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HT BRIEFS

Burmese supari

BOKAJAN: During routine checking on NH 36 at Dillai Tiniali, under Dillai police station the police recovered Burmese Supari from a truck. The police during routine checking at around 8 am a truck, AS 01 MC 7319, was intercepted and on thorough checking 1,600 kg of Burmese Supari was recovered. The Supari was concealed in the rear of the truck body by modifying it with a secret chamber on it.

Rhino killed

GUWAHATI: An adult female rhino was killed allegedly by poachers in Assam's Kaziranga National Park, an official said on Tuesday. Forest staff of Maklung anti-poaching camp under the park's eastern Agorotoli Range during patrolling duty detected the carcass of an adult female rhino on Monday. The horn of the dead rhino was found missing, the official said. The post-mortem report is awaited, he said, adding that the forest and police departments have jointly intensified the search operation. Senior forest and police officers are camping in the area, the official added.

Congress workers, police clash after Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra stopped from entering Guwahati • Several hurt in clash

CM directs DGP to file case against RaGa

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday asked the Director General of Police (DGP) to register a case against former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi for provoking the crowd which broke barricades here.

Sarma also termed the action of participants of Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra as "naxalite tactics".

"These are not part of Assamese culture. We are a peaceful state. Such 'naxalite tactics' are completely alien to our culture. I have instructed @DGPAssamPolice to register a case against your leader @RahulGandhi for provoking the crowd & use the footage you have posted on your handles as the evidence." Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X in response to a post of Youth Congress president Srinivas BV.

"Your unruly behaviour and violation of agreed guidelines have resulted in a massive traffic jam in Guwahati now," Sarma added.



The CM said evidence is emerging as to how Rahul Gandhi and Congress leader Jitendra Singh instigated the mob to kill Assam police personnel.

"Our police personnel are servants of the public and do not belong to any royal family. Rest assured, law has a long arm, it will definitely reach you", Sarma said.

Alleging that there was a conspiracy to stop Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' again by putting up barricades, the IYC chief on X said, "Use as many sticks as you want...This war will

Cong and INDIA allies concerned only about securing votes in name of caste census: JP Nadda

AHMEDABAD, Jan 23: BJP chief JP Nadda on Tuesday alleged that Congress and its allies in the INDIA bloc are interested only in garnering votes in the name of caste census and are not bothered about the welfare of various sections.

He was addressing BJP workers and leaders after inaugurating the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha Constituency office in Thaltej area of Ahmedabad.

Nadda also virtually inaugurated similar offices for the rest 25 LS constituencies in Gujarat from the stage.

"The Congress and INDI Alliance (INDIA) parties are talking about a caste census. They are not concerned about the welfare of castes, but are interested only in securing votes in the name of caste census," the BJP president alleged.

While Opposition parties pur-

sued the politics of the vote bank, Prime Minister Narendra Modi united the countrymen by giving the concept of 'GYAN' (Garib, Yuva, Annadata and Nari Shakti), said Nadda.

"Modiji said Garib, Yuva, Annadata and Nari Shakti are the only four castes in India. We will work for them. While the INDI Alliance was dividing the country in the name of castes and religion, Modiji united the country by the concept of GYAN," he said, adding that these four categories include everyone, irrespective of caste or religion.

Nadda claimed about 50 crore people are now covered under the Ayushman Bharat scheme wherein beneficiaries get free treatment up to ₹ 5 lakh annually based on their income and "not on the basis of caste". (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



Himanta distributes ration cards to beneficiaries in Jorhat



HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday launched the ceremonial distribution of ration cards to new beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013 of Jorhat Assembly constituency at a function held in Assam's Jorhat district.

Sarma, in his address, said that in Jorhat constituency, a total of 6,328 beneficiaries would receive ration cards which would benefit 23,000 families.

"Altogether over 34400 ration cards would be distributed across Jorhat district under this initiative. In the entire state 42 lakh people from 10 lakh families would be getting ration cards," he added.

Stating that the new ration cards benefi-

ciaries were distributed in two categories - Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Agradhikar Prapta Pariyal, he urged the beneficiaries to collect their quota of rice for this month from the ration shops before January 31.

The chief minister further informed that in the first category 35 kgs of rice is given per family in the second one five kgs of rice per each member of a family gets.

He also said that the ration card beneficiaries will be covered under PM Ayushman scheme to avail medical treatment up to ₹ five lakh in government hospitals/centres and empanelled nursing homes.

"Till they get the health cards the ration cards could be used to avail," he added.

Sarma also informed that the ration cards holders will also get the benefits of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUJ) and government has plans to extend Orunodoi scheme to the cardholder women members of the family.

Sarma, while asserting that a new journey of development, progress and prosperity had begun after his government came to power and people could see the transformation unfolding as government was undertaking steps to provide the benefits to people in their hands instead of (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

CMASY ration cards distributed in Bokajan

HT Bureau

BOKAJAN, Jan 23: In a significant welfare initiative, the Chief Minister Anna Suraksha Yojana (CMASY) ration cards were distributed by the Food and Civil Supply department in a program held at the Bokajan Sports Association (BSA) in Bokajan, Assam.

Tuliram Ronghang, chief executive member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), attended the ration card distribution program.

He also highlighted that beneficiaries of CMASY would receive free medical treatment of up to ₹ 5 lakh. Ronghang urged those with old ration cards to apply for new ones, assuring that they would be distributed accordingly. Additionally, he mentioned that more welfare schemes are in the pipeline for the people by the BJP government.

A total of 8674 CMASY Ration Cards (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

The crowd became so huge that the security personnel scrambled to maintain order

Ayodhya Ram temple sees devotee surge

AYODHYA, Jan 23: A massive crowd that swelled by the hour and became unmanageable in the afternoon thronged the main gateway to the Ram temple here as it opened its doors to the public on Tuesday, a day after the consecration ceremony.

Ram Path -- the main thoroughfare -- was choked as devotees flooded the streets of the temple town, which has been gripped by religious fervor over the inauguration of the grand mandir.

The entry of devotees to the temple complex began at 6 am and about 2.5 lakh people are likely to have visited the temple by 2 pm, Ayodhya divisional commissioner Gaurav Dayal told PTI.

It is estimated that about five lakh devotees will have visited by the end of the day, another official said.

Waiting in serpentine queues outside the temple were people who had been camping in Ayodhya since before the consecration ceremony, having made long and difficult journeys to reach the



temple town.

An idol of the new Ram Lalla was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on Monday, a landmark event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On Tuesday, 'Ram dhun' played in the streets as security personnel kept guard and sought to control the crowd even as many chanted 'Jai Shri Ram' and attempted to enter through the gateway.

For a couple hours in the afternoon, the crowd became so huge that the security personnel scrambled to maintain

of Ram Lalla, Dayal said.

The administration is taking measures to keep the crowd in order, "with proper holding (area), queuing and proper barricading", he added.

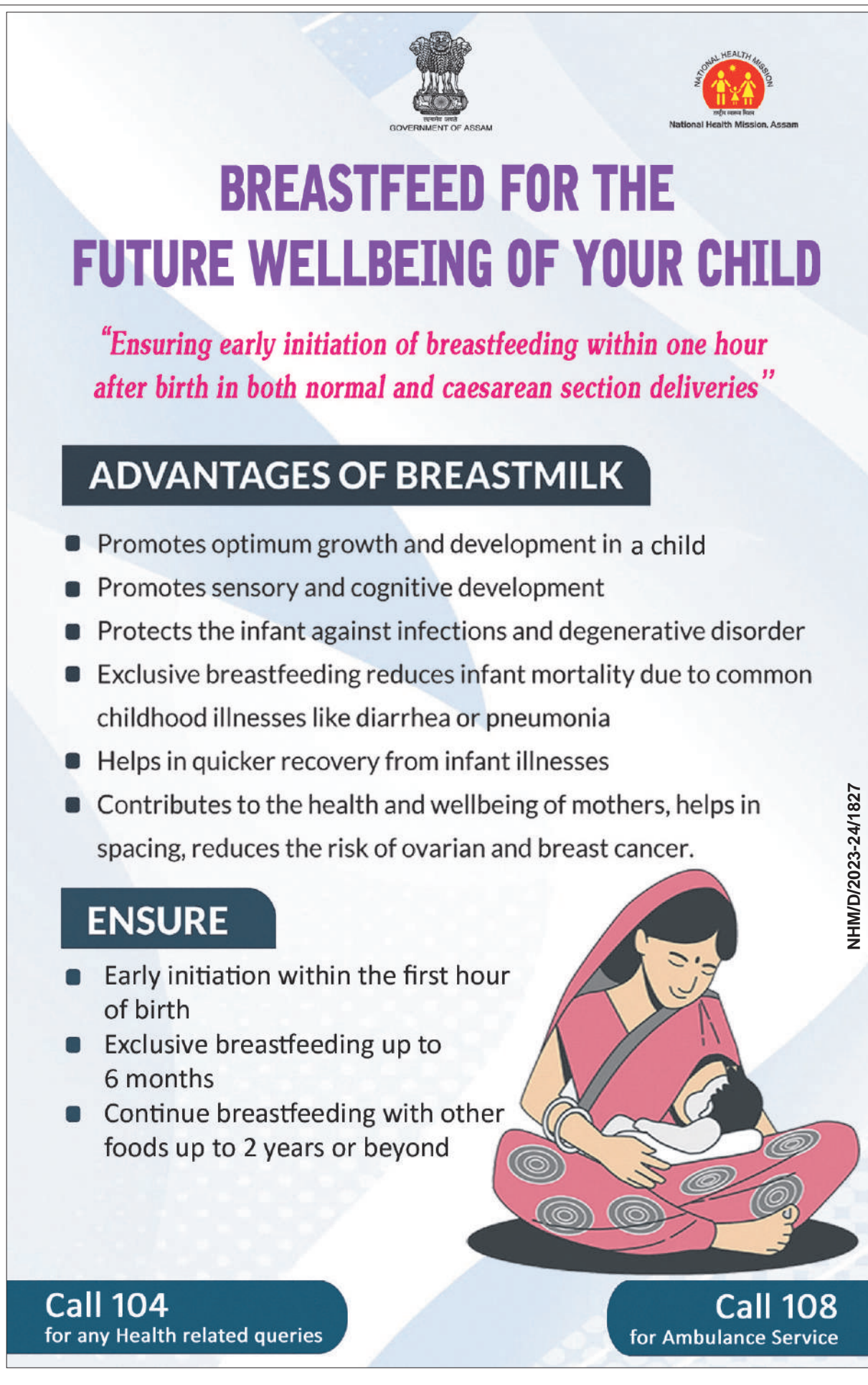
Uttar Pradesh information director Shishir said more than 8,000 policemen are deployed at the temple and "everything is under control".

Director General, Law Order, Prashant Kumar and principal secretary, Home, Sanjay Prasad are inside the temple and overseeing the arrangements.

Ayodhya police, in a post on X, also refuted rumours that the temple was temporarily closed due to the heavy rush.

Suresh Kumar and his friend from Chhattisgarh stood in the milling crowd, eager to have a 'darshan' but had little hope of getting in as they both carried suitcases.

"We have come from Durg. We took a train to Kanpur and then a bus to Lucknow and another bus to Ayodhya and reached Ayodhya at 10.30 am," he told PTI. The pair said they (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



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Govt raises import duty on gold, silver findings to 15 pc

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: The government has increased import duty on gold and silver findings and coins to 15 per cent by imposing a 5 per cent Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess (AIDC).

An AIDC of 4.35 per cent has also been levied on 'spent catalyst or ash containing precious metals', said a notification of the Central Board Of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC). AIDC has been imposed in addition to the basic customs duty of 10 per cent with an aim to bring the incidence of import duty on precious metals at par with bullion.

'Gold or silver findings' means a small component such as hook, clasp, clamp, pin, catch, or screw back, used to hold the whole or a part of a piece of jewellery. The additional duty came into effect from January 22.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the government had introduced AIDC cess on certain items to fund agricultural infrastructure. (PTI)



Mcap falls nearly ₹ 7,300 crore Zee Entertainment shares plunge 33 pc

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Shares of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) nosedived up to 33 per cent on Tuesday after Sony called off the proposed USD 10 billion merger of its India unit with the media group.

The market capitalisation of the company, which witnessed heavy selling pressure since morning, tumbled by ₹ 7,285.53 crore to ₹ 14,974.50 crore on the BSE.

Shares of ZEEL tanked 32.73 per cent to close at ₹ 155.90 apiece on the BSE.

On the NSE, the company's shares plunged 30.47 per cent to settle at ₹ 160.90 per share.

During the day, the scrip of ZEEL also touched its 52-week low of ₹ 152.50 apiece on both BSE and NSE.

The stock also touched its lower price band



on both the bourses, which also revised the lower circuit limit for the company on Tuesday.

In volume terms, nearly 1.46 crore equity shares were traded on the BSE while 22.84 crore shares were traded on the NSE, during the day.

The equity market witnessed heavy volatility during the day as the benchmark index Sensex after gaining more than 500 points in early trade, crashed over 1,000 points in the late session to close in the negative territory.

Sensex tumbled 1,053 points to close below the 71,000-level on Tuesday.

On Monday, Culver Max Entertainment, formerly known as Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), terminated merger agreements with Zee Entertainment, which could have otherwise created a USD 10 billion media enterprise in the country.

Besides, Sony has sought USD 90 million as break-up fees for violating the terms of the merger pact and "invoking arbitration", which ZEEL said it will contest legally. (PTI)

Axis Bank Q3 net profit rises to ₹ 6,071 crore

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Private sector Axis Bank on Tuesday reported a 4 per cent rise in standalone net profit at ₹ 6,071 crore in the third quarter ended December 2023.

The bank had earned a net profit of ₹ 5,853 crore in the October-December quarter of 2022.

The total income of the bank increased to ₹ 33,516 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal compared to ₹ 26,798 crore in the year-ago period, Axis Bank said in a regulatory filing.

In the latest quarter, the bank's interest income rose to ₹ 27,961 crore from ₹ 22,226 crore in the same period last fiscal.

The gross Non-Performing Asset (NPA) ratio improved to 1.58 per cent as of December 31, 2023. In the year-ago period, it stood at 2.38 per cent.

Similarly, the net NPA declined to 0.36 per cent as compared to 0.47 per cent at the end of December 2022.

During the 2023 December quarter, the bank made a provision of ₹ 181.70 crore in respect of investments in its Alternate Investment Funds (AIFs) pursuant to the RBI directive issued on December 19, 2023.

In the third quarter of this fiscal, the bank's Net Interest Income (NII) grew 9 per cent to ₹ 12,532 crore while its Net Interest Margin (NIM) stood at 4.01 per cent. (PTI)

Sensex slumps over 1k pts to slip below 71k Cycle Pure Agarbathi unveils 111-foot artistic tribute



MUMBAI, Jan 23: Equity benchmark Sensex tumbled 1,053 points to close below the 71,000 level on Tuesday, dragged down by index heavyweights HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and SBI amid escalating tensions in the Middle East.

Concerns over subdued quarterly performance by corporates triggered selling pressure in most of the counters, according to traders.

After opening with gains of nearly 450 points, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 1,053.10 points or 1.47 per cent to settle at 70,370.55. The index hit the lowest intraday level of 70,234.55. It also touched an intraday high of 72,039.20.

Broader Nifty also declined 330.15 points or 1.53 per cent to close at 21,241.65.

"The market witnessed a continuous decline today, abruptly turning negative despite a positive start, mainly due to substantial selling in heavyweight sectors, particularly finance.

"Selling by FII due to reasons like high valuation and mixed results for the earnings season so far, along with recent escalations in tensions in the Middle East and the Red Sea, prompted the investors to book profit from the recent rally. Going forward, markets are likely to witness stock-

specific actions during the ongoing earnings season," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Among the Sensex firms, IndusInd Bank was the biggest loser and fell 6.13 per cent, followed by SBI (3.99 pc), Hindustan Unilever (3.82 pc), Axis Bank (3.41 pc) and HDFC Bank (3.23 pc).

In contrast, Sun Pharma, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank and PowerGrid defied the trend and closed with gains of up to 3.67 per cent. TCS and Bajaj Finserv were the other gainers.

Shares of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) nosedived up to 33 per cent on Tuesday after Sony called off the proposed USD 10 billion merger of its India unit with the media group.

Meanwhile, private sector Axis Bank on Tuesday reported a 4 per cent rise in standalone net profit at ₹ 6,071 crore in the third quarter ended December 2023.

The S&P BSE MidCap fell 2.95 per cent to close at 37,247.84 and the midcap index settled 2.79 per cent lower at 43,378.40.

All the sectoral indices except healthcare settled with losses.

Realty and services indices fell the most by 5.46 per cent and 4.06 per cent, respectively. While metal declined by 3.97 per cent, oil & gas lowered by 3.96 per cent and

energy went down by 3.70 per cent. Commodities, FMCG, financial services and capital goods were other laggards.

On the other hand, the healthcare index rose 1.02 per cent.

"Global sentiments turned cautious after Fitch Group statement that South Asian economies would be most affected, amid rising hostilities in the Red Sea due to Houthi attacks and India's economic forecast faces a significant risk on account of a prolonged spell of disruptions," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

In Asia, Hong Kong's Hang Seng closed with a sharp gain of 2.63 per cent, and China's Shanghai Composite increased by 0.52 per cent. Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 0.8 per cent.

European markets were trading lower on Tuesday, with Germany's DAX down 0.09 per cent and the CAC 40 of France losing 0.16 per cent. London's FTSE 100 also declined 0.13 per cent.

In the US markets, the Dow, S&P 500 and Nasdaq closed with gains of up to 0.36 per cent on Monday.

"BoJ (Bank of Japan) followed China and kept interest rates unchanged. Now investors are awaiting US GDP data due late today along with the ECB rate decision due later this week. On the domestic front, this week is a truncated week with just three trading days.

"Given weak global cues and mixed set of earnings released so far, the market is likely to consolidate and may drop a little further till the next set of fresh positive triggers," Khemka said.

The domestic equity market was closed on January 22 due to the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya, while NSE and BSE held normal trading sessions on Saturday. (PTI)

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 23: Cycle Pure Agarbathi, India's leading agarbathi manufacturer, has unveiled a monumental 111-foot agarbathi as a tribute to local craftsmanship, illuminating the skies over Mysuru, Maharashtra, and Goa. The event, a celebration of diverse artisanal heritage, saw Saraswathi, mother of sculptor Arun Yogiraj, lighting the agarbathi in the presence of dignitaries such as Pratap Simha, MP, Mysore-Kodagu, and TS Sri-

vatsa, MLA, Krishnaraja. The Ranga family, including Guru, Kiran Ranga, Vishnu Ranga, Anirudh Ranga, and Nikhil Ranga, highlighted the brand's commitment to preserving heritage and traditional art. In Maharashtra, Chief Minister Eknath Sambhaji Shinde celebrated the state's craftsmanship, while in Goa, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant emphasized preserving and promoting the region's artistic expressions.

Cycle Pure Agarbathi's 111-foot masterpiece, blending modern technology with traditional art, pays homage to Mysuru's cultural heritage. Crafted over 23 days by a skilled team of 18 individuals, it incorporates auspicious materials like Dashanga, Honey, Konneri Gedde, Ghee, Sandal Wood Powder, and others. The manufacturing process utilizes a unique technology devised by the NRRS specialists team.

Finmin raises import duties on gold, silver findings, coins of precious metals to 15 pc

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: The finance Ministry has hiked import duties on gold and silver findings and coins of precious metals to 15 per cent from the existing 10 per cent. Import duty on gold and silver findings and coins of precious metals will now be 15 per cent.

This includes Basic Custom Duty (BCD) of 10 per cent and 5 per cent of AIDC (Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess), an official notification said. This is exempt from Social Welfare Surcharge (SWC).

Gold or silver findings are a small component such as a hook, pin, screw that holds the whole or a part of a piece of jewellery in place.

The Ministry has also hiked import duty on spent catalysts containing precious metals. The duty has been hiked to 14.35 per cent including 10 Basic Custom Duty (BCD) and 4.35 per cent AIDC (Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess) with exemption from SWS. (PTI)

Saraswathi expressed gratitude, stating, "Cycle Pure Agarbathi's proactive role in supporting and acknowledging our work holds immense value for our family and the artistic community. This support is particularly meaningful for Mysuru artists, contributing to the broader creative landscape."

Investors' wealth erodes by ₹ 8.50 lakh cr as markets tumble

MUMBAI, Jan 23: Equity investors became poorer by ₹ 8.50 lakh crore on Tuesday as markets came under a bear attack, with the benchmark Sensex falling almost 1,053.10 points.

Equity benchmark index Sensex tumbled 1,053 points to close below the 71,000 level on Tuesday, dragged down by index heavyweights HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and SBI amid mixed global cues.

Following the decline in the benchmark index, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by ₹ 8,50,820.81 crore to ₹ 3,65,97,915.97 crore.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies stood at ₹ 3,74,48,736.78 crore on January 20.

Domestic equities opened on a positive note but soon drifted into red witnessing a huge sell-off amid profit booking, said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services

Ltd. Global sentiments turned cautious after a Fitch Group statement that South Asian economies would be most affected, amid rising hostilities in the Red Sea due to Houthi attacks and India's economic forecast faces a significant risk on account of a prolonged spell of disruptions, Khemka said.

Further, the Bank of Japan followed China and kept interest rates unchanged. Now investors are awaiting US GDP data due late today along with the European Central Bank rate decision due later this week. On the domestic front, this week is a truncated week with just three trading days.

Given weak global cues and mixed set of earnings released so far, the market is likely to consolidate and may drop a little further till the next set of fresh positive triggers, Khemka added.

Among the Sensex firms, IndusInd Bank was the biggest loser

and fell 6.13 per cent, followed by SBI (3.99 pc), Hindustan Unilever (3.82 pc), Axis Bank (3.41 pc) and HDFC Bank (3.23 pc).

Midcap and smallcap indices witnessed more decline compared to the benchmarks.

The S&P BSE MidCap fell 2.95 per cent to close at 37,247.84 and the midcap index settled 2.79 per cent lower at 43,378.40. All the sectoral indices except healthcare settled with losses.

Realty and services indices fell the most by 5.46 per cent and 4.06 per cent, respectively. While metal declined 3.97 per cent, oil & gas lowered 3.96 per cent and energy went down by 3.70 per cent. Commodities, FMCG, financial services and capital goods were other laggards.

On the other hand, the healthcare index rose 1.02 per cent.

A total of 2,991 stocks declined while 938 advanced and 138 remained unchanged. (PTI)

Kia launches next-gen Sonet

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: Kia unveiled its latest offering, the New Sonet, a cutting-edge Compact SUV. Priced at an attractive introductory rate starting from ₹ 7.99 lakh (ex-showroom) nationwide, this vehicle promises to elevate the standards in the Compact SUV segment. Revealed in December 2023, the New Sonet stands out with an impressive array of features, including 25 safety features, a state-of-the-art Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS) encompassing 10 autonomous features, and a robust suite of 15 Hi-Safety features.

Boasting innovation, the New Sonet integrates over 70 Connected car features, showcasing Kia's commitment to technological advancements. Among these features is 'Find My Car with SVM', providing a comprehensive view of the car's surroundings, coupled with user-friendly Hinglish commands to enhance the driving experience.

Myung-sik Sohn, Chief Sales and Business Strategy Officer at Kia India, expressed the company's dedication to premiumizing the Compact SUV segment. He highlighted the success of the previous Sonet in disrupting the market with its exceptional design and technological prowess. With the introduction of the New Sonet, Kia aims to raise the bar even higher, delivering a winning proposition that combines style and innovation for a superior driving experience.

TCG forays into food technology space

KOLKATA, Jan 23: The Chatterjee Group, having interests in petrochemicals and life sciences, has forayed into the food technology space with the launch of Food Technology and Science Institute (FTSI), a company statement said on Tuesday.

A wing of the TCG Crest (Centres for Research & Education in Science and Technology), FTSI will be involved in developing high-quality, nutrient-rich food ingredients that is in perfect alignment with the contemporary health-conscious consumer trends, the statement said.

FTSI's primary focus will be on plant protein, dietary fibre, and food colours with the mission of extending the shelf-life of the products.

For this purpose, FTSI will work in close collaboration with a special purpose subsidiary of MCPI Private Limited, created and dedicated for the development of health foods, the statement said.

"FTSI and MCPI will work in synergy to create a robust online presence by creating an e-commerce platform", D P Patra, whole-time director and CEO of MCPI said as quoted in the statement.

Initially, the company will build B2B networks for distribution purposes, after which it will target the B2C market with its developed food products, he added.

MCPI manufactures PTA and polyesters at its Haldia plant in West Bengal. (PTI)

HDFC Bank achieves 2 Crore Credit Cards in force

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 23: HDFC Bank, India's premier private sector bank, proudly announced a historic achievement, crossing the remarkable milestone of 2 crore Credit Cards in Force (CIF). This accomplishment establishes HDFC Bank as the first and currently the only bank in India to reach this significant feat.

Initiating its credit card business in 2001, HDFC Bank steadily advanced to the 1 crore CIF mark in 2017, marking a remarkable 16-year journey. Impressively, the bank has now doubled this count to 2 crores in precisely 6 years and 1 month.

Parag Rao, group head of payments, consumer finance, marketing, liability product group, TPP, ABCP, non-resident products, GIB, and Gig Banking at HDFC Bank, expressed gratitude to their valued customers, stating, "As we achieve this remarkable milestone of issuing 2 crore credit cards, we extend our gratitude to our valued customers for their trust and loyalty. This achievement reflects the enduring partnership between our Bank and the community we serve. Every issued card represents our commitment and our shared journey towards financial empowerment, and we are dedicated to continuing this legacy of excellence in banking services."

Rupee falls 9 paise to close at 83.16 against US dollar



MUMBAI, Jan 23: The rupee depreciated 9 paise to 83.16 (provisional) against the US dollar, as elevated crude oil prices and weak domestic equities weighed on investor sentiments.

Forex traders said foreign fund outflows also put pressure on the rupee. However, a weak US Dollar overseas cushioned the downside.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.11 and finally settled at 83.16 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 9 paise from its previous close.

During the day, it witnessed an intraday high of 83.06 and a low of 83.17 against the American currency.

On Friday, the rupee settled at 83.07 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on weak domestic markets and selling pressure from foreign investors.

"Any further increase in crude oil prices may also weigh on the rupee. However, positive global markets and a weak Dollar may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may remain cautious ahead of Richmond manufacturing index data from the US," said

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Choudhary further noted that USD/INR spot price is likely to trade in a range of ₹ 82.80-83.50.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.10 per cent to 103.22.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading lower by 0.60 per cent to USD 79.58 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex declined 1,053.10 points, or 1.47 per cent, to settle at 70,370.55 points. The Nifty slipped 333.00 points, or 1.54 per cent, to 21,238.80 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Saturday as they offloaded shares worth ₹ 545.58 crore, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, India's forex reserves jumped USD 1.634 billion to USD 618.937 billion for the week ended January 12, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had declined sharply by USD 5.89 billion to USD 617.3 billion. (PTI)

Macy's rejects \$5.8B takeover bid from Arkhouse Management

Tony Spring takes over as president and CEO of Macy's next month

WASHINGTON, Jan 23: Macy's is rejecting a \$5.8 billion takeover offer from investment firms Arkhouse Management and Brigade Capital Management, saying they didn't provide a viable financing plan.

Arkhouse and Brigade offered \$21 for each of the remaining shares in Macy's they don't already own. Shares of New York-based Macy's rose 3.6% Monday to close at \$18.26.

Last week Macy's said that it was laying off about 3.5% of its total headcount, or about 2,350 employees. The department store operator also announced that it was closing five locations.

Macy's said its board reviewed the investment firms' proposal and not only had concerns about the financing plan, but also felt there was a "lack of compelling value."

"Following careful consideration and efforts to gather additional information from Arkhouse and

Brigade, the board determined that Arkhouse and Brigade's proposal is not actionable and that it fails to provide compelling value to Macy's Inc. shareholders," Jeff Gennette, outgoing chairman and CEO of Macy's, said in a statement. "We continue to be open to opportunities that are in the best interests of the company and all of our shareholders."

Tony Spring takes over as president and CEO of Macy's next month.

Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData, said in an email that Macy's management doesn't seem to want to do a deal.

"They likely see the real-estate focused approach of Arkhouse as wrong for the business — and, they have a point," Saunders said. "Monetizing real estate with no focus on revitalizing the retailer and bolstering trading would produce short-term gains but severely weaken long-term prospects."



But Saunders noted that Macy's has also had difficulty adding value, having neglected its stores and retail fundamentals for years.

"Unless other bidders step forward, Macy's shareholders are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. They can back existing management on the continued promise of jam tomorrow, or

cash out to an investor whose plans are unknown and could well hasten the demise of one of retail's most iconic names," Saunders said.

The moves come as Macy's and other department stores are under pressure to increase sales.

Before the pandemic, many department stores were struggling to compete with online rivals. Then,

the pandemic-induced shutdowns of stores in the beginning of the health crisis pushed some to the brink of peril. Neiman Marcus and JCPenney both filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, emerging as smaller entities. As stores reopened, many retailers enjoying outsized sales as shoppers stayed close to home and benefited from pandemic aid. But inflation set in and, even though pricing pressures have abated, shoppers have remained cautious.

Macy's has been embracing a number of moves to shore up sales, including accelerating the expansion of its small-format stores as it looks to cater to shoppers seeking more convenient locations. It announced in October it plans to add up to 30 new small-format locations through the fall of 2025, bringing the total number of such stores to roughly 42. The next round of expansion starts in fall 2024. (AP)

Minister Keshab Mahanta ceremonially distributes ration cards



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Jan 23: Health minister Keshab Mahanta ceremonially distributed new ration cards among 5,704 beneficiary families in Nagaon-Bataadroba delimited assembly constituency at a function held here at Nagaon Nehrubali field on Tuesday. It's pertinent to mention here that a total of 28,522 families, including these new beneficiary families, have facilitated ration cards till date in the delimited Nagaon-Bataadroba assembly constituency here.

While addressing the occasion, the minister asserted that the incumbent state government left no stone unturned to provide the ration cards to almost all eligible beneficiary families irrespective of castes, religions, and political backgrounds.

All the ration card holders will get benefits of ₹ 5 lakhs of medical reimbursement per annum under Ayushman card scheme sponsored by the government, the minister

said, adding that the government is committed to implementing free and fair each and every scheme sponsored by the government.

The card distribution programme was attended by local MLA Rupak Sarma, president of Nagaon Zilla Parishad Moonmoni Das Bora, chairman and vice chairman Ambika Mazumdar and Simanta Bora, district development commissioner Gunajit Kashyap, and other officials from the district food and civil supplies department, a release added.

Earlier, the same minister also participated in another ration card distribution programme held at Barhampur LAC where the minister ceremonially distributed ration cards among 5,604 beneficial families of the constituency. Including these new beneficiary families, over 35,186 families of the constituency will get benefits of the schemes, including medical reimbursement under Ayushman card scheme, the release stated.

Enthusiastic programs commemorate the iconic leader's legacy Grand celebration of 127th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 23: The 127th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Haflong, Dima Hasao, on Tuesday. The celebration committee organised a day-long program to honour the iconic leader, culminating in a spirited rally that attracted participants from diverse communities.

The rally, starting from the Cultural Institute Hall in Haflong, traversed the main thoroughfare with slogans such as 'Netaji Amar Rehey' and 'Bharat Mamta Ki Joy'. The procession concluded at the statue of Netaji near the police traffic point after passing through Council Rotary.

The celebration unfolded with the hoisting of the INF Flag at the Netaji Statue, accompanied by floral tributes and garlanding. Mohit Hojai, chairman of NC Hills Autonomous Council, was present as the chief guest, joined by NCHAC MAC Donpahinon Thaoson, Gopa Chaudhury (president of the celebration committee), secretary Abhijit Das, and other dignitaries. A public meeting at the Cultural Hall in Haflong followed, featuring discussions on the life and contributions of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. The meeting was graced by chief guest Mohit Hojai, Dima Hasao SP Mayank Kr Jha, and NCHAC MAC Donpahinon Thaoson. The meeting delved into discussions highlighting the life and contribu-

tions of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, a key figure in the Indian independence movement who advocated armed revolution.

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, born around January 23, 1897, in Cuttack, Orissa (Odisha), India, played a revolutionary role in the fight against British rule in India. His leadership extended to an Indian national force during World War II, where he opposed Western powers. Bose, a contemporary of Mahatma Gandhi, displayed a militant approach to independence and advocated for socialist policies. On this auspicious day, floral tributes were paid to statues of various freedom fighters and notable personalities around Haflong town. Additionally, the statue of Netaji was illuminated, marking the occasion with symbolic light.

The celebration concluded with a vibrant cultural program featuring renowned artists, followed by the distribution of prizes to participants in various competitions organised for children in honour of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

Our Margherita correspondent adds: Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's 127th birth anniversary was celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm at various places under the 83rd Margherita constituency on Tuesday. The celebrations took place at Margherita Public Higher Secondary School field playground, Margherita Chariali, Bargolai Netaji Park, Ledo Netaji Bhawan Samity, and Ledo Rod Gaon Primary School, organised



by 'Dishari' in collaboration with the local residents. At Ledo Netaji Bhawan Samity, the program began with the hoisting of the national flag by Tehan Hakun, the village pradhan (gaon burah) of Malu village, Ledo. This was followed by the illumination of earthen lamps and garlanding of flowers at the portrait of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose by noted social workers of Ledo - Bappi Sarkar, Krishna Acharjee, Utpal Chakraborty, and also by Anup Biswas and Chiranjib Acharjee, both president and general secretary of Ledo Netaji Bhawan Samity.

Distinguished invited persons then spoke about the life of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and his contributions to the country's independence. Various competitions among school children were held, including art competitions, recitations, sports competitions, and cultural programs.

Anup Biswas said that, like every year, this year, they celebrated Netaji Subhash Chandra

All Assam Bengali Youth Students Federation (AABYSF), Sivasagar District Committee, lit the ceremonial lamp in front of the photo of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. During the celebration, Rabindra Ghosh delivered a valuable speech on Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and Rupsa Ghosh performed a patriotic song. The program concluded with the singing of the national anthem.

Our Sivasagar correspondent adds: The birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was commemorated at Doulmukh Chariali, Sivasagar, through a street meeting organised by the Doulmukh Chariali Vyabasayee Santha and Alok Sangha. The event featured the lighting of ceremonial lamps and the laying of floral tributes to the great patriot by notable figures such as writer and educationist Samsul Barik, journalist Manoj Kumar Borthakur, Pranjal Rajguru (president, Alok Sangha), and Bokul Borthakur (president, Doulmukh Chariali Vyabasayee Santha).

Addressing the gathering, Samsul Barik said that Subhash Bose's uncompromising self and ideals continue to inspire the nation. Manoj Kr Borthakur highlighted Bose's dream of making India self-reliant in defense production, which he noted is being implemented by the present government. Pranjal Rajguru expressed the belief that Subhash Chandra Bose would have tackled corruption decisively had he lived longer.

Diamond jubilee celebration

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Jan 23: The Diamond Jubilee celebration of Jajari Dhalpuria Yuva Sangha Ananta Puthibharal and Community Centre is set to take place from January 25, 2024. The three-day event will feature a range of programs at Jajari 'Nachani Pothar' in Nagaon. The festivities will commence with the unfurling of 75 flags by prominent local dignitaries on January 25. Following this, a cultural procession will traverse Jajari Dhalpuria village, with the participation of noted Assamese film actor Arun Hazarika, Raag Omitom, and singer Krishna Moni Nath. The first open session on the same day will host special invitees, including renowned writer Mayur Bora, Akademi

awardee children's litterateur Jugal Luchan Das, and Nepali litterateur and Akademi awardee KB Nepali. During the session, an official release of a souvenir will be conducted by Mrinalini Devi, the vice president of Asom Sahitya Sabha. The cultural program scheduled for the first day will see Mohan and KK, participants from the popular TV comedy serial 'Beharbari Outpost'. On the second day, Acharya Borpatragohain will be the chief artiste in the cultural program, showcasing his musical talents. This information was shared in a press conference held on Tuesday by the Diamond Jubilee Celebration Committee, represented by Jibanram Bora and Dulal Bora, the president and secretary of the committee, respectively.

Asam Sahitya Sabha gears up for 11th Special Annual Conference

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, Jan 23: The 11th Special Annual Conference of Asam Sahitya Sabha is scheduled to take place from January 31 to February 3 at Pasuraja Samanyai Khetra, Barapujia, in the district. The organising committee has been actively preparing for the literary event, setting up temporary offices, meeting halls, and stalls with the involvement of 34 sub-committees.

In a press meet organised by the publicity committee of the special conference at the

reception committee's office in Barapujia on Tuesday, Dr Upendrajit Sarma, the secretary-general of AX X, and Dr Pradeep Deka, the general secretary of the reception committee, addressed the media. They shared that the 11th Special Conference, with a budget of ₹ 3 crore 67 lakh, will commence on January 31, 2024, and conclude on February 3, 2024.

The four-day program will begin on January 31 with paying respects to Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaruah at his birthplace in

Ahatguri. The state president, vice-president, secretary-general, and executive members of the literary body will pay tribute at the statue of Lakshminath Bezbaruah. On February 1, the special conference will officially start with the hoisting of the organisation's main flag. A colourful cultural rally, led by the state president, will mark the commencement of the conference.

The special conference will culminate on February 3 with the second open meeting of the event.

Department of Women & Child Development
Govt. of Assam

NATIONAL GIRL CHILD DAY

24th January 2024

"Every girl has the right to a safe, healthy and educated childhood"

Special Gram Sabhas at GP Level & Signature Campaigns on the rights of the girl child

Awareness rallies at District /Block Level

Special Sessions in schools/ colleges on rights, safety and security of the girl child

Organisation of games and sports among girls for all-round development and for promotion of sports

Campaign against Child Marriage and many more ...

AJANTA NEOG
Hon'ble Minister
Women & Child Development, Assam

Our Time is Now—Our Rights, Our Future
শক্তিশালী কন্যা শক্তিশালী রাষ্ট্র

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Man is what he reads.
- Joseph Brodsky

India's Space ambitions going up

As the Finance Minister gears up to present the interim budget for 2024-25 on February 1, the Indian space sector stands at the cusp of a transformative year. Labelled 'The Year of Gaganyaan' by ISRO chief S Somnath, 2024 holds immense promise for India's space exploration journey. ISRO, a key player in the global space community, has outlined an ambitious plan for the year, featuring crucial mission-related tests and demonstrations for the historic Gaganyaan project. Collaborating with NASA, the Synthetic Aperture Radar mission (NISAR) is poised for launch in 2024, highlighting India's commitment to international collaboration in space exploration. Among the numerous projects in the pipeline, the INSAT-3DS communications satellite takes center stage, playing a pivotal role in meteorology and disaster management studies. Additionally, projects like RISAT-1B, Resourcesat-3, TDSO1, and SPADEX are set to enhance India's remote-sensing capabilities and contribute to technological research for future Moon missions. Union Minister for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh has forecasted a robust 6%-8% growth rate for the Indian space sector in the coming year. The stakeholders eagerly await the budgetary allocation, given the critical juncture of the industry's expansion. In 2023-2024, the Department of Space (DoS) witnessed a substantial budgetary increase, reaching Rs 12,543.91 crore, doubling the allocation from 2013-2014.

However, scrutiny reveals an 8% reduction compared to the previous fiscal year's budget, signalling a potential challenge. The reduction impacted space science, including missions like Chandrayaan-3, Aditya-L-1, and ISRO's Climate and Atmospheric Programme, drawing some criticism. Despite this, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commendation for the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the Moon's south polar region echoes India's continued achievements in space exploration. India's space economy, currently valued at \$8.4 billion, constitutes 2%-3% of the global space economy. Minister Jitendra Singh envisions an ambitious projection, estimating the Indian space economy to reach \$44 billion by 2033, propelled by the contributions of the private space sector and the Indian Space Policy (ISP), 2023. The ISP aims for comprehensive space solutions, encompassing satellite manufacturing, launch vehicle production, satellite services, and ground system manufacturing. Despite these strides, the call for greater private sector involvement brings attention to challenges such as Customs duty on mission-critical materials. Stakeholders are urging for exemptions, citing high duty rates, sometimes reaching 40%, as a hindrance to budget constraints.

Additionally, there's a demand for the creation of specialized funds to address research and development needs, underlining the importance of nurturing innovation in the space sector. As India positions itself as a key player in the global space arena, the upcoming budget presents an opportunity to solidify the nation's commitment to space exploration. The allocation of funds, particularly for crucial projects like Gaganyaan and NISAR, will shape the trajectory of India's space journey in 2024. The delicate balance between fiscal responsibility and the nation's space aspirations is one that the Finance Minister must carefully navigate, ensuring that India continues to soar among the stars in the years to come. In 2024, India's space industry anticipates substantial growth with key missions like Gaganyaan and NISAR on the horizon. As the Finance Minister prepares to unveil the interim budget, stakeholders eagerly await increased allocations to support these ambitious endeavours. Despite a recent budgetary reduction, the sector's expansion, private sector involvement, and exemptions from Customs duty stand as crucial factors shaping India's continued ascent in the global space economy.

Samajwadi Party worried at Ram Mandir impact in Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh

By: Pradeep Kapoor

Terming the Ram Mandir inauguration as BJP-RSS-VHP event, the opposition parties of Uttar Pradesh have maintained distance from the program. Realising that BJP will take political benefits of the grand event to mobilise Hindu votes during forthcoming Lok Sabha polls, the opposition parties also want to be seen as Ram bhaktas. Former chief Minister and national President of Samajwadi Party Akhilesh Yadav politely declined the invite to attend the ceremony and said he would visit the temple later on. Few hours before the inauguration of Ram temple, Akhilesh tweeted a couplet which talked about Siyaram.

At the same time the SP president is involved in construction of huge temple of Lord Shiva in his hometown Itawah. Akhilesh Yadav too has become very demonstrative regarding his visits to various temples and public display of observing puja and festivals.

Samajwadi Party leader is also aware about people's memory of firing on karsewaks at Ayodhya in 1990 to protect Babri Mosque. After this incident, Mulayam Singh Yadav became very popular in muslim community. Since then his party is getting massive support of muslim voters in successive elections.

During 2022 assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party got unprecedented support from muslim community which increased the tally of the MLAs three times more. Recently Samajwadi Party leaders Shivpal and Swami Prasad Maurya defended the decision of Mulayam Singh Yadav government to protect Babri Mosque.

It is to be seen as to how Samajwadi Party deals with the post inauguration euphoria of Hindutva forces after the inauguration of Ram temple. That is why Akhilesh Yadav is working hard to strengthen his PDA alliance of backwards, dalits and Muslims.

Similar is the problem with Congress Party leadership which was also caught in the same dilemma whether to participate in the inauguration or not. Central leaders who were invited declined saying that it was BJP-RSS program.

The fact remains that that the statues of Ram Lalla were placed during the regime of Jawaharlal Nehru. The movement for Ram Jannabhum was first started by Congress leader Dau Dayal Khanna and later on taken up by VHP.

It was during the regime of Rajiv Gandhi at the centre and Veer Bahadur Singh in the state that the locks were removed from Babri Mosque. Then again during the regime of ND Tiwari, the Shilanyas for Ram temple was felicitated by Rajiv Gandhi government.

The mishandling of Ayodhya issue by Congress saw erosion of Hindu votes to BJP and Muslim votes to Samajwadi Party and Harijans were won over by BSP under the leadership of Kansiram-Mayawati.

While state leaders under the leadership of UPCC president Ajay Rai visited Ayodhya for darshan few days before the inauguration of Ram Temple. Former MP of Ayodhya and former UPCC president Nirmal Khatri was invited to attend the inauguration which he accepted and participated.

There are leaders like Acharya Pramod Krishnan who publicly criticised the leadership for not participating in the inauguration. At the same time Acharya Pramod Krishnan who was Congress candidate for Lok Sabha polls from Lucknow was full praise for PM Narendra Modi for ensuring construction of Ram Temple following Supreme Court order. It is going to be a testing time for Congress to deal with Hindutva forces within the party and outside during Lok Sabha polls.

When there is a continuous decline in vote share of her party Mayawati has announced that her party would not join NDA or INDIA. BSP contesting Lok Sabha polls alone is bound to help BJP. (IPA Service)

Indo-Iran ties strengthened further

As the crisis in the Red Sea spurred by the Israel-Hamas war escalates, India has begun a diplomatic outreach to crucial regional players to secure the country's trade and strategic interests. The outreach treads a line of neutrality in the conflict between the West-ern powers and the Islamic world wherein India has not joined the US-led multinational naval coalition in the Red Sea while it remains critical of the Houthis' violence.

In this backdrop, Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar's recent visit to Tehran was aimed to express India's concerns on the increasing attacks by the allegedly Iran-backed Houthis in the Red Sea, which he shared with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian.

MEA spokesperson said the issue of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the violence and destabilisation there, were among the things that were discussed, as India is 'deeply concerned about the whole situation'. In the last weeks, both the US and the UK have launched air strikes targeting the Houthi positions in Yemen. On its part, India has been closely monitoring the unfolding situation in the Red Sea. The issue also figured in a phone conversation be-

tween Jaishankar and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 11 January.

Countries like India are concerned that the conflict may impact most of Asian trade with Europe. This may lead to a supply chain restructuring, with neighbouring countries at higher costs.

Iran supposedly has close links with the Houthi militia in Yemen which have launched a series of attacks on shipping vessels plying the Red Sea route since mid-November. A key motivation for Jaishankar's visit was the recent attacks on several India-linked shipping vessels.

Terming the attacks on ships in the vicinity of India as a matter of 'grave concern' to the international community, S Jaishankar said in Tehran that such threats have a direct bearing on India's energy and economic interest as he underlined that this 'fraught situation' is not to the benefit of any party.

"There has also recently been a perceptible increase in threats to the safety of maritime commercial traffic in this important part of the Indian Ocean," he said in a joint press statement after wide-ranging talks with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian.

He stressed that it's im-



portant that this issue be 'speedily addressed', in an apparent reference to the targeting of merchant vessels in the Red Sea - one of the busiest trade routes - by Iranian-backed Yemen's Houthi rebels amid the Israel-Hamas conflict.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Asad Mirza

Economic aspects
EAM Jaishankar also met with Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash and held a detailed and productive discussion on establishing a long-term cooperation framework on the strategically vital Chabahar Port. During the visit, on 15 January, India and Iran signed an agreement on the further development of the Chabahar Port Located in Sistan-Balochistan province on

Iran's southern coast, the Chabahar Port is being developed jointly by India and Iran to boost connectivity and trade ties. India has been pushing for the port project to boost regional trade, especially for its connectivity to Afghanistan.

Earlier, Jaishankar had projected the Chabahar Port as a 'key regional transit hub' at a connectivity conference in Tashkent in 2021. The port is also seen as a key hub for the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project. The INSTC project is a 7,200-km-long multimode transport project for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia,

Central Asia and Europe.

Cultural links

In a significant move to deepen cultural ties, EAM S Jaishankar announced that the Government of India has decided to include Farsi (Persian) as one of the nine classical languages in India under the New Education Policy.

"The government of India has decided to include Farsi as one of the nine classical languages of India in our New Education Policy," said Jaishankar, highlighting the cultural, literary, and linguistic connections between Iran and India.

Jaishankar, made the above remarks during a joint press joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart, H Amirabdollahian on 15 January.

Indian outreach

Indian foreign minister's recent visit to Iran was part of the diplomatic efforts that have been stepped up to secure India's interests regionally.

Though, the Shiite population in India is quite small compared to the Sunni Muslims. Yet, the Indian government has always been able to build and balance its relationship with Iran and Saudi Arabia, both seen as the leaders of the Shia and Sunni communities globally. This diplomatic balancing has always worked to India's

advantage, besides giving it a regional clout.

At a regional level India has always accorded a significant priority to its ties with Iran. As the country apart from offering it a gateway to the central Asian republics and also Afghanistan, has also been a reliable oil supplier to India, and that too on a favourable rupee payment basis.

Therefore, the issues discussed during the foreign minister's visit also encompassed all aspects of the sustained relationship between India and Iran, as they covered regional security, trade and development and cultural ties. The announcement related to Farsi, was also timed right and was aimed at targeting the Muslim minority in the country.

Over the years Indo-Iran ties have moved ahead, in spite of meddling by other countries and the current diplomatic policy led by PM Modi and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, in this regard has not only carried on the old relationship, but the manner in which trade, economic and cultural ties between the two countries have progressed, shows their commitment to build a long-lasting relationship. (The author is a Delhi-based senior political and international affairs commentator)

The faith and politics: Regional strongholds in the Ayodhya project

By: Dipak Kurmi

As the Bharatiya Janata Party gears up for the upcoming national elections, the Ram Mandir project stands as a focal point. However, regional opponents are strategically employing faith-based political initiatives to build defenses against the anticipated surge of religious sentiments coinciding with the nationally televised inauguration of the Ayodhya temple. In the lead-up to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Ayodhya, Odisha's chief minister, Naveen Patnaik, initiated the Jagannath Parikrama in Puri, an ancient center of Hinduism. Against the backdrop of Vedic hymns, this move is perceived by many as a strategic maneuver by the astute leader to draw inspiration from the BJP's playbook and strengthen his influence over his community of "believers."

If the Ram Mandir movement is viewed as a political endeavor along with its supporters, aiming to establish a comprehensive pan-India civil-religious movement capable of assimilating local sects or variations of Hinduism into a unified Hindutva narrative, then the efforts by Patnaik to invoke Lord Jagannath or Mamata Banerjee's appeal to Goddess Kali in Kolkata may be interpreted as endeavors to reinforce and evoke enduring local traditions. These traditions, withstanding the trials of time, play a role in sustaining the diverse cultural-religious mosaic that defines India.

In Eastern India, particularly among Odias and Vaishnavites, Lord Jagannath holds a more prominent status compared to many other Hindu deities. Remarkably, the trio of the Lord, his brother Balaram, and sister Subhadra has not been embroiled in any political contention to date, in contrast to the fervor surrounding Ayodhya's Ram temple. The strategic decision by the Biju Janata Dal leader to position Lord Jagannath at a renovated center stage appears to have preemptively thwarted any potential attempts by the BJP to stoke Ram-centric enthusiasm in the coastal state.

Every household in the state has contributed rice and betel leaf for the consecration of the temple corridor project. A daily influx of around ten thousand lay followers will be transported to the ancient temple to participate in prayers.

Paradoxically, the BJP, known for accusing other political parties of neglecting Ayodhya celebrations, has opted to distance itself from Naveen Patnaik's Jagannath moment. The BJP alleges that the BJD has transformed the inauguration into a party-centric event, leading to their decision to stay uninvolved. In Odisha, the echoes of "Jai Jagannath" serve as a countermeasure to the allure of the "Jai Sri Ram" slogan. Meanwhile, TMC's dynamic leader Mamata Banerjee is orchestrating a comparable faith-driven political strategy. She plans to offer prayers at the medieval Kalighat temple and subsequently initiate

a communal harmony march, strategically aligning it with the Prime Minister's scheduled attendance at the Ayodhya temple inauguration.

Mamata Banerjee's strategic move, marked by its timing and symbolism, has ignited displeasure among the local BJP leadership in Bengal. Despite the BJP's prolonged efforts to instigate "Ram" fervor in the region, the presence of the Bhagwa or saffron flag with the Ram-Sita motif, a common sight in every village and suburb in North India, has been notably scarce in the lanes and bylanes of deltaic Bengal. Exceptions include a few industrial suburbs where Hindi-speaking workers dominate.

The inaugural woman chief minister of Bengal has strategically engaged the Reliance Foundation for the restoration of the Kalighat temple complex, a revered "shakti peetha" in Hinduism's Mother Goddess cult. This clever maneuver aims to reconstruct a significant temple while maintaining a separation between the state and her political party. Despite this detachment, the move anticipates reaping political benefits that may naturally emerge from the endeavor, given the temple's significance and the multitude of devotees it draws from across the country.

Having departed from the Congress in the 1990s to establish the Trinamool Congress, which has governed the eastern state for the past twelve years, Banerjee demonstrates a strategic equilibrium. She adeptly combines

Hindu religious symbolism with a politically charged "Sadbhabana" or communal harmony rally. This event is set to feature Hindu Sadhus, Buddhist monks, Christian priests, and Islamic religious leaders, emphasizing her commitment to "secular" principles.

According to Ranabir Samadhar, a renowned political scientist and former director of the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies in Kolkata, the worship of Kali has evolved as a grassroots religion, emerging and spreading independently of state support. This phenomenon mirrors various folk religious movements that have established their presence across the country. The act of invoking Kali, or even Jagannath, in response to the Ram movement, can be seen as an effort to advocate for religious inclusivity, contrasting with the constraints of a singular, unitary religion.

In contrast to Lord Jagannath, Kali, often referred to as "the dark one," has played a prominent role in politics. During the Agni Yug (1906-1931), armed revolutionaries invoked the goddess before embarking on individual or collective acts of violent agitation.

The goddess's political omnipresence and esteemed status extend beyond religious boundaries, earning her a patriotic reverence among the people of eastern India. This aspect, undoubtedly researched by Banerjee and her team of advisors, becomes evident as they strategically take on the BJP's flagship

Even after nearly nine months, Manipur govt fails to restore normalcy

By: Tirthankar Mitra

Nearly nine months have passed but the ethnic conflict in Manipur continues. The fallout of ethnic clashes has led to Manipur's present malady which are undeniably man-made. The state which gave birth to a form of dance all its own together with a unique culture, has been in flames since May 3 last year following clashes between Kukis and Meiteis.

The fire burning in Manipur for these days is no forest fire. It is a blaze that is burning off and apparently confined to pockets in the state. Continuing violence points to a lack of political will. Obduracy on the part of the powers that be in failing to acknowledge that more needs to be done is for all who care to see.

A closer look reveals Meiteis, especially the civilians have been at the receiving end of violence. The number of casualties have gone up to 12 this month and it needs no great insight into the affairs of Manipur to name the perpetrators of the ongoing violence.

Unrest that erupted in this state last May is far from over. Recurring incidents of violence are pointers to it. A mob targeting third Indian Reserve Battalion at Khangbok, Thoubal is not a sign of violence petering out. Another attack on Thoubal police head quarters is another pointer to an unquiet Manipur. The situ-

ation is indeed grim. It is a small consolation that the mob was not allowed to get its way on both occasions.

Three BSF personnel being injured, a Indian Reserve Battalion jawan and a havildar on deputation to Manipur police commandos being killed and two others being injured at the border town of Moreh are certainly not harbingers of peace. The attack came from two Kuki gun toting militants who turned out to being the main accused in the killing of Sub Divisional Police Officer of Moreh Chingtham Anand in October last year.

On the other hand, Manipur's home department commissioner requesting the Home Ministry for "air assets" in Imphal to meet with similar emergency situations is indeed a focus on fingers reaching out for the panic button. The helicopter has been provided for ferrying injured security personnel and relief materials.

The powers that be have thus prevented a scenario that a deteriorating law and order problem from worsening. But if it requires air strikes, it would be a dark

day for the Executive wing of the country.

The crisis is by no means over. Another chapter of it is about to begin which is a pointer to the past nine months of ethnic conflict. The state government is yet to step up and tackle it. Once the demand for the chief minister, N Biren Singh was on many lips. It was muffled when a group of women marched to his residence and sought that he stays put.

But one seeks answers why the accusation of partisanship is rife against the state government. So are the charges in the way of functioning of the security forces comprising Army and paramilitary personnel amassed during the initial stage of the conflict. Men in uniform have not been able to bring peace. The army chief's assertion in this regard cuts no ice.

In fact, it overlooks the fact the tramp of regulation boots in the deserted streets of riot torn areas need to dispense compassion and sensitivity. Both have to be given in equal measure if it is to be suitable prescription for the improvement of

the situation.

Violence against the security forces who do not have an axe to grind is a pointer to the people's identification of these men in uniform as anything but their protectors. It is a disturbing portent that only 30 per cent of the 4500 arms looted from the police armoury has been recovered so far.

It needs no great intelligence to infer that these arms are on circulation adding considerably to Manipur's troubles. The situation is such that each feels distrust for the others as well as those meant to protect them.

Nor is the instability in Myanmar together with Arakan rebels claim of taking over Petwa town in Chin state. Its proximity to Indian and Bangladesh borders adds to the volatility of the situation.

Formation of a peace committee with representation from different ethnic groups, civil society and political parties appeared to be the light at the end of the tunnel. The announcement coming from none other than Union home minister Amit Shah last June saw this committee running into hurdles.

The obstructions came in the shape of internal differences. It is yet to meet to cut short the season of anger and grief that seems to be unending. Manipur needs a salve of understanding and compassion for its open wounds. It is still on the lookout for them. (IPA Service)



The women who fought for justice for Bilkis Bano

By: Sravasti Dasgupta

For the petitioners who moved the Supreme Court against the Gujarat government's premature release of the 11 convicts jailed for gang-rape and multiple murders in the Bilkis Bano case, it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day speech in 2022 that proved the last straw.

Celebrating 75 years of Independence, Modi invoked woman power or 'nari shakti' from the Red Fort and called for an end to "every behaviour, culture that humiliates and demeans women."

Just then, the convicts, who had been sentenced to life for gang-raping a pregnant Bilkis Bano, members of her family, and also murdering at least 14 of them in 2002 while the Gujarat riots were on, walked out of Godhra sub-jail.

"On August 15, when the prime minister was talking about women's security and honouring women, the Gujarat government gave the remission order and released them (the convicts). I then heard that Bilkis made a statement saying 'is this the end of justice?' That really shook me and many like me who thought, 'What is the use of us being around?'" said CPI(M) leader and activist Subhashini Ali to The Wire.

Ali, former professor Roop Rekha Verma and journalist Revati Laul jointly filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the Gujarat government's remission and release order.

"We were trying to think of what we could do and it was very fortunate that lawyers like Kapil Sibal and Aparna Bhatt and others came forward," said Ali.

On January 8, the Supreme Court quashed the government's release order, said that the Gujarat government did not have the power to grant such a release to the convicts and directed them to return to prison within two weeks. The court also said that the Gujarat government had "acted in complicity" with the convicts.

The bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Ujjwal Bhuyan also held that the judgement of May 13, 2022, by a bench of Justices Ajay Rastogi and Vikram Nath, which directed the Gujarat government to consider remission, "a nullity" as it was obtained by "playing fraud on the court".

'Cruel joke on the nation'
Roop Rekha Verma, former professor at Lucknow University who was in Delhi when the news of the remission orders came out said that the prime minister's speech was "a cruel joke on the nation".

"The Prime Minister who was crying about violence on women in his Independence Day speech had already given permission for remission. That was a cruel joke on the nation," she said to The Wire.

Verma said that she then discussed the developments with some of her friends and associates, and the "idea cropped up collectively" to explore legal options.

"Although by that time we had enough examples to not look at courts with much hope, but there was no other door to knock on, apart from a petition in the Supreme Court," she said.

Journalist Revati Laul came onboard to become a petitioner in the case when she was told that they were looking for a third woman petitioner.



"They were looking for a third woman petitioner who had some locus standi in the matter. I was asked if I would like to be the third petitioner. I had written the book Anatomy of Hate which is based on the Gujarat riots and have been based in Gujarat for a while during and after the riots. I feel strongly about this case and I agreed," she said to The Wire.

The petitioners said that after they filed their petition, they found out that another PIL had been filed by now expelled Trinamool Congress Lok Sabha MP Mahua Moitra through lawyer Indira Jaising. Subsequently another petition was filed by former IPS officer Meeran Chadha Borwankar in September 2022. Her group also included petitioners Jagdeep Chokhar and Madhu Bhandari.

Borwankar said that she decided to "step in" and file a case when she realised that Bano herself had not challenged the remission orders.

"I was following the case closely and decided to step in when I realised that Bilkis Bano

had not challenged the remission orders. But she did so later," she said.

'Why should Bilkis have to come up?'

Bano moved the apex court against the remission orders only in November, 2022 following a petition filed by one of the convicts questioning the maintainability of these petitions saying the petitioners have no locus standi and are "complete strangers" in the matter.

Speaking to The Wire, her lawyer for the past two decades, Shobha Gupta said that Bano had to become a petitioner after the maintainability of these petitions were challenged in court.

"I was personally very clear, 'Why should she alone have to come up?' It was not an individual crime. It was a crime against humanity and a barbaric nature of crime. It is for the society to decide. That is why she did not take the plunge to begin with and I am glad she took her time to decide. In the meantime the right spirited persons challenged (the remission order) within no time and the court issued a no-

time in the PIL petitions on August 25 (2022)."

Gupta said that the remission orders had come as "rude shock" to Bano.

"Nobody could think this could happen so secretly. Suddenly you find that your rapists are roaming around being honoured and felicitated. The immediate reaction was that this was wrong. It has to be objected to but it is always tough to restart it (the fight) and how many times and for how long?"

'Milestone on the road to justice'

With the 11 convicts now being directed by the court to return to jail, Jaising who represented Moitra said that the judgement was extraordinary as the Supreme Court "very rarely declares its own judgement as null and void."

"It also gives you a roadmap to justice. I know they will apply to Maharashtra. We have to wait and see what happens in the future but the judgement is a milestone on the journey to justice," she said.

According to Verma, the

judgement comes at a time when faith in the Supreme Court has been low.

"This verdict is precious to me in many ways. When our faith in the Supreme Court and other courts was sagging low at that time such a judgement uplifts our faith in courts at least partially. It means to me not only individually but to the country as well that when judges are under a lot of pressure, a judgement can come that goes strictly by law but also puts some governments in the dock and says plainly that the state was hand in glove in complicity with the criminals.

"It shows that there are a few judges who don't serve as the staff of the government but will do what is expected of them and this expectation being fulfilled means everything in a democracy that we have a door to knock on and we will get justice," she said.

Laul said that the judgement comes as a "clear streak of light" in dark times.

"This (judgement) is a very clear streak of light. We must always use this streak of light to undo the dark and that requires a lot of work. We need to break the word Bilkis down and we as citizens need to ask ourselves - what is the institutional failure that allowed Bilkis's rape to become a public performance? What have we done as citizens to allow this monstrosity? It is not the optics but it is about what you and I are doing everyday that enables or disables this. We should not stop asking ourselves this question because otherwise we will be reducing this very important day to a pantomime," she said.

Ali said that the larger message behind this judgement is to

look beyond this as a "women's issue."

"Please do not think of this as a woman's fight. It is a fight to save this country from gross injustice and the Constitution being replaced by Manusmriti in every which way," she said.

Borwankar said that while it took a group of largely women to bring justice to Bano, the judgement shows that the "state cannot be partisan in its conduct."

'Not a lone battle'
In her first public statement after the judgement issued through Gupta on Monday, Bano said that she can "breathe again". She also thanked Gupta for never "allowing her to lose faith in the idea of justice."

Gupta said that she had not charged a penny in the matter right from when she was brought in by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) as a lawyer in the case following the riots in 2002.

"If you have the capacity as a lawyer why won't you do this for society? I was just five years into the profession. I was told by the NHRC that we have enough funds to pay lawyers but I said no not in this matter not even for paperwork. You have a job in society. It is something for the society you have to do. We are all a part of the society. She was a victim who was a direct sufferer of the riots.

"But each one of us suffered through the case, Like in Nirbhaya each one of us suffered as we witnessed it. Now with her case we are all associated because we have all seen the case. I stood by her because we want to tell her and society that you are not alone and this is not a lone battle," she said. (Courtesy: The Wire)

'I kept asking, why me?': Young women with rheumatoid arthritis on how they cope

By: Anoushka Rajesh

Tarika, a 29-year-old lawyer, was 23 when she first started noticing a persistent pain in her leg.

"Initially, I brushed it off. I thought maybe it was because of the cold, exhaustion, or the shoes I was wearing."

Fast forward a few months and the pain had rapidly spread to her other joints.

"It got so bad that I couldn't hold my toothbrush," she tells FIT.

This is when she consulted a doctor who ran some tests and told her she had rheumatoid arthritis.

"It was a complete shock to me. It took me some time to come to terms with it," says Tarika.

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune condition that mainly affects young women.

It's fairly common, can be diagnosed with a test, and has an effective treatment that can help control it. Yet, getting the diagnosis at the peak of your youth can be a hard blow to bounce back from.

Especially, since not enough patients are talking about it.

"I remember feeling so lonely at the time because I didn't know anyone else who could understand what I was going through."

Tarika, 29

"I used to work out and had a pretty good lifestyle. So I couldn't understand why it happened to me."

Is It Just Growing Pains, or Is It RA?

But, isn't arthritis that 'old people problem' that causes joint pain?

"There are many different kinds of arthritis. RA is an inflammatory kind of arthritis that generally occurs in young populations below 40 years of age," says Dr Priyanka Kharbanda, Senior Consultant, Rheumatology, Fortis Hospital, Delhi.

She adds, "RA is very common in the Indian population. Especially, in young women who are of childbearing age."

"Men can also get it, but the ratio is 9:1 (for every man who has RA, 9 women have it)."

Dr Priyanka Kharbanda.
Some symptoms to look out for include:

- Pain in the small joints, especially of the hands and feet
- Swelling in the joints
- Stiffness in the hands and the joints when one wakes up
- In more severe cases:
- Dry eyes and dry mouth
- Skin rashes
- Ulcers in the mouth



• Interstitial lung diseases (ILD)

According to Dr Kharbanda, symptoms of RA can appear without any preamble.

The Onset Of RA: It Comes Without a Warning

29-year-old Shreya, who was diagnosed with RA back in August 2023 says it started one day out of the blue.

"I felt a strange tightness in my fingers and then other parts of my hand for about a week straight," she says, adding, "and then my toe joints also started hurting, especially when I would wake up. It started suddenly. There were no telling symptoms leading up to it."

At a young age, one doesn't expect random aches and pains to be anything serious.

This is why many tend to ignore the signs, like both Tarika and Shreya did at first.

"Initially, the thought of RA hadn't even crossed my mind. When I finally showed it to a doctor and was diagnosed with RA, I couldn't reconcile with it," says Shreya.

'Feels Likes Being Given a Life Sentence'

The way Tarika and Shreya describe their journey after being diagnosed with RA is similar to what one goes through in the various stages of grief.

Denial

Tarika says, "I just didn't think it would be this serious. I wasn't ready to accept it. I kept thinking, Why me? Why me? Why me?"

"I've had a routine of working out, doing yoga, and I've been eating healthy too for the past two years, and have a pretty good lifestyle so the diagnosis came to me as a shocker," says Shreya.

Fear and Depression

"Initially it was hard for me to overcome my fear of doing physical activity. I was very scared of jogging, or jumping, or doing any activity," says

Tarika.

She goes on to say that it was also an extremely lonely time.

"I used to work out and had a pretty good lifestyle. So I couldn't understand why it happened to me."

"When I was diagnosed, it wasn't easy. I remember not wanting to leave my room and not wanting to speak to anyone."

Tarika

She says she was even met with apathy from the people around her. That made her clam up even further. "A boy in my college said to me, 'Well, you know my father has arthritis. He's 60. You're an oldie. Aren't you embarrassed? Perhaps he thought joking about it would make me feel better. It didn't.'"

Stress

Adjusting your life around this new condition can be an extremely overwhelming ordeal too.

For Shreya, the time she got diagnosed was also a time of major changes. "I was supposed to move to the US in August. So for me it was very stressful with moving countries all by myself, the harsh winters there, the whole healthcare system there, and how I would manage my illness alone."

"I had so many apprehensions and questions. But speaking to people who have had this experience before gave me some confidence."

Shreya Shrivastava

This is why doctors say, patient counselling is very important during and after the diagnosis.

Acceptance

"Eventually I had to have a conversation with myself to accept that this is just another circumstance that life has thrown at me and I can't choose to give up," says Tarika, adding that seeing a difference with medication helped further.

But, she says, acceptance is a continuous process. "Even now,

I find it hard to admit it to others that I have this condition."

"I used to work out and had a pretty good lifestyle. So I couldn't understand why it happened to me."

Doctors Want You to Know It Can Be Controlled, But You Must Act Fast

According to the experts that FIT spoke to, some conditions that can worsen RA are:

- Change in season
- Moisture in the air and humidity
- Cold weather
- Some viral and bacterial infections like COVID
- Smoking

And what can help alleviate it?

- Drier, warmer environments
- Exercising regularly, stretching in the morning
- Heat compression
- Regular and timely medication

"Now we have disease modifying drugs that not only stops the progression of the disease but can also, to some extent, reverse the severity," says Dr Sanjay Agarwala, DPS (Medical Director), Hinduja Hospital, Mumbai.

He adds, "So, it is possible to control the disease and have a totally normal life. Just like in the case of diabetes, high blood pressure, etc."

Dr Kharbanda adds, "There is a window of time of within two years of the first symptoms. If left untreated, the patient will develop deformities which cannot be then rectified. So, it is very important that the treatment is started as early as possible so that the deformities can be halted."

"Patients also have myths like we have to avoid sour foods, curd, or rice. No. During the treatment of arthritis, there is no food restriction required. But you have to take your drugs regularly on time."

Dr Priyanka Kharbanda

There is no permanent cure for RA - but early and aggressive treatment gives these young women the hope of remission.

Both Tarika and Shreya were able to bring their conditions into remission with timely treatment - they rarely experience symptoms and no longer need regular medication.

But this also does not mean that the symptoms cannot come back.

"They eventually will at some point," explains Dr Agarwala. "But as long as you keep up with medication, you can keep it under check, and live a full life without restrictions." (Courtesy: The Quint)

Face scrubs for glowing skin

By: Shahnaz Husain

Dull, dry, lustreless skin is result of regular exposure to dirt, dust and pollution in environment which accumulates toxins in deep pores. While washing and cleansing help get rid of superficial build up on face but misses out dead skin cells, blackheads and whiteheads. Face scrubs are must to clear dead cells and remove toxins from deep within pores for radiant, clear and flawless skin.

Packed with the goodness of natural ingredients and essential oils, face scrubs can provide your skin with deep exfoliation to give you smooth and clear skin. Scrubs not only improves skin texture, but also stimulates circulation and encourages toxins to escape through the unclogged pores.

When skin is clean and exfoliated, it can absorb the beneficial ingredients in treatment and moisturizing products much more effectively.

Scrubs play an important role by keeping the pores free of clogged oil, thus preventing blackheads and pimples. Some scrub ingredients, like lemon juice, lemon peels, curd, milk, turmeric, ground almonds, help to brighten the skin and lighten skin colour over a period of time.

Natural cooling ingredients can be used to make scrubs, like multani mitti, rose water, sandalwood, fruits, cucumber, aloe

vera, while natural antiseptics helps to prevent rashes. These are neem, tulsi, pudina. Other home ingredients for scrubs are ground almonds, oats, rice flour, wheat bran (choker), cucumber or pumpkin seeds, dried orange and lemon peels and eggs. For dry skin, use a scrub only once a week. If the skin is sensitive, with reddish patches or rash, avoid scrubs. For normal to oily skin, scrubs may be used more often.

For oily skin with enlarged pores: Mix oatmeal with egg white and apply on the areas. When it dries, dampen with water and rub gently with circular movements, washing off with water. Both egg white and oatmeal also help to reduce oiliness.

Mix 3 parts rice powder with 2 parts gram flour. Add curd and a little turmeric to mix into a paste. Apply on exposed areas of the body. Leave on for 10 minutes. Rub gently on the skin and wash off with water.

Ripe papaya has a cleansing action and contains an enzyme called papain, which helps to remove dead skin cells and brighten the skin. Add oats and curd to papaya. Apply on the face and rub gently on the skin, washing off with water.

Take 2 parts coarsely ground almonds and one part yogurt. Add a little turmeric. Mix together and apply on the body. After 5 minutes, rub gently and then wash off with water.

Take sesame seeds (til), dried mint (pudina) leaves and honey. Crush the sesame seeds coarsely and powder the dried mint leaves. Mix them with a little honey and apply on the skin. Leave on for 5 minutes. Rub gently and wash off with water. Sesame seeds actually have sun protective properties and also soothe sun-damaged skin. Or, mix ground almonds with yogurt. Apply on the face. Leave on for 15 minutes. Then moisten with water and rub gently. Wash off with plenty of water.

Dried and powdered lemon and orange peels, along with dried and powdered mint (pudina) leaves can be added to facial scrubs to help add a glow. In fact, mint also helps to keep the skin clear and prevent eruptions. Apply the mixture on the face and leave on for a few minutes. Then, rub gently, with small circular movements, washing off with water.

For all skin types, make a powder of green tea leaves and mix it with curd and aloe vera gel in equal quantities. Apply on face leave on for a few minutes. Rub gently and wash off with water.

Take one cup olive oil and mix with Epsom salts or sugar. Add a little grated lemon rind. Apply on the face and rub gently. Wash off. The remaining scrub may be kept in the fridge in an airtight jar. (The author is international fame beauty expert and is called herbal queen of India)

Empowered by water: Women's quality of life improves with household access to water supply

By Ruby Sarkar

Anita Chaudhary, a resident of Garhmau village in Madhya Pradesh, is one of the 56 women felicitated by the Union government in March this year for her efforts to improve the water situation in her area.

As head of Garhmau's water and sanitation committee since 2020, she has been monitoring supply of water to households in the village in Mohkhd tehsil, Chhindwara district, and sensitising other residents on conservation.

Two decades ago, Chaudhary, like most women in her village, spent a large part of the day walking 2-5 km to fetch water for her household's needs.

"We had no time to take care of our children. Our health declined as we covered long distances on foot with heavy water containers; some women were gravely injured" she said.

In 2015, Madhya Pradesh introduced the Mohkhd Water Supply Scheme to provide household water connections in the tehsil. The scheme was later brought under the aegis of the Centre's Jal Jeevan Mission, 2019 that aims to ensure drinking water supply through taps in all households by 2024.

The women in the tehsil took charge to ensure proper implementation of the scheme. Mamta Sudama Doble of Mau village, for instance, decided to play a greater role in governance.

"I stood as a sarpanch candidate for the village panchayat in 2012, on the promise of addressing water issues. But I lost. In 2022, when I contested again, the government had started supplying water

to households, but I was elected on the promise of keeping the system running properly," she said.

Further, the women nominated one or two members from each of the self-help groups already present in the tehsil to join the water and sanitation committee, as mandated by the Jal Jeevan Mission. Half the members of the committee should be women.

"We received training and kits from the government to test the quality of water supplied. If any village resident complains, we check the water and coordinate with officials to resolve issues," said Chaudhary.

Currently, there are some 8,500 water connections across 32-33 villages in the tehsil, said Basant Kumar Belvanshi, manager of Mohkhd Water Supply Scheme. Around 50,000 residents benefited from this. The results have not only eased women's water woes, but also empowered them. In general, women in Mohkhd work as daily-wage labourers, earning R150-200 a day.

But Chaudhary, for instance, opened a general provision store in 2021 that provides her additional income each month. Other women have taken up sewing or tutoring.

Such changes are reflected across the country, as more households are supplied water under the Jal Jeevan Mission.

"In many states, we see women's health and livelihoods improve as the burden of fetching water is lifted off their shoulders," said Sushmita Sengupta, senior programme manager, water, at Delhi-based think tank Centre for Science and Environment. (Courtesy: Dow To Earth)

The U.S. and British militaries launched a new round of strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen

21 soldiers are killed in the deadliest single attack on Israeli forces since the war in Gaza began

JERUSALEM, Jan 23: Twenty-one soldiers were killed in the Gaza Strip in the deadliest attack on Israel's forces since the October 7 Hamas raid that triggered the war, the military said on Tuesday, a major setback that could lead to mounting calls for a cease-fire.

Hours later, the military announced that ground forces had encircled the southern city of Khan Younis, Gaza's second largest, where dozens of Palestinians have been killed and wounded in heavy fighting in recent days.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mourned the soldiers but vowed to press ahead with the offensive until "absolute victory" over Hamas. He has also promised to return over 100 hostages held captive in Gaza.

But Israelis are increasingly divided on the question of whether it's possible to do either, and large numbers of Israeli casualties have pressured Israel's government to halt past military operations.

A senior Egyptian official meanwhile said Israel has proposed a two-month cease-fire in which the hostages would be freed in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and top Hamas leaders in Gaza would be allowed to relocate to other countries.

The official, who was not authorised to brief media and spoke on condition



of anonymity, said Hamas rejected the proposal and is insisting that no more hostages will be released until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws from Gaza. Israel's government declined to comment on the talks.

The official said Egypt and Qatar, which have brokered past agreements between Israel and Hamas, were developing a multistage proposal to try and bridge the gaps. Families of the hostages have called for Israel to reach a deal with Hamas, saying time is running out to bring the hostages home alive.

On Monday, Israeli reservists were preparing explosives to demolish two buildings in central Gaza when a militant fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a tank nearby. The blast triggered the explosives, causing both two-story buildings to collapse on the soldiers in

side. At least 217 soldiers have been killed since the ground offensive began in late October, including three killed in a separate event Monday, according to the military. Netanyahu acknowledged it was "one of the hardest days" since the war began and said the military would launch an investigation. "In the name of our heroes, and for our own lives, we will not stop fighting until absolute victory," he wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Israel launched its offensive after Hamas crossed the border October 7, killed over 1,200 people and abducted some 250 others. More than 100 were released in November in exchange for a weeklong cease-fire and the release of 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

The offensive has caused widespread destruction, displaced an estimated 85 per cent of Gaza's population and left over 25,000 Palestinians dead, according to health officials in the Hamas-run territory.

The United Nations and international aid agencies say the fighting has caused a humanitarian disaster, with a quarter of Gaza's 2.3 million people facing starvation.

The war has heightened regional tensions, with Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen attack-

ing United States and Israeli targets in support of Palestinians. The US and Britain launched another wave of strikes Monday against the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who have targeted international shipping in the Red Sea in what they portray as a blockade of Israel.

Hamas is believed to have suffered heavy losses but has continued to put up stiff resistance in the face of one of the deadliest air and ground offensives in recent history. Militants are still battling Israeli forces across the territory and launching rockets into Israel.

The attack that killed the soldiers occurred some 600 metres from the border in Maghazi, one of three built-up refugee camps in central Gaza dating back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

Ground operations have been focused on the camps, as well as Khan Younis, after Israel claimed to have largely defeated Hamas in northern Gaza in operations that caused widespread destruction to that part of the territory, including Gaza City.

The military said its forces had killed dozens of militants in Khan Younis in recent days and had managed to encircle the city. It did not provide evidence, and it was not possible to independently confirm details about the fighting there. (AP)

Russian missiles target Ukrainian cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv, killing 6 and wounding dozens

KYIV, Jan 23: A complex Russian missile attack targeted Ukrainian cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv on Tuesday morning, killing at least six people, wounding dozens and damaging residential buildings, officials said.

In the capital of Kyiv, at least one person was killed, according to city administration chief Roman Popko. Mayor Vitalii Klitschko said 18 people were injured, including a 13-year-old boy. Residential infrastructure was damaged in at least four districts. In Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, five people were killed and 38 were wounded, mayor Ihor Terekhov said.

An entire section of a multi-story residential building was destroyed, trapping an unknown number of people there, Terekhov said. Recent Russian attacks have tried to find gaps in Ukraine's defenses by using large numbers of missiles and drones in an apparent effort to saturate air defense systems. The massive barrages - more than 500 drones and missiles were fired between Dec 29 and Jan 2, according to officials in Kyiv - are also using up Ukraine's weapons stockpiles.

Tuesday's missile attack came a day after Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk visited Ukraine, vowing to keep supporting it against Russia's nearly 2-year-old invasion and announcing a new military aid package that includes a loan to buy larger weapons and a commitment to find ways to manufacture them together. Meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv, Tusk said they had reached "an understanding" to resolve through talks any differences between their countries over grain shipments and trucking. Those issues recently soured ties between the neighbours.

Ukraine's allies have recently sought to reassure the country that they are committed to its

long-term defence amid concerns that Western support could be flagging. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and France's new foreign minister also travelled to Kyiv in the new year.

Tusk, who returned to power last month and is keen to show that a change in government won't alter its Ukraine policy, also met with his Ukrainian counterpart, Denys Shmyhal. Kyiv was the first foreign capital he visited since becoming prime minister again, Tusk said. He returned to Polish politics after serving as president of the European Council - one of the European Union's top jobs.

He framed the war as a wider struggle between Europe and Russia that had repercussions beyond Ukraine, making it a priority for Poland. "Today Ukraine is shouldering the security matters of the entire European continent, today Ukraine is paying the huge price of blood for the values that are fundamental to the free world," he said. "Poland's security is also at stake in this struggle."

Zelenskyy described the talks as "very productive" and said Poland's new military aid would include a loan allowing Ukraine to purchase big-ticket weapons. They also assessed opportunities for joint arms production, he said, in line with similar discussions with other allies.

On Sunday, Moscow-installed officials in eastern Ukraine reported that Ukrainian shelling killed 27 people on the outskirts of Russian-occupied Donetsk. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called it a "monstrous terrorist act," and the Russia-backed local authorities declared a day of mourning.

The Ukrainian military, however, denied it had anything to do with the attack. It was not immediately possible to verify either side's claims. (AP)

NATO signs key artillery ammunition contract to replenish allied supplies and help Ukraine

BRUSSELS, Jan 23: NATO signed on Tuesday a USD 1.2-billion contract to make tens of thousands of artillery rounds to replenish the dwindling stocks of its member countries as they supply ammunition to Ukraine to help it defeat Russia's invasion.

The contract will allow for the purchase of 220,000 rounds of 155-millimetre ammunition, the most widely sought after artillery shell, according to NATO's support and procurement agency. It will allow allies to backfill their arsenals and to provide Ukraine with more ammunition.

"This is important to defend our own territory, to build up our own stocks, but also to continue to support Ukraine," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters.

"We cannot allow President (Vladimir) Putin to win in Ukraine," he added. "That would be a tragedy for the Ukrainians and dangerous for all of us."

Ukraine was firing around 4,000 to 7,000 artillery shells each day last summer, while Russia was launching more than 20,000 shells daily in its neighbour's territory, according to European Union estimates. Russia's arms industry far outweighs Ukraine's and Kyiv needs help to match Moscow's firepower.

But the shells will not arrive quickly - delivery on orders takes anywhere from 24 to 36 months, the NATO agency said.

The European Union plans to produce 1 million artillery rounds for Ukraine have fallen short, with only about a third of the target met. Senior EU officials have said that they now expect the European defence industry to be producing around one million shells annually by the end of this year. (AP)

7.1 magnitude earthquake rattles part of western China, injuring 6 people and collapsing 47 homes

BEIJING, Jan 23: A magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck a sparsely populated part of China's western Xinjiang region early on Tuesday, injuring six people and damaging or collapsing more than 120 homes in freezing cold weather, authorities said. The quake was the latest in a series of seismic events and natural disasters to hit the vast country's western regions.

The quake rocked Uchturpan county in Aksu prefecture shortly after 2 a.m., the China Earthquake Networks Centre said. Around 200 rescuers were dispatched to the epicentre. The county is called Wushi in the Mandarin language spoken by most Chinese.

Of the six people hurt, two had serious injuries and four were minor. In addition, 47 houses collapsed, 78 houses were damaged and some agricultural structures collapsed, the government of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region posted on its official Weibo social media account.

The quake downed power lines but electricity was quickly restored, Aksu authorities reported. Mountainous Uchtur-



pan county had around 233,000 people in 2022, according to Xinjiang authorities.

Urumqi Railroad Bureau resumed services after 7 a.m. following safety checks that confirmed no problems on the train lines. The suspension had affected 23 trains, the bureau serving the Xinjiang capital said on its official Weibo account.

The US Geological Survey said the quake measured 7.0 magnitude and occurred in the seismically active Tian Shan mountain range. It said the area's largest quake in the past century was 7.1 magnitude and occurred in 1978 about 200 kilometres to the north of one early Tuesday.

Multiple aftershocks were recorded, the strongest of them

at 5.3 magnitude. The rural area is populated mostly by Uyghurs, a Turkic ethnicity that is predominantly Muslim and has been the target of a state campaign of forced assimilation and mass detention. The region is heavily militarised and state broadcaster CCTV showed paramilitary troops moving in before dawn to clear rubble and set up tents for those displaced.

Uchturpan county is recording temperatures well below freezing, with lows down to negative 18 degrees C (just below zero F) forecast by the China Meteorological Administration this week.

In Yunnan province in China's southwest, rescue workers were still searching for victims buried by a landslide

Monday in the village of Liangshui. Eleven bodies have been recovered, and two survivors were rescued from among the 47 people buried in 18 homes in freezing cold and falling snow.

The tremors from Tuesday's earthquake were felt hundreds of kilometres away. Ma Shengyi, a 30-year-old pet shop owner living in Tacheng, 600 kilometres from the epicentre, said her dogs started barking before she felt her apartment building shudder. The quake was so strong her neighbours ran downstairs. Ma rushed to her bathroom and started to cry.

"There's no point in running away if it's a big earthquake," Ma said. "I was scared to death."

Chandeliers swung, buildings were evacuated and a media office building near the epicentre shook for a full minute, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. A video posted by a Chinese internet user on Weibo showed residents standing outside on the streets bundled in winter jackets, and a photo posted by CCTV showed a cracked wall with chunks fallen off. (AP)

Suspect in killing of 8 people in Chicago has fatally shot himself in Texas: Police

CHICAGO, Jan 23: A man suspected of shooting and killing eight people in suburban Chicago fatally shot himself after a confrontation with law enforcement officials in Texas, police said late on Monday.

Police in Joliet, Illinois, said on Facebook that at about 8:30 p.m. Central time 23-year-old Romeo Nance was located by US Marshals near Natalia, Texas, and that Nance shot himself after a confrontation.

The Medina County Sheriff's Office in Texas said on Facebook that the agency received a call about a person suspected in the Chicago killings heading into the county on Interstate 35. A standoff then occurred between Nance and police from multiple agencies at a gas station, where Nance shot himself, the sheriff's office said.

Nance is suspected of fatally shooting eight people at three locations in the Chicago suburbs, sparking a search that left neighbours on edge earlier on Monday as police warned he was still on the loose and should be considered "armed and dangerous."

Police in Will County in Illinois and Joliet previously said they did not know of a motive for the killings, but said Nance knew the victims. The FBI's fugitive task force had

been assisting local police in the search for the suspect, Joliet Police Chief William Evans said.

The victims were found on Sunday and Monday at three separate residences, authorities told reporters at a news conference earlier on Monday evening.

One of the people killed was found Sunday in a home in Will County. Seven others were found on Monday at two homes on the same block in Joliet, located about about 6 miles (9.6 kilometres) northwest of the scene police discovered first.

Authorities said they also believe Nance was connected to another shooting in Joliet that wounded a man on Sunday but would not discuss their evidence.

"I've been a policeman 29 years and this is probably the worst crime scene I've ever been associated with," Evans said during a news conference outside the Joliet homes on Monday evening.

Will County Chief Deputy Dan Jungles said during the Monday news conference that deputies had been staking out one of the houses since Sunday evening in case Nance, the suspect in the first fatal shooting they discovered, returned to them. Nance's last known address was one of the homes, police said. (AP)

Iran executes another prisoner detained during nationwide protests that erupted in 2022

DUBAI, Jan 23: Iran on Tuesday hanged another prisoner over crimes committed during nationwide protests that erupted in 2022 following the death of a young woman detained for improperly wearing her headscarf.

According to a report on state television, Mohammad Qobadlu was executed after being sentenced for killing a policeman and injuring five others after he ran them over in his car during a rally in the town of Parand, near the capital of Tehran.

The TV report said the 23-year-old Qobadlu, who had confessed to his crime, had access to a lawyer during the trial. Qobadly had appealed his death sentence, handed down by a lower court, but the Supreme Court later upheld the original verdict.

Qobadlu's execution was the ninth reported by the authorities since the protests started in the fall of 2022, according to a count by The



Associated Press.

The months-long unrest followed the Sept 16, 2022 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who had been detained by Iran's morality police allegedly because she improperly wore the mandatory Islamic veil, or hijab.

At least 529 people have been killed and scores of thousands of others have been de-

tained in the demonstrations. The protests gradually died down in the early months of last year.

In December, Iran executed a bank guard convicted of fatally shooting a senior cleric last April. Ayatollah Abbas Ali Soleimani, 77, was the most senior member of the clergy who was killed since the protests and the subsequent security crackdown on the demonstrators. The guard's motive for the shooting were not explained.

Though Shiite clergy have long held an important role in Iran, particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, discontent has increased in recent years during waves of protests over economic, political and civil rights issues.

In November, Iran hanged Milad Zohrehvand, 21, in the western city of Hamadan for shooting and killing a member of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard during the protests. (AP)

Sri Lankan Parl votes to debate controversial online safety bill

COLOMBO, Jan 23: Sri Lanka's Parliament on Tuesday voted to go ahead with a scheduled debate on a controversial Online Safety Bill that critics say will stifle freedom of speech.

Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeyswardena had called for a vote to decide if the two-day debate should proceed.

Out of 225 legislators, 83 voted in favour of holding the debate while 50 voted against it.

The Opposition parties had sought more time for consultations on the bill. Opposition MPs and other critics have warned that the Online Safety Bill could be a threat to freedom of speech. Tiran Alles, the public security

minister, while opening the debate said the Supreme Court had suggested amendments to the bill and they would be incorporated after the bill is approved in parliament on Wednesday.

As Alles was speaking, a civil group demonstrated near Parliament to oppose the bill.

They said the government aims to censor the expression of public opinion through social media.

The bill aims to establish the Online Safety Commission, make provisions to prohibit online communication of certain statements of fact in Sri Lanka and prevent the use of online accounts and inauthentic online ac-

counts for restricted purposes.

It also makes provisions to identify and declare online locations used for prohibited purposes in the island nation, support the financing, and other support of communication of false statements of fact.

The Asian Internet Coalition (AIC) in a letter to Alles had objected to the bill.

"The proposed legislation, in its present form, poses significant challenges that, if not addressed comprehensively, could undermine the potential growth of Sri Lanka's digital economy," it said.

The vote on the parliamentary approval of the bill is to take place on Wednesday. (PTI)

Rishi Sunak's Rwanda migration bill suffers a blow in Britain's Parliament

LONDON, Jan 23: The upper house of Britain's Parliament has urged the Conservative government not to ratify a migration treaty with Rwanda. It's a largely symbolic move, but signals more opposition to come for the stalled and contentious plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to the African nation.

The House of Lords voted by 214 to 171 on Monday evening to delay the treaty that paves the way for the deportation plan. The treaty and an accompanying bill are the pillars of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's bid to overcome a block on the deportations by the UK Supreme Court.

Members of the Lords, who are appointed rather than elected, backed a motion saying Parliament should not ratify the pact until ministers can show Rwanda is safe. John Kerr, a former diplomat who sits in the Lords, said the Rwanda plan was "incompatible with our responsibilities" under international human rights law.

"The considerations of international law and national reputation... convince

me that it wouldn't be right to ratify this treaty at any time," he said.

The vote has little practical impact, because the House of Lords can't block an international treaty, and the government says it will not delay. However, ignoring the demand could later be used against the government in a legal challenge.

Lawmakers in the House of Commons approved the bill last week, but only after 60 members of Sunak's governing Conservatives rebelled in an effort to make the legislation tougher.

Monday's vote indicates the strength of opposition in the House of Lords. Many there want to water down the bill - and, unlike in the Commons, the governing Conservatives do not have a majority of seats. The Lords will begin debating the bill next week.

Ultimately the upper house can delay and amend legislation but can't overrule the elected Commons.

The Rwanda policy is key to Sunak's pledge to "stop the boats" bringing unauthorised migrants to the UK across the English Channel from France. (AP)

There will be a 35% reduction in new student visas this year, with a reassessment of permits issued in 2025

Canada announces 2-year cap on international student visas; move likely to impact Indians

OTTAWA, Jan 23: Canada has announced that it is imposing an immediate two-year cap on new international student visas to tackle a housing crisis and target institutional "bad actors", a move that is likely to impact Indians planning to study in the country.

Immigration Minister Marc Miller said as part of the cap there will be a 35 per cent reduction in new study visas in 2024. The cap is expected to result in 364,000 new approved permits in 2024. Nearly 560,000 such visas were issued last year.

The cap will be in place for two years; the number of permits to be issued in 2025 will be reassessed at the end of this year, he said. "To maintain a sustainable level of temporary residence in Canada, as well to ensure that there is no further growth in the number of international students in Canada for 2024, we are setting a national application intake cap for two years from 2024," Global News quoted Miller as saying.

The move comes amid pressure on the federal government from provinces on the increasing numbers of non-permanent residents entering Canada while the country struggles with a housing crisis, CBC News



said. Miller earlier this month said that a cap on international students would not be a "one-size-fits-all solution" to housing shortages across Canada.

More than 800,000 international students were issued temporary study visas in 2022. Miller said last fall that 2023's numbers were on track to be more than triple the number accepted 10 years ago.

The move is expected to impact students from India who see Canada as a preferred destination for higher studies.

India was the first among the top ten origin countries of study permit holders in 2022 in Canada, with a total of 319,000 students. Miller said that by imposing the cap, the federal government is taking ac-

tion against some small private colleges.

The move will help the government to target institutional "bad actors", he said.

"It's unacceptable that some private institutions have taken advantage of international students by operating under-resourced campuses, lacking supports for students and charging high tuition fees all the while significantly increasing their intake of international students," Miller said.

In some provinces, Miller said, the total reduction in permits will be approximately 50 per cent.

Provinces and territories will be left to decide how permits are distributed among universities and colleges in their jurisdictions. The cap will be in place for two years; the number of permits to be issued in 2025 will be reassessed at the end of this year.

In an interview with CBC News on Monday, Miller spoke of "degree-granting institutions that are giving fake business degrees" to students who hope to stay in Canada. The minister said there could be "hundreds" of such schools operating in Canada and that the number has "exploded

in the last couple of years."

In addition to the cap, the federal government will also require international students applying for a permit to provide an attestation letter from a province or territory. "These measures are not against individual international students," Miller said.

"They are to ensure that as future students arrive in Canada, they receive the quality of education that they signed up for and the hope that they were provided in their home countries."

Miller also announced changes to the post-graduation work permit programme.

Starting in September, international students who begin a programme that's part of a curriculum licensing arrangement (one where a private college has been licensed to deliver the curriculum of an associated public college) will no longer be eligible for a post-graduation work permit.

Graduates of master's and other "short graduate-level programmes" will "soon" be able to apply for a three-year work permit, the government says. Open work permits will also be made available to the spouses of international students in master's and doctoral programs. (PTI)

Myanmar plane for soldiers' repatriation crashes at Mizoram airport, 8 injured

Myanmaese soldiers had crossed over to India following gunfights with ethnic group last week

AIZWAL, Jan 23: All the 14 passengers of a small Myanmar military plane had a miraculous escape on Tuesday after the aircraft overshoot the table-top Lengpui airport runway near here and crash-landed into a bush, officials said.

Of the 14 people aboard the plane, including the pilot, eight sustained minor injuries and were treated in a local health centre, they said.

The plane had come to take back 92 Myanmar soldiers who crossed over to India last week, following gunfights with an ethnic insurgent group, they said.

Officials said the Myanmar air force Y-8 cargo plane overshoot the table-top runway of the Mizoram government-run airport around 10.20 am and crash-landed into a nearby bush, splitting the bottom of the fuselage.

The injured were taken to Lengpui Primary Health centre for treatment, they added.



The runway is closed for the time being and all flights have been cancelled for today, an official said.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has ordered an

investigation into the accident, a state government official said.

"All flights have been cancelled. Hoping passengers would be able to either fly in or fly out as soon as possible, especially people with

medical emergency," she said.

In all, 276 Myanmar soldiers had entered Mizoram last week and 184 were sent back on Monday, officials said, adding the remaining 92 soldiers were to be repatriated in batches, they said.

The plane was supposed to take them to Sittwe in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

The Myanmar soldiers entered Bandukbanga village in Mizoram's Lawngtlai district with their weapons on January 17 and approached the Assam Rifles. They had fled to the northeastern state after their camp was overrun and captured by 'Arakan Army' fighters.

The soldiers were taken to the nearby Assam Rifles camp at Parva, and later majority of them were shifted to Lunglei, the official said.

They have been under the supervision of the Assam Rifles since then, the official said.

These soldiers were brought to Aizawl over Saturday and Sunday to be sent to Myanmar from Lengpui airport.

The group, headed by a colonel, has 36 officers and 240 lower-rank personnel, officials said.

With the 276 soldiers who entered last week, as many as 635 Myanmar soldiers have fled to Mizoram after their camps were overrun and captured by ethnic armed organisations and pro-democratic forces over the last few months, officials said.

In November, 104 Myanmar army personnel were sent to the border town of Moreh in Manipur from different places in Mizoram by Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopters, and then repatriated.

Earlier this month, 255 soldiers were sent back via the Lengpui airport by Myanmar air force planes.

Mizoram shares a 510-km-long border with Myanmar. (PTI)

Arunachal govt prepares blueprint for growth, priority to villages

ITANAGAR, Jan 23: Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu said his government has chalked out a blueprint to overhaul the existing planning process for accelerated growth of the north-eastern state. Priority will be accorded to facilitate the holistic development of all villages in the state.

Khandu, who is on a two-day tour of the Upper Siang district, while addressing a public meeting at Tuting assured to implement the new planning process after the elections.

Arunachal Pradesh would go for simultaneous Lok Sabha and state assembly polls this year.

"The new planning process will extensively involve stakeholders at the ground level as it is the people in villages and officers on the ground, who know what is required. So our state plan will stand on the inputs from the ground. The entire process will be from bottom to top, not like the erstwhile top-to-bottom process", he said.

The chief minister assured that the new model of planning will accelerate the holistic development of all villages in the state and that government resources would be optimally utilised without wastage, an official communique said here on Tuesday.

Khandu said that under the central government's ambitious flagship programme, 'Vibrant Village' Tuting area in the district will witness a rapid transformation.

Hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi for remodelling the concept of border villages, the chief minister said that Gelling, which was known as the last village on the Indian side in the Tuting subdivision of the district today has become the 'first village' on the Indian side.

He said under the present central and state governments, the connectivity sector in the state has witnessed a sea change.

Be it roads, air, rail or digital, Khandu said, all modes of connectivity have significantly improved in the last 7-8 years.

Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP), a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2023, aims at

the comprehensive development of select villages in 46 blocks in 19 districts abutting the northern border in Arunachal Pradesh along with Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Ladakh.

The programme envisages focused areas of interventions in the select villages for the creation of opportunities for livelihood generation through the promotion of tourism and cultural heritage, skill development and entrepreneurship and development of cooperative societies.

The interventions also include providing road connectivity to unconnected villages, housing, and village infrastructure, energy including renewable energy, television, and telecom connectivity.

"Recently the Union home ministry has sanctioned about 1,022 km of roads under the programme for Arunachal Pradesh. We are thankful to the Modi government that Arunachal Pradesh has the most number of border villages listed under the programme", Khandu added.

Appreciating state health minister Alo Libang, who is also the local MLA, for the all-round development of the district the chief minister noted that once the new Yingkiang-Tuting road is complete, the district will witness a surge in tourism activities.

Khandu also appealed to members of five communities - Memba, Khamba, Adi, Mishmi, and Tangam - in the district to co-exist peacefully and become equal stakeholders in the development of the border areas.

He said the communities residing in the northernmost part of the district that shares international border with Tibet-China have been living peacefully for ages and that there should not be any issue that disturbs this relationship of brotherhood.

"Upper Siang's Tuting administrative division is one of the most vivid and colourful in terms of the people living here. Each one of them is unique, distinct, and independent. Your peaceful coexistence and cultural amalgamation is the hallmark of the district", he added. (PTI)

Security tightened around Kangla Fort in Imphal

IMPHAL, Jan 23: Security has been beefed up in Imphal ahead of a meeting scheduled to be convened by Arambai Tenggol on Wednesday in the Kangla fort, situated in the heart of the state capital.

The vicinity of the fort has also been fortified by deploying a large number of security forces personnel.

Arambai Tenggol had said earlier that the meeting is being convened to take a concrete decision with regard to the prevailing problem.

In the meeting proposed to be convened at Kangla Utra of the Kangla fort on Wednesday at 10 am, Arambai Tenggol invited all the Meitei ministers and Meitei MLAs including the chief minister of Manipur.

All of them were asked to ensure attending the meeting, while asserting that if any of them stays away from the meeting, they will be treated as enemies of the Meitei community.

Meanwhile, to thwart any untoward incident arising of the expected mass congregation, the Manipur government has taken up special security measures.

As a part of the measures, a large number of security forces personnel were deployed in the state capital, particularly in and around the Kangla fort from this afternoon.

Apart from the deployment of the security forces, police officers along with their teams are being also deployed at all the gates of the Kangla fort besides deployment of police personnel inside the gate, as per an official source.

Meanwhile, officials of the Union ministry of home affairs (MHA) camping in Imphal were holding the second round of talks with the leaders of the Arambai Tenggol, led by its commander Koroungamba.

The MHA team, led by AK Mishra, who is also the interlocutor of the Naga peace talks and the suspension of operation (SoO) with the Kukli groups, comprises joint director of SIB New Delhi, Mandeep Singh and joint director of SIB Imphal, Rajesh Kumble.

The team arrived in Imphal on Monday and the first round of talks was held late on Monday evening. The talks were being held at the residence of Rajya Sabha MP Leishemba Sanajaoba in the palace. (PTI)

Nagaland Dy CM Patton asks village heads to identify illegal immigrants

HT Correspondent

DIMPUR, Jan 23: Nagaland deputy chief minister Y Patton urged the gaon burhas (village heads), especially in Dimapur, to identify any illegal immigrants settled in their respective jurisdictions to curb illegal immigration in the state.

Patton made the appeal while referring to Tripura where he said the original inhabitants have been reduced to 25 per cent of the total population of the state. He, however, added that by illegal immigrants he meant those who do not possess valid documents.

He also asked the village chiefs to keep an eye on illegal activities in their areas and report such matters to the administration or police.

He was speaking at a programme after inaugurating the new office-cum-customary court building of GB Union Dimapur at Zakiesato colony here on Tuesday afternoon.

Patton said unlike the gaon burhas in rural areas, the GBs in Dimapur Sadar have a complicated role to play as it is the gateway and



commercial hub of Nagaland and where almost all sections of people from across the country reside and do business.

"At times, the roles and responsibilities of gaon burhas in Dimapur become very crucial and important," he pointed out.

Highlighting the roles of gaon burhas, Patton said they are the pillars of the Naga tribal society and custodians of Naga customs and

traditional practices. He added that they have huge responsibilities in dispensing customary law and justice in the villages and rural areas.

Echoing Dimapur commissioner of police Kevitho Sophie, who also spoke on the occasion, Patton said the gaon burhas are not authorised to settle the cases that go against the state, including murder and rape cases according to the Naga customary laws.

Pointing out that the gaon burhas are appointed by the government, Patton said that their job is to assist the government in administration and delivering justice to the citizens as government agencies.

He warned that the gaon burhas should not be a stumbling block to the government's functioning, but rather should act a catalyst between the citizens and the government in governance.

He urged the village chiefs to live up to the expectations of the people.

Patton expressed happiness that the Gaon Burhas' Union, Dimapur got an office building 34 years after it came into being in 1990.

Tezpur University marks 31st Foundation Day VC unveils plans for new departments and expansion

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Jan 23: Tezpur University celebrated its 31st Foundation Day recently, with the presence of Padma Shri Prof Virander Singh Chauthan, an eminent Indian scientist and former chairman of the University Grants Commission and National Assessment and Accreditation Council.

Delivering the 31st Foundation Day oration, Prof Chauhan, in his speech, outlined the university's transformative journey and its crucial role in shaping the future of higher education. His insightful remarks touched upon several key aspects that highlight the university's commitment to societal progress and academic excellence. He highlighted the privilege of higher education, stressing that it provides a unique opportunity for success, independent thinking, and realisation of one's own right. Explaining the role of a university, the veteran academician said that it is the responsibility of a university to disseminate good quality education to its students. "The role of a university has gone through changes but the primary responsibility of a university is to provide quality education." Highlighting the seriousness of adverse climate change, Prof Chauhan said that humans need not be more greedy than they are today.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, vice chancellor,

congratulated everyone who has been an integral part of the development of Tezpur University. Highlighting the impressive journey of the University, he said that the institution's dedication towards delivering quality education, research, international collaborations, and ongoing projects.

"The University's vibrant research ecosystem is symbolised by the current year's publication record, which includes 558 journal papers, 30 books, 155 book chapters, and 63 conference proceedings among other forms of publications," Prof Singh said.

Sharing some future roadmap, Prof Singh said that the university is proposing to establish thirteen (13) new departments, such as Pharmaceutical Sciences, Petroleum Technology, Tourism Management, Yoga and Sports Science, Economics, Statistics, Psychology, Library and Information Science, etc.

"Along with these departments, the university is mulling to start a Centre for Defence Studies named after Ahom General Lachit Borphukan to fulfill the geopolitical need of this region," Prof Singh said. He informed the august gathering that the state government has given the university an additional plot of 240 acres to expand the current campus. Prof Singh also thanked chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, for giving away the land.

Initiating for the first time, the university felicitated Chayan Dutta, a notable alumnus of the department of Electronic and Communication, with the Distinguished Alumnus Award 2023. Dutta was given the award for successfully overseeing the launch operations of the Chandrayan-3 mission.

Janmejoy Sarkar, senior research fellow (SRF) of the department of Physics, was felicitated with the Distinguished Student Achiever Award 2023 for his contribution to developing the SUIT module of India's space mission ADITYA-L1. The other Distinguished Student Achiever Award 2023 was conferred on Reema Borah, a PhD scholar of the Department of Cultural Studies, for receiving the 69th National Film Awards for her Assamese film 'Anunaa - the Resonance'. The category was Best Film on Social Issues (Feature Films category).

During the occasion, three students of the department of Commerce were given the Institute of Company Secretaries of India gold medal. Along with that, a total of 32 faculty, researchers, and students were also honoured for their achievements on the occasion. During the occasion, Dr Juri Dutta, head, department of Assamese and alumna of the university, donated ₹ 50,000 to the alumni fund.

Gwthar Bathou San celebrated across Bodoland Territorial Region

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 23: The Gwthar Bathou San (Bathou Divosh) was joyously celebrated on Tuesday across the districts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and the entire state, given that the day was declared a state holiday by the government.

The Gwthar Bathou San-2024 (Bathou Divosh) was observed with Bathou tradition and religious fervour across the state on the second Tuesday of the Magh month. The state government had declared Gwthar Bathou San as a full-fledged holiday to be celebrated every year on the second Tuesday of the Magh month, and it was observed with great festivity.

In Kokrajhar, the Bathou San was celebrated at Bathou Thansali Baganshali, organised by Bathou Traditional & Cultural Center, Kokrajhar. Bathou devotees and people from various communities thronged to the Thansali, offering worship and prayers to Bwrai Bathou (Lord Shiva).

The celebration included the hoisting of the Bathou flag in the morning, followed by floral tributes (Gwtwri Shi Baonai) at the Bathou Thansali. Bathou devo-



tees and citizens from all sections participated, bringing traditional music instruments like Kham, Sifhum, Jota, and offered workshops and prayers to Bwrai Bathou. In Tamulpur, Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), graced the occasion as the chief guest at the Gwthar Bathou San celebration held at Hirimba Bathou Thansali. CEM Boro offered worship and prayers to Bwrai Bathou, extending greetings and best wishes to all Bathou followers. He mentioned the importance of keeping Bathouism alive as the aboriginal religion of the Bodos, serving as their iden-

city through language, culture, and religion.

In Udalguri, Bathou Divosh was celebrated at various Thansali with Bathou tradition, witnessing a large gathering since morning. People from all walks of life, adorned in traditional Bodo attire, offered workshops and prayers to Bwrai Bathou on the occasion.

State cabinet minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma, Bodo Sahitya Sabha president Dr Surath Narzary, ABSU president Dipen Boro, MLA Lawrence Islay extended their greetings and best wishes to all Bathou followers on the holy occasion of Gwthar Bathou San.

Sikkimese farmers, RGM workers to participate in R-Day event in Delhi

State agriculture minister flags off bus with 67 invitees to Republic Day programme on board

GANGTOK, Jan 23: A team of 47 workers under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission and 20 progressive farmers from Sikkim will participate in the Republic Day programme in New Delhi for the first time, according to an official statement issued here on Tuesday.

State agriculture and animal husbandry minister, Lok Nath Sharma extended warm wishes to them for safe and fruitful participation in such an event in the national capital.

47 multi-purpose artificial insemination workers under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM), a scheme for the development and conservation of indigenous bovine breeds, and 20 progressive farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)



began their journey from the premises of Krishi Bhawan here on Tuesday. PMKSY accords high priority to water conservation and its management.

In his brief address, the minister

highlighted the key factors of good governance in the effective implementation of the central schemes.

He also said, "Sikkim chief minister Prem Singh Tamang's

farming friendly vision led to achieve a notable transformation in livestock farming and agriculture sector", the official statement said.

"This is testified by the opportunity received by the farmers and artificial insemination workers to participate in the Republic Day Celebration for the first time in history," it said.

They were invited for the Republic Day programme on Friday in the national capital and Sharma flagged off the buses with 67 invitees on board.

The minister interacted with the farmers and made them aware of various initiatives undertaken by the state government for up liftment of the farming community. (PTI)

Investors awareness programme conducted



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Jan 23: An investors awareness programme, organised by the Security Exchange Board of India (SEBI), took place on Sunday at the Sivasagar District Mahila Samitee office in Phukan Nagar.

The event was presided over by Monica Saikia, an esteemed educationist and women's rights activist.

The ceremonial lighting of the lamp was done by senior journalist

Manoj Kumar Borthakur. During the inauguration, Kauranga Borgohain, assistant professor at Sibsagar Commerce College, said that the initiative by the women's organisation is a significant step forward for society, considering the importance of investment and economic activities in the contemporary world.

As a resource person, Bikash Upadhyay provided insights into the security exchange system and various investment opportunities.

Upadhyay elaborated on different aspects of the share business, distinguishing between equity shares, preference shares, debentures bonds, mutual funds, units, government securities, and more.

The session aimed to enhance awareness about the diverse trends in trade and commerce, empowering attendees with knowledge about investment options and the functioning of the security exchange.

Posthumous launch of Rishiraj Sharma's final composition

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 23: Byatikram MASDO launched the song titled 'Tumi Je Ahila' by singer Chandrima Bhattacharya at the Guwahati Press Club on Tuesday.

This song holds special significance as it was the last composition of the late artist Rishiraj Sharma, son of renowned musicians Dilip Sharma and Sudakshina Sharma. Chandrima Bhattacharya, a popular singer from Kolkata and daughter of Assam, rendered the vocals for the song.

Expressing her connection with Rishiraj Sharma, Chandrima Bhattacharya shared, "Rishiraj Sharma was very close to me. I lost contact with Rishida as I was not in Assam for a long time. After he was in Kolkata for a few days due to illness, my relationship with Rishida deepened again. (One day he said, 'Let's do a song together', but later, due to Rishida's illness and his untimely death, that plan was incomplete. So this time we are preparing to make his unfulfilled dreams into a reality."

Govt is working on 'big challenge' of integration of technology in entire policing system: Shah

GANDHINAGAR, Jan 23: The government is working on the "big challenge" of modernising the policing system using technology without changing its basic structure, union home minister Amit Shah said here on Tuesday.

As technology is changing rapidly, police need to stay "two generations" ahead of criminals, he said at a seminar on 'behavioural forensic' at the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU).

India's criminal justice system will be the most advanced in the world in the next five years once all the systems under the three new criminal laws -- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Act -- are in place, he said.

"Unless we integrate forensic science with all the stakeholders of the judicial process, we will not benefit. Forensic science should be used for investigation, prosecution, and justice. Now, time has come to go a step forward by adopting forensic science in education," Shah said.

"When we are moving towards a journey of 100 years of independence with a strong foundation, I can see four challenges in our criminal justice system. Integrating technology in the



entire policing system to make it a modern policing system without changing its basic structure is a big challenge before us," the Union minister said. Hybrid and multi-dimensional threats arising out of new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence also pose a challenge, and there is a need to identify and create a network to protect our systems, he said.

"We have worked on three chal-

enges -- creation of human resources through NFSU, creation of a technological database, completion of data integration and creation of software using Artificial Intelligence and making them legal," he said. Integrating the criminal justice system, technology and forensic investigation was another big challenge, Shah further said.

"I would request the students (of forensic science) to study the three laws minutely. We have given a very important place to forensic science on legal basis in investigation, prosecution and judicial system, and a very big area is going to emerge from the career point of view," he said. As the

forms and methods of crimes change, the police need to stay ahead of criminals, the minister noted.

"Perhaps (freedom fighter and former Union minister) K M Munshi once said that police should stay two steps ahead of criminals. I would like to say that police need to stay two generations ahead of crime and criminals. The generation of technology is much faster than human generation. If our system stays two generations ahead of crime, then we shall succeed in preventing crime," Shah added.

Efforts should also be made to bring uniformity in policy and rules of technology at the global level, he said. Technology is the answer for making justice available, accessible and affordable, Shah said, adding that the new laws were introduced keeping this in mind.

Behavioural science plays as important a role in preventing crime as strong administration and a good justice system, he said.

The new criminal laws make a visit by forensic officers to a scene of crime mandatory if the prescribed punishment for the offence exceeds seven years, and this provision is meant to help investigation, prosecution as well as the delivery of justice and increase the conviction rate, the minister said.

Naming the National Education Policy 2020, conversion of the Gujarat Forensic Sciences University into National Forensic Sciences University and the passage of the new criminal laws as among the Narendra Modi government's achievements, he said they could not be seen in isolation.

"We have become the world's biggest democracy and its foundation is deeper than 'patala' (netherworld). We have seen a transfer of power without shedding a drop of blood, and the people's trust in democracy cannot be questioned," he said.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has worked hard on creating a huge database using technology in the last five years, Shah said, adding that more than eight crore e-FIRs have been registered, and all the police stations in the country except seven stations based in hilly regions have been connected through technology. A solution is being worked out to connect the remaining police stations, he said.

Data of more than 15 crore prosecution cases has been made available online in every Indian language, database of two crore prisoners has been compiled using the e-prison system, Shah said, adding that 19 lakh forensic results of the last three years too have been made available online. (PTI)

140 CISF personnel contingent deployed for Parl security



NEW DELHI, Jan 23: A contingent of 140 CISF personnel has been deployed at the Parliament complex as part of the new measure to frisk the visitors and their baggage from the Budget Session that commences from January 31, official sources said.

The Union Home Ministry has sanctioned the strength after a comprehensive security review of the facility was undertaken in the wake of a breach by a few people, who entered the Parliament hall filled with MPs and sprayed coloured smoke canisters on December 13 last year.

A total of 140 personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) have taken charge at the Parliament complex from Monday. They will frisk the visitors, their belongings and also provide a fire safety cover to the building, sources told PTI.

An Assistant Commandant (AC) rank officer of the force will head the CISF unit that will have 36 personnel from the fire wing, sources said.

The contingent is undertaking familiarisation of the Parliament complex along with the other security agencies already present there so that they are ready for the task from January 31 when the Budget Session commences, they said.

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

The force has also written to the home ministry to sanction it this manpower of 140 personnel for Parliament security in a permanent manner.

"The current unit that has been deployed at the Parliament will be regularised under the Government Building Security (GBS) unit of the CISF that secures various gov-

ernment ministries and headquarters of probe agencies like the CBI and the ED," a senior officer said.

The about 1.70 lakh personnel strong CISF is a central armed police force (CAPF) under the Union home ministry and it guards 68 civil airports of the country apart from vital installations in the aerospace and nuclear energy domain.

Sources had earlier told PTI that both the new and the old Parliament complex and their allied buildings will be brought under a comprehensive security cover of the CISF which will also have the existing elements of Parliament Security Service (PSS), the Delhi Police and the Parliament Duty Group (PDG) of the CRPF.

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

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

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

Around the same time, two others sprayed coloured smoke from canisters while shouting slogans outside the Parliament premises.

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

Cong to hold state-level workers' conventions for 2024 polls



NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Getting battle-ready for the 2024 general elections, the Congress will from Thursday start holding state-level workers' conventions where party chief Mallikarjun Kharge will preside over meetings of office bearers to energise organisational cadres.

The first state-level workers' convention will be held on Thursday in Telangana where the Congress recently formed a government, ousting the K Chadrashankar Rao government of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi. The party will then hold the state-level workers' convention in Uttarakhand on January 28, in Odisha on January 29, in Delhi on February 3, in Kerala on February 4, in Himachal Pradesh on February 10, in Punjab on February 11, in Tamil Nadu on February 13 and in Jharkhand on February 15, accord-

ing to AICC general secretary, organisation, KC Venugopal.

During the conventions, Kharge will preside over meetings of office bearers from the booth to the state level and further "energise our dedicated cadre", Venugopal had said in a post earlier.

"Right to the booth level, the Congress is all geared up for a blitzkrieg campaign!" he had said.

The Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, led by Rahul Gandhi, is also ongoing with preparations for the general elections being undertaken simultaneously. At a key party meeting earlier this month, Kharge had said that by working night and day, we will be able to provide an alternative government to the people after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

"Leave aside differences, do not indulge in nipping and do not raise internal issues in the media and work as a team to ensure Congress' victory," he had told the gathering.

On January 4, senior Congress leaders from across the country discussed the party's strategy for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and seat sharing with other parties besides preparations for the Bharat Nyay Yatra. (PTI)

ED challenges order forming joint SIT into Sandeshkhali attack

KOLKATA, Jan 23: The Enforcement Directorate has challenged before a division bench of the Calcutta High Court a special bench order forming a joint special investigation team of CBI and West Bengal police to probe an attack on ED officials at Sandeshkhali, a lawyer representing the agency said on Tuesday.

The appeal has been listed for hearing before a division bench presided by Chief Justice T S Sivagnanam on Wednesday.

Challenging the formation of a joint SIT, the ED prayed for a holistic investigation by the CBI, the lawyer representing ED in the matter said.

The ED said that three of its officials were injured and their belongings like laptops, mobile phones and purses were "looted" in a mob attack on them when they went to search the premises of Trinamool Congress leader Shajahan Sheikh on January 5 at Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district.

The agency's counsel had prayed before the single bench for a transfer of the investigation into



the attack to the CBI, claiming that the central agency does not have faith in a probe being done by the West Bengal police.

Justice Jay Sengupta had on January 17 directed that the probe will be monitored by the court and the SIT to file a progress report of the investigation on February 12.

He had directed that one SP rank officer of CBI and Jaspreet Singh, SP of Islampur police district will jointly head the SIT.

Justice Sengupta had said that the ED's prayer for a single agency, the CBI, to probe the attack was not being allowed at this stage and can be considered later

on the basis of how the investigation progresses.

ED officials went to search the premises of Shajahan, including his residence and office, at Sandeshkhali in connection with their probe into the money trail in an alleged ration distribution scam case in West Bengal, when the central agency's officials and accompanying CRPF personnel were attacked by a mob.

The ED's counsels had submitted before the single bench that a facade was being carried out in the name of police investigation into the attack.

They had stated that despite public servants on duty having been grievously assaulted, only milder sections of the IPC were instituted in a suo motu FIR filed by the police.

Following the court's intervention on the previous date of hearing, the state government had informed it on January 17 that the application for inclusion of IPC Section 307 (attempt to murder) and that of dacoity has been given to the concerned lower court in North 24 Parganas district. (PTI)

Even if Pak objects, it's known that Sindh and other places were part of Akhand Bharat: MP CM

BHOPAL, Jan 23: Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav on Tuesday said even if neighbouring Pakistan objects, it was a known fact that before partition, Sindh and places were part of 'Akhand Bharat' or undivided India.

His statement comes three days after he said that the construction of a new Ram temple in Ayodhya was a step forward towards 'Akhand Bharat'.

"Even if Pakistan registers its objection lakhs of times, everyone knows that the displaced people who arrived here as refugees from Sindh...before that it was Akhand Bharat only," Yadav told reporters.

"Places like Nankana Sahib and others were part of the Akhand Bharat in our past. Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat, Maratha are included

in our National Anthem. How can we exclude Sindh from it," he said.

Sindh region which was earlier part of India, became part of Pakistan after the partition. Nankana Sahib, one of the most important religious places for the Sikhs, is located in Pakistan's Punjab province.

The CM was speaking on the sidelines of an event here when asked about Pakistan taking objections to his Akhand Bharat remark.

"After the consecration of the Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya, our dream of cultural Akhand Bharat is a fulfilment of our dream of thousands of years. Therefore, it will not vanish with anyone objecting to it (Akhand Bharat). It will always be there," he added.

On Saturday, CM Yadav had said that if God wishes, Akhand Bharat will extend as far

as Afghanistan. "It is God's will that the construction of Lord Ram's temple should definitely be a big step towards 'Akhand Bharat'."

The earlier temple of Lord Ram built at the site by Emperor Vikramaditya was a "thorn in the eyes of the enemies", and when India was passing through bad times, "tyrants destroyed it", he said.

In the same way, India lost Sindh, Punjab was divided, and Pakistan was formed after the Partition in 1947, the chief minister had said.

"If God wishes, Akhand Bharat will be formed again, if not today, then tomorrow; not only up to Sindh or Punjab but even Afghanistan. It is the wish of all of us that we should be able to see Nankana Sahib," Yadav had said. (PTI)

B'deshi border guard 'disguised as smuggler' shot dead by BSF at international boundary: officials

KOLKATA, Jan 23: A Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) trooper, who was "disguised as a smuggler", was fatally shot by the Border Security Force in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, BSF officials said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred in Bongaon area along the international border on Monday when a group of Bangladeshi smugglers attempted to enter India by breaching the newly constructed barbed wire fence.

A scuffle ensued as a BSF patrol unit intervened to thwart their illegal entry, leading to an exchange

of blows between the two sides, according to BSF officials.

"In the course of the scuffle, the BSF patrol party came under attack with weapons. In self-defence, the patrol unit opened fire. Subsequently, one of the attackers suffered injuries and he was promptly transported to a hospital, where he succumbed," an official said.

After the incident, BGB informed BSF in a flag meeting that one of their personnel was missing and they suspected that he had come towards the Indian border.

"Upon identification from a photograph, it was known that the

deceased man was Mohammad Riyasudin, serving as a sepoy in BGB, and was moving with cattle smugglers," the official said.

The BSF expressed uncertainty regarding the motive behind the BGB sepoy's presence at the international border in casual attire, a lungi and t-shirt, accompanying cattle smugglers and engaging in an assault on BSF personnel.

After the BSF official remarked, "Despite repeated protest letters to the BGB against cattle smuggling, Bangladeshi smugglers and miscreants continue to smuggle cattle, frequently resorting to attacks on BSF jawans." (PTI)

It's a shame that even today we do not know what happened to Netaji: Mamata

KOLKATA, Jan 23: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said it's a shame for the nation that even after so many years of the disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, people don't know what happened to the leader nor do they have the date of his death.

She also hit out at the BJP-ruled central government for not keeping their promise of investigating Netaji's disappearance.

In an apparent reference to the Centre declaring a half-day holiday in central government offices for Ram temple's consecration ceremony on Monday, Banerjee said these days holidays are declared for political advertisements, but nothing is announced for those who gave up their lives fighting for the country's freedom.

"It's India's bad luck that even after so many years we do not know Netaji's death date. We do not know what happened to him. It's a shame," Banerjee said after garlanding a statue of Bose here.

The country is celebrating Netaji's 127th birth anniversary on Tuesday. (PTI)

Three cubs born to Namibian cheetah at Kuno Park in MP

BHOPAL/NEW DELHI, Jan 23: A Namibian cheetah has given birth to three cubs at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh, weeks after three cubs were born to another feline.

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav shared the news on X on Tuesday, saying, "Kuno's new cubs! Namibian cheetah named Jwala has given birth to three cubs. This comes just weeks after Namibian cheetah Aasha gave birth to her cubs."

He further said in the post, "Congratulations to all wildlife frontline warriors and wildlife lovers across the country. May Bharat's wildlife thrive."

According to officials, these cubs were born to Jwala on January 20.

This is the second litter of Jwala, after a gap of 10 months. Jwala (Namibian name Siyaya) had also given birth to four cubs in March last year. However, only one of them survived.

On January 3, Yadav had shared the information about the birth of three cubs to the Namib-



ian cheetah Aasha.

So, the number of cubs in the KNP has increased to seven now, with six of them born in this month alone.

This has been a mixed month for India's cheetah project as it saw the birth of six cubs and the death of a Namibian cheetah, Shaurya, at the KNP on January 16.

Since March 2023, seven adult

cheetahs, including Shaurya, have died in the park due to various reasons. This has taken the total fatality count of felines, including three cubs, to 10 at the KNP.

The seven adult cheetahs - three females and four males - who died at the park were Sasha, Uday, Daksha, Tejas, Suraj, Dhatri and Shaurya. While the first six fatalities occurred in a period

of six months - from March to August last year, Shaurya died last week.

One of the four cubs born to translocated Namibian cheetah Jwala died on May 23, 2023, and two others two days later.

So the total number of cheetahs at the KNP currently stands at 20 (six males, seven females and seven cubs).

Jwala and Aasha are among the cheetahs translocated to India from Namibia under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Project Cheetah, aimed at re-introducing the only large carnivore species that went extinct in independent India. The first batch of eight cheetahs was introduced in India in September 2022.

The second batch of 12 cheetahs was flown in from South Africa last February.

The much-vaunted cheetah conservation project, however, has drawn sharp criticism over the deaths of seven of the 20 adults imported from Namibia and South Africa.

According to officials, one of the biggest challenges faced in

the first year of managing the cheetahs in India was the unexpected development of winter coats by some of the animals during the Indian summer and monsoon, in anticipation of the African winter (June to September).

The winter coat, combined with high humidity and temperatures, caused itching, prompting the animals to scratch their necks on tree trunks or the ground. This led to bruising and exposing the skin, where flies laid eggs, resulting in maggot infestations and, ultimately, bacterial infections and septicemia, leading to the deaths of three cheetahs, an official explained.

"The mortalities under Project Cheetah so far have been within the expected limits. As per Cheetah Action Plan, we anticipated approximately 50 per cent mortality. Right now, 14 imported cheetahs are surviving, besides one cub born on Indian soil," SP Yadav, additional director general of forests in the Union Environment Ministry, had said earlier. (PTI)

Lives on due to his unyielding dedication to his ideals: PM on Bal Thackeray

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday paid tributes to Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray on his birth anniversary, saying he was a towering figure whose impact on Maharashtra's political and cultural landscape remains unparalleled.

Thackeray, one of the early pioneers of hardline Hindutva politics, enjoyed a large following. He was born on this day in 1926 and passed away on November 17, 2012. In a post on X, Modi said, "Remembering Balasaheb Thackeray Ji on his birth anniversary. He was a towering figure whose impact on Maharashtra's political and cultural landscape remains unparalleled."

"In the hearts of countless people, he lives on due to his leadership, unyielding dedication to his ideals and commitment to speaking up for the poor and downtrodden," the prime minister said. The Shiv Sena has now split into two factions with the one commanding the support of a majority of its lawmakers siding with the BJP, while another headed by Thackeray's son Uddhav Thackeray aligning with the Opposition in the state. (PTI)

Ladakh bodies submit memorandum to home ministry demanding statehood, sixth schedule status

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Representatives from Ladakh have submitted a memorandum to the Union home ministry demanding statehood for Ladakh, and status under the Sixth Schedule, sources said.

According to sources, representatives from Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance have submitted a detailed memorandum, including a draft of a bill for amending the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act of 2019 to provide statehood to Ladakh. The memorandum was submitted to the Home Ministry last week.

This comes as a high-level committee chaired by Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai has been holding meetings with representatives from the two bodies representing the two regions of Ladakh - Leh and Kargil. The ministry had sought a list of demands from the two bodies in writing during their last meeting on December 4.

The memorandum observed that the Supreme Court in its recent judgment has said that statehood is going to be restored in Jammu and Kashmir, but those provisions are not being extended to Ladakh which will remain a Union territory.

Referring to precedents of states



like Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim and other northeastern states in seeking statehood for Ladakh, the memorandum points out that these states are also protected under the Sixth Schedule and Article 371 of the Constitution of India.

Raising the demand for Sixth Schedule status, the memorandum pointed out that tribal communities like Balti, Beda, Bot, Boto, Brokpa, Drokpa, Dard, Shin,

Changpa, Garra, Mon and Purigpa form a major chunk of population in Ladakh.

It also demanded a Ladakh Public Service Commission, stating that opportunities for the gazetted posts for the students of Ladakh have become limited as there is no such provision at present.

The memorandum also has a draft bill for amending the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act

2019, which includes the provision for two MPs from the region - one each from Leh and Kargil, and says they are hopeful that the state will also get one seat in the Rajya Sabha on the lines of states like Sikkim.

The sources added that the date of the next meeting between the representatives and the MoS has not been decided yet, but is likely to be held early in February.

Ladakh was turned into a Union territory without legislature when Article 370 and 35A were abrogated, and Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into two Union territories on August 5, 2019.

The Leh-based Ladakh Apex Body of People's Movement for 6th Schedule and Kargil Democratic Alliance are the bodies from the two regions of Ladakh which have been demanding statehood, and Sixth Schedule status among other demands.

The LAB and KDA joined hands to forward their demands in August 2021, and in January 2023, the Union home ministry constituted a high-powered committee headed by MoS Rai to "ensure the protection of land and employment" for the people of Ladakh. (PTI)

Ayodhya will become 'world's most sought-after' tourism destination: UP minister

AYODHYA, Jan 23: With an estimated 1 lakh devotees expected to visit Ayodhya daily following the inauguration of the Ram temple, the holy city is set to become the "world's most sought-after" tourist destination, Uttar Pradesh Tourism minister Jaiver Singh said on Tuesday.

Helicopter services to Ayodhya from six cities of the state, the on-going conservation of 37 ancient temples and the expansion of the existing airport in the holy city will result in a manifold rise in the influx of visitors, Singh said.

Asked about a report estimating that a USD 10 billion makeover of Ayodhya with a new airport, revamped railway station, township and improved road connectivity could attract over 50 million tourists a year, Singh said "it will certainly happen".

"In fact, we estimate over 1 lakh

tourists per day in Ayodhya and arrangements are being made keeping that in mind," Singh said.

According to the report, the Golden Temple in Amritsar gets an estimated 30-35 million visitors a year while the annual footfall at the Tirupati Temple is 25-30 million. Globally, Vatican City gets around 9 million tourists every year and Mecca in Saudi Arabia around 20 million.

The minister asserted, "Certainly, Ayodhya will be the most sought-after destination in not only the country but the entire world."

The crowd outside the temple today is tremendous. This moment has come after a wait of 500 years, he said.

Stressing that the number of visitors will start rising after Republic Day on January 26 as security measures affect the movement of trains and vehicles, Singh said the

hospitality industry in Ayodhya will also reap the benefits of religious tourism.

"After January 26, when rail traffic resumes, the number of visitors is going to rise. If you consider each devotee spending ₹ 2,000-2,500 on buying prasad, food, and lodging, the revenue generated will be tremendous," the minister said.

"In the next two to three years, tourism in Ayodhya will generate the maximum revenue for the government. I am saying three years because starting a project, getting clearances and implementation takes that much time," he said.

After January 26, the tourism department will also start helicopter services to Ayodhya from at least six districts -- Lucknow, Varanasi, Mathura, Agra, Gorakhpur and Prayagraj, he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

CM directs DGP to file case

changing the route which was resisted by the @assampolice", the DGP posted on X.

He further said that the road event, led by Congress leader Gandhi, was intended to travel from Meghalaya towards Kamrup through Guwahati. Despite permission granted for one of the major roads after discussions with organisers and ASL planning, participants insisted on altering the route, causing potential disruption to city life and compromising the security of a Z+ category-protected person involved in the event.

"This was done to ensure least inconvenience to general road users. However, participants of the event insisted on changing the route that would have thrown city life out of gear and also jeopardised the security of a Z+ category-protected person who is part of the road event", Singh said.

"Participants used force to break some barricades causing injury to some policemen and the general public. Sensing and seeing threat to life and property, @GuwahatiPol used persuasion to turn the event back to the allotted route," he stated.

DGP Singh further emphasised the commitment to providing a safe passage for the road event while ensuring the safety and security of the general public. Organizers were advised to adhere to the decisions made during ASL after mutual discussions.

"We remain committed to provide safe passage to the road event while ensuring safety and security of the general people. The organisers are again advised to stick to decisions arrived at by the ASL after mutual discussions", Singh added.

Police had set up barricades at two locations to prevent the Yatra from entering city limits, leading to the use of force to stop Congress workers.

In response, Congress leader Gandhi claimed that BJP president JP Nadda had taken the same route without obstruction.

Cong and INDIA allies concerned only

"PM Modi changed the definition and culture of politics in India by introducing the politics of accountability and credibility wherein votes are sought only on the basis of performance," he said.

Nadda exuded confidence that the BJP will retain power by winning a record number of seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and that Modi will become prime minister for a third term.

Notably, the BJP has been winning all the 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, the home state of PM Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah, since 2014.

Nadda said the BJP will score a hat-trick of this performance in Gujarat in the upcoming elections.

"Today, India has become the fifth largest economy under Modi. When you will once again elect Modi as our PM, India will become the third largest economy by 2028," the BJP chief said.

Referring to pran pratishtha of Lord Ram's idol at Ayodhya temple, Nadda said some Congress leaders have started saying that they also worship Lord Ram. He wondered why these leaders kept mum in the past.

"I want to ask them why you didn't say this earlier. The Congress accuses the BJP of capitalising on this issue. I told them that it was BJP workers who had vowed to sacrifice everything for this cause when Congress tried to create hurdles in the construction of the Ram temple.

"We are not capitalizing this. We are feeling fortunate that a dream has come true for which our ancestors fought for 500 years," said Nadda. (PTI)

Himanta distributes ration cards to

public making rounds at government offices. Mentioning about his Government's tough policies on curbing drugs, corruption and other ills that causes hindrance towards public benefits and welfare, the chief minister said that recruitment process for filling up one lakh posts had been transparent, free and fair with merit as the cornerstone.

He also announced that the process for absorbing another 35,000 people for government posts will start soon. Sarma announced that from February 16 to 22 the Government would distribute land pattas to three lakh people across Assam under the Mission Basundhara for which premium of Rs 500 will have to be paid.

The chief minister, while praising the Prime Minister Narendra Modi for taking India forward in all spheres under his leadership, spoke about various welfare schemes for poor and downtrodden which have been undertaken nine years for their uplift.

"During COVID-19 pandemic period the central government provided free rice to ration card holders across the country and also free vaccine immunisation," he stated.

Minister of Finance, Women and Child Development, who is also the guardian minister of Jorhat, Rajya Sabha MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, Jorhat MP Topon Kumar Gogoi, legislators of Jorhat and Dergaon were among the dignitaries who were present on the occasion.

CMASY ration cards distributed

were distributed during the program in Bokajan LA, emphasising the government's commitment to providing essential services to the residents.

The event was graced by the presence of key figures, including Madhurja Dhekiyal Phukon (Member of Autonomous Council), Kartik Ch Das (superintendent, Food & Civil Supply), MLA Dorsing Ronghang, Raju Tisso (KAAC Chairman), and executive members Surja Rongphar, Richard Tokbi, Mongal Sing Timung, Mukut Mahanta, Bilimohan Khaklary, and Kangbura Singar.

MACs Kadom Terangpi, Tilutama Hasnu, Sarabon Telenga, Jonny Timung, and Pabitra Rongpi were also in attendance, underlining the collaborative effort to bring welfare schemes to the people of the region.

Ayodhya Ram temple sees devotee

made a "sudden plan" to visit Ayodhya. "We have come just for the 'darshan'. We will go back today," he said.

Security guards later made a semi-circular human fence to manage the crowd as other personnel made announcements on loudspeakers to keep order.

A large number of devotees had gathered outside the main gates for hours since late Monday night, waiting to enter the premises.

Carrying flags bearing the visages of Lord Ram and chanting "Jai Shri Ram", the devotees waited for hours in the biting cold before the doors of the grand temple opened early in the morning.

"Felt so delighted, my life's aim has been fulfilled. Our ancestors struggled for this and it has been brought to fruition," said Manish Verma, a devotee from Punjab.

Nitish Kumar, a resident of Bihar's Madhepura district, cycled more than 600 kilometres to reach Ayodhya. "There is a massive rush but I am hopeful I will get a chance to have 'darshan' today. I will start my journey back once my wish is fulfilled. Though I couldn't go to the temple on Monday, what a day it was to be in Ayodhya," he told PTI.

Anurag Sharma from Rajasthan's Sikar was seen walking around with a model of the temple on the day of the consecration ceremony.

"I brought this model with me from my hometown. I arrived on the inaugural flight to Ayodhya and I have been here since then. I will go back only after having a 'darshan' of Ram Lalla," he told PTI.

Groups of people could also be seen marching towards the temple, passing through the decked-up Ram Path. "Ram Lalla gave us the strength to walk all the way from Chhattisgarh and now He only will get us through this crowd so we can take His blessings," said Sunil Madho, part of an eight-member group that undertook a 'padyatra' to Ayodhya.

Maharashtra native Gopal Krishna, who arrived in Ayodhya a few days ago, also jostled in the thick crowd as it moved towards the security check.

"We came here a few days ago as Lord Ram called us. People were telling us to not travel as police would impose restrictions on travel and rooms would not be available in hotels. We are staying at an ashram and this is the day we waited for," he told PTI.

The devotees chanted "Jai Shri Ram" as they walked in and out of the temple complex. Inside the main temple, "Jai Shri Ram" chants reverberated in its grand halls.

The temple complex, built in the traditional Nagara style, is 380 feet long from the east to the west, 250 feet wide and will eventually rise to 161 feet at the 'shikhar'.

Lakhs of people watched the 'pran pratishtha (consecration)' ceremony on television in their homes and neighbourhood temples, savouring the historic moment on Monday.

"January 22, 2024, is not merely a date in the calendar but heralds the advent of a new era," Modi said after he performed a series of rituals in the 'garbha griha (sanctum sanctorum)'.

The prime minister also prostrated himself before the 51-inch idol that depicts the child Ram.

"Today, our Ram has arrived. After a long wait for ages, our Ram has arrived. Our Ram Lalla will no longer live in a tent. Our Ram Lalla will stay in a magnificent temple," Modi said in his address to the invitees. (PTI)

Delhi HC recalls order allowing widow to abort 29-week pregnancy

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: The Delhi High Court on Tuesday recalled its earlier order allowing a woman, who lost her husband in October last year, to terminate her 29-week-old foetus.

Justice Subramonium Prasad said the 26-year-old woman, now already at 32 weeks of gestation, can go to AIIMS or any other central or state government hospital for delivery, and if she is subsequently inclined to give the newborn in adoption, the Centre shall ensure that the process takes place smoothly and at the earliest.

It added that the respective government would bear all medical and incidental expenses in the process of delivery.

"The Judgment dated 04.01.2024 is hereby recalled," the judge said.

On January 4, the court had allowed the widow, suffering from depression, to terminate her then 29-week-old foetus as continuation of pregnancy could affect her mental health and observed that the right to reproductive choice also includes the right not to procreate.

Justice Prasad's latest decision came after the Centre filed a plea seeking recall of the January 4 order allowing medical termination of the pregnancy on the woman's petition on the grounds that the child has a fair chance of survival and the court should consider protecting the right to life of the unborn child.

In its application, the central government, represented by Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, stated that "termination of pregnancy cannot happen unless the doctors conduct a foeticide, failing which there will be preterm delivery with huge complications".

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), where the woman was medically examined, also claimed that it was advisable that the pregnancy be continued for another two-three weeks for the betterment of the health of the mother and the child.

In its order, the court took note of the reports filed by AIIMS as well as its interaction with the doctors on the medical board and observed that the contention of the petitioner's lawyer that AIIMS must be directed to go ahead with the foeticide cannot be accepted.

It stated that the psychological assessment report of the petitioner, a graduate, indicated that she was suffering from depression associated with stress due to life events and not any psychotic features, and that there was no suggestion that the ongoing pregnancy or delivery would cause such a grave injury to her mental health that would necessitate termination of pregnancy.

The medical board, the court added, also opined that since the foetus did not show any abnormality, foeticide was neither justified nor ethical and a preterm induction

of labor has a high chance of failure, leading to serious implications on her future pregnancies as well as physical and mental deficiencies in the newborn.

Justice Prasad further said that the court tried its best and made its sincere efforts to persuade the petitioner, who was present in the proceedings, to go through the pregnancy keeping in mind the reports received from AIIMS hospital.

The court opined that the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in 2017, issued guidelines for termination of pregnancy beyond 20 weeks in certain cases like those of minor rape victims and in the present case there were no such circumstances.

"A perusal of the guidelines shows that the Medical Board which examines the patient has the responsibility to determine if the foetal abnormality is substantial enough to qualify as either incompatible with life or associated with significant morbidity or mortality in the child, if born and unless such abnormalities are not shown foeticide cannot be permitted. In the present case, no such circumstances exist, and therefore, the said guidelines cannot be pressed for permitting foeticide," the court said.

"If the petitioner is inclined to give the newborn child in adoption then as suggested by Aishwarya Bhati, learned ASG, the Union of India shall ensure that the process of adoption takes place at the earliest and in a smooth fashion," ordered the court.

On January 4, the high court while allowing the medical termination of pregnancy had noted that the woman lost her husband on October 19, 2023, and came to know about her pregnancy on October 31.

It had said the woman should be permitted to terminate her pregnancy because allowing her to continue with it can impair her mental stability as she was showing suicidal tendencies.

The woman, who got married in February, 2023, lost her husband in October after which she came to her parents' house and got to know that she was 20 weeks pregnant. In December, she decided not to continue with her pregnancy as she was suffering from extreme trauma due to the demise of her husband and approached doctors for termination.

However, since the gestation period was more than 24 weeks, the permissible limit to abort a foetus, she was not granted permission.

Thereafter, the woman approached the court seeking permission to medically terminate her pregnancy and a medical board was constituted to assess her health condition.

Rule 3(B) of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Rules permits a woman to terminate her pregnancy up to 24 weeks with certain conditions. (PTI)

PM interacts with Bal Puraskar recipients

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday interacted with children who were awarded the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar this year and shared his insights on music, culture, solar power and sports.

The award was given to 19 children -- nine boys and 10 girls -- from 18 states and Union Territories on Monday for exceptional bravery, artistic prowess, innovative thinking and selfless service.

During the interaction at his 7 Lok Kalyan Marg residence, Prime Minister Modi engaged in a freewheeling conversation with the awardees and also presented souvenirs to each of them, according to an official statement.

The children shared the details of their accomplishments that led to their selection for the coveted award.

Discussions between them and the prime minister covered several topics, including music, culture, solar power, and sports such as badminton and chess, the statement said.

The children also seized the opportunity to pose questions to Prime Minister Modi, creating an interactive and inspiring atmosphere, it said.

In response to a question, the prime minister shared his passion for music and how it aids him in meditation.

Asked about the recently launched Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana, he recalled his initiatives to harness solar energy during his tenure as the chief minister of Gujarat, elucidating the benefits that the scheme will bring to the people, the statement said. (PTI)

Jan 22 will be forever etched in our memories: Couples who were 'yajmans' at consecration ceremony

AYODHYA, Jan 23: "Divine experience and a proud moment" is how the 15 couples who were the 'mukhya yajman' for the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya described the grand event and said that the day will be forever etched in their memories.

While the 14 couples, including Dalits, tribals, backwards and upper castes, were chosen from across the country to perform the duty of yajmans or hosts for the main ceremony, RSS leader Anil Mishra and his wife presided over the daily rituals which began on January 16 ahead of the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony.

Mishra is among the 15 trustees of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra which was formed in 2020 to oversee the construction of the temple.

"The day will be etched in our memories forever. Tears rolled down our eyes during the ceremony, it was such a divine experience," Anil Chaudhury, from the family of "Dom Raja" told PTI.

Chaudhry performed the rituals along with his wife Sapna Devi.

Dom Raja is the guardian of the torch used to light pyres at Manikarnika and Harishchandra ghats and is considered the king of the lowest sub-caste among the Harijans.

Others on the 'yajman' list were



Ramchandra Kharadi from Udaipur in Rajasthan, Ram Kui Jemi from Assam, Gurucharan Singh Gill from Jaipur in Rajasthan, Adalarasan from Tamil Nadu, Lingaraj Basavraj from Karnataka and Vithal Rao Kamble from Maharashtra.

Mahadev Rao Gaikwad from Ghumantu Samaj Trust in Maharashtra's Latur, Dilip Valmiki from Lucknow, Kavindra Pratap Singh and Kailash Yadav from Kashi, Krishna Mohan from Hardoi, and Ramesh Jain from the Multani Lohar community in Uttar Pradesh, and Arun Chowdhury from Palwal in Haryana were also

among the yajmans.

"It was a proud moment for us. Such a surreal experience... while we were inside, our family members were among the attendees. Just to be here on a historic day is a big deal for anybody and getting to perform the rituals... What more could I have asked from Lord Ram," Kamble told PTI.

The new Ram Lalla idol was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on Monday, an event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who said it marked the advent of a new era.

Lakhs of people watched the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony on television at their homes and in

neighbourhood temples, becoming part of the historic event.

Kailash Yadav who is convener of Govardhan Puja Samiti, Varanasi and director of a district cooperative bank, said, "The kind of atmosphere one can see in Ayodhya today is something which cannot be grasped while watching it on TV. When we got to know that we had been chosen as yajmans, we couldn't believe it. It must be Lord Ram's desire that we were chosen to perform the rituals."

The Supreme Court delivered a historic verdict in 2019, settling a temple-mosque dispute that dated back more than a century. The court backed the construction of a Ram temple at the disputed site and ruled that an alternative five-acre plot must be found for building a mosque.

The newly constructed Ram temple was opened for public day with a massive rush of devotees thronging to seek blessings from Lord Ram.

Ayodhya was all decked up ahead of the 'Pran Prathishtha' ceremony. Streetlights on flyovers have been decorated with artwork depicting Lord Ram, including cutouts of bow and arrow, and ornamental lamp posts are carrying designs themed on the traditional 'Ramanandi Tilak'. (PTI)

Ananya makes runway debut at Paris Couture Week, walks ramp for Rahul Mishra

MUMBAI, Jan 23: Bollywood star Ananya Panday made her international runway debut at the Paris Couture Week as she walked the ramp for designer Rahul Mishra.

The ace couturier presented his haute couture spring collection 'Superheroes' at the 2024 edition of fashion gala on Monday.

Panday, 25, walked the ramp in a short black and gold strapless dress, accompanied by a handcrafted giant sieve, featuring a black, gold and white sequin dress and butterflies embroidered on the mesh.

"Walking for @rahulmishra_7 at Paris Couture week," the "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan" star posted on her Instagram Stories. She also shared behind-the-scenes pictures from the fashion show.

Mishra, who has presented his collections at the fashion gala in the past as well, also posted photos and videos from the show on Instagram.

On the film front, Panday was most recently seen in Netflix film "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan", co-starring Siddhant Chaturvedi and Adarsh Gourav. She will next star in an untitled movie, which will be directed by filmmaker Vikramaditya Motwane. (PTI)



Kangana Ranaut's 'Emergency' to release on June 14

MUMBAI, Jan 23: Actor Kangana Ranaut's latest movie "Emergency" will release in theatres on June 14, the makers announced on Tuesday.

The movie, also written and directed by Ranaut, features the actor in the role of former prime minister Indira Gandhi.

"Emergency" is my most ambitious project and second directorial post-'Manikarnika', we have the best of Indian and international talent come together for this big budget, grand period drama," the actor said in a statement.

The film was previously set to be released in theatres on November 24, 2023 but was postponed due to changes in Ranaut's schedule.

Produced by Zee Studios and Manikarnika Films, "Emergency" is touted as a mega budget depiction of the most controversial spectacle in the history of Indian Democracy.

"Standing at the core of this is one of the most sensational leaders of all time the first woman prime minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi," the official logline read.

The film also features Anupam Kher, Mahima Chaudhary, Milind Soman, Shreyas Talpade, Vishak Nair and the late Satish Kaushik. Ritesh Shah, known for "Pink", has penned the screenplay and dialogues of the movie. (PTI)



Nicole Kidman to star in and produce film 'Mice'



LOS ANGELES, Jan 23: Hollywood star Nicole Kidman will top-line "Mice", the feature film adaptation of author Gordon Reece's debut novel.

According to entertainment news outlet Deadline, the film will be directed by Justin Kurzel from a script adapted by Shaun Grant. The two earlier worked on the Cannes-winning "Nitramand" and the upcoming TV series "The Narrow Road to the Deep North".

"Mice", which was published in the US and the UK in 2011, follows Shelley and her mother who are pushed to their limits as they confront their moral convictions and the line between right and wrong in the face of bullying, violence

and fear.

Kidman will also produce the movie through her banner Blossom Films alongside Bruna Papandrea of Made Up Stories, and Kurzel and Grant of Thirdborn.

Blossom's Per Saari, Made Up Stories' Steve Hutensky and Jodi Matterson will also produce "Mice". Jeanne Snow will executive produce along with Nicole O'Donohue and Harriet Warner. Kidman is currently awaiting the release of her latest series "Expats". Created by Lulu Wang of "The Farewell" fame, the show will also feature Ji-young Yoo, Jack Huston, Sarayu Blue and Brian Tee. It will be released on Prime Video on January 26. (PTI)

Sofia Coppola reveals why Apple pulled the plug on 'The Custom of the Country' series



LOS ANGELES, Jan 23: Filmmaker Sofia Coppola has opened up on why Apple axed her limited series adaptation of Edith Wharton's "The Custom of the Country".

The director, known for independent and celebrated movies like "Lost in Translation", "The Bling Ring" and "Priscilla", said the executives did not get the unlikable heroine at the centre of the story. "Apple just pulled out. They pulled our funding," Coppola told The New Yorker in an interview. "It's a real drag. I thought they had endless resources."

"They didn't get the character of Undine," Coppola said. "She's so 'unlikable.' But so is Tony Soprano!"

About parting ways with the streamer, Coppola said, "It was like a relationship that you know you probably should've gotten out of a while ago." Wharton's 1913 novel follows Undine Spragg, a Midwestern on a desperate quest to infiltrate Gilded Age Manhattan society. The series was to be for five episodes with a reported budget of USD200 million.

Apple may have pulled the plug on Coppola's series adaptation, but they went ahead with adapting Wharton's unfinished novel "The Buccaneers", which is all set to get a second season. (PTI)

Bachchan calls consecration ceremony at Ram temple 'a day filled with relevance of divine spirit'

MUMBAI, Jan 23: Megastar Amitabh Bachchan, who was one of the prominent film personalities to attend the consecration ceremony at Ayodhya's Ram temple, on Tuesday described the event as "a day filled with the relevance of divine spirit".

Bachchan, 81, was accompanied by his son, actor Abhishek Bachchan, 47, to the ceremony, which was held on Monday in Uttar Pradesh's temple town believed to be Lord Ram's birthplace.

The screen icon shared a series of pictures of the temple and the new Ram Lalla idol after the consecration ('pran pratishtha')

on his personal blog. Amitabh Bachchan posted a picture with the Ram Lalla statue at the recently inaugurated Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The actor posted photos from his visit to the temple to his blog and account on X, formerly known as Twitter. Amitabh may be seen in the picture praying to the idol while standing inside the temple. The actor was seen wearing a white kurta-pyjama and a shawl around him.

Amitabh posted the pictures on X and stated, "T 4899 - Bol Siya Pati Ramchandra Ki Jai." Amitabh posted the images to his blog and penned, "A day filled with the relevance of divine spirit .. back

from the Pran Pratishtha ceremony at Ayodhya .. the glory the celebration and the belief of faith .. immersed in the reckoning of the TEMPLE at shri Ram's birth .. not much can be said beyond this .. for faith does not possess description .. Can you .. ?"

Amitabh Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan met Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after they both offered his prayers at the temple. Amitabh greeted the political leader with his hands folded and conversed with him before Abhishek joined them.

The veteran actor was also spotted interacting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the event.

The Prime Minister reportedly questioned Amitabh about several topics, including his surgically operated hand. A video that captured their conversation went viral.

After Monday's consecration ceremony, the idol of Lord Ram Lalla was placed at the Ram Temple as part of the ritual. The temple is almost completed with construction, and a few images from the location have already gone viral. Numerous celebrities attended the beautiful temple inauguration, including Vicky Kaushal, Alia Bhatt, Ranbir Kapoor, Katrina Kaif, and Kangana Ranaut. (AGENCIES)



Will have to be really accurate with bouncers against Rohit: Mark Wood

HYDERABAD, Jan 23: England fast bowler Mark Wood on Tuesday said taming Rohit Sharma with judicious use of short-pitched balls will figure highly in his and the team's plans to edge past a dominant-at-home India in the upcoming five-match Test series.

The first Test is scheduled to begin here from Thursday, and Wood said the nature of pitches, even if slow, could abet the strategy. "Yeah, the conditions will be assessed once I am out there, and bumps (bouncers) are rarely

bought out here. But the pitch sometimes can be two-paced and, if it is slow, it can help (bowlers) because the batters will be through with the shot," Wood said in a press conference here. "Someone like Rohit, I know how good he is on the short ball. That doesn't necessarily mean that I wouldn't bowl a bouncer. It just means that I'll have to be really accurate with it and bowl at the right time," he added.

Under their captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum, England have been playing an ag-



gressive brand of cricket, but Wood said the team is also willing to adapt to the conditions.

For him, it is all about cashing in on the opportunities to put the pressure back on the home side. "I think we'll still look to take the game on. I think at times it's been smart though, you know, to consolidate it in and then when the chance comes to put the pressure back on (India). The 34-year-old Durham man said handling pressure would also be a key factor in deciding whether England create history on these shores as they had

done against Pakistan in late 2022. "I guess it's all about soaking up that pressure when needed, maybe when the Indian batsmen are on top. We have to soak up that pressure and create a bit of a theatre or drama on the field and then when it's time, attack again. That's the same with bat and ball," said Wood. In 2022, England had become the first visiting team to inflict a 3-0 series clean sweep on Pakistan. In India, England's last Test series win came in 2012-13 under Alastair Cook.

"We know the challenges here.

They (India) very rarely lose at home. I think it's almost like a bit of a free hit for us where we can come in and try something different," Wood said.

"We created history in Pakistan recently, becoming the first team to win every match. So, this is another chance to do something historic and try to beat India in their own conditions," he added. Wood brushed aside concerns of England being under-prepared for this series and said their camp in Abu Dhabi helped the Three Lions tick several right boxes. (PTI)

Denied NOCs for playing in foreign leagues, Pakistan cricketers mull ending contract

LAHORE, Jan 23: Some of the top cricketers are contemplating terminating their central contracts with the Pakistan Cricket Board after some were refused NOCs to go and play in foreign T20 leagues.

According to sources in the team management, most of the centrally contracted players are upset with the board for not allowing them to play in foreign leagues despite being free from national commitments.

"The matter has come to a head because recently the board refused NOCs to some players including Zaman Khan, Fakhar Zaman, Muhammad Haris (all centrally contracted) to play in the Bangladesh Premier League on the grounds that they had already played two leagues besides the Pakistan Super League," a source said.

He said under the current PCB policy finalised during the tenure of Zaka Ashraf, centrally contracted players would be allowed to play in two foreign T20 leagues besides the PSL. "But for the players who are not centrally contracted there is no such binding unless they are required on national duty."

But most of the contracted players believe the board is following a dual policy based on whims and fancies when it comes to issuing NOCs.

"The players feel that when there is no Pakistan assignment before the PSL why should the board stop them from playing in

other leagues where they have good contracts," another source said. "The players' grouse is that the PCB does not even pay them anything to cover the losses of contracts not accepted because of PCB policies."

With the mushrooming of lucrative T20 leagues around the cricket world at present three leagues are being simultaneously held including the BPL, International Emirates League in UAE and the South Africa 20 league, meaning, potentially more earning opportunities for players.

A board official confided that the players need to understand that they are being compensated

if they follow the cap on leagues as they are paid a hefty monthly salary by the board under their central contracts regardless of whether they are playing or not.

"The top category players are getting paid around 6 million rupees

salary, those in category B get around 4.8 million so why are they complaining," the source questioned. But an agent for one of the players said that one the board deducted heavy taxes from those salaries and top players were getting offers of earning between USD 100,000 to USD 300,000 for playing five to six matches or more in a league.

"Do you know the contract value of Babar Azam and Shaheen Afridi for the BPL and ILT. Suffice to say one of them has a contract for USD 300,000 which is around 75 to 80 million rupees." (PTI)



Chayan Bora wins two Gold in National Karate C'ship

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Jan 23: Chayan Bora, a fifth-grade student at Indus Academy, Jagiroad, recently clinched two gold medals in the National Karate Championship held in Jharkhand. Khagen Das, a nominated member of the Tiwa Autonomous Council in Assam, felicitated the accomplished student today, presenting him with a Gamocha and a Japi. Additionally, during the school's assembly session, Indus Academy, Jagiroad, honored the budding player with a bouquet and a medal. Chayan Bora is the only son of Himangshu Bora and Jonti Bora of Jyotikuchi, Jagiroad.

Won't be ultra-attacking, but can't see any of my batsmen taking backward step: Dravid

HYDERABAD, Jan 23: Head coach Rahul Dravid did not see Indian batters replying to England's 'Bazball' in kind but he said they will not be taking a backward step in the five-match Test series beginning here from Thursday.

Dravid said India will formulate their game plans as per the situations that the match throws up at them in the rubber.

"I don't think we are going out there to try to be ultra-attacking. I think we look to play what's in front of us, what the situation demands. But by nature, if you look at our top six-seven batsmen, there are a lot of guys who are naturally positive and look to take the game on.

"So, they're not going to be looking to change that in any particular way. There'll be some different situations in which we may

need to look to push the game along or we might have to bat for long periods.

"But I can't see any of my batsmen taking a backward step or look to be defensive," Dravid said in an interaction here on Tuesday.

However, Dravid did not have much doubt that England would come hard at the hosts in the series, and the head coach hoped that his team would use the experience in these conditions to respond positively to the challenge.

"It's been exciting to watch them play and you know they've had success playing like that. They've done well in Pakistan. They've won in New Zealand and they had a really exciting series against Australia in the Ashes as well. So, we have to respect that.

"But we know that it's going



to be a challenge for them in these conditions because these are conditions we know very well. We've got a lot of experience in our attack. I'm looking forward to seeing how our boys respond, because I know that we will be put under pressure," said Dravid.

Dravid also termed the five-match series a fine chance for Indian players – experienced and upcoming – to set some splendid markers as India are poised to play a few more Tests in the upcoming months in the current World Test Championship (WTC) cycle.

"I do believe to allow people to be comfortable in the way they want to play. They are going to be judged by the results they produce. So, they've got to, you know, find a way to play and work around that. But yeah,

they've got some good experience.

"Guys like Rohit have been around for a while, Jaddu (Jadeja) and Ash (Ashwin) have been around for more than a decade. Even KL (Rahul) has been around for a while.

"So, it's a really good opportunity for them over the course of the next five games to set some good markers as there is a lot of Test cricket (for us) over the next 12 to 18 months.

"It's a really good opportunity for some of these young players, having had some taste of international cricket, to take the next steps. I'm interested to see how they go," he detailed.

Star batter Virat Kohli will skip the first two Tests against England owing to personal reasons.

Dravid said while the team would miss the presence and ex-

perience of Kohli, his absence is a chance for some other player to step and prove himself.

The former Indian captain was also excited because India will be playing a five-match Test series after a considerable hiatus.

India's last five-match series was against the same opposition during the pandemic era, and that had to be played in scattered fashion after Covid concerns.

"We are really looking forward to this. It's always exciting when England comes on, because it's one of the most followed Test series in the world. It should be five good Test matches after a long time.

"There's going to be a lot of punches traded on both sides. I really hope that you know, we can get the ground running hard and maybe strike a few balls early on," he concluded. (PTI)

THE TEAM MOSTLY INCLUDED THE WC FINALISTS INDIA & AUSTRALIA

Rohit Sharma leads ICC ODI Team of the Year dominated by Indians

DUBAI, Jan 23: Rohit Sharma was on Tuesday named captain of the ICC ODI Team of the Year, which featured five other Indians including star batter Virat Kohli and the pace duo of Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj.

The team mostly included the World Cup finalists - India (runner-up) and Australia (winner) - besides players from semi-finalists New Zealand and South Africa. The ICC said in a statement. All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin were the two Indians featuring in the Test Team of the Year, with Australian pacer Pat Cummins as its captain.

Ashwin was the leading wicket-taker for India in the Border-Gavaskar series, finishing with 25 wickets in four matches.

Jadeja performed quite well in the World Test Championship Final against Australia, picking up four wickets and adding a valuable 48 with the bat, despite India ultimately facing defeat.

Three Indians -- Yashasvi Jaiswal, Suryakumar Yadav and Arshdeep Singh -- figured in the ICC T20I Team of the Year.

Suryakumar, who was named captain of the T20I side, topped the runs chart with 733 runs in 18 matches at a strike rate of 155.95 to consolidate his position at the top of the rankings.

The ODI team's top order includes openers Rohit and Shubman Gill. While the Indian captain accumulated 1,255 runs at an average of 52 last year, the latter struck a brilliant 208 against the Kiwis and also finished as the highest run-scorer (1,584) in the format. At number three was Travis Head, who was consistent throughout the year and performed exceptionally well during the global event, with his 137 in the final being the highlight.

The middle order comprised Indian stalwart Kohli, followed by Daryl Mitchell, Heinrich Klaasen and Marco Jansen.

Kohli finished as the second-highest run-scorer of the year in ODIs (1,337) and slammed six centuries during the year. He surpassed Sachin Tendulkar's record of most international tons, besides winning the Player of the Tournament award during the World Cup. (PTI)



State of affair in Pakistan cricket is really sad: Miandad

KARACHI, Jan 23: Batting great Javed Miandad has lamented the way cricket is being run in the country, saying frequent appointments and changes in the Pakistan team has shaken the confidence of the players.

"I have not seen cricket governance anywhere in the world like we see in Pakistan and these state of affairs are really sad," Miandad told media during a ceremony held here to launch the Sindh Premier League.

The former Pakistan skipper, who appeared in 124 Tests, said the governance of cricket in recent times had a bad effect on the team and players as well.

"I don't think anywhere such frequent appointments and changes in cricket are made and it only means that we don't have continuity in our cricket structure and more importantly the players don't gain confidence," he said.

There has been a string of appointments in Pakistan cricket following the ODI World Cup with Shaheen Shah Afridi and Shan Masood named as T20I and Test captains respectively after Babar Azam stepped down from all formats.

Mohammad Hafeez too was appointed as director of cricket after the World Cup in India.

Miandad said Pakistan was slowly falling behind other teams because of the way sport was being run in the country by the cricket board.

"Since last year we have had a really bad time in terms of our team's performances and people who have no knowledge of cricket sit and take decisions which affect the entire structure in the country," he complained.

Pakistan team has recently lost the three-Test series against Australia 0-3, before going down 1-4 in the five-match T20 series against New Zealand. (PTI)

England batsmen may face spin test at Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, Jan 23: India head coach Rahul Dravid's words contained a mild warning to the England camp when he said the pitch for the first Test would offer assistance to spinners as the game moves on.

Ahead of the first Test starting here from Thursday, the 22-yard trampoline here spotted a dry look, especially from the good length area on either side of it.

"Hard one to say (nature of pitch). We will have a look once it (match) starts and figure it out. It looks a good one from what I've seen," Dravid began his statement during Tuesday's media interaction in a rather mundane manner.

Then he added: "But may spin a little bit. How quickly and how fast, I'm not sure. But it might spin a little bit certainly as the game goes on."

Fast bowler Mark Wood, on the other hand, admitted that the England camp has had a discussion about the nature of pitch but without creating a bedlam in



and rolling over thinking it's going to be tough because the pitches are not what we're used to. We have to find a way.

"We'll adapt. We've got a captain who always wants to take the game forward. So, it should be an entertaining series," said Wood.

However, that adaptation just might not be an easy process for the Englishmen.

"We've had enough time to prepare the pitch. There will be help for both batsmen and bowlers, but as the match moves on it will turn, but I think, these players are experienced enough to apply themselves and make runs," said an HCA official, who did not want to be named, told PTI.

Indian players hit the ground and sweated out earnestly here on Tuesday despite the training session being an optional one.

All the squad members, except pacer Jasprit Bumrah, attended the nets that lasted a little over two hours. (PTI)



Government of Assam
Department of Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs



As per decision of Assam Cabinet
Ensuring food security - yet another promise fulfilled by Government of Assam

16 - 25 January 2024

Distribution of new Ration Cards

In every new Legislative Assembly Constituency

Benefits of Ration Card

- Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) ration card holders receive 35 kg of free rice per month and each member of Priority Household (PHH) receives 5 kg of free rice per month. All new Ration Card holders will get this benefit from January 2024.
- Every ration card holder will get free medical services up to ₹5 lakh per annum through Ayushman Card under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana and Ayushman Assam Mukhya Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- Ration card holders who currently do not have LPG connections will get free LPG connections under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY). Under the Ujjwala scheme, beneficiaries initially receive gas stove, pipe, regulator and cylinder with gas weighing 14.20 kg or two cylinders with gas weighing 5 kg free of charge. On refilling the next time, the beneficiary can avail ₹300 off from the total cost of LPG as cash back.

Chief Guest
Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

📍 **No. 97 Nazira**
📅 **24-01-2024**
🕒 **11 AM**

Schedule for distribution of ration cards in new Legislative Assembly constituencies

Number and Name of new LAC	New Ration Cards as on 16-12-2023	New beneficiaries as on 16-12-2023	Minister or other official to be present	Date	Time
No. 7 Gauripur	9,568	40,558	Shri Sanjoy Kishan, Minister	24-01-2024	10 AM
No. 9 Birsing Jarua	15,866	71,372		24-01-2024	1 PM
No. 11 Mankachar	11,702	80,842	Shri Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Minister	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 12 Jaleswar	7,041	16,531	Shri Ashok Singhal, Minister	25-01-2024	3 PM
No. 13 Goalpara West (ST)	4,948	11,656		25-01-2024	1 PM
No. 14 Goalpara East	19,258	50,710		25-01-2024	11 AM
No. 29 Palasbari	11,536	46,362	Shri Chandra Mohan Patowary, Minister	24-01-2024	3 PM
No. 34 Dimoria (SC)	6,883	23,220	Smti Ajanta Neog, Minister	25-01-2024	2 PM
No. 35 New Guwahati	6,814	20,196		25-01-2024	11 AM
No. 36 Guwahati Central	7,521	23,150	Shri Chandra Mohan Patowary, Minister	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 43 Tamulpur (ST)	10,116	46,883	Smti Nandita Gorlosa, Minister	24-01-2024	10 AM
No. 44 Goreswar	4,016	22,280	Shri U.G. Brahma, Minister	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 67 Tezpur	6,740	29,668	Shri Pijush Hazarika, Minister	25-01-2024	11 AM
No. 69 Naduar	3,037	14,830		24-01-2024	2 PM
No. 70 Biswanath	10,663	38,937		24-01-2026	11 AM
No. 73 Bihpuria	4,912	22,426	Shri Atul Bora, Minister	25-01-2024	1 PM
No. 74 Ranganadi	7,070	22,444		25-01-2024	11 AM
No. 75 Nowboicha (SC)	10,475	37,782		24-01-2024	1 PM
No. 76 Lakhimpur	10,517	50,945		24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 82 Doom Dooma	5,641	26,760	Shri Bimal Borah, Minister	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 95 Demow	10,493	47,335	Shri Jogen Mohan, Minister	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 97 Nazira	7,150	34,584	Chief Minister, Assam & Dr Ranoj Pegu, Minister	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 111 Rongkhang (ST)	4,159	19,448	Shri Tuliram Ronghang, CEM, KAAC	25-01-2024	11 AM
No. 112 Amri (ST)	6,893	26,898		24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 113 Haflong (ST)	6,887	27,722	CEM, NCHAC	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 117 Borkhola	8,208	29,219	Shri Jayanta Mallabaruah, Minister	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 122 Algapur Katlicherra	8,702	45,458	Dr Numal Momin, Deputy Speaker, ALA	25-01-2024	11 AM
No. 124 Karimganj South	5,767	36,150	Shri Parimal Suklabaidya, Minister	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 125 Patharkandi	6,263	36,970	Dr Numal Momin, Deputy Speaker, ALA	24-01-2024	11 AM
No. 126 R K Nagar	6,202	36,993	Shri Parimal Suklabaidya, Minister	24-01-2024	3 PM

All new Ration Card holders can avail their free rice from
16th January'24 to 31st January'24

Households covered
66,38,399

Beneficiaries covered
2,31,88,213

New beneficiaries
42,85,745

New ration cards
10,73,489

Janasanyog /D/16701/23/24-Jan-24