

WORLD 6 Japan issues tsunami warnings after a series of very strong earthquakes
NATION 8 Nagaland welcomes 2024 with prayers for early solution to Naga pol imbroglia
One arrested, heroin worth ₹ 6 crores seized in Meghalaya

CM announces installation of 2,000 CCTV cameras for city security



GUWAHATI, Jan 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Monday that the Assam government is working to install two thousand CCTV cameras across the city for the security of the people.

Transport department, road accidents decreased by 37 per cent in the month of December. Commenting on climate change during the occasion, Sarma said that climate change is one of the gravest problems that the world is facing today.

"Flagging off 200 e-buses on the first day of the year reflects the Assam Government's unwavering commitment towards a greener environment, and more particularly, a greener Guwahati," he added.

Sarma also said that the state cabinet in the year 2021 on 20 August took a decision to introduce 100 CNG buses and 200 e-buses, adding, "In line with the decision, 100 CNG buses were introduced in the year 2023 and the first January of 2024 witnessed the introduction of 200 more e-buses."

The chief minister said that as a part of the government's commitment Guwahati will completely go for transition to a fully green transport system in next two years.

As per an official statement, fitted with different state of the art facilities, these buses will ply in Guwahati Municipal Corporation areas besides Chandrapur, Dharapur, Mirza, AIIMS Guwahati, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Himanta in touch with Paresh Barua

Talks with ULFA(I) unlikely in immediate future: CM

GUWAHATI, Jan 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said he is in touch with Paresh Barua, who leads the anti-talks United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) faction, but negotiations with the outfit are unlikely in the immediate future.

"As the political head of the state, I will continue to reach out to him. I usually talk to him every three or six months and I plan to speak to him again soon but I don't expect him to come for talks immediately," Sarma said during an interaction with journalists here.

It is not easy for Barua to give up the issue of sovereignty but he must realise that the people of Assam do not want it anymore, the CM said.

"He is fighting for the people of the state but people want development and not an independent Assam," he said.

"The ULFA charter of demands was prepared several decades ago and if Barua comes and stays in the state for 15 days, he will also change the de-



mands as Assam is now a land of peace and tranquility," he added.

"We have kept the channels for discussions open but we do not see talks happening in the near future. This is a long process which will continue," the CM added. On the recently signed tri-

partite agreement with the pro-talks faction of the ULFA, Sarma said the accord has in one stroke established political and land rights of the indigenous people of the state which cannot be disturbed for a long time to come. "The leaders of the pro-talks faction

were not in public life for the last 14 years after coming overground. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah consciously activated the peace process. This accord is an instrument to secure the future of the people of Assam," he said.

"The delimitation exercise in the state had ensured that 96 assembly constituencies in Brahmaputra Valley and nine in Barak Valley will be secured for the indigenous people, while the ULFA Accord has made it sure that the principle followed in this delimitation exercise will be followed in the next delimitation exercise to be conducted by the Centre across the country as well," the CM said.

Besides, as per the accord, nobody can encroach on government or forest lands, he said. "A voter cannot change his or her constituency... their voting rights will not be cancelled but will be maintained in the original constituency," Sarma added. (PTI)

HT BRIEFS ITBP DG

NEW DELHI: IPS officer Rahul Rasgotra on Monday took charge as the new director general of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), a paramilitary force tasked to guard the India-China Line of Actual Control. Rasgotra, a 1989-batch police officer of the Manipur cadre, was handed over the customary baton by his predecessor Anish Dayal Singh. Singh has been appointed as the DG of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). The new ITBP DG was given a guard of honour by a ceremonial unit of troops at the headquarters of the force at Lodhi Road before he took charge, a senior officer said.

Two drowned

NEW DELHI: A 10-year-old boy and his uncle are suspected have drowned in Agra Canal in southeast Delhi's Badarpur area, police said on Monday. According to police, till evening, the divers and rescuers were searching for the duo in the canal. The incident took place on December 31 evening, when Yash Kumar was playing near the canal, a police officer said, adding Yash wanted to clean his hand when he slipped into the canal.

Covid sub-variant

NEW DELHI: A total of 196 cases of Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1 have been detected in the country so far, with Odisha joining the list of states that have detected the presence of the variant, according to the INSACOG's data updated on Monday. Ten states and Union territories have so far detected the presence of the JN.1 sub-variant of the virus. These states are Kerala (83), Goa (51), Gujarat (34), Karnataka (eight), Maharashtra (seven), Rajasthan (five), Tamil Nadu (four), Telangana (two) Odisha (one) and Delhi (one), according to the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG). The INSACOG's data showed 179 Covid cases recorded in the country in December had the presence of JN.1, while 17 such cases were detected in November.

N Biren Singh raises alarm over attacks on state forces

IMPHAL, Jan 1: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh has voiced deep concern over recent attacks on state forces, particularly the assault on five police commandos in Moreh district. Singh further informed that the injured personnel were promptly airlifted to Imphal for medical care.



"The unprecedented attacks against the state forces in the recent times have become a serious national security threat. While the state and central security forces are actively engaged in maintaining control over the situation, it is also imperative for the combined security forces to adopt a robust and comprehensive approach to deal with these elements, who are relentlessly attempting to destabilise

the state of Manipur," Singh said in a post on micro-blogging site X.

The chief minister also held a meeting with BJP state president A Sharda Devi, ministers, MLAs and party leaders on Sunday and discussed the situation with them.

Singh said a delegation will also be going to Delhi soon to meet the central leaders to apprise them about the situation in Manipur.

"Joined a high level meeting of @BJP4Manipur in presence of Smt @AShardaDevi Ji, President BJP Manipur Pradesh, Hon'ble Ministers, Hon'ble MLAs and party karyakata to deliberate on a stringent approach to deal with elements who are hell bent on destabilising Manipur. A delegation will also be going to Delhi soon to meet the central leaders in this regard," he added.

Assam cabinet extends Mission Basundhara 2.0 case disposal deadline

GUWAHATI, Jan 1: The Assam cabinet has given its nod to extend the timeline for the disposal of cases under Mission Basundhara 2.0 until January 15, as informed by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday. The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting chaired by Himanta Biswa Sarma at Lok Sewa Bhawan in Dispur.

"Timelines for disposal of cases under Mission Basundhara 2.0 extended till January 15, 2024," Sarma wrote on the micro-blogging site X, where he shared the key decisions taken in the cabinet meeting.

It has also been decided that all successful cases should pay the premium up to January 31, failing which the land settlement offered will stand cancelled due to non-payment of the premium.

The cabinet also decided to pro-

vide a tariff subsidy of ₹ 200 crore to the APCDL, which will offer financial relief to 50 lakh Below Poverty Line (BPL) and domestic consumers in Assam.

Additionally, the cabinet approved guidelines for the appointment of Anganwadi Supervisors against 25 per cent of the total posts of Supervisors from among the in-service Anganwadi Workers under General Area districts.

"To ensure the selection of well-qualified candidates, guidelines approved for the appointment of Anganwadi Supervisors against 25 per cent of total posts of Supervisors from among in-service Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) under General Area districts," Sarma added.

However, the upper age limit for Anganwadi workers to apply in the selection processes has been removed as there will be a written test

and a computer proficiency test for the selection of candidates.

"Also, the selection process to be held at the state level and conducted by the Director of Women and Child Development," he added.

On the other hand, the cabinet also decided that a proposal is to be submitted to the Centre for the inclusion of the Madahi community under the Kachari tribe in Assam.

"A proposal to be submitted to the Government of India for the inclusion of the Madahi community under the Kachari tribe at serial number 5 of the ST list in Assam (including the Bodoland Territorial Region and excluding the autonomous districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao)," Sarma informed. The cabinet has also decided that under Mission Basundhara 2.0, land is to be settled in favor of (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Foundation stone laid for Guwahati's longest flyover

GUWAHATI, Jan 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma laid the foundation stone for Guwahati's longest flyover measuring 5,053.20 metre in length, said an official statement.

The flyover will be running from Dighalipukhuri to Noonmati in the city spanning a distance of 4.5 kilometers, making it the longest flyover in Assam.

"Adding another chapter towards the current state government's initiatives aimed at transforming Guwahati, the largest city in Northeast India, into the 'Gateway to Southeast Asia' and to ease the city's traffic congestion woes, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday laid the foundation stone for a 4-lane 'elevated corridor', or a flyover, measuring 5,053.20 metre in length and standing at a minimum height of 5.70 metres to be built at a projected cost of ₹ 852.68 crores that would connect Dighalipukhuri with Noonmati and having extended arms towards GNB Road, West Dighalipukhuri Road and Rajgarh Road," the statement added.

As per the statement, the flyover will be built under the overall supervision of the Public Works (Roads) Department of the Assam government. "The elevated corridor, to be the longest in the city on its completion, is scheduled to become operational by 2026," the statement read further.

Speaking at the occasion, Sarma said the government has been working relentlessly to transform the state into a developed one in near future. "The design of the flyover for which foundation stone has been laid today is a manifestation of the fact that the state is moving towards a new dawn," the chief minister stated. Sarma further said that elements such as a rotary over the existing flyover at Chandmari, rotary over the existing rotary at Guwahati Club area would mark a new beginning in the field of road infrastructure engineering in the state. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

FOR A PROSPEROUS YEAR



Devotees wait in a queue to offer prayers at the historic Shiva Dol on the first day of the New Year, 2024 in Sivasagar on Monday. UB photos

India asks Pakistan to release Indian prisoners in its custody

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: India on Monday asked Pakistan to expedite the release and repatriation of 184 Indian fishermen in view of completion of their jail term.

In addition, Islamabad has also been asked to provide immediate consular access to 12 civilian prisoners in Pakistan's custody, who are believed to be Indian, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

India made the request in the context of the exchange of lists of civilian prisoners and fishermen by both the countries as part of a practice to do so on January 1 and July 1 every calendar year under the framework of a 2008 pact.

India has shared lists of 337 civilian prisoners and 81 fishermen in its custody, who are Pakistani or are believed to be Pakistani.

Similarly, Pakistan has shared lists of 47 civilian prisoners and 184 fishermen in its custody, who are Indian or are believed to be Indian, according to the MEA.

"The government of India has

called for early release and repatriation of civilian prisoners, missing Indian defence personnel, and fishermen along with their boats, from Pakistan's custody," the MEA said.

"In this context, Pakistan was asked to expedite the release and repatriation of 184 Indian fishermen, who have completed their sentence," it said in a statement.

"In addition, Pakistan has been asked to provide immediate consular access to the remaining 12 civilian prisoners in Pakistan's custody, who are believed to be Indian," it said.

The MEA said Pakistan has been requested to ensure the safety, security and welfare of all Indian and believed-to-be Indian civilian prisoners and fishermen, pending their release and repatriation to India. "India remains committed to addressing, on priority, all humanitarian matters, including those pertaining to prisoners and fishermen in each other's country," it said. "In this context, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

'This govt is delivering on its commitment to the British public to cut migration' Tougher international student visa norms come into force in the UK

LONDON, Jan 1: International students, including Indians, starting courses at British universities this month will no longer be able to bring family members on all but postgraduate research courses and courses with government-funded scholarships under tougher UK visa norms effective from Monday. The UK Home Office said the changes, first announced by former home secretary Suella Braverman in May last year, are aimed at clamping down on people using the student visa as a backdoor route to work in the UK and will see an estimated 140,000 fewer people come to the UK. The tougher rules are geared towards cutting what Home Secretary James Cleverly dubbed as an "unreasonable practice" of overseas



students bringing dependants, which official figures show have risen by more than 930 per cent since 2019.

"This government is delivering on its commitment to the British

public to cut migration. We have set out a tough plan to rapidly bring numbers down, control our borders and prevent people from manipulating our immigration system, which will come into force throughout this

year," Cleverly said in a statement. "Today, a major part of that plan comes into effect, ending the unreasonable practice of overseas students bringing their family members to the UK. This will see migration falling rapidly by the tens of thousands and contribute to our overall strategy to prevent 300,000 people from coming to the UK," he said. The UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that in the year ending September 2023, as many as 152,980 visas were issued to dependants of students, a massive rise from the 14,839 in the year ending September 2019. "Our world-leading universities rightly attract some of the brightest students from around the world to the UK. But we have seen a surge in the number of dependants (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

CJI Chandrachud refuses to respond to criticism of Article 370 verdict

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Monday refused to respond to criticism of the unanimous five-judge bench verdict of the Supreme Court upholding scrapping of Article 370 of the Constitution, saying the judges decide a case "according to the Constitution and the law".

In an exclusive interview to PTI, the CJI said the judges speak their mind through their judgement which becomes public property after the pronouncement and people in a free society can always make their opinion about it.

"So far as we are concerned we decide according to the Constitution and the law. I don't think it will be appropriate for me either to respond to the criticism or mount a defence to my judgement. What we have said in my judgement is reflected in the reason present in the signed judgement and I must leave it at that," Justice Chandrachud said.

The response came to a query seeking his views on recent criticism by some jurists, including a former judge, on the Article 370 verdict, which upheld the Cen-



tre's August 5, 2019 decision to abrogate the provision bestowing special status on the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. On December 11, the top court, while upholding the scrapping of Article 370, ordered restoration of statehood "at the earliest" and set a September 30, 2024 deadline for holding the assembly elections in the present union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Settling the decades-long debate over the vexed constitutional provision, the five-judge constitution bench headed by Chandrachud delivered three concurring judgements upholding the abrogation of Article 370 that provided a unique status to Jammu and Kashmir when it acceded to the Union of India in 1947.

CJI Chandrachud said, "Judges who decide a case speak through their judgement. Once a judgement is delivered that judgement becomes a public property of the nation. Until a judgement is delivered the process is confined to the judges who are involved in the decision of that case. Once we arrive at a decision and the judgement is pronounced it's a public property. It's a property of the nation. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

World needs India to become reliable challenger to China: Anand Mahindra

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: The world needs India to become a reliable challenger to China's supply-chain dominance, which will provide a great opportunity in 2024 and investment will flow into the country in unprecedented volumes, according to Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra.

In his New Year message, Mahindra also said all signs point to the Indian economy achieving "the mythical lift-off that we have been awaiting, for decades" and predicted that in 2024 "companies that are able to create a portfolio of desirable products both in features and price will face the happy challenge of raising their production to meet demand".

Stressing that "a New Year is special because it always symbolises a new beginning", he said, "No matter how dark the year has gone by, the human spirit has an abiding capacity for hope. 2023 was a year characterised by conflict, climate change and a sluggish post-Covid recovery. The year ended with the world crying out for renewal." The first day of the new year opens a new chapter, a



fresh opportunity for optimism and renewal, he added.

"Globally, the world needs India to become a reliable challenger to China's supply-chain dominance. That is the great opportunity of 2024. That is what will fuel the lift-off. Investment is going to flow into India in unprecedented volumes," Mahindra said.

He further said, "The opportunity for India's manufacturing to achieve a quantum leap is within our grasp or ours to lose. Let's

seize it with both hands because growth in manufacturing and exports will, in turn, enhance the consumption story, setting into motion a virtuous cycle that could endure for years." In the long run, however, what will keep India's economy on the ascent is a capacity for disruptive innovation, Mahindra said adding "that aspiration is showing up in many of the newer startups. More power to this tribe!" In 2023, he said the Mahindra group also faced the challenges

first-hand in the communities it work with around the world being a transnational business.

"We also experienced the joy of overcoming those challenges, and in most situations, achieved extraordinary success. Our great advantage and opportunity in 2024 comes from our deeply embedded Indian roots. Because all signs point to the Indian economy achieving the mythical 'lift-off' that we have been awaiting, for decades!", he said. While the rest of the world faced increasing turbulence over the last few years, India kept the engine of the economy chugging along through doses of government capital and infrastructure investment, Mahindra noted.

"Now, the good news is that the consumption story is about to kick in. Companies that are able to create a portfolio of desirable products both in features and price will face the happy challenge of raising their production to meet demand," he said. As the sun rises in 2024, Mahindra asserted, "It's time for Carpe Diem - it's time to seize the day. Our destiny lies in our own hands. (PTI)

Petrol, diesel sales drop as winter sets in

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: Petrol and diesel sales in India slumped in December as setting in of winter tapered demand, preliminary data of state-owned firms showed on Monday.

Petrol sales of the three state-owned firms, which control 90 per cent of the fuel market, fell 1.4 per cent to 2.72 million tonnes in December 2023 when compared to the year-ago period, while diesel demand dropped 7.8 per cent to 6.73 million tonnes.

The onset of the winter season in northern India led to the tapering of air-conditioning demand.

Month-on-month petrol sales dropped 4.9 per cent when compared to 2.86 million tonnes consumption in November. Diesel demand too was down 0.8 per cent month-on-month when compared to 6.79 million tonnes in November.

Diesel is India's most consumed fuel, accounting for almost 40 per cent of all petroleum product consumption. Transport sector accounts for 70 per cent of all diesel sales in the country.

Fuel consumption has been on a see-saw over the last couple of months.

Demand for both petrol and diesel had risen in October but diesel consumption fell 7.5 per cent in the following month.



Consumption of petrol during December 2023 was 7.1 per cent more than in the Covid-marred December 2021 and 21.5 per cent more than in pre-pandemic December 2019.

Diesel consumption was up 4.3 per cent over December 2021 and 2.7 per cent compared to December 2019.

Jet fuel (ATF) sales rose 3.8 per cent year-on-year to 644,900 tonnes in December. But this was 6.5 per cent lower than in December 2019 primarily because not all international flights have resumed after the pandemic.

ATF consumption was 25.5 per

cent more than in December 2021, but lower than 628,400 tonnes used in pre-Covid December 2019.

Month-on-month jet fuel sales were 2.6 per cent higher than 628,400 tonnes in November 2023.

Cooking gas LPG sales were almost flat year-on-year at 2.73 million tonnes in December.

LPG consumption was 8.1 per cent higher than in December 2021 and 16.4 per cent more than in pre-Covid December 2019.

Month-on-month, LPG demand rose 6.2 per cent against 2.57 million tonnes of LPG consumption during November, the data showed. (PTI)

Rupee falls 6 paise to close at 83.22 against US dollar



MUMBAI, Jan 1: The rupee started the new year on a weak note, depreciating by 6 paise to 83.22 against the US dollar amid a muted trend in domestic equities and dollar demand from importers.

Forex traders said the rupee traded in a narrow range in the absence of global cues. Global crude oil markets were closed for New Year Day holiday.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.18 and finally settled at 83.22 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 6 paise from its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee appreciated 4 paise to settle at 83.16 against the US dollar on the last trading day of 2023.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.05 per cent up at 101.38.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 31.68 points, or 0.04 per cent, to settle at 72,271.94 points. The Nifty advanced 10.50 points, or 0.05 per cent, to 21,741.90 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Friday as they purchased shares worth Rs 1,459.12 crore, according to exchange data.

The forex reserves continued to rise for the third consecutive week, adding USD 4.471 billion more in the week ending December 22, taking the total to USD 620.441 billion, according to the weekly data released by the Reserve Bank on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the kitty had swollen by USD 9.112 billion to USD 615.971 billion, making the quantum of increase one of the highest in a week. In the week before, the overall reserves had risen by USD 2.816 billion to USD 606.859 billion. (PTI)

Sensex, Nifty kick off 2024 on a flat note amid high volatility

MUMBAI, Jan 1: Stock markets kicked off the New Year on a flat note with benchmark Sensex closing with modest gains of 31 points in a highly volatile trading session on Monday helped by buying in energy, services and telecom shares.

The 30-shares barometer scaled new intraday record high of 72,561.91 before closing at 72,271.94, a gain of 31.68 points or 0.04 per cent over the last close. During the day, it hit a low of 72,031.23 and a high of 72,561.91.

The broader Nifty also hit its all-time intraday high of 21,834.35 before settling higher by 10.50 points or 0.05 per cent at 21,741.90. As many as 22 Nifty shares advanced while 28 declined.

Key stock indices remained volatile throughout the session as traders were indecisive in the absence of global cues, analysts said.

"Market exhibited strength led by optimism on rate cuts, easing global inflation, and softer bond yields. But profit booking was visible at higher levels as lingering concerns over Red Sea disruptions pose short-term risks to global supply chains and freight costs," Vinod



Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

The spotlight of this week is also on FOMC minutes which will provide an insight for 2024 rate cut, Nair added.

In 2023, the BSE benchmark jumped 11,399.52 points or 18.73 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 3,626.1 points or 20 per cent.

On the Sensex chart, Nestle, Tech Mahindra, HCL Technologies, Tata Motors, Wipro and ITC were among the winners.

In contrast, Bharti Airtel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, NTPC and Hindustan Unilever were

among the laggards.

Momentum in mid and small caps remained strong, buoyed by a positive macro-outlook but private banks experienced a reversal trend.

In the broader market, the BSE small-cap gauge climbed 0.73 per cent and midcap index advanced 0.54 per cent.

Among the indices, energy jumped 0.82 per cent, telecommunication climbed 0.76 per cent, services (0.73 per cent), commodities (0.59 per cent), oil & gas (0.64 per cent) and industrials (0.35 per cent).

Auto, bankex and consumer durables were the laggards.

Asian and European markets were closed on Monday for the New Year. The US markets ended marginally lower on Friday.

According to exchange data, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 1,459.12 crore on Friday.

The BSE benchmark fell 170.12 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 72,240.26 on the last trading day of 2023 on Friday. The Nifty declined 47.30 points or 0.22 per cent to settle at 21,731.40. (PTI)

ATF price cut by 4 pc; commercial LPG rate reduced marginally by ₹ 1.5 per cylinder

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: Jet fuel or ATF price on Monday was cut by 4 per cent, the third straight monthly reduction, and commercial cooking gas (LPG) rates were marginally lowered by ₹ 1.50 per 19-kg cylinder in line with international benchmarks.

However, the price of domestic LPG -- used in household kitchens for cooking purposes -- remained unchanged at ₹ 903 per 14.2-kg cylinder.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was cut by ₹ 4,162.5, or 3.9 per cent, in the national capital to ₹ 101,993.17 per kl, according to price notifications of state-owned fuel retailers.

This is the third straight monthly reduction in jet fuel prices. ATF price was cut by almost 6 per cent (₹ 6,854.25 per kl) in November and by ₹ 5,189.25, or 4.6 per cent, in December. The three rounds of reduction have wiped away almost 45 per cent of the ₹ 29,391.08 per kl increase in rates effected in four monthly tranches starting July 1. The reduction in the price of jet fuel, which makes up for 40 per cent of an airline's operating cost, will ease the burden on already financially strained airlines.

Alongside, oil firms also reduced the price of commercial LPG - used in various establishments such as hotels and restaurants - by ₹ 1.50.

A 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder will now cost ₹ 1,755.50 in the national capital and ₹ 1,708.50 in Mumbai. The price hike follows a ₹ 39.5 per cylinder



reduction in rates effected on December 22.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) revise cooking gas and ATF prices on the 1st of every month, based on the average international price in the previous month. The revision on December 22 was an outlier.

Petrol and diesel prices continued to remain on freeze for a record 21st month in a row. Petrol costs ₹ 96.72 per litre in the national capital, and diesel costs ₹ 89.62 per litre.

State-owned fuel retailers are supposed to revise petrol and diesel prices daily, based on a 15-day rolling average of benchmark international fuel prices, but they haven't done that since April 6, 2022. (PTI)

Maharashtra now preferred destination for investments from overseas: CM Shinde

THANE, Jan 1: Maharashtra has become a preferred destination for investments from various countries, reflecting the state's conducive business environment, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has said.

Welcoming the New Year by participating in a midnight blood donation camp here, Shinde also spoke about the growing impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the positive impact of a deep cleaning drive taken up in Mumbai and its extension across the state.

The CM highlighted the successful implementation of 85 per cent of the Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed during the Davos meet (in 2023).

"Maharashtra has become a preferred destination for investments from various countries," he said.

Underlining the commitment to

people's welfare, Shinde said the Chief Minister's Relief Fund has provided assistance of over ₹ 165 crore to more than 20,000 individuals since his government assumed office, a significant increase from the earlier disbursement of ₹ 2 to 3 crore.

He also said that the deep cleaning drive, a crucial aspect of the Swachh Bharat campaign, has shown remarkable results in Mumbai, prompting its extension to other regions of the state.

More than one lakh people actively participated in the cleanliness drive across 10 different locations in Mumbai on Sunday, he said.

CM Shinde expressed his government's commitment towards a clean, green and healthy Mumbai.

Terming blood donation as the noblest gift, he lauded the people who came together for the cause. (PTI)

GST collections rises 10 pc to Rs 1.64 lakh cr in Dec

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections jumped 10 per cent to about ₹ 1.64 lakh crore in December compared to ₹ 1.49 lakh crore in the same month a year ago, the finance ministry said on Monday.

During the April-December 2023 period, gross GST collection witnessed a robust 12 per cent growth, reaching ₹ 14.97 lakh crore, as against ₹ 13.40 lakh crore collected in the same period of the previous year, the ministry said in a statement. The average monthly gross GST collection of ₹ 1.66 lakh crore in the first nine-month period this year represents a 12 per cent increase compared to the ₹ 1.49 lakh crore average recorded in the corresponding period of FY23, it said.

"The gross GST revenue collected in the month of December, 2023 is ₹ 1,64,882 crore out of which CGST is ₹ 30,443 crore, SGST is ₹ 37,935 crore, IGST is ₹ 84,255 crore (including ₹ 41,534 crore collected on import of goods) and cess is ₹ 12,249 crore (including ₹ 1,079 crore collected on import of goods)," it said. (PTI)

Gold remains flat at ₹ 63,920 per 10 grams

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: Gold prices remained flat at ₹ 63,920 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to HDFC Securities.

Silver was also flat at ₹ 78,500 per kilogram.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading flat at ₹ 63,920/10 gram, unchanged from the previous close.

"In domestic markets, gold prices traded firm due to a lack of fresh cues from the international market," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the futures trade on the MCX, February contract of gold climbed ₹ 101 to ₹ 63,304 per 10 grams. However, March contract of silver declined ₹ 74 to ₹ 74,356 per kg on the exchange. (PTI)

Gujarat dairy sector booming as 36 lakh farmers get ₹ 200 cr from GCMMF daily: Officials

AHMEDABAD, Jan 1: Gujarat's focus on animal husbandry has contributed significantly to the prosperity of the state's people as 36 lakh milk producers collectively receive ₹ 200 crore daily from the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), officials said.

The dairy sector in the state has grown to ₹1 lakh crore, they said. The upcoming 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, to be held in Gandhinagar between January 10 and 12, will provide a platform for the government to showcase the state's exponential growth in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has said.

As per a statement issued by the government, the agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry sectors in the state are experiencing significant growth through a com-

bination of natural farming and advanced technologies, contributing to the circular economy of Gujarat and advancing its global reputation in the dairy sector.

"The upcoming Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2024 will showcase the state's exponential growth in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry, thanks to a combination of natural farming practices and cutting-edge technology. This holistic approach is not only boosting the circular economy but also elevating the state's global standing in the dairy sector," CM Patel said at a function held recently.

The dairy industry in Gujarat has exceeded ₹1 lakh crore, with ₹ 200 crore being paid daily to 36 lakh milk producers through the GCMMF, a government release said.

"The globally recognised Amul brand, under which the GCMMF



markets milk and dairy products, stands as a testament to the hard work of millions of dairy farmers," it said.

Amul's organised dairy procurement from Gujarat has grown from 30 lakh litres to 270 lakh litres in 27 years, a nine-fold growth,

showing the leap the state's rural economy has taken over the years, said R S Sodhi, president of the Indian Dairy Association and former managing director of GCMMF.

"Now imagine the entire country's milk production increased by three times, but Gujarat's dairy

farmers saw a nine-fold increase. Nearly, ₹ 160 crore is getting added to Gujarat's rural economy for dairy farmers," Sodhi said.

Dairy farmers say that the Vibrant Gujarat summit has played a significant role in boosting the sector and adding to their prosperity.

Milk producer Sobhraj Rabari, from Napat Vanto village in Anand district, said his family started (dairy business) with two cows and gradually increased to 35 now.

"The Vibrant Gujarat summit, started by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has helped us a lot...I supply 2,000 litres of milk a month. My income is ₹ 1.10 lakh. We are getting good prices for the milk. We are getting good support from the government," he said.

Jayesh Patel, a dairy farmer from Zarola village in Anand's Borsad taluka, said despite having

a small-scale animal husbandry operation on a 1.5-acre plot in his family, he expanded the operation by adopting a scientific approach, advanced education and business acumen. "I currently maintain a herd of 10 to 12 cows. I ensure they receive regular and timely feed, and I have organised their feeding schedules to ensure they produce the specified quantity of milk each day," he said.

He has also adopted natural farming by using cow dung and urine as fertilisers and pesticides.

As Gujarat prepares for the upcoming Vibrant Summit 2024, Jayesh Patel said he has never missed a single summit.

"This summit is important to me. Many people like me attend this summit and gain numerous benefits. I have consistently leveraged the advantages of the Vibrant Gujarat summit," he said. (PTI)



Govt. of Assam

A step towards building a progressive society

Nari Adalat & Paina

STATE-LEVEL INAUGURATION

**“Empowering women for
an empowered nation”**

Chief Guest

Smt Ajanta Neog

Hon'ble Minister,
Women and Child Development, Assam



In glorious presence of

Smt Queen Oja

Hon'ble Member of Parliament,
Guwahati

Smt Suman Haripriya

Hon'ble MLA, Hajo
Chairperson, Women and Child Welfare Committee,
Assam Legislative Assembly

Guest of Honour

Shri Indevar Pandey

Secretary, Ministry of Women and
Child Development, Govt of India

Venue: Srimanta Sankaradeva
International Convention Centre,
Kalakshetra, Panjabari

Date : 3 January, 2024

Time: 11 am



Your presence is highly solicited

QUOTE OF THE DAY

I think in terms of the day's resolutions, not the years
- Henry Moore

Cong face seat-sharing woes

As the clock ticks, Congress finds itself in a race against time to finalise seat-sharing arrangements with its alliance partners in the INDIA alliance. A pivotal meeting led by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, scheduled for January 4, holds the key to resolving the differences within the party's committee on the alliance, which has been causing delays in meaningful discussions. Initially, the INDIA alliance had set a deadline of September 30 to complete seat-sharing, but Congress, preoccupied with state elections in November 2023, pushed back the process. The party believed that a strong showing in the state elections would give them the upper hand in negotiating for more seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha Election 2024. However, this strategy fell short, prompting a series of rescheduled meetings. The Congress National Committee on Alliance has proposed an ambitious plan to contest approximately 290 seats independently, while seeking an additional 85 seats from INDIA alliance partners, bringing the total to 375 seats. This decision stems from the party's aspirations following Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra and the upcoming Bharat Nyay Yatra starting on January 14. Yet, Congress' claim on seats faces resistance, given its previous performances in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The party won 52 seats in 2019, with 206 as the runner-up, totaling 258 seats. The challenge lies in convincing other INDIA alliance partners to agree to this distribution, leaving only 168 seats for further negotiation out of the total 543 Lok Sabha seats.

The complexity of seat-sharing talks intensifies as nearly 400 seats are already under the sway of INDIA alliance partners acting as an anti-BJP force. With 143 seats left for negotiation, the Congress Committee on National Alliance is strategizing to challenge Prime Minister Modi and the BJP in the upcoming General Election 2024. Congress faces particular difficulties in seat-sharing negotiations with AAP in Delhi, Punjab, and Gujarat, where both parties aspire to contest numerous seats. In Uttar Pradesh, tensions rise as the party seeks a substantial number of seats, while the Samajwadi Party is willing to concede only a few. West Bengal presents a challenging scenario for Congress, caught between pressure from the TMC and Left front. Similar situations unfold in Assam, Tripura, and several northeastern states. While Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra pose fewer problems due to existing working arrangements, Congress must navigate carefully. In Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and Haryana, Congress aims to contest all seats independently. However, pockets within these regions are influenced by other INDIA alliance partners, demanding a careful consideration of seat distribution.

The current pace of decision-making is foreboding, as delays in seat-sharing may shorten the campaign time for Congress candidates and parties. The party must expedite the process, basing its aspirations on ground realities rather than perceived resurgence. Critical lessons from recent losses in state elections, especially in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, should guide Congress in shaping a more pragmatic strategy for the road ahead.

2024: Global election fest

The current year will be the greatest year for democracy and democratic institutions worldwide. The greatest power in the world (the United States), the most populous country (India), the biggest trading bloc (the European Union), the largest Muslim country (Indonesia), the largest Spanish-speaking country (Mexico) and the territory that is the most contentious one between the two superpowers of this century (Taiwan), all will hold elections in 2024.

A total of more than 3.7 billion inhabitants around 70 countries - or almost half of the global population - will head to cast their votes in either presidential or legislative elections in the coming year. The verdict of these polls may have profound consequences on the lives of people and on a world that is going through a turbulent time, with on-going brutal wars in Ukraine and Gaza, as the West seems falling into decline, with no clear alternative.

On a geopolitical level, this electoral jamboree might have a major impact. Major disruptive results include the return of Donald Trump to the White House, a third consecutive victory in Taiwan by candidates that Beijing considers hostile, or a consolidation of the extreme right in the European Union, all of which could lead to far-reaching consequences.

In addition to these, other elections to watch out for include the potential presidential elections in Venezuela to those in Ukraine, from Indonesia

to South Africa and Mexico, besides the United Kingdom - where a substantial change of course would not be expected regardless of the outcome.

Test for Democracy However, what might be the worrisome aspect of these elections is the litmus test which democracy will undergo. Surveys by different international think tanks and institutes indicate dissatisfaction with the present-day working of democratic institutions - a sentiment common throughout the nations of the west - meaning, the US and Europe - even though they see themselves as democracy's home ground. A recent Ipsos opinion poll in western countries found a widespread belief that current democratic systems favour the rich and powerful and ignore everyone else.

Freedom House, the independent, US-based watchdog concluded in its 2023 report that the Global Freedom Index declined for the 17th consecutive year. The principle of free speech, essential to a fully functioning democracy, is also under attack.

Paradoxically, this unprecedented vote-fest comes at a moment when classic forms of liberal democracy are under existential attack from authoritarians and dictators such as China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin, far-right nationalist-populist parties such as in Austria, Hungary and Scandinavia, and military coup plotters and Islamists from Venezuela to Chad.

Yet the report said while 35 countries experienced



declines in political rights and civil liberties, 34 saw overall gains. Autocrats were neither infallible nor unbeatable.

The geopolitical and economic impacts of so many ballot box battles, occurring more or less at once, may combine to further destabilise an unstable world - for good or bad.

Rise of the Far Right The European continent will see elections in Austria, Belgium, Croatia and Finland, as well as for the European Parliament in June. The pervasive fear is that they may accelerate advances by nationalist-populist, anti-migrant, xenophobic parties of the far right, matching those seen recently in Italy, the Netherlands and Slovakia.

The results will shape the new chamber, with possible new legislative majorities that will influence the leadership of the EU. One wonders how high the far-right wave may rise.

The average of polls compiled by Politico magazine indicates a rise of the two far-right blocs and

a decline in support of the traditional European conservatives, social democrats, liberals and greens. Even so, the latter groups might retain a comfortable majority. The crux of the question is to see if an eventual coalition between

populist and far-right groups could

form an alternative majority. At the beginning of December, in the seat projection put out by Politico, the distance between extremists and moderates was only about 20 seats, out of a total of 720.

India and its neighbours For India, which itself will be holding the general elections, in which the incumbent Prime Minister N Modi is expected to score a hat trick, will watch closely elections in its neighbourhood i.e. in Pakistan and Bangladesh which may have a major regional and strategic impact.

Pakistan is plagued by a serious economic crisis and high political tensions, including arrests and attempted assassina-

tions of political leaders. Following the dissolution of Parliament back in August, elections should have been held within 90 days, but have been postponed twice. They are now scheduled for February. The country - with some 240 million inhabitants - has enormous strategic depth, not only due to its nuclear arsenal, but also due to its close relationship with China. The Beijing-Islamabad axis is New Delhi's biggest concern.

The first election of 2024 could be one of the most contentious. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the ruling Awami League -AL have dominated Bangladeshi politics for the past fifteen years. Over that time, they have increasingly eroded Bangladesh's democracy. As Freedom House puts it, the AL "has consolidated political power through sustained harassment of the opposition and those perceived to be allied with it, as well as of critical media and voices in civil society." The United States has been pressing Sheikh Hasina for months to hold free-and-fair elections, that pressure has yet to pay off.

Major elections At the global level the US elections and those of the EU may have a major bearing on India's foreign and defence policies, with some overlap on its internal politics, too.

The US presidential elections next November have immense disruptive potential. The possibility that Trump will be the Republican candidate and return to the White House is

still not ruled out. A Trump-return to the White House would represent a major shake-up with associated risks. It would be a step towards American isolationism at a time when rival powers are questioning the world order that Washington has created.

Trump would embody a break with 'America for the world' scenario, his "America first" doctrine means limiting efforts and expenses in distant horizons. It's doubtful whether he would commit to supporting Taiwan if it comes under attack, or whether he would maintain financing and security guarantees made to Ukraine and NATO. New trade wars would be likely, as would a withdrawal of commitments against climate change.

In addition, the elections in 2024 will further highlight the manner in which our lives have become slaves to the social media and this will have an impact on the election processes too. As Kay Spencer, program director of elections at the Washington-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) puts it, the year 2024 is a big year for social media platforms and it will be important to monitor how they will manage all the elections that are coming up.

Indeed 2024 might prove to be a year, which consolidates the liberal democratic principles and institutions, or lead to their further erosion. (The author is a Delhi-based senior political and international affairs commentator)

RBI data shows swindling of public money has risen sharply

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Number of Bank frauds in 2022-23 in India reached 13,576 as against just 4306 in 2013-14, and has even broken the record of the last year in only first six months of the current financial year 2023-24 when the fraud cases have already risen to 14,483.

Obviously, UPA government was no match to the NDA government led by PM Narendra Modi in banking frauds, though PM Narendra Modi has promised during his election campaigns that he would give a corruption free India.

Nevertheless, the Reserve Bank of India's Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2022-23, released on December 27 shows that the number of frauds prior to 2020-21 on the basis of date of occurrence reached to 9,621 involving ₹1,71,985 crore. In 2020-21 alone the number of frauds were 5,590, which rose to 7,659 in 2021-22, and 13,576 in 2022-23 involving the value of fraud ₹ 11,828 crore, ₹ 6,953 crore, and ₹ 2,146 crore respectively.

On the basis of date of reporting number of frauds were 7,263 in 2020-21, which rose to 9,053 in 2021-22, and 13,576 in 2022-23, involving ₹ 1,18,417 crore, 45,598 crore, and ₹ 26,632 crore.

All these show that number of banking frauds went on rising despite assurance of the Modi government that they have been taking appropriate actions to eliminate banking frauds in the country, nevertheless, the assurance given by the government to make banks and the country free from frauds and corruption.

As for the money fleeced in the banking frauds, in has been also on the rise. In the year 2011-12, a total of ₹ 4,497 crore were swindled, which rose to ₹ 18,491 crore in 2015-16, and peaked to 1,66,576 crore prior to 2019-20, and ₹ 1,71,985 crore prior to 2020-21.

PM Narendra Modi government was severely criticised for such an unprecedented rise in the bank frauds. The entire Banking Sector of India was reported to have been undergoing the worst crisis in the last two decades, and the rising frauds were believed to be the real culprit.

However, the Modi government put the blame of the banking crisis on the earlier governments led by opposition political parties, most of which are now in the INDIA alliance.

Nevertheless, the data shows that after an unprecedented rise in the value of bank frauds, it could be brought down as per data collected on the basis of reporting to only ₹ 1,18,417 crore in 2020-21, and further to ₹ 45,598 crore in 2021-22. In the year 2022-23, the amount involved further came down to ₹ 26,632, which was still much higher than ₹ 4,497 crore in

2011-12.

However, the RBI report says, "During 2022-23, the total amount of frauds reported by banks declined to a six-year low while the average amount involved in frauds was the lowest in a decade."

Further it stated that in the first half of the 2023-24, although the number of frauds reported rose over the corresponding period a year ago, the amount involved was only 14.9 per cent of the previous year's amount.

It must be noted that during the first half of 2022-23 (April-September) the number for frauds were only 5,396 which rose to 14,483 in the first half of the current fiscal 2023-24, but the amount involved were respectively ₹ 17,685 crore and ₹ 2,642 crore. Since the date is based on the date of reporting, the final data may change.

It is also worth noting that number of frauds cases are concentrated in card on internet related frauds during 2022-23. The number of fraud cases reported by PVBs accounted for 66.2 per cent of the total.

However, in terms of amount involved, PSBs had a higher share, which is a major cause of concern. While the majority of the frauds in PSBs were related to advances, PVBs accounted for a majority of card/internet and cash-related cases.

On the basis of date of occurrence, out of 9,621 total number frauds prior to 2020-21, the largest 7,530 number of frauds were

in advances.

In value of the fraud, out of ₹ 1,71,985 crore, a total of ₹ 1,69,225 crore were given by banks as advances. The value of frauds in advances has declined to Rs 10,660 crore in 2020-21 and ₹ 6,469 crore in 2021-22. However, after a decline in frauds in advances it again rose to ₹ 1,094 crore in 2022-23.

Data collected on the basis of reporting shows that out of 7,263 frauds in 2020-21, a total of 3,401 were frauds in advances involving ₹ 1,17,018 crore out of ₹ 1,18,417 crore total fraud. In 2021-22, out of total 9,053 frauds a total of 3,789 were frauds in advances involving ₹ 43,512 crore out of ₹ 45,598 crore. Similar was the case in 2022-23, out of fraud of ₹ 26,632 crore, a total of ₹ 25,177 crore was in advances.

The frauds in advances indicate corruption in the banking system that facilitated frauds. This, of course, has led to sharp rise in the amount of non-performing assets in the Indian Banking System, and the subsequent write-offs to big-borrowers and corporates.

During the Modi regime since 2014-15, written off NPAs appears to be above Rs 15 lakh crores, that the government resorted to clean balance sheets of the public sector banks. (IPA Service)

Israel and Hamas grapple with Egypt's Gaza roadmap

By: James M Dorsey

Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the leader of Palestine Islamic Jihad, the second most significant militant Gaza group, arrived in Cairo this week for carefully timed talks with Egyptian intelligence chief General Abbas Kamel. A Palestinian source said Al-Nakhalah was discussing an end to the Gaza war that would involve an exchange of prisoners, the withdrawal of Israeli forces, and reconstruction of the devastated territory. On the table was a three-stage Egyptian proposal that falls short of mutually exclusive Israeli and Palestinian demands.

Hamas used the plan to increase pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to prioritise the release of the remaining 107 living hostages kidnapped by the group during its October 7 attack on Israel and 22 bodies of killed captives rather than prosecution of the war.

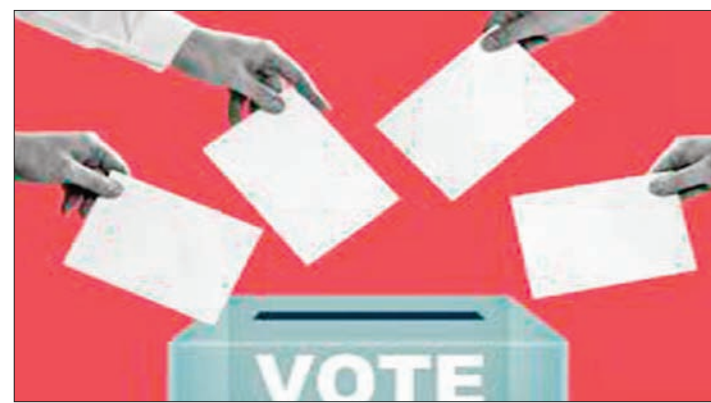
Even so, finding common ground between Israel, bent on destroying Hamas at any cost and refusing to contemplate an end to the Gaza war, and Hamas' refusal to negotiate further prisoner exchanges without Israel agreeing to a permanent ceasefire and withdrawal from Gaza amounts to a Herculean, if not impossible task.

More than 20,000 people, mostly innocent civilians, have been killed in Israel's ten-week-old air and ground assault on Gaza.

The Egyptian proposal seeks to manoeuvre the minefields by proposing the exchange of all remaining Hamas hostages for all Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, estimated at more than 7,000, in three phases over a period of up to two months during which both parties would hold their fire. The proposal would allow Hamas to drop its demand for a permanent ceasefire as a pre-condition for prisoner exchanges.

Speaking to Al Jazeera, Beirut-based Hamas political bureau member Osama Hamdan said the Egyptian plan was "still ideas" rather than a formal proposal. "We are not yet talking about a solid proposal," Hamdan said.

Israeli war cabinet member Benny Gantz told hostage families that "there are Egyptian proposals and there are other proposals flying around from all kinds of directions. I don't even know which of them are even relevant."



The Egyptian proposal envisions Israeli withdrawals from Gaza during the period of exchanges that would force Israel, should hostilities revive, to adopt less devastating, more limited and targeted military operations in line with American demands. On the assumption that Israel's goal of destroying Hamas is unrealistic; the plan further envisions Egyptian and Qatar-mediated reconciliation talks between Hamas and its arch rival, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's West Bank-based Al-Fatah movement.

An inter-Palestinian agreement would open the door for Hamas to be part of the Palestinian administration of Gaza and the West Bank and join the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), a Palestinian umbrella group. Seemingly responding to efforts to reconcile Hamas and Al-Fatah, Netanyahu, writing in The Wall Street Journal added deradicalization of Palestinian society to his war aims.

"Hamas must be destroyed, Gaza must be demilitarized, and Palestinian society must be deradicalized. These are the three prerequisites for peace between Israel and its Palestinian neighbors in Gaza... Palestinian civil society needs to be transformed so that its people support fighting terrorism rather than funding it," Netanyahu said.

The Egyptian plan envisions the creation of a technocratic Palestinian government that would take office in stage three. The government would prepare the ground for long-overdue presidential and parliamentary elections in which Hamas would compete. That's where the importance kicks in of the Cairo visit of Al-Nakhalah, whose Islamic Jihad group focuses on armed struggle against Israel and not on the day after the war or contours of a future Palestinian polity or Palestinian state.

The visit buys time for exiled

Hamas officials to try to bridge differences with the group's Gaza leadership. Some of the exiled officials favour reconciliation with Al-Fatah that would entail some form of implicit or explicit recognition of Israel while the Gaza leadership rejects concessions.

If the exiled officials prove successful, and that is if with a capital 'I', they could spark a paradigm shift in the dynamics of the Gaza war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict much like the PLO's recognition of Israel and disavowal of violence did in the 1980s.

Hamas has so far rejected the PLO template. It argues that the template failed to produce an independent Palestinian state and contributed to a weakening of the Palestinians since the 1993 signing of the Oslo accords. The shift in Hamas' position advocated by the exiles would complicate life for Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for whom acceptance of a role for Hamas in post-war Palestine would likely put the last nail in his political coffin. It would also put on the spot the Biden administration that supports Netanyahu's goal of destroying Hamas at any cost.

In contrast to Israel, the United States wants to see a capable and effective Palestine Authority government both the West Bank and Gaza. As a result, Palestinian reconciliation could force the United States to exert the kind of pressure on Israel it has so far refrained from applying. So far, US coaxing has not only failed to persuade Israel to change its military tactics to reduce innocent Palestinian casualties.

Israel has also stymied the Biden administration's efforts to make the discredited and cash-starved Palestine Authority viable and more fit for purpose by refusing to release US\$140 million in Palestinian tax money frozen since October 7 so that the Authority can pay salaries.

A second proposal to end the Gaza war, reportedly drafted by Abdelaziz al-Sagher, head of the Saudi-backed Gulf Research Council, and Anne Grillo, head of the French foreign ministry's North Africa and Middle East Department, called for the creation of a "joint transition council" to govern the territory for four years.

The council, operating under the auspices of a United Nations-mandated Arab peacekeeping force, would include Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Paradoxically, the plan, which was likely to be even less palatable to Israel, threw Netanyahu a bone by suggesting that Hamas political and military leaders, whether in exile or Gaza, be shipped off to Algeria.

The Egyptian plan calls for a first phase during which Hamas and Israel, much like in November, would exchange 40 hostages - women, children, and the elderly - for 120 Palestinians during a seven-to-10-day truce that would also allow for the less fettered entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Last month, Israel released 240 Palestinians for more than 100 hostages, mainly women and children, during a one-week truce. In the second seven-day phase Hamas would release captive Israeli women soldiers and the bodies of Israelis killed since October 7.

That's where the problems start given that the established ratio for the exchange of Israeli military personnel is far higher than the 1 Israeli for 3 Palestinians applied to civilian women and children.

In 2011, Hamas freed Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for 1,027 Palestinians. In 1984 Israel exchanged 4,500 Palestinians for six Israelis held in Lebanon by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and two years later 1,150 for three Israelis captured by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command.

The third month-long phase of Egypt's plan would see the release of the remaining hostages, primarily Israeli military personnel, in exchange for all Palestinians still in Israeli prisons, including those convicted to long prison or life sentences for killing Israelis. Their release could spark the breakup of Netanyahu's coalition government whose ultra-nationalist, ultra-conservative elements reject major concessions. (IPA Service)

How do we know when to eat? A host of sensory and visual cues influence the brain and stomach

By: Alex Johnson

The holiday season is upon us, and with it, opportunities to indulge in festive treats. The proverbial saying “you eat with your eyes first” seems particularly relevant at this time of year.

The science behind eating behaviour, however, reveals that the process of deciding what, when and how much to eat is far more complex than just consuming calories when your body needs fuel. Hunger cues are only part of why people choose to eat.

As a scientist interested in the psychology and biology that drives eating behaviour, I'm fascinated with how the brain's experiences with food shape eating decisions.

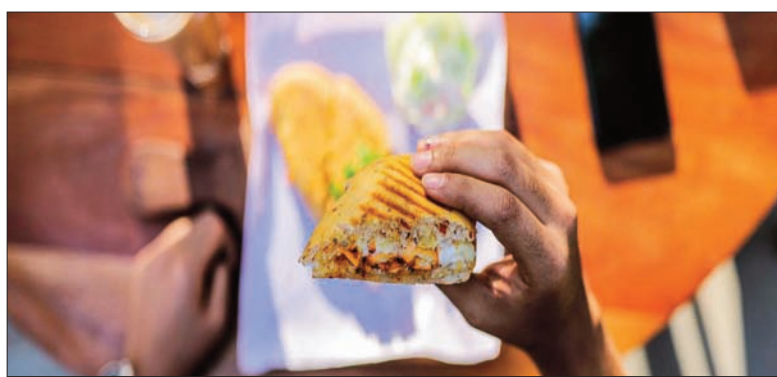
So how do people decide when to eat?

Eating with your eyes
Food-related visual cues can shape feeding behaviours in both people and animals. For example, wrapping food in McDonald's packaging is sufficient to enhance taste preferences across a range of foods – from chicken nuggets to carrots – in young children.

Visual food-related cues, such as presenting a light when food is delivered, can also promote overeating behaviours in animals by overriding energy needs.

In fact, a whole host of sensory stimuli – noises, smells and textures – can be associated with the pleasurable consequences of eating and influence food-related decisions. This is why hearing a catchy radio jingle for a food brand, seeing a television ad for a restaurant or walking by your favourite eatery can shape your decision to consume and sometimes overindulge.

However, your capacity to learn about food-related cues extends beyond just stimuli from the outside world and includes the internal milieu of your body. In other words, you also tend to eat with your stomach in mind, and you do so by using the same learning and brain mechanisms involved in processing food-



related stimuli from the outside world.

These internal signals, also called interoceptive cues, include feelings of hunger and fullness emanating from your gastrointestinal tract. It's no surprise that the signals from your gut help set the stage for when to eat, but the role these signals play is more profound than you might expect.

Trust your gut
Feelings of hunger or fullness act as important interoceptive cues influencing your decision-making around food.

To examine how interoceptive states shape eating behaviours, researchers trained laboratory rats to associate feelings of hunger or satiety with whether they receive food or not.

They did this by giving rats food only when they were hungry or full, such that the rats were forced to recognise those internal cues to calculate whether food would be available or not.

If a rat is trained to expect food only when hungry, it would generally avoid the area where food is available when it feels full because it does not expect to be fed.

However, when rats were injected with a hormone that triggers hunger called ghrelin, they approached the food delivery location more frequently. This suggests that the rats used this artificial state of hunger as an interoceptive cue to predict food delivery and subsequently behaved like they expected food.

Interoceptive states are sufficient to shape feeding behaviours even in the absence of external sensory cues. One particularly striking example comes from mice that have been genetically engineered to be unable to taste food but nevertheless show preferences for specific foods solely by caloric content.

In other words, rodents can use internal cues to shape their food-related decision-making, including when and where to eat and which foods they prefer.

These findings also suggest that feelings of hunger and the detection of nutrients is not restricted to the stomach. They also involve areas of the brain important for regulation and homeostasis, as well as centers of the brain involved in learning and memory, such as the hippocampus.

What happens in vagus
The gut-brain axis, or the biochemical connection between your gut and your brain, shapes feeding behaviours in many ways. One of them involves the vagus nerve, a cranial nerve that helps control the digestive tract, among other things.

The vagus nerve rapidly communicates nutrient information to the brain. Activating the vagus nerve can induce a pleasurable state, such that mice will voluntarily perform a behaviour, such as poking their nose through an open port, to stimulate their vagus nerve. Importantly, mice also learn to prefer foods and places where vagal nerve stimulation occurred.

The vagus nerve plays an essential role in not only communicating digestive signals but also an array of other interoceptive signals that can affect how you feel and behave. In people, vagal nerve stimulation can improve learning and memory and can be used to treat major depression.

Interoceptive awareness
Your body's capacity to use both external and internal cues to regulate how you learn and make decisions about food highlights the impressive processes involved in how you regulate your energy needs.

Poor interoceptive awareness is associated with a range of dysfunctional feeding behaviours, such as eating disorders. For instance, anorexia may result when interoceptive signals, such as feelings of hunger, are unable to trigger the motivation to eat.

Alternatively, the inability to use the feeling of fullness to dampen the rewarding and pleasurable consequences of eating palatable food could result in binge eating.

Your interoceptive signals play an important role in regulating your daily eating patterns. During the holidays, many stressors from the outside world surround eating, such as packed social calendars, pressures to conform and feelings of guilt when overindulging.

At this time, it is particularly important to cultivate a strong connection to your interoceptive signals.

This can help promote intuitive eating and a more holistic approach to your dietary habits. Rather than fixating on external factors and placing conditions on your eating behaviour, enjoy the moment, deliberately savour each bite and provide time for your interoceptive signals to function in the role they are designed to play.

Your brain evolved to sense your current energy needs. By integrating these signals with your experience of your food environment, you can both optimize your energetic needs and enjoy the season. (Courtesy: [Scroll.in](#))

Can ChatGPT play a productive role in science education?

By: Amrit B.L.S.

Hong Kong: It has been nearly a year since ChatGPT exploded into the public consciousness, sparking in equal measure excitement and anxiety about the rise of artificial intelligence (AI).

This is precisely why for most people, AI refers only to large language models like ChatGPT. But even before such models were accessible to the public, AI was ubiquitous in modern lives. Personalised social media feeds, automated spellcheckers and digital voice assistants like Siri are all powered by AI.

Those alarmed by the rise of ChatGPT feared that AI would eat into jobs or be misused to spread disinformation. Proponents of AI branded such people as Luddites.

Since then, opinions have not become any less polarised. This became evident at a recent panel discussion at the Hong Kong Laureate Forum, hosted by the Shaw Foundation. During a talk on the role of AI in science education, some panellists were deeply sceptical that AI indeed had a role at all, while others said it would democratise science.

Despite the polarised reactions, one thing remains common between the two camps: Nobody really knows where AI is headed, even in the near future. Our best bet at prediction, it appears, is through imperfect analogies.

Professor Andrew G. Cohen of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology was of the opinion that ChatGPT would be as disruptive as an electronic calculator. When calculators first became available, he said, many were concerned that it would discourage students from performing arithmetic and mathematical functions.

In the long run, calculators would negatively impact cognitive and problem-solving skills, it was believed.

While this prediction has partially come true, Cohen says the benefits of calculators far outweigh the drawbacks. With mental calculations out of the way, students had the opportunity to engage with more complex mathematical concepts.

What calculators did for arithmetic, large language models can do for language, the professor argued. The interactive nature of AI will allow students to engage with science in a way they have

not been able to so far, he says.

Cohen accepts that ChatGPT is sometimes prone to producing ‘garbage’. But it is for educators to find effective ways to use the tool. He said as an example, educators can ask language models to behave like an 18-year-old science student. This could give them some insights into the kind of questions that a student might ask or which parts of the lecture may be difficult to grasp.

For students, ChatGPT removes judgment, Cohen says. Those students who hesitate to pose questions to their teachers may instead prefer to ask ChatGPT.

Astrophysicist Victoria M. Kaspi agreed with Cohen's view, saying AI's computational skills have made processing big data sets easier. Used for the appropriate purposes, large language models can drive scientific understanding forward, she said.

Even the sceptics have their own imperfect analogies. Professor Reinhard Genzel, the 2020 Physics Nobel winner, compared learning science to learning music. Once a musician spends thousands of hours learning to play an instrument, they ‘feel’ the music rather than ‘play’ the music, he said. Similarly, someone who has spent hours doing mental calculations and problems will find it easier to ‘feel’ science.

Professor Roger D. Blandford of Stanford University felt that the experience of ‘online education’ during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that a human instructor was indispensable to the process of learning.

He added that while ChatGPT allows students to bypass solving some problems, they also lose the ability to learn the system. Solving an integral is not about learning the formula, but learning to adapt, expand and organise, he said. In these matters, a “good book that is thought through and has a logical structure” works much better than AI or ChatGPT, Blandford argued.

Of course, another imperfect analogy that has often been deployed is to compare the rise of AI with the threat of nuclear holocaust at the peak of the Cold War. But as one character in the recent biopic of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the ‘father of the atomic bomb’, says, the genie cannot be put back in the bottle. ChatGPT and other generative models are here to stay. It is for scientists to decide how it will be used. (Courtesy: [The Wire](#))

Holiday weight gain may have long-term impact

By Jeanna D. Smiley

Obesity is an increasingly prevalent and chronic disease, currently the fifth leading cause of death globally. It is strongly associated with type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer.

Research from 2000 suggests that the winter holiday season, beginning from the last week of November to the first or second week of January, can be a time of significant weight gain.

Medical specialists at the Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iasi, Romania surveyed winter holiday dietary patterns. The cultural season is notorious for overconsumption of high-calorie, high-sugar foods, drinks, and alcohol, along with decreased physical activity.

The experts considered psychological factors influencing weight gain during winter holidays and the nutritional makeup of popular festive foods.

They found that most people in the studies they analyzed kept the weight they gained during the holiday season, especially those with obesity. The researchers believe that this systematic review was the first to explore the significance of nutritional patterns during the winter holidays.

They hope that their findings, published in *Nutrients*, can help encourage behaviours linked to long-term success in weight management.

How do the winter holidays impact obesity?

Older research suggested that Americans pick up an average of just under one pound during the holidays. However, research suggests that this gain often does not reverse as seasons change.

The extra weight can amount to more than 50% of the total gained throughout the year. Consequently, holiday excess pounds might contribute to a cycle of gradually increasing weight over a person's lifetime.

Medical News Today discussed this study with Dr. Steven Batash, a board-certified gastroenterologist and leading physician at Batash Endoscopic Weight Loss Center. He was not involved in the research.

When asked about how the holidays can influence obesity, Dr. Batash suggested:

“The holiday season can be stressful and those experiencing stress tend to have higher levels of cortisol, the hormone that's released in response to stress. High cortisol

levels may cause weight gain because of the constant urge to eat.”

The gastroenterologist added that people might have up to 80% higher levels of melatonin during the winter holidays. This hormone is associated with the sleep-wake cycle and increased appetite.

Dr. Batash explained that “[t]his means disrupted sleep can increase appetite, which can cause a higher intake of calorie-dense foods and an increased chance of weight gain.”

What makes it hard to resist overeating during the holidays?

MNT also discussed the study with Kelsey Costa, a registered dietitian and nutrition consultant for the National Coalition on Healthcare. She was not involved in the research.

Costa pointed out that the most significant contributor is the abundance of highly palatable and calorie-dense foods available during this time. These foods are often linked to feelings of comfort and joy, making it difficult for individuals to resist indulging.

Furthermore, the scope of foods presented at workplaces and social gatherings often exceeds the recommended daily calorie intake by up to three times.

The nutritionist reasoned that the shift in dietary habits may be “propelled by a ‘one-last-time to indulge’ attitude” before hopefully adopting healthier habits in the New Year.

Combined with increased sedentary behaviours, these factors can make people more susceptible to weight gain during the holidays.

MNT also spoke with Dr. Nilda Agnes Abellera, the medical director of Infuze MD and The Superhuman Clinic, about this study. She was not involved in this research.

Dr. Abellera agreed that excess sugar and reduced physical activity are the primary drivers of obesity.

She cautioned: “While it's easy to be complacent with exercising, you don't want to be a couch potato and wait until January to start. I've seen some patients with this mentality gain 5–10 pounds between Thanks-

giving and New Year's.”

Systematic review of holiday eating habits

The Grigore T. Popa University team saw an urgent need to develop effective strategies for fighting obesity, which is often difficult to reverse once established. They believed that it is essential to gain an understanding of when people are especially vulnerable to weight gain.

To this end, the researchers performed a systematic search of the literature on eating behaviours and weight gain during the winter holidays.

The studies, published from 2013 to 2023, included only adult participants ages 18 to 65. After screening 216 articles, the researchers

focused on 10 that specifically addressed the topic of interest. Nine of the studies took place in the United States, Spain, or the United Kingdom, while one included participants in the U.S., Germany, and Japan.

A total of 4,627 individuals were included in the studies. Females predominated in six of the studies at 65–60%, while one study enrolled 66–74% males.

In eight of the studies, participants made at least two visits to the study labs to provide data. One study used wireless scales and another used self-weighing to assess weight changes.

Holiday weight gain can have long-term impact

The one multi-national study gathered information on the weight changes of 2,924 people from the U.S., Germany, and Japan over a 12-month period.

The participants in all three countries experienced weight fluctuations during the winter holidays. About half of the weight gained remained until the end of the study, suggesting that holiday-related weight gain can produce long-term effects.

In other studies, the experts observed that people with obesity were more likely to gain weight on vacation than people with normal

weight. Some research showed a positive correlation between eating at restaurants during the holidays and increases in BMI. Obesity linked to more difficulty losing holiday weight gain.

The research team found that typical winter holiday eating patterns have consistently induced weight gain in people with normal or higher BMIs.

Moreover, individuals with obesity gained more weight than those with normal weight, and they had greater difficulty losing the extra pounds after the holiday season.

The researchers concluded that obesity is a “multifaceted condition” that requires continual, multidisciplinary assistance for weight management.

Study strengths and limitations
The study authors said that collecting information on eating patterns during winter vacations was a strong point of their research.

However, their work involved relatively few articles, and the study methods employed varied widely.

The authors mentioned that their focus on “only 10 years” of research might be another limitation.

Furthermore, many experts argue that BMI may not be an accurate determinant of overweight or obesity. The authors faced a paucity of studies on older populations as well.

Tipping the scales
The researchers who conducted this review advise against extreme, unsustainable measures for staying off extra pounds in their paper.

Their review includes several tips for reducing the risk of weight gain during the winter holiday season, including:

- if you are eating multiple meals per day, consider adjusting consumption to smaller portions or only one course of a meal
- opt for a salad in place of an appetizer, or have a cup of coffee or tea instead of dessert
- choose water or sugar-free beverages
- create alternative activities to encourage movement and deflect emphasis on food
- limit screen time and enjoy eating at the table instead of the couch
- check food labels for fat and sugar content
- manage stress through deep breathing exercises, meditation, or sports
- get as much sleep as your body needs
- find an accountability partner for more motivation throughout the holidays and beyond. (Courtesy: [Medical News Today](#))

8 lessons that SRK's 'Dunki' teaches us

By: Abhiraj Jit

Rajkumar Hirani has made a comeback with Shah Rukh as the lead role with his movie *Dunki*. Mostly, it was full of emotions and some humour. Let's explore the things one would get to learn from *Dunki*.

1. The reality of English language
The Indian education system is treating Hindi and other regional languages as inferior languages. Everytime, most people from foreign ask if an Indian can speak English or not. Here, why do someone doesn't question the foreigners staying in India if they can speak regional languages of India?

It's the reality that one is treating English as the language of the Riches. The character Sukhi in the film said perfectly in the video about the English language as a class. Same thing even Hardy said in the movie that Englishmen chages the mindset of Indians that foreigners are inferior.

2. Reality of living in foreign country
The characters Hardy, Mannu and Buggu reach London through the *Dunki* Route where they meet Balli. Here, one of the reality Indians face is the lack of opportunities for Indians. Balli did odd jobs just to make a survival in London. The lavish lifestyle was only in photos but reality was just tough for illegal immigrants. One has to incur living costs which is once again a dark reality.

3. The jobs opportunities in India
Indians need to understand that it's not always important to go to foreign country for jobs. It's high time that Indians education system must change and encourage entrepreneurs in the country. There was a scene where agent was trying to provide fake degrees for Visas but no one encourages quality education. That seen was funny when Buggu was asked about Position of Kidney but that too was a reality scene.

4. The patriotism amongst Indians
Most Indians move out of India just for the lavish lifestyle but the future is in India only. There is just one requirement and that's the creation of job opportunities. Even in London, one has to face challenges of getting Citizenship. A scene was there where Judge asked Hardy and his friends to get asylum and acquire legal citizenship. Here, Hardy rejects asylum and is deported back to India because he can't abuse his country.

5. The Indian festivals
It would be a struggle after illegal immigrants stay in Asylum but they will miss their homes. The importance here is that one should never abuse their country just to make a living in a foreign country. It's high time Indians should be respectful to the country where they are born. Foreigners feel proud when they talk about their country and that's something Indians should have in their mind.

One will miss India if they stay abroad as lifestyle and culture is different which everyone will not appreciate. Indians have a future in India only and not in the foreign country. This is something Hardy's friends witnesses when they stayed in London through asylum but returned back after Hardy brought them back with the help of Boman Irani's character.

6. The priority for the NRIs
Marrying a girl to an NRI doesn't mean she would have a happy life. Here, Sukhi's girlfriend was unhappy when she got married and was sent to London. Those Indians who say that only an NRI would keep a woman happy then there is something called love. Indians must understand that one should judge a man more by his heart and not by his status of NRI. Even an NRI would not keep a woman happy if she doesn't love that NRI.

7. Don't trust a fake agent for a VISA
There are visa scams happening in the countries where agents are making profits. It should be kept in mind that one should stay away from these fake agents. They will take away money but will not give anything in return. Value of money is again something one would get to see in *Dunki*. Fake agents often scam on making London Visas but the reality is that they only want profits.

8. The *Dunki* route
Some people who think going to London or any country is everything then they must watch *Dunki*. There are various challenges one has to encounter while reaching London and one has lost their loved ones in the process. It's important that one should understand the importance of loved ones. Most illegal immigrants loose their lives when going to London through *Dunki* Route. Thanks to Raj Kumar Hirani that he made a film which emphasizes importance of nationalism and the loved ones.

In short, one should feel proud of their country where they are born and where they are raised. No Englishmen would ever call Indians inferior when India will develop and will perform better than develop countries. One should explore other countries too but respect should never be down for the country where one was born and also got raised in a good family. (Courtesy: [Youth Ki Awaaz](#))



New Year's Eve sweeps across the globe, but wars cast a shadow on 2024

WASHINGTON, Jan 1: New Year's Day arrived to cheers from thousands in New York's Times Square where a sparkling crystal ball descended to start 2024 with hope for some, even as the world's ongoing conflicts subdued celebrations and raised security concerns across the globe.

"It's beautiful," Corin Christian of Charlotte, North Carolina, said of the scene seconds past midnight as Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York" blared from speakers in the square and many in the crowd held cell phones in the air, trying to capture the spectacle.

"It's going very well so far," said Jacob Eriksson of Salt Lake City, Utah, with the earliest assessment of the New Year.

The march of midnight from time zone to time zone brought 2024 first to places like Australia, where more than 1 million people watched a pyrotechnic display centered around Sydney's famous Opera House and harbour bridge — a number of spectators equivalent to 1 in 5 of the city's residents. It would be another 16 hours before New York finished 2023.

There were snapshots of joy from country to country as the new year was welcomed with optimism that its days

will bring more joy than sorrow.

Before midnight arrived in Times Square, December Lee, 26, and Shadayah Lawrence, 25, of Columbus, Ohio, said their New York visit highlighted four years of travelling the globe. "It is a good way to bring in the new year," Lee said.

Also in Times Square, Tyrell Jacobs, 27, and Sarah Crayton, 26, arrived from New Orleans 15 hours before midnight and got engaged in streets packed with tens of thousands of people counting first the hours and then the minutes until midnight. "It's definitely a must-see," Crayton said of the colourful cast of strangers

nearby in tall hats and blowing noisemakers even before the ball dropped. "At least go once, you know, just to experience the magic." A small army of thousands of police officers worked to keep New York City safe, just as heightened security had done in the cities midnight hit first. New York has seen near-daily protests sparked by the Israel-Hamas war.

Some 90,000 police and security officers were deployed around France including along Champs-Elysees Avenue, where large crowds took in a multidimensional light show projected onto the Arc de Triomphe showcasing the history of Paris

and sports on the menu for next year's Summer Olympics in the city.

While New Year's Eve concerts were plentiful across America on Sunday night, CNN news personality Anderson Cooper followed a tribute to entertainers who died in 2023 by acknowledging the network's jovial New Year's Eve program with co-host Andy Cohen might also be a sad occasion for some viewers.

"There's a lot of people who feel like they can't celebrate," he said in the final minutes of a year that claimed the lives of Tina Turner, Tony Bennett, Harry Belafonte, Sinéad O'Connor, Jimmy Buffett,

Burt Bacharach and David Crosby, among others. Stunning fireworks displays bloomed at iconic locations like the Acropolis in Athens, Greece; reflected in the sleek glass walls of the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates; and accompanied a collective cheer filling the air in Nairobi, Kenya. China celebrated relatively quietly, with most major cities banning fireworks over safety and pollution concerns. Still, people gathered and performers danced in colourful costumes in Beijing, while a crowd released wish balloons in Chongqing. (AP)

Japan issues tsunami warnings after a series of very strong earthquakes shook its western coastline

The Japan Meteorological Agency reported more than a dozen quakes hitting Ishikawa and nearby prefectures, one of them measuring a preliminary magnitude of 7.4

TOKYO, Jan 1: Japan issued tsunami alerts and ordered evacuations following a series of earthquakes on Monday that started a fire and trapped people under rubble on the west coast of its main island.

The Japan Meteorological Agency reported more than a dozen quakes off the coast of Ishikawa and nearby prefectures shortly after 4 p.m., one of them with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6.

The agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of the island of Honshu, as well as the northernmost of its main islands, Hokkaido.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK TV warned torrents of water could reach as high as 5 meters (16.5 feet) and urged people to flee to high land or the top of a nearby building as quickly as possible.

NHK said the tsunami waves could keep returning, and warnings were continuing to be aired

hours after the initial alert. Several aftershocks also rocked the region.

Government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi said it was critical for people in coastal areas to get away from the oncoming tsunami.

"Every minute counts. Please evacuate to a safe area immediately," he said.

A tsunami of about 3 meters (about 10 feet) high was expected to hit Niigata and other prefectures on the western coast of Japan, and the waves were confirmed to have reached parts of the coastline.

At least six homes were damaged by the quakes, with people trapped inside. A fire has broken out in Wajima city, Ishikawa Prefecture, and electricity is out for more than 30,000 households, Hayashi said.

He said no reports of deaths or injuries had been confirmed, saying the situation was still unclear. Japan's military was taking part in the rescue efforts, he said.

Japanese media footage showed people running through the streets, and red smoke spewing from a fire



in a residential neighborhood. Photos showed a crowd of people, including a woman with a baby on her back, standing by huge cracks that had ripped through the pavement.

Bullet trains in the area were halted. Parts of the highway were also closed, and water pipes had burst, according to NHK. Some cell phone services in the region weren't working.

The Meteorological Agency said in a nationally broadcast news conference that more major quakes could hit the area over the next week, especially in the next two or

three days.

More than a dozen strong quakes had been detected in the region, with risks of setting off landslides and houses collapsing, according to the agency.

Takashi Wakabayashi, a worker at a convenience store in Ishikawa Prefecture, said some items had tumbled from the shelves, but the biggest problem was the huge crowd of people who had shown up to stock up on bottled water, rice balls and bread.

"We have customers at three times the level of usual," he said. Tsunami warnings were also issued

for parts of North Korea and Russia. Russian officials issued a tsunami alert for the island of Sakhalin, warning that areas across the island's west coast could be affected by the waves.

In nearby South Korea, the weather agency urged residents in some eastern coastal towns to watch for possible changes in sea levels. Tsunami waves that hit later can be bigger than the initial ones.

The Japanese government has set up a special emergency center to gather information on the quakes and tsunami and relay them speedily to residents to ensure safety. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters.

He reiterated the warning for immediate evacuation in affected areas. Japan is an extremely quake-prone nation. In March 2011, a major quake and tsunami caused meltdowns at a nuclear plant. Government spokesman Hayashi told reporters that nuclear plants in the affected area had not reported any irregularities on Monday. (AP)

Israel is pulling thousands of troops from Gaza as combat focuses on enclave's main southern city



TEL AVIV, Jan 1: Thousands of Israeli soldiers are being shifted out of the Gaza Strip, the military said on Monday, in the first significant drawdown of troops since the war began as forces continued to bear down on the main city in the southern half of the enclave.

The troop movement could signal that fighting is being scaled back in some areas of Gaza, particularly in the northern half where the military has said it is close to assuming operational control. Israel has been under pressure from its chief ally, the United States, to begin to switch to lower-intensity fighting.

Word of the drawdown came ahead of a visit by Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the region and after the Biden administration bypassed Congress for the second time this month to approve an emergency weapons sale to Israel.

But fierce fighting continued in other areas of Gaza, especially the southern city Khan Younis and central areas of the territory. Israel has pledged to charge ahead until its war aims have been achieved, including dismantling Hamas, which has ruled Gaza for 16 years.

The military said in a statement Monday that five brigades, or several thousand troops, were being taken out of Gaza in the coming weeks for training and rest.

In a briefing Sunday that first announced the troop withdrawal without specifying how many forces were leaving, army spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari did not say whether the decision meant Israel was launching a new phase of the war.

"The objectives of the war require prolonged fighting, and we are preparing accordingly," he said.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas' military and governing capabilities in its war, which was sparked by the militant group's Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, which killed 1,200 people. Roughly 240 people were taken hostage.

Israel responded with a blistering air, ground and sea offensive that has killed more than 21,800 people in Gaza, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its

count. Israel says more than 8,000 militants have been killed, without providing evidence. It blames Hamas for the high civilian death toll, saying the militants ebbed within residential areas, including schools and hospitals.

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.

In Khan Younis, where Israel is believed to have thousands of troops, residents reported airstrikes and shelling in the west and center of the city. The military and the militant group Islamic Jihad reported clashes in the area.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said on X, formerly Twitter, that it transported several dead and injured following a strike late Sunday in Beach Street in Khan Younis. It posted nighttime footage showing medics carrying casualties to ambulances.

Combat was also reported in urban refugee camps in central Gaza, where Israel expanded its offensive last week.

"It's our routine: bombings, massacres and martyrs," said Saeed Moustafa, a Palestinian from the Nuseirat camp. He said he could hear sporadic explosions and gunfire in Nuseirat and in the nearby Bureij and Maghaz camps.

"Just as we speak, there is a big explosion not far from my home," he said in a phone call Monday morning. The military said an airstrike killed Adel Mismah, a regional commander of Hamas' elite Nukhba forces, in the central city of Deir al-Balah.

Hamas fired a large barrage of rockets toward Israel, including at its commercial hub Tel Aviv, as the clock struck midnight on New Year's Eve.

Israel has said the war will last for months. It has argued that it needs time to clear Gaza of militants' weapons and infrastructure and to prevent Hamas from being able to stage more attacks. Israel has resisted international calls for a long-term cease-fire, saying doing so would amount to a victory for Hamas. (AP)

Xi & Biden exchange congratulatory messages on 45th anniversary of China-US ties

BEIJING, Jan 1: Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged his US counterpart Joe Biden to "earnestly implement" the outcomes of their summit in November as they exchanged congratulatory messages on Monday to mark the 45th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The two Presidents met on the sidelines of the APEC summit in San Francisco and agreed to cool down the raging tensions between the top two economies of the world.

In his message, Xi said the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US is a major event in the history of bilateral and international relations.

Over the past 45 years, the China-US relationship has gone through ups and downs and moved forward on the whole, which has not only enhanced the well-being of the two peoples but also promoted world peace, stability and prosperity. Xi was reported as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

History has already proven and will continue to fully prove that mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation are the right way for China and the United States to get along with each other as two major countries, he said. (PTI)

North Korea's Kim says military should 'thoroughly annihilate' US, South Korea if provoked

SEOUL, Jan 1: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his military should "thoroughly annihilate" the United States and South Korea if provoked, state media reported Monday, after he vowed to boost national defense to cope with what he called an unprecedented US-led confrontation.

North Korea has increased its warlike rhetoric in recent months in response to an expansion of US-South Korean military drills. Experts expect Kim will continue to escalate his rhetoric and weapons tests because he likely believes he can use heightened tensions to wrest US concessions if former President Donald Trump wins the US presidential election in November.

In a five-day major ruling party meeting last week, Kim said he will launch three more military spy satellites, produce more nuclear materials and develop attack drones this year in what observers say is an attempt to increase his leverage in future diplomacy with the US.

In a meeting on Sunday with commanding army officers, Kim said it is urgent to sharpen "the treasured sword" to safeguard na-

tional security, an apparent reference to his country's nuclear weapons program. He cited "the US and other hostile forces' military confrontation moves," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim stressed that "our army should deal a deadly blow to thoroughly annihilate them by mobilizing all the toughest means and potentialities without moment's hesitation" if they opt for military confrontation and provocations against North Korea, KCNA said.

In his New Year's Day address Monday, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said he will strengthen his military's preemptive strike, missile defense and retaliatory capabilities in response to the North Korean nuclear threat. "The Republic of Korea is building genuine, lasting peace through strength, not a submissive peace that is dependent on the goodwill of the adversary,"

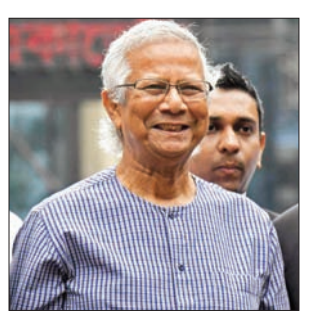
Yoon said, using South Korea's official name. At the party meeting, Kim called South Korea "a hemiclegic malformation and colonial subordinate state" whose society is "tainted by Yankee culture." He said his military must use all available means including nuclear weapons to "suppress the whole territory of South Korea" in the event of a conflict.

South Korea's Defense Ministry warned in response Sunday that if North Korea attempts to use nuclear weapons, South Korea will punish it overwhelmingly, resulting in the end of the Kim government.

KCNA said North Korean officials held talks on Monday to implement an order by Kim to disband or reform organizations handling relations with South Korea to "fundamentally change the principle and direction" of the North's struggle against the South. There was no immediate



Nobel laureate Yunus sentenced to 6 months in jail by Bangladesh court



DHAKA, Jan 1: Bangladesh's Nobel laureate economist Dr Muhammad Yunus was on Monday sentenced to six months in jail by a court on charges of violating the labour laws, a development termed as "politically motivated" by his supporters ahead of the general elections.

The 83-year-old economist won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his anti-poverty campaign, earning Bangladesh the reputation of being the home of microcredit through his Grameen Bank, which he founded in 1983.

Yunus and three of his colleagues in Grameen Telecom--one of the firms he founded--were accused of violating labour laws when they failed to create a workers' welfare fund

in the company.

The Third Labour Court Judge Sheikh Merina Sultana ordered Yunus to serve six months of simple or non-rigorous imprisonment for violating the law as the Grameen Telecom chairman, along with three other executives of the social business company.

"The allegation of violating the Labour Law against him has been proved. It appears that the allegation has not been barred by limitation (either)," the judge said, pronouncing the judgment while Yunus was in the dock.

She also slapped a Taka 25,000 fine (USD 227.82) on each of them, adding that they would have to serve 10 more days in jail in case of a default.

Soon after the judgment was passed, Yunus and the three other executives sought bail, which the judge granted immediately for a month in exchange for a Taka 5,000 bond.

Under the law, all four can appeal against the verdict in the High Court. The verdict comes 7 days ahead of the January 7 general election in Bangladesh. His supporters have described the judgment as

"politically motivated".

Last month, after a court appearance for the hearing, Yunus rejected claims of profiting from Grameen Telecom or any of the more than 50 social business firms he founded in Bangladesh. "They were not for my personal benefit," he told reporters.

His lawyers called the case "meritless, false and ill-motivated" and claimed it was only aimed to harass and humiliate Yunus before the global community. The Nobel laureate is also facing a series of charges relating to labour law and misappropriation of money.

The economist was on a protracted row with the incumbent government due to obscure reasons. The Sheikh Hasina-led administration began a series of investigations against him after coming to power in 2008.

Bangladesh authorities began a review of the statutory Grameen Bank's activities in 2011 and fired Yunus as its founding managing director on charges of violating the government retirement regulations.

Many people believe that Hasina became enraged when Yunus announced he would

form a political party in 2007 when the country was run by a military-backed government, and she was in prison.

However, Yunus did not follow through on the plan but criticised politicians in the country, alleging they were only interested in making money. Hasina's government began a review of the Grameen Bank's activities in 2011 and fired Yunus as its founding managing director on charges of violating government retirement regulations.

He was put on trial in 2013 on charges of receiving money without government permission, including his Nobel Prize award and royalties from a book. Hasina called Yunus a "bloodsucker" and accused him of using force and other means to recover loans from poor rural women as head of Grameen Bank.

He was later granted bail after his court appearance.

After his prolonged efforts to settle disputes with the government, Yunus blasted the government for paving the way for the "destruction" of the pioneering micro-lending bank he founded. (PTI)

Nominations of 22,711 candidates accepted for Pakistan's Feb 8 polls: Election commission

ISLAMABAD, Jan 1: The nominations of 22,711 candidates for the February 8 polls to Pakistan's National Assembly and four of its provincial assemblies have been accepted by the election commission after preliminary review, it emerged on Monday.

According to the data uploaded on the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) website, 7,473 candidates, including 7,028 male and 445 female candidates, submitted their nominations for the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament.

The Returning Officers (ROs) accepted nominations of 6,449 candidates including 6,094 male and 355 female candidates, and rejected the documents of 1,024 candidates, including 934 men and 90 women.

The data on rejected candidates was not provided in detail but jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has claimed that a vast majority of rejections were against its nominated candidates.

Similarly, the ROs approved 16,262 nomination papers for the four provincial assemblies, out of the documents submitted by 18,478 candidates, including 17,670 males and 808 females.

Nomination papers of 2,216 candidates, including 2,081 men and 135 women, failed to get the approval of ROs for provincial assemblies.



Overall, the 22,711 nomination papers for NA and provincial assemblies general seats have been approved, the ECP said, adding that 21,684 of them are men and 1,027 women.

A total of 25,951 papers were submitted, while nomination papers of 3,240 candidates, including 3,015 male candidates and 225 females, were rejected.

The ECP provided that data of accepted candidates after a five-day scrutiny stage which ended on December 30. The rejected candidates can file appeals by January 3 against the decisions of the ROs in the appellate bench of the respective high courts.

The appeals will be decided upon by the ECP's Appellate Tribunal by January 10, followed by subsequent publication of the revised list of candidates on January 11.

PTI chief Imran Khan is among the candidates whose papers have been rejected.

However, leading papers of the leading candidates of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), including Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, Shehbaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari have been accepted.

Affected parties can also challenge accepted nominations and in one such case the acceptance of PML-N chief Sharif's nomination papers from Lahore's constituency NA-130 for the upcoming February 8.

Advocate Ishtiaq Ahmed Samsialvi, who also goes by Ishtiaq Chaudhry, the chief organiser of Pakistan Awami Mahaz's (PAM) lawyers' wing, filed an appeal before the Lahore High Court's appellate tribunal under Section 63 (appeal against scrutiny order) of the Elections Act 2017.

He is also a candidate for NA-130 and challenged the rejection of his nomination papers as well.

In his petition, the PAM leader urged the tribunal to strike down the acceptance of Nawaz's papers as "illegal and unlawful" and that the papers be rejected due to his 2017 disqualification in the Panama Papers case, which the Supreme Court ruled was for

The elections will be held on February 8 and the preparation has been going as per the schedule. The Pakistan army also pledged its support for ensuring peace on the day of elections. (PTI)

NABARD outlines credit potential of ₹ 2484.92 crore for Nagaon & Hojai

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 1: In adherence to the guidelines set forth in the Lead Bank Scheme, Priority Sector Lending - Targets and Classification, and the guidelines for Potential Linked Credit Plans (PLPs), the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has projected a credit potential of ₹ 2484.92 crore for Nagaon and Hojai districts for the fiscal year 2024-25. The PLP for the upcoming year has been meticulously prepared by Rajendar Perna, district development manager (DDM) for Nagaon district.

Since 1989, NABARD has been annually formulating PLPs for districts nationwide, aiming to assess developmental potential, outline crucial functional areas, and identify the support required for overall district development. The PLP for 2024-25 accentuates the importance of augmenting credit flow for capital formation in agriculture and advocates the creation of innovative channels for seamless rural credit delivery in both farm and non-farm sectors.

Notably, the PLP emphasises adaptation and mitigation strategies to promote climate-resilient agriculture, encompassing areas such as millets, floriculture, sericulture, jute, and pearl culture. Rajendar Perna prepared the PLP in



alignment with the priorities outlined by the Government of India, the Government of Assam, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and NABARD. The process involved extensive consultations with the lead district manager (LDM), bankers, and all relevant line departments, under the supervision of Narendra Kr Shah, IAS, DC, Nagaon, and Lachit Kr Das, DC, Hojai.

The PLP for 2024-25 has been

categorised into five sectors: agriculture, MSME, export credit, education and housing, social infrastructure including renewable energy, and others (informal/micro credit). The projected credit potential for the fiscal year is estimated at ₹ 2484.92 crore, with ₹ 1427.14 crore allocated to the agriculture sector, ₹ 783.64 crore for the MSME sector, and ₹ 274.14 crore for all other priority sectors.

The official launch of the PLP

2024-25 for Nagaon (including Hojai) district took place during the District Consultative Committee (DCC) / District Level Review Committee (DLRC) meeting held in the Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office, Nagaon. The district development commissioner, Gunajit Kashyap, officiated the launch in the presence of LDO-RBI K K Singh, LDM, Nagaon, DAO, GM, DIC, Nagaon, among others.

Keshab Mahanta unveils New Year Calendar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 1: On the inaugural day of the new year, Keshab Mahanta, minister of Health & Family Welfare, Information Technology, Science and Technology, Government of Assam, unveiled the calendar crafted by AMTRON for the year 2024. This calendar serves as a tribute to the illustrious 200-year journey of the tea industry in the state, highlighting its rich heritage and significant contributions.

MD AMTRON Narsing Pawar, alongside other AMTRON officials, graced the event, adding to the ceremonial unveiling that commemorates the tea industry's enduring legacy in the region.



Discovery of deceased newborn in Dalgaoon

HT Correspondent

DALGAON, Jan 1: A distressing incident unfolded at Switch Gate (Dongpar) near Botabari under Dalgaoon Police Station on Monday morning as a deceased newborn baby was discovered. Local residents reported finding the baby wrapped in a carton, with the unfortunate news that the newborn had already passed away.

According to eyewitnesses, the baby appeared to be matured, leading to suspicions that an unknown and heartless mother might have discarded the baby after an abortion. The community expressed shock and sorrow at the callous act.

Dalgaoon Police swiftly responded to the information provided, taking custody of the deceased newborn and initiating an investigation into the shocking incident. It is noteworthy that the location where the baby was discovered is a popular picnic spot, attracting a large number of people from various places on the occasion of the new year.

The heart-wrenching discovery of the deceased newborn has cast a shadow over the joyful atmosphere of the region, leaving the community in disbelief and sadness. Authorities are working to uncover the circumstances surrounding this tragic incident and bring clarity to the shocking discovery.

College association expresses dissatisfaction with BTR govt's move

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Jan 1: The All BTR Venture Junior College Association convened a press conference at Kokrajhar on Sunday, expressing dissatisfaction with the BTR government's neglect of Junior Colleges and urging for the provincialisation of venture educational institutions before the upcoming Lok Sabha election in 2024.

In the press meet, the association criticised the BTR government's exclusive focus on higher education while overlooking the vital role played by junior colleges in providing education in underprivileged areas. The association emphasised the need to provincialise venture educational institutions to address the challenges faced by teaching staff in the BTR areas.

Expressing deep dissatisfaction and anguish over the complex provincialisation processes, the association highlighted the deteriorating condition of teaching staff in 15 venture educational institutions due to the norms set by the state government. It stressed that these colleges play a crucial role in educating students from rural areas and provide opportunities for further studies, especially since only a few higher secondary schools and colleges offer higher second-

ary courses in the BTR area.

The association underscored the plight of teaching staff who, having set up junior colleges without proper treatment and support, are suffering from complex diseases. It urged the BTR government to consider the impact of the decision to provincialise ten colleges based on Clause 6.3 of the BTR Agreement, as it has caused confusion and concerns among the teaching staff.

Calling for the provincialisation of the 302 teaching staff in 15 junior colleges before the Lok Sabha Election 2024, the association warned that the delay may negatively impact the upcoming elections. The press conference saw the participation of key figures, including Saneswar Narzary, president of BTR Junior College Association, Indrajit Basumaty, general secretary, and representatives from junior colleges within the BTR area.

While applauding the BTR chief Pramod Boro, CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, and both the BTR and state governments for their decision to provincialise ten colleges based on Clause 6.3 of the BTR Agreement, the association urged swift action to address the concerns of junior college teaching staff and ensure the continued growth of education in the region.

Re-examination for Assam Police personnel

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 1: Following the Body Mass Index (BMI) testing conducted in August 2023, the re-examination phase for 1884 Assam Police personnel categorised as obese (30+ BMI) is scheduled to commence in Guwahati, Silchar, and Jorhat from January 2, 2024. A three-month period has been allotted for these individuals to address their health concerns and improve their fitness levels. This initiative underscores the commitment of the Assam Police to ensure a professional and physically fit police force dedicated to serving the people of Assam.

The Director General of Police (DGP) of Assam Police took to his social media account on X to share the news, stating, "As a follow-up to BMI testing in August 2023, the re-examination of 1884 @assampolice personnel who fell in the Obese category (30+ BMI) would start at Guwahati, Silchar, and Jorhat from January 2nd, 2024. Hope most of them have shaped up in the three-month period given. We remain committed to providing the people of Assam a professional and fit Police Unit."

Devotees flock to temples in Demow

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Jan 1: Residents of Demow and its neighbouring areas embarked on visits to Kali Mandir, Radha Krishna Mandir in Demow, and Shiva Mandir in Sivasagar on Monday, marking the first day of the new year. Seeking blessings from the deities, devotees gathered to express their hopes and prayers for the upcoming year.

With Monday coinciding with the start of the new year, many people also chose to explore various picnic spots in the region, indulging in joyful celebrations. Notably, numerous businesses in Demow remained closed on Monday, contributing to the peaceful atmosphere. The streets of Demow witnessed minimal vehicle movement on this day as people engaged in temple visits and festive activities to kickstart the new year on a positive note.

Tocklai Tea Research Institute introduces revolutionary ergonomic tea harvesting shears

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 1: The Tocklai Tea Research Institute has designed ergonomic organic tea harvesting hand shears in collaboration with a startup company, TNT Associates. An official from the tea research institute mentioned that the shears have been demonstrated to various Small Tea Growers' (STG) groups, whose response was largely favorable. "The shears were designed with ergonomics in mind, featuring good-quality scissors for productivity improvement, leading to lower fatigue after extended use," the official stated.

The shears were designed and fabricated under a state government-sponsored project. The shears are expected to benefit both small tea growers and mainstream ones by being more efficient, ergonomic, and low-maintenance. Here are the important details related to the shears:

The management of tea gardens

is unable to hire enough workers to

pick tea during the peak season.

Due to their inability to harvest the

tea leaves in a timely manner, tea

companies are suffering significant

losses, especially between May

and November, which is the peak

season. The tea firms are exploring

various efficient solutions, and as

a result, the mechanization of tea

leaf harvesting seems unavoidable.

"In Assam, it takes roughly forty

man-hours to harvest one acre of

tea planting. Another socioeconomic

issue has worsened the scenario

mentioned above. Small tea

growers (STG) are being estab-

lished and growing in Assam. The

tea planters of northeast India

wanted such a gadget due to the

manpower shortage and escalating

cost of manpower involved in

manual plucking," explained the

official.

The improvement of existing

hand shears and mechanisation of

selective harvesters for large/small

tea growers have been aimed at the

following objectives: Efficient, er-

gonomic, low fatigue, durable, and

low-maintenance tea harvesting

hand shears; optimisation of tea

leaf harvesting shears for enhanc-

ing fine leaf count or percentage;

to increase gross productivity (in gardens that don't have the infrastructure for mechanised harvesting aids like one-man-operated powered shears).

Based on research trials and discussions with several experienced tea pickers, workers, supervisors, and managers of tea gardens, Tocklai has decided to have the tray on the left side, which was said to be the most comfortable. The sample prototype was made based on certain ergonomics involved in the design of good-quality scissors for productivity improvement, implying low fatigue after extended hours of use. This is based on the ratio of the length of the holding arms to the length of the cutting edge so that less effort is exerted with less fatigue in the shoulders and wrist. The length of the cutting edge and size of the tray can be reviewed only after comparing the performance of our prototypes and the locally made shears. It was decided that the shear plane should be a little above the tea bush (plucking table), which means that the bottom of the tray has to be a little below the shear plane.

The official mentioned that tea leaves were plucked and then transported to the processing facility for further processing. The best tea is produced using just one bud and the following two leaves. In Assam, female employees are mostly responsible for picking tea. A skilled plucker can pick 20 to 24 kg of green tea leaves each day, according to observations.

He added that the primary input component in the tea industry is the cost of labour. However, the pay for labourers in tea gardens was not very great, and the issue of a labour shortage has worsened recently. A lack of workers is adversely affecting the harvesting of tea, as younger members of the tea community, who have greater education and better employment possibilities in other fields, are migrating. The need for labour is growing daily due to the construction of new tiny tea plantations, yet there is no new source of labour supply, the official explained.

The tea gardens' management is unable to hire enough workers to pick tea during the peak season, leading to significant losses. The tea firms are exploring numerous efficient solutions, and as a result, the mechanisation of tea leaf harvesting seems unavoidable. "In Assam, it takes roughly forty man-hours to harvest one acre of tea planting. Another socioeconomic issue has worsened the scenario mentioned above. Small tea growers (STG) are being established and growing in Assam. The tea planters of northeast India wanted such a gadget due to the manpower shortage and escalating cost of manpower involved in manual plucking," said the official.

Improvement of existing hand shears and mechanization of selective harvesters for large/small tea growers have been aimed at various objectives, including efficient, ergonomic, low fatigue, durable, and low-maintenance tea harvesting hand shears. Optimisation of tea leaf harvesting shears for enhancing fine leaf count or percentage and increasing gross productivity in gardens without the infrastructure for mechanised harvesting aids like one-man-operated powered shears.

Based on research trials and discussions with experienced tea pickers, workers, supervisors, and managers of tea gardens, Tocklai has decided to place the tray on the left side, known to be the most comfortable. The sample prototype was made based on certain ergonomics involved in the design of good-quality scissors for productivity improvement, implying low fatigue after extended hours of use. This is based on the ratio of the length of the holding arms to the length of the cutting edge, allowing less effort with less fatigue in the shoulders and wrist. The length of the cutting edge and size of the tray can be reviewed only after comparing the performance of our prototypes and locally made shears. It was decided that the shear plane should be a little above the tea bush (plucking table), meaning the bottom of the tray has to be a little below the shear plane.

ALOK celebrates 37th anniversary in Nagsankar



HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 1: In celebration of its 37th anniversary, ALOK, a socio-cultural, literary, and eco-friendly organisation in the greater Nagsankar area, organised a lively drawing competition at the Nagsankar Mandir premises. The event drew enthusiastic participation from 112 competitors representing various educational institutions in Jamugurihat, Sootea, Biswanath, and the Nagsankar area.

The drawing competition, conducted in three categories, showcased the artistic talents of the participants. In category A, Kabyam Ojha secured the first prize, followed by Nabaneel Bora in second place, and Nandini Devi in third place. Smita Hazarika received a consolation award. Moving to category B, Mriganki Hazarika claimed the first prize, Anvesha Nath secured the second position, and Bhargav Kakaty came in third. Swikriti Sarma received the consolation prize.

In category C, the first prize was jointly awarded to Rishi Tamuli and Barnil Barua. The drawing competition not only provided a platform for artistic expression but also fostered a sense of community and celebration.

The prize distribution ceremony took place in the conference hall of the Nagsankar Mandir, presided over by Narayan Hazarika, the president of ALOK. The event was graced by the presence of Hitesh Barua, ZPC member, along with Baneswar Bora, Ghana Orang, and Putul Bora, among others. The proceedings were efficiently conducted by Padmeswar Saikia.

ALOK continues to play a vital role in promoting cultural and artistic endeavours in the region, contributing to the vibrant and dynamic community spirit in the Nagsankar area.

Historic Siva-doul draws thousands on new year's day

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 1: The three-century-old Siva-doul in Sivasagar witnessed a massive influx of devotees and revelers on the first day of the year 2024. Drawing thousands of visitors, the historic site became a focal point for celebrations. Given that the first day of the year fell on a Monday, a day considered sacred for Lord Siva devotees, people from various parts of the state gathered at the Siva-Devi-Bisnu-doul campus from the early hours. Many devotees sought the blessings of Lord Siva for universal peace, prosperity, and happiness among their families and friends. A tradition has developed among some families to visit Lord Siva's temple on New Year's Day, finding inner strength to face life's challenges and gaining something to share with the needy. Barnalee Khatuwar, ADC, Sivasagar, speaking on behalf of the administration, extended New Year wishes to all visitors and assured them of necessary assistance. Sivasagar has evolved into a prominent tourist destination, with historic relics attracting thousands of domestic tourists on the first day of the new year. In addition to Siva-doul and Sivasagar Borphukhuri, various other attractions, such as Jaysagar Pukhuri, Rudra Singha Park, Rudrasagar, Gaurisagar, Athaisagar, Karenggarh, Ranggarh, and the Ahom era natural zoo Pabu-garh, experienced a surge in visitors. Picturesque locations like Desangmukh, Didingmukh, and Sarguwa near the Panidihing Bird Sanctuary also drew hundreds of visitors on this day of celebration.

Satra Mukti Sangram Samiti welcomes ULFA Peace Accord

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Jan 1: The Satra Mukti Sangram Samiti expressed a warm welcome to the 'peace accord' signed between the pro-talks faction of ULFA and the Union government on December 30. Rahul Chetry, the general secretary of the Satra Mukti Sangram Samiti Central Committee, an umbrella organisation of Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, lauded the agreement, emphasising that its benefits should solely be directed towards the people of the state.

Chetry underscored the importance of keeping the peace agreement free from political entanglements. He highlighted that the sacrifices made by thousands of Assam youth who joined ULFA should be honoured, as many have laid down their lives for the motherland. Chetry also highlighted the challenges faced by surrendered ULFA cadres awaiting final verdicts in court.

Addressing the pro-talks faction of ULFA present during the peace agreement, Chetry reminded them of the innocent lives lost due to their actions, affecting families who lost mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, wives, and children. He urged that the peace accord should not be politicised, and its benefits must reach the people of Assam.

Chetry affirmed that Satra Mukti Sangram Samiti would vigilantly monitor the implementation of the peace agreement, ensuring that it doesn't go to waste and genuinely contributes to a lasting peace in the region.

Union minister Sonowal interacts with elderly residents in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Jan 1: Sarbananda Sonowal, the Union minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush, chose to spend the first day of the new year in the company of the elderly residents of Dibrugarh. Visiting the 'Pratyabartan', an old age home, Sonowal engaged in meaningful interactions with the residents, seeking their blessings for the year ahead.

Accompanied by Prashanta Phukan, the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Dibrugarh, Sonowal interacted with the residents of the old age home, fostering a sense of connection and understanding.

Expressing his sentiments after the visit, Sonowal acknowledged the impact of the guidance and warmth he received from the elderly. He emphasised that their blessings and advice have consistently played a guiding role in his life. Wishing them a happy New Year, he also paid his respects to the residents and extended prayers for their health and longevity.



He stated, "The blessings, affection, and advice have always guided me in my life. The warmth of their company has been a

constant source of inspiration. After receiving their blessings, I extended my heartfelt New Year wishes, paid my re-

spects, and prayed for their health and longevity."

Acknowledging the dedicated efforts of those involved with the 'Pratyabartan' shelter home, Sonowal commended their continuous support for the elderly, homeless, or helpless individuals. Following this visit, the Union minister paid a visit to his native village, Mulukgaon, where he paid homage at the sepulcher of his parents.

In a thoughtful reflection, Sonowal shared that while his parents may not be physically present, he has preserved the rich value system, purpose, and sense of life instilled by their constant education.

Minister Sonowal said, "Although my parents are not here physically, I have preserved the rich value system, purpose, and sense of life instilled by their constant guidance. Today, I bowed down in front of them, seeking their blessings as I remain committed to working towards nation-building and the upliftment and enrichment of my community."

Nagaland welcomes 2024 with prayers for early solution to Naga pol imbroglio

Centre has been negotiating on Naga issue with NSCN-IM since 1997, WC NNPGS since 2017

KOHHIMA, Jan 1: Nagaland on Monday welcomed 2024 with special prayers for an early resolution to the decades old Naga political issue for peace and progress of the state. Special prayer services were held in churches across the Christian state, firecrackers were burst on the eve of New Year which was ushered in at midnight by ringing of bells. Many groups and organisations also were engaged in picnics and outings welcoming the New Year. Convener of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR), Rev Wati Aier hoped that the negotiating parties of the Naga political talks, the Centre and Naga groups will arrive at a consensus for a solution to the issue. FNR has played a significant role in bringing about reconciliation between the warring Naga groups since 2008.

Replying to media queries on the recent talks held in Kohima not making any progress, Rev Aier, the founder of FNR expressed optimism that the issue can be solved without delay. "I don't think there is a deadlock but just that they (the Centre and the Naga groups) might be going through a difficult time... The process is not simple but difficult as there are hurdles. We should not be discouraged," said Rev Aier.

The Naga political issue is considered to be among the longest in the country and the Cen-



tre has been holding separate negotiations with NSCN-IM since 1997 and the Working Committee, Naga National Political Groups (WC NNPGS) since 2017. Eight years have passed since the signing of the 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 of NNPGS. As of now there is no significant development in the political negotiations between the Centre and Naga groups. 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 Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and

Nagaland besides neighbouring Myanmar. The WC of NNPGS on the other hand has expressed its willingness to accept whatever is granted by the Centre for now and continue with the talks. In a latest development three Naga nationalist groups, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) led by Akato Chophy, NSCN-K led by Khango Konyak and Naga National Council (NNC) led by Z Royim have come together and decided to pursue the negotiations with the Centre in the New Year.

Nagaland Governor La Ganesan, chief minister Neiphiu Rio and other leaders of the state have extended New Year greetings to the people. "Welcoming 2024 with hearts full of hope for a joyous and prosperous year ahead. May the New Year usher in peace, progress, and happiness to all the people of our beautiful state. Here's to a new beginning for a wonderful journey that lies ahead of us," Ganesan posted on X.

"Time to renew our hope, faith and resilience, as a #NewYear dawns. May we make the most of all that we are blessed with and forge ahead into the New Year with renewed vigour. May we be blessed with progress, unity and success in all our endeavours. #HappyNewYear2024," wrote Rio. (PTI)

1 arrested, heroin worth ₹ 6 croret seized in Meghalaya



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 1: The Meghalaya police has arrested a drug trafficker and seized heroin worth ₹ 6 crores at Khliehriat in the East Jaintia Hills district in Meghalaya. The Meghalaya police had conducted a raid at Khliehriat and seized the huge amount of narcotics. A swift desire car was also seized from his possession.

Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma said on X, "Kudos to @Irbishnoipis and the entire @MeghalayaPolice for a triumphant start to 2024! Their remarkable effort led to the seizure of Heroin worth ₹ 6 Crores at

Khliehriat under @ejhpolice from a hardcore interstate drug trafficker along with a swift desire car. Further investigation is on."

The chief minister also said that his government and the Meghalaya police is determined to root out the menace of drugs from the state. He said that stringent action will be taken against those dealing in such items.

"As we embark on this new year, our steadfast determination against drugs remains unshaken. Let's forge ahead unitedly to realize the vision of a #Drugs-FreeMeghalaya," Sangma further said on X.

Colleges, KVKs, research stations under AAU go paperless

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 1: The nine colleges, 23 Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVKs) and 11 research stations (6 Regional Agricultural Research Stations and 5 Commodity Research Stations) under the Assam Agricultural University (AAU) spread across the state, has gone 100 per cent paperless from Monday.

AAU vice-chancellor, Bidyut Chandan Deka said that the educational institution was the first varsity in Assam and perhaps in the northeastern region to become 100 per cent paperless in carrying out all its official works, which he stated would fast-track the process of file movement and also contribute towards environment-friendly initiative.

Deka said, "The decision is in line with the government policy of switching over to paperless mode from manual system in doing all official activities to fast-track movement of files and reduce the time period significantly and bring in more transparency."

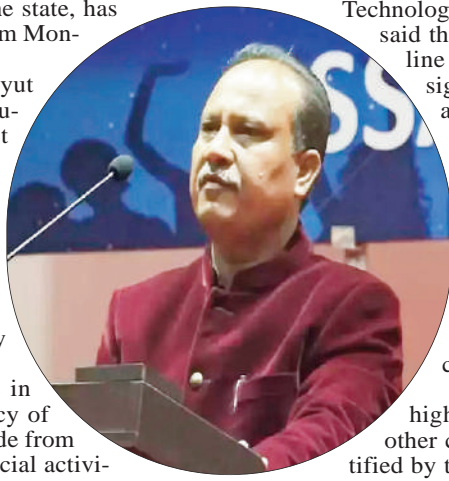
The vice-chancellor stated that from now onwards of-

icial process for a task that earlier took a month's time could be completed within a week or 10 days' period.

Stating that the entire system has been developed in-house by a team of dedicated team of experts of the Agricultural Knowledge Management and Information Technology (AKMIT) cell of the university, Deka said that file movement could be tracked online in the varsity's portal and no manual signatures of officials would be required as it would be digitally generated.

The vice-chancellor said, "The admission process to various undergraduate and post-graduate and PhD programmes and declaration of results of all examinations of the varsity has already gone on online mode in recent times under the academic management system of the AAU. The university altogether runs hundreds of courses in various levels."

Deka also informed that recently 10 high-yielding varieties of rice seeds and other crops developed by AAU has been notified by the Central Variety Release Committee under the Union ministry of agriculture and farmers' welfare. He said that six varieties were of rice, one of green gram, one of field pea, one of foxtail millet and one of finger millet.



Should Naga Christians support Central govt: Congress leader

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 1: As the New Year 2024 sets in, senior Congress leader and former Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee president K Therie questioned the Christian community in Nagaland whether they should continue to support the BJP government at the centre, alleging that the present government's 'outray' since it took over the rein in 2014 has been to 'eliminate the Christians from India'.

Extending his New Year greetings, Therie said India is changing towards a Hindu state and that the socialist and secular principles have been removed from the Constitution of India.

"We also have witnessed that the religious divide has become a reality in India. Religious projects are now projected as national programmes, spending taxpayers' money," the former Nagaland minister said.

Alleging that the Christians in the cow belts are no longer safe to identify themselves as Christians, Therie said to galvanize Hindutva in the Northeast, the Kuki-Zo issue in Manipur is also a process of eliminating Christianity in the nation.

He said the RSS/BJP have chosen Manipur because of the political and religious dominant position of the Meiteis who are mostly Hindus.

"The plan is not sudden but well pre-conceived and organized," he said. Therie further alleged that the BJP government in Manipur had allowed Arambai Teggol and Meitei Leepu, the two Meitei organisations, to loot more than 10,000 sophisticated arms and over six lakh ammunition to finish the Christians. "They have the support of the government. They have burnt 29 villages to ashes and destroyed over 350 churches," he said.

Therie also said 96 bodies of Christians are still lying in the mortuary while the Christians living in the Manipur Valley have lost material properties and dwellings to live in.

"The Prime Minister of India had not shown any concern in eight months. He is standing adamant looking sideways in Manipur. He is the modern Nebuchadnezzar. There were only three Christians who defied his order," he added.

Meghalaya activists take midnight dip to welcome New Year

SHILLONG, Jan 1: Activists in Meghalaya welcomed 2024 by diving into a pool of water filled with one ton of ice blocks, resolving to fight social ills that plague the state.

A total of 26 people, including four women, dived into the Crinoline swimming pool in Shillong at midnight keeping up with the tradition that has been continuing for 26 years.

Former students' activist Michael Syiem, who is the convener of the Mait Shaphrang Movement, has been at the forefront of organising the event for years.

"The midnight dip is a sober celebration which has more to do with determination and strengthening of the inner self to face the challenges of life," he said. A similar custom of midnight swim to welcome the New Year is also prevalent in Ar-

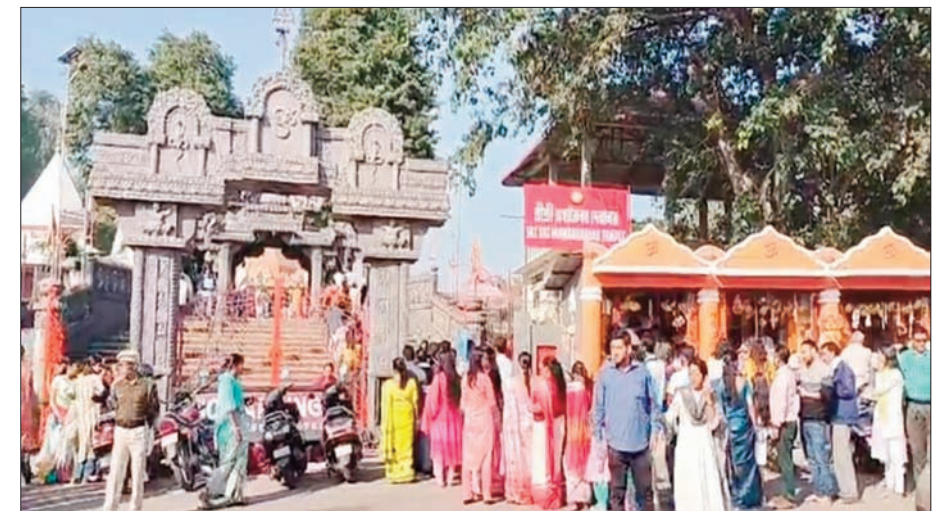
gentina and some parts of Russia, participants said. Meanwhile, as part of the Cherry Blossom Festival, American rapper Sean Kingston performed at the Polo grounds with revellers dancing to the beats till early morning.

Meanwhile, Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma extended greetings to the people of the state on the occasion.

"May we begin 2024 with a renewed commitment to promoting peace, prosperity and progress," he said.

Meghalaya Governor Phagu Chauhan said, "As we step into the New Year, let us bid adieu to the trials of the past and extend a cordial welcome to the opportunities that lie ahead. May the new year be adorned with moments of joy, growth and collective achievements." (PTI)

People throng picnic sites, religious places in Sonitpur on New Year



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Jan 1: Tezpur wore a festive look on Monday as a large number of people, especially families, thronged the historic Mahabhairab temple, Bhairabi temple, Ketekeswar Dewalay, Ganesh temple at Ganesh Ghat area among other religious places seeking the blessings of Gods and Goddesses.

Many also visited different picnic spots to celebrate the New Year. There are a good number of picnic spots in and around Tezpur town, including Bhomoraguri, Besseria area, Rudrapad, Dipota, bank of Gabharu River, Singri Chuti Pahar, Bhalukpong, Nameri, bank of the Jia Bharali river etc.

For the last few years, it has been witnessed that people from far-flung areas come to these spots for enjoy a picnic during the New Year. The first day of 2024 was also no exception, as a large

number of people were seen thronging these naturally enriched and scenic places. The major places of attraction within Tezpur town, like the Agnigarh Park, Cole Park (Chitralakha Udyan), Ouguri Hill, Bhairabi Mandir, Devi Singh Ghat, Garhdoul, Dalimi Pahar, Bishnurabha samadhi kshetra, Da-Parbatia stone gate of Gupta era maintained by the Tezpur Environment Society, have all the necessary modern facilities for the visitors with lush green playground for children. Meanwhile, a section of visitors have urged authorities concerned to take necessary measures to maintain these places of attraction to the utmost satisfaction of the visitors as some of the picnic parties or the visitors makes the city filthy by throwing plastic bags, polythene, used water bottles, wastage etc. Tezpur has been accorded the status of one of the cleanest cities in the country for its beauty and cleanliness

1 dead in accident in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 1: One man died in Jorhat on Monday after meeting with an accident on Sunday.

The deceased has been identified as Jayanta Bora (40). He was a resident of Tillikiaam Kalagaon in the Jorhat district.

According to sources, Bora had met with an accident on Sunday at Panichokiwa in Jorhat when he lost control over the two-wheeler that he was riding and crashed his vehicle on a road divider. He sustained serious injuries on his head. Locals soon rushed him to a hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries early in the morning on Sunday.

Body recovered in Gossaigaon

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Jan 1: Tension prevailed at the Sagunhara village in Gossaigaon in Kokrajhar district following the recovery of an unidentified body of a woman in the night on Sunday.

According to sources, the local people of Sagunhara village discovered the body of the woman and informed the Bhawraguri Police Station. A team of police officials reached the spot and sent the body to the Kokrajhar Civil Hospital for autopsy. The actual reason behind the death is yet to be ascertained as the autopsy report is being awaited. However, police have started preliminary investigations into the case.

Mizoram CM greets public on New Year

AIZWAL, Jan 1: Chief minister Lalduhoma greeted people on the occasion of New Year on Monday, which was celebrated with fervour and enthusiasm across Mizoram.

People offered prayers at churches and took part in congregational singing, while community feasts will be held the next day.

Defying prohibitory orders, many also burst firecrackers to welcome the New Year.

Chief minister Lalduhoma greeted people on the occasion. "Happy New Year 2024! May this year bring you prosperity, good health, and countless moments of joy. Cheers to a fresh start and new opportunities!" the CM said in a post on X.

With New Year celebrations generally being a two-day affair in Christian-majority Mizoram, most churches, including the Presbyterian Church and Baptist Church, dedicated the first day to worship service, thanksgiving and prayers, and will hold community feasts on Tuesday. In some local churches, New Year celebrations continue for over a week. Midnight mass was held in all churches and people of all hues participated in it. Defying a government ban on firecrackers to ensure peaceful and pollution-free celebrations, many burst firecrackers and displayed fireworks as the clock struck 12.

Police said no untoward incident was reported during New Year celebrations. (PTI)

Arunachal: Rajendra Prasad promoted as executive director of NHPC's 2000 MW SLHEP

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 1: Engineer Rajendra Prasad has been promoted to Executive Director of NHPC's 2000MW Subansiri Lower Hydroelectric Project (SLHEP) being built on the Subansiri River in Arunachal Pradesh.

He took charge of his new position on Monday (January 1, 2024).

A graduate in Civil Engineering, Prasad has over 32 years of vast experience at NHPC in all aspects of the development of a hydro-project from concept to commissioning.

He has rendered his services in some of the prestigious projects of NHPC like Chamera, Dulhasti, Kishanganga, and Salal Power Station besides Chamkharchhu and Mangdechhu Projects in Bhutan.



Before joining Subansiri Lower Project as Group General Manager on 1st November 2023, Rajendra Prasad rendered his service as the Head of Project of Kiru and Kirthai-II Project of Chenab Valley Power Projects (P) Ltd which is a joint venture between NHPC and J&K Government.

On the first day at the office as Executive Director, Prasad conveyed New Year's best wishes to the employees and other stakeholders of this prestigious project.

Agartala Book Fair to begin on Feb 21

The Agartala Book fair is second largest in North-east in terms of footfall, sale proceeds

AGARTALA, Jan 1: The 42nd Agartala Book Fair 2024 will be inaugurated by Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on February 21.

The two-week-long book fair will be held at the Hapania International Fair Ground in Agartala.

"The 42nd Agartala Book Fair 2024 is set to be inaugurated by chief minister Manik Saha on February 21 at Hapania International Fair Ground. February 21 is also the International Mother Language Day", state information and cultural affairs department secretary P K Chakravarty told PTI.

Chakravarty said the chief minister who presided over a preparatory meeting on the



book fair on December 30, underlined the need to buy quality books penned by local writers and publishers.

"We are hoping a good number of publishers from outside the state and also from Bangladesh will join the book fair. The govern-

ment will render all possible help to the publishers coming from outside the state", the secretary said.

The Agartala Book fair is the second largest in the northeast in terms of footfall and sale proceeds after Guwahati Book fair. (PTI)

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'Stop weaponising technology': Cong slams govt over Aadhaar-based system in MGNREGA payments

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: With an Aadhaar-based system reportedly becoming mandatory for MGNREGA payments, the Congress on Monday said the Modi government should "stop weaponising technology", especially Aadhaar, to deny the most vulnerable Indians their social welfare benefits.

The opposition party also condemned it and alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "well-known disdain for MGNREGA has translated into a slew of experiments designed to use technology as a weapon to exclude".

In a statement, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the fifth extension of the deadline set by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) to mandate the payments for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) through the Aadhaar-based Payment System (ABPS) ended on December 31, 2023.

"There are in total 25.69 crore MGNREGA workers of whom 14.33 crore are considered as active workers. As on December 27, 34.8 per cent of total registered workers (8.9 crore) and 12.7 per cent of active workers (1.8 crore) are still ineligible for ABPS," Ramesh said.

Despite many challenges highlighted by workers, practitioners and researchers in using ABPS for MGNREGA wage payments, the Modi government has continued



with its "destructive experiments with technology", he said. "This is prime minister's cruel new year gift to exclude crores of the poorest and marginalised Indians from earning a basic income," he alleged.

Ramesh pointed out that a statement issued by the MoRD dated August 30, 2023, made certain questionable claims such as job cards will not be deleted on the basis that the worker is not eligible for ABPS and that different "stakeholders" in certain "consultations" have found ABPS as the best route for making wage payment.

It also claimed that ABPS helps workers get their wage on time and avoids transaction rejections, Ramesh noted.

"First, since April 2022, an

alarming 7.6 crore registered workers were deleted from the system. 1.9 crore registered workers were deleted from the system nine months into the current financial year. Ground verification of deleted workers has shown that a significant number of deletions have been wrongfully done -- as a result of the tearing hurry of the Modi government to implement Aadhaar authentication and ABPS," he alleged. Ramesh said the ministry must clarify who these "stakeholders" were and when these consultations were held.

"In fact, the Modi government has turned a deaf ear to the multiple concerns from numerous delegations on the implementation of ABPS and other technological interventions," he claimed.

"The MoRD's claims regarding the increase in payment efficiency with the ABPS, which remain unsubstantiated, have been thoroughly debunked by a LibTech India working paper. The study analysed 3.2 crore wage transactions to demonstrate that there is no statistically significant difference in the time taken to process account and Aadhaar based payments by the Union government," he said. The working paper also shows that the difference in rejection rates between ABPS and the account-based payments is statistically negligible, he added.

"The PM's well-known disdain for MGNREGA has translated into a slew of experiments designed to use technology as a weapon to exclude -- such as the digital attendance (NMMS), ABPS, drone monitoring and the proposed integration of facial recognition to NMMS," Ramesh alleged.

No due consultation or scientific piloting was done before unleashing these experiments on crores of Indians, he claimed.

"The Indian National Congress reiterates its demand of August 30, 2023, that the Modi government should stop weaponising technology, especially Aadhaar to deny the most vulnerable Indians their social welfare benefits, release delayed wage payments and implement open muster rolls and social audits to improve transparency," Ramesh said in his statement. (PTI)

TMC Foundation Day: Mamata tells party workers to resist evil



KOLKATA, Jan 1: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday congratulated TMC workers on the occasion of the party's foundation day, emphasising a steadfast commitment to resist any evil force and persist in the ongoing struggle to safeguard the democratic rights of the people.

Speaking on the significance of TMC's formation on January 1, 1998, Banerjee highlighted the party's inception as a manifestation of conviction to honour the motherland, uphold state interests, and champion the protection of democratic rights for the masses. "I humbly honour and respect the dedication and self-sacrifices of each worker and supporter of our party. Today, the TMC family is blessed with the love and affection of all," she said in a statement on X.

Banerjee pledged to persist in her fight for the country's common people.

"It is on the strength of your unflinching support that we shall continue to fight for everyone in this great democratic country. No surrender to any evil force. In defiance of all terror we will continue our lifelong struggles for the common people of our country," she wrote in a post on X. Emerging from Congress in 1998, TMC rose to power after two unsuccessful attempts in 2001 and 2006 by defeating the Left Front regime in 2011, fuelled by widespread public discontent against the communists. Banerjee, a key figure in West Bengal politics, led TMC to a resounding victory in the 2021 assembly elections, securing her position as chief minister for the third consecutive term. (PTI)

Decline in terrorism in J&K but it hasn't been wiped out: DGP

JAMMU, Jan 1: Jammu and Kashmir Police chief R R Swain on Monday said there has been a decline in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir but it has not been completely wiped out, and asked his men to work towards peace so voters and candidates can take part in elections without fear.

In his New Year message to police officials, Swain said the challenge for 2024 is not to let the dismantled terror ecosystem "take roots or resurface even marginally in any form".

The Supreme Court recently directed the Centre to hold the long-awaited assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir by September 30 this year. Urban local bodies and panchayats in the union territory have completed their five-year terms.

In his five-page message, the director general of police (DGP) said, "We need to be fully prepared to ensure a peaceful environment... where ordinary young men and women without pedigree but committed to transparent governance and well-being of their electorate feel free to vote as voters and compete with each other to be voted to power as candidates without the fear of the lurking gun of the separatists and the soft separatists used through the hapless terrorists."

He said the peaceful environment is a prerequisite for investments, employment generation and establishment of new enterprises.

"Notwithstanding the progress made, let me remind



you all that there is no room for complacency. We still face challenges. Terrorism is down but not completely wiped out. We just cannot afford to lower the guard.

"The enemy is and will continue to try different tactics to derail peace. We have to defeat any such move before it takes root," Swain said.

He said while there has to be zero tolerance towards any activity or person posing a threat to the peace and stability of the country and safety of the local communities, "we have to show real empathy and compassion for our fellow peace-loving citizens".

"Till yesterday, the challenge was to dismantle the terror ecosystem in which significant progress has been achieved, and now, the new challenge is not to let it take roots or re-surface even marginally in any form," he added.

Swain said the force also faces challenges of drug menace and narco-terrorism.

"It is a security threat as well as a social evil. We need to work relentlessly to uproot it. We owe it to the society that J&K police shall keep our fu-

ture generations free from this menace," he said.

Swain also talked about the challenge posed by artificial intelligence (AI) warfare and warned that the threat is going to get stronger in the near future.

"So, while we continue to improve upon the traditional methods and practices of maintaining peace as well as counter-terrorism efforts, we need to keep honing our skills in technology and AI-backed policing with an urgency," he said.

Lauding the role of the police force, the DGP said over 1,600 police personnel have made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty in the past three decades of terrorism.

"This proud professional force has given enormous sacrifices to get J&K out of the clutches of sponsored terrorism and ensure an enabling environment for fostering peace and development," he said.

He said Jammu and Kashmir Police is a unique police force in the country as it has the "onerous" responsibility of maintaining law and order on the streets and battling terrorists with and without guns.

Swain also hailed the force for playing a lead role in realising the vision of 'Naya Kashmir' as envisaged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The DGP said police personnel and their families faced pressures in the past from "bulies and goons working secretly on behalf of the terrorist and secessionist networks". (PTI)

Outsiders can't buy land in U'khand till panel on land laws submits report

DEHRADUN, Jan 1: District Magistrates in Uttarakhand have been asked not to clear any proposal from outsiders to buy land in the state for the purpose of agriculture or horticulture till the submission of the report of the committee on land laws of the state.

An order to this effect was issued to all DMs on Sunday on the instructions of chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami.

It has been decided in public interest that till the submission of the report of the Land Law Committee or till further orders, the District Magistrates will not have the final say in granting permission to proposals from persons outside Uttarakhand to purchase land for the purpose of agriculture and horticulture in the state, an official re-

lease here said.

Dhami held a high-level meeting on Sunday to discuss the issue and directed officials that a detailed public hearing should be conducted by the committee to review land laws of the state in which people and experts from various fields should be heard.

According to an amendment made in 2004 in Section 154 of the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari and Land System Act 1950, persons who are not holders of immovable property in the state of Uttarakhand before September 12, 2003, are allowed to purchase land for the purpose of agriculture and horticulture from the District Magistrate.

A drafting committee has been constituted by the state government for preparing new land laws

for the state.

Earlier also, the chief minister had ordered background verification of buyers from outside before they purchase land in the state.

The draft should be prepared expeditiously by the committee on the basis of suggestions from experts and people from different walks of life, Dhami said.

All decisions are being taken by the state government in the interest of the state. The government will continuously work in accordance with the sentiments of the people of the state and their interest which is paramount, he said.

There were protests in various districts of the state recently in which demands were raised for making stricter laws for outsiders to buy land in the state. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

CM announces installation

Sualkuchi, Baihata Chariali, Jagiroad etc. Moreover, seamless states of the art charging facilities have been integrated for efficient operations of the buses at Runagar, Betkuchi, Mirza, Baihata Chariali, Jagiroad. "Moreover, e-vehicles will also be introduced in public transport and therefore, state government is giving government subsidy to expedite introduction of electric vehicles across the segment," the statement added.

The chief minister also said that if private parties come forward in setting up charging stations, Government will provide adequate support in such ventures. He also called upon every stakeholder to help the government's concerted efforts to the gradual phasing out of fossil fuel driven vehicles from Guwahati.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is not only leading the nation but also the world in increasing the use of green energy by 500 giga watt by 2030 and reducing the carbon emission by one billion tonne, the chief minister said that government is working very astutely to bring down carbon emission to zero by 2070. "The present state government is taking a lot of measures to curb environmental pollution which will start giving results within 4-5 years," he added.

Later, Sarma at the same programme also launched National Mobility Card following which Assam has become the country's third state to adopt this Rupay Powered Card which would offer customers seamless access to various transport modes. The chief minister on the occasion also sought blessings from the people of state to help the ministers and government officers and enable them to dedicate themselves to the service of the people of Assam.

Cabinet members of the state council of ministers Atul Bora, Chandra Mohan Patowary, Keshab Mahanta, Pijush Hazarika, Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Ajanta Neog, Parimal Suklabaidya, Ashok Singhal, UG Brahma, Jogen Mohan, Dr Ranoj Pegu, Jayanta Mallabaruah, Nandita Garlosa, MP Queen Oja, Pabitra Margherita, Chairman ASTC Mission Ranjan Das, chief secretary Paban Kumar Borthakur and a host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Assam cabinet extends

1,194 indigenous families in a total of 16 districts. "Land to be settled in favor of 1,194 indigenous, landless families in Tinsukia, Lakhimpur, Darrang, Sonitpur, Dhemaji, Biswanath, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Kamrup(M), Kamrup, Morigaon, Dhubri, Karimganj, Barpeta, and Bajali districts in both urban and rural areas under Mission Basundhara 2.0," Sarma added.

The cabinet also decided that VGR/PGR land is to be de-reserved, and an equivalent quantum of land is to be reserved as VGR/PGR.

"33 landless indigenous families to be settled on de-reserved VGR/PGR land," Sarma avowed.

India asks Pakistan to release

India has urged Pakistan to expedite necessary action at its end to confirm the nationality status of 65 believed-to-be Pakistani prisoners, including fishermen, whose repatriation is pending for want of nationality confirmation from Pakistan," it said. The MEA said as a result of sustained efforts by the government, 2,639 Indian fishermen and 67 Indian civilian prisoners have been repatriated from Pakistan since 2014. This includes 478 Indian fishermen and nine Indian civilian prisoners who were repatriated from Pakistan in 2023, it said. (PTI)

Foundation stone laid

"The flyover on its completion would aid in seamless and smooth traffic movement in the city for the next 25 years," he stated. Sarma exuded confidence, adding that the government shall take all measures possible to minimize inconveniences to the members of the general public during the period of construction of the flyover.

Stating that the aim is to complete the construction activities within a period of 2 years and 6 months, Sarma said apart from easing traffic woes, the flyover would also provide a boost to the business establishments along the Dighalipukhuri to Noonmati stretch of road by providing the much-needed parking spaces that would be available below the flyover.

Indicating the state government's commitments towards incorporating eco-friendly measures in policy-making, the chief minister said there will be a departure from the earlier practice of felling of trees and instead, focus will be on using technologies such as transplanting or relocating of trees for the construction of the flyover. Referring to the massive public infrastructure development projects currently at various stages of development or are scheduled to be launched, Sarma said all such initiatives collectively would transform Guwahati into a city that would be comparable to some of the highly urbanized cities in the rest of the country.

"A stretch of the ongoing river-front development project on the south bank of the mighty Brahmaputra River in Guwahati shall be ceremonially opened for the public on coming January 19," Sarma said.

He further added that it would immensely boost the city's tourism potential.

As per Sarma, the "Chief Judicial Magistrate" section of the project shall be completed within a period of six months. "The Kamakhya corridor development project, on its completion, would contribute significantly towards religious tourism and pilgrimage," he said. He further informed that the works on the upcoming ropeway project connecting Kamakhya Railway Station with the Kamakhya Temple shall begin very soon.

"On coming February 28, the stretch of the new bridge over river Brahmaputra connecting Bhoothath with Machkhona will be inaugurated," he further added. Sarma exuded confidence this would greatly reduce traffic congestion currently observed near Bharalumukh, adding, "Initiative to provide water supply to another 13,000 households will be launched today itself. A total of 200 electric buses have also been flagged off for the public this morning."

Tougher international student

being brought by students, which is contributing to unsustainable levels of migration," said UK Minister for Legal Migration and the Border Tom Pursglove. "We are completely committed to seeing a decisive cut in migration. The action implemented today to restrict bringing dependants on the student visa route allows us to better protect our public services while supporting the economy by allowing the students who contribute the most to keep coming here. This is part of a series of measures which together will see 300,000 fewer people coming to the UK compared to last year," he said. The Home Office said the changes to student visas strike the "right balance" to continue to preserve the attractiveness of the UK's world-leading higher education sector while removing the ability for institutions to undermine the UK's reputation by "selling immigration, not education".

It said the government will work with universities to design an "alternative approach" for the brightest and the best to bring dependants to the UK's world-leading universities while continuing to reduce net migration.

The Prime Minister Rishi Sunak-led UK government has committed to bring down levels of migration, both legal and illegal, into the country. Last month, Cleverly announced a further set of measures including tightening health and care visas by stopping overseas care workers from bringing dependants and requiring care firms in England to be regulated by the Care Quality Commission to sponsor visas.

Salary thresholds across the Skilled Worker route will also be increased by nearly 50 per cent to GBP 38,700, a figure to be matched for British or permanent UK residents sponsoring family members to join them in the UK by early next year. Meanwhile, the independent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) will be commissioned to review the Graduate route or post-study work visa. In the student visa category, Indian nationals represent the largest group of students granted leave to remain on this route, making up 43 per cent of grants. Diaspora student groups have expressed widespread concerns over this proposed review of the route, which allows for post-study work experience and is the topmost factor behind students from India choosing UK universities.

"This package of measures, taken in addition to the measures on student dependants, means that around 300,000 people who came to the UK last year would not be able to in the future -- the largest reduction ever. This is a tough but fair approach to bring net migration down to sustainable levels as soon as possible, while ensuring those affected have ample time to prepare for upcoming changes -- with the package being introduced gradually throughout early 2024," the Home Office said. (PTI)

CJI Chandrachud refuses

"We are a free society." "We have a Constitution which protects the right to the freedom of speech and expression. And therefore people are entitled to exercise their right to freedom of speech and expression. To criticise, to criticise, to appreciate..." he said. Writing the judgement for himself and Justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant, CJI Chandrachud had ruled that Article 370 was a temporary provision and the President of India was empowered to revoke it in the absence of the Constituent Assembly of the erstwhile state whose term expired in 1957.

"Article 370 of the Constitution read together with Article 1 leaves no manner of doubt that the integration of Jammu and Kashmir as a part of the nation, which in itself was a Union of States, was complete. Any interpretation of Article 370 cannot postulate that the integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India was temporary," the court had held. Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul (now retired) and Sanjiv Khanna, who were part of the five-judge bench, had penned separate but concurring verdicts on the issue. The apex court had also upheld the validity of the union government's decision to carve out the union territory of Ladakh from the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. (PTI)

Gujarat welcomes 2024 with 'Surya Namaskar' Guinness world record; PM hails feat

AHMEDABAD, Jan 1: Gujarat set a Guinness World Record on Monday after more than 50,000 people performed 'Surya Namaskar' simultaneously at 108 venues, earning praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi who said the state "welcomed 2024 with a remarkable feat". Surya Namaskar or sun salutation is an ancient Yogic practice of paying respect to the rising sun and comprises different postures or Asanas. As per the state government's release, Gujarat's name has been registered in the 'Guinness World Records' on the very first day of 2024 for the largest number of people, performing 'Surya Namaskar' simultaneously at 108 venues.

More than 50,000 people took part in the statewide event, the release informed.

The main event was organised in the presence of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel at Modhera Sun Temple in Mehsana district, the release said.

"Gujarat welcomed 2024 with a remarkable feat - setting a Guinness World Record for the most people performing Surya Namaskar simultaneously at 108 venues! As we all know, the number 108 holds a special significance in our culture. The venues also include the iconic Modhera Sun Temple, where several people joined," the PM said in his post on 'X', formerly Twitter.

"This is indeed a true testament to our commitment to Yoga and our cultural heritage. I also urge you all to make Surya Namaskar a



part of your daily routine. The benefits are immense," the Prime Minister further said.

While addressing a gathering outside Modhera Sun Temple, Patel said people have now become aware of their health and have adopted Yoga and Surya Namaskar for a healthy life, said the release. The ancient practice of Yoga, Pranayam and Surya Namaskar not only helps a person attain good health through exercise but it also connects an individual with spirituality, the release quoted Patel as saying.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah too hailed the achievement.

Taking to 'X', he also posted a few pictures of people performing 'Surya Namaskar' in Gujarat.

"Our culture is our pride. Proud women and men in Gujarat welcomed 2024 by performing Surya Namaskar at 108 venues and set a Guinness World Record for the same.

"Every proud nationalist felt the joy of seeing venues like the Modhera Sun Temple beaming with the zest of the Surya Namaskar performers. Let this event be the pedestal for a pledge to practice Yoga every day and live a healthy life," Shah said. (PTI)

Vijay's 68th film titled 'The Greatest of All Time'



CHENNAI, Jan 1: Leo star Vijay's 68th film is titled 'The Greatest of All Time', the makers have announced.

The upcoming Tamil movie is directed by Venkat Prabhu and produced by Archana Kalpathi of AGS Entertainment.

Vijay shared the title announcement on his X page on New Year's Eve.

The tagline on the poster of 'The Greatest of All Time' reads: "Light can devour the darkness but darkness cannot consume the light."

According to the first look, Vijay will star in a dual role.

Prashanth, Prabhudheva, Sneha, Laila, Meenakshi Chaudhary, Mohan, Jayaram, Ajmal Ameer and Yogi Babu also round out the cast of the much-anticipated film. (PTI)

Korean actor Cho Yeo-jeong remembers late 'Parasite' co-star Lee Sun-kyun in New Year's post

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: "Parasite" actor Cho Yeo-jeong paid tribute to Lee Sun-kyun in the New Year, remembering her late co-star as "a warm and good" artist. Bong Joon-ho's "Parasite" was a stinging satire on class divides in South Korea and etched history in 2020 when it became the first non-English film to win an Academy Award for best picture. It also bagged three more Oscars, including best director trophy for Bong.

Cho played Choi Yeon-gyo, the Park family matriarch, opposite Lee, who essayed the role of Park Dong-ik, the Park family head, in the genre-defying movie.

The actor shared a throwback

selfie on Instagram on Monday with Lee and other "Parasite" co-stars Choi Woo-shik and Park Myung-hoon from an awards show. "I will never forget the honour of being together (with you). I will never forget (your) cheerfulness of always making everyone smile. I will be a warm and good actor like you. I'll embrace a new year that is not pleasant. I'll try to do well," she wrote in the caption.

Lee, 48, was found dead last Wednesday in Seoul by South Korean authorities following a report that he had gone missing.

The actor had faced investigation over accusations of illegal drug use amid a government

crackdown in which police questioned him three times, with one session running 19 hours over the weekend.

Lee had said he was tricked into taking drugs by a bar hostess trying to blackmail him, the Yonhap news agency reported.

The actor is also known for Korean films such as "Helpless" and "All About My Wife" as well as K-dramas "Coffee Prince" and "My Mister".

Lee was nominated for best actor International Emmy for his titular role in Apple TV+'s first Korean-language original series "Mr Brain". Earlier, popular Korean actors like Kim Go-eun, Lee Je-hoon and Kim Nam-gil also paid homage to Lee. (PTI)



George R R Martin has three animated 'Game of Thrones' series in works



LOS ANGELES, Jan 1: "Game of Thrones" author George R R Martin has shared with fans that he has three animated projects, set in the world of "A Song of Ice & Fire", currently under various stages of development with HBO.

The 75-year-old writer, in his new blog post, shared his love for Netflix's animated series "Blue Eye Samurai" and then pivoted to share updates on the new shows.

"As it happens, HBO and I have our own animated projects, set in the world of A SONG OF ICE & FIRE. None of them have been greenlit yet, but I think we are getting close to taking the next step with a couple of them," Martin shared, adding they began with four ideas for animated show but two of them currently stand shelved.

He, however, hoped that the projects will find a life as "nothing is ever dead for good in Hollywood".

The storyline for the two spin off projects is still under wraps.

Talking about the third show in the development, Martin wrote, "Work on the other two animated projects continues apace, however... and meanwhile, we have moved NINE VOYAGES, our series about the legendary voyages of the Sea Snake, over from live action to animation. A move I support fully."

The writer said "budgetary constraints" would likely have made a live action version expensive as half of the show is set at sea.

"So we now have three animated projects underway... Will any of them make it to air? happen? No way to know. Nothing is certain in Hollywood. But if it does happen, with one or two or all three shows, I hope we can make them as good as gorgeous and gripping as BLUE EYE SAMURAI. We will for d*** sure try," the famous writer said.

Martin's books in the "Game of Thrones" series became the basis for HBO's mega hit show that spanned for eight seasons and he is also the creative mind behind "House of the Dragon", a show set 200 years before the events of "Game of Thrones".

The second season of the "House of Dragon" will premiere this summer. (PTI)

Prabhas thanks fans for making 'Salaar: Part One - Ceasefire' a big success

HYDERABAD, Jan 1: Actor Prabhas on Monday wished his fans a happy new year and thanked them for showering love on his latest release "Salaar: Part One - Ceasefire". Directed by Prashanth Neel, "Salaar: Part One - Ceasefire" hit the screens on December 22. Also starring Prithviraj Sukumaran, the film has grossed over Rs 500 crore worldwide at the box office. Set in the fictional dystopian city-state of Khansaar, "Salaar: Part One - Ceasefire" follows the friendship between Deva (Prabhas), a tribesman, and Varadha (Prithviraj), the prince of Khansaar. Prabhas shared his

New Year message on Instagram. "While I decide the fate of Khansaar, you all sit back and have a fantastic New Year darlings! Thank you for owning #SalaarCeaseFire and making it a big success," the "Baahubali" star wrote.

According to production banner Hombale Films, the movie earned Rs 178.7 crore on day one, registering the record for the best opening figures for any Indian title in 2023. Shruti Haasan, Eshwari Rao, Jagapathi Babu and Sriya Reddy also round out the cast of the film, which was released in Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi. (PTI)



Jeremy Renner to resume work on 'Mayor of Kingstown' S3



LOS ANGELES, Jan 1: Actor Jeremy Renner is set to head back to the set of "Mayor of Kingstown" season three, a year after he was injured in a near-fatal snow plough accident. Last week, the 52-year-old actor had hinted at his return to the show after he shared an "Instagram Story" with his co-star Emma Laird. As he continues to recover, Renner spoke with Andy Cohen and Anderson Cooper during their CNN New Year's Eve special. "It's been a wonderfully busy year. I think I'm ready and I think I'm strong enough. I literally go back in a week," he said about going back to work on the third season of "Mayor of Kingstown".

The "Marvel" star also said he had a lot to celebrate this year. "I'm so blessed that I had so many things to live for. I have a giant family and a 10-year-old daughter. I would have disap-

pointed and messed up a lot of people's lives if I passed. There's a lot for me to fight for. Recovery is a one-way road in my mind. I still work hard every day," he added. Renner had suffered an accident in January after a snow plough ran him over as he was trying to save his nephew from getting run over himself. Renner broke over 30 bones in the accident, which required major rehabilitation.

"Mayor of Kingstown" follows the McLusky family, power brokers in Kingstown, Michigan, where the business of incarceration is the only thriving industry. In the "Paramount+" series, Renner plays Mike McLusky, who acts as a liaison between criminals, prison guards and police. The show's second season premiered on the streamer on January 15, two weeks after Renner's accident. (PTI)

HINDI MOVIES TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2024

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: Hindi movie fans have a lot to look forward to in the new year which offers a range of movies, including big-budget spectacle cinema that led the way in 2023.

Here are some of the most anticipated releases of the year: 1. **Merry Christmas:** Katrina Kaif and Vijay Sethupathi star in this mystery thriller that marks the return of master-storyteller Sriram Raghavan after the national award-winning "Andhadhun" in 2016. The film's trailer has already generated a lot of buzz amongst the thriller lovers for its intriguing plot set around Christmas. The film releases on January 12.

Fighter: Director Siddharth Anand is looking to replicate the mega success of "Pathaan" with his new film that draws on similar themes of patriotism and heroism through "Fighter", starring Hrithik Roshan, the star of his previous hits "Bang Bang" and "War". The film, also featuring Deepika Padukone and Anil Kapoor, hits the screens on January 25, the day "Pathaan" completes one year.

Chandu Champion: Kartik Aryan's "Chandu Champion" is an extraordinary real-life story of a sportsman and his spirit of never giving up. For the first time, Kartik has teamed up with director Kabir Khan. Also starring Katrina Kaif and Shradha Kapoor, the film is expected to be released in June 2024.

Pushpa - The Rule: If there's one film that the audience is looking forward to



most in 2024, it's Allu Arjun-starrer "Pushpa: The Rule". Given the hype created by the blockbuster "Pushpa: The Rise", this film, also starring Rashmika Mandanna and Fahadh Faasil, is sure to take the box office by storm. The film is scheduled to be released on August 15, 2024.

Singham Again: Director Rohit Shetty will be back with his hit cop universe "Singham Again" on Independence Day 2024. A multi-starrer including Ajay Devgn, Kareena Kapoor, Deepika Padukone, Akshay Kumar, Tiger Shroff and Ranveer Singh, the third instalment of the blockbuster franchise is one of the most-awaited films of 2024.

Also, it will be very interesting to see Arjun Kapoor as the antagonist in the

movie.

Kalki 2898 AD: "Kalki 2898 AD" has been in the news ever since it was announced. Helmed by Nag Ashwin, this sci-fi dystopian drama film is said to be a desi version of "Dune". With Amitabh Bachchan, Kamal Haasan, Prabhas, Deepika Padukone, Dulquer Salmaan and Saswata Chatterjee in crucial roles, this film is making all the right noise.

Emergency: Kangana Ranaut didn't have a great 2023. But then, the first look of her new film, "Emergency" where she will be seen essaying the character of late PM Indira Gandhi, has garnered enough attention. Her first solo directorial also stars Anupam Kher, Mahima Chaudhry, Vishak Nair and Shreyas Talpade in pivotal roles. (PTI)

India made the most of the favourable home conditions in the one-off Test

Harmanpreet's form with bat in focus as India looks to salvage pride in final ODI against Australia

MUMBAI, Jan 1: Captain Harmanpreet Kaur's form with the bat will be in focus as the Indian Women's team looks to salvage pride and end a nine-match losing streak at home against a dominant Australia in the third and final ODI here on Tuesday.

Kaur has led her side admirably well in a long home season with a couple of historic results in the Tests, but this period has also witnessed her struggle with the bat. She has scored runs in double digits only thrice in eight innings across formats this season with her highest being 49 against England in the one-off Test last month.

In the historic win against Australia in the one-off Test, Kaur was out for a duck in India's first innings and she was not required to bat in the second essay. In the two ODIs against Australia who have taken an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series, her scores were 9 and 5.

While India made the most of the favourable home conditions in the one-off Test, the home team's frailties have come to the fore again in white-ball cricket in the last two ODIs.

If India were ordinary with the ball in the first ODI wherein they lost by six wickets even after posting their highest-ever total of 282



for 8 in the format, Kaur's side dropped as many as seven catches in the second game, as Australia get away with a three-run win.

At the same time, Richa Ghosh's heroics in the second ODI -- 96 off 113 balls (13 fours) in a stiff chase -- and Jemimah Rodrigues' consistency (82 and 44) have delivered the goods with the bat for India.

Ghosh is India's new find in No. 3 and to have an aggressive batter in the top order gives the hosts a lot

of firepower.

Pressure will be on the likes of Amanjot Kaur and Deepti Sharma, who could not finish the game for India despite the equation being almost run-a-ball in the second ODI.

The cliched old adage of 'catches win matches' came to the fore again after India dropped at least seven chances, and head coach Amol Muzumdar admitted after the game that Kaur's team remains a work in progress.

India's defeat by six wickets in the first ODI and narrowly by three runs in the second extended their plight at home against Australia, whom they have not beaten even once in the 50-over format in the last 16 years since February 2007.

Muzumdar had also confirmed that Sneha Rana would be available for the final ODI after missing the second half of the last game due to a collision with Pooja Vastrakar. India will host the 2025 Women's

50-over World Cup and with the core of the squad already determined, the task hereon would be to improve in all departments, particularly fielding.

Australia, on their part, would be keen on putting a better show in the field after dropping a few regulation chances in the last match, while big runs are awaited from skipper Alyssa Healy.

Healy has been scoring in double-digit figures consistently but a big score has deserted her so far, while Australia will expect further fireworks from both Phoebe Litchfield and Ellyse Perry who have hit fifties in both the ODIs.

The Teams (From):

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque, Renuka Singh Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Pooja Vastrakar, Sneha Rana, Harleen Deol.

Australia: Alyssa Healy (c & wk), Darcie Brown, Heather Graham, Ashleigh Gardner, Kim Garth, Jess Jonassen, Alana King, Phoebe Litchfield, Tahlia McGrath, Beth Mooney (wk), Ellyse Perry, Megan Schutt, Annabel Sutherland, Georgia Wareham.

Match starts at 1:30pm IST. (PTI)

Warner announces ODI retirement ahead of swansong Test at SCG



SYDNEY, Jan 1: Batting stalwart David Warner on Monday announced his retirement from ODI cricket alongside the end of his Test career here this week but he will continue to play T20 cricket for Australia.

The 37-year-old swashbuckling opener, however, kept the door open for himself to be available for the 2025 Champions Trophy if the Australian team needs him.

Ahead of his swansong Test at his hometown venue SCG, Warner revealed that Australia's World Cup final victory over India in November was his last match in the 50-over format.

"I'm definitely retiring from one-day cricket as well. That was something that I had said through the (50-over) World Cup (in India in 2023), get through that, and winning it in India, I think that's a massive achievement," he said at a press conference at the SCG on Monday.

"So I'll make that decision today, to retire from those forms, which does allow me to go and play some other leagues around the world and sort of get the one-day team moving forward a little bit," said an emotional Warner.

"I know there's a Champions Trophy coming up. If I'm playing decent cricket in two years' time and I'm around and they need someone, I'm going to be available."

Considered as one of Australia's and world's most destructive batters

in recent times, Warner ended his one-day career as a two-time world champion after finishing the 2023 World Cup in India as his team's leading run scorer.

The left-handed opener made his ODI debut in 2009 in a match against South Africa in Hobart. Since then, he has played 161 ODIs, scoring 6932 runs at an average of 45.30 with the help of 22 hundreds and 33 fifties.

He is Australia's sixth-highest run-scorer in men's ODIs and second on the hundreds list behind Ricky Ponting who played 205 more ODI innings than Warner.

In the 111 Tests he has played so far, Warner has scored 8695 runs at an average of 44.58 with 26 hundreds and 36 fifties.

He will continue to be available for Australia in T20 cricket and is hopeful of featuring in their World Cup campaign in that format in June in the Caribbean and USA.

After the ODI World Cup in India, Warner had hinted at pushing on until 2027 although he will have been 41 by then. He said that the way the team had rebounded in India made it the ideal finishing point. Warner holds an IPL contract with the Delhi Capitals and he could be one of the most sought after cricketers on the domestic T20 circuit.

"I definitely am keen to pursue playing Big Bash next year. There's going to be conversations behind the scenes to allow me to do that," he said. (PTI)

Steve Waugh slams SA for naming depleted squad, ICC for not caring about Test cricket

SYDNEY, Jan 1: Former Australia skipper Steve Waugh has slammed the International Cricket Council and top cricket boards, including the BCCI, for not caring about Test cricket after South Africa named a depleted red-ball squad for the tour of New Zealand, prioritising its T20 league over the longest format.

Cricket South Africa (CSA) have named a second-string Test squad which has seven uncapped players, including a new captain, for next month's two-Test series against New Zealand. The top South African cricketers are contracted to play in the second season of the SA20, the T20 league launched by CSA and Indian Premier League investors, which clashes with the tour. According to a CSA ruling, no player contracted to SA20 franchises is eligible for selection for the Tests.

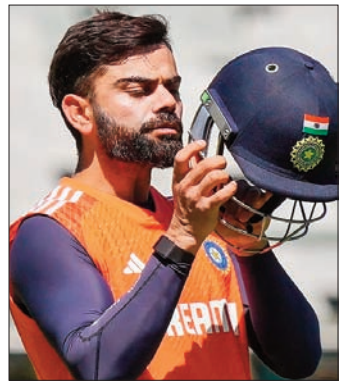
"Obviously, they don't care. It's going to happen if the South African cricket board are any indication of the future, keeping their best players at home," Waugh told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"If I was New Zealand, I wouldn't even play the series. I don't know why they're even playing. Why would you when it shows a lack of respect for New Zealand cricket?"

Initially, Waugh had taken to Instagram to raise his concern.

"Is this a defining moment in the death of Test cricket? Surely the ICC along (with) the cricket boards of India, England and Australia must step in to protect the purest form of the game. (PTI)

Kohli's simulation for Burger, Iyer faces short ball barrage



CAPE TOWN, Jan 1: Virat Kohli looked a million dollars as he did extensive simulation for South Africa's left-arm pacer Nandre Burger but Shreyas Iyer's problems seemed to continue while facing a barrage of short balls at nets here on Monday.

On the New Year's Day, it was business as usual for Kohli, who had an extended session lasting close to an hour. First, he was at the centre nets against bowlers and then he faced high-intensity throw-downs for about 20 to 25 minutes at outside nets.

Kohli is known to come to nets with specific purpose and on Monday, it seemed he wanted to extensively bat against a left-arm pacer.

Since the Indian team's pace bowling roster doesn't include a left-armed, a net bowler was summoned and Kohli faced a good 25 to 30 deliveries from him in between playing against Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, R Ashwin and Avesh Khan.

Kohli was repeatedly seen putting in a big stride forward and at times walking a couple of steps to whip the bowler through mid wicket.

However, the only problem here was that the youngster provided by Cricket South Africa (CSA) was at least 15 clicks lesser in terms of pace compared to Burger, who took seven wickets on debut in the opening Test at Centurion.

The net bowler's lack of pace allowed Kohli to read the inswing and then walk down a couple of steps to flick him through mid wicket.

In match situations, Kohli won't get so much time to come on the front foot.

A six off Ashwin was majestic and the way he played Bumrah, with so much time at his disposal, was a treat.

Iyer's shortcoming:

Shreyas Iyer's weakness against short ball is well documented. But the Mumbaier wasn't amused one bit when the question cropped up during the ODI World Cup at home.

However, the Centurion Test once again exposed his shortcomings against bounce.

He continues to have serious issues while facing anything that's remotely above his waist line. He looked iffy while batting and as Nuwan Senaviratne, the Sri Lankan left-arm side-armed, bowled one from 18 yards, Iyer reacted late while trying to pull the delivery and was hit on the fleshy part of the stomach. (PTI)

I've moved on from lifetime captaincy ban, enjoyed IPL leadership stints: Warner

SYDNEY, Jan 1: The controversy surrounding the lifetime captaincy ban on David Warner following the 2018 ball-tampering scandal could have been handled differently but he has moved on from that episode, the retiring batting stalwart said here on Monday.

Warner was handed a lifetime leadership ban after team-mate Cameron Bancroft was caught with sandpaper in his trouser pocket and Australia admitted to ball-tampering during the Cape Town Test against South Africa in 2018.

Among the three cricketers who were punished -- captain Steve Smith and Bancroft being the other two --, Warner got the harshest punishment.

Following an amendment to Cricket Australia's Code of Conduct for players and staff in 2022, the left-handed batter was to appeal against the ban but later decided not to do so as he apparently found out that the review panel hearing was to be done in public.

"When I look back at that, it can be handled differently. But I think Nick (Hockley, Cricket Australia's chief executive) did his ultimate best to put that forward to the board and the decision was made, and I'm happy with that. I've moved forward from that," Warner said after he announced his retirement from ODI cricket alongside the end of his Test career this week.

Warner was asked if he still held



any bitterness over the lifetime leadership ban and the way Cricket Australia handled the review into that.

The 37-year-old swashbuckling opener has already announced that he will retire from the longest format after the third and final Test against Pakistan starting at the SCG on Wednesday.

Warner, who has led Sunrisers Hyderabad and Delhi Capitals in the IPL, said he enjoyed his leadership stints in the lucrative T20 league.

"I've got opportunities to lead in the IPL, to lead in the ILT20. I've enjoyed my leadership roles."

"But for me, in recent years, I've learned that leadership (isn't about) wearing a captain or vice-captain badges. For me, I'm a leader in this team no matter what. You don't need that C or VC next to your

name.

"I know myself and my energy at times can be annoying, and I can be a pest, but I know that inside that changeroom it gets everyone up and about."

Asked what he had learnt from the ball-tampering scandal, he said, "...Reflecting back on that whole period, my whole career, I've got no regrets because you are going to have a lot of hurdles you are going to have to jump."

"There's going to be obstacles in the way, but you have to move forward and I've done that with dignity."

Warner also revealed that he was prepared to retire from Test cricket after the second match of the 2023 Ashes series at Lord's if he had not scored runs. The selectors initially named the Ashes squad only for the opening two Tests, and Warner was struggling for form then.

"I actually had Lord's pencilled in as my last Test, especially if I didn't go as well as I did in a partnership with 'Uzzie' (Usman Khawaja) at the top of the order. Then from there, it just followed on that we played some good innings together. I didn't have that hundred (in England) that I always wanted but always eluded me in achieving. But as a team and as a whole we did our bit."

"To get this ending is awesome, but it's not about me, it's about us. We've won the series (against Pakistan) but to win 3-0 and have a

whitewash here at the SCG would be a great thing for the team. We can't take away the fact of how well this team has been (playing) in the last 18 months."

About the 50-over World Cup triumph in India, he said, "To win in India, from where we were, was absolutely amazing. Everything's just so calm and relaxed inside the team. We back ourselves to train to the best of our ability and then go out there and perform."

"There's never any added pressure. When we lost two games in a row in India (in the World Cup), the bond just got stronger with each other. It's not by fluke or by chance that we were able to get to where we were."

He said he does not have any wishes that he could have done anything different because he has given it his best.

"A boy from a housing commission having a dream. I've not always fitted the mould, but I've been authentic and honest. I've played the exact same way. Someone who has gone out there and just given it his all," he said when asked how he would want to be remembered.

He picked the 2014 Test series with against South Africa as his favourite moment of his career, besides the Ashes triumphs.

His 100 in a session at the SCG against Pakistan in 2017 and the 335 not out -- also against Pakistan -- in 2019 were Warner's favourite innings. (PTI)

Rabada has competed in 61 matches, is just 13 scalps away from completing 300 Test wickets

Great hip and shoulder rotation makes Rabada special bowler: Donald

CAPE TOWN, Jan 1: Kagiso Rabada's hunger for success and an impeccable technique to release the ball easily makes him a modern-day South Africa legend, reckons former fast bowling great Allan Donald.

Explaining what makes Rabada special, Donald said Rabada's hip-rotation is like a javelin thrower and that adds pace to his bowling. Donald said Rabada's bowling style is similar to the past legends of the game.

The 28-year-old, who has competed in 61 matches, is just 13 scalps away from completing 300 Test wickets.

"Skill is one thing but he has an got amazing ability to run the ball away. He has got some amazing wickets with stunning balls in the first Test match," Donald, who is now an acclaimed pace bowling coach, told PTI in an interview.

In the series-opener, Rabada took seven wickets, including a five-wicket haul in the first Indian innings at Centurion.

"He was outstanding to watch as he always is and I just think his thirst for success drives his consistency. Anyone who gets success, doesn't matter what sport he plays, is judged by consistency," said Donald, who is now attached with Cricket South Africa academy.



"If you look at Dale Steyn, he brought that thirst for consistency for himself and KG is no different as he is such a hungry individual. I see in him to be the absolute best competitor on the field that he can be."

"If you look at Dale Steyn, he brought that thirst for consistency for himself and KG is no different as he is such a hungry individual. I see in him to be the absolute best competitor on the field that he can be."

The Technical Part:

To bowl fast, smooth hip and shoulder movements are pre-requisites and Rabada is a cut above the rest technically, the "white lightning" said.

"All genuine quicks have got great hip and shoulder rotation and if you observe him technically, he gets in a fantastic position in the air. We always talk about the launch, how they launch off the floor or how big they get at the crease."

"Look at other greats like Curtley Ambrose, Courtney Walsh, Ian Bishop, Michael Holding all these got off the floor to give them time to pull the trigger and that's what KG does beautifully. That hang time (off the ground) we talk about."

"Also if you see at point of back-foot strike, the hips are slightly closed and open up very very quickly. They don't spend too much time on backfoot. KG is very quick."

Donald likened Rabada's hip rotation to that of a top javelin thrower.

"If you listen to his feet, every ball is so quick. KG's hip rotation is

similar to a javelin thrower's right side release through the impact area. He knows his rhythm and action so well so technical point he is solid. He understands biomechanics as much as a Pat Cummins or a Mitchell Starc," Donald said.

Initially his partnership with Fanie de Villiers, Brian McMillan, Brett Schultz was talked about much and later on he formed a lethal partnership Shaun Pollock.

"I am always wary about drawing comparisons as to what we were and what currently is on the table for the Proteas. We had our time under the Sun and were No. 1 in the world. We had a wonderful attack and had incredible depth."

"We were also blessed and every province had 5 or 6 fast bowlers and you were always looking over your shoulder. If I don't pull my socks up then I could lose my place," he fondly recollected.

"But I think this attack I think have got a future in front of them you have got a guy in name of Rabada who is leading this attack beautifully, who is an outstanding performer and leader of the pack," he signed off. (PTI)

We will try to break Australia's unbeaten run soon: Deepti Sharma

MUMBAI, Jan 1: Ace off-spinner Deepti Sharma on Monday backed India Women to end Australia's winning streak against them at home 'as soon as possible' after losing nine consecutive ODIs including two games in the ongoing series.

Australia clinched a narrow three-run win in the second ODI here at the Wankhede Stadium on Saturday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

The last time India beat the Aussies at home was at Chennai on February 23, 2007.

"Look, winning and losing is a part of the game -- but we have improved as a team -- be it as a bowling unit or batting. We will try to break their winning streak as soon as possible," Deepti told the media here before India's training session.

"There have been a lot of improvements. Earlier, whenever we would play against Australia the games never used to go that close. This is one positive (from the last match) that we are able to take it till the end," she added.

Deepti said the team will look to focus on the positives drawn from the second game across departments. (PTI)

Girona's another chance to show it's a genuine title contender in Spain

Girona, partly owned by Manchester City's Abu Dhabi ownership, is tied with Real Madrid on 45 points

MADRID, Jan 1: The New Year brings Girona another chance to show it's a genuine title contender in the Spanish league.

Girona's first match of 2024 is a tough challenge against third-place Atletico Madrid at home on Wednesday.

The Catalan club has been the surprise team in Spain so far this season, with statement wins such as the one it earned at defending champion Barcelona last month.

Now it has a shot at taking down an Atletico team that finished the year with a win against Sevilla.

Girona, partly owned by Manchester City's Abu Dhabi ownership, is tied with Real Madrid on 45 points, but trails the Spanish powerhouse on a tiebreaker.

"We finished the first half of the season on the same level as the top clubs," Girona coach Michel Sánchez said. "Our fans are proud of what we have achieved so far."

The game against Atletico should help give an idea about whether Girona has what it takes to keep competing at the top.

Girona lost 3-0 to Madrid at home in September in its first big challenge of the season, but it recovered and showed its strength in a convincing 4-2 win at Barcelona in December.

Girona went on a 12-match unbeaten streak in all competitions since the loss to Madrid, with draws against fifth-place Athletic Bilbao in November and at Real Betis in its last match of the year, when it was winning until conceding an 88th-minute equal-



izer. The team coached by Michel has 14 wins in 18 matches, and has the league's best attack with 42 goals, three more than Madrid's high-profile offense.

Atletico Madrid forward Antoine Griezmann enters the game against Girona tied with Luis Aragonés as the club's all-time top scorer with 173 goals.

The France international has his second chance to break the record after going scoreless in the team's win against Sevilla on Dec. 23.

Atletico won only two of its five league matches in December in a run that included a loss at Barcelona and a 3-3 draw against

Getafe that ended the club's record-tying 20-game home winning streak in all competitions. Diego Simeone's team trails Madrid and Girona by seven points.

Real Madrid could enjoy the return of Vinicius Júnior when it hosts Mallorca on Wednesday.

Vinicius hasn't played since November, when he injured a leg muscle while playing a World Cup qualifier with Brazil's national team.

"I'm fine, doing very well," Vinicius said. "Now it's up to the coach to decide whether I'll play."

Also possibly returning from injury for

coach Carlo Ancelotti — who last week renewed his contract with the club until 2026 — are defender Dani Carvajal and midfielders Eduardo Camavinga and Arda Güler.

Madrid starts the year still without several key players because of knee ligament injuries, including goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and defenders David Alaba and Éder Militão.

Madrid is unbeaten in 17 games across all competitions, since a 3-1 league loss at Atletico in September. It has three draws since then.

Fourth-place Barcelona goes into its match at midtable Las Palmas on Thursday needing a win to overcome a tough run to end the year.

The Catalan club won only two of its six matches, including a loss to Mexican club America in a friendly in the United States in its final game of the year.

It also lost to Girona in the Spanish league and to Antwerp in the Champions League. Its last win was a hard-fought one against last-place Almeria at home in the league, when the team coached by Xavi Hernández was jeered after yet another poor performance.

In other matches, Bilbao visits struggling Sevilla on Thursday, while relegation-threatened Celta Vigo hosts seventh-place Real Betis on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, sixth-place Real Sociedad hosts Alaves, and Villarreal visits midtable Valencia. (AP)

Sarr scores but then goes off with injury in Tottenham's 3-1 win over Bournemouth in Premier League



LONDON, Jan 1: Pape Sarr opened the scoring for Tottenham in a 3-1 win over Bournemouth in the Premier League on Sunday before going off with an injury that could put his African Cup of Nations participation in doubt.

Son Heung-min doubled the lead with his 12th league goal of the season as Spurs rebounded from a 4-2 loss at Brighton on Thursday to move within one point of fourth-place Arsenal.

Sarr gave the hosts the lead in the ninth minute by rifling a shot into the bottom corner from 18 yards. But the Senegal international left the field in tears with an injury in the 32nd, just two weeks before the start of the African Cup.

"Pape felt his hamstring and he's emotional because he wants to go away with his national team," Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou said. "Disappointing for him but I am hoping it is not too serious and he can still go away and contribute to his country."

Tottenham then had to wait until the 71st minute for a second goal.

Giovani Lo Celso was the architect with a superb throughball with the outside of his boot to set

up Son, who found the bottom corner.

Richarlison then made the points safe 10 minutes from time when he swept home Brennan Johnson's cross in a carbon copy of his goal against Everton.

Substitute Alex Scott pulled one back for Bournemouth in the 84th minute after a cutback by Marcus Tavernier.

Postecoglou also received a boost before the game as Rodrigo Bentancur was fit enough to start, nearly a month ahead of schedule after an injury.

However, there was a heated exchange between the Tottenham manager and some of the Bournemouth backroom staff near the end of the game when young Tottenham substitute Alejo Veliz suffered a suspected knee injury, and he was repeatedly told by Postecoglou and his staff to stay down to receive treatment.

It led to Postecoglou exchanging words with Bournemouth first-team coach Shaun Cooper in stoppage time and angrily pointing his finger before being pulled away from a scuffle.

"We were just wishing each other happy new year," Postecoglou joked when asked about the incident. (AP)

Fabio Carvalho returns to Liverpool after loan spell

LIVERPOOL, Jan 1: Fabio Carvalho is returning to Liverpool after his loan spell at Leipzig ended early.

The 21-year-old winger had joined the German side on a season-long loan but made only three starts in a total of 15 appearances in all competitions for the team so far this season.

Leipzig sporting director Rouven Schroder said on the team's website that "both parties had expected more from his time here — especially Fabio in terms of his playing time."

"Due to the quality and competition within our squad at his position, we are unable to guarantee this for him," Schroder said. "We held several discussions over the last days and in the end, decided to end his loan early." Carvalho, who has played for Portugal's Under-21 team, moved to Liverpool from Fulham in the summer of 2022 and has featured 21 times for the Reds, scoring three goals. (AP)

Crystal Dunn signs with NWSL champion NJ/NY Gotham FC through 2026 season

HARRISON, Jan 1: Crystal Dunn is returning home to join NWSL champion NJ/NY Gotham FC, the team announced Sunday. The 31-year-old Dunn, a 2019 World Cup winner, signed a contract with Gotham through the 2026 season. The U.S. national team star played three seasons with the Portland Thorns before entering free agency in November.

"This place is one that I hold close to my heart," Dunn said of her home state of New York. "I am looking forward to playing alongside top players that will bring out the best in me, as we all work together to



push this club to achieve even more success this upcoming season and beyond."

Dunn has won three NWSL titles, including with the Thorns in 2022. The defender/midfielder won a bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

"Crystal is an exceptional player who can play anywhere at any time and have an incredible impact on the game," Gotham FC coach Juan Carlos Amorós said. Dunn, who had her first child in 2022, won consecutive NWSL Shields and NWSL championships with the North Carolina Courage in 2018-19. (AP)





GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
Department of School Education

GUNOTSAV 2024

Ensuring Quality Education

TOTAL SCHOOLS TO BE COVERED : 43,498

- GOVERNMENT/ PROVINCIALIZED SCHOOLS
- ADARSHA VIDYALAYA
- TEA GARDEN MODEL SCHOOLS
- KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYA
- NETAJI SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AVASIYA VIDYALAYA
- TEA GARDEN MANAGEMENT SCHOOLS

TOTAL STUDENTS TO BE EVALUATED : 39,63,542

• CLASSES I TO IX

TOTAL EXTERNAL EVALUATORS : 18,098

MINISTERS, MPs, MLAs, CEMs, EMs,
IAS, IPS, IFS, ACS, APS, AFS, CLASS I & II OFFICIALS OF STATE GOVT. ETC.

PHASES OF EVALUATION

1ST PHASE (3 - 6 JANUARY 2024)
12 Districts
BARPETA, BAJALI, HOJAI, KARIMGANJ, KAMRUP, KARBI ANGLONG, KOKRAJHAR, LAKHIMPUR, NAGAON, SIVASAGAR, SOUTH SALMARA-MANKACHAR AND UDALGURI DISTRICTS

2ND PHASE (9 - 12 JANUARY 2024)
13 Districts
BAKSA, BISWANATH, CHIRANG, CHARAIDEO, DHEMAJI, DHUBRI, GOLAGHAT, HAILAKANDI, JORHAT, KAMRUP (METRO), SONITPUR, TINSUKIA AND TAMULPUR DISTRICTS

3RD PHASE (5 - 8 FEBRUARY 2024)
10 Districts
BONGAIGAON, DARRANG, DIBRUGARH, GOALPARA, CACHAR, NALBARI, MORIGAON, DIMA HASAO, MAJULI AND WEST KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICTS



Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Participate and nurture our students and schools on their journey towards excellence !

Janasanyog /DF/2273/23/2-Jan-24