian films in cinema houses in Pakistan since late 2019 but movie buffs can easily watch these movies on different streaming platforms like 'Netflix' and 'Prime Video', which are legal and even others which are accessible through VPN services.

If there was no ban on Indian films in Pakistan, Quraishi said the Pakistan film drama industry would have been earning around ₹ 6,000 to 7,000 million annually from the entertainment business, including screening of Pakistani content on In-

dian streaming portals and some channels.

"Our movies and serials were being shown on their online portals and people went to the cinemas as well to watch Indian films and it brought in valuable revenue for our industry. It is funny we tend to shut down our avenues of revenue," he

Quraishi said he had come to the conclusion that until Indian films were allowed to be screened in Pakistani cinemas its industry could not grow. "People need new and exciting content to attract them to the cinemas and for that, not only do we need to improve our content and business models but also have no ban on screening of Indian movies.

This would also re-

open our content on streaming portals," he added. Quraishi said the Pakistan entertainment industry can be revived and it was necessary for Pakistani content to be shown on streaming portals. "It is time we started producing content of such a level that we can even hit the international streaming platforms," he said. (PTI)



2023: Controversies that rocked Hindi entertainment industry

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: Like every year, 2023 also had its fair share of controversies. It started with the colour politics of the song "Besharam Rang" from "Pathaan", featuring Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone, and ended with the Ranbir Kapoor-starrer "Animal" espousing the virtues of the alpha male, dominating both headlines and box office collections.

1. "Pathaan": The Hindi film industry stepped into the new year with a controversy at the ready. "Pathaan", the stylish spy thriller, faced boycott calls over its song "Besharam Rang" prior to its release on January 25, with right wing groups objecting to Deepika's orange bikini. Some politician also slammed the track for hurting religious

Despite the brouhaha, the film went on to become one of the biggest Hindi blockbusters of 2023 with over Rs 1,000 crore at the worldwide box office. 2. "The Kerala Story": The film, directed by Sudipto Sen and produced by Vipul Shah, polarised the political discourse in the country, leading to bans

in some states and a tax-free status in others. Branded as "propaganda", the film depicts how women from Kerala were forced to convert and recruited by the terror group Islamic State (IS).

Mounted on a reported budget of around Rs 20 crore, "The Kerala Story" grossed Rs 300 crore at the global box office

3. "Adipurush": With names such as pan-India star Prabhas and National Award-winning director Om Raut attached to it, this retelling of the Ramayana was high on promise but fizzled out upon its June 14 release as it courted trouble over its pedestrian language and poor quality of VFX. Many political parties also demanded a ban on the film. The film, reportedly mounted on a budget of Rs 500 crore, earned Rs 340 crore in the first three days but the box office collections went significantly down after the opening weekend.

4. "OMG 2": Starring Pankaj Tripathi and Akshay Kumar, the film was reportedly stuck with the Central Board of Film Certification for over two weeks.

The board cleared the movie, which shone a light on the importance of sex education in India, for its scheduled release on August 11 with an 'A' (for its scheduled release on August 11 with an 'A' (for adults) certificate and a few modifications. "OMG 2", a spiritual sequel to the 2012 film "OMG: Oh My God!", earned over Rs 221 crore worldwide, emerging as the one of the highest-grossing Hindi films of

5. "Bawaal": Ironically, this Nitesh Tiwari directorial stayed true to the meaning of its title ('bawaal' means 'uproar'). Starring Varun Dhawan and Janhvi Kapoor, the film stirred up a controversy for using the Holocaust as a reference to narrate a story of marital discord.

The Israeli embassy in India issued a statement, saying it was "disturbed by the trivialisation of the significance of the Holocaust" in the movie. A prominent Jewish group also called for the film's removal from streaming platform Prime Video, where it debuted on July 21. (PTI)

In Memoriam: Hindi cinema personalities who passed away in 2023

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: Junior Mehmood: The child star of films such as "Caravan", "Brahmachari" and "Mera Naam Joker" in the late 1960s and early 1970s died on December 8 following a battle with cancer. He

Born as Naeem Sayyed, the actor got his pen name from his idol Mehmood after they starred together in the 1968 film "Suhaag Raat".

2. Satish Kaushik: The actor-filmmaker, who was 66, died on March 9 after a heart attack. He passed away while he was on his way to a

Gurugram hospital. 3. Pradeep Sarkar: The filmmaker, best known for directing movies such as 'Parineeta" and "Mardaani", died on March 24 at a Mumbai hospital where he was undergoing treatment for a viral fever. He was 67. Primarily an adfilmmaker, Sarkar directed several advertisements for prominent brands and music videos, including Shubha Mudgal's "Ab Ke Saawan", Euphoria's "Dhoom Pichak Dhoom' and Sultan Khan's "Piya

4. Gufi Paintal: The actor, most popular for playing

the conniving Shakuni mama in the epic TV serial "Mahabharat", died on June 5 at a hospital here due to agerelated issues. He was 79.

5. Sulochana: The actor, known for her innumerable mother roles in Hindi and Marathi cinema, died on June 4 due to prolonged illness at a hospital in Mumbai. She was 94.

6. Sanjay Gadhvi: The director of the popular action thriller film series "Dhoom" died on November 19, just three days shy of his 57th birthday. According to Gadhvi's daughter, the director was "perfectly healthy".

7. Seema Deo: Best remembered for her roles in "Anand" and "Kora Kagaz", the actor died on August 24 due to age-related ailments at the age of 81. She had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for over three years. Deo acted in over 80 Hindi and Marathi films.

8. Sameer Khakhar: Khakhar became a fan favourite through his portrayal of the lovable drunk Khopdi in the classic 1980s TV serial "Nukkad". He died at a Mumbai hospital on March 15 due to multiple organ failure. He was



Oscar wins for 'Naatu Naatu', 'The Elephant Whisperers' find mention in PM's Mann Ki Baat

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday highlighted India's twin wins at this year's Oscars for the song "Naatu Naatu" from "RRR" and documentary short "The Elephant Whisperers" in his last Mann Ki Baat address for 2023.

In the 108th episode of the radio broadcast, the prime minister said the world saw India's creativ-

ity and understood the country's connection with the environment through

its entertainment industry.
"Friends, when 'Naatu
Naatu' got the Oscar, the
whole country rejoiced
with joy. Who was not
happy when they heard
about the honour given to
'The Elephant Whisperers'? Through these, the
world witnessed India's

creativity and understood

our connection with the environment," Modi said. At the 95th Academy

Awards, the foot-tapping Telugu chartbuster
"Naatu Naatu", composed by MM Keeravaani and penned by Chandrabose, won the best original song award and made SS Rajamouli's "RRR" the first Indian feature film production to bring home the Oscar.

Netflix's Tamil documentary "The Elephant Whisperers", directed by debutante Kartiki Gonsalves and produced by Guneet Monga, also became the maiden Indian production to win the Oscar in the documentary short film category.

During the Mann Ki Baat broadcast, actor Akshay Kumar also shared his fitness tips. (PTI)

Akshay Kumar bats for long-lasting fitness, accepting one's appearance in PM's Mann Ki Baat

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: One must focus on leading a fitter life and not a life with "filters" inspired by film stars, said actor Akshay Kumar on Sunday in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly radio programme Mann Ki

The actor was one of the many personalities from different walks of life who shared their tips on fitness in the 108th episode of the broadcast, the last for the year 2023.

Akshay, 56, thanked the prime minister for giving him a platform in Mann Ki Baat to share his thoughts with the citizens.

"You all know I'm passionate about fitness, but I'm even more passionate about staying fit the natural way. What I like more than fancy gyms is swimming, playing badminton, climbing stairs, exercising with 'mudgar', eating good healthy food...

"Change your lifestyle on the advice of doctors and not by looking at some film star's body. Actors are often not what they appear on screen. Many types of filters and special effects are used and after seeing them, we start using shortcuts to change our body,"

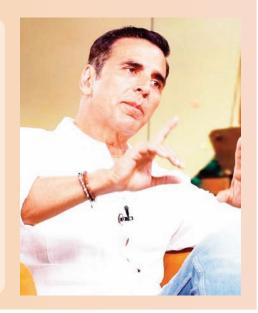
the actor said.

Akshay also cautioned the listeners about taking shortcuts in their fitness journey. "Nowadays, many people take steroids and go for these six packs and eight packs. Friends, with such shortcuts the body swells from outside but remains hollow from inside. Remember that shortcuts can cut your life short. You need long-lasting fitness, not

"Like, I believe pure ghee, if eaten in

the right quantity, is beneficial for us. But I see many boys and girls do not eat ghee because they fear they might become fat. It is very important for us to know what is good and what is bad for our fitness," he added.

The actor likened fitness to "devotion". "It shouldn't be like instant coffee or two-minutes noodles. In this new year, promise yourself no chemicals, no shortcut, exercise, yoga, good food, sleeping on time, some meditation and most importantly, happily accept how you look. After today, don't live a filter life, live a fitter life," Akshay said. During the broadcast of Mann Ki Baat, Isha Foundation founder Sadhguru, Indian Women's Cricket Team Captain Harmanpreet Kaur and chess legend Vishwanathan Anand also shared their fitness tips. (PTI)



FIH Hockey's World Cup: Simranjeet to lead India men; Rajni to captain women's side

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: (PTI) Simranjeet Singh and Rajni Etimarpu will lead the men's and women's sides respectively as Hockey India on Sunday named the Indian teams for the upcoming FIH Hockey5s World Cup to be held in Mus-

While the Hockey5s Women's World Cup will be held between January 24 and 27, the men's event is slated from January 28 to January 31.

Experienced goalkeeper Rajni will have defender Mahima Chaudhary as her deputy, while Mandeep Mor will be the vice-captain of the

The women's team also comprises Bansari Solanki as the second goalkeeper, with Akshata Abaso Dhekale and Jyoti Chhatri as defenders. Among midfielders, Mariana Kujur and Mumtaz Khan have been named while Ajmina Kujur, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal and Deepika Soreng

have been named as forwards. The Indian Women are grouped in Pool C along with Namibia, Poland and the United States. A total of 16 teams will participate in the Hockey5s Women's World Cup which includes

Fiji, Malaysia, the Netherlands and hosts Oman in Pool A, while Australia, South Africa, Ukraine medallist Simranjeet, includes goalkeepers Suraj Karkera and Prashant Kumar Chauhan. in Pool A, while Australia, South Africa, Ukraine and Zambia are in Pool B and Pool D features

New Zealand, Paraguay, Thailand and Uruguay. "The team comprises young players with enough international experience and understanding of the challenges of playing a prestigious event such as the Hockey 5's World Cup," coach

Soundarya said in a HI release. 'We are well prepared and are upbeat ahead of the tournament

The Indian men's team, led by Olympic bronze

Mandeep Mor will be joined by Manjeet in defence, while midfield features Mohd Raheel Mouseen and Maninder Singh and forward-line comprises Pawan Rajbhar, Gurjot Singh and Uttam Singh along with captain Simranjeet.

Grouped in Pool B, India will play against Egypt, Jamaica and Switzerland to make the knockout rounds.

The other teams in the fray include the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan and Poland in Pool A and Pool C features Australia, Kenya, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago while Pool D includes Fiji, Malaysia, Oman and the United

"We have chosen a very balanced team with youth and experience for this exciting format of

hockey," coach Sardar Singh said. "Several players in this squad already have the experience of playing this format and are eager to perform well. We have worked hard for this tournament and look forward to finishing on the podium." (PTI)

Indian pacers' creativity will be tested in Cape Town: Donald

CAPE TOWN, Dec 31: The Indian pace bowlers were not patient on a good bowling surface during the opening Test against South Africa, a virtue they will need in abundance on a batting paradise at Newlands, where spinners will have little role to play, reckoned legendary Allan Donald.

India lost the first Test by an innings and 32 runs after conceding 408 in the first innings on a spicy Centurion track that offered steep bounce and enough lateral movement. "I know South Africa probably got the better of the conditions, no questions about that. They pitched the ball in a 5 and 5.5 meter area and gave it a chance to do something off the deck.

But what they did better than India...they were more patient in that area and even they used the short ball a little bit more in the second innings," Donald, a fearsome pacer of his generation, decoded Îndia's defeat in an exclusive interview to PTI.

The 57-year-old, who took 330 wickets in just 72 Tests, feels Indians were waiting for things to happen. "For India, there was one debutant (Prasidh Krishna). I thought (Jasprit) Bumrah, but Indian bowlers searched too much for things to happen.

They quickly reverted to shorter balls and then lost their length a bit on the shorter side and then got opened up on either side – square leg, off side and SA batters capitalized." "Come Cape Town, it will be hard work and there will be a lot more energy from both teams. Cape Town will be hard work and it will bring honesty out of both the attacks," the 'White Lightening'



Town way more difficult than Centurion? "You need to be more creative in Cape Town as wickets are a lot more flatter and partnerships will stretch and that's traditionally as someone who knows it will be tougher Tests," he added.

Donald says if India envisage any chance of restoring parity, they need to use the new ball judiciously. "The massive emphasis is on the new ball because traditionally if there's a South westerly wind blowing across Newlands, then you know that is going to dry the pitch up. But not in any way or form I think the pitch will turn."

That assessment of Donald isn't great news for veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who is all set to be benched. "There might be

for spinners later on but it's not going to happen. India in South Africa, there's no way that will bring Indian spinners into it. So, you can forget that part. "But your first innings bowling could reward you, if you pitch the new ball a bit fuller and try to swing it for the first 25 to 30 overs. And then start mixing your pace," he noted.

Once the Kookaburra ball gets old, then India would need what Donald calls a "battering ram" or a "bully" who will ramp it up with short balls. "When the partnership stretches longer, you need to have two guys who need to bowl short and full. Your spinner will keep one side nice and tight while seamers operate from one end. As the game goes long and the partnership

effect." India, as a batting unit, haven't had a lot of success in the 'Rainbow Nation' but Sachin Tendulkar is one batter, who has scored four Test centuries in five tours to the country. "It's not an easy place to combat. We see that daily in South Africa, the ball does nip around more than it does in Australia or England. If your footwork isn't 100 percent then you are in trouble," Donald cited. Then he explained why Tendulkar was a huge success individually.

"Only person I know who played us well was Tendulkar, who triggered (had a trigger movement) while batting in South Africa rather than stand on middle-stump. He pressed forward and left the ball amazingly well," Donald ex-

New Zealand beat B'desh by 17 runs in 3rd T20, share series 1-1

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, Dec 31: Mitchell Santner and Jimmy Neesham combined in a 46-run partnership which steered New Zealand to a 17 run win over Bangladesh under the Duckworth-Lewis system in the third Twenty20 international on Sunday, dashing the Tigers' hopes of their first series win in New Zealand.

Captain Santner and Neesham provided the cool heads New Zealand needed to overcome another top-order collapse and chase down Bangladesh's inadequate total of only 110 in a race against encroaching dark clouds and rain.

New Zealand was in desperate trouble at 49-5 in the ninth over, trailing under the Duckworth-Lewis system when Neesham and Santner came together. They stayed together and guided New Zealand to 95-5 in the 15th over when the forecast rain arrived torrentially and brought the match to an abrupt end.

"I think we always knew there was going to be a bit of rain around whether it came at the end of halfway through that second innings," Santner said. "The bowlers did the job up front and it was good to get across the line in a pretty hard-fought series."

In extraordinary scenes, spectators dashed for the exits of Bay Oval as the rain pelted down, driven by strong winds. New Zealand needed 78 runs to be ahead on the Duckworth-Lewis calculation. Sunday's win leveled the three-match series at 1-1 after Bangladesh won the first match by five wickets and after the second match at Bay Oval was washed out after 11 overs.

But New Zealand can no longer turn a blind eye to the failings of its top order in the ongoing absence of



way. Bangladesh may have lost the three-match one-day international series and shared the T20 series, but it achieved its first wins in New Zealand in both formats. In the third ODI, New Zealand

was reduced to 70-6 and in the first T20 it was 50-5 as its top batters failed to master the Bangladesh attack. The latest collapse seemed both inevitable and at times comical. Santner excelled as New Zealand bowled out Bangladesh for only 110 in 19.2 overs after winning the toss. Bangladesh lost three wickets for 45 runs in the power play then was bogged down in the middle overs, scoring only 32 between the seventh and 16th

Najmul Hossain Shanto's 17 from 15 balls was the top score. Four other batsmen reached double figures, including Towhid Hridoy who made 16 from 18 balls. Santner was particularly effective in the middle stages and there was enough grass on the pitch at Bay Oval for the ball to grip and turn a little. Santner took 4-16 from his mid-pitch as Allen crossed over four overs while the seamers Tim

Sears shared six wickets. "Bowling into the wind can be challenging at times but I was thinking of changing the pace and trying to get a bit of bounce out of the wicket," Santner said. "As a

whole the seamers bowled ex-

tremely well as well to keep them

to 110 on a pretty good pitch.' Santner surprised a little when he chose to field on winning the toss. Bay Oval usually is a bat-first pitch with an average first innings score of 190. But with rain forecast, bowling gave New Zealand some control. In the end it was decisive and New Zealand became the first team to win a T20 at Bay

Oval when batting second. But, matching the forecast, New Zealand made heavy weather of an apparently easy run chase.

Tim Seifert fell in the second over, then Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips and Mark Chapman fell in quick succession. All four batsmen were out for 1. Chapman's dismissal had an element of the comic as he collided with Finn Allen in and ran down the wrong side of the

Raducanu feeling 'eborn' as she Gill is playing too aggressively starts 2024 season in Auckland in Test cricket: Gavaskar

U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu says she feels "reborn" as she prepares to play her first match of 2024 at the Auckland tennis classic.

The 21-year-old Raducanu has been out of action since April after wrist and knee operations and says she feels reinvigorated at the start of a new season. "I feel reborn in a way, I feel fresh," the 2021 major winner told reporters. "I feel ready, I feel happy, I feel excited.

"So overall I'm feeling positive and lighter. For two years after the U.S. Open I felt maybe a bit more like with a weight on my shoulders,

but now I feel completely fresh. Raducanu suffered an ankle injury in Auckland last year but played through the pain at the Australian Open. By April she had come to realize she had to take time out for surgery. "I was having wrist pains for five months before I came to Auckland so I was managing it, keeping

problem but I wanted to keep going through the season. "I'm feeling a lot better now, I'm feeling stronger. I feel fitter, more

it going and under wraps as much as

I could," Raducanu said. "I knew it

was inevitable if I wanted to fix the

Raducanu will play a qualifier in the first round of the Auckland tour-

nament on Monday or Tuesday. Meanwhile, the 2023 U.S. Open champ Coco Gauff is drawn to play American compatriot Claire Liu in the first round as she begins her 2024 season and defense of the Auckland singles title.

After her major win at home, Gauff has become the standardbearer for U.S. women's tennis but it is a mantle she bears reluctantly.

"Public publicity wise and ranking wise, technically I'm at the front, that," Gauff said. "So, I don't feel like I'm leading them in any way or leading it. "Maybe for (the media) it feels like that. But for us, or at least for me, I just feel like I'm just focusing on me. I'm not trying to lead anybody. If anything, I'm really learning from them.

Caroline Wozniacki will play Ukraine's Elina Svitolina in round one as she plays at the Auckland tournament for the eighth time. The 33-year-old made a strong comeback in 2023 after taking three years away from tennis to

endary Sunil Gavaskar has asked Shubman Gill to curb his aggressive intentions while batting in Tests after the young batsman failed to produce a substantial outing in the first Test against South Africa at Centurion.

Gill made two and 26 at the SuperSport Park and fell to pacers Nandre Burger and Marco Jansen in the first and second innings respectively as India lost the opening Test by an innings and 32

Gavaskar advised Gill to take in the different needs of Test cricket as compared to white ball

"I think he is playing a bit too aggressively in Test cricket. There is a slight difference when you play Test cricket when compared to T20I and ODI cricket. The difference is in the ball.

'The red ball moves a little more than the white ball in the air and off the pitch as well. It bounces a little more too. He should keep that in mind," Gavaskar told Star Sports.

While Gill had a fine run in the limited over versions, he has managed to score only one fiftyplus score in the traditional for-

hundred against Australia at home in March.

His nine other outings produced scores of: 21, 5, 13, 18, 6, 10, 29 not out, 2, 26.

Gavaskar hoped that Gill would find his range sooner than

"Shubman Gill started off his career so well and we praised his shots. We can only hope that he gets back into his form. Hope he trains harder and does well in the future," said Gavaskar. India will be aiming to square the series in the second and final Test against South Africa at Cape Town, startmat in 10 innings in 2023, a ing from January 3. (PTI)

Despite clinching series, Australia will revisit plans anticipating spin-friendly pitch: Healy

MUMBAI, Dec 31: They might have recorded a narrow three-run win over India in the second ODI but Australia Women's captain Alyssa Healy said the visitors were not prepared for a spinfriendly pitch and will need to revisit their plans ahead of the third

Indian spinner Deepti Sharma returned with figures of 10-0-38-5 to peg Australia back as they slipped from 117 for 1 to 258 for 8 after batting first. Things could have been different if the home team had not dropped as many as seven catches.

Healy said Australia will have to consider more scoring options if turn is going to be a huge factor in the third and final ODI as well.

"We probably weren't as prepared for how much turn there was," Healy told the media here

"Early (before the game), we spoke about it, that maybe there was going to be a little bit, but probably (now) just need to chat a little bit about that if they're going to prepare something really similar for game three.

"We just probably need to work out a few more different scoring areas for ourselves and obviously probably our attack as well (in regards to) what we can do to cash

The third ODI is scheduled on January 2 at the Wankhede Stadium. Having recorded their ninth ODI series win in India and her first as full-time captain, Healy said it was a statistic that did not bother the team much.

"Not really. I mean, that statistic doesn't bother us too much. (It) feels like people only write So there might have been a good thing, but that's not on the mind at all." Healy said.

"We're fully aware of just how good this opposition is that we're playing against and we know we've got to be able to be on the mark to maintain that." The Australian captain said her

side was at least 40 runs short but a quickfire 28 not out from 17 balls from Alana King, in which she was dropped twice, tilted the momentum in their favour.

"King got some momentum back into our change room. I thought we were probably 20-30 or maybe 40 runs short with the bat. I thought we'd let ourselves down a little bit (by) just losing

wickets at bad times. "(We) probably let India back in the game and in that regard,

and probably needed at least to creating dot balls, kept creating add on that we could, even though it was difficult conditions," she

Healy said dismissing Richa Ghosh and 96 with Phoebe Litchfield taking a fine catch was perhaps a turning point in the game. When we we hung on to Richa

Ghosh when she was on 96, that was when probably the group thought 'we're on here'. I think we could have probably caught her earlier," she said. Ghosh made the most of the

two lifelines which she got on nought (dropped by Litchfield) and 36 (dropped by Annabel Sutherland) to make her highest individual score in ODI cricket so

"They were hovering around run-a-ball for a really long period of time. We just knew if we kept pressure, then chances would come, and yeah, that's exactly what the this team has been really, really good at for a long period of time. We did it again," Healy

Healy, who is yet to record a big knock for herself on this tour, said she was happy to be back on the field after a long injury (finger) layoff and is not burdened by captaincy pressure.

"I've also missed eight weeks of cricket leading into this, so this is my first series back from a fairly significant injury. In that regard, the captaincy is weighing on me at all," she said.

"I'm just excited to be back out here playing cricket, to be completely honest with you, and the captaincy is just a side part of that." (PTI)

Nunisa awarded 'Bosortur Priya Byaktitya Sanman 2023'



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 31: Assam Sepak Takraw Association general secretary, Dr. Bishnu Ram Nunisa, was awarded the 'Bosortur Priya Byaktitya Sanman 2023' by Democracy Live 24x7 at the PWD Guest House Conference Hall in Guwahati on December 30. In an august gathering, renowned music artist Malabika Bora presented the award to Dr. Nunisa for his significant contributions in the field of sports as a sports organiser. Addressing the event, Dr. Nunisa expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the organisers for bestowing this honour upon him

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12 THE HILLS TIMES **MONDAY, JANUARY 1, 2024**



From 16 to 22 January, 10,73,489 additional families will receive their new ration cards as announced by the Government



For those families, extended Anna Sewa Din

January



Under National Food Security Act, 2013

For beneficiaries under 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana'



Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) Per month, per family



Priority Household (PHH) Per month, per beneficiary

will be provided



Households covered 66,38,399



Beneficiaries covered 2,31,88,213



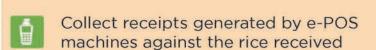
New ration cards 10,73,489



New beneficiaries 42,85,745

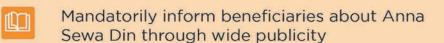
'To do' for Beneficiaries

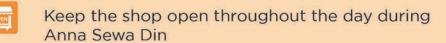


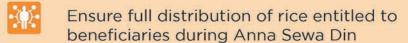


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