

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- Powerful earthquakes leave at least 48 dead
- Heavy Russian missile attacks hit Ukraine's 2 largest cities
- PM Modi rolls out new projects, hails TN for its cultural leadership
- Jairam Ramesh writes to CEC, seeks time for INDIA bloc team

Biren Singh asked the people not to take the law into their hands

Those engaged in violence will be responsible if AFSPA is re-imposed: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, Jan 2: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh Tuesday said that he is "highly upset" with the ongoing violence in Manipur and elements who engage in it will be held responsible for any stringent government action, including the reimposition of AFSPA.

"Whatever is going on in the society now is too much. The government will find it really hard to tolerate if anyone or any group keeps on taking the law into their own hands. The central government will not keep on looking. If AFSPA is again re-imposed, they will be held responsible," he said after visiting those injured in a firing incident at Lilong Chingjao area in Manipur's Thoubal district.

"Elements who continuously engage in violence should be held accountable if the government takes any stringent action, including re-imposition of the unwanted AFSPA ... I am highly upset (sic). The government cannot watch all these forever," he said.

AFSPA was extended for six months in the hill areas of the north eastern state since October last year and 19 police station areas Imphal valley area and an area that shares its boundary with neighbouring Assam were kept outside its purview despite the violent ethnic conflict that broke out in May.

The chief minister asked the people not to take the law into their hands and to inform the authorities concerned if they find anything suspicious so that the necessary legal actions are taken. He also asked them to identify the "enemies of Manipur" and face them unitedly rather than engage in internal clashes.

Singh visited the injured at Raj Medicity, a private hospital here. Four persons received bullet wounds in the firing and two of them who were injured critically firing are being treated in the ICU of the hospital.

Four villagers were gunned down by cadres of the



Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), the political wing of the banned People's Liberation Army (PLA) in minority-dominated Lilong Chingjao on Monday. Ten others were injured in the incident and are currently undergoing treatment.

The incident was seen as the fallout of a dispute over money collected through illegal drug trade, officials said. After the attack, enraged locals set fire to four vehicles in which the attackers had arrived.

Following the violence, curfew was imposed in Thoubal, Imphal East and Imphal West, Kakching and Bishnupur districts.

The RPF owned responsibility for the shooting, which took place when some of its members went to the house of one person in the area who has several narcotics cases pending against him. Within minutes, around 1,000 people gathered outside the residence of the suspected narcotic dealer and chased them away.

The RPF cadres then opened fire on the locals, killing four and injuring (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

CAA rules to be notified 'much before' Lok Sabha poll announcement: Official

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Rules for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019 will be notified "much before" the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections, a senior government functionary said on Tuesday.

Under the CAA brought in by the Narendra Modi government, Indian nationality will be granted to persecuted non-Muslim migrants - Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians -- from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who had come to India till December 31, 2014.

There were massive protests in some parts of the country after the CAA was passed by Parliament in December 2019 and received the presidential assent subsequently.

"We are going to issue the rules for the CAA soon. Once the rules are issued, the law can be implemented and those eligible can be granted Indian citizenship," the functionary said.

Delayed by more than four years, rules for

the CAA are a must for its implementation. Asked whether the rules will be notified before the announcement of the next Lok Sabha elections that are likely to be held in April-May, the functionary said, "Yes, much before that."

"The rules are ready and the online portal is also in place and the entire process will be online. The applicants will have to declare the year when they entered India without travel documents. No document will be sought from the applicants," the functionary said.

On December 27, Union home minister Amit Shah had said that no one can stop the implementation of the CAA as it is the law of the land and accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of misleading people on the issue.

Addressing a party meeting in Kolkata, Shah said it was the BJP's commitment to implement the CAA. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



Jayanta Mallabaruah unveils plans for sustainable growth with innovative Tourism Bill

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: Assam tourism minister Jayanta Mallabaruah on Tuesday that the state's tourism department is diligently crafting a tourism bill, designed to regulate and promote the sustainable growth of the industry.

He said that the bill aims to encourage practices that not only boost tourism but also minimize adverse effects on the environment, local culture, and communities.

"State tourism department is working on the formulation of a tourism bill with the aim to regulate and facilitate the sustainable development of the tourism industry by encouraging practices that minimize negative impacts on the environment, culture and local communities," he

said during a press conference in Guwahati.

He further informed that the department plans to celebrate Bihu with fervour and showcase the myriad cultures, traditions and heritage throughout the state.

"In order to boost religious tourism and pilgrimage a proposal for the development and beautification of Navagraha Temple has been submitted to Government of India (GoI). Moreover, developmental activities have already been started at Bhima Shankar Jyotirlinga," he added.

Commenting on the protecting and preserving the Ahom legacy in Sivsagar District, the minister informed that the Rang Ghar Project has been undertaken for the development and beautification of the historical site. He also said that another initiative (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Foundation stone laid for NCDC branches

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: The Union minister of health and family welfare Mansukh Mandaviya on Tuesday laid the foundation stone of the Regional National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), Delhi along with other 9 states including Assam, said an official statement.

The foundation stone was laid through a virtual ceremony from new auditorium complex, New Delhi.

The laying of foundation stone of regional NCDC, Guwahati, Assam was graced by the august presence of Keshav Mahanta, minister for health and family welfare etc., along with Queen Oja, member of parliament, LS Guwahati, from NHM conference hall.

"This Regional Branch of NCDC will be built on the allotted plot next to Rani CHC, Kamrup. The NCDC branches in the states will support the state government in timely disease surveillance and monitoring and will enable early warning leading to timely intervention based on evidence gathered from (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

312 Covid sub-variant JN.1 cases detected in country

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: A total of 312 cases of COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1 have been detected in the country so far, with about 47 per cent of them recorded in Kerala, according to the INSACOG's data updated on Tuesday.

Ten states and Union territories have so far detected the presence of the JN.1 sub-variant of the virus.

These states are Kerala (147), Goa (51), Gujarat (34), Maharashtra (26), Tamil Nadu (22), Delhi (16), Karnataka (eight), Rajasthan (five), Telangana (two) and Odisha (one), according to the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG).

The INSACOG's data showed 279 Covid cases recorded in the country in December had the presence of JN.1, while 33 such cases were detected in November.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified JN.1 as a separate "variant of interest" given its rapidly-increasing spread, but said it (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

HT BRIEFS

56th Raising Day

DIPHU: The 20 Bn. CRPF in Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam celebrated its 56th Raising Day here on January 1 in a befitting manner under the presidency of the battalion commandant Swam Singh and joined by other officers and jawans of the unit. In the morning, the rank and file at the Unit headquarters paid homage by offering floral tribute to the martyrs who gave their supreme sacrifice in the line of service to the nation. A volleyball match was organised in the afternoon. A cultural programme with dance, and songs followed by a regimental dinner 'Bara Khana' was held in the evening. SP, Karbi Anglong, Sanjib Kumar Saikia; additional SP, Headquarters, Kangkam Kumar Nath; additional SP, crime Nayan Moni Barman; commandant GC CRPF, Khatkhathi, T. Thongkhankal; 2-I/C, Range CRPF, Khatkhathi and other invitees graced the occasion.

Honsing Teron

DIPHU: Honsing Teron, Samam Habe (Karbi traditional dignitary) of Chinthong longri, West Karbi Anglong, an expert in Karbi customary laws and rituals and also the general secretary of Ser Hongthom Amei -gathering of Karbi traditional dignitaries, died yesterday due to stroke at his residence in Rongagora in West Karbi Anglong. He was 75 years old. His younger brother Dilip Millick said Teron died at around 3:45 pm. He was taken to Baithalanso Primary Health Centre, but died there.

Assam to assess students, schools in state-wide drive

DIBRUGARH, Jan 2: The Assam government will carry out 'Gunotsav 2024', a state-wide exercise to evaluate the performance of nearly 40 lakh students, from January 3 to February 8, education minister Ranaj Pegu said on Tuesday.

Announcing this year's evaluation process at a press conference here, Pegu said the exercise will help in ensuring quality education with improved learning outcomes.

"The exercise will be carried out at 43,498 government schools across 35 districts of the state, covering 39,63,542 students," he said.

Gunotsav will see the participation of all stakeholders from teachers, students, administrators and local communities, enhancing accountability among them for quality education, the minister said.

This year's exercise will be carried out in three phases with 12 districts included in the first round from January 3-6, 13 districts from January 9-12 and the remaining 10 districts in the last leg from February 5-8. "It will identify the learning gaps of each child and ensure quality education with grade-specific outcomes... It will also assess the

performance of schools on areas such as scholastic, co-scholastic, availability and utilisation of infrastructure and community participation," Pegu said.

A total of 18,098 external evaluators will be deployed across Assam for the purpose. The chief minister, MLAs, the chief secretary, college teachers, among others, will visit the schools as external evaluators.

Gunotsav was first organised in 2017, and already four rounds of the exercise have been conducted since then, covering all the districts of Assam, officials said. (PTI)

PIL in SC challenges new law on appointment of CEC and ECs



NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Amid a political row over dropping the Chief Justice of India (CJI) from a panel empowered to choose the chief election commissioner and election commissioners, an advocate has moved the Supreme Court, seeking quashing of the new law that accords the central government sweeping powers to make appointments to the poll body.

The plea filed by advocate Gopal Singh has sought the apex court's direction to implement an "independent and transparent system of selection, constituting a neutral and independent selection committee for appointment of the chief election commissioner and election commissioners (CEC and ECs)". While dropping the CJI from the selection committee, the new law said "Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners shall be appointed by the President on the recommendation of a Selection Committee consisting of—(a) the Prime Minister—Chairperson; (b) the leader of opposition in the House of the

People—Member; (c) a Union cabinet minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister—Member." The opposition has accused the Modi government of having defied the Supreme Court by dropping the CJI from the selection panel.

In its March 2023 order, the Supreme Court had said the prime minister, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the CJI will pick the CEC and the election commissioners.

Singh, in his Public Interest Litigation (PIL), has sought an order from the apex court to injunct the implementation of the gazette notification of December 28, 2023 relating to the chief election commissioner and the other election commissioners (Appointment, Condition of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

"The pivotal legal question placed for the court's consideration in the writ petition revolves around the constitutional inquiry of whether the Parliament or any legislative assembly possesses the authority to (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Government plans to end Free Movement Regime with Myanmar to curb influx

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The Free Movement Regime (FMR), which allows people residing close to the India-Myanmar border to venture 16 km into each other's territory without visa, will be ended soon, a senior government functionary said on Tuesday.

The 1,643-km-long India-Myanmar border, which passes through Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, currently has FMR. It was implemented in 2018 as part of India's Act East policy. Under the FMR, every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar and who is resident of any area within 16 km on either side of border can cross over on production of a border pass with one year validity and can stay up to two weeks per visit.

"We are going to end the FMR along the Indo-Myanmar border soon. We are going to put fencing along the entire border. The fencing will be completed in next four-and-a-half years. Anyone coming through will have to...get a visa," the functionary said.

The idea is to not only to stop the misuse of FMR, which is used by insurgent groups to carry out attacks on Indian side and flee towards Myanmar, but also put a halt to influx of illegal immigrants, and paralyse

drugs and gold smuggling networks.

Tendering for an advanced smart fencing system for 300 km of the India-Myanmar border is already in pipeline and the work will be started very soon.

It may be mentioned that Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh had urged the Centre in September 2023 to end the FMR. The state government has argued that insurgents use the free movement regime to further their activities.

Manipur shares around 390 km of porous border with Myanmar and only about 10 km has been fenced so far. In July last year, the state government shared data that around 700 illegal immigrants entered the state.

Besides, Mizoram has seen an influx of anti-Junta rebels in thousands since the military coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021. According to government estimates, several thousand refugees are living in different parts of Mizoram since the coup.

Mizoram shares a 510-km-long porous border with Myanmar.

The Manipur chief minister had also said that several persons from Myanmar tried to enter into his state but returned on seeing the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

'Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates joined BRICS as new full members'

BRICS doubles in size with admission of 5 new members

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The BRICS bloc of top emerging economies, including India, Russia and China, has announced induction of five full members into it in an attempt to expand its strategic heft against the backdrop of Western dominance in world affairs.

As Moscow assumed the presidency of BRICS, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday said the grouping has become a 10-nation body now with Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates joining it as new members, adding work on modalities to induct new categories of partner nations would start now.

In August, the top BRICS leaders at the grouping's summit in Johannesburg approved a proposal to



admit six countries, including Argentina, into the bloc with effect from January 1.

However, Argentina's new Presi-

dent Javier Milei last week announced withdrawing his country from becoming a member of the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-

South Africa). "Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates joined BRICS as new full members which is a strong indication of the growing authority of the association and its role in international affairs," Putin said in an address.

The Russian President said BRICS is attracting an ever increasing number of supporters and like-minded countries that share its underlying principles such as sovereign equality, openness, consensus, aspiration to form a multi-polar international order and a fair global financial and trading system.

The grouping took shape in September 2006 and it originally comprised Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC). It was renamed as BRICS after South Africa was ac-

cepted as a full member in September 2010. With Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa as its members, BRICS represents a quarter of the global economy and it has been a major engine of global economic growth over the years.

In his remarks, the Russian President said about 30 more countries are prepared to join the multi-dimensional agenda of the BRICS.

"Of course, we will consider the degree to which many other countries, about 30 of them, are prepared to join the BRICS multi-dimensional agenda in one form or another," Putin said.

"To this end, we will start working on the modalities of a new category of BRICS partner country," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Cong raises ₹ 10 crore in 2 weeks through crowdfunding ahead of LS polls

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The Congress on Tuesday said it has raised ₹ 10 crore through crowdfunding campaign in the first two weeks of its launch ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said the online donation campaign launched by the party on December 18 has crossed the ₹ 100 million (₹ 10 crore) mark in the New Year.

"New Year, New Milestones - We just crossed Rs 100 crores in 2 weeks. As 2024 unfolds, we at the Indian National Congress are thrilled to share two significant achievements: Celebrating 138 Years of Service: Our journey in serving our great nation has now spanned 138 remarkable years.

Phenomenal Success in Online Donations: Our online donation campaign (https://donate.in) marks culmination of 2nd week with a groundbreaking milestone. We've raised a whopping ₹ 100 Million (₹ 10 crore)," Maken said in a post on X.

"A heartfelt Thank You: To the lakh of supporters who have joined us in this journey - your generosity is overwhelming. With 2,48,929 (2.49 lakh) valid transaction requests in just two weeks, your support is the backbone of this success," he said.

Urging those who have not contributed so far to come forward and donate to the party, Maken said, "A Call to Action: Haven't contributed yet? Now (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Tea production falls by 6.18pc to 127.12 mtkgs in Nov 2023

KOLKATA, Jan 2: Tea production in the country has dipped by 6.18 per cent to 127.12 million kilograms in November 2023.

According to Tea Board data, the production in the year-ago month was 135.49 million kgs.

In North India, primarily comprising Assam and West Bengal, the production volume was at 106.23 million kgs (mtkgs), down from 114.18 mtkgs in the same period previous year.

The production figures in November 2023 in South India stood lower at 20.89 mtkgs from 21.31 mtkgs in the same month of 2022.

Maintaining the trend, the production of small growers was higher than the organised gardens in the month under review.

Small growers produced 67.50 mtkgs in November 2023, Tea Board data said.

Tea Board had issued notifications regarding plucking restrictions during the winter months in order to preserve the quality of bushes.

For tea estates in Darjeeling and gardens located at higher elevations, the last date for plucking of green leaves was December 11, 2023. The same for North Bengal's Dooars and Terai regions was December 23. (PTI)



India-Bangladesh trade down in pre-election season

Impact is particularly acute in West Bengal's border town of Bangaon near the Petrapol border

KOLKATA, Jan 2: The India-Bangladesh bilateral trade, already strained by economic headwinds during the year, has dampened in some land ports due to the upcoming general elections in the neighbouring country, exporters said on Tuesday.

Bangladesh is set to hold its 12th general election on January 7 and the pre-election atmosphere has cast a shadow on the cross-border trade.

Indian exports to Bangladesh between April and October 2023 declined by 13.32 per cent, while imports saw a marginally smaller 2.3 per cent dip, according to data from the department of commerce.

"Trade activity has been affected for some time now due to Bangladesh's forex shortages and liquidity crunch. The election-related slowdown is expected to be temporary, but stricter rules like the 110 per cent margin on letters of credit compared to the earlier 10 per cent have been a major concern for traders," a commodity exporter told PTI on condition of anonymity.

Stakeholders point to the general slowdown in trade activity during elections as a natural phenomenon due to factors like tighter border controls, heightened risk aversion among businesses, and the potential for disruptions like protests and short-



age of labourers who go back to their hometowns for voting.

The impact is particularly acute in West Bengal's border town of Bangaon near the Petrapol border, where local markets heavily rely on Bangladeshi tourists, they said.

"Export activity, especially of construction materials like stone chips, has slowed down due to the elections," said Prasonjit Ghosh of Malda's Malhadipur Exporters' Association.

Fly ash exports via the Indo-Bangladesh protocol route through Kolkata port have also witnessed a 15-25 per cent drop during the peak construction season, highlighting the broader impact on construction material trade.

"There's been a temporary slowdown due to the election mode, but we expect trade to bounce back to normal after the polls," said Sajedur Rahman of the Benapole C&F Agents Association.

Although Petrapole cargo truck movement data shows no major trade disruptions, the number of trucks moving between December 21 and 31 had been quite erratic due to holidays. However, passenger movement, particularly inbound traffic, had reduced significantly.

The inflow to India through Petrapole reduced to 2141 passengers on December 31 from 2894 on December 21, Petrapole Land Port Manager Kamlesh Saini said.

Binay Sinha, secretary of the Bangaon Chamber of Commerce, pinpointed the stark impact of the Bangladeshi elections on Bangaon's three local markets: Taw Market, Motilal Market, and New Market.

"Visa issuance restrictions imposed by Bangladesh except for medical treatment on its citizens during the election period drastically reduced tourist flow," Sinha elaborated.

"These markets heavily rely on Bangladeshi tourists who purchase goods in India before returning home but these local markets are not closed," he said.

Adding to the woes, "informal trade channels have also come to a standstill during the elections, further squeezing these markets", a local trader said. (PTI)

About 2,000 petrol pumps run dry as truckers strike against new penal code



NEW DELHI, Jan 2: About 2,000 petrol pumps, mostly in western and northern India, have run out of fuel stocks as the strike by some truckers' associations entered the second day on Tuesday.

While state-owned oil firms had topped up tanks at most petrol pumps across the country in anticipation of the truckers' strike, some petrol pumps in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab ran out of stock due to heavy rush, industry officials said.

Long queues were witnessed at several pumps in these states as panic set in on stocks running out.

Situation in southern India is better with no major supply disruption barring a few pumps in Hyderabad, they said.

Essential supplies of vegetables, fruits and milk too may get affected if the three-day strike is extended or a pan-India movement is launched.

Some truck, bus and tanker operators began a three-day strike on Monday against the stringent jail and fine regulations under the new criminal law Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) for hit-and-run cases.

The All India Motor Transport Association -- the umbrella body of truck operators -- has so far not given a nationwide strike call and its representatives will be meeting home ministry officials to raise their

concerns around BNS.

The industry officials said most petrol pumps have stocks to last 2-3 days and should not see any problems if the strike was to last for the stated three days. However, there will be trouble if the strike is extended or a pan-India protest is called, they added.

There are about 1 lakh trucks that ferry petrol and diesel as well as LPG from oil company depots to petrol pumps and gas distribution agencies.

The strike has impacted the movement of trucks in some western and northern states, they said, adding some LPG truck movement too has been impacted.

However, there is no complaints on LPG shortage just yet as most users have double connections (two LPG cylinders) and reserve stock even if one cylinder gets exhausted.

If the strike were to get extended, LPG supplies too may get hit, they said.

In Maharashtra, the state government requested police to ensure an uninterrupted supply of petrol and diesel while commuters in Madhya Pradesh encountered travel inconvenience.

Since Monday, protestors have blockaded roads and highways across states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya

Pradesh.

The new law, which replaced the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, provides for a jail of up to 10 years and/or a fine of ₹ 7 lakh for serious road accidents due to negligent driving and where drivers run away without informing the police.

Truckers said most truck drivers choose to run away even in minor accidents as they otherwise will have to face mob justice and risk of life. While the mobs typically go unpunished, to impose stringent punishment on drivers was unfair, they said.

Long queues at petrol pumps in Himachal Pradesh's Shimla and Dharamshala were also reported. Heavy rush was seen outside petrol pumps in Mumbai and Thane as people came to fill up their vehicle tanks fearing shortage of fuel.

Petrol Dealers Association, Mumbai, president Chetan Modi told PTI that the fuel supply to petrol pumps was affected due to the drivers' agitation since Monday. "Petrol pumps started running dry yesterday. If we don't get the supply, most of the pumps will run out of fuel by the end of the day," he said.

Protesters obstructed highways in several districts of Gujarat, including Kheda, Valsad, Gir Somnath, Bharuch, and Mehsana, and in places like Nagpur in Maharashtra by using trucks as blockades on roads.

Tapan Sharma, a former president of the Ahmedabad Motor Transport Association in Gujarat, told PTI that the protests occurred spontaneously. "The association has not called for a strike. Drivers are acting independently due to concerns about the new law. They protest briefly and then move on. However, these sporadic demonstrations have caused delays in the delivery of goods." (PTI)

FOREIGN FUND OUTFLOWS

Sensex falls 379 pts on profit taking in bank & IT stocks

MUMBAI, Jan 2: Benchmark Sensex declined by 379 points on Tuesday due to profit-taking in bank, auto and IT shares after recent sharp gains and fresh foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 379.46 points or 0.53 per cent to settle at 71,892.48 with 22 of its constituents ending in the red. The index opened lower and tumbled further by 658.2 points or 0.91 per cent to hit a low of 71,613.74. However, buying in pharma and energy shares helped trim losses.

The broader Nifty declined by 76.10 points or 0.35 per cent to close at 21,665.80. As many as 31 Nifty shares declined while 19 advanced. The index hit a low of 21,555.65 but managed to close above the 21,600 level.

Banking, auto and IT shares succumbed to selling pressure after recent gains while gains in pharma and energy shares capped the damage.

Among the Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra fell the most by 2.78 per cent. UltraTech Cement dropped by 2.46 per cent, Kotak Bank by 2.41 per cent and Larsen & Toubro by 2.36 per cent. ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank, Wipro and Hindustan Unilever also declined.

Sun Pharma, Bajaj Finance, Bharti Airtel, Reliance Industries,



Bajaj Finserv and Titan were among the winners.

"The market extended yesterday's last hour's sell-off, taking negative cues from Asian peers due to weak Chinese manufacturing data and mounting tensions in the Red Sea, which has the potential to disrupt global trade and crude supplies," Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services said.

"Ahead of the impending results season, investors are adopting a profit booking strategy. Auto stocks declined on below-expected volume numbers, while pharma stocks were the standout due to catch-up in the US economy," Nair added.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.08 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.03 per cent.

Among the indices, capital goods fell 1.42 per cent, auto declined 1.32 per cent, bankex (1.16 per cent), realty (1.04 per cent), IT (1.03 per cent) and teck (0.75 per

cent). Energy, healthcare, services and metal were among the winners.

"Markets traded volatile for yet another session and lost nearly half a per cent, in continuation to the prevailing consolidation phase," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

A total of 1,992 stocks advanced while 1,811 declined and 126 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower while Seoul ended in the green. European markets were mostly trading in positive territory.

Asian, European and US markets were closed on Monday for the New Year.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 2.05 per cent to USD 78.58 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 855.80 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

The BSE gauge eked out a modest gain of 31.68 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 72,271.94 after a muted beginning on Monday. The Nifty went up by 10.50 points or 0.05 per cent to 21,741.90.

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

HDFC Bank acts as a sponsor and destination bank for facilitating ASBA

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: HDFC Bank, a leading clearing and settlement bank of NSE & BSE in the Cash & Equity Derivatives segments, acted as a sponsor and destination bank for "Trading supported by blocked amount in secondary market" that kicked off from January 1, 2024 on the Indian stock exchanges.

SEBI and Stock Exchanges permitted Trading in Cash segment through block mechanism, on optional basis, for secondary market from January 1, 2024 on the lines of ASBA for primary markets where investor's funds will continue to remain in their savings

account with the required funds being blocked instead of the investor having to upfront transfer the amount to the broker's account for placing the trades.

The bank has been able to support this new initiative of SEBI through integration of its systems with that of exchanges and respective clearing corporations. This system integration facilitates investor validation, block creation, release, revoke, execution and end of day reconciliation and reporting. The UPI backed technology solution of block / release of funds helps investors meet margin and settlement obligations seamlessly.

Brazil's economy improves during President Lula's first year back

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan 2: Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva likes to boast he had a good first year after returning to the job. The economy is improving, Congress passed a long-overdue tax reform bill, rioters who wanted to oust him are now in jail, and his predecessor and foe Jair Bolsonaro is barred from running for office until 2030.

Still, the 78-year-old leader has struggled to boost his support among citizens and lawmakers. Some major setbacks, including a series of votes by Congress to override his vetoes, signaled that Lula's

future could be less productive in a Brazil almost evenly split between his supporters and Bolsonaro's. "Brazil's political polarization is such that it crystallized the opinions of Lula and Bolsonaro voters beyond the economy," said political consultant Thomas Traumann, the author of a recent best-selling book on Brazil's political divisions. "These groups are separated by very different world views, the values that form the identity of each group are more important than food prices or interest rates."

Lula took office on Jan. 1, 2023, after a narrow victory over Bolsonaro in October 2022. At the beginning of his four-year term, only one fourth of Brazil's Congress sided with him. Business and opposition leaders feared Lula had gone too far to the left.

A riot led by Bolsonaro supporters destroyed government buildings in the capital of Brasilia on Jan. 8 and more turmoil looked certain. Former Finance Minister Paulo Guedes, among other conservatives, forecast Lula's policies would make Brazil's economy soon turn as sour as those in crisis-ridden Argentina and Venezuela.

"Six months to become Argentina, one year and a half to become Venezuela,"

Guedes said in an interview.

Fast forward to December.

Brazil's economy is set to grow 3% this year instead of the 0.6% expected by market economists. Inflation looks controlled at about 4.7% on a yearly basis, slightly above projections but far from the double digits of recent years. The unemployment rate fell to 7.5% in November, one percentage point below the day Bolsonaro left office.

The Sao Paulo stock exchange hit record levels in December, rising above 134,000 points for the first time in its history. Brazil's real

currency is also rising against the U.S. dollar. All that brought back the optimistic, keen-to-travel-abroad Lula who had been missing during almost a decade of personal gloom.

"We needed to get our house fixed (in 2023), put things into place," Lula said in a meeting at the presidential palace on Dec. 12. "And now I say get ready. Next year, the Brazilian economy will not let anyone down."

Yet some polls have shown unchanged support for the president, at between 38% and 40% since January 2023. The numbers didn't pick up even after the announcement of a higher minimum wage in 2024, the buildup of Bolsonaro's legal woes or Brazil's return as a player in foreign affairs under Lula.

About a third of Brazilians consider Lula's presidency about average and another third deeply dislike the way he governs Latin America's powerhouse economy, which rose once again to the top 10 biggest in the world after years of sinking.

Lula's supporters are at home, but Bolsonaro's are still taking to the streets.

Though not as numerous as in the recent past, the few thousand protesters asking



Congress to impeach Lula on corruption allegations have shown the resilience of the far-right leader's political base.

Bolsonaro was barred in June 2023 from running for office again until 2030 after Brazil's electoral court ruled that he abused his power and cast unfounded doubts on the country's electronic voting system.

Engineer Eduardo Carlos Santos, 73, believes Brazil's economy recovered due to the work of Bolsonaro. A devout evangelical, as with many in the former president's base, he says there is a cultural war against conservatives and that leftists should have no place in government.

"Like it or not, Bolsonaro left a better economy and Lula is just reaping the fruits of that," said Santos, who blames the economic difficulties during the previous presidency on the COVID-19 pandemic and health restrictions. "Lula is a former inmate, sentenced for corruption. He had

his time in office, we needed to move the country to another direction. I don't see a bright year coming ahead."

Lula was imprisoned for alleged corruption in 2018, when he led polls to return to the presidency. He was released after the country's Supreme Court ruled the following year that prison sentences could only take place after every appeal has been exhausted — which was not the case with Lula. Later, the same court ruled that the judge in Lula's case, now a pro-Bolsonaro senator, was biased against him.

Lula's difficulties on the streets also appeared in Congress, which voted several times to override his vetoes, especially on environmental legislation. The most recent was in December, when lawmakers reinstated legislation to undo protections of Indigenous peoples' land rights. The decision set up a new battle between lawmakers and the country's top court on the matter.

LOST

I lost my Bachelor of Education (EEd) marksheet of 2010 bearing registration No.10800952 year 2005-06, Roll 910 No. 3040532 of Diphu Ed. College, Diphu, in the month of December, 2023, while returning from Diphu market to my room i.e. Rongmarjong, near Polytechnic College Diphu. The finder is requested to return and contact the following.

Amar Engleng
Rongmarjong,
Near Polytechnic,
Diphu, Karbi
Anglong, Assam
Contact
No.7002738678.

CORRIGENDUM AGAINST TENDER NOTICE NO. S&T_CON_2023-17
The Corrigendum of Tender No. 02/2023/LMG/DMV in connection with Tender Notice No. S&T_CON_2023-17. Now to be read as: Date & Time of Opening of Tender: 15.00 hrs. of 08-01-2024.
All other terms & conditions shall remain unchanged.
By CSTE/CON/Lumding at Maligaon, NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY (Construction Organisation)
Serving Customers With A Smile

NEP 2020 has potential to produce generation capable of creating employments: Governor

Governor attends Entrepreneurship and Rural Development Conclave

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria said that entrepreneurship and skill development of youth, women and farmers hold the key for an empowered and inclusive country.

Inaugurating an Entrepreneurship and Rural Development conclave (ERDC-2024) at IIT-Guwahati here on Tuesday, the Governor said that the government has been taking several transformative steps to foster entrepreneurship and skill development of different targeted people of the country to strengthen the foundation of empowered and inclusive nation.

The Governor said, "Entrepreneurship plays an important role in economic development and raising the living standard of the countrymen. Entrepreneurship development is a powerful tool to empower individuals like youth, women and other people living at the grass root. Entrepreneurship should be linked to economic growth to meet the rising aspirations of the youth. There is a need to create more awareness for the expansion of entrepreneurship, especially among the students of our educational institutions."

The Governor also said that for the sustainable development in the country there is a strong need for creating more employment avenues, which can be achieved only by stimulating the entrepreneurial skills of the youth, women and farmers. He expressed happiness that through such conclave, the new generation will definitely get inspiration and they can play as a catalyst in developing the landscape of entrepreneurship and pro-



viding employment to others. He on this occasion also reiterated on the need of changing the conventional beliefs and accept new ideas.

Governor Kataria further highlighted that entrepreneurship is the most viable option to take the grass root people to the pinnacle of success. It can also strengthen the foundation of Atmanirbhar Bharat which will be more empowered and inclusive. He also

stressed on the need for generating awareness among the people to promote entrepreneurship. The Governor also said that the government is taking concerted efforts to introduce entrepreneurship development models in all educational institutions in a planned and organised manner, where they can connect with other stakeholders of the startup eco-system.

Governor Kataria also said that the youth

of the country can play an important role in promoting sustainable development and responsible business practices. They can advocate corporate social responsibility, environmental stewardship and inclusive growth. This not only enhances India's global reputation, but also ensures long-term, sustainable development for future generations.

He moreover said that, in the new education policy 2020, special emphasis has been given on skill and vocational education. With the successful implementation of this policy, a new generation will be created who will be adept in different skill sets required for Industry 4.0. They will not be the generation looking for employment, but will be the generation providing employment.

Skill Development Employment and Entrepreneurship minister Jayanta Malla Baruah also spoke at the conclave which was organised by IIT-Guwahati in collaboration with IIT, Ropar and Entrepreneurship and Rural Development Center (ERDC).

It may be mentioned that the conclave will host three one-day conferences to spread awareness about Entrepreneurship and Rural Development in India and identify the enthusiastic entrepreneurial minds that will eventually set the tone for future development. Director IIT, Ropar and officiating director of IIT-G, Prof Rajeev Ahuja, president of Vidya Bharati, Assam, Dr Dibya Jyoti Mahanta, dean PRBR, IIT, Guwahati Prof P K Iyer, head ERDC Chetan Sahore along with a host of other dignitaries attended the conclave.

CEM Tuliram Ronghang reviews preparations for 50th Karbi Youth Festival



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: KAAC CEM Tuliram Ronghang took a comprehensive approach to reviewing the ongoing preparations for the momentous 50th Karbi Youth Festival's Golden Jubilee Celebration. The discussions encompassed not only the logistics of the festival but also focused on the upcoming visits of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on January 8, 2024, and the President of India Droupadi Murmu, on January 17, 2024.

The review session saw the active involvement of various key stakeholders, including executive members (EMs), members of autonomous council (MACs), principal secretary (PS), district commissioner, superintendent of police (SP), chairman of Diphu

Municipal Board, senior secretaries, heads of department, and representatives from the Karbi Cultural Society and KYF Reception Committee, among others.

Simultaneously, Tuliram Ronghang played a vibrant role in a campaign meeting held in Longku village, rallying support for BJP candidate Samsing Engti, who is contesting from the 17th Garampani MAC Constituency in Umrang, Dima Hasao district. The massive turnout and support observed during the meeting underscored the strong backing for the Saffron Party in the region.

The event witnessed the presence of Darsing Ronghang, M.L.A., as well as other prominent dignitaries, creating an electrifying atmosphere of support and solidarity for the BJP candidate.

Re-checking of BMI of 'obese' Assam Police personnel begins

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: In a bid to ensure a professional outfit, the re-examination of body mass index (BMI) of "obese" Assam Police personnel began on Tuesday, a top official said.

Police personnel, who will fail to meet the required standard will undergo an 'assessment' of the factors due to which they could not make it, as the exercise is aimed at improving "fitness of the force and not punishing anyone", another official said.

The review of BMI of 1,884 police personnel started at Jorhat, Silchar and Guwahati, director general of police GP Singh said.

The state police had conducted the body mass index (BMI) check of all personnel in August last year with the director general of police (DGP) undergoing the screening test first.

"As a follow up to BMI testing

in August 2023, the re-examination of 1,884 @assampolice personnel who fell in Obese category (30+ BMI) would start at Guwahati, Silchar and Jorhat from January 2nd 2024," Singh wrote on X on Monday. Body mass index is a measurement of a person's weight with respect to his or her height. According to the World Health Organization, a BMI over 25 is considered overweight, and over 30 is obese.

Reaffirming stress on physical fitness, the DGP said, "Hope most of them have shaped up in the three months period given. We remain committed to provide people of Assam a professional and fit Police Unit."

The exercise is being carried out to ensure better health of the serving personnel, another officer said on condition of anonymity.

"Our aim is to have a healthy po-

lice force. If someone cannot achieve the BMI standard due to medical reasons, it's a different matter."

"But if someone cannot meet it without any underlying medical condition, we will make an assessment of the reasons for it," he said.

There could be reasons like the nature of assignment or place of posting or something else, the officer said.

"Depending on why the personnel are not being able to meet the BMI standard, the decision will be taken. It has to be a policy-level decision," he said.

Asked if a policeman failing to meet the requirements could lose their jobs, he refused to comment.

"We want our force to be a fit one. That is the basic idea behind this exercise, not to punish anyone," he said.

Nearly 2.5 per cent of the police

personnel, who had undergone BMI tests in August last year, were found obese and were put under medical care to make them fit, Singh had said earlier.

Altogether 70,161 personnel had undergone such a test in the first phase of the exercise, and of them, 1,748 were found to have BMI readings of over 30, he said.

The DGP had earlier said that all those who would not be able to reduce their weight by the end of the stipulated period would be offered a voluntary retirement option, except for those who have genuine medical reasons like thyroidism.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had previously advocated removing the 'dead wood' from the police force - habitual drinkers, those with extreme obesity and with charges of corruption - to turn the force into a responsive and action-oriented one. (PTI)

Conclusion of self-financed inputs dealers training



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 2: The 'Self Financed Inputs Dealers (Fertiliser) Training' program, spanning a fortnight and organised for primary agricultural credit societies by KVK, Nagaon at its office premises, concluded successfully

on Tuesday.

The program, inaugurated on December 14, 2023, by Gunajit Kashyap, DDC, Nagaon, witnessed the participation of Dr H C Bhattacharya, Dean, Daffodil College of Horticulture, and a virtual presence by Dr Manu Ranjan

Assam Rifles conducted a cleanliness drive at Lokra

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 2: Assam Rifles orchestrated a 'cleanliness drive' at Battalion Headquarters in Lokra, according to a press release.

The primary objective of the program was to instill awareness among the youth regarding cleanliness as part of the Swachhata Abhiyan, an initiative by the Government of India.

To foster a positive impact on the community, participants were educated on extensive knowledge and techniques for reducing littering, promoting improved sanitation, and increasing awareness about the benefits of cleanliness. All attendees developed a heightened consciousness of their surroundings and actively contributed to maintaining cleanliness in garrison areas.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks, with a total of 25 AR personnel and 7 villagers participating in the campaign with great zeal and enthusiasm.

on Tuesday.

The program, inaugurated on December 14, 2023, by Gunajit Kashyap, DDC, Nagaon, witnessed the participation of Dr H C Bhattacharya, Dean, Daffodil College of Horticulture, and a virtual presence by Dr Manu Ranjan

Truck drivers stage protest against stringent laws in Simultapu

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Jan 2: In a significant demonstration, hundreds of truck drivers took to the National Highway-31 (c) and blockaded the Assam-Bengal inter-state border at Simultapu. The protest aimed to voice opposition against recently enacted laws perceived as harsh and targeting the entire truck driver community. The drivers demanded the immediate withdrawal of these stringent regulations.

Expressing their discontent, the truck drivers emphasised that accidents are unforeseeable events, and the new law unfairly holds drivers accountable for hit-and-run incidents. They contended that during such incidents, drivers often face violent reactions from the public, making the proposed legislation problematic.

The atmosphere became disruptive, leading to police intervention and lathi charges to disperse the protesters. Despite the intervention, the drivers continued to voice concerns about the proposed legislation's impact on their well-being in the event of accidents. Drivers operating various types of vehicles along the Assam-Bengal border have threatened to initiate an indefinite strike unless revisions are made to the stringent laws, reflecting their determination to protect their rights and working conditions.

B Palkee performs at 5th Devi Kamakhya Sanskritik Mahotsav

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: The '5th Devi Kamakhya Sanskritik Mahotsav' took place at the Maa Kamakhya Temple on December 29, commemorating the wedding anniversary of Lord Shiva and Goddess Maa Kamakhya. Organised by Kalpabriksha and Muktimangal, the event featured a 25-minute dance program by B Palkee, a disciple of Kathak exponents Guru Marami Medhi and Meghrajani Medhi, as well as an actor.

Palkee's performance included a Shiva Vandana, a Kathak Shuddha Nritya in Vilambit, Madhya, and Drut laya of Trital, concluding with a Devi Stuti. Accompanied by music composed by the renowned classical musician Guru Joyprakash Medhi, Palkee left a lasting impression on tourists, devotees, and spectators from around the world.

Shivangi Chakraborty, a disciple of eminent musician Guru Jatin Basumatari, presented a Ganesh Vandana and a Devi Stuti. Saangeeta Ghosh's disciple Jayshree Saha showcased a Shiva Vandana in the Bharatanatyam dance style. The event also featured 'Energy Healer' Riddhima Kejriwal, who recited poetry about Shiva and Gauri to create a spiritual atmosphere.

The inauguration was conducted by Bar Doloi of Maa Kamakhya Devalaya, Kavindra Sharma, and the temple's secretary, Gyan Nath Sharma, who lit the lamps. Past editions of the festival welcomed renowned personalities such as Sujata Mahapatra, Rama Vaidyanathan, Jaya Prabha Menon, Kabita Dwivedi, Vajjayanti Kashi, Pandit Rajendra Gangani, Rahul Acharya, and others.

Former Janambhumi correspondent passes away



HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 2: Hemanta Bordoloi, the former correspondent of The Janambhumi newspaper and a distinguished businessman, breathed his last at his residence in Tarajan Sonarigaon on Tuesday evening. He was 97 years old.

Bordoloi, a founding member of All Assam Moyna Parijat in 1948, was widely known for owning the well-regarded bookstore, Bookland. The bookstore was a popular spot among college students during the seventies, eighties, and nineties.

He is survived by two sons and three daughters.

Zero deaths in snake bites

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Jan 2: Demow Model Hospital, situated at Demow Konwar, has achieved another milestone in snakebite treatment. Dr Surajit Giri, an anaesthesiologist and snake bite specialist at Demow Model Hospital, along with his team, has successfully prevented deaths due to snake bites for the third consecutive year. In recognition of this accomplishment, Demow Model Hospital will celebrate the 'Hat-Trick Year of Zero Death in Snake Bites from 2021 to 2023'. A cake-cutting ceremony is scheduled on January 3, 2024, on the first floor of Demow Model Hospital, with the presence of dignitaries.

OBITUARY

Death—the supreme reality embraced in its arms, a lady with a sagacious spirit leading a life of principles against all odds. Daughter of a pioneer veterinarian and the wife of a medical officer, she had at her disposal the choice of comfort and the nines. Born with the destiny to be better known for her commitment to social and religious causes, it was obvious that she chose a route of Puritanism, taking with glee in her strides all the struggles and pains that would come along.

The lady, for whom discipline and dedication were the middle name, was my mother—Hiran Deka—BA. An ex-active student of TC School, who took to NCC and dramas, she was a favourite of her teachers, particularly the language teachers of English as well as Sanskrit, where she excelled. An ex-primary class teacher of Gandhi-Basti High School and Sacred Heart High School, she was a wizard of craft and had a penchant for creative activities like sewing, knitting, embroidery, and crafting. She had a special love for crafting toys, novelties, and utilities created out of thrown-out items. Waste was a resource for her, and she would take special interest in converting expired items into items of utility.

An ardent devotee of Shiva and Sri Satya Sai Baba, she was a staunch practitioner of religious austereities and would never compromise on her rituals even as she discharged her duties towards everyone and everything. An ironical package of a personality who had an excellent command over the English language and oration, yet a deep inclination towards traditional values and ethos and the elements of Sanatani Tatva.

My father, Late Gajendra Nath Deka, who was a



well-respected medical officer known for his sincerity and honesty, owes it to my mother for playing the acceptance foil for his life of honesty and piety. She would continually remind him not to venture beyond the justified means of earning wealth and rather earn people's blessings. She was a perfect 'Sah-Dharmini' to my duty-bound father who would be posted at different rural areas of Assam and would be in prolonged excursions, especially during floods and epidemics. It was her choice of simplicity and a sedentary life that supported my father's penance and commitment towards duty and service of people.

As a teacher, she earned the admiration of her little students and colleagues, particularly for the niche she carved for herself through her craftsmanship exploits and teaching. In her latter life, she was instrumental in setting up and leading the local unit of Moyna Paar-ijaa and led the unit to a stage of glory, earning accolades in various meets.

She leaves behind her son, daughter-in-law, and grandson and a host of relatives and well-wishers. Her Adya Shradha falls on January 3, 2024, and on that day, I would pray to the Almighty to grant her eternal peace and may she shower her blessings upon us to keep trekking her desired path of 'Manav Seva'.

- Pranab Kumar Deka

Atul Bora inaugurates water supply schemes in Bokakhat

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: Minister Atul Bora inaugurated two major water supply schemes, the Upar Temera and No 2 Bakuli Chapari, under Gulung Temera Gaon Panchayat, Bokakhat. These projects, emblematic of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's unwavering commitment to the ambitious Jal Jeevan scheme, were celebrated in a ceremony attended by various dignitaries.

Acknowledging the vital role of these water supply initiatives, minister Atul Bora earnestly called upon officials and local residents to ensure the continuous operation of these essential projects. The event witnessed the presence of the Magistrate of Bokakhat sub-division, executive engineer & assistant executive engineer from the Public Health Engineering Depart-



ment, the president of Gulung Temera Gaon Panchayat, various Panchayat representatives, officials, and local residents.

Minister Atul Bora also inau-

gurated the Morongiyl Doital Water Supply Scheme at Dusitumukh GP, Bokakhat, as part of the Jal Jeevan Mission initiative. Additionally, the inauguration of

the Barbam Water Supply Scheme under JJM at Pub-Mohura GP, Bokakhat, is set to benefit 350 households in the area. The ₹ 129.28 lakh project reinforces chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's deep commitment to the Jal Jeevan scheme, aiming to ensure a reliable drinking water supply. This collaborative effort marks a significant step in transforming the accessibility of water, underscoring the government's dedication to citizen welfare.

The occasion was graced by the Magistrate of Bokakhat sub-division, executive engineer, and assistant executive engineer from the Public Health Engineering Department, along with Gaon Panchayat president, Anchalik Panchayat member, diverse Panchayat representatives, officials, dignitaries, and local residents.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it. - Roseanne Barr

Safety shocker for women!

In a shocking incident at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), a 22-year-old student was allegedly raped by three BJP youth leaders on November 1, raising serious concerns about women's safety under the Modi-Yogi administration. The incident occurred inside the campus, a supposed stronghold of Hindutva values, in Varanasi, the Lok Sabha constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The victim reported that the accused, riding a motorcycle, waylaid her and a friend, forcing the friend away before assaulting her. Disturbingly, they also filmed the assault. Despite the complaint, the police failed to file an FIR on the same day, creating a delay that has fueled accusations of political influence. The accused, Kunal Pandey, Abhishek Chauhan, and Saksham Patel, identified by the police, were allowed to leave Varanasi within five days, tasked with electioneering for assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh. The involvement of these BJP youth leaders, with roles such as IT cell convenor and working committee member, highlights the alleged political protection they enjoyed. Their subsequent arrest took two months, and they were placed on judicial remand rather than police remand, raising questions about the handling of the case. The police did not seek a PC (police custody) to delve deeper into their activities or potential habitual offenses.

The incident sparked public outrage in Varanasi, leading to protests and demands for justice. The victim's courage stands in contrast to the reported reluctance of other students to file complaints due to fear of the accused's political connections. Disturbing images circulating on social media show the accused posing with top BJP leaders, including Narendra Modi, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and BJP president J.P. Nadda. Denials of association with the BJP by state leaders further add to the controversy. Vidya Sagar Rai, BJP's Varanasi city unit in-charge, disclaimed any connection, while opposition leaders accused the police of letting the accused go free to protect the BJP's electoral interests. University academics are now seeking answers from UP CM Yogi Adityanath, questioning whether the accused's houses will face legal action and if justice will be served for the victim. Despite Yogi's claims of creating a crime-free state, Uttar Pradesh continues to witness high rates of crimes against women. This incident underscores the broader issue of rising crimes against women in India under Modi's rule. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data for 2021 reveals a concerning increase in crimes against women, with over 4,00,000 reported cases, including 32,033 rape cases—a 26.35% rise over six years. The BJP's slogan 'Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao' is being questioned as incidents like the BHU rape case unfold.

The involvement of accused BJP youth leaders in an RSS event and their connection with ABVP raises concerns about the political influence affecting the campus environment. The RSS has faced criticism for creating a lawless situation in BHU, including instances of insulting professors and forcing a Muslim Sanskrit scholar to stop teaching. As the nation grapples with the aftermath of this shocking incident, it brings to light the urgent need for addressing the safety concerns of women and holding perpetrators accountable, irrespective of their political affiliations. The BHU rape case exposes alarming safety issues for women under the Modi-Yogi administration. Delayed arrests of BJP youth leaders and their alleged political protection raise serious concerns about justice and accountability.

The controversial passage of India's new legal codes

By: Dipak Kurmi

It should ideally be a moment of celebration for every Indian citizen as the three British-era laws that governed criminal justice administration in India - the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860; the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (originally enacted in 1898); and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 - are now giving way to three new laws - the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023; the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023; and Bharatiya Sakshya (BS), 2023, respectively. However, those deeply invested in the preservation of democracy in the country seem to lack the enthusiasm exhibited by Union home minister Amit Shah, who presented the bill in the Lok Sabha. This sentiment persists despite the assurances given in his response before the House adopted the three bills on December 20, 2023.

The impact of these three laws is poised to resonate through the lives of Indians for generations to come. Every police officer and legal professional in the country will be transitioning to the new codes, handling charges encrypted within them to serve the people. However, the pace of this transformation was notably swift - presented on August 11 of this year, the revised versions of the bills were passed within a mere four months.

Despite requests from members of the Opposition in the parliamentary standing committee on home affairs, which is tasked with subjecting the bills to thorough scrutiny over an extended period, their appeals were disregarded. Subsequently, the home minister announced the withdrawal of the bills presented in August, introducing new ones with changes suggested by domain experts and legal professionals. In a matter of days, the Lok Sabha embraced these bills.

The fundamental flaw in the home minister's approach lies in his undervaluation of Parliament's significance as the nation's paramount law-making institution. It is within the walls of Parliament that laws are crafted and dismantled, and the people elect representatives to ensure their perspectives are considered in this legislative process. While recognizing that law-making indeed requires the input of domain experts, the essence of democracy lies in having representatives with a grassroots-level understanding of life. These elected officials comprehend the intricacies of implementing laws on the ground far better than experts, and it is their insights that render a law truly people-friendly. A mere couple of days of discussion on the just over a thousand sections in the three bills - though many were replaced - is undeniably insufficient by any standard, particularly considering the inclusion of critical subjects such as terrorism and the rights of under-trials in the new laws.

In a disconcerting turn of events, crucial laws were slyly pushed through via a voice vote in a House where a significant chunk of Opposition members found themselves ousted for merely raising valid concerns. This power move by the government underscores its unwavering dominance in the Lower House, demonstrating a blatant disregard for the Opposition's voice. Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, eloquently highlighted the essence of democracy, emphasizing that while the majority may prevail, the minority retains the right to express its perspective. Contrary to this principle, the government seems singularly focused on imposing its will, leaving little room for the democratic discourse it should uphold. (The writer can be reached at dipaknews@gmail.com)

Trinamool Congress's 26 year old journey in Bengal has been stormy

A model of the comic strip character Spiderman has been strategically placed before Trinamool Congress supremo and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's Harish Chatterjee Street residence as part of Christmas and New Year decorations this year. It is lit up after dark and its limbs move too; in a way it encapsulates the ups and downs of the TMC in the past 26 years even as January 1 is the party's foundation day.

Didi, as Banerjee is known to legions of TMC activists was seen standing just outside her tiled home door and admiring it days ago. The expression on her face was relaxed not giving the impression that the challenge of 2024 will pose any serious challenge to her in Bengal.

One does not have to read her mind or look into a crystal ball to guess it. An astute politician with the instincts of a street fighter, the TMC chief is always focused on the problem at hand with a penchant to tackle it head on.

It is this trait which has helped Banerjee to attain her present status. It has been since the cold January day of 1998 when she broke away from Congress and set up Trinamool Congress where she has the last word in decision making at the highest level to the daily nitty gritty of TMC's functioning.

Quizzed how the state of the Spiderman model represents the TMC, the answer is as clear as daylight. Like Spiderman climbing up the steep wall of a glass, steel and concrete condominium, the TMC too has scaled unscathed heights.

The latest peak TMC has flown its flag from is "political annihilation" of CPI(M) and Congress in the 2021 Assembly election which a wheel-chair bound Banerjee with a gammy leg led from the

front. In this election, Banerjee also binned the invincibility of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP election juggernaut which had to screech to a halt in its track.

For the first time in post independence period, neither the Congress nor the Left is sans any representation in West Bengal Assembly. If BJP legislators led by TMC rebel Subhendu Adhikari occupy the Opposition benches in the House, their ranks are often thinned by defection to the Trinamool.

This electoral triumph set Banerjee on a path she had so far aspired. A claimant to lead the anti-BJP bloc in 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Just as she appeared to be in an unassailable position ground below her feet gave way as litigations together with CBI and ED teams armed with a clutch of serious charges of financial corruption swooped down on her nephew Abhishek considered to be political heir and her close associates.

Some of them including Partha Chatterjee and Jyotipriya Mallik, both members of her Cabinet are in prison. Anubrata Mondal whom Banerjee has diagnosed with "occasional stropping oxygen supply to his brain" was the key organisation man in Birbhum is marking time in Tihar jail these days.

These are similar incidents along with previous ones which the Spiderman model represents when it is unlit. Trinamool Congress seems to have the focus on it for the wrong reasons.

Unlike Spiderman, Banerjee and TMC whose heart and soul she happens to be, has slipped up. It is one of those dark periods which has visited her in the past.

Banerjee has never been chary of facing a problem however overwhelming it

may appear. It has been so since she broke set from in 1998 with only Ajit Panja, a senior leader and a handful of faithful at her side.

But Banerjee's skills as a political strategist came to the fore at this point. She hitched bandwagon with BJP and won 7 seats in 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The flourish continued as Subrata Mukherjee her onetime political mentor crossed over from Congress together with several other leaders swelling TMC's ranks.

The maverick political outfit swept away the CPI(M) from Kolkata Municipal Corporation forming the board.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Tirthankar Mitra

Mukherjee as mayor and the civic body's driving force did a good job though ego problems between the mayor and the TMC were never quite away from public domain.

Banerjee meanwhile has joined the BJP government as minister for railways raining projects on West Bengal and jobs to her supporters. It marked the beginning of expansion of her political base at the expense of the Congress and the Left led by CPI(M).

Assembly elections in 2001 saw TMC emerge as the principal Opposition party. Unpleasant surprise was in store for Banerjee as TMC and BJP were defeated in the Lok Sabha elections in 2004 and the duo parted company.

TMC's political fortunes dipped further as CPI(M) led Left Front attained a brute majority in 2006 assembly polls. Its tally of seats in Lok Sabha earlier was reduced to one with Banerjee as sole party MP.

Many political columnists were on the point of penning Banerjee's obituary. But then came Nandigram earmarked by Left Front government as a

chemical hub in which several farmers were gunned down by "policemen in flip flops as their footwear" and worse descending on their women folk.

Suddenly strong gusts of winds started flowing into TMC sails. Singur where plans for a small car factory together with ancillary units on mukti crop plots was aborted by the front dispensation which had developed a cold feet since Nandigram.

The shoe was clearly in Didi's feet. Lok Sabha elections 2009 results made the writing on the wall in bold for the Left Front.

It also smeared the image of Banerjee and her party, the people reaffirmed their faith on both in elections. Inarguably, schemes of Banerjee's government and her girl next door image have still many takers. There are not too many avenues of employment and sops Kanyasree, Sabuj Sathi Lakshmir Bhandar to name woeing students who now vote at a younger age than before and housewives have endeared Didi to the masses.

The Assembly elections in 2011 saw TMC and Congress in an alliance with Banerjee calling the shots. The coexistence in the new government was short-lived with Congress leaving in a huff plagued by defections to TMC and many of its party offices taken over by the outfit it had helped to come to power.

The years that rolled by witnessed Trinamool getting better of its political rivals while being in the throes of one scam after another. It started with the Sanadhi chit fund scam, a Ponzi scheme which lured many to invest their funds in it which they lost after a few returns whose rate had nothing to do with existing interest rates in the market.

There were reports of its chief, Sudipto Sen having bought a painting by Mamata Banerjee for a huge sum. Sen was arrested from Kashmir after Banerjee blurting out that the

fugitive has fled north.

Enquiry commissions were formed and Supreme Court directed a CBI probe into the matter. Come 2016 Assembly elections and Congress joined forces with the CPI(M) to take on its onetime ally TMC, but the TMC improved its tally further.

Meanwhile, Naradasthing operation live footages in which several TMC leaders including city mayor Sovan Chattopadhyay, number two in the state Cabinet Subrata Mukherjee, senior MPs Sougata Roy and Sudip Bandopadhyay were seen in camera taking currency note bundles. If it badly smeared the image of Banerjee and her party, the people reaffirmed their faith on both in elections.

Inarguably, schemes of Banerjee's government and her girl next door image have still many takers. There are not too many avenues of employment and sops Kanyasree, Sabuj Sathi Lakshmir Bhandar to name woeing students who now vote at a younger age than before and housewives have endeared Didi to the masses.

It had indeed helped TMC combat electoral violence charges which hang round its neck and cannot be shaken away. But the majority seemed to have overlooked it if electoral success of the ruling party is any indication.

The road ahead now for the ruling dispensation of the state does not appear to be roses all the way. Ever since the induction of Banerjee's nephew Abhishek elected MP from Diamond Harbour, intraparty squabbles have cropped up.

As the newcomer is trying to build his own team, sparks fly between the greenhorns and veterans. Even Banerjee has to step in calling for an amicable combination in which the young must respect the

seniors.

TMC's chief vote catcher remains its charismatic supremo Mamata Banerjee. Though members of INDIA bloc, both Congress and CPI(M) have accused her of being in hand and glove with the saffron camp.

It buys her nephew immunity from the clutches of the central probe agencies, it is alleged. Banerjee already having hit the campaign trail is unfazed.

The TMC chief having snatched electoral triumph from the jaws of impending disaster however remains unfazed. For she is aware that her personal equation with Sonia Gandhi, still the power behind the throne in the Grand Old Party can help her muffle criticism from state Congress leaders.

The state Congress needs her badly in the coming election as CPI(M) activists are unlikely to campaign for it in West Bengal. In sum, Banerjee led TMC will have to contend with a faction ridden BJP and depleted Left.

None has won even in a single occasion against TMC post 2021 elections. But then public opinion being fickle, Banerjee seeks to take no chances and has already hit the ground running even as the voters are almost coming across fresh reports and visuals of the charges of financial misdemeanours of some of the party leaders and differences between the Young Turks and the Old Guard. TMC supremo has uncanny political sense and links with the masses. Already, TMC has prepared a draft list of Lok Sabha candidates, the supremo is just waiting for the Congress to take the final decision. Mamata still remains the street fighter like her early days. She is once again on her mission to trounce the BJP in the coming Lok Sabha elections. (IPA Service)

Growth challenges for India's defence manufacturing sector

By: Girish Linganna

The Indian defence manufacturing sector has advanced significantly, largely due to the government's 'Make in India' policy and emphasis on self-sufficiency. But difficulties that can hinder development in 2024 need to be addressed. So like all significant nations, India has an Army, Navy and Air Force and these wings need among other essentials, ground vehicles, naval vessels, C4ISR, fixed-wing aircraft, rotary-wing aircraft, weapons and ammunition, protection and training and unmanned systems.

The Indian defence market is growing. It is expected to increase at 4 percent annually. India's rivalry with China needs constant modernization of military equipment, cutting imports and market growth. Geopolitical tensions - as well as terror threat perceptions - have pushed India to expand its perimeter, security, naval and aviation capabilities. The country's defence budget has steadily expanded.

Military budget for 2024 could be \$84 billion - a whopping 13 percent rise from 2023. This increase will support market expansion over the projection period. Also, with the 'Make in India' initiative, India seeks self-sufficiency in defence and allied areas, thereby opening up new prospects for market players.

The increased emphasis on modernizing aircraft capabilities will stimulate segment growth—including HAL Tejas LCA Mk-1A, Dornier 228, HAL Dhruv ALH/Rudra and HAL Light Combat Helicopter deliveries. India's initiatives in manufacturing and operational self-sufficiency generate considerable opportunities for regional suppliers. India will keep spending on AMCA, LCA Mk-2, 3-ton-class Indian Multi-Role Helicopter and AWACS.

The Indian Air Force will buy 114 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) worth approximately \$18-\$20 billion. The IAF wants to keep expanding its air defence capabilities and invest in key capabilities by obtaining local and foreign-produced systems - such as Akash SAM, S-400 and MRSAM IAI. Such programmes will support segment growth.

The Ministry of Defence had an exceptional year in 2023, experiencing a sharp rise in defence exports - an unparalleled



\$1.95 billion, nearly \$365 million more than in the previous year. Simultaneously, defence production surpassed the milestone of \$12.2 billion for the first time. The Indian government has set a target of \$25 billion in defence production by 2025, with \$5 billion coming from exports.

Through Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and ammunition production factories, the Department of Defence Production (DDP) has created vast manufacturing capabilities for producing various pieces of defence equipment including heavy transport vehicles, weapons and ammunition, tanks, armoured vehicles, helicopters, fighter planes, military ships and submarines.

The IAF promotes 'Make in India' via targeted, sustainable, established indigenization programmes. The current focus is on reducing reliance on imported defence technology. Light Combat Aircraft, Akash missiles and Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) have all been introduced recently. It actively supports and closely coordinates with the Defence Ministry on LCH, RPA, medium-power radars, low-level tracking radars and other systems, its actions in line with that of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

The Strategic Partner Model also aligns with 'Make in India'. Shipyards have also followed the 'Make in India' model. The Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC)-1 is India's largest and most sophisticated military ship, built by Cochin Shipyard Limited. Submarines, destroyers, frigates, replenishment oilers, research vessels, diving support vessels and tugs are being built in India. Such advances will lead to increased indigenous

development of various defence technologies.

The Indian defence market is moderately consolidated, with several prominent firms having market shares including Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), DRDO, Rostec and Airbus SE. The 'Make in India' policy has fostered the formation of partnerships between foreign and indigenous enterprises. This has enhanced the capacities of Indian companies. Recent partnerships have benefited HAL, Safran, Elbit Systems Ltd, Tata Motors, Bharat Forge, General Dynamics, Russian companies, L&T, Boeing and Mahindra.

India is also working to improve its domestic manufacturing capabilities to broaden the variety of local defence equipment it can make, and reduce reliance on foreign procurement. Some state-owned enterprises are developing indigenous technologies to boost local players' market share.

But there are issues galore! Imports, for example, India still relies largely on imports for vital defence technologies and components, notably high-end systems, such as fighter planes, submarines and missiles. Because of this reliance, India is subject to supply chain disruptions and geopolitical pressures.

Then there are infrastructure bottlenecks. The Indian defence manufacturing ecosystem is underdeveloped regarding infrastructure, such as testing facilities, production lines and trained labour. This might result in delays, inefficiencies and increased expenses.

Financial constraints: While defence spending is increasing, it remains restrained compared to that of other big

powers. This reduces resources available for R&D, upgrading and procuring new technology. There are also bureaucratic obstacles which complicate and delay procurement, discourage private participation and hinder development and deployment of new technology. It is critical for speedier expansion to streamline the procurement process and reduce red-tape.

Attracting Private Capital: To close the technology gap and encourage innovation, the Indian defence sector needs to attract more private investment. Private players can be enticed by creating a suitable climate with clear policies, incentives and long-term contracts.

Skilled Labour Shortage: The Indian defence industry faces a skills deficit, notably in such fields as aeronautical engineering, cyber security and robotics. Investing in education and training programmes is critical for closing this gap.

MSMEs Integration: Micro, small and medium-size companies (MSMEs) can be important in supplying components and subsystems to bigger military manufacturers. However, properly integrating MSMEs into the supply chain necessitates improved access to money, technology and market opportunities.

Geopolitical Uncertainty: The current global geopolitical environment, including the war in Ukraine and tensions with China, can disrupt supply chains and raise the cost of defence equipment. India must establish alternative sources for vital technology and minerals to offset these risks. Threats to Cyber Security: Cyber attacks on the defence sector are becoming more common, with the potential to disrupt operations and compromise sensitive data. Strong cyber security measures are crucial to safeguarding key infrastructure and information.

Cost-Quality Balance: While cost-effectiveness is critical, sacrificing quality can have major implications for national security. Finding the correct mix between price and performance is a major problem for India's defence industry.

Addressing these difficulties requires a collaborative effort by government, industry and academia. India can build a robust and self-sufficient military manufacturing ecosystem that can satisfy the country's strategic demands in the coming years by investing in infrastructure, technology and people resources. (IPA Service)

Women entrepreneurs in India: What is holding them back?

By: Sabrina Korreck

The Indian economy has grown steadily over the last decade, and there has been a parallel surge in the number of startups and new businesses in the country. A majority of these have been founded by men. While many Indian women have ambitions towards entrepreneurship, it is often more difficult for them to succeed. In fact, India has been found to be in a group of countries where women business owners (as well as women leaders and professionals) struggle with less favourable conditions, pronounced cultural biases, and a lack of business resources such as finances, capital, training, and development.

A society in which women cannot realise their full potential loses out on the significant potential for innovation, economic growth, and job creation. For instance, a recent study showed that in India, measures to close the gender gap could lead to a 6.8-percent gain in GDP. Another study estimated that advancing women's equality in India could boost its GDP by \$0.7 trillion in 2025 or 16 percent as compared to the 'business as usual' scenario. Moreover, entrepreneurship remains critical to harness the economic potential of women and thus, achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030.

This issue brief seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation of women entrepreneurs in India. To this end, it gathers information on the share of businesses that are started by Indian women, and in which sectors and states they are active. It explores the underlying reasons that make it difficult for Indian women to succeed, and offers recommendations for pushing women's entrepreneurial empowerment.

The brief builds on a review of the latest literature on the subject and supplements theory with insights culled by this author during interviews with female founders and managers of startup support organisations. The interview data was obtained as part of a broader study on the Indian startup ecosystem, in which 14 of the 39 interview partners were women, who were asked additional questions and invited to share their perspectives on the subject.

Women entrepreneurs in India: A glance at the figures

On an individual level, some women have strong entrepreneurial ambitions. Interestingly, several of the interview partners mentioned that they got inspired by male role models such as Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, or that they were introduced to the "startup world" by their male friends who are entrepreneurs. On an institutional level, the government has launched several schemes to augment the entrepreneurial motivations of women and there is more noticeable political will to empower them.

However, looking beyond high individual and political aspirations and investigating the statistics of how many women actually own businesses shows a rather sobering balance. Literature on the subject often cites data from the Sixth Economic Census, which was conducted between January 2013 and April 2014. Out of 58.5 million businesses counted by that census, 8.05 million were owned by women, which corresponds to a rate of 13.76 percent of women among the total number of entrepreneurs in India. The World Bank Enterprise Survey, meanwhile, found that in 2014, the percentage of firms with female participation in ownership was 10.7 percent. While more recent data is not available, interview partners, as well as recent media reports, highlighted a steady rise in the number of startups founded by women.

The low rates of women entrepreneurship are reflected in a dismal score in the Index of Women Entrepreneurs, where India is ranked 52nd out of the 57 surveyed countries. The fact that few women own companies is part of a larger phenomenon of weak engagement of women in business. This further relates to a low female labour force participation rate as well as women having fewer opportunities to become business leaders, professionals and technical workers. Indeed, despite high economic growth rates as well as an increase in the proportion of working-age women in the population, the participation in the work force has decreased from 35 percent in 2005 to just 26 percent in 2018. According to a World Bank Enterprise Survey, the percentage of women in leadership positions in 2014 was as low as nine percent.

It is hardly a surprise, therefore, that the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report finds India's gender gap to be particularly prevalent in the indicator group "economic participation and opportunity," where the country is ranked 142nd out of 149 countries. India's overall rank, which takes into account three further indicator groups, is 108th. Unequal education is an issue holding women back, and it is not a coincidence that states with relatively higher literacy rates also have more women entrepreneurs. The top five states with the highest percentage of women entrepreneurs are Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Maharashtra.

To be sure, India is a highly diverse country, and so are the forms of entrepreneurship women engage in. The availability of micro-finance has ameliorated women's empowerment and entrepreneurship and 98 percent of businesses owned by women are micro-enterprises, where approximately 90 percent of them operate in the informal sector. Interview partners observed that women entrepreneurs are often active in social areas and sectors such as health, clean energy and zero waste, education, women's hygiene, fashion, cosmetics, food and nutrition, garments and textiles, and services (such as

management and human resources).

Causes of low female entrepreneurship rates

Regardless of gender, starting a business is a difficult prospect. Key challenges for startups in India include generating funding, limited understanding of customers, penetrating the market, hiring qualified employees, and the complex regulatory environment. For women entrepreneurs, however, there are additional barriers which are part of a broader and more pronounced gender gap in the male-dominated Indian society.

Unconscious gender bias

Some female founders who were interviewed by this author, who were at early stages of their careers, said that they had not experienced discrimination based on gender. While they struggled with various entrepreneurial challenges, they do not think it had to do with their gender. They saw themselves as hardworking and had faith that the best ideas will prevail, and the brightest and most passionate entrepreneurs succeed. Conversely, senior women entrepreneurs with much more experience were rather disillusioned and described being a woman founder as difficult. While it is possible that the younger entrepreneurs had not (yet) experienced unequal treatment based on their gender, the discrepancy of perceptions could also indicate a lack of awareness of subtle bias, which is often worse than blatant discrimination. Unconscious gender bias is defined as "unintentional and automatic mental associations based on gender, stemming from traditions, norms, values, culture and/or experience," and has been found to be a key factor impeding the progress of women entrepreneurs. Automatic associations enable quick assessment of an individual and often feed into decision-making that is unfavourable towards women. Individuals, regardless of gender, hold unconscious biases.

Confidence in business skills

Frequently-repeated stereotypes enforce the notion that "business is not a woman's world," and the belief that men are more competent when it comes to financial matters. As such attitudes reflect in communication, women entrepreneurs are often treated with less respect and they sense doubt when interacting with business partners. For instance, one interview partner (19.03.2019, Mumbai), who co-founded a startup with her husband, shared how people often talked to her as part of a "founding" couple, "he is earning, you are helping." Countering such negative feedback makes it more challenging for women to develop a business mindset. Therefore, unsurprisingly, women often have lower confidence in their own business skills. In fact, highly successful women often struggle with self-doubt and underestimate their abilities and performance, while the opposite has been observed for men. Moreover, it has been found that practically everywhere in the world, men tend to think that they are much smarter than women, yet arrogance and overconfidence are inversely related to leadership talent.

Access to finance

While entrepreneurship is an inherently risky undertaking, women are often easily assumed to be less willing to take risks. For instance, one of Indian's most successful women entrepreneurs, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, observed a great deal of skepticism towards women entrepreneurs and she was considered 'high-risk' by potential funders whose investment she courted for her biotechnology company, Biocon. Again, stereotypes appear to manifest in behaviour as fewer women actively approach investors and are more reluctant to divest stakes, as observed by one interview partner (22.03.2019, Bangalore). However, if women do approach investors, they are perceived differently than men, and investors have been found to prefer pitches presented by men as compared to those by women, despite identical content. Further difficulties with procuring funding occur due to the fact that Indian women rarely own property, which can be used as collateral for loans. Moreover, about 79 percent of women-owned ventures are self-financed, but families are often hesitant to support their daughters' entrepreneurial ventures financially.

Networks and relationships

Masculine corporate cultures are one of the most-cited barriers to women's leadership. Even a male interviewee (28.03.2019, Bangalore) described that the Indian startup ecosystem is characterised by a "bro culture" of "alpha males", where empathy is lacking and talking about emotional challenges is perceived as a weakness. For example, an article revealed a cutthroat culture in India's most famous startup — Flipkart — and that rumors about sexual harassment led to the resignation of co-founder Binny Bansal. Women tend to feel alienated in this culture and this explains why, as one interview partner pointed out (22.03.2019, Bangalore), women entrepreneurs do not feel comfortable in prominent industry networks. Not being part of such networks further impedes progress of women entrepreneurs because — as the broader study identified — in the Indian context relationships strongly matter. Women entrepreneurs miss important opportunities to mingle and connect with people in the market and thus, struggle even more than male entrepreneurs with getting access into the market.

Family support

The other side of the "business is a man's domain" coin is that predominant social norms expect women to first and foremost look after their home. In fact, many Indian women often do assume greater responsibility at home and spend, on average, five

times as much time than men on housework, household care, and other unpaid activities. As juggling between both home and company can be challenging, family support is considered a core success factor for Indian female entrepreneurs. The women who were interviewed, explained that their families "had a modern outlook" or they "understood her passion" and often mentioned, "I was lucky" — thereby implicitly suggesting that such supportive families are not the norm. One interviewee (19.03.2019, Mumbai) greatly appreciated the supportive role of her husband and quoted a prominent statement by Facebook's Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg — that the most important career choice that women make is who they choose to marry.

Child care

While some perceive entrepreneurial careers as difficult to reconcile with duties at home, they might, as one interview partner said (22.03.2019, Bangalore), be a good opportunity for women, allowing them to work with more flexible hours and space. However, when women entrepreneurs become mothers, they often encounter further difficulties holding them back. On the one hand, they are not entitled to maternity benefits. On the other, when women start working again, they need help and some women entrepreneurs live with or close to the grandparents, who can look after the kids. However, those who are less fortunate, struggle with a lack of options for childcare. Some women consider hiring nannies, but again, negative perceptions come into play, and interview partners pointed out that these mothers are seen as "selfish" and are made to feel guilty by their peers.

Safety in work and public spaces

Finally, safety at the workspace as well as during commutes between the office and home is an issue in India. Delhi, in particular — which is considered one of India's four global startup cities — continues to be notoriously poor in ensuring women's safety and has high rates of sexual crimes. Interview partners highlighted that women need to leave the office early, since public spaces are perceived as unsafe after a certain time in the evening. Moreover, the perception of danger reinforces social norms, which restrict women's mobility and thereby, their economic participation and freedom.

Conclusion

Harnessing the full potential of women entrepreneurs can promote innovation, economic growth, and job creation. This brief has described the current situation in India and identified causes that explain the low female entrepreneurship rate in the country. Overcoming these barriers is a matter of grit and passion of individual women themselves, as well as tackling structural factors in the external environment, which they alone have limited control over. Accordingly, this article arrives at five sets of recommendations, which will help women seize entrepreneurial opportunities and increase their chances of success.

First, the low women entrepreneurship rates are part of a broader gender gap in economic participation and opportunity. Thus, it is crucial to provide equal access to education and encourage women to use their acquired skills by joining the workforce. Policies aimed at including more women in senior and leadership positions are needed and will help women gain experience and knowledge, which in turn will enable them to start their own businesses.

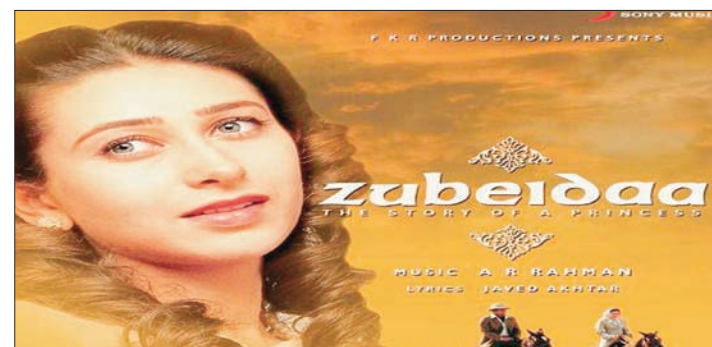
Second, awareness of unconscious biases and how they disadvantage women entrepreneurs needs to be raised. However, as changes in mindsets take time, women entrepreneurs need to deal with negative attitudes — as one interview partner (29.03.2019, Bangalore) expressed — by being conscious about the bias themselves, while finding ways to minimise it. Moreover, new role models have come up and shown that it is possible to "crack through conformity." Sharing their success stories in social and traditional media provides inspiration and proof that business can be a woman's world, too, and therefore strengthen the confidence of younger female entrepreneurs.

Third, women entrepreneurs in India need better access to finance and networks. Organisations such as NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform, Catalyst for Women Entrepreneurship, and the accelerator for women in tech initiated by Zone Startups India, provide dedicated support for women entrepreneurs. They connect them with relevant people in their industry and foster networking among the women entrepreneurs themselves, so they can learn from each other's experiences. Moreover, they assist in fundraising by teaching how to pitch and connecting them with potential investors. Studies indicate that policies aimed at reducing collateral constraints can improve equal access to finance. In the interviews, the requirement for a seed fund for women entrepreneurs was articulated.

Fourth, more inclusive, non-discriminatory, and safe work environments are needed to help retain qualified women, especially in the tech sector. Measures to improve the safety of public spaces are necessary, so women can commute between their homes and offices without the mental load of having to always worry about their security.

Fifth, women entrepreneurs need more support from their families and social circles to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions. Household and care duties should not be understood as women's sole responsibility. Furthermore, granting maternity benefits to women entrepreneurs, improving childcare, and cultivating social acceptance would help them combine their entrepreneurial pursuits and family responsibilities. (Courtesy: ORF)

Defying the male gaze: Shyam Benegal's lens deftly captured women's inner worlds



By: Shoma A Chatterji

Shyam Benegal, who celebrated his 89th birthday this month, is one of the most outstanding filmmakers in Indian Cinema. He has never claimed to be a "feminist" filmmaker but his films clearly show his regard, respect, and concern for women across caste, class, status, education. They defy Laura Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze" framed in 1975 in which she says that women in films are objects of titillation that sensualises their bodies without probing into their minds.

She stated that as the director was male and so were his technicians, with the audience majorly male, the women in their films were reduced to 'objects' and not 'subjects' of the films they featured in.

Benegal did not subscribe to this theory. Even when he made films centered on sex workers, he saw that they were strong 'subjects' and not 'objects'.

Benegal's films dabbled with women in socially sensitive contexts

Benegal's first feature film Ankur (1974) introduced the powerful FTII gold medalist Shabana Azmi. She is the wife of a deaf-mute farmer who is a Dalit wage-labourer played by Sadhu Meher, in the village zamindar (Anant Nag)'s home where his wife works as a housemaid.

The young zamindar manipulates an affair with the maid though he is a married man. Through these incidents, the film defines a sharp critique of casteism, sexual exploitation, silent abuse of the zamindar's wife played by Priya Tendulkar, and physical torture of the deaf-mute labourer.

• **Bhoomika** (The Role, 1977) was based on the autobiography titled 'Sangtye Aika' (Listen to this) penned by a famous Marathi-speaking actress of her time, Hansa Wadkar. For Bhoomika, Benegal based the film on Wadkar's autobiography and had actress Smita Patil play her on screen.

The film was much ahead of its time when the audiences could hardly be expected to digest a film with a woman protagonist who lived a very controversial life com-

pletely on her terms after a stormy and exploitative girlhood in which she was victimised and exploited by her own mother and her lover, financially and sexually.

It explores the invisible and little-known areas of female subjectivity. Although biographical in intent, Bhoomika's structural complexity seems to suggest that the journey of self-exploration undertaken by Usha (named Urvashi for her screen persona) portrayed by Patil when she was very fresh in film, is circular, full of snares, forever incomplete.

Portrayal of complex and conflicting themes with ease was his forte

• **Mandi** (Marketplace, 1983) is one of the very few films that revolve around an old brothel the existence of which stands threatened because of land-grabbers, including local politicians, and landlords who wished to grab the land on which the brothel stands without offering them any alternative space.

The brothel, located along the fringes of Hyderabad city, is headed by a madam portrayed by Shabana Azmi. Benegal has used burlesque as the mode to explore the dynamics of a whorehouse. He tempers the film with an air of black comedy, allowing for some crude voyeurism in keeping with the social environment in which the women live.

Mandi makes a delightful case of depicting the conflicting and complex aspects of prostitution.

• **Sooraj Ka Satvan Ghoda** (The Seventh Horse of the Sun, 1992): Based on Dharamvir Bharati's noted Hindi novel of the same name, this film is not only a classic example of the transcription/interpretation of literature on celluloid, but also, one of the few celluloid experiments with the lost art of storytelling. Characters of one story telescope and move freely in and out of the other two, growing with time, and subtly hinting at the changes in their lives, as seen from the point of view of Manek Mulla played by Rajit Kapoor who grows from a gawky adolescent with a big crush on young girl Jamuna in the neighbouring house to a young man in the second story till in the last episode, he is a fully grown

adult trying to cope with the pained and tortured and exploited young gypsy girl Sakti (Neena Gupta), but failing to come to a definite closure in any of the relationships.

Suggested adultery enriches the tapestry and texture of Sooraj Ka Satvan Ghoda. Of the three women who enter Manek Mulla's life, one is adulterous purely by suggestion, even before she becomes a widow. Jamuna, forced to marry an old widower, suddenly finds herself pregnant.

But can one rightfully call it adultery? The question is left hanging in mid-air, leaving you to find the right answer which would depend on your perspective on morals underlined by patriarchy.

• **Zubeidaa** (2001) is said to be Benegal's costliest film before Neetaji — comprising four female characters seems to suggest that the journey of self-exploration undertaken by Usha (named Urvashi for her screen persona) portrayed by Patil when she was very fresh in film, is circular, full of snares, forever incomplete.

Apartment from Zubeidaa (Karishma Kapoor), there is

Fayyazi (Surekha Sikri) her mother, who is not very educated and is Muslim. She is submissive and never raises her voice against her domineering and abusive husband Suleiman (Amrish Puri) even when he openly flaunts his keep, Rose Davenport (Lilette Dubej) in public. But Fayyazi takes a critical decision when Zubeidaa decides to marry her Hindu prince of Jodhpur, Hukam Singh (Manoj Bajpeyee) though he is already married to Mandira (Rekha) and has kids. But she does not permit Zubeidaa to take little Riyaz with her.

When Riyazi comes to meet Rose, she is a ghost of her former self, without work or identity because, post Independence, the Anglo Indian was gradually falling out of favour with the newly formed Indian Government. Mandira (Rekha), the original queen of Hukam Singh, is officially acknowledged by the Royal family, by the Royal family and by the subjects of Fatehpur.

She speaks impeccable English but is always bejewelled and costumed royally like any Indian princess of her time. Her name is abbreviated to the British-sounding Mandy, probably motivated by the sycophantic allegiance Indian royalty bore towards the British.

But she had affection for the much younger Zubeidaa and was pleasantly surprised by her free spirit, her living life completely on her own terms though it brought her not only unhappiness but, a lack of rootedness that finally led to her death in the plant crash. Was the crash a sabotage? Or, was it just a crash? Benegal leaves the question open. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Onion for beauty

By: Shahnaz Husain

Onions are something almost every household can't do without. But if you think onions are used only in kitchens and are good to be used only there, you are wrong.

Known for its strong flavour and sharp and pungent taste, Onion is a natural ingredient that is easily and widely available and can be added to your beauty regime instantly.

Onions are the most versatile vegetables of all in terms of their properties, taste, and health benefits. It is believed that every part of an onion has a healthy component.

The vegetable is a surprisingly rich source of skin-friendly acids and compounds. The infamous tearjerker might even help soften your skin if you apply it just right.

Onions have a fair share of vitamins and minerals like vitamin C, B6, potassium, etc. Onions have excellent quercetin content, a fantastic antioxidant to ward off free radicals. This quercetin is also found to inhibit inflammation in our bodies.

Onion juice, most popularly known as onion hair oil is an amazing home remedy for a lot of skin, and hair-related problems.

Onion hair oil is the extracted juice from an onion that is applied to the scalp and hair.

All you need to do is chop onions into smaller pieces and blend them in a mixer till they form a juice. Then apply it directly to the hair.

To add the skin, it would be better to add additional ingredients



like lemon or yogurt, for onion could sting a little. Onion juice makes your skin soft and supple.

Take a fresh, medium-sized onion, cut it into small pieces, and puree it.

Dip a cotton ball into it apply it all over your skin and leave it for 30 minutes. This will help in reducing the fine lines and wrinkles on the skin.

When applied directly on the skin, onions help in getting rid of toxins from the skin, therefore preventing the risk of any skin infections. It keeps the skin healthy and glowing.

Peel one onion and clean it well. Cut into several pieces and put it in the blender with water to turn it into a puree. Add the honey into a puree and mix them well.

Apply the mixture to the Skin. Spread it over spots and blemishes. Rinse with warm water after a few minutes.

Blemishes will gradually start to clear.

Mix onion juice and fresh yogurt in equal quantities. Massage your face with this mixture, using gentle circular movements for 10 to 15 minutes. Wash your face with a deep cleanser. You can try it once in a week for op-

timum results.

Take 1 bowl of onion skin and throw it in the blender. Add 1 tablespoon of rose water, and blend it to make a thick paste.

Once done, evenly apply on your skin skipping your eyes. Let it sit and dry for 10 minutes and wash it off with cold water.

You can also take one tablespoon of onion juice and add one tablespoon of olive oil or almond oil to it. Blend well and apply to your skin. After 20 minutes, wash off with cold water.

Cook slow-cooked oatmeal for 20 minutes, and then allow it to cool. Blend a peeled medium onion until it has a paste-like consistency.

Mix onion paste with oatmeal and 1 tablespoon honey. Apply an onion-oatmeal mask to your face and rinse off after 10 minutes.

To make an onion extract gel: Combine approximately 1 teaspoon of freshly squeezed onion juice with 1 tablespoon of pure aloe vera. Apply gel topically to the scar. Leave on for a few minutes, then rinse off and moisturize the area. (The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)

Japan lowers tsunami warning after a series of earthquakes but tells people to stay away from coast

Powerful earthquakes leave at least 48 dead; destroy buildings along Japan's western coast

WAJIMA, Jan 2: A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, leaving at least 48 people dead and damaging thousands of buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes.

Aftershocks continued to shake Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas a day after a magnitude 7.6 temblor slammed the area on Monday afternoon.

Forty-eight people were confirmed dead in Ishikawa, officials said.

Sixteen others were seriously injured, while damage to homes was so great that it could not immediately be assessed, they said.

Japanese media reports said tens of thousands of homes were destroyed. Government spokesperson Yoshimasa Hayashi said 17 people were seriously injured and gave a slightly lower death tally, while saying he was aware of the prefecture's tally.

Japan lowers tsunami warn-



ing after a series of earthquakes but tells people to stay away from coast.

Water, power and cellphone service were still down in some areas, and residents expressed sorrow about their destroyed homes and uncertain futures.

"It's not just that it's a mess. The wall has collapsed, and you can see through to the next room. I don't think we can live here anymore," Miki Kobayashi, an Ishikawa resident, said as she swept around her house.

Their house was also damaged in a 2007 quake, she said. Japan's military dispatched

1,000 soldiers to the disaster zones to join rescue efforts, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Tuesday.

"Saving lives is our priority and we are fighting a battle against time," he said. "It is critical that people trapped in homes get rescued immediately."

A quake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.6 shook the Ishikawa area as he was speaking.

Firefighters were able to bring a fire under control in Wajima city which had reddened the sky with embers and smoke.

Nuclear regulators said several nuclear plants in the region were operating normally. A major quake and tsunami in March 2011 caused three reactors to melt and release large amounts of radiation at a nuclear plant in northeastern Japan.

News videos showed rows of collapsed houses. Some wooden structures were flattened and cars were overturned. Half-sunken ships floated in bays where tsunami waves had rolled in, leaving a muddled coastline.

On Monday, the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, as well as for the northern island of Hokkaido.

The warning was downgraded several hours later, and all tsunami warnings were lifted as of early Tuesday. Waves measuring more than one meter (3 feet) hit some places.

The agency warned that more major quakes could hit the area over the next few days.

People who were evacuated from their homes huddled in auditoriums, schools and community centers. Bullet trains in the region were halted, but service was mostly restored by Tuesday afternoon. Sections of highways were closed.

Weather forecasters predicted rain, setting off worries about already crumbling buildings and infrastructure.

The region includes tourist spots famous for lacquerware and other traditional crafts, along with designated cultural heritage sites.

U.S. President Joe Biden said in a statement that his administration was "ready to provide any necessary assistance for the Japanese people."

Japan is frequently hit by earthquakes because of its location along the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin.

Over the last day, the nation has experienced about a hundred aftershocks. (AP)

Heavy Russian missile attacks hit Ukraine's 2 largest cities

KYIV (UKRAINE), Jan 2: Ukraine's two largest cities came under heavy Russian missile attacks on Tuesday, killing one person and injuring dozens.

Oleh Syniehubov, the governor of the Kharkiv region, said one person died and 41 were injured in Russian missile strikes that hit the centre of Kharkiv city and other areas. In Kyiv, the capital, five areas of the city were hit in the strikes and at least 12 people injured, according to mayor Vitali Klitschko.

The barrage of the cities continued Russia's escalated attacks on Ukraine in recent days that began on Friday with its largest single attack on Ukraine since the war started, in which at least 41 civilians were killed.

The following day, shelling of the Russian border city of Belgorod that Russian officials blamed on Ukraine killed more than two dozen people. Russia has struck back repeatedly since.

The attack on Belgorod was one of the deadliest to take place on Russian soil since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine started more than 22 months ago.

Russian officials said the death toll stood at 25 as of Monday, including five children.

Cities across western Russia regularly have come under drone attacks since May, although Ukrainian officials never acknowledge responsibility for strikes on Russian territory or the Crimean Peninsula.

"They want to intimidate us and create uncertainty within our country. We will intensify strikes. Not a single crime against our civilian population will go unpunished," Putin said Monday, describing the barrage of Belgorod as a "terrorist act."

Russia launched about 90 Shahed-type drones across Ukraine on Monday.

Putin accused Western nations of using Ukraine to try to "put Russia in its place." While vowing retribution, he insisted Russia would only target military infrastructure in Ukraine.

However, Ukraine reports civilian casualties from daily Russian attacks, which have hit apartment buildings, shopping centres and residential areas in small communities. (AP)



Russia launched about 90 Shahed-type drones across Ukraine on Monday.

Militants kill 6 barbers from Punjab in Pak's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

PESHAWAR, Jan 2: Unidentified militants shot and killed six barbers from Pakistan's Punjab province after abducting them from the restive northwest region, police said.

The incident took place in the Mir Ali area of the North Waziristan district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, ARY News reported on Tuesday.

The victims, who were from the Punjab province, ran barber shops in the local bazaar, police said, adding that they were abducted a day earlier and their bodies were recovered on Tuesday.

However, no one immediately claimed responsibility for the killings. Police have launched a search to arrest the culprits who shot and killed the six barbers.

The latest incident from North Waziristan came after five labourers were killed in the same province by unidentified militants while they were in their tents.

The gruesome act took place at a time when the province wrestled with a worsening law and order situation due to the rising terrorism at a time when the much-awaited countrywide elections were just over a month away.

The increase in terrorist acts — including attacks on military and police as well as targeted killings — is on the rise in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially the former tribal belt.

However, the region around Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan has been worst affected. (PTI)

Israel's SC overturns a key component of Netanyahu's polarizing judicial overhaul



JERUSALEM, Jan 2: Israel's Supreme Court struck down a key component of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's contentious judicial overhaul on Monday, delivering a landmark decision that could reopen the fissures in Israeli society that preceded the country's ongoing war against Hamas.

The planned overhaul sparked months of mass protests, threatened to trigger a constitutional crisis between the judicial and legislative branches of government, and rattled the cohesion of Israel's powerful military. Those divisions were largely put aside after Hamas militants carried out a bloody cross-border attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, triggering a war that has raged in Gaza for nearly three months. But Monday's court decision could reignite those tensions even while the country remains at war.

Justice Minister Yariv Levin, a Netanyahu ally and the architect of the overhaul, lambasted the court's decision, saying it demonstrated "the opposite of the spirit of unity required these days for the success of our soldiers on the front."

Israeli parliament takes first major step in Netanyahu's contentious overhaul, deepening divisions.

The ruling "will not discourage us," Levin said without indicating whether the government would try to revive his plan in the short term. "As the campaigns are continuing on different fronts, we will continue to act with restraint and responsibility," he said.

In Monday's decision, the court narrowly voted to overturn a law passed in July that prevents judges from striking down government decisions they deem "unreasonable." Opponents had argued that Netanyahu's efforts to remove the

standard of reasonability opens the door to corruption and improper appointments of unqualified cronies to important positions. The law was the first in a planned overhaul of the Israeli justice system. The overhaul was put on hold after Hamas militants carried out their Oct. 7 attack, killing some 1,200 people and kidnapping 240 others. Israel immediately declared war, and is pressing forward with an offensive that Palestinian health officials say has killed nearly 22,000 people in Gaza.

In an 8-7 decision, the Supreme Court justices struck down the law because of the "severe and unprecedented harm to the core character of the State of Israel as a democratic country." The justices also ruled 12-3 that they had the authority to overturn so-called "Basic Laws," major pieces of legislation that serve as a sort of constitution for Israel.

It was a significant blow to Netanyahu and his hard-line allies, who claimed the national legislature, not the high court, should have the final word over the legality of legislation and other key decisions. The justices said the Knesset, or parliament, does not have "omnipotent" power. Netanyahu's government could decide to ignore Monday's ruling, setting the stage for a constitutional showdown over which branch of government has ultimate authority.

The court issued its decision because its outgoing president, Esther Hayut, is retiring, and Monday was her last day on the job.

Netanyahu and his allies announced their sweeping plan to reshape the judiciary shortly after taking office a year ago. It calls for curbing the power of the judges, including by limiting the Supreme Court's ability to review parliamentary decisions and changing the way judges are appointed. Supporters said the changes aim to strengthen democracy by circumscribing the authority of unelected judges and turning over more powers to elected officials. But opponents see the overhaul as a power grab by Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption charges, and an assault on a key watchdog. (AP)

SKorean oppn leader is stabbed in the neck by a knife-wielding man

SEOUL, Jan 2: South Korea's tough-speaking liberal opposition leader, Lee Jae-myung, was stabbed in the neck by an unidentified knife-wielding man during a visit on Tuesday to the southeastern city of Busan, police said.

Lee, 59, the head of the main opposition Democratic Party, was airlifted to a Seoul hospital for surgery after receiving emergency treatment in Busan. Police and emergency officials earlier said he was conscious after the attack and wasn't in critical condition, but his exact status was unknown.

The attack happened as Lee walked through a crowd of journalists and others after a tour of the proposed site of a new airport in Busan. The attacker approached Lee, saying he wanted to get his autograph, and then stabbed him in the left side of his neck with a knife, senior Busan police officer Sohn Jae-han said in a televised briefing.

Sohn said Democratic Party officials near Lee quickly subdued the attacker before police officers detained him. He said 41 police officers had been deployed to the area for crowd control and traffic management.

TV footage showed Lee, his eyes closed, lying on the ground as a person pressed a handkerchief to his neck to stop the bleeding. A witness, Jin Jeong-hwa, told YTN television that Lee had bled a lot. Videos circulated

on social media showed the suspect, wearing a paper crown reading "I'm Lee Jae-myung," being chased and tackled by several people, apparently including plainclothes police officers.

Sohn said the suspect, aged about 67, told investigators that he bought the 18-centimetre knife online. He said police are investigating the motive for the attack.

Lee's Democratic Party called the incident "a terrorist attack on Lee and a serious threat to democracy." It called on police to make a through, swift investigation.

At Pusan National University Hospital in Busan, where Lee received emergency treatment, party spokesperson Kwon Chil-seung said Lee's jugular vein was believed to have been damaged and there was concern over the large amount of bleeding. Hospital officials would not comment on Lee's condition.

President Yoon Suk Yeol expressed deep concern about Lee's health and ordered authorities to investigate the attack, saying such violence would not be tolerated, according to Yoon's office.

Lee lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by 0.7 percentage point, the narrowest margin ever recorded in a South Korean presidential election. Since his election defeat, Lee has



been a harsh critic of Yoon's major policies. Last year, Lee held a 24-day hunger strike to protest what he called Yoon's failure to oppose Japan's release of treated radioactive wastewater from its crippled Fukushima nuclear power, his handling of the country's post-pandemic economy and his hard-line policies on North Korea.

Lee faces an array of corruption allegations, including that he provided unlawful favors to a private investor who reaped huge profits from a dubious housing project in the city of Seongnam, where Lee was mayor for a decade until 2018. Lee has denied legal wrongdoing and accused Yoon's government of pursuing a political vendetta.

Last September, a South Korean court denied an arrest warrant for Lee over the allegations, but Lee report-

edly faces a continuing investigation by prosecutors. The court hearing was arranged after the opposition-controlled parliament voted to lift Lee's immunity to arrest, a move that reflected growing divisions within his Democratic Party over his legal troubles.

Lee, who also served as governor of Gyeonggi province, which surrounds Seoul, is known for his outspoken style. His supporters see him as an anti-elitist hero who could reform establishment politics, eradicate corruption and solve growing economic inequality. Critics view him as a dangerous populist who relies on stoking divisions and demonising his conservative opponents.

Lee is also known for his self-made success story. He worked in a factory as a boy, an experience that left him with an arm disability. He later made his own way through school and passed the country's notoriously difficult bar exam to work as a human rights lawyer.

Lee joined a predecessor of the Democratic Party in 2005. Previously a political outsider, he rose quickly amid public anger over an explosive 2016-17 corruption scandal that eventually led to the ouster of then-President Park Geun-hye, a conservative. (AP)

Vivek Ramaswamy reiterates pledge to withdraw from state ballots that removed Donald Trump's name

WASHINGTON, Jan 2: Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy has urged his rivals to follow him and withdraw from the ballots of the US states of Maine and Colorado which disqualified the party's frontrunner Donald Trump from contesting this year's race for the White House.

Maine and Colorado disqualified the 77-year-old former president from the presidency this year in the states because of his role in the attack on the US Capitol in 2021. Trump's disqualification was based on the Constitu-

tion's 14th Amendment, which says officials who take an oath to support the US Constitution are banned from future office.

November 5, 2024 Presidential election, is currently the frontrunner among the Republican Party candidates.

"If (the states) going to be have in that unconstitutional way, the Republican candidates can actually stop this form of election interference," Ramaswamy was quoted as saying by The Hill newspaper.

"I said I would remove my name from those ballots, and I called on the other Republi-



IMF updated the economic projections and data for Pak, warning that the country faces challenging outlook for the new year 2024

Pakistan likely to get USD 700 million from IMF as next tranche of bailout this month: Report

ISLAMABAD, Jan 2: Cash-strapped Pakistan is expected to get USD 700 million as the next tranche of the bailout from the IMF as the Executive Board of the global lender meets on January 11, according to a media report on Tuesday.

The board of the Washington-based International Monetary Fund is set to deliberate and potentially grant final approval for the disbursement of the next USD 700 million tranche for Pakistan under the existing USD 3 billion Stand-By Arrangement (SBA), the Dawn newspaper reported.

According to the IMF Executive Board calendar, upcoming meetings are scheduled for January 8, 10 and 11, with Pakistan's case slated for discussion on the last day.

The current IMF programme, amounting to USD 3 billion, is expected to conclude in the second week of April, with approximately USD 1.8 billion remaining undis-



bursed. The initial tranche of USD 1.2 billion was released in July. In November 2023, a Staff-Level Agreement was reached between the IMF staff and Pakistani authorities regarding the first review under Pakistan's SBA.

This agreement is contingent upon approval by the IMF's Executive Board. Despite expectations for board approval in December, it seems the process has been scheduled for January 11.

This development holds significance for Pakistan's economic landscape as the disbursement of the next tranche could provide much-

needed financial support. The outcome of the upcoming meeting will shape the trajectory of the ongoing economic cooperation between Pakistan and the IMF.

"Discussions between the IMF staff and the authorities on policies to strengthen macroeconomic stability in the coming year continue, and important progress has been made over the FY23 budget," the IMF said in another statement.

The IMF also updated economic projections and data for Pakistan, depicting a challenging outlook for the country in 2024. According to the IMF's latest figures, the projected real GDP for the year is anticipated to experience a contraction of 0.5 per cent, indicating potential economic headwinds.

Simultaneously, the projection for the Consumer Price Index in 2024 shows a significant increase. This suggests a substantial rise in inflation, posing additional challenges for the country's economic

stability. Despite a surprise jump of USD 853 million in the reserves of the State Bank in the week ending on December 22, 2023, Pakistan is keen to receive the second tranche which shows Islamabad has fulfilled the IMF's demands for economic recovery.

The Ministry of Finance has recently announced that the July-December revenue collection target of Rs 4.425 trillion, given by the IMF, has successfully been surpassed by Rs 43 billion. After securing the second tranche of USD 700 million for this month, Pakistan is more likely to receive the remaining amount in March under the USD 3 billion SBA.

However, Caretaker Finance Minister Shamshad Akhtar had already informed the nation that the country needs to enter a new agreement with the IMF to revive the economy.

There is no hope that Pakistan could say goodbye to the lending

agency. Despite tough conditions, Pakistan is still facing very high inflation which clocked in at 29.7 per cent for December from 29.2 per cent in the preceding month.

The latest data reveals that Pakistan has engaged in 24 arrangements with the IMF since becoming a member on July 11, 1950. This underscores the country's historical reliance on IMF support to address economic challenges, according to Dawn.

Pakistan has been facing balance-of-payments-related challenges, driven by a burgeoning trade deficit, every few years due to which the country has had 23 arrangements with the IMF over the past few decades.

The current programme with the lender was agreed to in 2019 when the country faced another balance-of-payments crisis. Since then, the IMF has disbursed about \$4 billion to Pakistan, with a balance of \$2.6 billion remaining. (PTI)

4 shot down in Thoubal, CM promises action

Victims shot down by PLA cadres over drug money

IMPHAL, Jan 2: The situation in the minority-dominated Lilong Chingjao area in Manipur's Thoubal district, where four villagers were gunned down by cadres of the banned People's Liberation Army, remained calm on Tuesday as additional security forces were deployed there, officials said.



The toll in the incident increased to four after one more person succumbed to injuries, while two other critically injured persons were undergoing treatment at the ICU of an Imphal-based hospital, they said.

The deceased, whose bodies were brought to Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal for post-mortem examination, were identified as Md Daulat (30), M Sirajuddin (50), Md Azad Khan (40) and Md Hussain (22), the officials said.

collected through illegal drug trade, the officials said. Giving details of the incident, the officials said that some cadres of the banned People's Liberation Army (PLA) arrived at the house of one person, who has several narcotics cases pending against him.

that the gunmen belonged to the outfit and they were holding an internal inquiry into the incident. Both the organisations are banned under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

After the incident, police held an inter-faith meeting in the presence of civil society leaders and Lilong MLA Abdul Nasir to ease tension in the area.

Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh also assured that the culprits will be arrested and punished as per the law. The chief minister visited Raj Medicity hospital where the injured were being treated.

Additional security forces have been deployed in the area and vehicular patrolling has been increased to prevent any untoward incident, he said.

The chief minister later visited the families of the deceased to "offer my heartfelt condolences

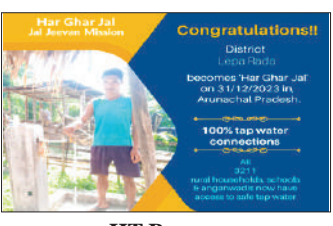
and express my sympathy during this difficult time". "We stand united as a community and our government is committed to ensuring swift and thorough investigations to bring those responsible to justice," he posted on X.

Residents of Lilong Chingjao submitted a memorandum to the chief minister with a list of demands. They demanded that the investigation into the incident be handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and ex-gratia payment of ₹ 20 lakh each to the families of the deceased and ₹ 2 lakh to the injured.

Meanwhile, with curfew being imposed in five districts of Imphal Valley in view of the "prevailing law and order situation", a few vehicles were seen plying roads as most commercial establishments remained closed. After the attack, enraged locals set fire to four vehicles in which the attackers had arrived. Senior Superintendent of Police of Thoubal Rakesh Balwal was among the first to reach the spot after the incident.

Following the violence, curfew was imposed in Thoubal, Imphal East and Imphal West, Kachhing and Bishnupur districts. (PTI)

Lepa Rada district achieves 100% tap water connection under JJM



GUWAHATI, Jan 2: Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday congratulated the Lepa Rada district administration for successfully providing functional household tap connection (FHTC) in every household of the district. The piped water connections have been provided under the central scheme, Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

The chief minister also expressed his satisfaction over the state achieving 98.21 per cent of providing functional household tap connection under JJM.

Pema Khandu said through a post on X, "Heartiest congratulations to Team Lepa Rada District Administration for ensuring 100 per cent Functional Household Tap Connection. It's such exemplary dedication of all stakeholders, which has helped 9 districts to get Har Ghar Jal status. I'm proud of the fact that today FHTC coverage in my State is 98.21 per cent."

Fresh gunfight breaks out in Manipur's Moreh



IMPHAL/CHURACHANDPUR, Jan 2: A fresh gunfight broke out on Tuesday morning between security forces and suspected militants at Moreh town in Manipur's Tengnoupal district, police said.

The gunbattle started in Chavangphai area, around 107 km from the state capital Imphal this morning, after two persons, during a search operation, were picked up for allegedly being involved in an attack on police personnel a day before, a senior officer said, adding that local women tried to secure the release of the two persons.

Security personnel retaliated after suspected militants opened fire at them, he said.

"The gunfight is still going on," the officer told PTI. Four police personnel and a Border Security Force constable, who were injured during a gunfight be-

tween militants and security personnel on Monday, were airlifted from Moreh town to the state capital for better treatment, another officer said.

The injured personnel are now being treated at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal, an official of the hospital said.

Moreh town near the India-Myanmar border has been witnessing gunfights between security forces and militants since December 30 last year.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh had recently expressed concern over the attacks on state forces and termed these as a 'serious national security threat' and 'an attempt to destabilise Manipur'.

Singh had also said a delegation would soon leave for Delhi to meet representatives of the Centre and apprise them of the developing situation. (PTI)

IIT-Guwahati student found dead in hotel room

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: A fourth-year female student of the Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati was found dead in a hotel here, a police officer said on Tuesday. The deceased, who hailed from Telangana, and three of her batchmates came to Guwahati, which is about 25 kilometres from the institute on December 31 evening to celebrate the New Year.

doctors pronounced her as brought dead. "We have launched our investigation and are interrogating all her friends. Other people are also being questioned," the officer said. The deceased has been identified as Aishwarya Pulluri, a B.Tech fourth-year student in the electronics and communications department. Besides her, another female and two male students had checked-in in the hotel.

"They had booked two rooms in a hotel through online mode. Post midnight, they reached the hotel for check-in. According to the hotel staff, they were inebriated. We are investigating that part," the officer added.

Meanwhile, IIT-Guwahati issued a statement expressing condolences to the family of the student.

The next morning, the girl was found unconscious in the wash-room by her friend, who was staying in the same room. She was rushed to the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital where

"It is with deep regret that IIT Guwahati shares the unfortunate news of the death of a student outside the campus on December 31, 2023. The police are actively investigating the circumstances surrounding this unfortunate incident," it added. (PTI)

4 houses, granary gutted in fire in East Siang district



ITANAGAR, Jan 2: At least four houses and a granary were gutted in a fire at Sido village in East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, police said.

One person suffered a minor injury in the incident on Monday, Ruksin Police Station's officer-in-charge, C Joseph said.

Property worth lakhs of rupees as well as important documents and food grains were reduced to ashes in the fire, he said.

The blaze, which was brought under control by fire tenders and locals, was caused by an electrical short-circuit, the police officer said.

Foreign mercenaries likely involved in attacks on security forces: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, Jan 2: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday claimed that foreign mercenaries from Myanmar are likely to have been involved in the attacks on security forces in Moreh town.



Singh, after visiting the injured security personnel who are undergoing treatment at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences here, said terrorists were "using sophisticated weapons" and the government is countering them.

Four police personnel and a Border Security Force constable, who were injured during a gunfight between militants and security personnel on Monday, were airlifted from Moreh town to the state capital for better treatment, an official said.

"Search and combing operations are on and reinforcement has been sent. We are having some doubts of the involvement of foreign mercenaries from Myanmar side...We will take necessary measures to counter such terrorist activities," Singh said.

The state government is "in touch with the Centre and operations are being conducted jointly by state and central security forces", he said.

Moreh near the India-Myanmar border has been witnessing gunfights between security forces and militants since December 30 last year.

A fresh gunbattle broke out on Tuesday morning between security forces and suspected militants at the border town in Tengnoupal district, police added. (PTI)

Training on child mental health & protection begins at Biswanath



HT Correspondent BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 2: A training programme for nodal teachers of secondary level on 'Child Mental Health and Protection' began at the Gingia Mahabir HS School in Biswanath Chariali on Tuesday.

The three-day training programme, which has been organized by the Axom Sarba Shiksha Abhijan, was inaugurated by Tankeswar Bora, principal of the Gingia Mahabir HS School, Bedabrat Bora. The programme will conclude on

January 4. A total of 90 nodal teachers from various higher secondary, junior colleges and high schools of Biswanath district attended the training programme.

District programme officer conducted the proceedings of the inaugural session and explained the objectives of the programme. Ritushmita Saikia and Meghali Bhuyan imparted the training session as master trainers while Joonmani Mahanta and Barun Bhagawati assisted in imparting training as resource persons.

CBI files two charge sheets against 5 in missing students' case

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The CBI has filed two separate charge sheets against five accused in connection with the case of two missing Manipuri students who were feared killed during ethnic violence in the state, officials said Tuesday.

wards Bishnupur side and from there to Thas View Point Area on old Cachar Road. They were intercepted by a group of people and held captive by the five charge-sheeted accused who forcibly put them in a vehicle and took them to an undisclosed location where they were 'suspected to have been killed', the CBI spokesperson said.

phel Police on July 8 and July 19, respectively. The father of the girl had alleged that his daughter may have been kidnapped with the intention of getting married, while the boy's father had apprehended the kidnapping of his son.

Photos purportedly showing their bodies surfaced on September 25, 2023, leading to violent protests, mainly by students. The CBI, however, is yet to find the bodies. The agency filed the charge sheets in the interconnected cases before a designated special court in Kamrup, giving a sequence of events before they went missing.

Among the five charge-sheeted accused, Paolunmgang was arrested from Pune, Paominlun Haokip, Smalsawm Haokip and Lhingneichong Baitekuki were nabbed from the Henglep area of Churachandpur district and Nohgin Baitekuki remains on the run.

"The CBI has filed charge sheets in both cases against the five accused. Further investigation is continuing," the spokesperson said.

The agency said on July 6, 2023, the boy went to the tuition class of the girl and, after picking her up on his bike, proceeded to-

The parents of the missing teenagers had filed FIRs with the Imphal Police and Lam-

More than 180 people lost their lives, and several hundred were injured in ethnic clashes that broke out in Manipur on May 3, after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. (PTI)

744 infiltrators, including 112 Rohingyas arrested along Indo-Bangla border

AGARTALA, Jan 2: A total of 744 people, including 112 Rohingyas, were arrested by the Border Security Force (BSF) while they were trying to illegally enter India from Bangladesh through the Indo-Bangla international border in Tripura, an official said on Tuesday.

He said BSF personnel have also seized contraband items such as banned cough syrup, cannabis, Yaba tablets and brown sugar worth a total of Rs 41.82 crore.

This number was the highest in the last three years, with the BSF Tripura Frontier nabbing 369 infiltrators in 2022 and 208 in 2021, he said.

Besides, 4 kg of gold was also seized, the officer said.

"In 2023, the BSF arrested a total of 744 infiltrators and of them, 112 are Rohingyas, 337 are Bangladeshis and 295 are Indians. This was the highest number of arrests of infiltrators in the frontier state in the last three years," he said.

Over the years, the BSF Tripura Frontier has performed multifarious responsibilities in fighting insurgency, maintaining the border's sanctity and preventing all kinds of trans-border crimes while working under adverse climatic conditions in remote and inhospitable terrain, he added.

151 Myanmar soldiers sent back from Mizoram

AIZWAL, Jan 2: Altogether 151 Myanmar soldiers, who had fled during armed clashes with an ethnic insurgent group in the neighbouring country and came to Mizoram, were sent back on Tuesday, an Assam Rifles officer said.

The soldiers were airlifted by the Myanmar Air Force from Aizawl, the capital of the northeastern state. They had crossed the Indian border and entered southern Mizoram's Lawngtlai district on December 29 after their camps near the international borders were overrun by fighters of the Arakan Army, an insurgent group, the officer said.

The Myanmar army personnel who fled with their arms approached the Assam Rifles at Tuisentlang. They had been in the custody of the para-military force at Parva near the international border since then. (PTI)

PHCs in Meghalaya upgraded with solar power

Meghalaya govt collaborated with GHE to provide solar energy in health centres

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: Four public health centres in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills district will no longer have to depend on the grid for uninterrupted electricity supply as they have been upgraded with solar power.



These public health centres are the Jongksha PHC, Wahsherkhmot PHC, Mawkynrew PHC and Jatah PHC. The state government has collaborated with the Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE) to provide solar power in these four public health centres. Apart from this, these health centres have also been up graded with advanced medical equipment to help in the diagnosis and treat-

ment of patients. "Before the start of this #NewYear, 4 more PHCs have been upgraded with solar power and various medical equipment in different districts of Khasi Hills through a collaboration between State Government and

@GHE_Connect", said Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma on X.

In 2021, the GHE through its social impact arm, the RHYTHM had announced to collaborate with Asian direct selling company, QNET to provide solar power to people in remote areas of the state Along with improving the infrastructure of healthcare institution in these areas.

GHE and QNET had targeted to provide power connection in 470 villages and solar power in primary healthcare centres through the project 'Empowering North-East India'. The project aimed to cater to the power needs of 23,000 residents in the state

Assam Public Service Commission
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022.

No. 44PSC/CON/Exam-06/2023-2024 Dated Guwahati the 2nd January, 2024

NOTIFICATION

The Assam Public Service Commission hereby declares today, the 2nd January, 2024, the result of the Screening Test (OMR based) for the post of **Research Assistant in Planning Services under Transformation and Development Department** (Advt. No. 03/2023 Dtd. 23/03/2023) conducted by the Commission on 27/08/2023. Candidates bearing the following Roll Numbers will have to appear for Interview. The date(s) of Interview will be notified shortly.

Roll Numbers of candidates to be appeared in the Interview are stated below (horizontally):

10245	10280	20072	20133	20213	20221	20482	20791	20843	20944
20972	21132	21144	21307	21338	21518	21634	21786	21805	21834
21873	22008	22137	22156	22248	22249	30079	30122	30127	40031
40060	40153	40168	40393	40423	40641	50004	50124	50253	60044
60046	60053	60077	60084	60230	60260	60267	60270	60324	60332
60383	60462	60586	60731	60761	60801	60905	61121	61198	61280
61393	61514	61522	61620	61639	61647	61669	61774	61811	61903
62015	62061	62101	62178	62228	62252	62304	62346	62427	62523
62535	62567	62660	62728	62741	62954	62955	62986	63071	63128
63192	63449	63470	63501	63505	63524	63617	63670	63732	63752
63786	63839	63866	63878	63882	63898	64032	64054	64118	64128
64287	64418	64445	64465	64515	64564	64571	64577	64981	65058
65128	65137	65172	65217	65330	65340	65341	65349		

N.B.: The Commission will not be responsible for any typing/printing mistakes.

Sd/-
Principal Controller of Examinations,
Assam Public Service Commission,
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-82

Janasanyog/D/15705/23/3-Jan-24

PM Modi rolls out new projects, hails TN for its cultural leadership; bets on nationalism

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI, Jan 2: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday inaugurated a string of projects here and laid foundation stone for new initiatives, in all worth ₹ 20,140 crore.

The Prime Minister hailed Tamil Nadu for its cultural inspiration and by praising DMDK late leader Vijayakanth rooted for nationalism while Chief Minister M K Stalin championed the social justice-led Dravidian model of governance which, among other goals, is also aimed at taking education to all.

Against the background of recent rains, floods and consequent damage and loss of lives in Chennai and southern Tamil Nadu, while PM Modi said the Centre was providing all possible support, Stalin urged him to declare the heavy showers-deluge as 'severe natural disasters' and release appropriate funds to the state from National Disaster Relief Fund. Modi laid the foundation stone, inaugurated and dedicated to the nation, 20 projects related to air and seaports, railway, highway, petroleum and natural gas, atomic energy and higher education in the state from this central Tamil Nadu district, located about 300 km from state capital Chennai. Earlier, he attended the 38th Convocation of Bharathidasan University here.

The projects, the Prime Minister said will strengthen Tamil Nadu's progress and boost ease of travel and create thousands of employment opportunities.

Stalin said the state governments, being close to the people, have the duty of providing students access to



education, health care amenities and all other necessary assistance to people. Hence, reiterating a request for Central funding to tackle the aftermath of floods and rains and establishing state rights is only "the demand of the people and not a political rhetoric", the CM asserted.

Inaugurating the new terminal building at Tiruchirappalli International Airport, the PM said, "our endeavour is to consistently expand the cultural inspiration derived from Tamil Nadu in the development of the country."

The 'revered Sengol' has been installed in the new Parliament building in Delhi. It is an inspiration driven from the model of good governance given by Tamil culture to the whole country.

The 'Azadi Ka Amrit Kaal' for the next 25 years will play a crucial role in India becoming a developed nation, which has both economic and cultural dimensions, the PM

added. India is proud of the vibrant culture and heritage of Tamil Nadu, he said.

While taking part in public events in the past, Modi, who had spoken in English on most occasions on Tuesday spoke in Hindi as well. In his address, the Prime Minister referred to last month's rains and floods in the state and the consequent losses and said he was deeply moved by the condition of affected families.

"The central government stands with people of Tamil Nadu in this time of crisis. We are providing every possible support to the state government."

Modi praised Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) leader Vijayakanth who passed away days ago as a 'captain' in both cinema and politics.

As a leader, in politics, Vijayakanth always placed national interest above everything, the PM

said. "I pay my tributes to him, I also express my condolences to his family and admirers."

He also remembered eminent farm scientist M S Swaminathan of Tamil Nadu, who passed away recently and said he ensured food security for the country.

Today, the PM said, the nation was making unprecedented investment in physical and social infrastructure and it is among the top 5 economies, emerging as a new hope. TN is becoming a very significant brand ambassador for 'Make In India,' he added.

The Prime Minister reiterated the Central government's approach where the development of the state reflects in the development of the nation.

He said more than 40 Union ministers toured Tamil Nadu more than 400 times in the past year. "India will progress with the progress of Tamil Nadu", he said and underscored on connectivity, which is the route for development giving a boost to businesses and makes people's lives easier.

The new terminal building here will increase capacity by three times and strengthen connectivity with East Asia, Middle East and create new opportunities for investments, businesses, education, health and tourism.

He expressed satisfaction that the airport with its strengthened infrastructure will introduce the world to Tamil culture and heritage.

In his Bharathidasan University convocation address, he said one of

the factors behind the rise of India today, is the 'rise of our universities.'

India is setting records in economic growth as the fastest growing major economy. At the same time, universities are also entering global rankings in record numbers.

Bharat and civilisation have always been centred around knowledge. Ancient universities such as Nalanda and Vikramashila are well known and there are references to Kanchipuram housing great varieties and Madurai serving as a centre of learning, he said.

The origin of modern day concept of convocation could be traced to the Sangam era wherein literary works were submitted for scrutiny for recognition.

On the new railway projects, PM Modi said they will promote industry and electricity generation. The new road projects will connect important centers of faith and tourism like Srirangam, Chidambaram, Rameshwaram and Vellore.

The projects inaugurated include electrification of Tiruchirappalli-Manamadurai-Virudunagar railway line. The PM said that in the decade before 2014, states were given ₹ 30 lakh crore; whereas in the last 10 years states were given ₹ 120 lakh crore. Tamil Nadu too got 2.5 times more in this period as compared to the 10 years preceding 2014.

For national highway construction, more than three times expenditure was done in the state and 2.5 times more money was spent in the railways sector in the state, he said. (PTI)

Jairam Ramesh writes to CEC, seeks time for INDIA bloc team to put forward view on VVPATS

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has written to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, requesting that a team of INDIA bloc leaders are provided an opportunity to meet him and his colleagues to put forward their point of view on VVPATS. In his letter to Kumar, Ramesh said that on December 20, 2023, INDIA parties' leaders had requested for an appointment with the ECI to "discuss and provide suggestions on the use of VVPATS" based on a resolution passed at meeting of leaders of the bloc held the previous day.

"We have been trying to meet with the ECI to hand over a copy of this resolution and have a discussion but have not been successful so far in doing so," he said.

"I once again make a request for an opportunity for a 3-4 member team of INDIA party leaders to meet with you and your colleagues and take a few minutes to put forward our point of view on VVPATS," Ramesh said.

In his letter dated December 30, 2023, the Congress general secretary also pointed out that on August 9, 2023 a memorandum had been submitted to the ECI on EVM-related concerns of INDIA parties. This was supported with several requests on August 9, 10, 16, 18 and 23 last year for a meeting of an INDIA parties' delegation with the ECI, he said.

"On August 23, 2023 ECI issued a clarification to our counsel on the memorandum. This clarification was generic in nature and (i) directed us to refer to the standard FAQs on EVMs available on ECI website; (ii) explained the legal

backing for EVMs through Section 61A of the Representation of Peoples' Act, 1951; (iii) summarised judgments of High Courts and the Supreme Court on issue of EVMs; (iv) provided a chart of assembly and parliamentary election results since 2004 to show that the political party winning the maximum number of seats changed several times," Ramesh said. However, there was no meeting or hearing provided to INDIA parties' delegation despite repeated requests, he said. On October 2, 2023 a follow-up representation was sent by us through counsel, Ramesh pointed out. The representation raised specific concerns which remained unaddressed in the ECI's clarification of August 23, 2023, he said and added that no response was received on the same.

Ramesh's letter comes days after the opposition INDIA bloc asserted that there are many doubts about the integrity of the functioning of electronic voting machines and suggested that VVPAT slips be handed over to voters and its 100 per cent counting done later.

Leaders of several opposition parties had deliberated on the issue of EVMs, especially after the recent victories of the BJP in the state assembly elections, and felt that the entire opposition coalition should raise the matter unitedly before the people. According to the Election Commission, mandatory verification of printed voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) slips of five randomly selected polling stations of each assembly constituency or each assembly segment is done in case of election to the House of the People before declaring results. (PTI)

Privileges panel to meet on Jan 12 on issue of suspension of opposition members

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The Privileges Committee of Lok Sabha will meet next week to examine the issue of suspension of three Congress members from the House during the Winter Session for unruly behaviour.

The Committee, chaired by BJP member Sunil Kumar Singh, at its meeting on January 12 will record oral evidence of Congress members K Jayakumar, Abdul Khaleque and Vijayakumar Vijay Vasanth, who were suspended for creating "grave disorder in the House" on December 18.

During the Winter Session of Parliament, 100 Lok Sabha members from the opposition ranks were suspended from the Lower House for unruly behaviour after they brought placards and raised slogans demanding a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah on the issue of breach of Parliament security.

While 97 members were suspended for the remainder of the Winter Session, the issue of Singh, Khaleque and Vijayakumar, who had reached the presiding officer's chair, was referred to the Privileges Committee.



The suspension of the three members will continue till the Committee submits its report to the Lok Sabha Speaker.

In Rajya Sabha also, 46 members were suspended during the Winter Session including 11 members whose case was referred to the Privileges Committee of the Upper House. The Privileges Committee of Rajya Sabha is chaired by Deputy Chairman Harivansh and is yet to convene a meeting to examine the case of

suspension of 11 members referred to it. Opposition members Jebi Mather Hisham, L Hanumanthaiah, Neeraj Dangi, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar, G C Chandrasekhar (all Congress); Binoy Viswam and Sandosh Kumar P. (both CPI), M Mohamed Abdulla (DMK), John Brittas and A A Rahim (both CPI-M) were suspended till the House "has the benefit of the Report of the Committee of Privilege". (PTI)

Army probing civilian deaths in Poonch, those found guilty will definitely be punished: Official

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The Army is conducting an internal probe into the death of three civilians in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir and those found guilty will "definitely be punished," a senior government functionary said on Tuesday.

Three civilians, aged between 27 and 42, were found dead on December 22 after they were allegedly picked up by the Army for questioning in connection with a terrorist ambush a day before that left four soldiers dead in Poonch district.

The deaths sparked public outrage, prompting the authorities to announce compensation for their families.

"The Army is conducting its own investigation. If anyone is found to be guilty, they will definitely be punished. But such an investigation is not to be disclosed publicly. Let the Army do its work. There is no need to prejudice anything or make any comment on the Army," the official said.

The official said the Army itself said

that it would conduct the investigation and hence everyone should have faith in it.

On December 27, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said he had full faith in the Indian Army that it will wipe out terrorism from Jammu and Kashmir, even as he urged the troops to not make such "mistakes" that may hurt the citizens of the country.

It is the responsibility of the troops to win the hearts of the people while performing their duty towards the security of the nation, Singh had said.

Soon after the three civilians were found dead and a few others were injured, video clips purportedly showing their torture went viral on social media.

The Army has initiated a Court of Inquiry and police lodged a murder case against unidentified persons.

"...after terror incident at DKG (Dhera Ki Gali) on December 21, Army troops carried out searches in Topa Peer in Buffiaz for the terrorists who escaped after the attack. During

searches, Army troops detained a few local youths for questioning, reportedly three such youths namely Safer Ahmad, Mohd Showkat and Shabir Ahmad succumbed to injuries.

"As such, cognizable offence under section 302 IPC is made out. On this information instant case stands registered. As the instant case is of special nature...special report will be submitted separately as investigation is taken up," an official said quoting the FIR.

A brigadier-level officer was shifted and action was being taken against three officers of 48 Rashtriya Rifles as the Army took serious note of the allegation of custodial torture.

The counter-insurgency unit of the Army was in the news for wrong reasons in October last year as well when one of its major-rank officers opened fire on his colleagues and exploded grenades inside the Neeli post camp near Thanamandi, leaving five personnel including three officers injured. (PTI)

Criminal always a criminal until acquitted by court: CM Siddaramaiah on arrest of kar sevaks of '92

VIJAYAPURA, Jan 2: With the recent arrest of two BJP activists who had taken part in the Ayodhya agitation back in 1992 snowballing into a controversy, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said a criminal is always a criminal unless acquitted by a court of law.

Hitting out at Union Minister of Coal and Mines Pralhad Joshi for his jibe at the government, Siddaramaiah said Joshi does not know the law and is talking politically and not legally.

"A criminal is always a criminal unless acquitted by the court. Does crime vanish with time? Does Pralhad Joshi know the law? Crime does not fade away with time. It remains as it is," Siddaramaiah told reporters.

He was reacting to a question on the recent arrest of two 'kar sevaks' who were allegedly involved in the conviction that ensued post Babri mosque demolition in 1992 in Hubballi.

The BJP criticised the Congress government

"for pursuing the politics of vendetta" against kar sevaks after 31 years of the incident. It warned the government that it will stage a vehement agitation if the kar sevaks are not released.

"Is Pralhad Joshi a legal expert or legal luminary? Is he a court? Can Pralhad Joshi's statement be accepted as a quote from the Vedas? He is talking politically and not legally. Government abides by the law," the chief minister said.

He explained that the state Home Minister G Parameshwara had ordered police officials to pursue and dispose of old cases. So the police rounded up people involved in old cases. Police have only obeyed the home minister's direction, he added.

To a question on Joshi's allegation that the government has stooped low by arresting the accused in a 31-year-old case, Siddaramaiah attributed Joshi's remarks to his "low-level mentality, because he is supporting criminals".

When asked why the police did not act when the non-bailable warrant was issued, he sought to know what was wrong in arresting them now.

"It's true that there was a delay in taking action but is there any rule that the arrests should not have happened?" the chief minister asked.

"What should be done to those who do wrong? Should they be freed just like that? We have directed (the police) to dispose of old cases. Accordingly, the police have taken action. We do not pursue the politics of vendetta or arrest innocent people," Siddaramaiah said.

He clarified that the police action was based on the direction by the court.

On the BJP's demand that the state government announce a holiday on January 22, when the Lord Rama idol will be installed in the newly built Ayodhya temple, Siddaramaiah said let the Centre do it since it is organising the event. (PTI)

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Odisha's Chilika Lake to remain closed for visitors till tomorrow for bird count

BERHAMPUR (ODISHA), Jan 2: Asia's largest brackish water lagoon Chilika will remain closed for visitors on January 3 and 4 for the annual bird census, officials said.

The mid-winter survey of birds in the lake will be carried out by the Chilika Wildlife Division on January 4, while training will imparted to enumerators on January 3, they said.

"We have decided to stop the entry of visitors to the lake for these two days to conduct an undisturbed bird census," Divisional Forest Officer Amlan Nayak of Chilika Wildlife Division said. He said boat associations have also been requested not to ferry visitors during this period and these bodies have assured the forest department of full cooperation for the smooth conduct of the census. Thousands of winged guests, mostly from Russia and central Asian countries, visit Chilika Lake every winter to escape the biting cold in their homelands and in search of food. They start their homeward journey before the onset of summer.

He said over 100 people, including ornithologists, wildlife activists and researchers of different organisations, including the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), will participate in the bird census. "We will form 21 teams, with five persons in each team headed by an expert, for the bird count. Each team will be provided with instruments such as binoculars," he said.

He said not a single poaching case has been registered in the division this year due to the strict patrolling at the lake. In last winter's survey, as many as 11,31,929 birds of 184 different species were counted at the 1,100 sq km blue lagoon. These included 10,93,049 feathered guests of 105 various species, and 38,859 of 79 species of resident birds, sources said. (PTI)

CBI closes 2019 IPL betting cases over lack of evidence

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The CBI has closed two cases related to alleged fixing of Indian Premier League matches in 2019 "based on inputs" from Pakistan due to lack of evidence, officials said on Tuesday.

The agency had filed two FIRs in May 2022 against seven people after receiving information that "a network of individuals involved in cricket betting are influencing the outcome of Indian Premier League (IPL) matches based on inputs received from Pakistan".

The CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) named Dileep Kumar, based in Delhi's Rohini, and Gurram Vasu and Gurram Satish -- based in Hyderabad -- as accused in its first FIR. Sajjan Singh, Prabhu Lal Meena, Ram Avtar and Amit Kumar Sharma, all from Rajasthan, were named as accused in the second FIR.

After nearly two years of probe, the CBI could not find enough evidence to proceed with the prosecution against them.

The agency filed a closure report in a special court on December 23, in which it has given detailed description of the allegations and its probe in the matter, besides citing reasons for recommending the closure of the case, officials said.

It will now be up to the court to decide whether to accept the report filed by the agency or order it to continue further investigations, they said.

The agency had booked these people on allegations that they were running the racket for more than 10-13 years with suspicious cash transactions being made from their accounts, the officials said.

The CBI had alleged that these individuals were in touch with Pakistani individuals through a Pakistani mobile number. (PTI)

SC issues notice to Centre on PIL for framing of rehabilitation policy for differently-abled person

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought a response from the Centre and others on a PIL seeking framing of guidelines for rehabilitation and social reintegration of mentally and physically challenged people who have no one to take care after they turn 18 years of age.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the plea filed by KSR Menon, a former journalist, seeking framing of a policy or guidelines to provide aftercare facilities to such people.

The PIL, filed through law firm 'KMNP LAW AOR', referred to a provision of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act which deals with the "child in need of care and protection".

Lawyer Abir Phukan, appearing for Menon, a former news agency journalist, said the plea has been

filed for rehabilitation of children who are "mentally ill or mentally or physically challenged or suffering from terminal or incurable disease, having no one to support or look after or having parents or guardians unfit to take care".

The top court issued notices to the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Chief Commissioner, Persons with Disability Department of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, and sought their responses within four weeks.

"The Petitioner has preferred the present writ petition, inter alia, in public interest seeking issuance of a writ of Mandamus ... direction or guidelines for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of children of Child Care Institutions (CCIs)/Juvenile Homes who are mentally ill or mentally or physically challenged or suffer from terminal or incurable disease



considered as child in need of care and protection under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and has no

one to support them or take care of them upon them turning 18 years," the plea said. The petition also sought a direction for maintaining a database of all children who are in need of care and protection.

"The demands are foreseen on the grounds of Right to live a life with dignity under the Constitution and to provide rehabilitation and social re-integration with financial support," it said.

"Declare that 'Child in need of care and protection' (CNCP) recognised under Section 2(14)(iv) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 have a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution to after-care beyond the age of 21 years and till the time they are rehabilitated and integrated in society," it said.

The plea, which referred to various studies, said according to the 2011 census, the differently-abled

population in India stood at 26.8 million.

"In percentage terms, this stands at 2.21 %. There has been a marginal increase in the differently-abled population in India, with the figure rising from 21.9 million in 2001 to 26.8 million in 10 years. There are 14.9 million men with disabilities as compared to 11.8 million women in the country. There appears to be only one after-care home in Bangalore which caters to children with special needs," it said.

It said these differently-abled people also have the fundamental right to live a life with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution.

"The child in need of care and protection as defined under the JJ Act, 2015 is a citizen of India and by virtue thereof, he/she is entitled to live a life of dignity," it said. (PTI)

Kerala Minister retracts controversial remarks on bishops amid Church criticism

KOCHI, Jan 2: Facing criticism from various church groups for his remarks against bishops who attended the Prime Minister's Christmas programme, Kerala Cultural Affairs Minister Saji Cheriyan on Tuesday said he is withdrawing the controversial parts of his speech related to "cake and wine" that had offended them.

Cheriyan, a senior leader of the CPI(M) in Kerala, however, maintained his stance on the alleged silence of bishops regarding "violence targeting Christians" in Manipur and other parts of the country during Modi's Christmas programme.

He addressed the media, acknowledging the criticism from the Catholic Church and other Christian groups, particularly regarding his comments against priests present at the Prime Minister's Christmas event at his official residence in New Delhi on December 25.

"If there is any difficulty and pain in the remarks about cake and wine, those parts are withdrawn," Cheriyan said in response to attacks against him.

He said that the priests had raised concerns about his speech during the inauguration of a CPI(M) local committee office in Alappuzha district on Sunday evening. Cheriyan acknowledged that the mention of wine and cake in his speech may have caused discomfort.

The Minister withdrew his contentious statement following Kerala Catholic Bishops Council's (KCBC) declaration of non-cooperation with the state government until he retracts it.

"The mention of wine and cake is retracted if they feel like it," he said, referring to KCBC president Cardinal Baselios Cleemis' displeasure over his statement.

The minister said he has a personal relationship with all the bishops and asserted that there was no intention to defame them.

He, however, said he was sticking to the points he had raised on the issue of violence in Manipur.

"The Prime Minister's Christmas programme was a good opportunity to raise the issue of Manipur violence. But that was not done. If the issue could have been raised, then it would have gained great importance," Cheriyan said.

Strongly criticising Cheriyan's remarks, where he suggested that the Bishops who attended the programme prioritised enjoying "wine and cake" over addressing the issue of violence against Christians in Manipur, a Catholic church spokesperson had on Monday said

persons in high positions should refrain from making such statements. Responding to Cheriyan's criticism that priests did not discuss the Manipur violence issue with Modi during the Christmas programme, the Church spokesperson had said that it is not the role of political parties to dictate the political stance of Christians.

He questioned the minister's motive behind linking the Christian community's participation in the prime minister's event to a specific political affiliation.

Speaking at the CPI(M) event in Alappuzha on Sunday, Cheriyan had mocked

the bishops who had attended the PM's programme, saying they got "goosebumps" when BJP leaders invited them.

Talking to reporters here today, the minister also recounted accounts of attacks on Christians in BJP-ruled states.

He alleged that attacks on Christians have increased since 2014. Additionally, the minister pointed out that the Prime Minister has neither visited the riot-hit areas nor made a statement in Parliament on

the Manipur issue.

Cheriyan alleged that an attempt is being made to promote "Hindutva communalism by unleashing intense attacks and propaganda against minorities."

Citing data provided by the United Christian Forum, a Christian outfit, he said there were about 700 communal attacks against Christians in the country last year.

"It is reported that there are attacks on Christian groups in two places in a day. Of these, 287 occurred in Uttar Pradesh, 148 in Chhattisgarh, 49 in Jharkhand, and 47 in Haryana. All of these states are governed by the BJP", the CPI(M) leader said.

The CPI(M) leader launched the attack against the Bishops after the BJP initiated Christian outreach programmes in Kerala ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

On Monday, veteran Marxist leader and state Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan also took on the BJP for the violence in Manipur allegedly targeting the minority community.

In an apparent reference to the Prime Minister's Christmas programme, the Marxist veteran had said that a person holding the highest position, who had not taken any steps to prevent attacks against the minority community in Manipur, was making some "friendly moves for four votes," and the people can understand it. (PTI)



Yet to take final decision on Ram Lalla idol: Temple trust

AYODHYA, Jan 2: The Ram temple trust is yet to take a final decision on which of the three Ram Lalla idols being sculpted over the past months will be installed at the temple here, those associated with the trust said on Tuesday. On Monday, BJP leader and former Karnataka chief minister B S Yediyurappa had congratulated Arun Yogiraj, a sculptor from the state, saying that the idol carved by him has been chosen to be enshrined at the new temple Ayodhya. But the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, which is building the temple, has not made its decision known.

The decision will be taken by the trust in consultation with Shankaracharya Vijayendra Saraswati and other seers, trust functionaries said. "Whatever is the decision of the trust, it will be made public at an appropriate time," Prakash Gupta, office in-charge of the trust told PTI.

The chosen idol will be installed in the sanctum sanctorum and consecrated at a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 22. The first phase of the temple's construction is now over.

Since 1949, devotees have offered prayers at a makeshift shrine housing an idol of Ram Lalla. This shrine too was shifted for the temple's construction, which began after a historic Supreme Court verdict in 2019 that settled the temple-mosque dispute in Ayodhya. Now, trust officials say, that the old "movable" idol will now be kept in the complex for festive occasions, indirectly suggesting that it could be on display on some days of the year. Three sculptors worked separately on different boulders to carve out idols of the deity. For two of them, the stone came from Karnataka and the third idol was being carved out from a rock brought from Rajasthan.

The idols were carved by sculptors Satyanarayan Pandey from Jaipur, and Ganesh Bhatt and Arun Yogiraj from Karnataka.

While picking the idol for the sanctum sanctorum, a technical report would also be taken into consideration on aspects like the longevity of its sheen, according to trust officials. (PTI)

Prime Minister Modi visits Lakshadweep, highlights decade of development in Islands

AGATTI (LAKSHADWEEP), Jan 2: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that numerous developmental projects have been completed in Lakshadweep over the past 10 years of his government, and the Centre is committed to the progress of the islands.

The Prime Minister addressed a public function immediately after his arrival at Agatti Airport. During his address, Modi noted the immense possibilities that Lakshadweep offers and alleged that the islands faced neglect for many years after independence.

"The union territory is full of many possibilities, but for a long time after independence, the infrastructure of Lakshadweep was not given much attention," he said.

He mentioned weak port infrastructure, despite shipping being the lifeline of the islands. This applies to education, health, and even petrol and diesel as well, he said.

"Even though shipping is the lifeline of the archipelago, the port infrastructure is weak. Whether it's health, education, or even petrol and diesel, we had to face a lot of problems. All these challenges are being addressed by our government," Modi said.

He said that the government has now taken up the task of developing the Lakshadweep Islands in earnest.

Expressing optimism about the newly introduced ice plant at Agatti, the Prime Minister emphasised that it would pave the way for enhanced seafood processing possibilities on the island.

The Prime Minister said that many development projects were completed in Agatti in the past 10 years and mentioned the creation of modern facilities, especially for fishermen.

He also touched upon the fact that Agatti now has an airport as well as an ice plant.



Thanks to this, Modi said, new possibilities are being created for the seafood export and seafood processing sectors.

He mentioned the initiation of the export of tuna fish from Lakshadweep, which has also paved the way for increasing the income of the fishermen in the union territory.

Referring to new development projects, the prime minister mentioned the inauguration of a solar plant and an aviation fuel depot to meet the electricity and other energy needs of Lakshadweep.

He also spoke about providing tapped water connections to all houses on Agatti Island and reiterated the government's efforts to ensure houses, toilets, electricity, and cooking gas for the poor.

"The Government of India is working with full commitment for the development of the entire Lakshadweep, including Agatti," Modi added.

During this visit to Lakshadweep, the Prime Minister will inaugurate and dedicate to the nation development projects worth more than Rs 1,150 crore.

In what would become a transformational initiative, the prime minister had resolved to overcome

the challenge of slow internet speed on Lakshadweep Island with the Kochi-Lakshadweep Islands Submarine Optical Fiber Connection (KLI-SOFC) project, which he had announced in his Independence Day speech in August 2020 at Red Fort.

The project has now been completed and will be inaugurated by the PM, an official statement said. This will lead to an increase in internet speed of more than 100 times (from 1.7 Gbps to 200 Gbps) in the islands.

For the first time, Lakshadweep will be connected through submarine optical fibre cable, it said.

The statement said the dedicated submarine OFC will ensure a paradigm shift in communication infrastructure in the Lakshadweep islands, enabling faster and more reliable internet services, telemedicine, e-governance, educational initiatives, digital banking, digital currency usage, digital literacy, etc.

The PM will also inaugurate the Low Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) plant at Kadmat.

This will produce 1.5 lakh litres of clean drinking water every day.

Modi will also dedicate to the nation the Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) in all households on the Agatti and Minicoy islands.

Other projects include the solar power plant at Kavaratti, which is the first-ever battery-backed solar power project in Lakshadweep; the laying of the foundation stone for the renovation of the primary health care facility in Kalpeni; and the construction of five model Anganwadi centres (mand ghars) in the five islands of Androth, Chetlat, Kadmat, Agatti, and Minicoy, the statement added.

The Prime Minister is scheduled to stay overnight on the islands. (PTI)

On Modi's visit, CM Stalin reiterates plea to declare state's devastating rains a national calamity

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI (TN), Jan 2: Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin on Tuesday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare the rains that caused massive destruction in Tamil Nadu a natural calamity and immediately provide NDRF funds to facilitate relief and restoration work.

He exuded the hope that the Prime Minister would consider the plea he reiterated as the demand of the people affected by the rains.

"You are aware of the havoc caused by the rains in Chennai and the southern districts last month. Infrastructure was extensively damaged and people's livelihood was affected due to the floods," Stalin, who is also the president of the DMK, said raising the issue before Prime Minister Narendra Modi here.

The Prime Minister dedicated to the nation and laid the foundation stone for multiple development projects worth over Rs 20,000 crore here in the presence of the chief minister and Governor R N Ravi.

"The calamity is very severe. Don't think that I am repeatedly making this demand," Stalin said, adding that it was up to him to convey the will of the people.

Hospitals cannot admit critically ill patients in ICU if they or kin refuse: Govt guidelines

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Hospitals cannot admit critically ill patients in the intensive care unit in case of refusal by them and their relatives, the Union Health Ministry has said in its recent guidelines on ICU admissions.

The guidelines compiled by 24 experts further recommended that when no further treatment is possible or available in a disease or in terminally ill patients if the continuation of therapy is not going to make an impact on the outcome, especially survival, then keeping in ICU is futile care.

Further, anyone with a living will or advanced directive against ICU care should not be admitted to ICU.

Besides, low priority criteria in case of pandemic or disaster situation, where there is resource limitation, should be taken into account for keeping a patient in the ICU.

Criteria for admitting a patient to ICU should be based on organ failure and need for organ support or in anticipation of deterioration in the medical condition, the guidelines stated.

Altered level of consciousness of recent onset, hemodynamic instability, need for respiratory support, patients with acute illness requiring intensive monitoring and/or organ support or any medical condition or disease with anticipation of deterioration have been listed as criteria for ICU admission.

Patients who have experienced any major intraoperative complication like cardiovascular or respiratory instability or have undergone major surgery also feature among the criteria. (PTI)

Those engaged in violence will be

ten others. Both PLA and RPF are banned under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. After his visit, Singh posted on X, "We strongly condemn all forms of violence, and the state government has launched mass combing operations to nab the culprits and the culprit will be punished according to the law. No one is above the law."

The chief minister visited the families of the deceased. "We stand united as a community and our government is committed to ensuring swift and thorough investigations to bring those responsible to justice," he posted on X.

In another incident which also took place on Monday at Moreh town of Tengenoual district four police personnel and a Border Security Force constable were injured during a gunfight between militants and security personnel on Monday. They were airlifted to the state capital for better treatment, an official said.

Moreh, which is near the India-Myanmar border has been witnessing gunfights between security forces and militants since December 30 last year. (PTI)

CAA rules to be notified 'much

The TMC, led by Mamata Banerjee, has been opposing the CAA. The promise of implementing the controversial CAA was a major plank of the BJP in the last Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in West Bengal. The saffron party's leaders consider it a plausible factor that led to the rise of the BJP in the state.

According to the manual of parliamentary procedures, the rules for any legislation should have been framed within six months of presidential assent or seek extension from the Committees on Subordinate Legislation in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

Since 2020, the home ministry has been taking extension in regular interval from the parliamentary committees for framing the rules. More than a hundred people lost their lives during the protests or police action after Parliament passed the law. Meanwhile, in last two years, more than 30 district magistrates and home secretaries of nine states have been given powers to grant Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan under the Citizenship Act of 1955.

According to the annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs for 2021-22, from April 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021, a total of 1,414 foreigners belonging to these non-Muslim minority communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan were given Indian citizenship by registration or naturalization under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

The nine states where Indian citizenship by registration or naturalization is given under the Citizenship Act of 1955 to non-Muslim minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are Gujarat, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra.

Authorities of none of the districts of Assam and West Bengal, where the issue is politically very sensitive, have been given the powers so far. (PTI)

Jayanta Mallabuaruh unveils plans for

has been taken up by the Department to construct a corridor at Kamakhya Temple with an aim to transform the grandeur of the 'Shaktipeeth' and making it accessible for differently abled and aged devotees.

During the press conference, the minister also spoke about the key achievements of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in the year 2023 and informed that 30 per cent of Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) provided the same year.

"Total 20,75,204 (30 per cent) Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) provided in the Year 2023 and the cumulative FHTC Progress as on 30.12.2023 is 48,60,749 (69.6 per cent)," he added.

Foundation stone laid for NCDC

the field," it added. The statement further said that the state branch will coordinate with NCDC HQ at New Delhi with real time sharing of data and information. The Regional NCDC branches would also be crucial in ensuring timely availability of updated guidelines in the state and entire northeast so that accurate scientifically backed information can be disseminated easily. The minister for health and family welfare Keshav Mahanta after completion of the ceremony had an interaction session with the journalists.

The Health Minister said that "This new regional NCDC center will surely help in strengthening the health system in the state by effectively detecting, investigating, monitoring, preventing, and combating Public health emergencies and disease outbreaks in the State. The regional branch of NCDC will provide a boost to public health infrastructure with prompt surveillance, rapid detection and monitoring of diseases thereby enabling early interventions in this NE region of the country."

The meeting was also graced by Avinash P Joshi, additional chief secretary, H&FW, Dr LS Singh, senior regional director, MoH&FW, Kamaljit Talukdar, ACS, DHS (FW), Dr Kareng Rongpipi (IC) director of health services, Dr Manoj Kumar Choudhury, ED, NHM, Assam, Pankaj Chamuah, OSD, NHM Assam, Dr NS Tishya, SSO-IDSP and team, NHM state and health officials and concerned development partners.

Government plans to end Free Movement

presence of a large number of security personnel. Manipur shares a 398-km border with Myanmar. Arunachal Pradesh shares a 520-km border with Myanmar while Nagaland shares a 215-km border with the country. (PTI)

PIL in SC challenges new law on

promulgate a gazette notification or ordinance to nullify or amend a judgment previously rendered by the Supreme Court, particularly when the judgment emanates from a Constitution Bench," the PIL says.

The plea seeks inclusion of the CJ in the selection committee for the appointment of the CEC and ECs.

The chief election commissioner and Other election commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 has provisions to set up a search committee chaired by the union law minister and two other persons not below the rank of secretary to prepare a panel of five persons for consideration of the selection committee for appointment as CEC or ECs. (PTI)

312 Covid sub-variant JN.1 cases

poses a "low" global public health risk. The JN.1 sub-variant of the coronavirus was previously classified as a variant of interest (VOI) as part of the BA.2.86 sub-lineage, the parent lineage that is classified as a VOI, the world body said. However, in recent weeks, JN.1 cases continued to be reported from multiple countries and its prevalence has rapidly increased globally. The Centre has asked states and Union territories to maintain a constant vigil amid an uptick in the number of Covid cases and the detection of the JN.1 sub-variant in the country. India has recorded 573 new coronavirus infections, while the active cases stood at 4,565, according to data released by the Health ministry on Tuesday. (PTI)

Cong raises ₹ 10 crore in 2 weeks through

is the time to strengthen our democracy. Join us in this vital exercise. Already contributed? Consider supporting again as per your capability. Every contribution, big or small, is a step towards a stronger nation."

"Remember, the nation needs you, the Indian National Congress needs you. Your support fuels our mission and empowers us to keep moving forward. Together, let's make 2024 a year of unparalleled success and progress. Join us, contribute, and be a part of this historic journey," the Congress treasurer said in his post.

The Congress had launched its 'Donate for Desh' crowdfunding campaign on December 18 with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge donating ₹ 1.38 lakh to the party on the first day. The campaign is aimed at generating resources for the party ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The BJP has, however, hit out at the opposition party, alleging it was "another attempt to siphon off public money and enrich the Gandhis" and pointed to the recent record cash seizure during income tax raids against a company linked to a Congress MP.

Congress leaders have said that the crowdfunding initiative was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's historic 'Tilak Swaraj Fund', which was launched more than a hundred years ago in 1920-21.

The party had launched an 'outreach-cum-crowdfunding' campaign on October 2, 2018, ahead of the last general elections, but the campaign did not gain much momentum on the ground.

The campaign was launched to coincide with the 138th year of the formation of the Congress.

The initiative aims at empowering the party in creating a country that is rich in equal resource distribution and opportunities, a senior leader said.

Donors have been asked to donate in the multiples of ₹ 138, symbolising the party's enduring commitment to a better India. Congress sources said the party is cash-strapped and facing a dearth of money to fight "the well-oiled BJP poll machinery". The grand old party has alleged that the BJP is garnering a majority of electoral bonds as the scheme is designed to favour the ruling party.

"Our inaugural campaign -- 'Donate for Behar Bharat' -- commemorates the 138-year journey of the Indian National Congress. Embracing our history, we invite supporters to donate in multiples of ₹ 138, symbolising the party's enduring commitment to a better India," AICC general secretary K C Venugopal had said ahead of the campaign launch. (PTI)

BRICS doubles in size with admission

Putin said enhancing the role of BRICS in the international monetary system, expanding interbanking cooperation as well as boosting use of national currencies in mutual trade will be areas of focus of the Russian presidency of the grouping. He said Russian 2024 BRICS chairmanship under the motto 'strengthening multi-lateralism for equitable global development and security' will focus on positive and constructive cooperation with all concerned countries.

"We will spare no effort to ensure that, while preserving traditions and being guided by the experience gained by the association in years past, we facilitate the harmonious integration of new participants in all formats of its activities," he said, according to the Kremlin.

"In general, Russia will continue to promote all aspects of the BRICS partnership in three key areas: politics and security, economy and finance, and cultural and humanitarian contacts," he said.

"Naturally, we will focus on enhancing foreign policy coordination among the member countries and on jointly seeking effective responses to the challenges and threats to international and regional security and stability," he said. Putin said the priorities under the Russian presidency of the grouping will include promoting cooperation in science, high technology, healthcare, environmental protection, culture and sports.

"In total, over 200 events of different levels and types will be held in many Russian cities as part of the chairmanship," he said.

"We encourage representatives of all countries interested in cooperating with our organisation to take part in them. The BRICS Summit in Kazan in October will be the culmination of our chairmanship," he added.

Putin said the Russian presidency of BRICS will focus on contributing to the practical implementation of the strategy for BRICS economic partnership 2025 and the action plan for the grouping's innovation cooperation 2021-2024 for ensuring energy and food security. (PTI)

ANA OFELIA MURGUIA, VOICE OF DISNEY'S 'COCO', DIES AT 90

LOS ANGELES, Jan 2: Mexican actor Ana Ofelia Murguia, who voiced the role of Mama Coco in Disney's two-time Oscar-winning animated feature film *Coco* has died. She was 90. Murguia passed away on December 31, 2023.

The news of her demise was shared on Monday by Mexico's National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature. "With deep sadness we regret the sensitive death of the first actress Ana Ofelia Murguia, who was part of the stable cast of the @CNTeatromx del #INBAL and whose artistic career was vital for the performing arts of Mexico. We send condolences and warm hugs to her family and friends," the institute wrote on X.

Born in Mexico in 1933, Murguia's career spanned over 40 years in movies and television during Mexican cinema's golden age. She received the Golden Ariel lifetime achievement award, the highest honour given by the Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Science, in 2011. She also won best supporting actress at the Ariel awards in 1979, 1986 and 1996.

Murguia's acting credits include *The Queen of the Night* (1994) and *Nobody Will Speak of Us When We're Dead* (1995). *Coco* followed the story of an aspiring musician Miguel (Anthony Gonzalez) who has to face his family's prejudices against music.

On the Day of the Dead, he ventures into the Land of the Dead and encounters his ancestor, a legendary singer. At the climax, Murguia's *Coco* sings the film's Oscar-winning song *Remember Me* with Miguel in the memory of her father. *Coco* also won an Academy Award for best animated film in 2018. (PTI)



JR NTR RETURNS FROM QUAKE-STROCK JAPAN, HOPES FOR COUNTRY'S SWIFT RECOVERY

HYDERABAD, Jan 2: "RRR" star Jr NTR on Tuesday morning said he had returned from Japan and wished for its swift recovery after a series of powerful earthquakes hit the island country. The quakes struck the western region of Japan, leaving at least eight people dead and damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes.

Jr NTR, who spent the last week in Japan, in a post on X said he was "deeply shocked" by the earthquakes in the country.

"Back home today from Japan and deeply shocked by the earthquakes hitting. Spent the entire last week there, and my heart goes out to everyone affected. Grateful for the resilience of the people and hoping for a swift recovery. Stay strong, Japan," the actor wrote on the microblogging site.

"RRR", a period action drama also starring Ram Charan, had emerged as the highest-grossing Indian film upon its release in Japan in 2022. The SS Rajamouli directorial had raised over 410 million yen (Rs 24.13 crore approxi-



mately) at the Japanese box office. Rajamouli also sent out prayers for Japan, a country that holds "a special place in our hearts". "It's very disturbing to learn about the earthquakes affecting Japan severely. The country holds a special place in our hearts. My thoughts are with everyone affected," the director said in

an X post. On Monday, the quakes, the largest of which had a magnitude of 7.6, also started a fire and collapsed buildings on the west coast of Japan's main island, Honshu, causing the country to drop its highest-level tsunami alert after issuing one following a series of major earthquakes.

Aftershocks continued to shake Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas a day after a magnitude 7.6 temblor slammed the area on Monday afternoon.

Eight people were confirmed dead in Wajima city, officials said. Seven others were seriously injured, while damage to homes was so great that it could not immediately be assessed, they said. (PTI)

NEW AND RETURNING HINDI SHOWS TO STREAM IN 2024

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Streaming services Netflix, Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar, SonyLIV and Zee5 are packing ample programming, including new as well as returning shows to keep audiences entertained throughout 2024.

Here are some of the most anticipated shows of the year: Netflix "Killer Soup": The first new original series from the streamers stars versa-

exciting comedy extravaganza' to his fans all over the world. In his new adventure, the comedian will be accompanied by fellow members from The Kapil Sharma Show — Archana Puran Singh, Krushna Abhishek, Kiku Sharda and Rajiv Thakur.

Prime Video 'Indian Police Force': Bollywood star Sidharth Malhotra and filmmaker Rohit Shetty will make their OTT debut with the

his role of Hathiram Chaudhary in season two.

Written and created by Sudip Sharma, the first season of the Prime Video show featured Ahlawat as a washed-out Delhi police officer who lands the case of a lifetime when four suspects are captured in the assassination attempt of a prime time journalist.

Disney+ Hotstar Showtime: The new series hails from Karan Johar's Dharmatic Entertainment and is billed as an 'epic saga of legacy and ambition in the world of cinema'. It features an ensemble cast of Emraan Hashmi, Mahima Makwana, Mouni Roy, Naseeruddin Shah, Rajeev Khandelwal and Shriya Saran. Showtime is created by Sumit Roy and showrun Mihir Desai, who also serves as the director along with Archit Kumar.

Karmma Calling: Raveena Tandon stars in the lead in this yet-another new title from Disney+ Hotstar. Based on the popular American series *Revenge*, the show is set in the world of glitz and glamour, filled with deceit and betrayal, and will feature Tandon as Indrani Kothari, the reigning queen of the AIBAUG society.

Adapted and directed by Ruchi Narain of 'Guilty' fame, 'Karmma Calling' will debut on the streamer's platform on January 26.

SonyLIV Maharani: The Huma Qureshi-led series will be back with its third season, which is expected to come out in 2024.

Created by Subhash Kapoor, Maharani features Qureshi as Rani

Bharti, a village woman who is handpicked by her husband and politician Bheema Bharti (Sohum Shah) to become the chief minister of Bihar.

The second season of the show, which premiered in August 2022, saw Rani learn the ropes of politics as she is accused of misgovernance and fight her greatest enemy, her husband.

Gullak: In 2024, SonyLIV is bringing back the fan-favourite show, produced by The Viral Fever (TVF) for its season four.

Starring Jameel Khan, Geetanjali Kulkarni, Vaibhav Raj Gupta and Harsh Mayar, the show revolves around the Mishra family, comprising parents Santosh and Shanti Mishra, and their sons Annu and Aman. The show is created by Shreyansh Pandey and by Palash Vaswani.

Zee5 Sunflower: Season two of Sunil Grover-led series will be the first release from the streaming service in 2024. Touted as a situational crime-comedy, the series revolves around a middle-class housing society in Mumbai called Sunflower which is filled with quirky characters. Directed by Vikas Bahl, the first season of the show also starred Ranvir Shorey, Girish Kulkarni, Mukul Chadda, Shonali Nagrani, Sonal Jha and Ashish Vidyarthi.

Crime Beat: The show comes from critically-acclaimed filmmaker Sudhir Mishra. It is expected to premiere in 2024. The streamer had announced the project in May 2023 when it unveiled its content slate of over 100 titles. (PTI)

Shah Rukh Khan's 'Dunki' touches ₹ 400 crore mark at global box office



MUMBAI, Jan 2: Shah Rukh Khan-starrer "Dunki" has crossed ₹ 400 crore mark in gross worldwide collection, the makers said on Tuesday.

Directed by Rajkumar Hirani, the comedy drama opened to mixed reviews upon its release on December 21. Red Chillies Entertainment, one of the production houses behind "Dunki", shared the movie has grossed ₹ 400.40 crore in globally.

"Our Banda and his ullu de pathe are reaching new heights at the Box Office with your endless love," the production banner posted on Instagram.

"Dunki", based on an illegal immigration technique 'donkey flight', also stars Taapsee Pannu, Vicky Kaushal, Boman Irani, Vikram Kochhar and Anil Grover.

The film is also presented by JIO Studios and Rajkumar Hirani Films. (PTI)



tile actors Manoj Bajpayee and Konkona Sensharma. Directed by Abhishek Chaubey of "Uda Punjab" and "Sonchirya" fame, the comedy crime-drama will release on Netflix on January 11.

It follows Swathi Shetty (Konkana), an aspiring yet talentless home chef, who cooks up a bizarre plan to replace her husband, Prabhakar (Bajpayee), with her lover, Umesh (also played by Bajpayee).

Kapil Sharma's new comedy show: Comedian Kapil Sharma will join the streaming bandwagon in 2024 to bring a "fresh, new and an

seven-part show, set to be released on January 19. Also starring Vivek Oberoi and Shilpa Shetty, the series is billed a homage to the "relentless commitment of Indian police officers".

Indian Police Force is the next chapter of Shetty's cop universe that he started with 2011 movie *Singham* and expanded with *Singham Returns* (2014), *Simmba* (2018) and *Sooryavanshi* (2021).

Paatal Lok season 2: The critically-acclaimed series is expected to return with its sophomore chapter in 2024. Jaideep Ahlawat is reprising

Sriram Raghavan on Merry Christmas-Pinocchio connection: It's a story of deception

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Sriram Raghavan says his upcoming thriller "Merry Christmas", starring Katrina Kaif and Vijay Sethupathi, is set in the early '80s and shares a thematic connection with the story of "Pinocchio".

Raghavan, regarded as the master of the thriller genre in India, returns to direction with the film after 2016's hit "Andhadhun" and hopes the audiences engage with the story that unfolds within a span of one night. It will hit the screens on January 12.

The trailer of "Merry Christmas" shows the two central characters walking past a theatre showing the children's classic "Pinocchio", about the titular wooden puppet whose nose grows longer when he lies.

"We have not specified the time but it is set in the early '80s. 'Pinocchio' has many movie versions so we decided to design our own version of the 'Pinocchio' poster. We haven't shown the movie on screen, you will only hear the soundtrack. So, thematically it's very much like

our film because it is about deception. When Pinocchio tells lies, his nose gets longer," Raghavan told PTI in an interview.

The filmmaker said it was challenging to cut the trailer of the Hindi film as he wanted to create intrigue about the plot of the movie, which he shot simultaneously in Tamil. "The Hindi trailer was more fun because it's got these quick cuts. The whole aim was to not give away the story and make viewers think of their own stories so that when they come to the cinema hall, they're surprised. Occasionally, one of them will be right too," he said.

The Hindi trailer of "Merry Christmas" seems like a time capsule, taking viewers back to the era of weighing machines, landline phones and single-screen theatres.

Raghavan, 60, said he decided to include these elements as they are all gone now. "These are iconic things of that era and it has all gone now. I remember I would go to the railway station just to check my weight and get

that little card, which had a picture and something written on it. I used to collect those. This is why we chose it for our film."

The idea to set the film within the span of a night was also by design, said the director, known for cult classics like "Ek Hasina Thi", "Johnny Gaddar", "Badlapur" and his biggest hit, "Andhadhun". Raghavan said one of his earliest memories is watching Yash Chopra's 1969 thriller "Ittefaq", starring Rajesh Khanna and Nanda, which was also set in the course of a night. "I think one-night stories are a genre in themselves because there can be all kinds of stories. I remember seeing Yash Chopra's 'Ittefaq' and I was completely blown away by that movie and performances. Even 'Die Hard' (the 1988 Hollywood hit featuring Bruce Willis) was a one night and a Christmas story.

"I like the sub-genre of one-night stories because it's tough to hold the attention of the audience. It's exciting to think how you are going to compress time and space, and make the story

work," he added.

"Merry Christmas", according to the filmmaker, is an intimate story of two mysterious strangers. "You meet them on this particular day. What they were doing before, how much of what they are saying is true or false, it is all left to you to make assumptions as a viewer. These two strangers are meeting each other and the viewer is meeting each of them, and we have to figure out, 'Okay, what's happening here?' It just makes you curious," he teased.

Just like his films, chance played an important role in the unique casting of Kaif and Sethupathi. Kaif had once spoken to Raghavan about doing a film that is "out of her comfort zone" and that conversation stayed with him.

"It is unlike the films she has done so far which largely, and I'm saying largely, project her as a very glamorous person. She once met me two years back and said she would love to do something in this sort of a zone. Luckily, I found this story," he recalled.

The director said he was looking for an "oddball" pairing, but most of the suggestions that came up for the leading man seemed a bit too familiar. "By chance, I met Vijay Sethupathi in Melbourne, where he was getting an award for 'Super Deluxe' and Tabu was getting an award for 'Andhadhun'. In the flight, it was fortuitous that I happened to see '96', starring Sethupathi, and then I landed and met the actor. "I told him, 'I just saw your movie' and in my mind I kept thinking, 'What if this is the guy?' He's a Tamilian who speaks Hindi as he has lived in Dubai for three years. The language is not really alien to him," he said.

Raghavan said he kept thinking about Sethupathi and finally spoke to his team. Later, they also came onboard with the idea.

"This casting is so oddball that I hope it will create curiosity. You can't write chemistry on paper. Chemistry has to be performed and enacted. It has to come through. What they have managed is difficult to achieve." (PTI)

Phoebe Litchfield's 119 fires Australia Women's to highest ODI total of 338/7 against India

MUMBAI, Jan 2: Phoebe Litchfield continued her rich vein of form with a magnificent century as Australia Women flayed India to post their highest ever total of 338 for seven in the third and final ODI here on Tuesday.

Litchfield cracked as many as 16 fours and a six to make 119 off 125 balls and put on a record 189-run stand for the first wicket with Australia captain Alyssa Healy, who also cashed in on the opportunity with an 85-ball 82 (4x4s, 3x6s).

Australia, who already have the series in the bank, were relentless with the bat from the word go and despite Shreyanka Patil's 3/57, the visitors made merry on a placid wicket that proved to be a batting haven.

Litchfield and Healy's 189-run stand is now the highest for any wicket among all the visiting sides in India in the 50-overs format, bettering South Africans Lizelle Lee and Laura Wolvaardt's 169-run partnership for the first wicket in 2021.

Having possibly missed out



on making tons in each of the first two ODIs with scores of 78 and 63, Litchfield showcased her rich arsenal of strokes all

around the park to flatten India. Litchfield, however, was also lucky when Deepthi Sharma could not hold onto a tough div-

ing catch to her left, off Amanjot Kaur (10-0-70-2) in the 19th over, when the batter was on 62. If it was any consolation,

Deepthi had Litchfield caught by Harmanpreet Kaur in the 40th over and with that the right-arm spinner became only the fourth Indian to have taken 100 wickets in one-day cricket.

Patil was the most successful Indian bowlers with 3 for 57 in her 10-over spell, with her twin strikes in the 36th over providing some respite on a tough day out in the field for her teammates. Patil trapped Beth Mooney (3) and Tahlia McGrath (0) leg-before on consecutive deliveries to peg Australia back, albeit momentarily, as the visitors' aggressive approach again brought them back on top.

Ashleigh Gardner's 27-ball 30 with four fours, Annabel Sutherland's 21-ball 23 (2x4s, 1x6s) and late fireworks yet again from Alana King — 26 not out off 14 balls, three sixes, one four — helped Australia better their own record.

King took 19 runs off Vastrakar's final over as Australia bettered their own record for highest-ever total against India in ODIs. Australia had made

332/7 in March 2018 at Vadodara.

Apart from a slew of misfields and dropped catches, Indian team was also guilty of conceding 28 extras, which gave further push to the visitor's massive total.

Early on, Healy was lucky when she got an inside edge which fell short of wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh off Vastrakar in the ninth over.

But Healy was more belligerent in comparison to her younger opening partner Litchfield, before being cleaned up by Vastrakar for India's first success in the 29th over.

Having spilled as many as seven catches in the last game, India's fielding certainly did not seem to have improved a great deal when Smriti Mandhana spilled a sitter at deep midwicket to give Ellyse Perry a reprieve.

But much to the relief of India and Mandhana, Amanjot trapped Perry soon after for a nine-ball 16 featuring three fours, sparking a fightback for the hosts. (PTI)

Crystal Dunn signs with NWSL champion NJ/NY Gotham FC through 2026 season



HARRISON, N.J., Jan 2: Crystal Dunn is returning home to join NWSL champion NJ/NY Gotham FC, the team announced Sunday.

The 31-year-old Dunn, a 2019 World Cup winner, signed a contract with Gotham through the 2026 season. The U.S. national team star played three seasons with the Portland Thorns before entering free agency in November.

"This place is one that I hold close to my heart," Dunn said of her home state of New York. "I am looking forward to playing alongside top players that will bring out the best in me, as we all work together to push this club to achieve even more success this upcoming season and beyond."

Dunn has won three NWSL titles, including with the Thorns in 2022. The defender/midfielder won a bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

"Crystal is an exceptional player who can play anywhere at any time and have an incredible impact on the game," Gotham FC coach Juan Carlos Amorós said.

Dunn, who had her first child in 2022, won consecutive NWSL Shields and NWSL championships with the North Carolina Courage in 2018-19. (AP)

Paris Saint-Germain signs Brazilian defender Lucas Beraldo on a 5-year deal

PARIS, Jan 2: Paris Saint-Germain has signed Brazilian center back Lucas Beraldo on a five-year deal. The French league leader announced the signing on Monday but did not give financial details. The left-footed, 20-year-old Beraldo joins PSG from Brazilian club São Paulo. PSG said he'll wear the No. 35 jersey. (AP)

Australia PM praises Khawaja for showing courage amid stand-off with ICC

MELBOURNE, Jan 2: Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has praised Usman Khawaja's courage amid his stand-off with the ICC after expressing solidarity with the victims of the conflict between Palestine and Israel.

The ICC has barred the Australian opener from displaying messages of equality and freedom, specifically a dove logo and an olive branch on his shoes, during the Test series against Pakistan.

The decision was based on the international regulation that prohibits players from showing a sign of personal messages on their uniforms. But his act has won him an admirer in the country's premier, who touched upon Khawaja's gesture during an address to the Australian and Pakistani teams ahead of the Sydney Test.

"I'd like to congratulate (Khawaja) for the courage he has shown standing up for human values," Albanese said.

"He has shown courage, and the fact that the team has backed him in is a great thing." "When Ussie and Dave (David Warner) go out, it will be a very special moment, when you walk on to the SCG," Albanese added.

The SCG Test will mark the last time Khawaja and Warner will be walking out together to

open the innings with the latter retiring from the traditional format after the match beginning on Wednesday.

Last week, Australian captain Pat Cummins had come in support of his teammate, saying the opener's attempt to bring to the fore the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was "not offensive." Cricket's global governing body, the ICC, had rejected Khawaja's application to have a sticker showing a black dove holding an olive branch on his bat and shoes during the Boxing Day Test against Pakistan.

"We really support Ussy. He's standing up for what he believes and I think he's done it really respectfully," Cummins had said on the eve of the second Test at the MCG, which Australia won to wrap up the series.

"As I said last week, 'All lives are equal', I don't think that's very offensive and I'd say the same about the dove," Cummins had said.

Notably, the ICC reprimanded Khawaja for wearing a black armband during Australia's 360-run win over Pakistan in Perth, the action coming after he was barred from wearing boots with the messages "Freedom is a human right" and "All lives are equal" in the colours of the Palestinian flag during the match at the Optus Stadium. (PTI)



Salah scores 2 as Liverpool beat Newcastle to open up 3-point lead

LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND, Jan 2: Mohamed Salah headed off to the Africa Cup of Nations on the back of a starring role for Liverpool in its 4-2 win over Newcastle that opened up a three-point lead in the English Premier League on Monday.

An individual performance that started with his latest failure from the penalty spot ended with Salah scoring Liverpool's first and last goals and having a hand in the other two for his team in a chaotic game in wet and wild conditions at Anfield. All of the goals came in an end-to-end second half.

The league pauses for the FA Cup and then a winter break lasting much of the rest of January with Liverpool looking the team most likely to stop Manchester City winning an unprecedented fourth straight top-flight title. City was in third place, five points behind Liverpool — and two behind Aston Villa — with a



game in hand.

Salah, who could be missing until mid-February depending on how far Egypt advances in the Africa Cup, could be the player to lead Liverpool to a record-tying 20th league championship. He has 14 goals for the campaign,

led by the most with City's Erling Haaland.

"I said to myself, 'Are you going to leave for the national team with that performance? Not really,'" Salah said, referring to his penalty failure in the 22nd minute. "I just had to step up."

16-yr-old reaches semis at world darts c'ship and confident of going all the way

LONDON, Jan 2: The amazing journey of 16-year-old Luke Littler at the world darts championship has reached the semifinals — and the young sensation has boldly said it will take something special to stop him becoming the champion. Littler is the youngest semifinalist ever after beating Brendan Dolan 5-1 in the quarterfinals on Monday. He is on the cusp of producing one of the greatest sporting stories of all time, and next up is 2018 winner Rob Cross in the last four at Alexandra Palace on Tuesday.

"It feels unbelievable. I would never have thought I would have got to the semis on my debut year," Littler said. "Brendan was just another opponent in my way



and I have brushed him aside and now I am into the semifinal.

"It's going to take a lot to stop me, based on my performances so far. But it is about whatever Luke Littler turns up. I have got the ability to go all the way — if it's not to be tomorrow night, it's not to be. I know I have got a

good chance and I have got a good feeling I could go all the way tomorrow."

Littler, who finished with an average of 101.93 against Dolan, is enjoying his new-found celebrity status.

He and his family received complimentary tickets to watch Arsenal in the English Premier League last Thursday, with Arsenal players Declan Rice and Aaron Ramsdale asking him for a photo, while players from his favorite team, Manchester United, sent him good luck messages before his win against former world champion Raymond van Barneveld. He was also pictured at Tottenham's match against Bournemouth. (AP)

Real Madrid and Liverpool possible destinations for PSG star Mbappe

PARIS, Jan 2: As the New Year begins, so does the countdown on Kylian Mbappe's future.

It promises to be a nervous start to 2024 for Paris Saint-Germain and its fans with speculation set to intensify about their prolific striker, one of only two players in soccer history to score a hat trick in a World Cup final.

Mbappe began this season in a transfer standoff with his club after not taking up the option of a 12-month extension into 2025. It means that, starting Jan. 1, he can openly talk to other clubs or even sign a pre-contract agreement with long-time suitor Real Madrid or Premier League leader Liverpool.

Mbappe can do so because his contract runs out in June, when he can leave the defending French champion for free, having joined from Monaco — initially on loan in 2017 — for 180 million euros (now \$199 million).

The France star is PSG's all-time leading scorer with 233 goals despite only recently turning 25, and has already netted some 46 goals for Les Bleus.

But it has been frustrating at times for Mbappe at PSG, which failed to reach the quarterfinals of the Champions League in the last two seasons and has scraped through to the last 16 in second place this season.

Despite having scored 21 goals in 22 games in all competitions so far this season, Mbappe failed to make his mark when PSG lost 4-1 at Newcastle and 2-1 at AC Milan.

His frustration has been seen in some of PSG's league games over the past three seasons, when bad defending and a lack of teamwork has led to soft goals being conceded.

Mbappe has said he wants to win the Ballon d'Or — soccer's most prestigious individual prize

— and the Champions League. But whether he can win either with PSG remains to be seen and, at age 25, the time could be right for him to leave PSG as he enters his peak years.

Here's a look at where Mbappe might go:

REAL MADRID

Will it be third time lucky for the Spanish powerhouse with a record 14 European Cup titles?

PSG rejected an offer of 180 million euros for Mbappe in 2021 and Madrid missed out a year later when Mbappe — amid frenzied speculation that Madrid would finally get him to join — signed a new deal with PSG in May 2022.

Mbappe held aloft the PSG jersey that day with 2025 on the back. But he was reportedly annoyed because the actual deal only took him to 2024 and, while good PR for the club, it was also seen as somewhat presumptuous to expect he would sign the extension given his world renown.

Mbappe has spoken about his affection for Madrid but, if he does not join this time, then the move may never happen. Coach Carlo Ancelotti has re-shaped the attack since Karim Benzema left and it is functioning well.

LIVERPOOL

Mbappe's English is near-fluent and he's at ease conducting interviews after Champions League games with British broadcasters.

It would make his transition to the Premier League even easier, for his speed, strength on the ball, dribbling and lethal finishing are all attributes that would serve him well.

The six-time European champions are trying to hold onto prolific forward Mohamed Salah amid growing interest in the Egypt star from the even richer Saudi Arabian league. (AP)

Warner's ability and importance ensured his contract didn't get ripped up: Michael Clarke

SYDNEY, Jan 2: Former captain Michael Clarke has observed that David Warner's extraordinary talent went a long way in ensuring that the explosive opener's contract with Cricket Australia didn't get ripped up despite some off-field issues.

The 37-year-old, who will retire from the Test format at the end of the series against Pakistan, has had a stellar career that also had its share of controversies including the ball-tampering scandal in a match against South Africa in 2018.

"Davey has always been a tough character, someone I loved having in the team, that intent, that aggressive approach," Clarke told ESPN's 'Around The Wicket' show.

"But he was the same off the field, a little bull, and got into a little bit of trouble along the way," said Clarke, who was Australia's captain in 2013 when Warner was suspended for his altercation with Joe Root in a Birmingham bar, after which he

missed the first two Tests of that year's Ashes.

"But I think he had a lot of support and help from, certainly, senior players and around Cricket Australia that helped him not have his contract ripped up. There was a bit of a fight to keep him because he was so important to the team. (There was) the confidence, being his captain, that (at) the start of his career that like all of us, we are young, (he) needed to learn lessons along the way." "Davey's game has really been learnt at the highest level, playing for Australia, which is not easy to do. So I think he deserves a lot of credit."

Warner's aggressive brand of cricket did not convince many at the start of his career when he made the cut to Australia first-class cricket from T20s. But Clarke said he proved the doubter's wrong.

"He's had a stellar career, opening the batting (is) such a hard position," Clarke said. "There were a lot of doubts



around the way Davey played. Could he cut it in Test cricket? (He) started as a T20 player and there was always that risk. I think from day one everyone saw the talent, very gifted, can do things that a lot of players can't do."

"And he's been able to manage that role as an opening batsman but keep his intent, which is easier said than done."

Speaking further about Warner, Clarke drew a parallel with former Australia openers Matthew Hayden and Michael Slater.

"An Australian batsman that set the tone when it came to opening batting was Matthew Hayden — I used to love watching Hayden and Michael Slater walk out and bat and play that aggressive role — and think Davey continued in that manner."

"If the ball was full and there to drive early in his innings he'd take it on, if it was short he takes on that pull or hook shot, he wanted to score runs. That's the name of the game but it's easier said than done, trying to do that

T20 WC: Agarkar likely to speak to Rohit and Kohli, 30-odd players could be monitored during IPL

CAPE TOWN, Jan 2: The Ajit Agarkar-led selection committee will have some sleepless nights before selecting the squad for T20s against Afghanistan with veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli keen to play the World Cup in June.

Both Rohit and Kohli have not played in the shortest format for India since the T20 World Cup semifinal against England in November 2022.

The two national selectors, Shiv Sunder Das and Salil Ankola are both here and will be joined by their chairman Agarkar during the course of the second Test at Newlands.

It is expected that Agarkar and Co will speak to head coach Rahul Dravid along with Test and ODI skipper Rohit, star batter Kohli before announcing the squad against Afghanistan. Around 30 T20 specialists, including India and IPL stars, will be monitored ahead of the ICC event in Caribbean and United States.

It remains to be seen whether Agarkar and his colleagues select both Rohit and Kohli for the short series starting January 11 in



Mohali or directly check their form and fitness during IPL. The two contemporary legends have apparently made it clear that they would very much like to be part of T20

World Cup. With England Tests starting in Hyderabad from January 25, it is unlikely that even if Rohit and Virat are selected, they would play beyond a couple of matches.

"Suryakumar Yadav and Hardik Pandya aren't fit. The Afghanistan series won't tell you anything. Everything will be decided on the basis of the first month of IPL," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Workload management and monitoring core group during IPL

The BCCI brass knows that they can't tell any franchise to optimally use a potential pick for the T20 World Cup which will be held in June-July after IPL concludes in last week of May.

"The BCCI can never tell a franchise to manage a star player's workload unless it's a case of injury management," source added.

So there is a possibility that at least 25 to 30 players are zeroed in and monitored closely during the two months of IPL.

There could be a case of injury or fitness issue during the IPL and the selection committee would need two players for each slot, so that the like-for-like replacement is ready.

The only player whose ready replacement won't be available is Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya. (PTI)

India must focus on building bigger fast bowling pool in 2024: Irfan Pathan



NEW DELHI, Jan 2: India must focus on increasing the bench strength of their pace attack in 2024 as the Centurion Test exposed chinks in that department, reckons former pacer Irfan Pathan. Mohammed Shami's absence was felt badly in the heavy loss to South Africa in the opening Test of the two-match series in the Rainbow Nation last week.

Jasprit Bumrah, who did not get the support from the likes of Shardul Thakur and Prasadh Krishna in the first Test, is also injury prone.

Speaking to Star Sports on areas India need to improve in the new year, Pathan said: "India need to prepare a good fast bowling unit in 2024. We saw what happened in South Africa, the back ups were not ready. Shami was missed."

"If god forbid, something happens to Bumrah as we have seen in the past, injury can happen to him. If we don't prepare a big pool, we won't get quality pacers like them

(Bumrah, Shami). You need to have 7-8 pacers ready for the highest level," he said.

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar wants the Indian team to have the right blend of youth and experience.

"The biggest focus should be on having a good blend of youth and experience. Because that is always something that comes in handy. You need to have a wise cool head to temper the excitement of the younger blood," said Gavaskar.

India must also prepare leaders to take over from Rohit Sharma in due time, added Pathan.

"Leadership is another area we need to focus on. We need to have 2-3 leaders ready as this year we can see many changes. India did very well under Kohli in Test cricket for five years. He led from the front. "Same with Rohit who led us to the World Cup final and we won Asia Cup under him. We need to groom leaders like them," added Pathan. (PTI)

Several grapplers seek UWW intervention in resolving wrestling crisis in India

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Several international medal-winning wrestlers from different states have approached the world governing body UWW, requesting its intervention for restoration of the suspended WFI and accused Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik of orchestrating a "fake agitation". The three wrestlers had led a protest against former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, alleging that he has sexually exploited women wrestlers and sought his arrest. The matter is being heard by a Delhi court and Brij Bhushan is out on bail.

The National camps have not been held for a long time due to the ongoing tussle between the elite wrestlers and the BJP MP. An ad-hoc panel ran the sport till recently but was brought back to handle day-to-day affairs of the sports body after the newly-elected body was suspended by the Sports Ministry.

"I would like to inform you that due to fake agitation of three wrestlers, the wrestling in India has been destroyed. I am a woman wrestler but I did not face any sexual demand from the previous president," wrote an Asian Games and CWG medal-winning wrestler.

"I thought after the election of WFI, this controversy will be over but these three wrestlers are trying to damage wrestling in India. Being a woman wrestler, I personally contacted many women wrestlers but no one corroborated the version of these wrestlers.

"My humble request to UWW is to interfere in the matter and a permanent Federation may please be established in India otherwise wrestling will be destroyed," the Arjuna awardee added.

It may be mentioned that United World Wrestling (UWW) had suspended the WFI on August 24 for not holding elections on time and Indian wrestlers had to compete as neutral athletes at the World Championships last year.

A junior wrestler from Maharashtra, in her letter to UWW President Nenad Lalovic, wrote how their careers have been stalled in the absence of junior national championships.

"Since two years, there is no sub junior and junior competition, the wrestlers are not getting the chance to show their talent as there are only three senior players (creating controversy) and on top of that due to politics, a big crisis has come..... Please give justice to Indian wrestlers by activating Wrestling Federation of India," the wrestler wrote.

The newly elected body WFI had announced immediately after the polls that U15 and U20 Nationals will be held in the last week of December in Gonda, UP but due to WFI suspension, the competitions could not be held. Interestingly, the minor who filed a sexual harassment complaint against Brij Bhushan before withdrawing it, also wrote to the UWW admitting that her father filed a fake complaint against the former WFI boss.

She even said that she did it under the influence of Punia, Phogat and Malik. "This was all fake. Nothing happened to me. I came under pressure from the top three wrestlers but I did not know what they really wanted from me. (PTI)

People from all walks of life get together to bid adieu to Sandeep Chattoo

JAMMU, Jan 2: Hundreds of people from all walks of life including sports personalities bid adieu to Sandeep Chattoo, a prominent businessman and the owner of Real Kashmir Football Club (RKFC), as he was cremated here on Tuesday. Chattoo, 57, died in Gurugram on Sunday after suffering a heart attack. He is survived by his mother, wife, and two children.

His body was flown from Delhi to his native place Jammu where people paid their last respects to Chattoo, who is widely acknowledged for his pivotal role in reinvigorating football in the insurgency-affected Kashmir valley. The last rites were performed by his son Samarth in the presence of many mourners who had turned up to pay their last respect to the departed soul. Chattoo's death has left the football community in shock and grief, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, where he made significant contributions to the sport. As a hotelier, Chattoo founded RKFC in 2016 with the aim of providing a platform for local players to showcase their talent.

Under his leadership, the club achieved great success, including winning the second division I-League in 2018 and securing victory in the 123rd edition of the IFA Shield in December 2020.

Chattoo's unwavering commitment to promoting local talent resulted in many individuals from Jammu and Kashmir participating in India's premier football leagues. His passion for football and dedication to uplift the young athletes will always be remembered.

Sportspersons, political parties, and football associations have expressed their condolences and paid tributes to Chattoo's legacy.

Former chief minister and Lok Sabha MP Farooq Abdullah and National Conference party's vice president Omar Abdullah described him as "an invaluable jewel" who worked tirelessly for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir. "Chattoo's death is a huge loss, especially for the people of Kashmir where he did a tremendous job in the sports arena and creating jobs. His only urge was to do something for the locals and he proved it by his dedication and commitment." An Pnri party vice president and former minister Usman Majid Wani told PTI.

He said Chattoo's death left the people in the valley disappointed. "I am a broken man as I have lost my brother who groomed young footballers of the valley." Former MLC Charan Jeet Singh Khalsa said he stayed



back in Kashmir and organised tournaments, sending a message to the outside world that the situation in the valley is normal. The Youth Wing of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) said it was deeply saddened by Chattoo's sudden passing and praised his efforts to promote local players. The Jammu and Kashmir Football Association offered its deepest condolences to Chattoo's family and the entire football fraternity.

Indian Super League organisers also expressed their condolences, calling Chattoo's death a devastating loss to the sport. Former All India Football Federation (AIFF) Secretary General Shaji Prabhakaran recalled Chattoo's immense contributions to football in Jammu and Kashmir, stating that his legacy would be taken forward through the club he created.

David Robertson, former coach of RKFC, described Chattoo as a gentleman and a great friend, expressing his devastation at the news of his death. Ranjit Bajaj, proprietor of Minerva Punjab, acknowledged Chattoo's pioneering role in establishing RKFC as the only representative from Jammu and Kashmir in international competitions. Chattoo's untimely demise has left a void in the football community, but his legacy will continue to inspire and motivate young athletes in Jammu and Kashmir and beyond. (PTI)

Cape of 'Good Hope': Indian bowlers face tall task as Rohit seeks redemption

CAPE TOWN, Jan 2: Rohit Sharma, the leader, will need to channelise the champion tactician that resides in him as India look to restore parity against South Africa and remain consequential in the World Championship points table when the second Test starts here on Wednesday.

India are sixth in the nine-team table with 14 points (38.89 PCT) and a defeat will dent their standing further. Ravindra Jadeja, India's "Most Valuable Player" across formats, will come back to add the requisite middle-order batting balance and steady overs with the old Kookaburra but it will be the skipper's choice of third and fourth speed merchants that will define the embattled team's response.

As harsh as it might sound, no one knows more than Rohit that Prasadh Krishna is pretty undercooked to counter the vagaries of Test cricket and Shardul Thakur's bits and pieces talent will not win him much on most days.

But with three top-order batters, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer compounding the team's worries with their ineptitude while dealing with the bouncer barrage, Shardul's presence gives the side an assumption of batting depth on paper.

Save KL Rahul in the first innings and Virat Kohli in the second essay, none of the Indian batters could cope with the extra bounce and lateral movement at Centurion.

With one loss and one draw in three Tests in the new World Test Championship cycle, India would be desperate for a win, which will be easier said than done at the picturesque cricket stadium where the visitors have lost four of their previous six games.

The last six weeks of 2023 haven't exactly been kind to Rohit, who is still trying to pick up the pieces after India's World Cup final defeat.

That final and Rohit have become a tragic love story, and what has added humiliation to the mix is the two and half day defeat at Centurion in the run up to the New Year. The skipper stood as exposed tactically as his batters and bowlers were found to be inept technically in an innings and 32 run defeat.

There would be no better way to start 2024



than a win at the Newlands ground with the breathtaking Table Mountain adding to the scenic backdrop.

But South Africa have had an upper hand against India at this venue and Dean Elgar, who would captain South Africa in his last Test appearance wouldn't want that Rohit becomes the second skipper after Mahendra Singh Dhoni to at least draw a Test series in the Rainbow Nation. The toss will be crucial at Newlands which is recording temperatures of 33 to 34 degrees and despite decent grass covering, the pitch will be a batting paradise with little help for spinners from either side.

It will therefore not be prudent to retain Ravichandran Ashwin given that Jadeja is fit and available for selection.

However, Rohit's biggest decision as skipper would be whether to rely on his specialist batters and replace Shardul and Prasadh with Mukesh Kumar and Avesh Khan.

There's no guarantee that the two rookies, with a combined experience of one Test (played by Mukesh), will pull any rabbit out of the hat. But with their solid experience of first-class cricket, their presence might just give the skipper a stronger shot at a win.

Mukesh has bowled extended spells and is certainly more effective compared to Shardul while Avesh could be the proverbial hit-the-deck bowler, who can put the red cherry on hard lengths and extract steep bounce.

But on a track, which gets better for batting with the passage of time, Dean Elgar, Aiden

Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Keegan Petersen, David Bedingham are a formidable force.

To counter them, the new ball overs will be vital. Jasprit Bumrah would pray that there is a suitable cloud cover known as "Table Cloth" over the mountains and he is not as unlucky as he was at Centurion where he beat the bat 26 times in his first spell without much success.

If the bowlers need to step up, Rohit, the skipper would also need to tell "Rohit the batter" to buck up. He might be a compulsive hooker and puller of the short ball, but in his heart, Rohit knows that only one career Test hundred in SENA countries in a decade is not a fair reflection of his abilities.

The peerless Kagiso Rabada has made him his bunny and the Indian captain needs to out-think the legend in the making.

Lungi Ngidi, who also asks probing questions, won't make life any easier for the Indian skipper and his colleagues.

There would also be the young Nandre Burger to expose the Indian batting line-up's historically fragile technique against left-armers. He would be bowling in and around the ribcage, occasionally slipping a fuller one across the line. Virat Kohli looked in imperious form during both innings of the last Test, getting a beauty from Rabada in the first essay and running out of partners en route his 76 in the second innings.

However, there are plenty of questions for a circumspect Indian team and sooner it gets the answers, the better it will be for its captain.

Squads:

India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Avesh Khan, Prasadh Krishna, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kona Bharat, Abhimanyu Easwaran.

South Africa: Dean Elgar (captain), Aiden Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Keegan Petersen, David Bedingham, Kyle Verreynne (wk), Marco Jansen, Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Nandre Burger, Keshav Maharaj, Wiaan Mulder, Zubayr Hamza, Tristan Stubbs.

Match Starts at 1.30pm (IST). (PTI)

Premier Club Cricket: Phoenix CC advance to next round

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 2: Phoenix Cricket Club advanced to the next round of the Premier Club Cricket Championship in Sivasagar zone, defeating Sivasagar Cricket Club by 7 wickets on Tuesday.

Electing to bat first, Sivasagar CC scored only 96 losing all wickets in 21.2 overs. Phoenix CC gathered the required runs losing 3 wickets in only 13.5 overs. Madhurjya Bora remained not out on 38.

Trott to continue as Afghan coach in 2024

KABUL, Jan 2: Afghanistan head coach Jonathan Trott's contract has been extended for a year, the country's cricket board announced, rewarding him for making significant contributions to the team's progress and development. Having taken over as head coach in July 2022, the former England batter's 18-month tenure came to an end in 2023.

Under his guidance, Afghanistan achieved remarkable success and secured several victories. This included the team's impressive performance at the T20 Asia Cup 2022, its maiden international win, a T20I series victory against Pakistan and their first-ever ODI series win over Bangladesh.

Afghanistan also enjoyed a successful campaign at the last year's ODI World Cup where they beat Pakistan, England, Sri Lanka and the Netherlands. Afghanistan are currently in the United Arab Emirates for a three-match T20I series against the host team.

Following this, they are scheduled to travel to India, for a three-match T20I series from January 11-17. (PTI)

HEM HEM ARNAM!
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"NIM ISI, NING ISI"

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KANGSAM 3.00 AN**

Venue:
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NIHANG RONGKETHE,
SAI SPORTS COMPLEX,
5 MILES, DIPHU,
KARBI ANGLONG**