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PAGES 12

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Scan for more information

Hamara Sankalp
Viksit Bharat

Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee Freedom from colonial mindset

Rajpath now becomes Kartavyapath, Mughal Garden becomes Amrit Udyan, new epaulettes of Indian Navy to be based on the naval ensign of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj



Disadvantaged sections top govt's focus list: CM

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 24: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that the state government is working relentlessly for upliftment of disadvantaged sections of the society. He said this while taking part in the ceremonial distribution of ration cards to beneficiaries of National Food Security Act (NFSA) at an event held at Chakimukh Higher Secondary School Playground in Sivasagar district.

"The current State government is working round the clock for overall growth and development of Assam and its residents. Recruitment to government jobs are being carried out in a very transparent manner," an official statement quoted him as saying.

He further informed that work on Mission Basundhara 2.0 is going on in full swing and by next month, a large number of applicants would be allotted land patta under the same.

Sarma further informed that owing to the earlier income limit of ₹ 2 lakh per annum, many families belonging to the disadvantaged sections of the society were deprived

of benefits under NFSA as they were deemed ineligible for ration cards.

"The state government decided to increase the income limit to ₹ 4 lakh so that a greater number of families could avail the benefits of ration card," he added.

As a result, additional 8,411 families across the Nazira Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC) were able to get themselves registered for ration cards in this phase of card distribution, he said.

He also added that with the latest addition of 8,441 beneficiary families, the total number of beneficiary families holding ration cards would stand at 52,103 in Nazira LAC.

Commenting on the Anna Sewa Saptah, Sarma opined that the government has been working relentlessly to ensure ration card holders are able to enjoy all benefits under NFSA, adding, "With this in mind, the government brought Anna Sewa Saptah and the positive impact of the same is being observed at the ground level across the state." He said ration cards isn't about rice distribution alone anymore but (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Rahul to be arrested after LS polls: Himanta

FIR registered against Cong leader • BJP-RSS can't intimidate me: RaGa

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, against whom an FIR has been registered here on the charge of instigating violence, will be arrested after the Lok Sabha elections, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday.

The Assam police suo motu registered the FIR against Gandhi and several other leaders for "wanton acts of violence" here during the party's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' on Tuesday.

The former Congress leader said the BJP-ruled Assam government could file "as many cases as it can", but he cannot be intimidated.

"We have filed an FIR. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) will conduct the investigation and he (Gandhi) will be arrested after the Lok Sabha elections", Sarma said on the sidelines of a programme at Nazira in Sivasagar district.

The Lok Sabha elections are due within a few months in the country.



The FIR was filed against Congress leaders under IPC sections that deal with criminal conspiracy, unlawful assembly, rioting, assault or criminal force to deter public servants from discharging their duty, damaging public property and others.

Director General of Police G P Singh said that the case has been transferred to the Assam CID for a thorough investigation through an SIT to be constituted by the additional director general of police (CID).

Sarma had instructed the DGP to reg-

ister a case against Gandhi for provoking the crowd to break barricades in an attempt to enter Guwahati city during the Yatra on Tuesday leading to a scuffle with the police.

Senior Congress leaders, including state party President Bhupen Bora and leader of opposition in the state assembly Debabrata Saikia, besides four police personnel, were injured in the melee. The government said the Yatra participants were asked to take a highway to reach Kamrup (Rural) district and denied permission to enter the main thoroughfare of Guwahati as it would lead to traffic snarls.

On Monday, the administration had also stopped Gandhi from visiting the birthplace of Assamese icon Srimanta Sankardeva in Nagaon district while the Morigaon district authorities barred him from holding street corner meetings and padyatra. The police had also registered an FIR (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

HT BRIEFS

Cleanliness drive

TEZPUR: Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College NCC, LOKD College Students Union and College NSS jointly organised cleanliness drive on Wednesday as part of the celebration of 75th Republic Day of India. On the occasion all the student union members, NCC cadets, NSS volunteers, teachers and office staff assembled in front of the administrative building with banners. Principal of the college Dr Sukdev Adhikari formally inaugurated the program and offered a brief speech in presence of Governing Body President Dr Jogendra Saikia. ANO Capt Dr Jyotshna Baruah NSS program officer Prasanta Bodo and Phandhar Basumatary along with student union members. The cadets and volunteers along with student union members cleaned the entire campus starting from the main entrance of the college. Some students also enthusiastically participated in the drive.

Foundation Day

BOKAJAN: The three day foundation day celebration of the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHL) from January 21 to 23 concluded at Japralangso in Bokajan Sub-Division. The foundation day was attended by a huge gathering which was attended by Guwahati High Court Senior Advocate Raju Deori; President of APHL, JI Kathar and party leaders, APHL Spokesperson, Angtong Ingti Kathar and others. The celebration was concluded peacefully.

Over 6k ration cards distributed to beneficiaries in Haflong

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 24: The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), Debolal Gorlosa, oversaw the distribution of 6,887 new ration cards at the District Library Auditorium on Wednesday.

Addressing the beneficiaries, CEM Gorlosa emphasised that this initiative would benefit a total of 27,722 individuals, urging those yet to enrol for family ration cards to contact officials to safeguard their entitlements.

In his speech, CEM Gorlosa elaborated on the two types of ration cards issued under the Food Security Act, namely the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) card and the Priority Household (PHH) card, based on the financial status of the beneficiaries.

On the occasion, secretary Partha Sarathi Jahari provided insights into the National Food Security Act 2013, in force in Assam since December 2015, aiming to ensure the food security of the population.

According to the 2011 census, nearly 2.52 crore individuals in Assam are covered under the Food Security Act, with 84.17% in rural areas and 60.35% in urban areas. Under this Act, AAY families receive 35 kg of free rice per month, while each member of the Priority Household (PHH) receives 5 kg of free rice monthly.

Since January 2023, the Union government has provided free rice across the country under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. With a target of 2.52 crore beneficiaries, Assam has already achieved coverage for approximately (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

AASU protests demanding revocation of teaching Science, Maths in English in vernacular schools



HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 24: Responding to a call given by the Central Committee of AASU, the Jorhat regional unit of the students' body on Wednesday staged a protest in front of Jorhat District Commissioner's office complex seeking revocation of the decision of the Assam Government to teach science and mathematics subjects in English medium in all vernacular medium government schools from Class VI.

The protesters holding banners and placards shouted slogans against the Government, seeking withdrawal of

the decision and to carry on with the earlier practice of teaching the two subjects in its respective languages.

They also burnt the copy of the Government notification regarding the Assam Cabinet decision in this regard. The protesters stated that the decision of the State Government was contrary to the announcements of the Prime Minister and union home minister, who in recent times were advocating for medium of teaching in engineering and medical institutions be done in the native languages.

They pointed out that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has laid emphasis on use of mother tongue and local languages in the primary level. Terming the Government's move as detrimental to the growth of Assamese, Bodo and other local languages, the protesters asked the Government not to impose the said decision on the schools and listen to large number of voices opposing the move for the greater interest of Assam and the students.

The protesters, on the other hand, urged the Government to take necessary steps to improve the infrastructure of Government schools in the State. They said that since last year the AASU were (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Valley MLAs have assured to convey people's concern to Centre: Arambai Tenggol

IMPHAL, Jan 24: The Arambai Tenggol (AT) claimed that all the legislators of the Valley districts met their leaders at Kangla Fort here on Wednesday and assured to convey the concerns of the people to the Centre.

Arambai Tenggol, an organisation of around 50,000 people engaged in guarding villages in the valley areas of the state had asked all ministers and MLAs of the valley districts to come for discussions.

AT chief Koroungba Khuman addressing the public at Khwairamband Keithel claimed "The legislators including chief minister N Biren Singh today assured to convey it to the Centre".

The media was not allowed to attend the meeting of the Arambai Tenggol with the valley legislator.

"Our points included removal of Suspension of Operations (SoO), implementation of NRC, replacement of Assam Rifles and removal of Kuki illegal immigrants from Scheduled Tribe list to bring peace", Khuman said. He claimed that the elected representatives assured to act in 15 days time.

"What we wanted to show today is that ministers and MLAs are under the public," he said.

"They also agreed not to indulge in internal squabbling among themselves", Khuman said.

Khuman also quoting the legislators said, "If the Centre does not listen to our concerns, we (legislators) will take the movement to protect Manipur along with the people." (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Marijuana worth ₹ 10 cr seized

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: Police seized marijuana worth ₹ 10 crores from the possession of two persons in Guwahati on Wednesday.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Assam Police's Special Task Force (STF), led by its deputy inspector general Parthasarathi Mahanta carried out an operation in Beharbari area under the Basistha Police Station limits and intercepted a truck carrying 4,000 kg marijuana hidden under raw rubber, a police statement said.

"The contraband item was being transported from Tripura to a state in central India. The police team seized 4,000 kg of marijuana," Mahanta said. The market value of the seized narcotics substance is estimated to be approximately ₹ 10 crore, he said. During the operation, two peddlers were apprehended, and necessary legal formalities were being taken, the statement added. Further necessary legal formalities are being taken in this case.

Earlier in this month, Assam police seized different types of contraband valued at over ₹ 100 crore was recovered in Karimganj district in the southern tip of the state on Tuesday and four peddlers were arrested.

'Community sensitisation programmes such as workshops on menstrual hygiene are being held'

Centre asks states to conduct 5-day special campaign

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: To create wider awareness and encourage participative spirit as part of National Girl Child Day celebrations, the Centre has requested all states and Union territories to conduct a five-day campaign especially designed for public engagement up to the grassroots level.

Further, the Women and Child Development Ministry has encouraged the states and UTs to use the "My Bharat" portal which offers a digital platform for sharing and dissemination of information on various activities being undertaken for National Girl Child Day 2024, an official said. The five-day special campaign incorporates novel ideas such as special Gram Sabha/ Mahila Sabha on CSR, oath-taking ceremonies/signature ceremonies, affixing 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)' stickers with messages on



NATIONAL GIRL CHILD DAY

every visited house, public building and panchayat office during the door-to-door programmes, the official said.

Community sensitisation programmes such as workshops on menstrual hygiene are being held with the distribution of hygiene kits

and special emphasis is being placed on plantation drives which denote the importance of a girl child, he said.

"It also involves school-going children through sports activities involving NYKS volunteers in schools, programmes with both

government and private schools focusing on the value of the girl child, and competitions like posters and slogan writing, drawing, wall painting, science fairs and exhibitions in schools," he added.

Acknowledging and celebrating local champions in the district in the fields of education, sports, social welfare, and community mobilisation are also made part of this campaign.

The National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) is also partnering in this campaign by organising a national-level event on its premises.

This event saw the participation of children from Child Care Institutions (CCIs) in Delhi through a painting competition on the theme 'Mere Viksit Bharat Ka Sapna'. National Girl Child Day is celebrated on January 24 every year. (PTI)

Present UNSC does not reflect today's reality: UNGA President

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis on Wednesday said the existing composition of the UN Security Council does not reflect the contemporary geopolitical reality of the world and it needs reform.

The Security Council has progressively been unable to take decisions in recent years to strengthen global peace and security, he said at a media briefing shortly after holding talks with external affairs minister S Jaishankar.

Ambassador Francis, who is on a five-day visit to India, also strongly underlined the need for reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC).

"The reform of the UN Security Council is absolutely necessary," he said, adding the issue figured in his talks with Jaishankar as well.

India has been pressing for reform of the United Nations, especially the UN Security Council.



New Delhi has been particularly upset over lack of any meaningful movement forward in the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) on Security Council reform.

India is a strong contender for a permanent membership at the UN Security Council. At present, the UNSC comprises five permanent members and 10 non-permanent member countries which are elected for a two-year term by the General Assembly of the UN.

The five permanent members are

Russia, the UK, China, France and the United States and these countries can veto any substantive resolution.

The UN General Assembly president also hailed India for its role in making the African Union a full member of the G20.

"There is no doubt in anyone's mind that India's outreach to Africa particularly with regard to its facilitating the membership of the African Union in the G20 demonstrates India's leadership in the international arena," Francis said.

"But more than that it demonstrated India's long-standing commitment to assist and facilitate development in the Global South," he added. Belonging to the diplomatic service of Trinidad and Tobago, Francis has announced his presidency priorities to include peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability. (PTI)

Govt allows direct listing of Indian cos on international exchanges of GIFT IFSC



NEW DELHI, Jan 24: The government on Wednesday permitted the direct listing of securities by Indian companies on international exchanges of GIFT IFSC to boost foreign investments.

The department of economic affairs (DEA) in the Ministry of finance has amended Foreign Exchange Management (Non-debt Instruments) Rules and notified the 'Direct Listing of Equity Shares of Companies Incorporated in India on International Exchanges Scheme'.

Also, the Ministry of corporate affairs (MCA) has issued Companies (Listing of Equity Shares in Permissible Jurisdictions) Rules, 2024. On July 28 last year, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman made an announcement regarding the direct listing of Indian Companies at GIFT-IFSC exchanges in the first phase.

"These, together, provide an overarching regulatory framework

to enable public Indian companies to issue and list their shares in permitted international exchanges," the finance ministry said in a statement.

It further said the initiative will boost foreign investment flows, unlock growth opportunities and broaden the investor base for Indian companies. As of now, the framework allows unlisted public Indian companies to list their shares on an international exchange.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is in the process of issuing operational guidelines for listed public Indian companies.

International stock exchanges at GIFT-IFSC - India International Exchange and NSE International Exchange have been, currently, prescribed as permitted stock exchanges. These exchanges are under the regulatory supervision of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA). (PTI)

Gold falls ₹ 50; silver jumps ₹ 300

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Gold prices fell ₹ 50 to ₹ 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at ₹ 63,250 per 10 grams. However, silver jumped ₹ 300 to ₹ 76,000 per kilogram while it had settled at ₹ 75,700 per kilogram in the previous close.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 63,200 per 10 grams, down by ₹ 50, taking cues from the international market," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,026 per ounce, down USD 2 from the previous close.

However, silver was trading higher at USD 22.70 per ounce. (PTI)

Markets rebound 1 pc as metal, commodity shares gain

MUMBAI, Jan 24: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply by 1 per cent on Wednesday after sliding for the past two sessions, propelled by bargain hunting in metal, commodity and telecom stocks.

Trading through a patchy track in the opening session, the 30-share BSE Sensex gradually gained ground and jumped 689.76 points, or 0.98 per cent, to settle at 71,060.31. The benchmark moved between an intra-day high of 71,149.61 and a low of 70,001.60.

The broader NSE Nifty also closed 215.15 points or 1.01 per cent higher at 21,453.95.

Among the Sensex firms, major winners included Tata Steel, rising 3.77 per cent, followed by HCL Tech, which gained 3.62 per cent.

IndusInd Bank and PowerGrid closed with a gain of 3.60 and 3.34 per cent, respectively. Other gainers were Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finserv and Bharti Airtel, among others.

On the other hand, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance and TCS were the only laggards, sliding up to 2.94 per cent.

A total of 25 stocks of the 30-share benchmark settled in green, while 43 constituents of the NSE Nifty witnessed gains.



"The market rebounded from yesterday's sell-off taking cues from global peers. The sentiment was reinforced by the PBOC's 0.5 per cent cut in reserve ratio to boost growth and financial liquidity. However, overall sentiment is muted as concerns persist on FIIs selling due to premium valuations in India and below expectation Q3 earnings so far," Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services, said. The BSE Midcap rose 1.71 per cent to settle at 37,884.28, while the smallcap index rose 1.72 per cent to 44,124.36.

Among sectoral indices, telecommunications and metal rose by 3.57 per cent and 3.21 per cent,

KOLKATA, Jan 24: The government is aiming to increase the share of scrap in steel making process to 50 per cent by 2047, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Wednesday.

The steel minister emphasised on usage of scrap in steel making as manufacturing the metal through scrap and other waste products is less polluting and termed it as a step "towards green steel initiative".

"As per our ministry's vision 2047 document, in the next 25 years, the percentage of scrap will be 50 per cent along with the balance 50 per cent as iron ore," Scindia said at the 11th International Material Recycling Conference in Kolkata.

Use of scrap not only reduces

the use of natural resources but also cuts emission by 25 per cent in comparison to the primary route of steelmaking, the minister said addressing through a video message.

More scrap would be needed in the future to reduce emission and produce green steel and for this to happen there is a need for environment-friendly formal scrapping centres, Scindia added.

Today, around 25 million tonnes of scrap are produced in the country and around 5 million tonnes are imported, he said.

Besides, various waste by-products generated during mining and steel making can also be effectively used in cement manufacturing, road construction and agriculture, the minister said.

India to press for two-tier dispute resolution at WTO meeting

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: India will press for the two-tier dispute resolution system at the World Trade Organization (WTO) during the ministerial-level meeting in Abu Dhabi next month, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

The official said that the country would also reiterate that the automatic binding, rule-based and independent nature of the dispute settlement body should be restored.

Developed countries like the US have been advocating for changes in the system, arguing that the present dispensation is rigid.

The US had earlier stated that over time, despite settlement it has become synonymous with litigation, which is prolonged, expensive and contentious. (PTI)

NEREV expo concludes in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: The Federation of Industry & Commerce of North Eastern Region (FINER) proudly announces the successful organisation of the 1st ever North East Renewable Energy & Electric Vehicle Expo (NEREV)-2024. The 3-day expo which started from January 21, 2024 at Sarusajai Stadium in Guwahati successfully concluded recently which was organised with the active support of the Ministry of new & renewable energy, Ministry of MSME, Ministry of DONER, and Ministry of road transport and highways attracted significant attention and participation from key stakeholders in the industry. This groundbreaking event marks the first-ever expo dedicated to renewable energy and electric vehicles in the North Eastern Region, setting a new standard for such initiatives. Eventgate Trade Fair & Events Pvt Ltd is an associate of the FINER for the NEREV-2024.

More than 70 prominent companies from across India actively participated in NEREV-2024. Renowned brands such as Mercedes and Audi showcased their electric vehicles, drawing attention from

an enthusiastic audience. Participants from Delhi, Gujarat, Bangalore, and Hyderabad added a pan-Indian dimension to the expo, making it a diverse and enriching platform for the exchange of ideas and innovations in renewable energy and electric vehicles. Attendees had the unique opportunity to test ride electric vehicles, gaining firsthand experience with the latest technologies in the field.

The 3 day Expo was inaugurated by Ashok Singhal, minister of urban affairs and irrigation, government of Assam. The expo attracted a footfall of over 3000 attendees, demonstrating the keen interest and relevance of the event in the region.

The expo also featured technical sessions and workshops, with a focus on solar technology. These sessions proved to be highly beneficial for budding entrepreneurs and students, providing valuable insights into the rapidly evolving landscape of renewable energy.

The expo showcased the latest advancements in renewable energy and electric vehicles and fostered collaborations and discussions that will shape the future of sustainable technology in the Northeast India.



Scindia further said, "Our steel sector is known as a hard to abate sector...with an emissions intensity of 2.55 tonne of CO2 per tonne of

crude steel produced."

At present, scrap contributes around 30-35 per cent to India's overall steel production, Sanjay

Mehta, President, Material Recycling Association of India (MRAI), said.

"India has the potential to become a global leader in recycling, given its vast population and the increasing awareness of the importance of sustainability. The recycling industry in India has the potential to create jobs, reduce the impact of waste on the environment, and contribute to the country's economic growth," Mehta said.

Around 2,000 delegates from across 35 nations have attended the two-day conference which focuses on increasing usage of scrap to promote circular economy, help India achieve the net zero goals and minimising impact on the environment, Mehta said. (PTI)

Mahindra introduces all-electric XUV400

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: Successful women entrepreneurs and professionals unveil the new XUV 400 electric SUV of Mahindra & Mahindra in the city.

At the unveiling event, Gargya Mahindra felicitated some of the successful women entrepreneurs and professionals as a celebration of their individual success and collective vision.

The new XUV 400 Pro range starts at an introductory price of Rs 15.49 lakh. The latest Pro range introduces three new variants: EC Pro (34.5 kWh battery, 3.3 kW AC Charger), EL Pro (34.5 kWh battery, 7.2 kW AC charger), and EL Pro (39.4 kWh battery, 7.2 kW AC charger), each offering advanced features and enhanced comfort.

The cockpit of the XUV400 Pro Range is equipped with advanced technology, including a 26.04 cm infotainment system and a 26.04 cm instrument cluster, designed for modern connectivity and ease of use. Adding to this, the Adrenox connected car system: offering over 50 connected features will further enhance driving safety, ownership experience, and overall vehicle functionality.

Additionally, the Pro range will offer an elevated cabin experience with Dual-zone Automatic Temperature Control, complemented by dedicated rear air vents, to ensure a consistently comfortable environment for all passengers. The convenience of wireless charger and a rear USB port will help the passengers remain connected on the move.

The all-electric SUV will further enhance its technological capabilities with the introduction of wireless Android Auto and Apple Car Play features, which will be made available through over-the-air firmware updates in the next few months. This enhancement, along with Alexa compatibility, promises to offer effortless navigation and a user-friendly driving experience.

ECoR achieves 200 million tonne freight loading in 295 days

BHUBANESWAR, Jan 24: The East Coast Railway has loaded more than 200 million tonne of freight and earned ₹ 20,551.9 crore in this financial year, an official statement said.

From April 1, 2023 to January 22, 2024, the ECoR zone loaded 202.111 million tonne of freight, shattering the earlier record of 191.39 MT loaded in the last fiscal. With this achievement, the ECoR became the first zone in the country to cross the milestone of 200 million tonne of loading for the fifth time in a row. The three divisions of the ECoR have contributed greatly to the stupendous feat achieved by it, an official said.

During the financial year 2023-24, East Coast Railway has loaded 121,747 MT of coal, 10.65 MT of raw materials to steel plants, 16,398 MT of pig iron and finished steel, 24,018 MT of iron ore, 1,192 MT of cement, 2,415 MT of foodgrains, 5,235 MT of fertilizers, 2,425 MT of mineral oil, 3,774 MT of freight in containers and 14,358 MT of other goods. (PTI)

China cuts bank reserve requirements and will boost property lending

Central bank stated the deposit reserve requirement would be cut by 0.5 percentage points

BANGKOK, Jan 24: China's central bank said Wednesday it will cut the ratio of reserves banks must hold as part of a slew of measures to support the slowing economy.

The announcement by the People's Bank of China prompted a surge in share prices, with Hong Kong's benchmark jumping 3.6%.

Chinese stock markets have languished in recent months as investors pulled money out, discouraged by a faltering recovery from the shocks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A sell-off earlier in the week was followed by unconfirmed reports that the government planned to get state-owned investment companies to funnel offshore funds into the markets to help staunch the losses. The central bank's moves appear to be part of a concerted effort to stabilize the markets and instill greater confidence in the outlook for the world's second-largest economy.

Central bank Guv Pan Gongsheng said the deposit reserve requirement would be cut by 0.5 percentage points as of Feb 5. Pan said that would inject about 1 trillion yuan (USD 141 billion) into the economy. As of December, the reserve requirement ratio was 7.4%.

Pan told reporters in Beijing that the

central bank also plans to issue a policy soon on lending to property developers to help support the industry. China's economy is recovering, he said, allowing ample room for policy maneuvers.

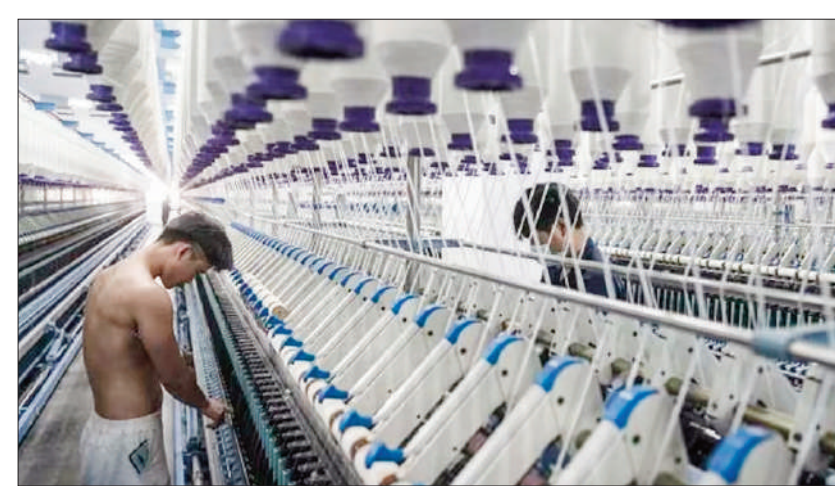
"At present, our country's financial risks are generally controllable, the overall operations of financial institutions are sound, and financial markets are operating smoothly," the government website China.com cited Pan as saying.

The economy expanded at a 5.2% annual pace in the October-December quarter, enabling the government to attain its target of about 5% annual growth for 2023. But the recovery remains uneven, and most forecasts say the economy will grow more slowly in 2024.

The slow pace of the recovery after China dropped stringent anti-virus precautions in late 2022 has added to gloom over a crisis in the once-booming property market as dozens of developers defaulted on loans after the government cracked down on excessive borrowing a few years ago.

That has left many Chinese families who had invested their life savings in un-built homes in limbo, unsure if the developers would deliver those apartments.

There have been some signs of improvement: Last week, the government resumed its reporting on the rate of unemployment



among young people, which stood at a record 21.3% in June. According to a revised methodology, the latest youth unemployment rate was 15%. Overall unemployment stood at 5.1%.

Many youths also were left without work after the government cracked down on technology companies, which tended to hire younger workers. More recently, moves to impose more controls on online gaming spurred massive sell-offs of game company shares, leading the authorities to apparently backpedal on that plan.

The Federal Reserve and other major central banks have been raising interest rates and finding other ways to raise the cost of borrowing to help stem inflation, which peaked at 9.1% in mid-2022 in the United States. Central banks are now easing their monetary policies as price pressures abate.

In China, regulators are grappling with the opposite problem, a risk that weak demand will cause prices to spiral lower, discouraging investment and hobbling growth. The moves by the central bank

this week will ease credit and pump money into the economy to try to spur businesses and consumers to start spending more.

The central bank cut the reserve requirement twice in 2023, by 0.25 percentage points each time. A key policy tool for controlling the amount of money circulating in the economy, it peaked at more than 20% in 2011 and is at its lowest level since the early 2000s.

"The authorities will likely launch more measures to stabilize market sentiment, such as mobilizing state resources to support the stock market," Raymond Yeung of ANZ said in a report. "The authorities are clearly concerned about market sentiment."

He noted that the central bank is also acting to avoid a weakening in the Chinese currency, the yuan. Pan told reporters in Beijing that the PBOC would ensure the yuan's value remains stable.

Like many other analysts, Yeung said the latest moves might not be enough to fully reassure investors and that more needs to be done to foster wider reforms.

"This requires some structural measures to boost private sector confidence and the long-term outlook of the real estate sector," he said. "The measures announced so far do not seem sufficient." (AP)

SIGNAL & TELECOM ENGINEERING WORKS AT LUMDING DIVISION

E-Tender No.: SNT-31-LMG-2023-24
 Dated: 19-01-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:
Name of work: Provision of ethernet based connectivity of UTS-PRS for IPMPLS in Lumding-Furkating section and backup power supply to router, switches & modem of UTS-PRS in Lumding-Chaparmukh Jn-Silghat Town section under jurisdiction of Sr. DSTE/Lumding.
Tender Value: ₹ 37,49,836.79. **Earnest Money:** ₹ 75,000/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. and opening at 15:30 hrs. on 12-02-2024. For details please visit in website www.ireps.gov.in
 DSTE, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers With A Smile

Following pact with govt, ULFA disbanded 44 years after formation

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: The pro-talk ULFA, which had signed a tripartite agreement on December 29 last year, has been formally disbanded 44 years after it was formed, a senior leader of the outfit said.

According to a clause of the pact, ULFA shall abjure the path of violence, give up all arms and ammunition and disband the organisation within one month.

The tripartite agreement was signed by the central and state governments and the ULFA.

The decision to disband the organisation was taken at a meeting of the organisation held in Assam's Darrang district on Tuesday, the outfit's general secretary Anup Chetia told PTI.

It was also decided at the meeting to form a seven-member monitoring committee to ensure the implementation of the various clauses of the tripartite agreement, he said.

Chetia will be the convener of the committee.

A socio-cultural organisation named 'Asom Jatiya Bikash Mancha' will be formed, which will work towards protecting the cultural and linguistic identity of the society, he said.

The members will also soon meet



chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to inform him about the outfit being disbanded and also to take forward the implementation of the agreement, Chetia added.

A possible organisational set-up for the rehabilitation of the cadres and to involve them in productive economic activity was also discussed at the meeting, another senior leader Mrinal Hazarika said.

The outfit will also have to vacate all the nine designated camps where ULFA cadres and their families were staying after coming for talks in 2011.

The arms/ammunition will be handed over to the state government at a formal ceremony later this month.

The agreement, signed in New Delhi in the presence of Union Home minister Amit Shah, also included an ex-gratia payment to the cadres, funding of their economic, vocational training and government jobs depending on eligibility along with withdrawal of criminal cases registered against the cadres for non-heinous crimes.

The ULFA was formed on April 7, 1979, in Sivasagar by a group of

20 youths from Upper Assam districts to establish a sovereign Assam through an armed struggle. The outfit had split in 2011 with the top leadership, including chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, returning to Assam from a neighbouring country and agreed to talk without the sovereignty clause and submitted a 12-point charter of demands to the central government.

Another faction ULFA (Independent), led by Paresh Barua, remained firm on the demand for sovereignty and is yet to come for talks. (PTI)

Debolal Gorlosa takes oath as CEM for third term in 13th NCHAC

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: Debolal Gorlosa, the elected Member of Autonomous Council Constituency (MAC) from Dehangi, officially assumed the position of chief executive member (CEM) for the 13th North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC). The swearing-in ceremony took place at the District Library Auditorium on Wednesday in Haflong with Simanta Kr Das, the district commissioner of Dima Hasao, administering the oath of office to Gorlosa, who appeared in traditional Dimas attire. This swearing-in ceremony was carried out in accordance with the official communication received from the Governor of Assam, as per letter no GSA/04/2024/8 dated January 23, 2024.

Notably, this marks Debolal Gorlosa's third consecutive term as the CEM of NCHAC, reflecting his political acumen and dynamic approach that have led to significant multifaceted development in the Dima Hasao district under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led government in the state and in Centre. During the recent election campaign, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had announced Gorlosa as the next CEM for NCHAC, citing his popularity and effective leadership.

The NCHAC, established under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, plays a crucial role in



administering the region and fostering the development of hill communities. Currently, the council is under the leadership of the BJP, with Debolal Gorlosa serving as the chief executive member.

Addressing the media after the swearing-in ceremony, CEM Gorlosa expressed gratitude to the people of Dima Hasao for their confidence in his council and highlighted the accomplishments of the BJP-led government under chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. He assured the public of the government's commitment to further development in road communication, infrastructure, tourism, education, healthcare, agriculture, women's empowerment, and em-

ployment sectors. CEM Gorlosa also called for media cooperation in making Dima Hasao a drug and addiction-free district to safeguard the younger generation. Additionally, he announced the formation of the council cabinet, expected to take place around February 10, 2024, following the upcoming 'Busu Dima Festival'.

The swearing-in ceremony witnessed the presence of elected MACs for the 13th NCHAC, NCHAC principal secretary (Normal), Dima Hasao Debanon Daulaguppu, Dima Hasao SP Mayank Kr Jha, and various dignitaries from different communities, along with BJP members and media personnel.

Haflong organises National Girl Child Day

DHEW and Directorate of Health Services collaborate for day of advocacy



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: National Girl Child Day was observed in Haflong, along with the rest of the country. The program was organised by the District Hub for Empowerment of Women (DHEW), Department of Social Welfare, in collaboration with the Directorate of Health Services. In this regard, a rally was organised by the Office of the Additional Director Chief Medical & Health Officer, Haflong, Dima Hasao. The rally started from the Office of the Additional Director Chief Medical & Health Officer, Haflong, up to the Cultural Institute Hall. The rally was attended by officials from line

departments such as the Medical and Social Welfare Department, students from different schools, and others.

After the rally, an awareness program was held at the Cultural Institute Hall, attended by CMOCD Dr Paban Kr Ganju i/c joint DHS Haflong as the chief guest, along with postmaster Dilip Kumar Barman, administrator doctors, and other dignitaries.

The program began with a welcome speech by district immunisation officer Dr Marina L Changsan, who gave a brief description of the importance of a girl child. The chief guest, Dr Paban Kr Ganju, spoke about the importance of

safeguarding a girl child, emphasising the difficulties of educating a girl child due to economic conditions. He highlighted the improvement in the situation due to various government programs and steps. He urged parents/guardians to provide further education to a girl child.

District child protection officer Sushanta Langthasa promoted awareness about the rights of a girl child and addressed issues like child marriage, discrimination, and violence against girls.

Postmaster Dilip Kumar Barman raised awareness of Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana for the Social Security of the Girl Child. Under this scheme, a minimum deposit of ₹ 250 and a maximum deposit of ₹ 1.5 lakh can be made in a financial year. He mentioned that an account can be opened in the name of a girl child until she attains the age of 10 years.

As part of the program, various distributions took place, including the distribution of kits to the girl child, distribution of 'Selfie Contest' prizes by the Social Welfare Department, and distribution of certificates and gifts to students.

Digitisation in managing train operations expands across NFR

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: The North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has implemented the full automation of the Train Signal Register (e-TSR) at various stations under its jurisdiction as part of its efforts to enhance transparency through digitisation. A total of 60 stations across NFR have now been equipped with e-TSR.

The Train Signal Register is a crucial document maintained by the station master, recording all details of passing trains, including the time of entry to the station limit and departure, along with other associated processes. In the traditional manual practice, the station master manually enters data each time a train crosses the station. The automation of the Train Signal Register (e-TSR) ensures a high level of transparency, allowing station masters to focus more on safety aspects. Additionally, the automated e-TSR serves as a legal document and proves valuable as an authentic source of information during accident inquiries, eliminating the possibility of data alteration or manipulation.

SSB personnel attend workshop on combating wildlife crimes & illegal trade

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: A workshop aimed at sensitising at least 40 personnel from the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) on tackling the growing menace of 'wildlife crimes and illegal wildlife trade' was organised on Wednesday at the Daranga Border Outpost (BOP) of the 64th Battalion of the border guarding force, located close to the India-Bhutan border.

Upon invitation from the SSB, a senior official from the biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, Binita Baruwati, delivered an enlightening talk during the workshop on wildlife crime. She cited recent case studies, providing one year's worth of data from the greater Manas National Park area and discussed the role of border guarding agencies in the Manas landscape.

Baruwati presented details of recent case studies related to hunting and wildlife trafficking, including incidents of elephant poaching and ivory seizure, tiger poaching and seizure of tiger body parts, as well as rhino poaching and the apprehension of poachers and traders.

During her presentation, the Aaranyak official emphasised the importance of detection for preventing



wildlife crime in the first place. Mizing Baro, a staff member from Aaranyak, assisted Binita Baruwati during the workshop.

Jawaharlal Baro, assistant director from the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), also delivered a talk in the workshop. His discussion focused on the identification of wildlife species and wildlife products, along with the role of border agencies in detecting and deterring wildlife trafficking. Kangan Kaushik Goswami from WCCB also participated in the workshop.

SSB personnel from various Border Outposts under the 64th Battalion SSB of the Manas Landscape actively participated in the workshop.

Pariksha Pe Charcha 2024 inspires artistic expression

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 24: An on-the-spot painting competition took place at Kendriya Vidyalaya in Nagaon, organised as per the directions from the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangstha, New Delhi. The event, known as 'Pariksha Pe Charcha 2024', witnessed the participation of 100 students from over 17 schools, including neighbouring Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, and other state-run schools in the town.

The principal of the school, Apurba Das, welcomed all the participants, escorts, and judges, addressing the gathering and motivating the aspiring painters to express their desires and dreams through their artistic skills.

Participants, ranging from class 9 to 12, were provided with painting kits containing all the necessary stationery. They chose topics from the mantras provided in the 'Exam Warriors' book penned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which aimed to address examination stress and anxiety. Topics such as Chandrayaan, sporting success, Viksit Bharat, and other mantras were chosen by the painters, re-



flecting themes that would help individuals overcome obstacles in life and celebrate life as it comes.

Under the fine weather and sunny day, participants engaged in

their paintings, and a panel of three judges reviewed the submissions. The judges assessed the participants' creativity, the quality of artwork, and the demonstrated artistic

32nd Annual Session of All Assam Treasury Employees Association set to commence

Health minister Keshab Mahanta to grace open session

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 24: The 32nd Annual Session of the All Assam Treasury Employees Association will be held at the Nagaon District Library Auditorium from February 9, 2024, with two days of programs.

As per the schedule, Ananta Gogoi, CEO of Nagaon Zilla Parishad, will inaugurate the representatives' meet at 4 pm on February 9, followed by an interactive program among the participants.

On the second day, the program will commence with a cleanliness drive and a special plantation drive. Sarit Sengupta, the president of the association, will unfurl the organisation's flag. During the morning session, a special felicitation program will be held to honour retired employees of the Nagaon Treasury office.

The open session of the program will be attended by Health minister Keshab Mahanta as the chief guest, with local MLA Rupak Sarma as the guest of honour. Nani Gopal Mahanta, retired finance advisor to the Government of Assam, and Madhav Malakar, director of the Directorate of Audit and Treasury, Government of Assam, will be present as invitees. The session will conclude with a cultural extravaganza in the evening, as per a release this afternoon.

Researcher Dr Udaratta Bhattacharya secures post-doctoral position in Japan

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 24: Dr Udaratta Bhattacharjee, daughter of Pratick Bhattacharjee and Mamoni Sarma Bhattacharjee of Nagaon Amulapatty, has been selected for post-doctoral research at the Institute of Technology, Department of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Industrial Management, Nagoya in Japan.

Dr Bhattacharjee will be working on a project related to the remediation of groundwater using organohalide-respiring bacteria and related microbiology. She has received approval for a professor visa from the Ministry of Japan for this purpose.

It is noteworthy that Dr Bhattacharjee completed her doctorate degree from IIT Guwahati. Previously, her work received acknowledgment through two conference awards for her contributions in developing and modifying a particular bio-fertiliser commonly used

Role of health in competitive achievements highlighted

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 24: Shagun More, who successfully cleared the Assam Public Service Commission Combined Competitive Examination 2022 and secured the position of block development officer, emphasised the pivotal role of physical and mental health in achieving success in any competitive examination.

Shagun More, the daughter of Rekha-Mohan More, shared some tips for new aspirants aiming to clear competitive exams. She highlighted the significance of smart work, consistency, maintaining a proper routine, and effective time management alongside hard work.

In an interview with our correspondent, she mentioned her educational background, having completed her matriculation from Don Bosco High School, Hojai, higher secondary from Don Bosco High School, Guwahati, and BSc from Cotton University, Guwahati.

by Indian rural communities to improve soil microbial consortium, plant growth, and nutritional factors. This was achieved by incorporating cheap precursors such as water hyacinth and waste tea leaves.

Dr Bhattacharjee was felicitated with international and national awards in the International Conference on Biotechnology for Sustainable Bioresources and Bioeconomy in 2022 and the National Conference on Gau-Vigyan in Modern Life and Medical Science in 2023 for her best poster and oral presentation skills. Dr Bhattacharjee has a total of 7 publications in Google Scholar.

Apart from her research work, she has written a preface and provided editorial assistance in the book 'Conservation of Biodiversity in Northeastern States: Proceedings of NERC 2022' from Springer Nature, as mentioned in the release.

Obituary

Ramesh Hazarika, a revered educationist and social worker, passed away at the age of 92 at his residence in Ghiladhari Basti, Biswanath, due to prolonged illness. Hazarika was the founder headmaster of Dolonguri Higher Secondary School and was actively involved with various socio-cultural organisations in the greater Balichang and Sootea areas.

Born in Jamugurihat, Hazarika later moved to Ghiladhari Basti in search of employment opportunities. He played a pivotal role as the founder headmaster of Dolonguri ME School, established in 1956. He voluntarily stepped down from his position when the ME school was upgraded to a high school. Hazarika also actively participated in the historic Assam Agitation Movement and joined the Gana Sangram Parishad and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP).

His contributions extended to serving as the president of 5 No Sootea Anchalik Panchayat and No 1 Sootea Co-operative Society. Hazarika's demise is mourned by Biswanath MLA Pramod Borthakur, Sootea MLA Padma Hazarika, former minister Prabin Hazarika, and various other organisations. He is survived by his son, two daughters-in-law, and a host of relatives.

Ration cards distributed

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Jan 24: The distribution of new ration cards under the National Food Security Act is progressing in every constituency, and the distribution for 107 No Thowra constituency (95 No Demow constituency) took place in Demow Public Playground on Wednesday. Jogen Mohan, the state Revenue minister, distributed the new ration cards among the beneficiaries in the presence of various dignitaries.

In 95 No Demow constituency (107 No Thowra constituency), the number of new ration cards is 10,493, and the count of new beneficiaries is 47,335. The distribution ceremony in Demow Public Playground saw the formal distribution of ration cards to 15 beneficiaries.

Albatrosses are threatened with extinction - and climate change could put their nesting sites at risk

By: Mia Momberg

The wandering albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) is the world's largest flying bird, with a wingspan reaching an incredible 3.5 metres. These birds are oceanic nomads: they spend most of their 60 years of life at sea and only come to land to breed approximately every two years once they have reached sexual maturity.

Their playground is the vast Southern Ocean — the region between the latitude of 60 degrees south and the continent of Antarctica — and the scattered islands within this ocean where they make their nests.

Marion Island and Prince Edward Island, about 2,300km south of South Africa, are some of the only land masses for thousands of kilometres in the Southern Ocean. Together, these two islands support about half of the entire world's wandering albatross breeding population, estimated at around 20,000 mature individuals. Every year scientists from South African universities survey Marion Island to locate and record each wandering albatross nest.

The species, listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, faces huge risks while in the open ocean, in particular due to bycatch from longline fishing trawlers. This makes it important to understand their breeding ecology to ensure that the population remains stable. I was part of a study during 2021 to investigate which environmental variables affect the birds' choice of nest site on Marion Island. The birds make their nests — a mound of soil and vegetation — on the ground. We looked at wind characteristics, vegetation and geological characteristics at nest locations from three breeding seasons.

Elevation turned out to be the most important variable — the albatrosses preferred a low (warmer) site and



coastal vegetation. But these preferences also point to dangers for the birds from climate change. The greatest risk to the availability of nesting sites will be a much smaller suitable nesting range in future than at present. This could be devastating to the population.

Variables influencing nest site selection

Marion Island is of volcanic origin and has a rough terrain. Some areas are covered in sharp rock and others are boggy, with very wet vegetation. There is rain and strong wind on most days. Conducting research here requires walking long distances in all weathers — but the island is ideal for studying climate change, because the Southern Ocean is experiencing some of the largest global changes in climate and it is relatively undisturbed by humans.

Using GPS coordinate nest data from the entire breeding population on Marion Island, we aimed to determine which factors affected where the birds breed. With more than 1,900 nests and 10,000 randomly generated points where nests are not present, we extracted:

- elevation (which on this island is also a proxy for temperature)
- terrain ruggedness
- slope
- distance to the coast
- vegetation type

- wind speed
- wind turbulence
- underlying geology.

The variables were ranked according to their influence on the statistical model predicting the likelihood of a nest being present under the conditions found at a certain point.

The most important variable was elevation. The majority of the nests were found close to the coast, where the elevation is lower. These areas are warmer, which means that the chicks would be less exposed to very cold temperatures on their open nests.

The probability of nests being present also declined with distance from the coast, probably because there are more suitable habitats closer to the coast.

Vegetation type was strongly determined by elevation and distance from the coast. This was an important factor, as the birds use vegetation to build their nests.

In addition, dead vegetation contributes to the soil formation on the island, which is also used in nest construction.

The probability of encountering nests is lower as the terrain ruggedness increases since these birds need a runway of flat space to use for take-off and landing.

During incubation, the adults take turns to remain on the nest. Later they will leave the chick on its own for up

to 10 days at a time. They continue to feed the chick for up to 300 days. Areas with intermediate wind speeds were those most likely to have a nest. At least some wind is needed for flight, but too much wind may cause chicks to blow off the nests or become too cold.

Delicate balance

Changing climates may upset this delicate balance. Human-driven changes will have impacts on temperature, rainfall and wind speeds, which in turn affect vegetation and other species distribution patterns.

By 2003, Marion Island's temperature had increased by 1.2°C compared to 50 years before. Precipitation had decreased by 25 per cent and cloud cover also decreased, leading to an increase in sunshine hours. The permanent snowline which was present in the 1950s no longer exists. These changes have continued in the 20 years since their initial documentation and are likely to continue.

Strong vegetation shifts were already documented in the sub-Antarctic years ago. Over 40 years, many species have shifted their ranges to higher elevations where the temperatures remain cooler. Wind speeds have also already increased in the Southern Ocean and are predicted to continue doing so, which may have effects on the size of areas suitable for nesting.

If nesting sites move to higher elevations on Marion Island as temperatures warm and some areas become unsuitable due to changes in vegetation or wind speeds, it is likely that the suitable nesting area on the island will shrink considerably. Our study adds to what is known about the elements affecting nest-site selection in birds. Notably, we add knowledge of wind, an underexplored element, influencing nest-site selection in a large oceanic bird. The results could also provide insights that apply to other surface-nesting seabirds. (Courtesy: *Down To Earth*)

As snowfall and rain elude Himalayas in the peak of winter, worries mount

By: Nidhi Jamwal

Vikram Katoch is visibly worried: the vast valley of Lahaul-Spiti in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh is almost snowless this January. "By now we should have had at least four to five feet of snow, but right now we have nothing," he says. "It is a matter of grave concern because snowfall ensures our water security and provides water for irrigation and farming to local villagers."

Katoch is vice president of the Save Lahaul Spiti Society, a non-profit organisation trying to protect this ecologically fragile valley from environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change.

Over 500 km north, the situation is no different in the skiing destination of Gulmarg, Kashmir. Despite the ongoing Chillai Kalan (Kashmir's harsh, 40-day winter period) snow is missing from Gulmarg's slopes.

On social media, on January 9, Omar Abdullah, the vice president of the Jammu Kashmir National Conference party, said: "I've never seen Gulmarg so dry in the winter ... If we don't get snow soon the summer is going to be miserable."

On January 10, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) meteorologist Sonam Lotus confirmed large winter snowfall deficits across the northern regions of Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. He added there is no likelihood of snow until January 25.

Where is the western disturbance?

A western disturbance is an extratropical storm that originates in the Mediterranean region. An area of reduced air pressure, this disturbance carries moisture from the Mediterranean and Caspian seas east, via the subtropical westerly jet stream. This brings rain and snow to Pakistan and northern India, which replenishes glaciers. These disturbances are therefore crucial for the region's water security, farming and tourism.

According to Madhavan Rajeevan, a former secretary of India's earth sciences ministry, both the intensity and frequency of western disturbances are decreasing: "The recent studies very clearly suggest that there is a decreasing trend in winter snow or winter precipitation over the region. This is related to the less-frequent passage of western disturbances."

"The most important worry should be the future projections of WDs," he said. "Climate models suggest a further decrease of about 10%-15% in the frequency of WDs by 2050 or so. It should really worry us."

A July 2023 study, "The decline in western disturbance activity over northern India in recent decades", assessed 39 western disturbance seasons between 1980 and 2019. It reported a declining trend in the frequency of these storms.

According to the report: "The combined mean frequency of strong and extreme WDs declined by as much as -43%, contrary to the mean occurrences of feeble and moderate WDs, which rose by -11% ... The sharpest decline (~49%) was observed for the most intense WDs (strong and extreme), primarily explaining the decreasing WD precipitation intensity across the core WD zone."

Similarly, a 2019 western disturbance study published by the American Meteorological Society concluded that: "The de-



cline in WD frequency and intensity will cause a decrease in mean winter rainfall over Pakistan and northern India amounting to about 15% of the mean."

"WDs are associated with the mid-latitude jet stream — strong westerly winds at around 12km-15km," says Rajeevan. "Observations show this jet stream has moved north during the recent winters. It could be related to global warming (which shows everything moving poleward, including monsoons, tropical cyclones) and also Arctic Sea ice melting."

Lower winter precipitation, higher summer rainfall

Another disturbing trend linked to western disturbances is their increasingly frequent occurrences during May, June and July. This trend is noted in the August 2023 preprint of a western disturbance analysis by Kieran Hunt, a meteorology research fellow at the UK's University of Reading.

According to Hunt's analysis: "WDs have been twice as common in June in the last 20 years than during the previous 50. This is attributed to delayed northward retreat of the subtropical jet, which historically has occurred before the onset of the summer monsoon."

The preprint says its most important finding is the significant increase in monsoonal western disturbances, which means "catastrophic events like the 2013 Uttarakhand floods and the 2023 north India floods are becoming much more frequent".

Snowless winters

Lotus is based in Leh, Ladakh, where snowless winters are becoming a huge concern. "It is mid-January, which is the peak winter season," he says. "But it is unusually warm. This winter is the warmest winter in Leh in the past decade."

According to data from the India Meteorological Department, December 2023 was an almost snowless month for most of northern India. Precipitation in both Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh was -79% of those levels typical in December. In the state of Himachal Pradesh it was -85% and in Uttarakhand it was -75%.

January has so far been worse, with Uttarakhand recording -99% of the typical precipitation during the first two weeks of this month. Meanwhile, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh have not received any precipitation.

Lotus says this is not the region's first dry spell: "Analysis of the past 43 years of data shows that there have been years when snowfall has been lower than what has been received this winter." For example, in 2016 and 2018 Leh did not receive snow during November and December. Gulmarg was similarly dry in 2016: snowfall during November and December amounted to 7.6cms, compared to 23cms in 2023.

Lotus is reluctant to make a direct connection between climate change and this year's unusual snowfall in the Himalayas. What he deems indisputable, however, is that rising temperatures are making things worse. In 2023, the lowest minimum temperature recorded in Leh was -12.2 degrees

Celsius, which is significantly warmer than previous years. Lotus says this combination of low snowfall and high temperatures will accelerate Himalayan glacial melt.

Impact on glaciers

The Third Pole spoke to Irfan Rashid, an assistant geoinformatics professor at the University of Kashmir, who specialises in Kashmir's cryosphere. Rashid agrees with Lotus: "In the past two decades, we have had at least four snowless Chillai Kalans. Snowfall during the winter period is crucial as it feeds the glaciers which, during the summer months, slowly release water that rejuvenates springs, feeds the rivers and also provides water for irrigation."

"People in the valley are already speculating about a drought this year, as it is the winter snowfall that sustains them through the year by providing them water to grow [rice] and apples," adds Rashid.

The loss of glacier mass is a critical threat to the water security of the Himalayan region. "I have personally been studying the Drang Drung Glacier [in Ladakh] that feeds the Zaskar River," says Rashid. "It has been receding at a rate of 50m per year since 2017."

A threat to water security

Rajeevan agrees that the water security of the region could be affected if western disturbances and their associated snowfall decrease: "Water flowing into these rivers [the five rivers of the Indus Basin] due to the melting of snow is very important for water management over this area, for agriculture, power generation."

He adds that the Indus Water Treaty, which manages river water sharing between India and Pakistan, could also be impacted; Rashid agrees that the lack of winter snowfall and receding glaciers could have a transboundary impact: "We need basin-wide, detailed studies for the same."

Rashid says these changes also threaten more disasters in the region, such as the Chamoli disaster in February 2021, or the more recent South Lhonak Lake disaster in Sikkim.

"The Himalayan region — not just in India, but the entire Hindu Kush and Karakoram — has steep slopes that host snow or permafrost," explains Rashid. "These are vulnerable slopes and as heat rises and there is a lack of sufficient snowfall, these areas are likely to become hotspots for disasters such as GLOFs."

Some of these disasters are already evident. Uttarakhand has seen an enormous increase in forest fires, from 922 in 2002, to 41,600 in 2019. Climate change, which increases the chances of low rainfall in this region, is a critical driving factor. Uttarakhand's forest fires usually happen between April and June, but this year they are already igniting.

Given the scope of these emerging challenges, Rashid believes the Indian government needs to urgently set up a national programme to establish what is happening to western disturbances. Armed with credible scientific data, Rashid says institutions can devise plans to handle this looming threat. (Courtesy: *Scroll.in*)

What's behind North India's winter smog? It's not just stubble burning.

By: Vinayak Sinha and Abhishek Mishra

Every January millions of people across India's Ganges plain find themselves caught in fog — cloud at ground level. This cloud then mixes with smoke from open fire lit for heating and cooking and vehicle exhaust, turning the fog into a toxic smog that shrouds the country for weeks. Besides air quality deterioration, it also reduces visibility, disrupts travel as well as the transportation of goods and can even lead to loss of life. The livelihood of millions of people is affected.

The Indian meteorological department defines a fog event to have occurred when visibility reduces to 1000 metres or less. In the last 40 years, there has been a five-fold increase in the number of poor visibility days in the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

Like all clouds, the main ingredient of fog is water vapour. Pollutants in the air in the form of microscopic aerosol particles soak up the water vapour and grow to larger droplets blocking solar light by scattering and absorption.

The high aerosol load reduces radiation from reaching the surface, thereby cooling the ground. At the same time, it warms the layers of the atmosphere above the ground, which in turn lowers the "boundary layer height".

The "boundary layer height" is like a lid over the lower atmosphere layer into which surface-emitted and chemically formed pollutants accumulate.

During summer, the height of this lid over the Indo-Gangetic Plain reaches 2000m or more during the daytime and is still several hundreds of metres high at night.

By winter, however, the height of this lid drops several hundred metres. The same air pollution emissions then accumulate and build up within a much smaller container (that is reduced in volume by as much as five times compared to summer), resulting in higher air pollutant concentrations.

These further aggravate the duration and inten-

sity of the fog. This is what causes the visibility to decrease, preventing airplanes from landing and slowing down cars and trains.

Economic losses due to these disruptions easily exceed several hundred million rupees every year.

During November, paddy stubble burning adds significantly to the aerosol burden and pollution.

By late December and early January, the extra open fires for cooking and heating by the vast population who cannot afford cleaner technologies, become the major sources of air pollutants.

The lower temperatures that accompany fog episodes trigger more open burning for heating — scenes of people huddled around these small fires are a common sight across the region's cities and villages during winter.

These open fires end up releasing more aerosol particles, which can prolong the fog event by providing additional particles that can soak up the water vapour and swell to produce more fog droplets. Such open fire emissions release copious amounts of both gaseous and aerosol pollutants into the air, a noxious cocktail that, when combined with the aerosol-radiation feedback, strengthens the spread of the thick blanket of smog over the region. Several toxic chemicals like isocyanic acid and benzene, a human carcinogen, are also released. While these factors significantly affect the fog lifecycle, without large scale regional availability of moisture, they would only result in air pollution aggravation, as in the November cycle.

What distinguishes the late December and early January periods from November, is the influx of water vapour near the ground through the rainfall induced by the extra-tropical weather system known as Western Disturbance.

This moistens the ground. The irrigation of the winter wheat crop provides even more water for evaporation, in addition to the existing natural water bodies (ponds, rivers and canals) present in the region.

Further, the occurrence of "atmospheric rivers" as a result of moisture transported from the Arabian Sea, also adds to the water vapour in the air during winter. Over the past few decades, there has been a documented increase in fog frequency, persistence and intensity over the region.

The most intense fog events predominantly occur from midnight to 8am. This is when wind speeds are low, promoting stagnant conditions for accumulation. Surface water vapour easily condenses through the night-time cooling of the ground. The ground air cools to its dew point — thereby condensing the water vapour in it to liquid droplets.

Dissipation of the fog occurs during daytime due to surface warming and when wind speeds pick up. However, this may not happen for prolonged periods. This is the most common type of fog that occurs over the Indo-Gangetic Plain and in scientific parlance is referred to as "radiation-fog".

Research such as the winter fog experiments program led by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology and several other national research institutes in India, are attempting to find out more about the phenomenon.

Right now, there are still more "unknowns" than "knowns". Further scientific efforts are needed to design focused regional field studies with comprehensive chemical and meteorological observations to unravel the chemistry of fog. This will help with improved fog forecasts that can alert citizens with more accurate and timely warnings.

As for improving air quality and minimising fog, a serious investigation of prevalent agricultural practices, in particular for irrigation and handling of crop residue, and preventing open fires will help. This can be done by providing access to cleaner energy technologies for heating and cooking along with better waste disposal. This would be a win-win for air quality and improved quality of life for the millions that inhabit this dynamic developing region of the world. (Courtesy: *The Wire*)

Beyond India: A global perspective on climate change and disability

By: Puneet Singhal

In the bustling heart of a Delhi slum, where the relentless Indian sun beats down, I first understood the profound intersection of climate change and disability. However, this narrative isn't unique to India. Across the Global South, from the bustling cities of Africa to the remote villages of Latin America, similar stories unfold. In this blog, we expand our lens, exploring how countries in the Global South are navigating these challenges and what lessons can be shared globally.

Echoes of India: Shared Challenges in the Global South

Africa's Rising Heat and Disability Concerns: In sub-Saharan Africa, increasing temperatures are not just an environmental concern but a direct health threat, especially for those with disabilities. In regions like Kenya and Nigeria, the lack of climate-resilient healthcare and infrastructure exacerbates the struggles of the disabled.

Latin America's Battle with Natural Disasters:

Latin American countries, prone to hurricanes and floods, face a unique challenge in ensuring safety and accessibility for individuals with disabilities during these disasters. The recent hurricanes in Honduras and Nicaragua have laid bare the urgent need for inclusive disaster management plans.

Lessons Across Borders

1. Community Engagement as a Foundation: Similar to India, community-driven initiatives in African nations demonstrate the power of local action. In Ethiopia, community groups play a crucial role in disseminating climate information and resources, ensuring that these are accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities.

2. Leveraging Local Knowledge: In Latin America, indigenous knowledge systems in environmental management have proved invaluable. These practices, rooted in deep understanding and respect for nature, offer important lessons in sustain-

ability and resilience.

3. Policy Integration and Advocacy:

Just as India grapples with integrating disability rights into climate policies, countries like Brazil and South Africa are actively working towards policy frameworks that acknowledge this intersection. The advocacy efforts here have been crucial in pushing for legislative changes.

The Path Forward: Unity and Learning

The stories from the Global South underscore a vital truth — the challenges at the intersection of climate change and disability are universal, transcending borders and cultures. Yet, within these challenges lie opportunities for shared learning and solidarity.

Cross-Cultural Exchange Programs: Establishing platforms for exchange between countries can facilitate the sharing of strategies, innovations, and lessons learned in addressing these dual challenges.

Global Advocacy Movements:

There's power in numbers. A unified global movement advocating for the rights of the disabled in the context of climate change can wield significant influence on international policies and agreements.

Technology and Innovation Sharing: Innovations like solar-powered aids in Kenya or flood-resistant homes in Bangladesh should be shared and adapted across borders, empowering communities globally.

A Collective Journey

As we navigate the complexities of climate change and disability, it's clear that this journey is not one to be walked alone. The experiences of India reflect a global reality, and in this shared reality lies our strength. We can build a more inclusive and resilient world by learning from each other, advocating together, and sharing our innovations. The challenges are immense, but so are our collective spirit and resolve. Let's continue to push forward, together. (Courtesy: *Youth Ki Awaaz*)

Spillover of Israel-Hamas conflict has direct bearing on India's energy and economic interests: Dy Permanent Representative tells UNSC

WASHINGTON, Jan 24: The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas is impacting the safety of maritime commercial traffic in the Indian Ocean, including in the vicinity of India, directly impacting the country's energy and economic interests, a top Indian diplomat told members of the UN Security Council. The remarks by R Ravindra, the Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, came during a UNSC Open Debate on the Middle East.

"The ongoing conflict is also impacting the safety of maritime commercial traffic in the Indian Ocean, including some attacks in the vicinity of India," Ravindra said.

His remarks came amid Houthi

rebels stepping up attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

"This is a matter of great concern to the international community and has a direct bearing on India's own energy and economic interests. This fraught situation is not to the benefit of any party, and this must be clearly recognised," Ravindra said, without naming Houthi rebels. There have been concerns over the safety of maritime traffic in the region. The Houthis have said the attacks are in response to Israel's war in Gaza and to show their support for the Palestinians.

Ravindra said the message that India has conveyed since the start of this conflict is clear and consistent — it is important to prevent es-

calation, to ensure continued delivery of humanitarian aid. The humanitarian situation needs to be addressed in earnest, he said, adding that India welcomes the efforts of the UN and international community. India, he said, has delivered shipments of relief material to the Palestinian people in Gaza. We have also provided USD 5 million, including the USD 2.5 million we provided at the end of December, to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which will go to support the Agency's core programmes and services, including education, healthcare, relief and social services provided to Palestinian

refugees.

Reiterating India's long-standing support for a Two-State solution where the Palestinian people are able to live freely in an independent country within secure borders, with due regard to the security needs of Israel, Ravindra said India firmly believes that only a Two-State solution, achieved through direct and meaningful negotiations between both sides on final status issues, will deliver an enduring peace that the people of Israel and Palestine desire and deserve.

"For this, we urge all parties to de-escalate, eschew violence, avoid provocative and escalatory actions, and work towards creating conditions for an early resumption of di-

rect peace negotiations," he said.

In her speech, Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights of the United States, called on Israeli leaders to take feasible precautions to minimise civilian harm in line with international law.

She also emphasised Hamas' role in unleashing the conflict and condemned attacks in the wider region by Iran and its proxies. Emphasising that the only guarantor of peace is a Two-State solution — with Israel's security guaranteed — she called for a strong Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza, even if this was "difficult to imagine". United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the

Security Council that any refusal to accept the two-State solution by any party must be firmly rejected and stressed that Israeli leaders' recent, clear and repeated rejection of a two-State solution is unacceptable.

The denial of the right to Statehood would indefinitely prolong the conflict, and a One-State solution — huge Palestinian populations inside that State without any real sense of freedom, rights and dignity — would be inconceivable. The only way to address the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians is through the Two-State formula, he underscored. Riyadh Al-Maliki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates

of the State of Palestine said that Israeli leaders "do not see our people as an empirical and political reality to coexist with, but as a demographic threat to get rid of through death, displacement or subjugation".

Israel's representative urged the council to shift its focus towards addressing the real, significant security threats in the Middle East, which is suffering from "cancer" — the continuous threat posed by Hamas, which exploits international aid to turn Gaza into "a war machine", as well as the "genocidal goals of annihilating Israel" pursued by Hamas during the 7 October events where over 1,200 Israelis were killed. (PTI)

US strikes come against an explosive regional backdrop, fuelled by the war in Gaza

US hits Iraq militia sites and anti-ship missiles in Yemen as fight with Iranian proxies intensifies

WASHINGTON, Jan 24: The U.S. military struck three facilities in Iraq and two anti-ship missiles in Yemen operated by Iranian-backed militias that have attacked U.S. personnel and ships in the region as the United States tries to keep the Israel-Hamas war from spilling over into a wider conflict.

Both the strikes in Iraq and Yemen late on Tuesday targeted sites that the U.S. has said are involved in the attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria and were threatening U.S. military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement that the strikes in Iraq were at the direction of President Joe Biden and targeted facilities used by the Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia and other Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq.

"These precision strikes are in direct response to a series of escalatory attacks against U.S. and Coalition personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-sponsored militias," Austin said. Those strikes hit



militia facilities in Jurf al-Sakhar, which is south of Baghdad, al-Qaim and another unnamed site in western Iraq, two U.S. officials said. Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said the strikes "blatantly violate Iraq's sovereignty" and contribute to an "irresponsible escalation," according to a statement from his office.

The statement, signed by military spokesman Yahya Rasool, said Iraq considers the strikes "hostile acts" and is taking measures to protect the lives of Iraqis.

The Popular Mobilization Forces, or PMF, a coalition of armed mostly

Shiite groups only nominally under Iraqi military authority, said the strike near the Syrian border killed one of its fighters and wounded two, while the strike south of Baghdad caused material damage.

The U.S. Central Command announced it had also struck two anti-ship missiles belonging to the Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels that were being prepared for launch and were aimed at the southern part of the Red Sea.

"U.S. forces identified the missiles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and determined that they presented an imminent threat to

merchant vessels and the U.S. Navy ships in the region," Central Command said. Both fronts — land attacks in Iraq and Syria, and sea attacks originating from Yemen — have seen a significant uptick in launches and counterstrikes over the last few days.

The U.S. strikes on the Kataib Hezbollah sites in Iraq came hours after the U.S. said militiamen fired two one-way attack drones at al-Asad Air Base, injuring U.S. service members and damaging infrastructure. And they followed the militia's most serious attack this year on the air base, when it launched multiple ballistic missiles on Saturday.

U.S. Central Command said it targeted Kataib Hezbollah headquarters, storage, and training locations for rocket, missile, and one-way attack drone capabilities.

In the drone attacks against al-Asad earlier Tuesday, U.S. defenses were able to intercept the first drone but it crashed on base while the second drone hit the base, U.S. officials said.

Injuries, including traumatic brain injuries and smoke inhalation, were reported to be minor. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details that had not been announced publicly.

The strikes on the Houthi missile launch sites in Yemen followed a joint operation on Monday night where the U.S. and Britain used warship- and submarine-launched Tomahawk missiles and fighter jets to take out Houthi missile storage sites, drones and launchers.

On both fronts, the Iranian-backed militias have employed ballistic missiles to target U.S. bases and ships, which marks an escalation, said Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies who specializes in Iran.

The militias have typically used drones and rockets to attack. Tehran supplied Shiite militias in Iraq with short-range and close-range ballistic missiles in 2019, Taleblu said, but they had not been used until November's attacks. (AP)

Russian transport plane crashes near Ukraine with 65 Ukrainian POWs on board

MOSCOW, Jan 24: A Russian military transport plane carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war, six crew and three people accompanying them crashed on Wednesday morning in Russia's Belgorod region near Ukraine, Russia's Defense Ministry said.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the crash, which occurred around 11 a.m. It was also not known if anyone survived.

The authorities were investigating the cause of the crash, and a special military commission was on the way to the crash site, the Defense Ministry said.

Earlier Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said a major Russian missile attack that apparently was devised to overwhelm Ukraine's air defenses had killed 18 people and injured 130. Ukraine is marking the 700th day since the full-scale invasion by Kremlin's forces started.

The barrage employing more than 40 ballistic cruise, anti-aircraft and guided missiles early Tuesday hit 130 residential buildings in three Ukrainian cities, "all ordinary houses," Zelenskyy said on X, formerly Twitter.

Russia may have employed decoy missiles in Tuesday's attack in an effort to open up holes in Ukraine's air defenses, a U.S. think tank said.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said Moscow is likely trying to acquire more ballistic missiles from foreign countries, including Iran and North Korea, because they may be more effective in some circumstances.

A further barrage of Russian S-300 missiles struck residential districts of Kharkiv late Tuesday, injuring nine people and damaging residential buildings, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said.

Russia denies its forces strike civilian areas, although there is substantial evidence to the contrary.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that air defenses shot down four Ukrainian drones over the Oryol region of western Russia early Wednesday.



Oryol Mayor Yuri Parakhin said that several drones were downed over the city. He said there were no casualties, but windows were shattered in several apartment buildings in the city.

SKorea says NKorea has fired several cruise missiles into the sea

SEOUL, Jan 24: South Korea's military said on Wednesday that North Korea fired several cruise missiles into waters off its western coast, as an analysis of commercial satellite images suggested that the North has torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with war-divided rival South Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last week described the Pyongyang monument as an "eyesore" and called for its removal while declaring that the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North's constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

The launches marked North Korea's second known launch event of the year, following a Jan 14 flight test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate range ballistic missile, which reflected its efforts to advance its lineup of weapons targeting US military bases in Japan and Guam.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said Wednesday that the US and South Korean militaries were analysing the latest launches. It did not immediately confirm the exact number of missiles fired or their specific flight details.

"Our military has increased surveillance and vigilance and is closely coordinating with the United States while monitoring for further signs and activity from North Korea," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have in-



creased in recent months as Kim continues to accelerate his weapons development and issue provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the United States and its Asian allies.

NK News, a North Korea-focused news site, reported that Pyongyang's Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification, which was also commonly called the Arch of Reunification, appeared gone in satellite images taken by Planet Labs Tuesday morning, although it was unclear exactly when or how it was taken down. The Associated Press couldn't immediately confirm the report independently.

The arch was a 30-metre (about 100-foot) tall structure that looked over a highway leading to the city of Kaesong near the border with South Korea.

The US, South Korea and Japan have been expanding their combined military exercises in response to the North's missile tests. Kim characterises these drills rehearsals for an invasion. (AP)

Trump wins New Hampshire Republican primary; Haley vows to fight on

WASHINGTON, Jan 24: Donald Trump has defeated Indian-American politician Nikki Haley in the New Hampshire Republican primary, continuing his march toward the party's presidential nomination and a possible final contest with President Joe Biden in the November 5 election.

With three-quarters of the votes counted, Trump, 77, was leading 55 per cent to 44 per cent. Although only two states have voted so far, Trump's victory in Tuesday's primary underscored his dominance of the Republican Party.

The former president won a landslide in Iowa's caucuses last week. Trump's victory is remarkable, considering he faces 91 criminal charges, including those related to seeking to overturn the 2020 presidential election. But Haley, 52, the former South Carolina governor and ambassador to the United Nations, vowed to fight on, giving a feisty

speech to supporters on Tuesday night in which she questioned the former president's mental fitness and warned Republicans that renominating Trump would lead the party to defeat.

Speaking after the results, Haley - who campaigned hard in the state - congratulated Trump, saying he "earned it". But she said the race was "far from over" with "dozens of states left to go". "I'm a fighter, and I'm scrappy," Haley, Trump's last remaining rival in the Republican nomination race, said. Haley said when she started, there were 14 of them in the race, and she was polling at two per cent in the polls. "And now we're the last one standing next to Donald Trump," Haley said.

"A Trump nomination is a Biden win and a Kamala Harris presidency," she said.

"And the next one is my sweet state of South Carolina," she said. Haley is hoping a strong showing in South Carolina could propel

her into the March 5 Super Tuesday contests. Trump said that Haley "had a very bad night" and was "doing a speech like she'd won" when she lost.

Trump called her "delusional". "Who the hell was that impostor that went up on that stage that went before and claimed victory?" he asked. Trump Haley hit back almost immediately, describing his speech as a "furious and rumbling rant".

Notably, Trump is the first non-incumbent Republican presidential candidate to win both the Iowa Caucus and the New Hampshire primary back-to-back.

Trump is the only Republican candidate to have won the New Hampshire primary three times. "This is a decisive win for Donald Trump tonight," former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy told Fox News in an interview. He said that Haley must withdraw from the race in favour of Trump. (PTI)

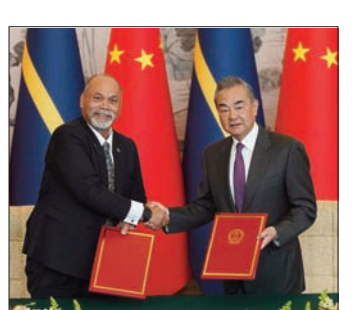
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China formally restores diplomatic relations with Nauru after Pacific island nation cut Taiwan ties



BELING, Jan 24: China and Nauru formally restored diplomatic relations on Wednesday after the tiny Pacific island nation cut its ties with Taiwan earlier this month, in a further move by Beijing to isolate Taipei's democratic government.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Nauru's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Lionel Aingimea at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, and Wang said the resumption of ties "once again demonstrates to the world that adherence to the one-China principle is an irresistible historical trend."

Aingimea said Nauru recognized that Taiwan is part of China, despite the fact that the People's Republic of China has never governed the island and that Taiwan's 23 million people overwhelmingly

reject Beijing's claims to sovereignty over them.

"We look forward to the practical cooperation that's going to happen between Nauru and China. The prospect is bright," Aingimea said.

Nauru's announcement on Jan. 15 came just two days after Taiwan elected a new president and left the self-governing republic with only 12 remaining diplomatic allies, although it enjoys strong unofficial relations with the U.S., Japan and most other major nations.

American officials expressed disappointment with the decision. The United States has diplomatic relations with China but also maintains extensive unofficial ties with Taiwan, including selling it fighter jets and other weaponry for its defense. Nauru first established diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1980, then switched to Beijing in 2002, then back to Taiwan in 2005, amid allegations that both sides were paying off or otherwise pressuring Nauruan officials.

China claims Taiwan as its territory and doesn't recognize its government or its right to diplomatic recognition, participation in global bodies such as the United Nations or any official contact with foreign political entities.

"This policy change is a significant first step in moving forward with Nauru's development," Nauru's government said in a news release announcing the severing of relations with Taiwan.

China has been gradually poaching Taiwan's diplomatic allies, partly to punish the ruling Democratic Progressive Party that advocates maintaining the status quo under which Taiwan has its own government, military and de-facto independent status outside of the control of the PRC.

Ten countries have switched ties from Taipei to Beijing since the initial election of DPP President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016. China says that Taiwan must come under its control at some point and has staged military drills around the island to demonstrate its determination.

Taiwan now has official ties with 11 countries and the Vatican. Seven are in Latin America and the Caribbean, three are in the Pacific islands and one is in Africa. Nauru's switching of relations has further intensified the focus on Taiwan's remaining allies, most of which are developing nations seen as vulnerable to China's global influence and willingness to offer hefty financial inducements. (AP)

Thousands of people are forced out of their homes after 7.1 quake in western China

UCHTURPAN (CHINA), Jan 24: As aftershocks continued to rock western China on Wednesday, more than 12,000 people were staying in tents and other shelters, lighting bonfires to fend off the freezing weather.

The previous day, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake in a remote part of China's Xinjiang region killed three people and left five injured, while damaging hundreds of buildings.

The quake caused significant damage amid freezing temperatures, but the toll on lives and property was relatively light, owing to the sparse population around the epicenter in Uchurpan county, near the border with Kazakhstan. Footage shown by state broadcaster CCTV on Wednesday showed evacuees eating instant noodles in tents with bonfires providing heat.

Jian Gewa, a 16-year old student in Uchurpan, said he was in the bathroom when the quake began. The entire building shook violently. "I just thought I had to get myself to safety as quickly as possible," Jian said.

He was evacuated to a school where he was staying in a dorm room with his grandfather, joining about 200 others. Local officials

said they planned to check houses' stability before people could return.

The earthquake hit in a sparsely populated area with clusters of towns and villages scattered across an otherwise barren winter landscape. A two lane highway runs from the city of Aksu about 125 kilometers (78 miles) to the area, through frozen brown flatlands on one side and craggy outcroppings on the other. Power lines and an occasional cement factory are virtually the only signs of human presence.

In Kizilsu Kirgiz prefecture, the earthquake caused damage of various degrees to 851 buildings, collapsing 93 structures near the epicenter and killing 910 livestock, according to the prefecture deputy party secretary Wurouzilaji Haxihaerbayi.

The area is populated mostly by Kyrgyz and Uyghurs, ethnic Turkic minorities who are predominantly Muslim and have been the

target of a state campaign of forced assimilation and mass detention. The region is heavily militarized, and state broadcaster CCTV showed paramilitary troops moving in before dawn to clear rubble and set up tents for those displaced.

The prefecture has deployed more than 2,300 rescuers, and Akqi county evacuated 7,338 residents. In total, 12,426 people have been evacuated.

Rescue crews combed through the rubble while emergency survival gear including coats and tents arrived to help the thousands of people who fled their homes.

"This 7.1 rating is very strong, but the death and injury situation is not severe," Zhang Yongjiu, the head of Xinjiang Earthquake Administration, told a news conference. The quake's epicenter was in a mountainous area about 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) above sea

level, Zhang said.

In the village of Yamansu, about 115 people were staying in a Communist Party meeting hall, their bedding neatly rolled up on Wednesday morning on top of five long rows of metal bed frames. Medical staff were on hand to check on older residents.

A grandmother fed one of her grandchildren on one of the beds, while an older one slurped instant noodles.

Outside, men chatted around a large metal wood-burning cooker with a stove pipe, two wearing chef's toques. Chunks of meat and vegetables in large plastic and metal containers sat on two weathered desks set up on the ground outside.

A light layer of snow covered the frozen ground as temperatures remained well below freezing, although the sunshine brought people outside. The quake hit shortly after 2 a.m. on Tuesday. By evening, authorities said three people had died and five were injured, two seriously.

State broadcaster CCTV said 1,104 aftershocks, including five that were above magnitude 5.0, were recorded as of 8:00 a.m. Wednesday. The largest registered at magnitude 5.7. (AP)



Rescue crews combed through the rubble while emergency survival gear including coats and tents arrived to help the thousands of people who fled their homes.

Shun money culture during elections: Rijju to youths



ITANAGAR, Jan 24: Union minister Kiren Rijju appealed to young voters to shun money culture during the elections, which he said is the root cause of corruption.

Interacting with the newly enrolled voters, during an event organised at the BJP head office here on Tuesday, Rijju, the Union earth science minister urged the young voters for a clean election without involvement of money power and other illegal means.

"Forcefully capturing votes is not good for politics but also bad for a democracy", he said and urged the youth to do transparent politics.

Rijju said the role of the new voters is manifold and they should responsibly vote to elect a perfect leader.

Rijju highlighted the various developmental initiatives of the central and state governments and urged the new voters to join hands with the governments for a developed state and country.

Speaking on the occasion, BJP state unit president Biyuram Wahga said the party's intention is not to grab power, but to work for the welfare of the people so as to gain the confidence of the masses.

He urged the youth to spread awareness on clean elections in the society for a better future. (PTI)

Soldier kills himself after opening fire at colleagues

6 jawans injured as Assam Rifles soldier fires at colleagues

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 24: At least six Assam Rifles personnel were injured after a soldier opened fire at his colleagues before killing himself in Manipur's Chandel district, police said.

The incident took place at Sajik Tampak village in the Chakpikarong sub-district of Chandel district late on Tuesday. According to police officials the Assam Rifles jawan fired at his colleagues and then pulled the trigger on himself.

All the six jawans belong to the Assam Rifles battalion, which has been deployed near the Indo-Myanmar international border in South Manipur.

The injured jawans were rushed to the Military Hospital, where they are currently admitted. Doc-



tors of the hospital have stated their condition to be stable.

On the other hand, the Manipur police has issued a statement that the incident should not be related

to the ongoing ethnic conflict in the state. None of the injured jawans hail from the state.

Meanwhile, an investigation has been ordered into the incident.

Meghalaya cabinet meeting in Shillong, takes imp't decisions

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 24: The Meghalaya cabinet led by chief minister Conrad Sangma took several important decisions during a meeting in Shillong on Wednesday.

The cabinet approved the amendment to the Meghalaya Financial Service Rules 1989 of the Principal Rules. The cabinet will incorporate a number of new rules in the Meghalaya Financial Service Rules to ensure their uniformity and proper codification.

The Meghalaya cabinet also revised the minimum and maximum age limit of candidates for recruitment to a few departments like police, excise registration taxation and stamps, home guards and civil

defence, prisons and correctional services and forests and environment departments.

CM Sangma said that the minimum and maximum limits have been revised considering the physical nature of the jobs requiring employees to be young and energetic.

"Cabinet approved the amendment to the Meghalaya Financial Service Rules 1989 of the Principal Rules. A number of rules related to various Departments have come up by way of Office Memorandums (OMs) from time to time and the Departments have been following the OMs but today in order to ensure uniformity and proper codification of the rules, it was decided to incorporate them in

the Meghalaya Financial Service Rules," said Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma on 'X'.

"Cabinet today approved the minimum and maximum age limit for recruitment into Government Service for certain Departments namely Home (Police), Excise Registration Taxation & Stamps, Home Guards and Civil Defence, Department of Prisons & Correctional Services and Forests and Environment Departments. Because of the physical nature of the work requiring candidates to be young, dynamic and energetic, the minimum age limit and upper age limit have been set differently for the above Departments which have been approved by the Cabinet today," the CM further said on 'X'.

Security beefed up in Imphal, as valley MLAs asked to meet Arambai Tenggol

IMPHAL, Jan 24: Security has been beefed up in and around Manipur capital Imphal as the Arambai Tenggol has asked all ministers and MLAs of the valley districts for a meeting at Kangla Fort here on Wednesday, an official said.

Arambai Tenggol, an organisation of around 50,000 people engaged in guarding villages in the valley areas of the state, has asked all ministers and MLAs of the valley districts to come for discussions, the details of which have not been specified, the official said, adding "there are intelligence reports that they (Arambai Tenggol) are planning to enter Kangla fort with arms before the meeting."

The group has demanded the delisting of Kukis from the scheduled tribe list, deportation of refugees to camps in Mizoram, border fencing, replacement of Assam Rifles with other paramilitary forces and revoking Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement between Centre and Kuki militant groups, officials said.

Security forces in full battle gear are guarding the high-security area where the Raj Bhavan, CM secretariat, Manipur police headquarters, 1st Manipur Rifles complex and Kangla fort are located.

They have barricaded all the entry points to the Kangla fort. The Kangla fort served as the royal seat of the Manipur kingdom till 1891.

Earlier too, Arambai Tenggol had asked all legislators to attend a meeting at Kangla Fort, the official said.

A three-member Union home ministry team met the leaders of the group at the residence of Rajya Sabha MP Leishemba Sanajaoba on Monday, the official said. (PTI)

Meeting on handloom promotion held in Shillong

SHILLONG, Jan 24: A one-day strategic meeting on handloom promotion of the northeastern region was organised by the APJ Abdul Kalam Centre for Policy Research and Analysis, India Institute of Management (IIM), Shillong, with the support from the development commissioner (handloom) of the Union ministry of textile and National Institute of Fashion Technology, Shillong as a knowledge partner.

The event was inaugurated on Tuesday by Atul C. Kulkarni, member of the IIM, Shillong's board of governors as the guest of honour in the presence of D. P. Goyal, director of IIM, Shillong.

Informing the audience, Sanjeev Ningombam, the centre co-ordinator of the Kalam Centre stated that the purpose of the strategic meeting on handloom promotion is to address stakeholder concerns while concentrating on the agenda item of textiles as driver NER economy.

Sessions including Innovation and Design Intervention, Marketing Integration of Handloom Products, Business Strategy and Cluster Development were scheduled for the event.

There was an exclusive session on idea exchange where stakeholders presented their ideas and best practices. Participating in the day-long discussion were resource persons and representatives from the business world, governmental organisations, educational institutions, training centres, and about 150 students.

Several prominent figures from the region's handloom industry



were powerfully represented in the discussion including Lovely Baruah, Jesmina Zeliang, Mitrani Kakti, Koijan Mantri, Yangoijam Maxwell, Zosangliana Hangzo, James Evantis Dkhar and C Lalhlenmawia.

Speakers discussed various perspectives on promoting handloom by focusing on the unique identity and culture of specific tribes' weaving traditions. It was discussed at length to integrate culture and tradition with commerce through design intervention and innovation.

This approach aimed to not only preserve the heritage of these tribes, but also create

sustainable livelihood opportunities for the weavers. By combining traditional techniques with contemporary designs, it was believed that handloom products could appeal to a wider market and ensure the economic empowerment of these communities. The Northeastern region in India has the highest concentration of handlooms, with 14.6 lakh units in five states.

Despite its rich cultural heritage

and traditional craftsmanship, the region faces commercial production and fabric output challenges. Improving infrastructure, market access, and skill development can help harness the region's potential.

One of the session's main conclusions was that the region needed to develop a market for handwoven goods. The absence of co-operative societies in the area is a problem that requires our collective attention to restore such societies, which are capable of advancing production. In order to capture a market it is imperative to combine modern and traditional components.

The deliberation emphasized sustainable fashion and consumerism, highlighting low investment as a cause for the lack of innovation. Changing product line-ups can create niche markets. The outcome of the deliberation will be proposed as a recommendation for developing a holistic plan aligned with the national mission of handloom policy. Participants agreed to collectively work and continue the discussion forward with more actionable plans. (NNN)

BJP Meghalaya unit accuses Congress of lies

SHILLONG, Jan 24: The Meghalaya unit of BJP on Wednesday slammed leaders of the Congress "for telling lies that the proposed interactive session of Rahul Gandhi at USTM in Ri-Bhoi district was cancelled because the Meghalaya government was powerless against pressure from New Delhi and Assam".

"However, USTM itself has now come up with a clarification on its social media handles. Here it is clearly stated that permission was denied to Congress by local administration because of non-compliance with requisite formalities and USTM was left with no other choice, but to cancel the event, a fact that the Congress found convenient to ignore," the BJP said in a statement.

"After all, this reeks of their own inefficiency; inefficiency that has been the hallmark Congress administration through the ages," it also said.

The statement said the BJP's Meghalaya unit requested the Congress and its leaders to be honest once in a while and if that's too much of a task, at least maintain dignified silence.

"This suppression of the truth and giving an altogether new spin to reality has always been part of Congress' guide to politics. Propaganda is their rule book and yet, they find fault with everyone else about it. It's a party that never seems to tire of screaming dictatorship when mentioning the BJP and conveniently forgets its own wrongdoings down the years," it said.

"Remember the emergency?"



Remember the act of invoking the president's rule and dismissing legitimately elected state governments at the Centre's whims and fancies?

The narrative of stifled voices propagated by the Congress conveniently overlooks their own history of muzzling dissent," the BJP added.

The BJP alleged that, in their (Congress) heydays, the party has been notorious for suppressing internal voices that dared to question the leadership. It's perplexing how a party with such a legacy could now claim to be a champion of democracy and free expression.

"The Congress would do itself

a service by realising that in the ever-evolving political landscape, people are becoming increasingly discerning. The party's outdated tactics of orchestrating a spectacle every five years with ill-informed speeches and distorted representations no longer resonate with the public. Times have changed, and citizens are demanding transparency, accountability, and genuine commitment to democratic values. The people of India continue to choose the BJP in election after election. As they say - 'Satyameva jayate', the truth will finally prevail, this USTM incident stands testimony to it," it said. (NNN)

Will not allow boundary fencing at India-Myanmar border, says NSCN (IM)

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Jan 24: The NSCN (IM) said it would not allow the proposed boundary fencing along the India-Myanmar border.

In a statement on Wednesday, the NSCN said it is totally against boundary fencing "in our lands that violates our rights as one family" and further divides the Naga family as a nation. It stressed that as one family, the Nagas need free movement from both sides.

The outfit said the recent move of the government of India to abolish the time-honoured Free Movement Regime (FMR) has come as a rude shock to it in particular and the whole Nagas in general.

"It reminds us of the treacherous division of the Nagas by former Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and the Burmese Prime Minister, U Nu in 1953. However, the fact remains that the Nagas have never accepted the arbitrary international boundary demarcation set up by these two Prime Ministers and the Nagas living on either side of the so-called international border have remained as one family defying all the odds," the statement read.

Further, the NSCN said, the nature of the boundary demarcation was "so cruel" that it runs right through the house of Longwa king in Mon district.

"Nothing can be crueler than this while dividing the Naga family," it added. On the issue of illegal immigrants, the NSCN said the Nagas themselves would control any illegal immigrant on Naga soil.

Land port to directly connect state with Ramgarh port in Bangladesh

Sabroom land port likely to be opened in February

AGARTALA, Jan 24: Sabroom in South Tripura is all set to get its land port with the Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI) making efforts to inaugurate its facility here by February this year.

When the land port becomes operational, it will provide direct access to Bangladesh's Ramgarh port, which is also under construction.

To expedite the work, the Land Ports Authority of India chairman, Aditya Mishra on Tuesday visited the construction site of the Sabroom land port and reviewed the progress.

"Around 95 per cent of the cargo terminal at the Sabroom facility has been completed and 80 per cent of the work at the passenger terminal has been completed till date," the official said.

"The LPAI chairman has reviewed the progress of work of the proposed land port at Sabroom and emphasised on the importance of completing the same at the earliest on both sides. He had also discussed with a Bangladesh delegation led by project director of Ramgarh Port, Sarwar Alam, at Sabroom," Land Ports Authority of India's Agartala manager Debabish



Nandi told PTI.

He said the LPAI wants to start passengers movement through Sabroom land port by February because facilities for cargo handling have not made much progress on the Bangladesh side.

"We are leaving no stone unturned to open passenger movement from Sabroom land port

from the next month as Matri Setu, connecting both sides across the international border, was opened in 2021. The cargo movement will take time because facilities are yet to be in place in Bangladesh's Ramgarh," he said. An amount of ₹ 232 crore was earmarked for the construction of the land port capable of handling both cargo and passengers at Sabroom. (PTI)

GOVT. OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

DIPHU GOVERNMENT COLLEGE, DIPHU

KARBI ANGLONG (ASSAM)

Website: diphugovernmentcollege.com

email: principaldgc@gmail.com

No. DGC/V1-55/2023-24/2031

Dated Diphu, the 24th Jan. '2024

NOTICE

This is for information to TDC Odd Semester Non CBCS (Arts, Science & Commerce) who took admission in the academic year 2015-16 and 2016-17 and 2017-18 to collect examination forms for TDC Odd semester (Non CBCS) Examination 2024 and submit the same before or on 9-2-2024.

Date of submission of Examination form is as follows:

TDC Odd semester (Non CBCS) Arts, Sc. & Com. = 08-02-2024

No forms will be entertained after these dates:

1. Examination form fee : = Rs. 10/-

Examination fees as follows :

Category	Courses	TDC Odd Sem. (Arts & Com.)	TDC Odd Sem. (Sc.)
One paper only	Pass/Hons	Rs. 1050.00	Rs. 1050.00
More than one paper	Pass/Hons	Rs. 1950.00	Rs. 1950.00

N.B. Arts/Commerce/Science students offering practical subjects will have to pay Rs. 100/- extra.

The following particulars must attached alongwith examination forms:

1. Attested copies of each mark-sheets
2. Passport size photo must be pasted in proper place.
3. Xerox copy of the Registration Certificate.

Sd/-
Principal
Diphu Govt. College, Diphu

Memo No. DGC/V1-55/2023-24/

Dated Diphu, the 24th Jan. '2024

SETBACK FOR INDIA BLOC

Mamata says will go alone in Bengal for LS polls

KOLKATA, Jan 24: In a major setback to the opposition INDIA bloc, West Bengal chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday announced that her party has decided to go alone in the state in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Banerjee's comments came a day before Congress leader Rahul Gandhi-led 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' will enter West Bengal.

"I had given them (Congress) a proposal (on seat-sharing), but they refused it at the outset. Our party has now decided to go alone in Bengal," Banerjee said amid the seat-negotiation tussle between the Congress and the TMC.

The surprise announcement caught the grand old party off guard.

Reacting to Banerjee's statement, the party said, "No one can imagine the existence of the opposition INDIA bloc without West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee."

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a press conference in Assam that Banerjee's party Trinamool Congress is an "important pillar" of the opposition alliance.

"The INDIA bloc will fight the Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal and all (partners) will participate," he said.

Denying reports that TMC and Congress are in talks for seat-sharing, Banerjee asserted that she has not spoken to anyone in the grand old party on the issue.

"Now, we have decided that there will be no relation with the Congress in Bengal," she said.

According to sources, the TMC's offer of



two seats to the grand old party based on its 2019 Lok Sabha election performance, triggered tension among the leaders, as the arrangement was deemed insufficient.

The CPI(M)-led Left Front, Congress, and the TMC are part of the 28-party INDIA bloc. The TMC boss also said the party will have no relationship with the Congress in the state.

"Let the Congress fight 300 seats on its own (in the country). The regional parties are together and can contest the rest. However, we will not tolerate any interference by them (Congress) in Bengal," she said.

The TMC chief had made a similar remark during a recent rally in Kolkata, where she batted for the idea of regional leaders spearheading the fight against the BJP in

specific regions.

Expressing her commitment to the opposition alliance, Banerjee said on Wednesday, "At the national level, we, as a part of the INDIA bloc, will decide our strategy after the elections. All the regional parties will stay united and the opposition front doesn't belong to any single party. We will do whatever it takes to defeat the BJP."

On the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', which is scheduled to enter West Bengal on Thursday, she claimed that the Congress did not inform her about the Yatra's itinerary in the state. "As a gesture of courtesy, did they (Congress) let me know that they are coming to Bengal for the Yatra? I am not aware of it," she said.

The Yatra, currently in Assam, is set to

enter West Bengal through Bakshirhat in Cooch Behar district on January 25. After a two-day recess on January 26-27, it will traverse Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Uttar Dinajpur and Darjeeling before reaching Bihar on January 29.

It will re-enter West Bengal on January 31 through Malda and travel via Murshidabad, both strongholds of the Congress, before leaving the state on February 1.

Banerjee's announcement of going solo in Bengal was mocked by the Bengal BJP which said the INDIA bloc alliance lacked any ideological conviction and was built on an anti-Modi platform.

"Did this alliance have any ideological conviction? It was all about just opposing the Prime Minister and the BJP to protect their own political identities," BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar said.

State Congress president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, a vocal TMC critic, has maintained that it wouldn't "beg" for seats from Bengal's ruling party.

In the 2019 elections, TMC had secured 22 seats, Congress won two, and the BJP bagged 18 seats in the state.

The Trinamool Congress had recently abstained from a recent INDIA bloc virtual meeting and emphasised the necessity for Congress to recognise its limitations in Bengal, and permit the TMC to spearhead the state's political battle.

TMC had previously allied with the Congress in the 2001 assembly polls, the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, and the 2011 assembly polls, leading to the ousting of the CPI (M)-led Left Front government of 34 years. (PTI)

TMC denies participating in Congress' Nyay Yatra



NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Trinamool Congress on Tuesday said it is not participating in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Assam, a few hours after its state unit chief said TMC workers and leaders supported the east-west Congress rally.

A senior TMC leader said that seat-sharing talks need to be concluded first.

The yatra will be heading to West Bengal after Assam and is likely to reach Cooch Behar on January 25 via Dubri in Assam.

On Tuesday, some people carrying Trinamool Congress flags were seen participating in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, with Assam unit chief Ripun Bora confirming that the party members took part in the yatra in a post on X.

Bora later deleted his post that also carried pictures of TMC workers in the yatra.

A senior party leader later said the TMC did not officially partici-

pate in the Congress' Rahul Gandhi-led Yatra, though some workers might have joined in their personal capacity.

The TMC leader stressed that the seat-sharing talks remain a priority, and needs to be addressed first.

Assam Trinamool Congress (TMC) chief Ripun Bora had earlier in the day posted on X about the party's participation in the yatra with pictures of TMC workers holding party flags welcoming Gandhi.

"Large number of @AITC4Assam leaders & workers welcomed Rahul Gandhi at Guwahati & joined the #BharatJodoNyayYatra," Bora had said in the post that he later deleted.

Bora is a former state Congress chief and a former Rajya Sabha MP who had switched sides to join the TMC. (PTI)

PM could claim full credit for Bharat Ratna to Karpoori Thakur: Nitish



PATNA, Jan 24: Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday took a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the latter might claim "full credit" for conferring Bharat Ratna on Karpoori Thakur.

Addressing a rally organised by the JD(U) on the birth centenary of

the former Bihar CM, Kumar, who is also the party president, also highlighted his relentless demands for the highest civilian award for his political mentor.

"I was told by Ramnath Thakur, my party colleague and the late leader's son, that the prime minister

had called him up after the announcement. The PM has not called me so far. It is possible that he may claim full credit for the move. Be that as it may, I thank the PM and his government for fulfilling a demand I have been raising since I assumed power in Bihar," Kumar said.

The JD(U) chief also said he "never tried to promote" any of his family members since he drew inspiration from late Karpoori Thakur who was known for probity in public life.

"It was also Karpoori Thakur who inspired our commitment to the cause of Other Backward Classes and Extremely Backward Classes. The caste survey, which we conducted and followed it up with many other welfare measures for the deprived sections, should be implemented across the country", Kumar told the rally. (PTI)

Congress slams BJP over Yatra 'disruptions'

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Accusing the BJP of disrupting its Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra repeatedly, the Congress on Wednesday said "unjust forces" were creating obstacles in the fight for justice and asserted that it would not be cowed down by the filing of "false" cases against its leaders and workers in Assam.

In an apparent swipe at Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the opposition party said many chief ministers can fall to any level of sycophancy to "make Delhi happy".

Congress leader Kanhaiya Kumar said the country needs "five types of justice" in the current scenario -- justice for youth, women, farmers, labourers, and participation of all.

Only the restoration of these justices will give strength to the country. The majority of the population of our country is still outside its ambit, Kumar said at a press conference at the AICC headquarters here.

"It seems the rulers are afraid of the success of struggle," he said, adding that while Bharat Jodo Yatra did not face any major hindrances, obstacles were being created for the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

He said it started with the denial of permission to start the Yatra from an Imphal ground.

"They (BJP governments) give the excuse of security every time to disrupt our Yatra and the unjust forces are creating obstacles in this fight for justice," Kumar said.



"This is not an electoral yatra but a yatra of struggle for the country. Efforts are being made repeatedly to stop the Yatra and permissions are withdrawn at the last moment," the Congress leader alleged.

"The question is that due to our Yatra, a law and order situation arises but on the same route when ministers or (BJP chief J P) Nadda ji's programme is there, it is allowed. So the government is standing with injustice," Kumar said.

The Congress party "which defeated the British, which was not afraid of their cannons, why would they be afraid of the barricades", he said in a reference to the Yatra being stopped from entering Guwahati on Tuesday.

"Many CMs can fall to any level of sycophancy in order to make Delhi happy... 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' is being organised only to

establish social, economic and political justice in the country.

"FIRs on false allegations and false cases have been filed against Congress workers and leaders and we will not be scared of such tactics, we will not be cowed down," the Congress leader said.

Rahul Gandhi was booked on Tuesday for "wanton acts of violence" by the Assam Police as the political confrontation between the Congress leader and state chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma escalated on the tenth day of the Yatra.

"Concerning wanton acts of violence, provocation, damage to public property and assault on police personnel today by Congress members, an FIR has been registered against Rahul Gandhi, KC Venugopal, Kanhaiya Kumar and other individuals...", the chief minister posted on X. (PTI)

Caste and religious differences were created to destroy Tamils' unity: TN CM Stalin

MADURAI (TN), Jan 24: Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin on Wednesday said caste and religious differences were created "later" to destroy Tamils' unity and urged them to conduct cultural festivals like the traditional bull-taming sport Jallikattu unitedly as Tamils. In his address after inaugurating a grand jallikattu arena named after his father and late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi, Stalin also charged the central BJP with "enacting a drama" over granting permission to hold the sport in the state, before the Supreme Court gave a favourable verdict on the matter.

He recalled that DMK founder, the late CN An-

nadurai gave Tamil Nadu its name (it was earlier known as Madras Presidency) while Karunanidhi ensured classical language status for Tamil.

His "Dravida model government" has constructed the grand arena in this district to highlight "aerut-hazhuthal which is a symbol of Tamils' culture," he said.

"At this juncture what I want to tell you is--caste divisions and religious differences were created later to destroy Tamils' unity. Let us conduct such cultural festivals unitedly with the Tamil identity," he said. (PTI)

Bharat Ratna award to Karpoori Thakur reflects Modi govt's desperation, hypocrisy: Congress

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: The Congress on Wednesday welcomed the decision to confer Bharat Ratna to former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur and said it reflects the Narendra Modi government's desperation and hypocrisy.

Thakur was a champion of social justice and conducting a nationwide caste census would be an appropriate tribute to him, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said.

"Even though it reflects the Modi Govt's desperation and hypocrisy, the Indian National Congress welcomes the posthumously awarded Bharat Ratna to the champion of social justice Jannayak Karpoori Thakurji," Ramesh said in a post on X.

"Bhagidari Nyay' is one of the five pillars of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. It will need a nation-wide caste census as a starting point.

"Rahul Gandhi has been consistently advocating this but the Modi Government has all along refused to release the results of the Socio Economic Caste Census 2011 and also refused to commit itself to conduct an updated nation-wide caste census which will be the most appropri-

ate tribute to Jannayak Karpoori Thakurji," he said.

Two-time Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur has been named for the country's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna posthumously, a Rashtrapati Bhawan communique said on Tuesday on the eve of the birth centenary of the fountainhead of OBC politics in Bihar.

Thakur, who passed away in 1988, was the first non-Congress socialist leader who became chief minister twice -- first for seven months in December 1970 and later for two years in 1977.

"The President has been pleased to award Bharat Ratna to Shri Karpoori Thakur (posthumously)," the communique said. Thakur, known affectionately as 'Jan Nayak' (people's leader), is the 49th recipient of the country's highest civilian award. The award was last conferred on late president Pranab Mukherjee in 2019.

Born on January 24, 1924 in Nai samaj (barber society), Thakur is credited in Bihar politics for enforcing total prohibition of alcohol in 1970. The village where he was born in Samistapur district was renamed after him as Karpuri Gram. (PTI)

My govt has walked on path shown by Karpoori Thakur: PM Modi

'His decision was met with heavy opposition but he did not bow to any pressure'

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid rich tributes to former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur, who has been named for the country's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna, on his birth centenary on Wednesday, and said he left an unforgettable imprint on Indian society and politics.

Modi said Thakur's relentless pursuit of social justice created a positive impact in people's lives.

Sharing his write-up on the pioneering backward caste leader, Modi posted on X, "I bow to Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur Ji on his birth centenary. On this special occasion, our Government has had the honour of conferring the Bharat Ratna on him. I've penned a few thoughts on his unparalleled impact on our society and polity."

Overcoming numerous obstacles, Thakur achieved a lot and worked for societal betterment, the prime minister said. Thakur's most significant contributions to India was perhaps his role in strengthening the affirmative action apparatus for the backward classes, with the hope that they were given the representation and opportunities they deserved, he said.

His decision was met with heavy opposition but he did not bow to any pressure and his policies laid the groundwork for a more inclusive society, where one's birth did not determine one's fate, the prime minister wrote in an article which appeared in many newspapers on Wednesday.

Modi said his government over the last 10 years has walked on Thakur's path, bringing



in schemes and policies that have brought transformative empowerment.

The prime minister said, "He belonged to the most backward strata of society but he worked for all the people. He had no trace of bitterness in him, which is what makes him truly great."

He said the life of 'Jan Nayak', as Thakur came to be known as, revolved around the twin pillars of simplicity and social justice, and his simple lifestyle and humble nature resonated deeply with the common people till his last breath.

"Those who worked with him recall how he preferred to spend his own money for any personal matter, including his daughter's wedding. During his tenure as Chief Minister of Bihar, a decision was taken to build a

colony for political leaders but he himself did not take any land or money for the same," he said.

When Thakur passed away in 1988, several leaders went to his village to pay tributes and were moved to tears seeing the condition of his house, he noted.

Looking at his torn kurta at an event to mark the birthday of socialist icon Jayaprakash Narayan in 1977, Chandrashekhar, another political stalwart, asked people to donate some money so that Thakur could buy a new kurta, but the then Bihar chief minister donated the amount to the CM Relief Fund, he recalled.

Modi said social justice was most dear to Thakur and his political journey was marked by monumental efforts to create a society

where resources were distributed fairly, and everyone, regardless of their social standing, had access to opportunities.

He took a distinctly anti-Congress line because he was convinced very early on that the Congress had deviated from its founding principles, Modi said.

Education was a subject very close to his heart and he worked throughout to improve education facilities for the poor, the prime minister said.

One of the biggest tragedies of our polity has been that barring a few leaders like Thakur, the call for social justice was restricted to being a political slogan, he said.

Modi added, "Inspired by Karpoori Ji's vision we implemented it as an effective governance model. I can say with confidence and pride that Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur Ji would have been very proud of India's feat of freeing 25 crore people from the clutches of poverty in the last few years."

Today, when people from OBC, SC and ST Communities are becoming entrepreneurs due to MUDRA Loans, it fulfills Thakur's vision of economic independence, he said.

"Likewise, it was our government which had the privilege of extending SC, ST and OBC reservation. We also had the honour of setting up the OBC Commission (which was opposed by Congress, sadly), which is working on the path shown by Karpoori Ji," he added.

As a person belonging to the backward classes himself, Modi said, he has much to thank Thakur for. (PTI)

No alliance with Congress in Punjab for LS polls: CM Mann

CHANDIGARH, Jan 24: Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday said his party will not enter into an alliance with the Congress in the state for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, reiterating that the AAP will win all 13 seats.

Mann's statement comes on a day West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo Mamata Banerjee announced that her party will not ally with the Congress for the parliamentary polls in that state.

The AAP is part of the 28-party INDIA bloc along with the Congress, TMC and the CPI(M)-led Left Front.

The Punjab chief minister made the statement at a time the AAP and the Congress are locked in talks over seat sharing in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Goa and Gujarat for the general elections.

However, the AAP has entered into an alliance with the Congress for the Chandigarh mayoral poll.

Replying to a question on his party's alliance with the Congress, Mann said he has said many times that "Punjab will become a hero in the country and the AAP will win 13-0 in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls".

When questioned if it was clear that the AAP will not have an electoral alliance with the Congress, Mann said, "We are not going with them (Congress)."

He further said discussions have already taken place on the AAP's probable candidates for Punjab's 13 Lok Sabha seats and the names of 40 probables have come up. (PTI)

India's future will be built on transformation of last 10 years: EAM Jaishankar at DU

'India as a democracy has not only worked on upholding its values but also delivered its benefits to all segments of society'

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: The foundation of India's future will be the transformation witnessed by it in the last 10 years, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday, stressing that the country has progressed while carrying forward its traditions and values.

Jaishankar was addressing an interactive session organised by Delhi University's Miranda House College here on the theme 'Future of India'.

Referring to the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission and the efficiency and scale at which Covid-19 vaccines were manufactured in India, the minister said the country has in the last decade taken tremendous strides in different fields and has achieved a strong position in the global arena.

"The transformation that India has made in the last 10 years will build the foundation on which the future of the next 25 years will be decided," the minister said highlighting developments like digitalisation, work on education, closing



the gender gap, skill development, start-up culture, and the increasing reach of welfare schemes among citizens.

He stressed that India as a democracy has not only worked on upholding its values but also delivered its benefits to all segments of society.

The foundation on which the future of Bharat is being built are democracy, talent, technology and tradition, Jaishankar said.

The External Affairs Minister said the work done in the past decade reflects how much India has delivered as a democracy.

"Don't take democracy as given. We have to nurture it and build it. In many countries of the world democracy is not available," the minister said adding that when a society is indifferent to its people, democracy doesn't flourish.

Speaking about India's position on the global stage, Jaishankar em-

phasised that the world recognises Indian talent and there is a demand for it in the global market.

He said that India has progressed while carrying its traditions and values and the Indian modernity is based on Indian values.

The minister also spoke about the low ranking of India on the world democracy index, noting that for a long time, world politics has been dominated by some countries that have their own agendas and political bias.

"They have taken the right to judge others and when we counter their narrative, there is agenda and political partiality. So we have to look at the index keeping this intent in mind," he said.

On the issue of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the minister said what happened in Israel on October 7 last year was a terrorist attack that should be condemned, but there are pressing matters such as the hostage issue and the need to create a humanitarian corridor that need to be addressed as well. (PTI)

Over 98,000 trees cut for coal mining project in Chhattisgarh, activists allege underreporting

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Amid a political uproar over tree felling in Chhattisgarh's biodiversity-rich Hasdeo Aranya, the state government has informed the National Green Tribunal that more than 98,000 trees were cut for coal mining in the Parsa East Kete Basan coal field since 2012.

However, activists protesting against the cutting of the dense forest in the tribal-dominated Surguja district claim that the government has "grossly" underreported the figures.

The ongoing tree felling for the second phase of the Parsa East Kete Basan (PEKB) coal mining project has become a political flashpoint in Chhattisgarh ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, with the state's Congress chief unit Deepak Bajj joining the protests against the tree cutting earlier this month.

Last month, locals and activists alleged that they had been detained for protesting against the tree felling, following which the Congress raised the issue in the Chhattisgarh assembly.

Taking suo-motu cognisance of the matter, the National Green Tribunal sought a report from the state's Forest department which, in its reply, said the tree felling is being undertaken "in strict adherence to the approvals and permissions given by both central and state government authorities".

It mentioned that the PEBK coal block is spread over 1,898

hectares of forest land. Phase 1 mining over 762 hectares has been completed while Phase 2 is underway on the remaining 1,136 hectares.

The Chhattisgarh Forest department reported that a total 81,866 trees were cut in the first phase of mining between 2012 and 2022. Around 17,460 trees have been felled on 113 hectares under Phase 2, which is being conducted in parts. The department informed the green panel that more than 53 lakh saplings have been planted to compensate for the loss of trees. Alok Shukla, convener of the Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan, said there are 400 trees per hectare in Hasdeo Aranya, citing a Wildlife Institute of India (WII) study.

"This means more than 3.5 lakh trees have already been cut since 2012. The state government has grossly underreported the numbers," he claimed.

A total 22 coal blocks are identified in Hasdeo Aranya, of which seven -- with a total area of about 8,500 hectares -- have been allotted to various state government companies. Mining in these coal blocks will lead to the destruction of more than 32 lakh trees, he claimed.

According to the Indian Bureau of Mines, coal reserves in the Hasdeo Aranya forest amount to 5,179.35 million tons.

Shukla said Hasdeo Aranya, spread over 1,70,000 hectares, is

much larger than the country's capital Delhi. The WII study conducted on the directions of the Supreme Court said nine species of Schedule I animals are present in this forest.

"This region is home to more than 167 species of plants, including 18 that are highly vulnerable and endangered. At least 82 species of birds are present in this area, of which six are considered endangered," he said.

The report had also warned of a severe human-elephant conflict due to coal mining in the forest area and recommended keeping the entire forest area free from mining activities.

Shukla also said the entire area comes under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, where it is the responsibility of the governments to protect the forests, land, livelihood and culture of tribals.

According to the Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006; PESA Act, 1996; and Land Acquisition Act, 2013, made for these areas, consent of the gram sabha is mandatory for any project.

"But the Centre and the state government together, in violation of all these laws, gave coal mines in Hasdeo Aranya to the Rajasthan government," Shukla alleged.

"The coal needs of Rajasthan can be met by the huge mines of Coal India located in Chhattisgarh. Rajasthan itself has produced thousands of megawatts of solar power," he said. (PTI)

India, France, UAE conduct mega air exercise over Arabian Sea

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: India, France and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) carried out a mega air exercise over the Arabian Sea against the backdrop of the rising global concerns over Houthi militants targeting several commercial vessels in the strategic waterways in the region.

The exercise 'Desert Knight', conducted on Tuesday, featured several frontline aerial assets and combat jets of the air forces of the three countries, officials said.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) component at the drills consisted of Su-30 MKI, MiG-29 and Jaguar fighter jets besides AWACS (airborne early warning and control aircraft, C-130-J transport plane and air-to-air refuelling aircraft. "The main focus of exercise 'Desert Knight' was on enhancing synergy and interoperability between the three air forces," the Indian Air Force said.

The exercise took place in the Indian FIR (Flight Information Regions) and with IAF aircraft operated from several bases in India.

All airspace worldwide is divided into FIRs and each of them is managed by a controlling authority responsible for ensuring that air traffic services are provided to aircraft flying within it. The exercise came amid increasing

attacks on commercial vessels by Houthi militants in the Red Sea.

"On January 23, the Indian Air Force conducted exercise Desert Knight along with French Air and Space Force (FASF) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Air Force," the IAF said. "While the French participation included the Rafale fighter aircraft and a multi role tanker transport, the UAE Air Force fielded the F-16," it said in a statement. The aircraft of the French and the UAE air forces operated from the Al Dhafra air base in the UAE.

"The interactions during the exercise facilitated the exchange of operational knowledge, experiences and best practices amongst the participants," the IAF said. "Such exercises are indicative of the growing diplomatic and military interactions in the region, apart from showcasing the prowess of the IAF," it added.

The trilateral exercise came days before India's Republic Day celebrations where two Rafale fighter jets and an Airbus A330 multi-role tanker transport aircraft of the French air force will also feature.

A 95-member marching contingent and 33-member band contingent from France will also take part in the parade. (PTI)

DGCA slaps ₹1.10 cr penalty on Air India for safety violations

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Aviation watchdog DGCA has imposed a penalty of ₹ 1.10 crore on Air India for safety violations with respect to operations of leased Boeing 777 planes to the US.

This is the second time in a week that the regulator has penalised Air India.

The regulator had received a complaint from a former Air India pilot alleging that the airline operated Boeing 777 planes to the US without having the required system of emergency oxygen supply. A comprehensive investigation into the matter was carried out by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), which also issued a show cause notice to the airline.

"Since the said operations of the leased aircraft were not in line with regulatory/OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) performance limits, DGCA has initiated enforcement action and imposed a penalty of ₹ 1.10 crore on Air India," DGCA said in a release on Wednesday. There was no immediate comment from Air India on the penalty.

According to the release, the regulator carried out a detailed probe after receiving a voluntary safety report from an airline employee alleging safety violations of flights operated by Air India on certain long range terrain critical routes.

Since the investigation prima facie revealed non-compliance by the airline, DGCA said a show cause notice was issued to Air India, it added.

Specific details were not disclosed in the release. DGCA analysed the airline's response to the show cause notice with respect to the laid down stipulations under the relevant statutory provisions and the performance limits stipulated in critical documentations laid down by the OEM before taking the enforcement action, the release said. On October 29, 2023, the pilot, who had served as a B777 commander, complained about the airline's practice of not carrying the required system of emergency oxygen supply.

At that time, sources had said the complaint was that Air India has been operating flights with leased B777 aircraft that carry a chemically-generated oxygen system which lasts around 12 minutes, and hence should not be used for the airline's direct flights to and from San Francisco.

The airline has to factor in that in case of an emergency situation of depressurisation, there should be sufficient oxygen supply to all the crew and the passengers for any period that is more than 12 minutes. (PTI)

Govt committed to transform country's healthcare landscape: Health min

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: The government is committed to transform the country's entire healthcare landscape, health minister Mansukh Mandaviya said Wednesday, highlighting that this dispensation opened several new AIIMS, raised the number of medical colleges to almost double and operationalised more than 10,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras. He was speaking after virtually inaugurating a Super Specialty Block at Ganesh Shankar Vidarthi Memorial Medical College in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. He also laid the foundation stone of an All India Institute of Speech and Hearing (AIISH) Satellite Centre in Kanpur.

"This Super Specialty Block offering 12 super-specialty services will help people take these specialised services locally, saving their valuable time and resources," he said. On the AIISH Centre in Kanpur, he said it will be the first such state-of-the-art centre in North India which will not only train doctors but also provide care to people. It is the dream of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that AIISH institutes be established all over the country on the lines of AIISH, Mysore, the health minister said. "It is the commitment of the Union government to transform the entire gamut of healthcare landscape of the country," he said.

"The number of AIIMS in the country has increased from six to 23 in the country, the number of medical colleges have almost doubled to 710, Jan Aushadhi Kendras have increased to more than 10,000 and other similar achievements like doubling of MBBS and PG seats and the establishment of more than 1.60 lakh Ayushman Aarogya Mandirs under the Ayushman Bharat scheme underscore the rapid progress being achieved in the healthcare sector in India," he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Disadvantaged sections

there are many other benefits and schemes ration card holder families can enjoy. "One such scheme is the Ayushman Bharat that provides assured medical benefits of ₹ 5 lakh per family. Ration card holders are also eligible for being enrolled for Ujjwala scheme. The possibility of enrolment of ration card holders under accidental deaths insurance and life insurance is also being explored," he remarked.

Further, the chief minister said he aspires to see all ration card holders included as beneficiaries of Orunodoi scheme by 2026.

It is worth mentioning that a total of 8,411 beneficiary families shall be allotted ration cards within Nazira Legislative Assembly Constituency. This is in addition to the 43,692 numbers of already existing beneficiary families in Nazira LAC, thus taking the total number of beneficiary families to 52,103.

Ministers of Assam Cabinet Ranajo Pegu and Jogen Mohan, parliamentarian Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, members of legislative assembly Taranga Gogoi and Dharmeswar Konwar, were also present on the occasion.

Rahul to be arrested

suo motu in Jorhat Sadar police station on January 18, the first day of the Yatra in the state, for the alleged route deviation by the Congress.

Earlier in the day, Gandhi said at a public meeting that the BJP-ruled Assam government could file "as many cases as it can", but he cannot be intimidated.

"I don't know how Himanta Biswa Sarma got the idea that he can intimidate me by filing cases... File 25 more cases. BJP-RSS can't intimidate me," he added. The chief minister claimed that Gandhi does not love Assam but created a fuss to enter the birthplace of Vaishnav saint Srimanta Sankardeva to "capture media attention".

"If he has so much regard for Assam's icons, he should have visited legendary singer Bhupen Hazarika's memorial or the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati and the holy Poa Mecca (a place of pilgrimage for Muslims) or Hayagriva Temple at Hajo where he addressed a press conference on Tuesday," Sarma said.

He had halted for the night at Barpeta and could have visited the Sattrra (Vaisnavite monastery) where Sankardeva had stayed, he added.

"The Congress did not visit any of these places but wanted to engage in cheap politics. They should, however, remember that such tactics will take them nowhere in the long run," he said. Asked about the Yatra not being allowed to enter Guwahati, Sarma shot back: "How did they reach Barpeta from Nagaon... by a rocket launcher? It is just that they were asked not to take a particular road but another. They indulged in violent behaviour attacking public servants who were on duty".

In a post on X, Sarma ridiculed Gandhi saying he has "set a new standard for being a 'Darpok' (coward)".

"Interesting. After instigating Congress workers to orchestrate violence, Rahul Gandhi (who is on a Bus Yatra) quietly came out of his fancy bus and fled the city in a small car to Hajo, his next destination. Rahul has set a new standard for being a Darpok. Ha ha".

In another post, he posted two photographs of the Yatra with Gandhi inside a bus, with the caption -- "Hindu majority area (inside the vehicle)". The other one was captioned "Muslim Majority area (atop the vehicle)". Sarma said he is happy about one thing - mothers and sisters in Muslim majority areas did not join this Yatra. (PTI)

Over 6k ration card

2.00 crore individuals. Moreover, the Assam Cabinet has decided to extend the scheme to cover an additional 40 lakh people in the state.

Speaking further, CEM Gorlosa also commended the dynamic leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, highlighting the successful inclusion of 42,85,745 new beneficiaries and the registration of 10,73,489 new families for ration cards in the state.

Council chairman Mohit Hojai shared that those who have linked their Aadhaar numbers to their ration cards can now receive their entitled rations in any state of the country through the designated portal. The dignitaries present on the occasion included Niranjan Hojai and Donphainon Thoosen, along with CEM Debola Gorlosa, chairman Mohit Hojai, and secretary Partha Jahari.

AASU protests demanding

holding stir programmes across the State opposing the decision and would continue to do so till Government withdraws the decision.

Meanwhile in Majuli island, the students' body staged demonstration holding AASU flags banners and placards against the Government's move and sought taking back the decision.

Valley MLAs have assured

Earlier in the day security was beefed up in and around Manipur's capital Imphal as the Arambai Tenggol asked all ministers and MLAs of the valley districts for a meeting at Kangla Fort here. Security forces in full battle gear are guarding the high-security area where the Raj Bhavan, CM Secretariat, Manipur Police headquarters, 1st Manipur Rifles complex and Kangla fort are located.

The security forces barricaded all the entry points to the Kanga fort. The Kangla fort served as the royal seat of the Manipur kingdom till 1891.

A three-member Union home ministry team met the AT leaders at the residence of Rajya Sabha MP Leishemba Sanajaoba on Monday, an official said.

The group has demanded the delisting of Kukis from the ST list, deportation of refugees to camps in Mizoram, border fencing, replacement of Assam Rifles with other paramilitary forces and revoking Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement between Centre and Kuki militant groups, officials said. (PTI)

Without Mamata, no one

we get speed breakers and red lights. It does not mean that we will push back the journey. The journey crosses the speed breaker and the red light turns green."

Citing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he asserted that the TMC and especially Banerjee, who is a leader of West Bengal and India, are "very important pillars of the INDIA alliance".

Ramesh also claimed that seat-sharing talks are "going on" with the TMC for West Bengal and a solution to the stalemate will be found soon.

"We hope that the talks, which are going on, will find some middle path and the INDIA alliance will fight Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal and all partners will cooperate," he added.

Banerjee, however, asserted that she has not spoken to anyone in the Congress on the seat-sharing issue.

Talking about Banerjee's statement that she was not invited to participate in the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' when it will enter West Bengal, Ramesh said Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and the party's West Bengal in-charge have spoken to her.

"I know that Kharge ji has mentioned 3-4 times in his speech that all INDIA partners are invited to join the Yatra and invitations were sent to all parties. I don't know in what reference she said like this," he added. (PTI)

No.Tech/URBD/BLDG/IFB/2023-24/ Dated 19/01/2024
PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
 The Executive Engineer, PWD, (B&NH), Udalguri & Baksa District Territorial Building Division, Udalguri on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from approved and eligible Contractors registered with Public works Department (Building), Assam/Contractors registered with Bodoland Territorial Council in the category of Class-I (A, B & C), Class-II and Class-III for 02 (two) nos. of works for bids amounting to Rs.2501557.00 (approx) (Rupees twenty five lakh one thousand five hundred fifty seven & paise seventy seven) only. Details may be seen at in the Office of the undersigned during office hours.
 Sd/-
 Executive Engineer, PWD, (B&NH),
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 IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1207

No.Tech/URBD/BLDG/IFB/2023-24/245 Dated 19/01/2024
PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
 The Executive Engineer, PWD, (B&NH), Udalguri & Baksa District Territorial Building Division, Udalguri on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from approved and eligible Contractors registered with Public works Department (Building), Assam/Contractors registered with Bodoland Territorial Council in the category of Class-I (A, B & C), Class-II and Class-III for 02 (two) nos. of works for bids amounting to Rs.8488187.72 (approx) (Rupees eighty four lakh eighty eight thousand one hundred eighty seven & paise seventy two) only. Details may be seen at in the Office of the undersigned during office hours.
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 IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1207

অসম পাবলিক সেৱা আয়োগ
 ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
 No. 45PSC/CON/Exam-20/2022-2023
RESULT
 The Assam Public Service Commission hereby declares today, the 24th January, 2024, the result of the recruitment for the post of **Lecturer (Botany, Zoology, Chemistry) at Sericulture Training Institute, Titabor, Jorhat under Handloom Textiles & Sericulture Department** (Advt. No. 15/2022 Dtd. 10/08/2022).
 The Interviews for the said posts were conducted by the Commission on 24th January, 2024. The Commission recommended the following candidates for the said posts in order of merit.
1. Lecturer (Botany):
 No. of Post: 1 (Open Category)

Sl. No.	Roll No.	Name of Candidate	Gender	Recommended against vacancy
1	10119	SANJIV DAS	M	Open Category

2. Lecturer (Zoology):
 No. of Post: 1 (Open Category)

Sl. No.	Roll No.	Name of Candidate	Gender	Recommended against vacancy
1	20091	NIHAR ADHIKARI	M	Open Category

3. Lecturer (Chemistry):
 No. of Post: 1 (Open Category)

Sl. No.	Roll No.	Name of Candidate	Gender	Recommended against vacancy
1	30197	PULOK GOGOI	M	Open Category

NB: The Commission will not be responsible for any typing/printing mistakes.
 * Results may be accessed through the APSC's website www.apsc.nic.in
 Sd/-
 Controller of Examinations,
 Assam Public Service Commission,
 Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22
 Janasanyog /D/16769/23/25-Jan-24

WHAT ONE YEAR OF 'PATHAAN' MEANS FOR SRK, HIS FANS AND HINDI FILM INDUSTRY

NEW DELHI, Jan 24: Propelled by a long absence and fans' desire to give a hero's welcome to an actor who had gone through professional and personal setbacks, "Pathaan", which released a year ago, not only reinstated Shah Rukh Khan's superstardom but also breathed a new life to the Hindi cinema theatrical business.

Released on January 25, 2023, the high-octane action spy thriller completes one year of its release on Thursday. Directed by Siddharth Anand, it was the next chapter in the Yash Raj Films (YRF) spy franchise and also starred Deepika Padukone and John Abraham. Before "Pathaan", many believed the glory days of Bollywood were over as big titles such as "Samrat Prithviraj", "Shamsher" and "Laal Singh Chaddha" failed to work at the ticket window in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. The rise of the South cinema and the boycott calls against Hindi movies also added to its woes. According to trade expert Taran Adarsh, "Pathaan" was the bona fide "first biggie of 2023" which opened to Rs 55 crore in the Hindi version

alone. Its Tamil and Telugu dubbed versions brought in additional Rs 2 crore on day one. It was touted as the "highest grossing first day for a Hindi film" at the time of its release by YRF.

"One year of 'Pathaan' means a lot for both the Hindi film industry as well as Shah Rukh Khan, who made a solid comeback with the film. Those who had written off Shah Rukh, it was a shock to them when 'Pathaan' opened to such terrific numbers.

"For the film industry, it mattered a lot because we were going through a rough patch and this was the first biggie of 2023. The box office numbers were so huge that it brought a lot of optimism, cheer and confidence back, and I think that was more important than anything else. It was a win-win situation for the industry as well as Shah Rukh Khan," Adarsh told PTI.

The success of "Pathaan" came after the actor went through a period of intense media scrutiny when his eldest son Aryan Khan was arrested in the Mumbai cruise drugs case in 2021. Aryan, who spent almost a month in prison,

was cleared of all charges later. During his time away as the leading hero, Shah Rukh had not one but three back-to-back cameos in "Rocketry: The Nambi Effect", "Laal Singh Chaddha" and "Brahmastra: Part One - Shiva". These special appearances only piqued interest about "Pathaan", which raised over Rs 1,000 crore at the box office globally.

For Shah Rukh Khan fans, "Pathaan" was that one film which brought them back to theatres. NCR-based homemaker Nivedita Upadhyay said watching her favourite star on the big screen after a long wait was totally worth it. "The success of 'Pathaan' was huge for Shah Rukh Khan and his fans. He was due for a hit for a really long time. Despite being a brilliant actor, people had started writing him off. Post pandemic, a lot of big-budget movies were just failing. People kind of stopped going to theatres. 'Pathaan' changed that," Upadhyay told PTI. Trade expert Girish Wankhede, also based out of Mumbai, said the spectacular box office performance of "Pathaan" signalled that Hindi theatrical ex-

perience is here to stay.

"Before 'Pathaan' was released, there was a lot of tussle between OTT content and theatricals, and people had this idea that the days of the big screen are numbered. With 'Pathaan', the entire scene changed. Shah Rukh Khan's charm, action genre and the great mounting of the film brought people back to the cinemas. 'Pathaan' was the first legitimate super duper hit of 2023," Wankhede said.

According to Upadhyay, Shah Rukh fans also ensured he got "a new lease of life", especially after the Aryan episode. "The movie itself was far from SRK's best but his on-screen charisma solidified his regal stature in Bollywood and rightfully so," the admirer added. The actor, who was recently named the CNN-News18 Indian of the Year 2023, spoke about how fans, whether they liked his films or not, turned up in theatres to watch "Pathaan" and his other two releases of the year-- "Jawan" and "Dunki", which were commercially successful as well. "The last four-five years have been a bit of a ride for me and my family...

Most of my films flopped, lots of analysts started writing my death knell. And then, at a personal (level), a little bit of bothersome and unpleasant things also happened, which made me learn a lesson: keep quiet and work hard with dignity.

"Some of you may have not even liked my films but I hope deep down inside you came there to support me and my family. I bow down to you and thank you for bringing cheer to my family and making me the star I am, yet again," Shah Rukh said in his impassioned speech recently.

And fans believe that Shah Rukh deserved a great comeback after what he went through. (PTI)



Shruti Haasan to star in Indo-UK movie 'Chennai Story'

MUMBAI, Jan 24: Actor Shruti Haasan is set to headline "Chennai Story", an upcoming Indo-UK co-production that will be directed by BAFTA-winning filmmaker Philip John.

The movie, which is co-produced by Guru Films (India), Ripple World Pictures (UK) and ie ie Productions (Wales), is based on author Timmer N Murari's bestseller "The Arrangements of Love".

It is described as an English film interspersed with Tamil and Welsh, exploring themes of love, self-expression, and acceptance, a press release said.

Set against the backdrop of Wales and India, the coming-of-age romantic comedy will feature Haasan as Anu, a spunky private detective.

"Hailing from Chennai, a story showing the diversity and uniqueness of Chennai is so special to me - collaborating with Phil is something I'm so excited to experience, telling global and rooted stories

through international collaboration is what making cinema is all about," the actor said.



John, best known for "Moon Dogs" and series "Being Human", said he is excited to collaborate with Haasan. "I'm thrilled to be teaming up with the incredibly talented Shruti, on an emotional roller coaster of a story set in Chennai and Cardiff - two vibrant and multicultural cities. With the support of BFI, this film brings a whole new collaboration to international film production, while also bringing a fresh, under-explored Wales and India to the big screen," the filmmaker said.

Co-written by Nimmi Harasgama, the movie will also star British-Indian actor Viveik Kalra, who currently features in Netflix movie "Lift". "Chennai Story" is backed by the British Film Institute's UK Global Screen Fund. It was the sole Indian project to be included by

the BFI for funding through its UK Global Screen Fund that was launched in April 2021 to boost global opportunities for the UK's independent screen sector. This is the first time the fund has supported a collaboration with India.

The film will start its principal photography soon in locations in Chennai and subsequently in Cardiff. (PTI)

FIRST LOOK OF BEJOY NAMBIAR'S HINDI-TAMIL MOVIE UNVEILED



MUMBAI, Jan 24: Bollywood studio T-Series on Wednesday shared the first look of filmmaker Bejoy Nambiar's upcoming Hindi-Tamil feature film.

The studio shared the posters of the film, titled "Dange" in Hindi and "Por" in Tamil, in a post on Instagram.

"#Dange loading!! Get ready to pick a side. #Por." T-Series posted.

The Hindi version of the film will feature Harshvardhan Rane and Ehan Bhatt in the lead roles, with Nikita Dutta and TJ Bhanu in supporting parts.

Whereas, the Tamil version is headlined by "Master" actor Arjun Das and Kalidas Jayaram of "Poomaram" fame. TJ Bhanu will also appear in the Tamil version alongside Sanchana Natarajan.

Nambiar, who earlier directed films such as "Shaitan", "David" and "Taish", has also produced the movie along with Prabhu Antony and Madhu Alexander. (PTI)

50TH KARBI YOUTH FESTIVAL: DHONI BEY WINS KARBI RAP COMPETITION

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 24: Dhoni Bey 'KPOB' won the Karbi rap competition held as part of 50th Karbi Youth Festival, Golden Jubilee here at Taralango, Karbi Anglong.

The Karbi Rap Star Season 5 was concluded at Taralango on the evening of January 16 at Semson Sing Intgi stage. 5 rappers were selected from among 9 semi finalists. The 5 who reaches the final were

Sarlong Kro, Dhoni Bey, Alon Terang, Lipson Tisso and Sagor Tisso. Performing amidst a roaring crowd the competitors who won were Dhoni Bey 'KPOB' of Rongchingri Hamren; the Runners Up Alon Terang "PhoEnix Td" of Men Hanse Village-Deihori; 2nd Runners up Sagor Tisso "B Heloipo" of Bhoksong in West Karbi Anglong. The Karbi rap competition was organised by Karbi Rap Star team,

Karbi Rap Society and ArniKeme Production. The audition was held on January 14. The judges were Shivajee Terang (Inglong Aso) winner of Season 1; Petrus Langne (Young 2rus Tribal) winner Season 2; Sarkiri Terang (Kiri Hanzangdili) winner Season 3 and Longsi-im Hanse (Bonghom rapper) winner Season 4.

The event was sponsored by the Chief Executive Member of Karbi

Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang and co-Sponsored by Executive Members of KAAC, Surjya Rongphar and Madhuram Lekthe; Member of Autonomous Council, Abhijit Kro; Chairman, Diphu Municipal Board, Rah Kro; GS, Karbi Youth Organisation, Si-em Teron; President, Lumbajong Development Organisation, Mongalsing Timung and social worker, Rustom Lekthe.

Bhansali's next film titled 'Love & War'; to star Alia Bhatt, Ranbir Kapoor and Vicky Kaushal

MUMBAI, Jan 24: Actor Ryan Gosling, who received a Best Supporting Actor nomination in Oscar 2024 for his work in "Barbie" has a mixed feeling after the nominees were unveiled. He is happy about the achievement, although, at the same place, his thoughts were with Greta Gerwig, who failed to be nominated in the Best Director category, and Margot Robbie, who was left out of the Best Actress category, reported People.

"There is no Ken without Barbie, and there is no Barbie movie without Greta Gerwig and Margot Robbie, the two people most responsible for this history-making, globally-celebrated film. No

recognition would be possible for anyone on the film without their talent, grit and genius," Gosling said in a statement shared that to say he's disappointed that they are not nominated in their respective categories "would be an understatement."

"Against all odds with nothing but a couple of soulless, scantily clad, and thankfully crotchless dolls, they made us laugh, they broke our hearts, they pushed the culture and they made history. Their work should be recognized along with the other very deserving nominees," his statement continued. According to People, Gerwig and her husband, Noah Baum-

bach, were recognized in the Best Adapted Screenplay category. The record-breaking film also received nominations in Costume Design and Production Design categories. Robbie, her husband Tom Ackerly, Robbie Brenner and David Hyman were nominated for Best Picture as producers.

Apart from receiving two nominations for Best Original Song, America Ferrera also got nominated in the Best Supporting Actress category. Gosling congratulated Ferrera and talked about being nominated for "portraying a plastic doll named Ken." "I am extremely honoured to be nominated by my colleagues alongside such

remarkable artists in a year of so many great films. And I never thought I'd be saying this, but I'm also incredibly honoured and proud that it's for portraying a plastic doll named Ken," his statement read. Like Gosling, Ferrera also shared her disappointment about the nominations, telling Variety that "Greta has done just about everything that a director could do to deserve it."

"Creating this world, and taking something that didn't have inherent value to most people and making it a global phenomenon. It feels disappointing to not see her on that list," Ferrera added, reported People. (AGENCIES)



U-19 World Cup: More intent expected from Indian batters against Ireland

BLOEMFONTEIN, Jan 24: India's young turks would be aiming for a more proactive approach while batting when they take on Ireland in the second group league encounter of the ICC U-19 World Cup here on Thursday.

While India disposed off Bangladesh by 84 runs in what turned out to be an easier than expected opener, Ireland game will provide them with an opportunity to play differently before tougher opposition comes calling during the Super Six phase starting next week.

Ireland are coming into the game with a defeat against Bangladesh after beating minnows USA in the opening game.

For India, more than battling the opposition, it will be about raising the bar for themselves and playing the 50-over game, keeping the modern approach in mind, compared to the early 1990s style of play.

The skipper Uday Saharan, who scored 64 and top scorer Adarsh Singh (76), had strike-rates of 79 and 68 respectively, which is slightly unacceptable

in modern times.

That India had two terrific but vastly different left-arm spinners Saumy Kumar Pandey and Musheer Khan doing a fantastic job for them meant coach Hrishikesh Kanitkar didn't have much to worry about.

One hopes that Saumy, easily the best bowler by a distance in the first game, doesn't have too much of a shoulder problem that forced him to take a temporary break in the first game in between his first and second spells.

On a slowish Bloemfontein track, Indian batters would need to rotate the strike better and also find more gaps in the Powerplay overs.

There would be a lot of talent scouts, who are keenly watching the 'Boys in Blue' and with a mega IPL auctions lined up next year, people like Saharan, Adrash and Priyanshu Moliya will need to up their game in order to grab eye balls from men who matter.

Something only Sachin Dhas was able to do in first game with his cameo that took India

past 250-run mark.

All eyes will be on Priyanshu, especially, as he is the only player in the side, with two Ranji Trophy tons for Baroda already under his belt. His defensive mindset in the first game was baffling.

For Ireland, their new ball bowlers Oliver Riley, Reuben Wilson and Carson McCullough could ask some probing questions and both Arshin Kulkarni, who has an IPL contract, and Sarfaraz Khan's younger sibling Musheer are due for a big score. (PTI)



INDIA CONCEDED SIX GOALS IN THE TOURNAMENT

We need players with confidence: Stimac after India's Asian Cup exit



AL KHOR (QATAR), Jan 24: India ended their Asian Cup campaign pointless and goal-less, and head coach Igor Stimac admitted that his team needs players with confidence in front of opposition goal, a significant statement considering the likely retirement of talismanic striker Sunil Chhetri in the next few years.

It's no secret that the Indian team lacks a quality striker, apart from the 39-year-old Chhetri, though Stimac understandably would often play down such concerns in the past. But, he chose to be candid after India lost 0-1 to Syria on Tuesday to crash out of the Asian Cup with an all-loss record. "Scoring goals comes with having good goal scorers in the team, people with confidence in front of goal," Stimac said at the post-match conference.

"The team produced enough chances to score enough goals. You all know why we are not scoring goals at international level. It will happen when we start having Indian players in centre forward positions (at club level). Only then we're going to have many more goal scorers for national team.

"So, kindly raise that question somewhere else not here," he said, clearly referring to the lack of Indians in centre forward positions in the Indian Super League clubs.

India lost all their three group matches and conceded six goals in

the tournament, the worst in all the five editions the country had participated. They lost 0-2 to Australia and 0-3 to Uzbekistan before the solitary goal defeat to Syria.

"It's a good learning experience for us. Overall, in three games, we proved we can compete at this level. "Obviously, everybody sees the missing points when India play. (Regarding) the problems in Indian football, as much as you give that much you get at the end. That is my conclusion of this tournament," said Stimac, who had demanded a four-week pre-tournament training camp but got just 10 days.

This was the first time India returned without scoring a goal, with Chhetri, the lone ranger for a long time, also having an ordinary outing considering his high standards. The world's third most prolific player among active footballers is in the twilight of his career and certainly has played his last Asian Cup. He had scored two goals each in the 2011 and 2019 editions of the Asian Cup, where India also failed to qualify for the knock-out rounds.

Stimac said he does not possess a magic wand to take Indian football forward in a short span of time. "India never qualified for U-23 AFC Asian Cup. Then how will we have good senior players? How can we expect good results at senior level if we don't qualify for

U-18, U-20 and U-23 Asian Cup? "I'm not a magician, I don't have a magic wand. I'm just a hard-working guy who is asking you to be patient, as good things in football don't happen overnight.

"I promise to take you to the third round of World Cup Qualifiers in the next 12 months. After that things need to speed up with investments, with foreign coaches coming in to take charge of Indian football academies."

Talking about his game plan in the Syria match, he said, "We had a clear plan to take the game into 60 minutes with a clean-sheet and to bring on the fresh legs, which I was hoping would give us something and get an impact to this team in the last 30 minutes, which obviously didn't happen.

"I think Udanta (Singh) was the only one who came as a substitute and did a few things, others did not have any impact whatsoever," rued the experienced coach, who is also a World Cup bronze winner for Croatia.

Defensive mainstay Sandesh Jhingan was taken off the field in the first minute of the second half due to an injury. Till then the match was scoreless. But, Stimac did not feel that Jhingan's absence had a big impact on the result, saying other defenders such as Rahul Bheke and Subhasish Bose did quite well. (PTI)

Kemar Roach sees plenty of promise in fellow fast bowler Shamar

BRISBANE, Jan 24: West Indies veteran fast bowler Kemar Roach is predicting big things for the new guy on the team, 24-year-old fellow pacerman Shamar Joseph.

Ahead of the second Test -- a day-night match -- that begins Thursday at the Gabba in Brisbane, the 35-year-old Roach has 267 Tests wickets, placing him fifth on the all-time list for the West Indies.

In 2009, on his first Test tour, Roach shattered Ricky

Ponting's elbow with a blazing bouncer that forced Ponting to retire hurt from the match.

Joseph took 5-94 on debut in the first Test in Adelaide last week, including the wicket of Steve Smith with his first delivery. Australia won the first Test by 10 wickets in 2 1-2 days.

"The best advice I can give him is to build his own legacy and understand what you want from cricket," Roach said of Joseph. "That's up to him to determine ... if it's monetary, or if

it's just stats and statistics or whatever. There's gonna be a lot of distractions and he's a hot commodity right now."

"The (Twenty20) franchisees are a big distraction but guys still want to relish red-ball cricket. Test cricket is still in the hearts of West Indian cricketers at home. It's just about us to provide support around it."

Roach says the early signs from Joseph were all positive.

"He is a very confident young man and has shared a lot of in-

formation with me. We have a lot of conversations," Roach said. "He has a good energy I love. I am happy to be around him and to be a part of his career at the start of it. Let's see how long and how good he can be at the end of it. He is destined to be good if he puts the work in." Meanwhile, Australia opener Usman Khawaja has been passed fit by Cricket Australia's medical team to play in Brisbane. And Travis Head is likely to play despite a recent

positive COVID-19 test.

Khawaja was struck in the head by a West Indies bouncer during Friday's short run chase in Adelaide.

The 37-year-old completed concussion assessments earlier this week, and has been approved to partner Steve Smith in Khawaja's home Gabba test. "Khawaja was assessed again today and has no symptoms of delayed concussion," a Cricket Australia spokesperson said. (AP)

Maxwell needs to hold up his end of bargain: McDonald

BRISBANE, Jan 24: Glenn Maxwell is a vital cog in Australia's white-ball set up but he must "hold up his end of the bargain" after his "less than ideal" incident in Adelaide, said head coach Andrew McDonald.

Last week Maxwell was hospitalised in Adelaide after he got too drunk after attending a concert by 'Six and Out', the band featuring former Australian pacer Brett Lee and passed out.

He wasn't kept in the hospital for long and was discharged soon after and is now back in training.

"I've spoken to Glenn, had a good chat with him yesterday around the incident. Him looking after himself needs to be a consideration moving forward," McDonald was quoted as saying to Sydney Evening News. "We've given him the opportunity to rest and rehab in that period of time and I suppose the lessons for him around that would be to take up his end of the bargain in that space and take care of himself." Maxwell was rested for next month's three-match ODI series against the West Indies at home and he took the opportunity

to attend a golf event in Adelaide before the incident took place.

"We want to see Glenn Maxwell playing cricket for the next three to four years for Australia. Can he get to the next World Cup in 2027 in South Africa? Who knows. But, he's a key player in our white-ball formats," McDonald said.

"When he is out there we're a far better team, and on the back of that horrific injury that he did have, there's going to be some management things that are put in place around him.

"But, we want Glenn Maxwell playing for Australia for as long as he can. We're going to have to do our end, and Glenn is no doubt going to have to hold up his end of the bargain."

This is not the first time that Maxwell has been in trouble. In 2022 after the T20 World Cup, Maxwell had fractured his leg badly while partying at a friend's house. This kept Maxwell out of the Australian team for months. He had also hurt his head and got bruises after falling from the back of a golf cart in a freak accident last November. (PTI)

Rampant Chelsea surge into English League Cup final to give American owners chance at first trophy

LONDON, Jan 24: After a chaotic and underwhelming 20 months in charge, Chelsea's big-spending American ownership has a date at Wembley Stadium as the London club seeks a first trophy of the new regime.

Chelsea routed second-tier Middlesbrough 6-1 in the English League Cup semifinals on Tuesday to overturn a 1-0 first-leg deficit to an opponent that was looking to become the first team from outside the Premier League to reach the competition's title match since 2013.

A 15th-minute own-goal tied the score on aggregate before Chelsea added more goals in the first half through Enzo Fernandez, Axel Disasi and Cole Palmer.

Strikes after the break from Palmer and Noni Madueke piled on the misery for Middlesbrough as Chelsea sealed a 6-2 aggregate victory, setting up a match against either Liverpool or Fulham in the final on Feb. 25. Liverpool will take a 2-1



lead into the second leg in London on Wednesday.

If it is Chelsea-Liverpool, it will be a repeat of the League Cup final in 2022. The teams also met in the FA Cup final that year, with Liverpool winning both matches on penalties.

A Todd Boehly-fronted consortium and Clearlake Capital have owned Chelsea since buy-

ing the club off Roman Abramovich in May 2022. Their spending on players has been unprecedented — more than USD 1 billion in the first three full transfer windows — but hit-and-miss, while the regime is onto its third permanent manager in Mauricio Pochettino.

The team is languishing in ninth place in the Premier

League, having finished a dismal 12th last season.

It has taken a while but things might finally be falling into place, even if Chelsea still appears far off the top teams in England.

"When you see the team, we are young and we need to grow," Pochettino said.

"This type of game is good experience for our young players. Step by step, we are building a good team. We have the talent, but we need time to put it all in place. It's a new project."

Even after its surprising loss at Riverside Stadium two weeks ago, Chelsea was still favored to advance to the final and the flurry of early goals — four in the first 42 minutes — virtually ended Middlesbrough's hopes.

The visiting team coached by former Manchester United and England midfielder Michael Carrick was its own worst enemy at times, like when Jonny Howson diverted the ball into his own net for the opening

goal as he tried to tackle Armando Broja in the area.

Fernandez swept in a close-range finish for 2-0 after Broja helped on a cross from Disasi, who then scored himself by converting a cross from Raheem Sterling in the 36th.

Palmer, a revelation since joining from Manchester City in August, stroked in his first goal of the game in the 42nd after dispossessing Boro defender Daniel Barlaser on edge of the visitors' area.

He made it 5-0 in the 77th before substitute Madueke wrapped up the win four minutes later.

Morgan Rogers grabbed an 88th-minute consolation for Middlesbrough.

The domestic cups offer the best — likely the only — chance of silverware this season for Chelsea.

Pochettino's team is still in the FA Cup though faces a tough fourth-round match against Aston Villa on Friday. (AP)

Cameroon reach Africa Cup last 16 with 3-2 win over Gambia

ABIDJAN (IVORY COAST), Jan 24: Christopher

Wooh was the last player to score in an extraordinary finale as Cameroon defeated Gambia 3-2 to save its Africa Cup of Nations campaign on Tuesday, when Ghana and Algeria were both eliminated.

Cameroon, which had been in danger of an early exit, clinched its place in the knockout stage as runner-up in Group C as it scored more goals than Guinea, which lost 2-0 to group winner Senegal.

Gambia defender Muhammed Sanneh stunned the Cameroon players in stoppage time when he scored what would have been the fourth goal in eight minutes for 3-3, but a VAR check showed he used his hand. A draw would have eliminated both teams. "There are a lot of surprises this year, but we had confidence in ourselves," said Georges-Kévin Nkoudou, who struck the crossbar in the first half for Cameroon.

"You know that things can happen very quickly and that's what happened. I've no more words, I don't know what to say. It's incredible."

Gambia had put itself in contention for the last 16 by coming from behind to take a 2-1 lead when Ebrima Colley scored with just five minutes of normal time remaining. Then an own goal two minutes later from James Gomez, who was trying to cut out a cross, drew Cameroon level, and Wooh scored what proved to be winner with a header from a corner in the first minute of stoppage time. "We just won a final, a great match against a very, very good team who gave everything, who gave their all. Bravo to them, and congratulations to my teammates who believed in this victory despite everything," Cameroon captain André-Frank Zambo Anguissa said.

Defending champion Senegal finished with a perfect nine points from three games, followed by Cameroon and Guinea

on four, with Gambia finishing bottom of the group with none despite all the excitement the Scorpions had brought to the tournament.

Gambia coach Tom Saintfiet resigned after the game.

Cameroon counterpart Rigobert Song dropped Manchester United goalkeeper André Onana to the bench in favor of Onana's cousin, Fabrice Ondoa. Onana missed Cameroon's first game after playing for United the day before, then produced a shaky performance in its second.

Goals from Abdoulaye Seck and Iliman Ndiaye were enough for Senegal to maintain its perfect start to its title defense with another commanding performance in Yamoussoukro.

Cameroon's win also eliminated Ghana, which had been hoping to still somehow finish as one of the four best third-place finishers. That's no longer possible for the Black Stars with just two points. The Ghana Football Association later fired Chris Hughton as coach. His team missed its chance to progress Monday when it conceded two goals in stoppage time to draw with Mozambique 2-2. Mauritania eliminated two-time champion Algeria by winning its first-ever Africa Cup game to reach the last 16.

Mohamed Dellahi Yali's first-half strike helped Mauritania win 1-0 and left the Desert Foxes contemplating their second straight group-stage exit. Substitute Pape Ibrahima Ba missed a great chance to seal it late when he struck the crossbar with goal at his mercy, but the Lions of Chinguetti survived 11 minutes of stoppage time to see out their first win in their third participation in the tournament.

"We suffered. We knew that this team had great individual quality (but) we were solid. We scored from one situation and we fought, we showed great desire, and I'm very proud, very proud of what we did," Mauritania coach Amir Abdou said. (AP)

India's Spinball vs England's Bazball: Rohit's men bank on spin for first strike

HYDERABAD, Jan 24: India's unalloyed dominance at home over the last 12 years will be put through its most unique examination till date when Rohit Sharma's side faces a trend-defying England in the first match of what promises to be a stirring five-Test series from Thursday.

No team has been as invincible as India at home since their 1-2 defeat against the Three Lions led by Alastair Cook in 2012, stitching together a bull run of 16 successive series wins, including seven series sweeps.

If one further breaks down the stats, India have lost just three Tests out of 44 they played in their own backyard in this phase, and this is a power walk even beyond the all-conquering West Indies in the '80s or Australia of the turn of the century.

Several factors have contributed to this astonishing run over the last decade, including favourable pitches, bowlers who knew how to exploit those tracks and batters who churned out runs like popcorn from a vending machine.

But two players have stood head and shoulders above the rest in these conquests -- off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja.

From Thursday, the Ash-Jaddu duet will be on show here at the RGI Stadium, where the pitch is expected to turn and grip as the match moves towards its conclusion.

England already have a taste of what these two can do from their past visits here, and they will be worried, particularly about Ashwin.

The 37-year-old still retains the burning zest of a 17-year-old to keep improving his craft and since 2012, Ashwin has grabbed 283 wickets from 46 Tests averaging a shade over 19.

Jadeja might often get viewed as a supporting act to Ashwin, but in his own right, the Saurashtra man is a potent threat, and his deliveries that dart on straight could confuse the batters on a turner.

Jadeja has taken 191 wickets from 39 Tests in the period where Ashwin kicked up a bedlam in opposition ranks to ensure that they don't get breathing space from both the



ends. Together, they have bagged 500 wickets at an average of 21.

In all likelihood, India will also include a third spinner to the combination in the form of either Axar Patel or Kuldeep Yadav, with the former having a better chance at the moment.

England will be aware that no amount of preparation involving scruffing up pitches some 1600 miles away in Abu Dhabi will be enough to tackle this real menace, and in that sense, they will also need to tame the demons inside their own minds.

What could work for them is that India

will not have the presence and solidity of Virat Kohli at No. 4, as he has skipped the opening two Tests owing to personal reasons.

He is a towering presence against England in Test cricket. The star batter has made 1991 runs against them from 28 matches with five hundreds, but more than the numbers, his ability to master grand occasions will be missed.

Middle-order batter Rajat Patidar is expected to join the squad as a replacement for Kohli for the Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam matches, though India's No.4 and 5 will be

Shreyas Iyer and KL Rahul with KS Bharat doing the wicket-keeping duties.

Despite their talisman's absence, India is still a tall hurdle for the 'Bazball-ing' England to cross over.

Of course, they have won a Test series in Pakistan 3-0 in late 2022 but a set of proven match-winners offer the visitors a far tougher challenge here.

The whole furor over the return of young off-spinner Shoaib Bashir after the delay in processing his Indian visa too might have disturbed them ahead of an important fixture. Skipper Ben Stokes has already stated that he is "devastated" for the 20-year-old rookie.

But this is not to say that England are totally incapable of pulling off a miracle. Under Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum, they have been able to dish out a really fascinating brand of cricket.

Notwithstanding that, the visitors need more than one element to come together for a meaningful fight -- big runs from veteran Joe Root and Stokes, a few wickets upfront from the ever-green James Anderson and their spinners who have no significant experience in these conditions.

On the periphery, it is asking for too much.

But Test cricket is a strange and unpredictable beast and it has the history of producing some truly extraordinary spectacles.

Will Hyderabad offer one or will it be an all too familiar Indian romp? The wait is on.

Teams (from):
Rohit Sharma (Captain), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, KS Bharat (WK), Dhruv Jurel (WK), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah (VC), Avesh Khan.

England: Ben Stokes (Captain), Rehan Ahmed, James Anderson, Gus Atkinson, Jonny Bairstow, Dan Lawrence, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ben Foakes, Tom Hartley, Jack Leach, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Joe Root, Mark Wood.

Match starts at 9.30 AM. (PTI)

Suryakumar Yadav named ICC T20I Player of the Year for 2023



DUBAI, Jan 24: Big-hitting batter Suryakumar Yadav was on Wednesday named the T20I Player of the Year for a second consecutive time by the International Cricket Council (ICC), which described him as the "backbone of India's middle order" in the format.

Yadav did quite well in 2023 with an average that closed in on 50 and a strike rate exceeding 150. He is currently recuperating from a groin surgery that he underwent in Germany earlier this month. He is expected to be back in action in the IPL for the Mumbai Indians in March.

"The backbone of India's middle order got starts throughout the year, delivering several match-winning contributions. This is the second consecutive year that the India batter has taken this award home," the ICC stated.

Yadav's first innings of just seven to start the year against Sri Lanka was a mere speed bump in another prolific year.

"Consistent scoring in 20s to 40s continued, before an innings of 83 (44) against the West Indies in Providence proved his class. He ended the series against the West Indies with a knock of 61 (45) in Florida.

"Yadav flourished despite the burden of captaincy, taking the reins of a young side towards the end of the year," the world body stated. Yadav made half-centuries against Australia (80 off 42 balls) and South Africa (56 from 36 balls), before posting a 100 against the Proteas off just 56 balls in their final T20I of the year in Johannesburg.

His knock of 112 off 51 balls against Sri Lanka in January included nine sixes and seven fours, equating to almost a boundary every three deliveries.

The effort was the second-fastest hundred for India in men's T20Is behind Rohit Sharma's 35-ball effort against the same opponent in 2017, and India were clear 91-run winners. (PTI)

Guwahati Junior Tennis tourney postponed

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: The 7th Guwahati Open Junior Tennis Championship -2024, organised by Guwahati Tennis Association, scheduled to be held from January 29 to February 3 at RG Baruah Sports Complex, Nehru Stadium, Guwahati has been postponed due to some organisational reasons. General Secretary of the Association Bhaskar Sarma informed in a press release that the next dates will be announced in due course.

Shah Khawar takes over as acting PCB chairman

LAHORE, Jan 24: Shah Khawar, an advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, has taken charge as acting chairman of the country's cricket board (PCB) on Wednesday after the resignation of Zaka Ashraf.

Zaka Ashraf's resignation was accepted by PCB's patron-in-chief, the caretaker Prime Minister, Anwar ul Haq Kakar.

"My primary responsibility will be to hold the election of Chairman PCB in a free and transparent manner at the earliest," Khawar said in a statement.

But before he holds the elections for the Chairman's position, Khawar has to first form the Board of Governors which is made up of four representatives each of the affiliated departments and regional associations with the two nominees of the patron-in-chief also on the BOG.

The elevation of Khawar, who is also the Election Commissioner of PCB, comes after the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (sports) issued a notification on Tuesday announcing that under Article 7(2) of the PCB Constitution the Election Commissioner is vested with the powers of Chairman PCB.

The Ministry later also issued a notification confirming that Mohsin Naqvi, the caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab, had been nominated by the premier to replace Zaka Ashraf on the Board of Governors and Interim Managing Committee of the board.

The two notifications were issued after Zaka Ashraf stepped down as Chairman of the Interim Management Committee which was appointed by the government in July to run board affairs and its extension term expires on February 5.

Being a direct nominee of the patron-in-chief, Mohsin Naqvi can contest the elections for the Chairman's post when it is held by the acting chairman and election commissioner. (PTI)

Siraj's warning: If England play Bazball, the match might get over within two days

HYDERABAD, Jan 24: India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj believes England's much-hyped 'Bazball' strategy won't work in Indian conditions and if the visitors go with their ultra-aggressive approach then the match may get over within two days.

"Bazball", a hell-for-leather attacking batting approach, coined after Test team head coach Brendon McCullum, has given England tremendous success last year but it will face its baptism by fire on sub-continental tracks, which offer turn and bounce in equal measure.

"If England play Bazball in Indian conditions, the match might get over within a day-and-a-half or two. It's not easy to hit every time here as the ball turns sometimes and straightens on other occasions," Siraj told 'Jio Cinema' on the eve of the opening Test beginning here on Thursday.

"So, I think it'll be difficult to see Bazball here. But if they play



it, it'll be good for us as the match may get over quickly."

Talking about his preparations for the tour, Siraj said: "On their previous tour to India, the matches were getting over quickly. In that series (in 2021) I think I played two matches.

"In the first innings of one of these, I bowled five overs and took two wickets of Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow. So, the aim will be to control runs in how many ever over I bowl. If I get wickets fine, but I'll have to stay patient and continue building pressure on

the batsmen."

England are set to play five Tests against India.

The 29-year-old Siraj has taken 68 wickets so far in 23 Tests since making his debut a little three years back in Australia.

He said focussing on consistently hitting the right spot irrespective of the format and conditions has helped him in his career.

"I bowl with the new ball, so my line and length remain the same. I don't change things whether it's the white ball or the red ball. You have to bowl that length of five-six metres, because with the new ball, you have to pitch it up to get wickets," he said.

"If the ball doesn't swing, you have to adjust the length slightly. So, I try to find consistency and keep pitching the new ball at the same spot. That's what I focus on whether it's the new ball or the old ball. That consistency has helped me take wickets till now." (PTI)

Wood is an impact builder, three spinners picked because of conditions: Stokes

HYDERABAD, Jan 24: England captain Ben Stokes on Tuesday rated Mark Wood as an "impact builder" with high pace after they decided to enter the first Test against India, starting here from Thursday, with a solitary fast bowler and three spinners.

Wood was preferred over veteran James Anderson for this match, and Stokes said the Durham man's ability to touch 150 clicks tilted the scales in his favour.

"Obviously, what he brings with his high pace...he is a real impact builder. Bowling the 90 mile an hour with a reversing ball is obviously going to be very difficult to play against.

He's another weapon which you can use out here with short, sharp spells, wanting him to be bowling as fast as he can and short periods. There're no worries about these long spells because that's how we're going to use him this week," said Stokes during his pre-match press meet here.

So, how did the team management handle the situation of looking over a highly-experienced bowler like Anderson?

Stokes said Anderson has taken the whole episode quite professionally.

"Jimmy's incredible professional. You never know how conditions might change and what you might feel as the best setup for your team.

But now we're not looking at having to manage Jimmy or his workloads or anything like that. You know, we put him in the spot because we think he's one of the best



performers," said Stokes.

However, Stokes asserted that he will not bowl in the series. The premier all-rounder is still recuperating from a knee surgery.

The focus, then, will be on England's three-spinner strategy as they will field Jack Leach, Rehan Ahmed and debutant Tom Hartley with Joe Root adding another part-time spin option.

Stokes gave a broad guideline about how did England arrive at this decision.

"I don't necessarily think it's bold or brave. It's just me and Baz (McCullum) looking at the wicket and picking the XI

that we think will give us the best chance.

You have always got to think that the ball is going to turn in India, but you don't want to go in with any preconceived ideas. We have to adapt.

India is one of those places where you've got to think about selection a lot more than anywhere else in the world, because of what you can get from the wicket," said Stokes.

However, this is not the first time a visiting team fielded three spinners as Australia had picked Nathan Lyon, Todd Murphy and Matthew Kuhnemann for the last three Tests of the four-match series against India in early 2023.

The 32-year-old Durham cricketer has a penchant for funky, result-oriented captaincy. But can he drive on the same path in conditions that are so un-English and on pitches that are certain to offer barrowful of assistance to spinners?

Stokes saw the challenge of playing in India as a chance for his side to achieve something special.

"I think any team that comes to India, it's always a tough challenge. We respect that as a team as well. But that presents us with an opportunity. This team loves opportunities. We sort of take every opportunity head on and we run towards it.

We don't back away from anything. But yeah, India is an incredibly hard place to come and win a game cricket. But I am really, really looking forward to the challenge," Stokes concluded. (PTI)