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India's economy projected to grow at 6.2 per cent in 2024: UN

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 5: India is projected to grow at 6.2 per cent in 2024, supported by robust domestic demand and strong growth in the manufacturing and services sectors, the United Nations has said.

The UN World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2024 report, launched here on Thursday, said that gross domestic product in South Asia is projected to increase by 5.2 per cent in 2024, driven by a robust expansion in India, which remains the fastest-growing large economy in the world.

"Growth in India is projected to reach 6.2 per cent in 2024, slightly lower than the 6.3 per cent estimate for 2023, amid robust domestic demand and strong growth in the manufacturing and services sectors," the report

said. India's GDP is projected to increase to 6.6 per cent in 2025. The report notes that economic growth in India is projected to remain "strong" at 6.2 per cent this year mainly supported by resilient private consumption and strong public investment.

While manufacturing and services sectors will continue to support the economy, erratic rainfall patterns will likely dampen agricultural output, it said.

"Indian economy again outperformed its peers, not just this year but the last few years," chief of the global economic division monitoring branch, economic analysis and policy division (UN DESA) Hamid Rashid told reporters.

He said that India's economic growth has consistently remained over six (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Assam govt assures to table demands before top authorities

Transporters' unions call off strike from today

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Transporters' unions of Assam, whose strike against the new penal law on hit-and-run cases brought commercial vehicle services to a standstill on Friday, decided to call off their agitation.

The strike will be withdrawn at 5 am on Saturday.

The decision to call off the 48-hour strike was taken following discussions with the state government.

"The transporters' unions have agreed to withdraw the strike from 5 am tomorrow," the senior official, privy to the talks, said.

"We have assured them that their demands will be placed before top authorities and their interests would not be compromised," he added.

The strike had been called by the joint forum of transporters' unions



from 5 am on Friday till 5 am on Sunday against the new penal law on hit-and-run cases.

Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which is set to replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code (IPC), drivers causing serious road accidents due to negligent driving and running away without inform-

ing the police or the administration can face up to 10 years in prison or a fine of ₹ 7 lakh.

The punishment for such offences was two years under the IPC.

All commercial vehicles, including school buses and app-based taxis, have been off the roads since

morning in response to the strike.

In several places, including Guwahati, Tinsukia, Tezpur, Gohpur, Bijnai and Bongaigaon, the protestors came out on the streets and raised slogans against the government.

In Bongaigaon, several drivers burnt their driving licenses maintaining that with the stringent measures proposed under the new law, they will not be able to sustain in their current profession.

In some places, including Guwahati and Dibrugarh, strike supporters were seen preventing vehicles, including private cars, from plying on the roads.

Office-goers had a difficult time reaching their workplaces as buses, taxis and app-based cabs were off the roads, abiding by the strike call. Long queues were seen at petrol pumps (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Measures implemented to curb NH 39 accidents in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau

BOKAJAN, Jan 5: In response to the alarming rate of accidents on NH 39 in Karbi Anglong, local authorities, including the police and the District Transport Office (DTO), have announced concerted efforts to address the issue and enhance road safety.

During a press conference held at Hanjlangso, SP Karbi Anglong, Sanjib Kumar Saikia, highlighted the measures taken last year by the police and Transport Department to reduce accidents. These efforts included document checks on vehicles and imposing fines for rule violations.

Despite these initiatives, 33 fatalities occurred in accidents along National Highway (NH) 39. Most incidents transpire in Bokajan and Borpathar, particularly during the evening (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Karbi villages celebrate annual ritual 'Rongker'

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 5: The cultural tapestry of Karbi villages came alive as 'Rongker,' the annual ritual aimed at appeasing deities for prosperity and well-being, unfolded in various Karbi communities.

Following the harvest of paddy and agricultural produce, villages dedicated time to perform the age-old 'Rongker' ceremony.

In the heart of Diphu town, Rongchingri village, ward No. 14, joined the chorus of tradition by performing Rongker to seek blessings (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Assam secures investments exceeding ₹ 11,000 crore in 2023: CM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: In a significant economic boost, Assam witnessed investment proposals surpassing ₹ 11,000 crore in 2023, signaling a potential creation of more than 10,000 jobs, said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Terming the year as a "landmark" for Assam's industrial growth, Sarma attributed this success to the state's conducive investment environment and a groundbreaking customized incen-

tive policy.

"In 2023, Assam saw a record investment proposal of over ₹ 11,000 crores with proposed generation of more than 10,000 jobs due to our path-breaking customised incentive policy," he wrote on micro-blogging site X on Thursday.

He further said that these customised incentives specifically target "mega projects" requiring a minimum investment of ₹ 100 crore and generating a minimum of

200 permanent jobs, further encouraging substantial economic growth in the region.

Highlighting key aspects of the scheme, Sarma revealed that 17 investors have expressed interest, collectively proposing an investment of ₹ 11,753.7 crore.

"The capital investment is estimated at ₹ 8,775.5 crore, with the potential to create 10,906 direct and indirect jobs," he added. Sarma also outlined various incentives (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Transport Workers Union in KA protests against 'Hit and Run Law'

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 5: The Karbi Anglong Motor Transport Workers and Drivers Union (KAMTW&DU) have taken a stand against the newly implemented 'Hit and Run Law,' causing disruptions in the movement of buses, trucks, and other commercial vehicles in solidarity with the ongoing 48-hour strike organised by the All Assam Motor Labour Union (AMLU).

The contentious law stipulates severe penalties, including imprisonment for up to 10 years and a fine of ₹ 7 lakh for individuals causing fatal crashes and fleeing the scene without reporting to authorities.

Truck drivers nationwide are expressing their dissent against the stringent penalties outlined in the new

law. The All India Motor Transport Congress and truck drivers collectively advocate for the repeal of this legislation.

As a result of the union's restrictions, public buses, trucks, and other commercial vehicles refrained from plying the Diphu-Manja road, which connects National Highway (NH) 36 at Manja. Buses remained stationary at Diphu public bus stand and Karbi Anglong Bus Association stand.

The members of the Union stationed near the Buddhist temple in Manja, intercepted vans and commercial cars, compelling passengers to disembark and continue on foot to Manja. The absence of commercial vehicles on the road from (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Modi Government's Big Gift to Jute Organisations, Jute Artisans and Farmers

PATSAN BHAWAN

Inauguration by
Shri Piyush Goyal

Hon'ble Union Minister of Commerce & Industry,
Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution and Textiles
Govt. of India

August presence

Smt. Darshana Vikram Jardosh
Minister of State for Railways & Textiles, Govt. of India

Venue :

**CF Block, Action Area - I,
New Town, Kolkata - 700156
on 6th January, 2024 at 10:30 AM**



❖ Patсан Bhawan features ❖

- A state of the art building ■ Head Quarters of the office of Jute Commissioner, National Jute Board and The Jute Corporation of India Ltd. ■ Seamless service to the jute industry benefitting 40 lakh jute farmers, 4 lakh workers and other stakeholders from a common premise ■ Welfare measures for Jute Mill workers, their girl children with better coordination
- In-house Jute Design & Resource Centre for providing modern and market worthy designs for Jute Artisans, Exporters & Entrepreneurs

❖ Jute Sector Achievements ❖

- Over Rs. 12000 Crores worth of Jute Bags being procured by Central Govt. every year now ■ Highest ever MSP of raw Jute during 2023-24 ■ More than 4 Lakhs farmers supported under I-CARE ■ More than 800 jute artisans/WSHG's imparted training of Jute diversification ■ Production of Jute Goods, more than 12 lakh MT ■ Jute goods export more than Rs. 3500 Crores ■ Jute diversified products exports more than Rs. 1500 Crores

Markets extend gains for 2nd session on fresh foreign fund inflows

Nifty climbed 52.20 points or 0.24 per cent to 21,710.80

MUMBAI, Jan 5: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher for a second straight day on Friday, following gains in IT, tech and capital goods shares amid fresh foreign capital inflows.

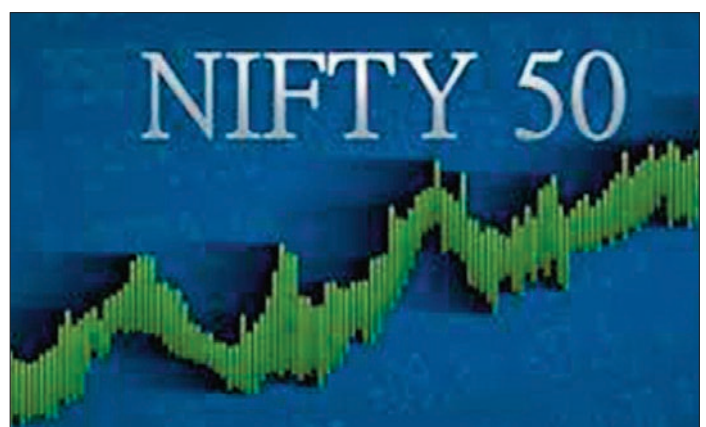
After slipping briefly during the late afternoon trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex made a quick recovery and jumped 178.58 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 72,026.15. During the day, it soared 308.91 points or 0.42 per cent to 72,156.48.

The Nifty climbed 52.20 points or 0.24 per cent to 21,710.80.

On a weekly basis, the BSE benchmark declined 214.11 points or 0.29 per cent, and the Nifty dipped 20.6 points or 0.09 per cent.

"Markets traded volatile and ended marginally higher amid mixed cues. After the initial uptick, the Nifty drifted gradually lower and oscillated in a range till the end.

"Meanwhile, a mixed trend continued on the sectoral front wherein recovery in IT majors and follow-up buying in select heavyweights kept the traders occupied. The broader indices managed to edge higher for yet



another session wherein smallcap gained over half a per cent," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Among the Sensex firms, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, HCL Technologies, Hindustan Unilever, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank and Wipro were the major gainers. Nestle India, Asian Paints, JSW Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank and HDFC Bank were among the losers.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.61 per cent, and the midcap index rose

0.19 per cent.

Among the indices, IT jumped 1.29 per cent, capital goods (1.27 per cent), tech 1.03 per cent, industrials (0.97 per cent), telecommunication (0.59 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.35 per cent).

Commodities, consumer durables and metal were the laggards.

"Investors are also staying cautious ahead of eurozone inflation data today. On the domestic front, the market is moving towards the results season, and we expect the exuberance of the broader index may be tested if the December quarter earnings do not justify the

valuation," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

The services sector growth in India rose to a three-month high in December, supported by favourable economic conditions and positive demand trends, a monthly survey said on Friday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from 56.9 in November to 59 in December, highlighting a sharp increase in output that was the most pronounced since September.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading with losses. The US markets ended mostly lower on Thursday.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.94 per cent to USD 78.32 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 1,513.41 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

On Thursday, the BSE benchmark rose 490.97 points or 0.69 per cent to settle at 71,847.57, and the Nifty surged 141.25 points or 0.66 per cent to 21,658.60. (PTI)

Snap-E Cabs initiates women driver induction process

KOLKATA, Jan 5: Snap-E Cabs, an on-demand app-based Electric Vehicles (EV) fleet, announced its plans to increase the number of women cab drivers in its fleet to 100 in the next few months.

The company is set to train and engage the first batch with 30 women drivers and 50-60 in the next two batches, taking the overall count to about 100 in the next few months.

The company said in a statement that the initiative seeks to create earning opportunities for individuals of all genders who aspire to work as professional cab drivers.

Snap E Cabs aims to achieve a significant female representation in its workforce, targeting a range of 30 per cent.

This initiative aligns with broader industry efforts to enhance inclusivity and provide more opportunities for women in the transportation sector.

Snap-E Cabs has tied up with the NPTC Group of Colleges, UK, to implement a training programme under 'Utkarsh Bangla', a flagship scheme under the aegis of the Paschim Banga Society for Skill Development.

NPTC will bring the UK's expertise in the operation and maintenance of electric cabs as well as develop skill sets of EV drivers for maintaining optimal battery conditions while driving and improving efficiency of overall electric vehicle fleets.

This is supported by the UK-India 'Accelerating Smart Power and Renewable Energy in India' (ASPIRE) programme. The app cab company said passengers appreciate the diverse and welcoming environment that women drivers contribute to the overall ride-hailing experience. (PTI)

Rupee rises 8 paise to close at 83.16 against US dollar



MUMBAI, Jan 5: The rupee appreciated 8 paise to close at 83.16 against the US dollar on Friday, helped by a positive trend in domestic equities and fresh foreign capital inflows.

However, rising crude oil prices in international markets and a strong greenback overseas restricted gains for the local unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened flat at 83.23 against the greenback.

The rupee oscillated between an intra-day low of 83.24 and a high of 83.12 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.16, higher by 8 paise from its previous close of 83.24.

"The Indian rupee remained the second-best performer among the Asian currencies following Chinese currencies. The dollar inflows and stable crude oil prices helped the rupee to buck the past two week's bearish trend," said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities.

The expectations of a strong December US jobs report could temporarily reverse the soft-landing playbook, Parmar said.

Traders will also closely watch India's 2024 growth forecast for next week's rupee directions, Parmar said, adding that from the level front, spot USD/INR has support at 83.10 and resistance at 83.35.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.25 per cent lower at 102.68.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.90 per cent to USD 78.29 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex surged 178.58 points, or 0.25 per cent, to settle at 72,026.15 points. The Nifty advanced 52.20 points, or 0.24 per cent, to 21,710.80 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Thursday as they bought shares worth ₹ 1,513.41 crore, according to exchange data.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, the services sector growth in India rose to a three-month high in December supported by favourable economic conditions and positive demand trends.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from 56.9 in November to 59 in December, highlighting a sharp increase in output that was the most pronounced since September. (PTI)

Symbiosis International unveils undergraduate programme applications

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Symbiosis International (Deemed University) (SIU) has officially opened the application process for its esteemed entrance tests, paving the way for admissions to various undergraduate programs across its legacy institutes. The comprehensive examinations include SET - General (Symbiosis Entrance Test), SET - Law (Symbiosis Law Admission Test or SLAT), and the Symbiosis Institute of Technology Engineering Entrance Exam (SITEEE). These tests are conducted in computer based test (CBT) mode across 76 cities nationwide.

Prospective candidates can register for the respective tests by accessing the official registration links provided below, accompanied by detailed information about each examination.

SET - General (Symbiosis Entrance Test):

The registration process for SET 2024 commenced on December 13 last year and will remain open for approximately four months, allowing

SYMBIOSIS INTERNATIONAL (DEEMED UNIVERSITY)

APPLICATIONS OPEN

for Symbiosis UG Programmes

via SET | SLAT | SITEEE

76	25	2
TEST CITIES	PROGRAMMES	TEST ATTEMPTS

candidates to apply online until April 12, 2024. The SET is scheduled to occur on May 5 (Sunday) and May 11 (Saturday) this year. Interested candidates can complete their registration through the official website.

Symbiosis Law Admission Test (SLAT):

SLAT 2024 will be conducted on May 5 (Sunday) and May 11 (Saturday) this year in CBT mode at designated SLAT 2024 test centers. The SLAT application process for all Symbiosis Law Schools (SLSs) started on December 13 last year.

Candidates aspiring for programs such as B.A LL. B (Hons), B.B.A LL. B (Hons), B.A LL. B., and B.B.A LL. B can complete their registration by accessing the official website.

SET - Engineering Entrance Exam (SITEEE):

The SITEEE 2024 application process for a range of B.Tech Programs is conducted online, with test dates set for May 5 (Test 1) and May 11 (Test 2) this year. Interested candidates for SITEEE 2024 must visit the official website.

Gold falls ₹100 to ₹63,450 per 10 grams



NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Gold prices fell ₹100 to ₹63,450 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid weak global cues, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at ₹63,550 per 10 grams.

However, silver remained flat at ₹76,900 per kg.

"Gold extended its losses on Friday, with spot gold prices in the Delhi markets trading at ₹63,450/10 grams, down by ₹100 following bearish trends in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the global markets, both gold and silver were marginally down at USD 2,040 per ounce and USD 23.03 per ounce, respectively.

Gold prices are under pressure as the dollar and US treasury yields rise in response to better-than-expected US macro data and uncertainty on the Federal Reserve's monetary policy interest rate cut strategy, Gandhi added. (PTI)

India's forex reserves jump USD 2.75 bn to USD 623.2 bn

MUMBAI, Jan 5: India's forex reserves jumped by USD 2.75 billion to USD 623.2 billion in the week ending December 29, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had increased by USD 4.471 billion to USD 620.441 billion.

In October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year.

For the week ended December 29, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by USD 1.869 billion to USD 551.615 billion, as per the data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). (PTI)

Brookfield to buy ATC's India biz in \$ 2.5 bn deal

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Canadian firm Brookfield is all set to acquire the Indian business of American Tower Corporation, in a mega USD 2.5 billion deal that includes USD 2 billion enterprise value on ATC India alongside a 'ticking fee' accruing from October 1, 2023.

The transaction is subject to regulatory approvals and expected to close in the second half of 2024.

"Data Infrastructure Trust (DIT), an Infrastructure Investment Trust sponsored by an affiliate of Brookfield Asset Management, today announced the signing of an agreement with ATC to acquire 100 per cent of the equity interests in American Tower's operations in India (ATC India), for an enterprise value of ₹ 16,500 crore (USD 2 billion) which is subject to pre-closing terms as per the securities purchase agreement," a release by DIT said.

ATC India has a portfolio of approximately 78,000 sites across India.

A release by ATC said total cash proceeds to American Tower at closing, subject to certain pre-closing terms, would potentially represent up to approximately ₹ 21,000 crore or USD 2.5 billion at current exchange rates.

"Total cash proceeds include an enterprise value on ATC India operations of approximately USD 2 billion, plus a ticking fee that accrues from October 1, 2023, to the date of closing," the release said spelling out financial details of the transaction.

Proceeds associated with the enterprise value assume the repayment of existing intercompany debt and the repayment, or assumption, of the existing India term loan, by DIT.

"Furthermore, and considered within the total potential cash proceeds above, American Tower will retain the full economic benefit associated with the optionally converted debentures (OCDs) issued by Vodafone Idea and will be entitled to receive future payments related to existing ATC India receivables. Proceeds from the transaction are expected to be used



to repay American Tower's existing indebtedness," ATC said.

DIT houses Brookfield's telecom tower businesses in India through Summit Digital and Crest Digital.

This will be Brookfield's third acquisition in the Indian telecommunications space. According to Brookfield's release, in 2022 it had acquired a portfolio of 5,000 indoor business solution sites and small cell sites, which advances the rollout of 5G and enables telecom operators to extend their coverage capacity in difficult-to-access and dense areas.

Brookfield also has a portfolio of nearly 1,75,000 towers that were acquired in 2020 from Reliance Industrial Investments and Holdings Ltd.

ATC India will be included in DIT, which includes the existing telecommunications assets.

Arpit Agrawal, Managing Director, Head of Infrastructure, India and Middle East, at Brookfield, said, "We look forward to expanding and enhancing our existing telecom tower portfolio in India, which enables a broader array of solutions for our customers and partners."

Agrawal added: "Through strategic acquisitions like ATC India, we remain deeply committed to empowering digital connectivity and transforming the telecom infrastructure landscape across the region."

In India, Brookfield has approximately USD 25 billion in assets under management across Infrastructure, Real Estate, Renewable Power and Transition and Private Equity. (PTI)

Tata Motors Unveils Revolutionary Pure EV Architecture

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Tata Passenger Electric Mobility (TPEM) has taken a significant leap in the electric vehicle (EV) market with the introduction of its groundbreaking pure EV architecture, known as acti.ev. The acronym stands for Advanced Connected Tech-Intelligent Electric Vehicle, reflecting the company's commitment to cutting-edge technology. This architecture will serve as the foundation for upcoming products within the TPPEM portfolio, marking a pivotal moment in India's EV evolution.

The inaugural product to utilize this pure electric architecture is the Punch.ev, signaling the beginning of a diverse range of offerings with various body styles and sizes. Interested customers can secure their Punch.ev by making a booking at Tata Motors showrooms or Tata.ev

stores, requiring a nominal ₹ 21,000.

Anand Kulkarni, chief products officer, emphasized that the acti.ev architecture is strategically designed to achieve class-leading efficiencies by optimizing space, battery capacity, and enhancing the overall driving experience. Notably, the architecture is globally compatible and forward-looking, incorporating software-oriented features to ensure Tata vehicles remain technologically advanced and future-proof. The acti.ev architecture revolves around key principles—performance, technology, modularity, and space efficiency, encompassing four essential layers of powertrain, chassis, electrical architecture, and cloud architecture. The powertrain boasts an optimized battery pack design, offering modularity and multiple range options.

India's Dec services PMI hits 3-month high on sharp rise in new orders

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The services sector growth in India rose to a three-month high in December supported by favourable economic conditions and positive demand trends, a monthly survey said on Friday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from 56.9 in November to 59 in December, highlighting a sharp increase in output that was the most pronounced since September.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

The survey is compiled from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 service sector companies.

"India's services sector ended the year on a high note, with an uptick in business activity, led by a three-month high new orders index," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

The rise in total new business was supported by continued growth of international sales. Service providers noted higher demand from clients based in Australia, Canada, Europe, the Middle East and South America during December.



"Demand buoyancy spurred sales, subsequently fuelling business activity. Job creation extended into a 19th successive month, while business optimism strengthened," the survey said.

Going ahead, services firms in India expect the strong demand momentum to carry forward to 2024 on advertising and better customer relationships.

RBI revises definition of politically-exposed persons for KYC purpose

New rules include person who is entrusted by foreign country with a public function

MUMBAI, Jan 5: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has changed the definition of politically-exposed persons (PEPs) under its norms, a move that will make it easier for those individuals to carry out various banking transactions, including availing loans.

Certain changes have been made in the RBI's Know Your Customer (KYC) norms.

The earlier norms pertaining to PEPs were open-ended and there was a lack of clarity on the definition, apparently leading to issues for bankers, parliamentarians and others. There were also concerns in certain quarters that PEPs were finding it difficult to get loans or open bank accounts.

In the amended KYC master direction, the central bank defines PEPs as "individuals who are or



have been entrusted with prominent public functions by a foreign country, including the heads of states/governments, senior politicians, senior government or judicial or military officers, senior executives of state-owned corporations and important political party officials".

The new rules also include a person who is entrusted by a foreign country with a public function.

Bank accounts of PEPs have additional KYC norms under the current provisions and special due diligence has to be undertaken by a senior bank official.

A sub-clause in the master direction in KYC norms issued by way of a circular on February 25, 2016 has been removed by the central bank.

The central bank has also asked chairpersons and chief executives of banks and other financial services, which are into lending business, to make the changes effective immediately.

Last year, the Centre amended the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to introduce more disclosures for non-government organisations by reporting entities. (PTI)

Indian economy to grow 7.3 pc in 2023-24, govt estimates

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The Indian economy is estimated to grow at 7.3 per cent in 2023-24 against 7.2 per cent in the previous fiscal, the National Statistical Office (NSO) said on Friday in its first advance estimates of national accounts.

Releasing the first advance estimates of National Income for 2023-24, the NSO said, "Real GDP or GDP at Constant (2011-12) Prices in the year 2023-24 is estimated to attain a level of ₹ 171.79 lakh crore, as against the Provisional Estimate of GDP for the year 2022-23 of ₹ 160.06 lakh crore, released on 31st May 2023". According to a statement, the growth in real GDP during 2023-24 is estimated at 7.3 per cent compared to 7.2 per cent in 2022-23. GDP at current prices in the year 2023-24 is estimated at ₹ 296.58 lakh crore against the provisional estimate of GDP of ₹ 272.41 lakh crore for the year 2022-23, released on May 31, 2023, it stated. The growth in nominal GDP during 2023-24 is estimated at 8.9 per cent against 16.1 per cent in 2022-23, it added. In December 2023, the RBI raised India's GDP growth rate estimate to 7 per cent for 2023-24 from its earlier projection of 6.5 per cent. (PTI)

ADOPTION OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES AT DIBRUGARH WORKSHOP

E-Tender Notice No. DBWS/Elec/ EEM/2023-24 Dated: 03-01-2024.

E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: E-Tender No. EL-1-DB-W-1-EEM-2023-24-73. Name of work: Adoption of Energy Efficiency measures at Dibrugarh workshop.

Tender Value: ₹24,24,268.70 inclusive GST. **Earnest Money:** ₹48,500/- **Date & Time of Closing of Tender:** 15.00 hrs. on 24-01-2024 & opening at 15.30 hrs. of 24-01-2024. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 24-01-2024 in website www.irops.gov.in

Dy. Chief Electrical Engineer, Mech. Workshop, Dibrugarh NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

Serving Customers With A Smile

Minister Atul Bora inaugurates Livestock and Poultry Show 2024

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Atul Bora, the minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, enthusiastically participated in the inaugural ceremony of the Livestock and Poultry Show 2024 at Farmgate Field, Khanapara, Guwahati. The three-day event, jointly organised by the AHV Department and ALPCO, was designed to facilitate meaningful exchanges between industry leaders in the livestock sector and potential farmer entrepreneurs.

Against the backdrop of the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Central and state governments have underscored the significance of agriculture, livestock, and allied sectors. Minister Bora, recognising various measures undertaken to ensure the prosperity and dignity of farmers, encouraged the youth to actively engage in agriculture and livestock farming by leveraging government schemes and policies.

The distinguished gathering at the opening ceremony included Sikkim minister Lok Nath Sharma, MP Queen Oja, MP Pabira Margherita, MLA Ramendra Narayan Kalita, AAU VC Dr Bidyut Chandan Deka,



ALPCO chairman Manoj Saikia, vice chairman Pares Borkotoky, AHV Department principal secretary Manish Thakur, secretary Abhijit Barua, CVSc Khanapara dean Dr Bibekananda Saikia, senior officials of AHV Department, Government of Assam, and directors of Veterinary Departments from Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur, and Meghalaya governments. The ceremony attracted other senior officials from various North Eastern states.

The Livestock and Poultry Show not only

serves as a prominent platform for showcasing advancements in these sectors but also aligns with the government's vision of fostering growth through collaborations, knowledge transfer, and expanded market access. Minister Bora extended his best wishes to all livestock farmers, entrepreneurs, officials, and experts from Assam and other North Eastern states, urging stakeholders to collaborate for the event's success and the ultimate benefit of farmers.

In addition to the livestock event, minister Bora attended the 'Assam Rising Youth Conclave 2023-24' organised by Aalok Pravanjan Welfare Society in Guwahati. He commended the organisers for their noble initiative, anticipating that it would significantly contribute to youth entrepreneurship and unlock true potential across various sectors in the state. Minister Bora presented awards and felicitated individuals for their noteworthy contributions to various fields, extending congratulations and best wishes for their future endeavors. Distinguished personalities such as Dr Naren Hazarika, Bhupendranath Bhattacharya, Shankar Gohain, Digijyoti Lahkar, and other youths and students graced the occasion.

Education minister evaluates students' reading skills in Sivasagar



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 5: On the second day of the Gunotsav event in Sivasagar district, Education minister Ranaj Pegu visited three schools in the town and conducted a test to assess students' knowledge of the use of punctuation marks. The minister, during his visit to Bezbaruah School, prompted students to read Assamese texts and stressed the importance of proper punctuation for developing reading skills and acquiring concepts.

Following this, minister Pegu inspected the construction of the new building at Sivasagar Government HS School and discussed the preparations for Gunotsav with the staff. He also

visited Sivasagar Government MV School, inaugurating the newly constructed additional classrooms. The minister urged external evaluators to assess students' performance sincerely, expressing hope for good results in the district, as seen in previous years.

Accompanying the minister were DC Sivasagar AV Yadav and IS, Sivasagar Devajyoti Gogoi. Dr Pegu also visited the Tai Academi in Bokota Patsaku before heading to Dhemajhi.

This year, 71,680 students from 1,263 schools in the district will undergo assessments conducted by external evaluators from various departments and educational institutions, including 12 VVIPs.

MSSV organises national seminar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya's Department of Sankaradeva Studies successfully organised a national seminar on the theme of 'Srimanta Sankaradeva in the Perspective of Social Transformation' on Thursday. The event took place at the university's Guwahati campus in collaboration with Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, Nagaon, and Assam Sahitya Sabha.

Dr. Mridul Hazarika, vice chancellor of MSSV, inaugurated the seminar, and Dr Surya Kanta Hazarika, president of Assam Sahitya Sabha, delivered the keynote address. Dr Hazarika highlighted the importance of systematic study, investigation, research, and translation of the works of Mahapurusha Sankaradeva, noting that many of Srimanta Sankaradeva's works are yet to be fully explored.

Chancellor Bhabendra Nath Deka, vice chancellor Dr Mridul Hazarika, and registrar Dr Mrinal Kumar Bora of MSSV participated in the seminar, highlighting the university's unique position as the sole institution for the study and research of Sankaradeva in India or Assam. Dr Upendrajit Sarma, secretary of Assam Sahitya Sabha, pradhan sampadak of Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha Kuchal Thakuria, and former pradhan sampadak of SSS Babul Bora also contributed thoughtful lectures on various aspects of the changing social landscape. The seminar featured 85 participants, including faculty, researchers, and students from different institutions. They presented seminar papers across six parallel technical seminar platforms, covering various fields of study related to the theme.

Additionally, Dr Priti Deka, faculty of the Department of Sankaradeva Studies at MSSV, released her book titled 'Srimanta Sankaradeva as an Educationist' during the seminar. Dr Niranjana Kalita, head of the Department of Sankaradeva Studies, MSSV, expressed gratitude to all attendees and announced plans for publishing a comprehensive book containing selected research papers from the seminar. He sought cooperation for future seminars of similar significance.

Surya Namaskar extravaganza at Goalpara

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: In a splendid demonstration of well-being and unity, the Department of Yogic Science & Naturopathy at Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, in collaboration with the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, is set to organise a grand Surya Namaskar event on Saturday. The event will take place at Surya Pahar, Goalpara, starting from 09:00 am, marking the occasion of Makar Sankranti and commemorating the sun's journey to the northern hemisphere. The initiative is under the guiding influence of Prof Mridul Hazarika, vice chancellor of the University.

The Ministry of AYUSH has strategically chosen the major Sun temple of the country for the Surya Namaskar event, as Sun temples hold special significance in their dedication to the Sun God, Surya, making them an ideal venue for such an occasion. Conducting the Surya Namaskar amidst the Sun temple's serene premises aims to promote the myriad benefits of this practice among the people. It is anticipated that approximately 1000 individuals, including participants from various yoga organisations, schools, and colleges, will actively engage in this event.

VCA program by 1st BN SSB

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: As part of their ongoing Veterinary Civic Action Program, 1st BN SSB conducted a Village OPD at Jarikuri village in Digaru Gaon Panchayat. The initiative, led by Anuj Kumar, officiating commandant 1st BN SSB Sonapur, aimed to provide veterinary assistance to the villagers.

Under the Veterinary Civic Action Program, the SSB veterinary team offered medical aid to the community, benefiting the villagers in Jarikuri. As an extension of their commitment to the region's development, 1st BN SSB will also organise an agricultural workshop for farmers. This workshop aims to impart knowledge related to farming practices, and free seed distribution will be a part of the program. In addition to the agricultural workshop, a football tournament is scheduled to take place at BN HQR Sonapur from January 8, providing recreational and community-building opportunities for the villagers.



63rd triennial conference of Sadou Assam Ahom Sabha commences in Jorhat

'The event featured a diverse array of activities, including a book fair, textile exhibition etc'

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 5: The Jorhat District Sports Association (JDSA) ground became the focal point for the commencement of the three-day 63rd triennial conference of the Sadou Assam Ahom Sabha (All Assam Ahom Association), state committee, on Friday.

The 130-year-old Ahom association, revered as a leading body of the Ahom community, strategically chose Jorhat, the last capital of the Ahom dynasty, as the host city for its triennial conference.

In a gesture of honor and historical acknowledgment, the venue of the conference has been christened Purnananda Buragohain Kshetra. This title pays homage to Buragohain, an adept nobleman who held the prestigious post of Prime Minister in the court of the Ahom king during the late 18th and early 19th century.

The inaugural ceremony commenced with the lighting of the traditional ceremonial lamp (Khek-ban-fai) by notable figures, including the president of All Assam Ahom Association, Umakanta Konwar, and the organising committee's president and general secretary, Dr Bimala Prasad Baruah and Tapan Kumar Gogoi, respectively. Following this, members of Joya Romoni Sora presented Ai Ching Lao, a traditional Tai Ahom prayer.

The event featured a diverse array of activities, including a book fair, textile exhibition, and various food stalls. Bishnu Buragohain, a distinguished sports

organiser and life member of Tai Ahom Sanskriti Sangrakshan Aru Siksha Bikash Samiti, inaugurated these vibrant additions to the conference. Furthermore, a prize money state-level quiz competition on Asom Buranji, conducted by Hridayjit Phukan of Moran Quiz Club, added an intellectual facet to the proceedings.

As evening descended, the venue came alive with a cultural program that showcased the rich heritage of the Tai Ahom community.

Anticipating a distinguished gathering, the conference has drawn attention from noted Tai Ahom scholars, academicians, and eminent personalities, including renowned filmmaker Jahnua Barua and Assam minister for industries and commerce, cultural affairs, Bimal Borah. The conference promises the release of a substantial 500-page souvenir, edited by Chao Pranab Borpatragohain.

The culmination of the event will be marked by a massive and colorful cultural procession parading through the town, creating a memorable conclusion to this historic gathering.

It is noteworthy that the 130-year-old All Assam Ahom Association, founded by Padmanath Gohain Baruah, a luminary of Assamese literature, continues to stand as a premier body within the Ahom community. Gohain Baruah, also the founder-president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, has left an enduring legacy that forms the foundation of this distinguished association.

Budhindra Narzary passes away

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Jan 5: Renowned social worker and former AASU leader from Sonitpur district, Budhindra Kumar Narzary, passed away on Thursday after a prolonged battle with cancer. At the age of 62, he succumbed to his illness in the early hours of the day. Late Narzary, actively engaged in the Assam Agitation, served as the vice president of the Tezpur Unit AASU (All Assam Students' Union) and held various leadership roles within the organisation. Additionally, he served as the assistant general secretary of the Tezpur College Students' Union. A committed social worker,



Narzary contributed to several socio-cultural and religious organisations, including Bahbari Usha

Minister Chandra Mohan conducts Gunotsav evaluation

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Chandra Mohan Patowary, the minister for Environment & Forests, Act East Policy Affairs, and Welfare of Minorities Department, visited Madhab Deb High School in Kamrup district to participate as an external evaluator in the Gunotsav program. During his visit, the minister engaged in interactive sessions with both students and teachers, thoroughly assessing the academic performance, extracurricular activities, and infrastructure of the school.

Minister Patowary actively participated in discussions, gaining insights into the overall educational environment at Madhab Deb High School. The visit included a detailed review of the school's academic curriculum, the range of extracurricular activities available to students, and the state of the school's infrastructure.

CM, journalist fraternity condole veteran journalist's death

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday condoled the death of veteran journalist and former working president of the Journalists Association of Assam, Jadu Kakati, who had passed away on Thursday night at the age of 92 years.

The body of the veteran journalist was taken from his residence in Hengrabari to the office of the Media Trust at Rugpnagar in the city, where the journalist fraternity and many citizens paid rich floral tributes to him.

Kakati was associated with various media houses in the state. He held important positions in various newspapers. He was also involved in social work and can be credited with establishing the office of the Media Trust of Assam, establishing archives, organizing workshops, establishing libraries, etc.

Members of the Media Trust also paid rich floral tributes to him. Meanwhile, the Journalists Association of Assam (JAA) has condoled Kakati's death.

JAA president Dharendra Nath Chakraborty said Jadu Kakati had been trying to unite journalists from all media houses in the state by leading the organisation for a long time since the 1990s. Moreover, journalists and media in general began to struggle to get justice. The death of such a journalist is an irreparable loss to Assam journalism.

Veteran journalist Jadu Kakati's lifelong dedication and responsibility in the field of journalism will be remembered, he said.

CEM Pramod Boro attends mass gathering in Srirampur

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Jan 5: A significant mass gathering and joining program of the ruling United People's Party (UPPL) took place at Bhairiguri in Srirampur, Kokrajhar district, drawing the participation of CEM Pramod Boro. During the event, Boro highlighted the challenges faced by the region during the 17 years of BPF party rule, emphasising a climate of fear and discontent. He credited the positive changes in BTC to the BJP government at the Center and state, acknowledging the role of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home minister Amit Shah.

Boro outlined the achievements of the UPPL-led BTR government, including the distribution of 96,000 land pattas to landless families in the last three years, with plans to reach one lakh pattas in the coming years. He criti-

cised Hagrama Mohilary for the incomplete 39 thousand houses, contrasting it with UPPL's allocation of 1 lakh 60 thousand houses to needy families. EM Wilson Hasda and MLA Jiran Basumatary also spoke about the positive transformations in BTC, highlighting the shift from negativity to positivity and the implementation of various developmental schemes.

In the midst of a busy schedule, CEM Pramod Boro inaugurated the iron bridge on Madati River in Gossaigaon and ceremonially unveiled the Clock Tower for the beautification of Gossaigaon Town. Boro engaged with local intellectuals, discussing schemes for the development and beautification of Gossaigaon town, distribution of solar lamps, steel filters for clean drinking water, and providing a tractor for supplying clean drinking water to the municipality.

Strayed Royal Bengal Tiger claims life in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 5: A sudden attack by a strayed Royal Bengal Tiger at Nonoi Bhelaigaon under Nagaon PS resulted in the tragic death of Aditya Saikia (60) and serious injuries to Satya Phukan (45) early on Friday morning. According to local sources, Satya Phukan had gone to a nearby crop field to feed his cows when the Bengal Tiger confronted and leaped on him. Alert villagers rushed to the scene with sticks, causing a commotion that led the tiger to retreat, leaving Phukan with severe injuries. Subsequently, the tiger entered the residential area where it attacked Aditya Saikia. The injured victims were promptly admitted to Nagaon Medical College and Hospital for urgent treatment. Forest officials and personnel from Nagaon Forest Range Office were immediately informed and attempted to locate the strayed Bengal Tiger to capture it. However, as of the latest report, the tiger remains untraced. In response to the incident, district commissioner Narendra Kr Shah (IAS) issued an official notification on Friday afternoon, imposing CrPC 144 with immediate effect in the greater Nonoi areas. The order strictly prohibits the assembly of five persons or more, carrying firearms, lethal weapons, bows and arrows, and making loud noises in these areas. Violation of this order will result in lawful action under Section 188. The notification, however, exempts police, forest personnel, and other paramilitary forces from these restrictions.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

I was really too honest a man to be a politician and live.
—Socrates

B'desh polls: A test for democracy

As Bangladesh gears up for its general elections on January 7, 2024, the political landscape is marked by controversy and international attention. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League faces a challenging task to prove the fairness of the polls, especially with the main opposition party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), choosing to boycott, citing concerns of government interference. The lead-up to the elections has seen notable events, including the controversial sentencing of Nobel Prize-winning economist Muhammad Yunus to six months in prison, widely perceived as politically motivated. The BNP alleges that the government's actions are aimed at suppressing the opposition, setting the stage for a political showdown primarily between Sheikh Hasina's Awami League and Islamic fundamentalist parties. India's concern about a potential rise in Islamic extremism if the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami return to power echoes historical patterns from 2001 and 2006. India, having gained trust in Sheikh Hasina's previous term, indirectly supports her return to prevent such a scenario. However, allegations against the Awami League government suggest ties with conservative Islamic organizations and the fostering of radical ideologies for electoral gains.

A crucial factor in this election is the voting behaviour of minority communities, particularly the Hindu population. Despite allegations of violence and persecution during Awami League's tenure, the minority communities, especially Hindus, appear inclined to vote for the party. The BNP's accusations of the Awami League being responsible for deaths and exodus among minority populations seem overshadowed by the BNP's own perceived disrepute. The Sheikh Hasina government has taken measures to weaken the opposition, arresting hundreds of BNP activists and leaders through the controversial Ansar Battalion Bill 2023. This legislation grants police extensive powers, allowing them to enter homes, arrest suspects, and hand them over to the police. Critics argue that this has brought the opposition to its knees, further evidenced by the BNP's decision to boycott the elections. The BNP's October 28 rally in Dhaka turned violent, resulting in the death of a policeman and a BNP activist. Subsequent arrests of thousands of activists have led to severe overcrowding in all 68 prisons in Bangladesh, doubling their capacity. This escalation of tensions adds complexity to an already contentious electoral atmosphere.

Amidst the internal dynamics, there is a perception that the Awami League is apprehensive about the election, despite the opposition's boycott. Speculations about the United States' influence on the situation, expressed through threats of visa bans on those undermining democracy, further complicates the narrative. While the US and other Western countries align against Sheikh Hasina's government, Russia and China seem to favour the Awami League. The January 7 elections have garnered global attention, drawing scrutiny from human rights groups. As the world watches, Sheikh Hasina's government faces a critical test on election day. The outcome will not only shape the political landscape of Bangladesh but will also influence international perceptions of democracy and fairness in the electoral process. The upcoming elections in Bangladesh stand at the crossroads of political controversy and international scrutiny. Amidst the boycott by the main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League faces accusations of suppressing the opposition. Concerns about rising Islamic extremism, India's indirect support for Sheikh Hasina, and the controversial arrests under the Ansar Battalion Bill 2023 contribute to a highly charged electoral atmosphere.

Democracy prevails: Truckers granted reprieve

By: Dipak Kurmi

Democracy emerged as the ultimate victor in the standoff between India's truck drivers and the Central government.

Once more, the Indian populace demonstrated that, even in the absence of an active Opposition, their voluntary and steadfast mobilization has the potential to sway the outcome in their favor.

Nationwide, truck drivers initiated a strike in protest against a recent law enacted by the Central government. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita includes provisions targeting the prevalence of the 'hit and run' phenomenon on Indian roads, especially those involving heavy commercial vehicles.

As per a national report from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, India witnessed a staggering surge of 12 percent in road accidents last year, totaling over 4.6 lakh incidents. Shockingly, every hour witnesses 53 accidents, resulting in the loss of 19 lives. In 2022 alone, 1.68 lakh individuals lost their lives in 4.61 lakh accidents. The prevalence of injuries, including severe ones, is disproportionately high when compared to societies of similar magnitude globally.

Under the recent amendments, truck drivers may now confront a substantial increase in penalties, including a maximum jail term of up to 10 years and a substantial fine of ₹ 7 lakhs. This applies when a driver, responsible for or involved in an accident, opts to flee from the scene without reporting it. This marks a significant escalation from the previous provisions of the Indian Penal Code, where the maximum imprisonment stood at two years.

In swift response to the bill's provisions, drivers' unions and their leaders expressed strong opposition, deeming the specific section as unacceptable. According to reports, Bal Malikit Singh, the leader of the organizing committee of the All India Motor Transport Congress, issued a direct challenge to the government, stating, "Hum ye kanoon laagu nahi hone denge (we will not allow the government to implement this law)." The majority of drivers' associations collectively

denounced the new provisions, labeling them as "kaala kanoon" or black law.

Following the unions' opposition, the strike commenced, causing a substantial disruption in the supply chains of essential goods across multiple states, with a notable impact on fuel and petroleum products. The regions most heavily affected included Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, all of which hold significant political importance in the lead-up to the Lok Sabha elections.

As thousands of petrol stations faced shortages, individuals flocked to queue up for fuel, exacerbating the chaos. Reports flooded the media and social platforms, documenting extensive lines at petrol stations, with many displaying signs proclaiming "No diesel." This laid the groundwork for widespread turmoil across the nation.

The Opposition parties, particularly the Congress, raised their voice against the "stringent provisions" of the new regulations, claiming that they would breed "organized corruption." Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge accused the BJP of unfairly penalizing the underprivileged, while MP Rahul Gandhi strongly condemned the approach, stating that the insistence on enacting laws without consulting the affected class and engaging in dialogue with the Opposition constitutes a persistent assault on the essence of democracy.

In anticipation of a recurrence of the challenges faced with the farm laws, the government yielded gracefully. Following a meeting between leaders of the AIMTC and officials of the home ministry, the strike was called off, but not before they secured a reprieve. The ministry assured the drivers that no decisions would proceed without prior consultation.

Ultimately, the resolution to the looming economic standoff was swift, serving as a valuable lesson for the government to engage with stakeholders in a more thorough and proactive manner. If the provisions of the new law had undergone exhaustive debate in Parliament, this crisis might have been averted altogether. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Israel is seeking to cleanse Gaza of Palestinians through unending bombings

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have announced that the military operations in Gaza will continue throughout 2024. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has repeatedly stated that the war in Gaza will continue till the Hamas is totally finished. He has also stated that Israel will control the Gaza border with Egypt which would mean Israel's de facto control over the whole of the Gaza strip.

After three months of air, ground and naval operations in the Gaza strip, the Israeli armed forces have not still been able to eliminate Hamas or end the resistance put up by Hamas fighters. The reality is that military force will not be able to finish off the Hamas. Even if militarily defeated, it will resurface in some form or the other.

The real aim of Israel's never-ending war is to ensure the ethnic cleansing of Gaza by making this narrow strip of land uninhabitable; to kill, starve and force out the Palestinian people out of Gaza. For the Palestinian people, the Nakba (catastrophe) which began in 1948 is still going on.

Since October 7, Israelis have dropped approximately 29,000 bombs on Gaza (till the third week of December). Compare this to the US bombing in Iraq, where 3,678 bombs were dropped between 2004 and 2010. 85 per cent of the population have been displaced from their homes and according to a World Bank publication of December 12, 77 per cent of healthcare facilities, 72 per cent of public buildings including parks, courts and libraries, 68



per cent of communication infrastructure and almost the entire industrial zone in Gaza were destroyed due to the Israeli aggression.

The genocidal attack has resulted in over 22,000 deaths in the last 88 days, which works out to roughly 250 deaths every day and the mind-numbing figure of approximately 90 children daily.

So the world is witnessing a genocidal massacre perpetrated by Israel's armed forces with the declared intention of removing the Palestinian population from Gaza. This is not an exaggerated claim. Ministers in the far-right government have made public declarations about this. The Jewish extremist national security minister, Ben-Gvir, and finance minister Smotrich, have called for the migration of Palestinian civilians as a solution to the conflict.

According to Ben-Gvir, the war presents an "opportunity to concentrate on encouraging the migration of the residents of Gaza". While this was echoed

by Smotrich, who also talked about "encouraging the voluntary migration of Gaza's residents" and predicted that "Israel will permanently control the territory of the Gaza strip including

through the establishment of settlements", there are discussions in the Israeli media about how North Sinai (in adjoining Egypt) would be an ideal place for the Palestinians to take refuge in.

The far-right government of Netanyahu is exploiting the October 7 Hamas attack to conduct an extensive anti-Palestinian drive. This is evident from the way the attacks on the Palestinian people have been stepped up in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In raids by the Israeli army and attack by settlers, over 300 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank.

Over 4,700 have been arrested and detained. Palestinian farmers are being stopped from conducting agricultural operations, prevented from harvesting their olive trees and dispossessed of

their lands and houses. With illegal settlements containing over 700,000 settlers dotted across the West Bank, the Palestinian people are being forced to live in apartheid-style bantustans.

Israel is able to get away with this State-sponsored genocide and ethnic cleansing because it has the full backing of US imperialism. Despite 150 countries voting in the UN General Assembly for an immediate ceasefire, there has been no movement in this direction because the United States has vetoed all such resolutions in the Security Council. The United States goes on hypocritically about minimising civilian casualties in Gaza, while providing Israel with lethal weapons and ammunition to carry out the mass killings.

After the 106 million dollar aid package for Israel and Ukraine got stalled in the US Congress, the Biden administration has twice in the month of December, approved emergency weapon sales to Israel. The first time it approved the sale of 14,000 rounds of tank ammunition worth more than 106 million dollars. This was followed by a second emergency sale of 147.5 million dollar sale of equipment – fuses, charges and primers – that are needed to make the 150 mm shells that Israel has already purchased functional. It is these shells that are being used to kill women, children and health workers who are sheltering in UN-run schools and around hospitals. The United States is fully complicit in the genocidal massacre in Gaza.

The process of ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians cannot be understood unless the link between Israel and US imperialism is grasped. Israel, as a settler-colonial State, has existed and got strengthened over the decades because of the full-fledged backing of US imperialism; no other State has been financially supported and equipped with arms by the United States to such an extent as Israel.

It is the intervention of the United States that led the Arab countries, one after the other, beginning with Egypt to make peace and collaborate with Israel by betraying the Palestinian cause.

The United States had propped up the reactionary kingdoms and sheikhs to counter the secular Arab nationalist forces and facilitate diplomatic relations with Israel, the latest being the Abraham Accords. But though the Palestinian people were let down by the rulers of the Arab countries, the Arab masses have never abandoned their support and solidarity for Palestine.

The current upsurge of mass support for the people of Gaza in the entire region shows that whatever the US-Israeli axis do, the struggle of the Palestinian people can never be isolated and suppressed. With the escalating clashes between the Israeli forces and the Hezbollah in the Lebanon border and the Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, all indicators are of a widening regional conflict, the results of which may upset the existing geo-political balance of forces. (IPA Service)

Housing crisis, inflation posing big challenge to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

By Arun Kumar Shrivastava

The electoral chances of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberal Party have faced significant challenges. However, recent opinion polls indicate a resurgence in Liberal support ahead of July 1, 2024 election. According to analysts, Pierre Poilievre, the Conservative Party leader, appears to have played a role in this shift, with his actions alienating voters and pushing them back into the Liberal fold. Poilievre's confrontational approach towards journalists and his party's opposition to trade deals have made him less acceptable to past Liberal supporters.

Pierre Poilievre has focused on housing affordability as a means to attract young voters. Despite this emphasis, Housing Minister Sean Fraser is making progress in addressing this issue. For instance, Fraser's decision to reintroduce the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's catalogue of housing designs has the potential to be massively beneficial. While Fraser's efforts may not completely solve the problem by 2025, they demonstrate tangible steps towards making homes more affordable for young people.

Canada is currently facing a housing affordability crisis, which has adversely affected the popularity of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. In an effort to tackle this crisis, Trudeau plans to revive a post-World War Two strategy of using pre-approved designs for quick and cost-effective home construction.

Canada's housing affordability crisis stems from a lack of housing supply that fails to keep up with the country's population growth and high demand. As a result, housing prices have soared, making it increasingly difficult for people to afford homes. Affordable housing plays a crucial role in addressing Canada's housing affordability crisis. The demand for affordable housing is high, especially among vulnerable populations who struggle to find suitable and cost-effective living arrangements.

Recognizing the urgency of the issue, Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau has made housing his top priority. He has introduced various measures aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Opposition leader Pierre Poilievre has criticized Trudeau for the shortages, which has led to a decrease in Trudeau's popularity. However, Trudeau remains committed to addressing the housing affordability crisis by implementing innovative strategies.

To combat the housing affordability crisis, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau plans to bring back a post-World War Two strategy of using pre-approved designs for quick and cost-effective home construction. This strategy was used from the 1950s to 1970s when there was a surge in demand for housing after soldiers returned home.

The goal of this strategy is to cut down on time and costs associated with building new homes. By having a streamlined catalogue of pre-approved designs, builders can avoid lengthy approval processes and expensive customization. These pre-approved designs would be tied to existing building codes, ensuring compliance with safety regulations.

Public consultations on this strategy will begin in January, allowing Canadians to contribute their ideas and opinions on how best to implement the plan. By integrating lessons from the past into the 21st century, Trudeau hopes to provide affordable housing options for Canadians.

In an effort to address the housing affordability crisis in Vancouver, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has pledged over \$100 million through the Housing Accelerator Fund. This investment aims to build more than 40,000 homes in Vancouver over the next decade. The exact types of homes, whether single-family houses,

multiplexes, or apartments, have not been specified.

The Housing Accelerator Fund will streamline the building process near transit areas, promote density homes, and increase affordable rental housing options. The investment of \$115 million from Ottawa's Housing Accelerator Fund will aid Vancouver City Hall in fast-tracking high-density projects near transit areas. This includes a move towards a digital permitting process and continued investment in social housing for vulnerable communities.



Calgary has received the largest portion of the deal thus far, amounting to \$228 million, followed by Brampton, Ontario, with \$114 million. The other agreements announced to date vary from \$93.5 million to \$15.5 million.

The impact of inflation on Canadians' financial well-being cannot be ignored. However, experts predict that central banks worldwide will start cutting interest rates as early as next year. The New York Federal Reserve

President believes that the United States will achieve its two per cent inflation target by 2025, which is likely to influence Canada's inflation rate as well. As interest rates for mortgages and lines of credit decrease, affordability concerns may alleviate significantly before the federal election.

Climate change remains a crucial issue that could heavily influence the outcome of the election, particularly if it occurs after a smoky summer. Trust is another battleground, and Poilievre's associations with far-right influencers may make him vulnerable to mainstream Canadians who find such connections hard to accept. Additionally, the possibility of another Trump administration could disrupt the political landscape in unpredictable ways. (IPA Service)

Pakistan witnessed 70 per cent rise in fatal attacks in 2023

By Girish Linganna

As recently as on Tuesday, (December 12, 2023), fighters stormed a military outpost in northwestern Pakistan as they opened fire and rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the army base in the town of Daraban, about 60 kilometres (37 miles) from Dera Ismail Khan city, in the restive province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, located at the edge of the lawless tribal regions that fringe Afghanistan. At least 23 people were killed in the gun-and-suicide bomb attack, the Pakistani military said in a statement.

On Saturday, (December 2, 2023), a transport bus came under attack from a group of attackers near Chilas town in Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan, which is an autonomous region in the country's north near Pakistan's border with China. The bus, which was carrying 45 civilian passengers down the Karakoram Highway connecting Pakistan with China through the Karakoram Mountain Range, was hit by armed men and 10 of the passengers died. Many of them survived multiple bullet wounds.

In 2023, Pakistan experienced a notable escalation in violence, as reported by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies. The country saw almost a 70% increase in the number of attacks—a nearly 81% rise in the number of deaths from

these incidents, and a 62% uptick in the number of those injured.

Data published on Monday (January 1, 2024), revealed that Pakistan faced around 645 militant attacks in 2023, resulting in 976 fatalities and 1,354 injuries. This equates to roughly one attack every 14 hours throughout the year. In 2022, there were 380 attacks recorded, leading to 539 deaths and 836 injuries. In 2023, there was an approximately 70% surge in fatal militant attacks compared to those in previous years, marking it as the most deadly in over half a decade. This increase in violence has persisted since the Taliban assumed control in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The Islamabad-based think tank, Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, stated that the number of casualties and injuries could have been higher if Pakistan's security forces had not successfully thwarted hundreds of attacks and attempts over the year. The majority of the attacks were attributed to the Pakistani Taliban, an organization sharing the same ideology, but differing in structure from their counterparts in Afghanistan. The Pakistani Taliban, officially known as Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is an Islamic fundamentalist militant group primarily active in the northwestern tribal areas of Pakistan. Formed in 2007, it comprises various militant factions united under the ideology of establishing Sharia law in Pakistan.

The TTP is known for its opposition to the Pakistani government and has been involved in numerous high-profile terrorist attacks within Pakistan, including on civilians, the military and political figures. While sharing a common ideology with the Afghan Taliban, such as strict Islamic governance, the TTP operates independently, with distinct leadership and objectives focused on Pakistan rather than Afghanistan.

Pakistan's legal system is a combination of Islamic law (Sharia) and British-influenced civil law. While certain aspects of the Sharia are incorporated into Pakistan's legal framework—particularly in family law—it is not the sole basis for the country's legal system. The Constitution of Pakistan lays the foundation for parliamentary democracy with Islamic provisions. Islamic law influences some personal and moral conduct laws, but the nation's criminal and civil laws are primarily derived from the British legal system—a remnant of the colonial era. Thus, Pakistan's legal system is a hybrid of both Islamic and secular laws. Pakistan claims that the group conducts attacks from the supposed safe havens located along the Afghanistan border region. However, Kabul denies these allegations. Since the Afghan Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in 2021, there has been an increase in violent activities by Islamist militants in Pakistan.

Pakistan, an Islamic republic possessing

nuclear arms and a population exceeding 240 million, collaborates with China in its global market expansion endeavours—both overland and maritime—as part of the 'Belt and Road Initiative'. The recent instability is partly viewed as a response to Chinese investments in Balochistan, the southwestern province of Pakistan, where nationalist insurgents are opposing the government.

This opposition by the nationalist insurgents in Balochistan springs from their long-standing grievances over the distribution of resources and political marginalization. Balochistan, although it is resources-rich—particularly in minerals and natural gas—is one of Pakistan's least developed provinces. The local population feels that they have not adequately benefited from these resources or the Chinese investments, which are part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Instead, they perceive that the profits are disproportionately favouring the other regions of Pakistan, and China. This has fuelled a sense of economic exploitation and political neglect among the Baloch people, leading to insurgent groups seeking greater autonomy or independence.

According to predictions made by a security analyst based in the northwestern city, there is an anticipation of an increase in deadly attacks as the country approaches its elections next month. (IPA Service)



By: Ranjan K Baruah

All of us who are reading this article means we have beaten one of the pandemic that affected all of us. The COVID 19 has taught us many lessons though we have survived either without being infected or got cured. Like the corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic major infectious diseases and epidemics have devas-

tating impacts on human lives, wreaking havoc on long-term social and economic development.

Global health crises threaten to overwhelm already overstretched health systems, disrupt global supply chains and cause disproportionate devastation of the livelihoods of people, including women and children, and the economies of the poorest and most vulnerable countries. There is an urgent need to have resilient

and robust health systems, reaching those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations.

The United Nations system, in particular the World Health Organization, plays a pivotal role in coordinating responses to epidemics, in accordance with its mandate, and in supporting national, regional and international efforts to prevent, mitigate and address the impacts of infectious diseases and epidemics in accordance with the goal of advancing the 2030 Agenda.

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 27th December as the International Day of Epidemic Preparedness by a resolution passed by the UN General

Assembly on December 7, 2020. Epidemic preparedness constitutes all the activities that have to be undertaken from the national to the health facility levels to be ready to respond effectively to disease outbreaks. Epidemics of infectious disease are generally caused by several factors. An epidemic may be restricted to one location; however, if it spreads to other countries or continents and affects a substantial number of people, it may be termed a pandemic.

We are aware that public health management must be well organized to fight epidemics. There is great need of raising awareness, the exchange of information, scientific knowledge and best practices, quality education, and advocacy programmes on epidemics at the local, national, regional and global levels as effective measures to prevent and respond to epidemics. India has witnessed many outbreaks since the 1990s such as the SARS outbreak, swine flu outbreak, etc. but none of the outbreaks was as widespread and as fatal as COVID-19. Before COVID 19, different places in India have faced pandemics which includes Encephalitis Lethargica, Spanish Flu, Cholera pandemic, Flu pandemic, Smallpox epidemic, Plague in Surat in 1994, SARS, Dengue and Chikungunya outbreak, etc.

Looking at this we cannot ignore that the world is free from epidemic, so there is an urgent need for preparedness and one may choose this field as a career option and work to prevent the epidemic or contribute in proper management in case there is any outbreak so that lives can be saved. One area is to study medicine or become doctors. Apart from doctors, others health workers or community workers also contribute in different ways. Health workers like nurses, lab technicians, etc are equally important.

Apart from being direct health

workers one may choose to study courses like health administration or health management and work in different capacities to contribute to epidemic preparedness. Qualified and trained people are engaged in different health agencies or agencies that work related to health and also raising awareness on different epidemics. It is better to prevent than to cure and hence preparedness is very important so that instead of cure we can focus more on prevention and that is possible when we have more persons working in this field. *(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjn@gmail.com)*

DC Charaideo Recruitment 2024 – 3 GIS Assistant Posts

Last Date: 08/01/2024

District Commissioner, Charaideo has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 3 GIS Assistant Posts under Charaideo District for engagement on contractual basis. Interested and eligible candidates may apply here.

Name of post: GIS Assistant
No of posts: 5 posts
Place of work: Respective Revenue Circle Office
Pay: ₹ 25000 per month (fixed)

Eligibility Criteria of DC Charaideo Recruitment

Age Limit: Above 21 years and not more than 45 years as on 01/01/2023.

Essential Qualification:

Bachelor's degree in Geography/Geology/Mathematics/Geo informatics/ Physics/Computer Science or a related field with Certificate/Diploma in GIS & Remote Sensing or in Geo-informatics.
Or

M.Tech./M.Sc. in GIS & Remote sensing/ Geo- informatics; MCA/ M.A/ M.Sc. in Geography/Geology/Mathematics/ Environmental Science with Geo-informatics as one of the subject or Certificate or Diploma in GIS/ Remote Sensing or Geo-informatics.

Desirable Qualification:

Proficiency in GIS software such as ArcGIS, QGIS, Global Mapper or other industry-standard applications.
Familiarity with spatial data formats (e.g., Shape files, GeoJSON, KML) and coordinate systems.
Knowledge of geospatial analysis, image processing techniques, data collection through drone survey and tools for development of geospatial data, use of HRSI for land mapping, modern survey techniques using RTK GNSS Rovers, DGPS, ETS etc.
Effective communication and teamwork skills.
Ability to work independently and prioritize tasks effectively.
Prior experience in a GIS-related role or internship is preferred but not mandatory.

Experience:

Preference will be given to those candidates having relevant work experience of minimum Experience 1 year.
Preference will be given to the RCCC trained candidates having command over GIS.

Skills:

Proficiency in Arc Desktop, Arc Pro, AutoCAD, Global Mapper
Proficiency in MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Google Docs/Spreadsheets and
Fluency in Assamese, Hindi and English is required.

How to Apply for DC Charaideo Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may appear in the walk in interview as per the schedule mentioned below.

Date: 08/01/2024

Time: 11:00 AM onwards.

Venue: O/o District Commissioner, Charaideo, Conference Hall.

Documents needed in the Interview

1. Detailed Curriculum Vitae.
2. Photo Identity & Address Proof.
3. Original Educational Certificates (HSLC onwards) for verification.
4. Work Experience Certificates
5. Photocopy of all the certificates, mark sheets, experience certificates etc. to be submitted in the Interview.

UPSC NDA & NA (I) Recruitment 2024 – 400 Vacancy, Apply Online

Last Date: 09/01/2024

Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 400 vacancy for National Defence Academy & Naval Academy Examination (I), 2024 (Indian Naval Academy Course (INAC)). Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of exam: National Defence Academy & Naval Academy Examination (I), 2024

No of posts: 400 posts

Vacancy Breakup:

National Defence Academy: 370

Naval Academy (10+2 Cadet Entry Scheme): 30

Eligibility Criteria of UPSC NDA & NA (I) Recruitment

Educational Qualification:

Army Wing of National Defence Academy: 12th Class pass of the 10+2 pattern of School Education or equivalent examination conducted by a State Education Board or a University.

Air Force and Naval Wings of National Defence Academy and for the 10+2 Cadet Entry Scheme at the Indian Naval Academy: 12th Class pass with Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics of the 10+2 pattern of School Education or equivalent conducted by a State Education Board or a University.

Candidates who are appearing in the 12th Class under the 10+2 pattern of School Education or equivalent examination can also apply for this examination

Age Limit: Only unmarried male /female candidates born not earlier than 02nd July, 2005 and not later than 1st July, 2008 are eligible.

Application Fee of UPSC NDA & NA (I) Exam

#Others: ₹ 100

SC/ST Candidates/Sons of JCOs/NCOs/ORs: Nil

#Women: Nil

#Payment Mode: Online/ Offline

Important Dates of UPSC NDA & NA Exam 2024

+ **Starting date of online application submission:** 20th December 2023

+ **Last date of online application submission:** 9th January 2024

DC Kamrup Metro Recruitment 2024 – 5 GIS Assistant Posts

Last Date: 09/01/2024.

District Commissioner, Kamrup Metro has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 5 GIS Assistant Posts under Kamrup Metro District for engagement on contractual basis under Directorate of Land Records & Surveys etc., Assam. Interested and eligible candidates may apply here.

Name of post: GIS Assistant

No of posts: 5 posts

Place of work: Respective Revenue Circle Office

Duration of Engagement: Up to 31 March, 2024 subject to extension by Govt.
Pay: ₹ 25000 per month (fixed)

Eligibility Criteria of DC Kamrup Metro Recruitment

Age Limit: Above 21 years and not more than 45 years as on 01/01/2023

Essential Qualification:

Bachelor's degree in Geography/Geology/Mathematics/ Geo informatics/ Physics/Computer Science or a related field with Certificate/Diploma in GIS & Remote Sensing or in Geo-informatics.
Or
M.Tech./M.Sc. in GIS & Remote sensing/ Geo- informatics; MCA/ M.A/ M.Sc. in Geography/Geology/Mathematics/ Environmental Science with Geo-informatics as one of the subject or Certificate or Diploma in GIS/ Remote Sensing or Geo-informatics.

Desirable Qualification:

Proficiency in GIS software such as ArcGIS, QGIS, Global Mapper or other industry-standard applications.
Familiarity with spatial data formats (e.g., Shape files, GeoJSON, KML) and coordinate systems.
Knowledge of geospatial analysis, image processing techniques, data collection through drone survey and tools for development of geospatial data, use of HRSI for land mapping, modern survey techniques using RTK GNSS Rovers, DGPS, ETS etc.
Effective communication and teamwork skills.
Ability to work independently and prioritize tasks effectively.
Prior experience in a GIS-related role or internship is preferred but not mandatory.

Experience:

Preference will be given to those candidates having relevant work experience of minimum Experience 1 year.
Preference will be given to the RCCC trained candidates having command over GIS.

Skills:

Proficiency in Arc Desktop, Arc Pro, AutoCAD, Global Mapper
Proficiency in MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Google Docs/Spreadsheets and
Fluency in Assamese, Hindi and English is required.

How to Apply for DC Kamrup Metro Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may appear in the walk in interview as per the schedule mentioned below.

Date: 09/01/2024

Time: 10:00 AM onwards.

Venue: O/o District Commissioner, Kamrup Metro, Conference Hall.

Documents needed in the Interview

1. Detailed Curriculum Vitae.
2. Photo Identity & Address Proof.
3. Original Educational Certificates (HSLC onwards) for verification.
4. Work Experience Certificates
5. Photocopy of all the certificates, mark sheets, experience certificates etc. to be submitted in the Interview.

AAI Recruitment 2024 – 64 Senior Assistant & Junior Assistant Posts

Last Date: 10/02/2024

Airports Authority of India (AAI) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 64 Senior Assistant and Junior Assistant Posts in Airports Authority of India, North Eastern Region (NER). Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. Senior Assistant (Electronics)

No of posts: 14 posts

Pay Scale: ₹ 36,000-1,10,000

Educational Qualification: Diploma in Electronics/ Telecommunication/ Radio Engineering.

Experience: 2 Years relevant experience in the concerned discipline

2. Senior Assistant (Operations)

No of posts: 2 posts

Pay Scale: ₹ 36,000 - ₹ 1,10,000

Educational Qualification: Graduate with LMV Licence Diploma in Management will be preferred.

Experience: 2 Years relevant experience in the concerned discipline.

3. Senior Assistant (Accounts)

No of posts: 5 posts

Pay Scale: ₹ 36,000 - ₹ 1,10,000

Educational Qualification: Graduate preferably B. Com. with Computer literacy test in MS Office.

Experience: 2 Years relevant experience in the concerned discipline.

4. Junior Assistant (Fire Services)

No of posts: 43 posts

Pay Scale: ₹ 31,000 - ₹ 92,000

Educational Qualification:

i) 10th Pass + 3 years' approved regular Diploma in Mechanical/ Automobile/ Fire with "Pass marks". (OR)
ii) 12th Pass (Regular Study) with "Pass marks".

Driving Licence:

a) Valid Heavy Vehicle Driving License (OR)
b) Valid Medium Vehicle License issued at least one year before the date of Advertisement i.e. 30/12/2023 (OR)
c) Valid Light Motor Vehicle (LMV) licence issued at least two years before the date of Advertisement i.e. 30/12/2023.

Age Limit: The candidates' age shall be 18 to 30 years as on 30/12/2023.

Age Relaxation: Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

OBC/ NCL: 3 years
SC: 5 years
ST: 5 years
PWD: 10 years
PWD- OBC: 13 years
PWD- SC/ ST: 15 years

Domicile: Only candidates who are Domicile of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura can apply for the above posts.

Application Fee:

SC/ST/Female/ Apprentice: Nil
Others: ₹ 1000
PWD: Nil
Payment mode: Online

Important Dates of AAI Vacancy 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 10th January 2024

Last date of submission of online application: 10th February 2024

NRL Recruitment 2024 – 4 Fire & Safety Professional Posts

Last Date: 11/01/2024

Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 4 Fire & Safety Professional Posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. Sr. Officer (F&S)

No of posts: 2 posts (OBC-NCL 01; UR-01)

Pay: ₹ 60,000 – 1,80,000

Age Limit: 30 years

Educational Qualification:

B.E/ B.Tech in Fire/ Fire & Safety Engineering with minimum 65% Marks in aggregate from any AICTE approved College/ University
OR

BE/B.Tech in any branch of Engineering + M.Tech in Industrial Safety with minimum 65% Marks in aggregate from any AICTE approved College/ University

Experience: Minimum 05 (five) years post qualification experience in Oil & Gas sector (including experience as GET/ET/MT) in Fire and Safety discipline as an employee of that Organisation.

2. Officer (F&S)

No of posts: 2 posts (OBC-NCL 01; UR-01)

Pay: ₹ 50,000 – 1,60,000

Age Limit: 27 years

Educational Qualification:

B.E/ B.Tech in Fire/ Fire & Safety Engineering with minimum 65% Marks in aggregate from any AICTE approved College/ University
OR

BE/B.Tech in any branch of Engineering + M.Tech in Industrial Safety with minimum 65% Marks in aggregate from any AICTE approved College/University.

Experience: Minimum 01 (one) year post qualification experience in Oil & Gas sector (including experience as GET/ET/MT) in Fire and Safety discipline as an employee of that Organisation.



Important Dates of Numaligarh Refinery Limited Recruitment 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 4th January 2024

Last date of Submission of online application: 11th January 2024

The U.S., United Kingdom and France are providing most of the warships now, and Greece and Denmark will also be providing vessels

Houthi launch sea drone to attack ships hours after US, allies issue final warning

WASHINGTON, Jan 5: An armed unmanned surface vessel launched from Houthi-controlled Yemen got within a "couple of miles" of U.S. Navy and commercial vessels in the Red Sea before detonating on Thursday, just hours after the White House and a host of partner nations issued a final warning to the Iran-backed militia group to cease the attacks or face potential military action.

Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, the head of U.S. Navy operations in the Middle East, said it was the first time the Houthi had used an unmanned surface vessel, or USV, since their harassment of commercial ships in the Red Sea began after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. They have, however, used them in years past.

Fabian Hinz, a missile expert and research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said the USV's are a key part of the Houthi maritime arsenal and were used during previous battles against the Saudi coalition

forces that intervened in Yemen's war. They have regularly been used as suicide drone boats that explode upon impact.

Most of the Houthi's USVs are likely assembled in Yemen but often fitted with components made in Iran, such as computerized guidance systems, Hinz said.

At the United Nations, U.S. deputy ambassador Christopher Lu said at a emergency Security Council meeting on Wednesday that Iran has supplied the Houthi with money and advanced weapons systems, including drones, land attack cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. He said Iran also has been deeply involved in planning the Houthi's attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. He said the United States isn't seeking a confrontation with Iran, but Tehran has a choice.

"It can continue its current course," Lu said, "or it can withhold its support without which the Houthi would struggle to effectively track and strike commercial



vessels navigating shipping lanes through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden."

This raises questions as to whether any action against the Houthi would also address Iran's role in any way, which could risk widening the conflict.

A statement Wednesday signed by the United States, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan,

Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom gave the Houthi what a senior Biden administration official described as a final warning.

"Let our message now be clear: we call for the immediate end of these illegal attacks and release of unlawfully detained vessels and crews," the countries said in the statement. "The Houthi will bear the responsibility of the conse-

quences should they continue to threaten lives, the global economy, and free flow of commerce in the region's critical waterways."

Pentagon spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder would not say whether any military action would follow Thursday's launch of the sea drone. "I'll let the statement speak for itself, which, again, represented many nations around the world and highlighted that if these strikes don't stop, there will be consequences," Ryder said.

Since late October, the Houthi have launched scores of one-way attack drones and missiles at commercial vessels transiting the Red Sea. U.S. Navy warships have also intercepted ballistic missiles the Pentagon says were headed toward Israel. Cooper said a total of 61 missiles and drones have been shot down by U.S. warships.

In response to the Houthi attacks, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in December announced Operation Prosperity Guardian,

with the United States and other countries sending additional ships to the southern Red Sea to provide protection for commercial vessels passing through the critical Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Cooper said 1,500 commercial ships have been able to transit safely since the operation was launched on Dec. 18.

However, the Houthi have continued to launch missiles and attack drones, prompting the White House and 12 allies to issue what amounted to a final warning Wednesday to cease their attacks on vessels in the Red Sea or face potential targeted military action.

Cooper said Operation Prosperity Guardian was solely defensive in nature and separate from any military action the U.S. might take if the Houthi attacks continue.

The U.S., United Kingdom and France are providing most of the warships now, and Greece and Denmark will also be providing vessels, he said. (AP)

Russia used NKorean ballistic missiles in Ukraine and is seeking Iranian missiles: US

WASHINGTON, Jan 5: U.S. intelligence officials have determined that Russia has acquired ballistic missiles from North Korea and is seeking close-range ballistic missiles from Iran as Moscow struggles to replenish supplies for its war with Ukraine, the White House said on Thursday.

Recently declassified intelligence found that North Korea has provided Russia with ballistic missile launchers and several ballistic missiles, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said. Russian forces fired at least one of those ballistic missiles into Ukraine on Dec. 30 and it landed in an open field in the Zaporizhzhia region, he said.

Russia launched multiple North Korean ballistic missiles on Tuesday as part of an overnight attack, and the U.S. was assessing the impact, he said. The missiles have a range of about 550 miles (885 kilometers).

U.S. intelligence officials believe that North Korea, in return for its arms support, wants Russia to provide it with aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, armored vehicles, ballistic missile production equipment and other advanced technologies.

Kirby said that a Russia-Iran deal had not been completed but that the U.S. "is concerned that Russia's negotiations to acquire close range ballistic missiles from Iran are actively advancing."

The U.S. intelligence finding supports South Korea's assessment that North Korea has increased its cooperation with Moscow. South Korea's military said in November that it suspected North Korea had sent an unspecified number of short-range ballistic missiles, anti-tank missiles and portable anti-air missiles to Russia, in addition to rifles, rocket launchers, mortars and shells.

The Biden administration has repeatedly sought to make the case that the Kremlin has become reliant on North Korea, as well as Iran, for the arms it needs to fight its war against Ukraine and has disclosed intelligence findings that it says show as much. North Korea and Iran are largely isolated on the international stage for their nuclear programs and human rights records.

The White House in October said that North Korea delivered more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions to Russia.

Relations between Russia and North Korea go back to the 1948 foundation of North Korea. Soviet officials installed a young and ambitious nationalist, Kim Il Sung, the late grandfather of current leader Kim Jong Un, as the country's first ruler. Soviet aid shipments were crucial in keeping North Korea's economy afloat for decades before the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

Kim traveled to Russia in September to meet President Vladimir Putin and visit key military sites.

The White House has said Russia has received hundreds of one-way attack drones, as well as drone production-related equipment, from Iran. (AP)

North Korea conducts artillery drills along disputed sea border. South Korea plans similar drills

SEOUL, Jan 5: North Korea fired artillery rounds on Friday near its disputed sea boundary with South Korea in violation of a fragile 2018 military agreement, officials said, prompting the South to plan similar drills.

North Korea's front-line maritime firing exercise was the first of its kind in about a year. Experts say North Korea will likely intensify a run of weapons tests in the coming months, escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula ahead of the South's parliamentary elections in April and the United States presidential election in November. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea fired 200 rounds in the waters north of their disputed western sea boundary. It said South Korea suffered no damages.

Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson Lee Sung Joon told a televised briefing that the North's artillery firing was "an act of provocation that threatens peace and heightens tensions on the Korean Peninsula." Lee said South Korea strongly urges North Korea to stop provocations. He said South Korea's military will take an unspecified step in response to the North's artillery firing while closely monitoring North Korean moves in close coordination with the United States.

Lee didn't elaborate what corresponding step South Korea would take. But residents of South Korea's front-line island of Yeonpyeong said the South Korean military has asked them to evacuate because it plans to launch maritime firing drills later Friday.

The Koreans' poorly marked western sea boundary witnessed bloody naval clashes in 1999, 2002 and 2009. The North's alleged torpedoing of a South Korean warship killed 46 South Korean sailors in March 2010, and the North's artillery bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island killed four South Koreans in November 2010. The 2018 agreement requires the two Koreas to halt live-fire exercises and aerial surveillance in no-fly and buffer zones that they established along their



border. But the deal is in danger of collapsing after the two Koreas began bickering since the North's first successful military spy satellite launch in November.

South Korea accused North Korea of restoring front-line guard posts that it had dismantled under the 2018 deal, after South Korea resumed front-line aerial surveillance in protest of the North's satellite launch. South Korea also accused North Korea of violating the deal numerous times with firing drills at the buffer zones, including one as recently as December 2022 off the Korean Peninsula's east coast.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un fired off fierce, derisive rhetoric against South Korea in a key ruling party meeting at the end of December. Kim called South Korea "a hemiplegic malformation and colonial subordinate state" whose society is "tainted by Yankee culture." He said South Korea must not be considered as a partner for reconciliation or unification, and ordered the military to use all available means — including nuclear weapons — to conquer South Korea in the event of a conflict.

"North Korea is now in the stage of finding a justification for provocation after scrapping the 2018 military agreement," said Lee Sang Sook, a research professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security. "There is a possibility for North Korea to ramp up provocation steadily, so big and

small provocations along the western sea boundary and the land border are expected this year."

Earlier Friday, North Korea's state media said Kim ordered authorities to increase production of mobile launch vehicles for missiles because the country faces a looming military showdown with its enemies.

The official Korean Central News Agency said Kim made the comments during a visit to a factory that produces transport erector launchers, or TELs, without saying when he went or where the factory is.

TELs are mobile launch vehicles, which give North Korea the ability to move missiles around its territory. This makes it more difficult for adversaries to detect launches in advance. Some South Korean experts have estimated that North Korea has about 100-200 such vehicles. Kim said the factory's role is "very important" in bolstering North Korea's national defense "given the prevailing grave situation that requires the country to be more firmly prepared for a military showdown with the enemy," KCNA reported.

"He took an important measure for expanding the production capacity of the factory," it said. Experts say Kim is likely to increase weapons tests ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November because of a belief that a boosted military capability would increase his chances of wresting U.S. concessions if former President Donald Trump is reelected.

In the recent ruling party meeting, Kim also vowed to expand the country's nuclear arsenal, launch three additional military spy satellites and take other steps to build up the military this year to acquire "overwhelming" war readiness to cope with what he called U.S.-led confrontation, citing the expansion of U.S.-South Korean military drills that sometimes involve U.S. long-range bombers and a nuclear-armed submarine. (AP)

Maldivian President Muizzu to visit China next week

BEIJING, Jan 5: Mohamed Muizzu, the new Maldivian President, will pay a state visit to China from January 8 to 12, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced here on Friday.

Muizzu, who is seen as a pro-China politician, took oath as the eighth President of the Maldives after defeating the India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September.

Muizzu is visiting China at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said in a press release.

Muizzu's predecessors in the recent past visited India first, considering the wide-ranging bilateral ties and the Maldives' proximity to India, followed by China which has expanded its influence in the island nation by investing in major infrastructure projects there.

However, Muizzu chose Turkey as his first destination for a foreign visit soon after his election followed by the UAE where he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) on December 1 and discussed the progress of the wide-ranging bilateral ties.

During the meeting, both leaders agreed to set up a core group to discuss the multi-dimensional relations and further deepen ties. The meeting took place after Muizzu requested New Delhi to withdraw 77 Indian military personnel from the Maldives and decided to review more than 100 bilateral agreements between the two countries.

Earlier, Muizzu's government announced its plans to drop a hydrographic survey agreement with India. Muizzu will be the second-highest

politician to visit China in recent weeks. The new Maldives Vice President Hussain Mohamed Latheef last month visited China, his first visit abroad, and took part in the China-sponsored China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation, (CIORF) in Kunming.

During the meeting, he said cooperation in the Indian Ocean must include all countries in the region and avoid factionalism to bring about development among the ocean communities in the area. Significantly, while praising Chinese infrastructure projects, Latheef made no mention of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under which most of the Maldives' infrastructure projects were built. The BRI is an ambitious plan initiated by President Xi in 2013 to develop new trade routes connecting China with the rest of the world via land and maritime networks to improve regional integration, increase trade and stimulate economic growth.

Observers say Muizzu's foreign policy is still evolving as the Maldives domestic political situation has undergone a major change after his election in November last year. Soon after his election Muizzu fell out with former pro-China President Abdulla Yameen, regarded as his mentor, and opted to pursue his own foreign and domestic policy.

Under Yameen's Presidency, China carried out major infra projects amid allegations of debt traps by some influential politicians of the Maldives.

Angry with Muizzu, Yameen, who is currently serving a prison sentence for corruption, quit the ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and formed his own political party called People's National Front (PNC) from jail to oppose Muizzu. (PTI)

Sudan paramilitary leader says he's committed to cease-fire, but no progress on proposed peace talks



CAPE TOWN (SOUTH AFRICA), Jan 5: Sudanese paramilitary leader Gen Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo said on Thursday he was committed to a cease-fire to end the devastating war that has wrecked his country, even as fighting continues and there has been no progress on proposed peace talks between Dagalo and Sudan military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan.

Dagalo, leader of the Rapid Support Forces, said in a statement following a meeting in Pretoria with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa that he had briefed Ramaphosa on the "considerable efforts taken to end this war."

"I emphasized our unwavering commitment to cease hostilities," Dagalo said, although he didn't say if or when he would meet with Burhan. The warring generals agreed last month to a face-to-face meeting and to start talks over a possible cease-fire, according to the East African regional bloc IGAD.

No date or location for the talks have been announced.

During Thursday's meeting with Dagalo, Ramaphosa said he hoped there would be an "imminent face-to-face dialogue" between Dagalo and Burhan and called for an "immediate cease-fire." Ramaphosa's spokesperson, Vincent Magwenya, said.

Dagalo is on a tour of African countries. He met with Kenyan President William Ruto on Wednesday following visits to Uganda, Ethiopia and Djibouti.

Tensions between former allies Dagalo and Burhan erupted in all-out war in mid-April in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere across the country. The fighting has killed more than 12,000 people, according to the United Nations, while doctors and activists say the real death toll is higher. More than 7 million people have been forced to leave their homes.

Despite talk of a cease-fire, the conflict has intensified. Last month, U.N. humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said more than 500,000 people were forced to flee their homes in Jazera province that had become a safe haven for civilians after the RSF attacked and took its capital, Wad Medani. The RSF takeover prompted fears among Wad Medani residents that they would carry out atrocities in their city as they are accused of doing in Khartoum, and the Darfur region in western Sudan. The U.S. State Department has said that both the RSF and the Sudanese military have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity during the nine-month conflict.

Griffiths, the U.N. undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, said in a statement Thursday that "the same horrific abuses that have defined this war in other hotspots - Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan - are now being reported in Wad Medani."

"Given Wad Medani's significance as a hub for relief operations, the fighting there - and looting of humanitarian warehouses and supplies - is a body blow to our efforts to deliver food, water, health care and other critical aid," he said.

Griffiths said nearly 25 million people across Sudan will need humanitarian assistance in 2024 "but the bleak reality is that intensifying hostilities are putting most of them beyond our reach."

Deliveries from Chad to Darfur continue, but efforts to get aid elsewhere are increasingly under threat, he said, and "deliveries across conflict lines have ground to a halt."

Griffiths said the international community, especially those with influence on the parties, "must take decisive and immediate action to stop the fighting." (AP)

Trains collide on Indonesia's main island of Java, killing 4 people

BANDUNG (INDONESIA) Jan 5: Two trains collided on Indonesia's main island of Java on Friday, causing carriages to buckle and overturn and killing at least four people, officials said.

The accident happened about 500 meters (yards) from Cicalengka train station in West Java province, said Ayep Hanapi, a spokesperson for PT Kereta Api Indonesia, the national railways.

He said the Turangga express train carrying 287 passengers was traveling from Surabaya, the capital of East Java province, when it plowed into a Bandung Raya commuter train with 191 passengers heading to Padalarang from Cicalengka station at about 6:30 a.m.

"All passengers of the two crashed trains have been evacuated safely," Hanapi said, adding that 28 people were injured. He said 22 were being treated at a hospital, mostly with head injuries.

West Java Police spokesperson Ibrahim Tompo said at least four train crew members were killed — the driver and his assistant on the commuter train and a steward and a security guard on the express train.

Television video showed several carriages overturned or badly mangled. One carriage plunged into a nearby rice field. People screamed as panicked passengers tried to get out of the train. Some walked through the fields carrying suitcases and other items as ambulances evacuated the injured.

Transportation ministry spokesperson Adita Irawati apologized for the accident and for the disruption of railway services across Java island.

She said the cause of the accident was being investigated and that rescuers had evacuated all passengers and were working to remove the trains to restore service.

Train accidents are common on Indonesia's aging railroad network, especially at crossings. (PTI)

US: Police say 17-year-old killed 6th-grader, wounded 5 in Iowa school shooting

PERRY (US), Jan 5: A 17-year-old opened fire at a small-town Iowa high school on the first day of school after the winter break, killing a sixth-grader and wounding five others on Thursday as students barricaded in offices, ducked into classrooms and fled in panic.

The suspect, a student at the school in Perry, died of what investigators believe is a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

An Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation official said. Authorities said one of the five people wounded was an administrator, and later identified as Perry High School Principal Dan Marburger by an eastern Iowa school district where he graduated from high school.

Authorities identified the shooter as Dylan Butler, 17, and provided no information about a possible motive. Two friends and their mother who spoke with The Associated Press said Butler was a quiet person who had been bullied for years.

Perry has about 8,000 residents and is about 40 miles (65 kilometers) northwest of Des Moines, on the edge of the state capital's metropolitan area. It is home to a large pork-processing plant, and low-slung, single-story homes spread among trees now shorn of their leaves by winter. The high

school and middle school are connected, sitting on the east edge of the town.

Authorities said the shooter had a pump-action shotgun and a small-calibre handgun. Mitch Mortvedt, the state investigation division's assistant director, said during a news conference that authorities also found a "pretty rudimentary" improvised explosive device and rendered it safe.

The suspect's motive is being investigated and authorities are looking into "a number of social media posts" he made around the time of the shooting. Mortvedt added.

Sisters Yesenia Roeder and Khamya Hall, both 17, said alongside their mother, Alita, that Butler was bullied relentlessly since elementary school, but it escalated recently when his younger sister started getting picked on, too. Officials at the school did not intervene, they said, and that was "the last straw" for Butler.

"He was hurting. He got tired. He got tired of the bullying. He got tired of the harassment," Yesenia Roeder Hall, 17, said. "Was it a smart idea to shoot up the school? No. God, no."

Perry High School senior Ava Augustus said she was awaiting a counsellor in a school office when she heard three shots. Unable to

flee through a small window, she and others barricaded the door and were ready to throw things if necessary.

"And then we hear 'He is down. You can go out,'" Augustus said through tears. "And I run and you can just see glass everywhere, blood on the floor. I get to my car and they are taking a girl out of the auditorium who had been shot in her leg."

Three gunshot victims were being treated at Iowa Methodist Medical Centre in Des Moines, a spokesperson said. Others were taken to a second Des Moines hospital, a spokesperson for MercyOne Des Moines Medical Centre confirmed.

Mortvedt said one person was in critical condition but the injuries did not appear to be life-threatening. The other victims were stable, he said.

Community members gathered for a vigil on Thursday evening at a park. A post on the high school's Facebook page said it would be closed on Friday and counselling services would be available for students, faculty and members of the community.

Governor Kim Reynolds ordered all flags in Iowa lowered to half-staff. "This senseless tragedy has shaken our entire state to its core," she said. In Washington, President Joe Biden and US Attorney General Merrick Garland were briefed on the shooting. FBI agents from the Omaha-Des Moines office are assisting with the investigation led by the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation. (AP)

RPP opposes move to scrap free movement regime along Indo-Myanmar border

Under free movement regime people residing on both sides of international border can venture 16 kms into each other's territory without visa

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 5: The Rising People's Party (RPP) has opposed the decision of the Centre to end the free movement regime (FMR) that allows people residing on either side of the India-Myanmar international border to venture 16 km into each other's territory without visa, terming it as alarming and a wake-up call for the Nagas.

Saying that the New Year has begun on an ominous note for the tribal states of Northeast and the Naga people, the RPP, in a statement, said apart from the proposed visa travel, the central government aims to construct high-security fencing along the border.

"The Nagas are already the most geographically divided people and this proposal will only heighten the divide amongst the Naga people," the RPP noted. The party stressed that any policy that aims to further divide the Nagas should be opposed tooth and nail.

It urged Prime Minister Naren-



dra Modi to uphold the age-old mechanism that allows people across borders to converge and live as honourable peoples, whether Nagas or Zo-Kuki.

The party further said the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP)-BJP coalition in the state should strongly oppose the proposed scrapping of the FMR.

"If necessary, all the 60 MLAs should meet either the Prime Minister or his home minister and convey the strong feelings of the Naga people that under no circumstances the construction of the fencing will be allowed," it said.

The RPP pointed out that various forms of FMR have been in place since the creation of Nagaland state in 1963 respecting the needs and the sentiments of the Naga people living on both sides of the border. This needs to be respected and upheld, it stressed.

It said the 'ineptitude' of Manipur chief minister Biren Singh and his "communal policies" cannot be the excuse for the central government to scrap the FMR.

Recalling that in 2017 the Burmese junta proposed to fence the international border near Pangsha under Noklak district in Nagaland, the RPP said the plan was subsequently dropped due to strong and spirited opposition by the people.

4 houses gutted in fire in Manipur



IMPHAL, Jan 5: Four houses, which have been abandoned since the ethnic violence broke out in Manipur in May 2023, were gutted in a fire at New Lambulane locality in Imphal, officials said.

At least three fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the flames, first noticed around 9 pm on Thursday, they said.

"It is not yet clear how the blaze erupted and engulfed the houses. An inquiry will determine the cause of the fire," an official said.

The damage to property is also being assessed, he said.

The houses belong to a particular community, and have been abandoned since May last year, he said.

Meanwhile, locals alleged that the incident was a conspiracy by miscreants to disturb peace in the area. More than 180 people have been killed and several hundred injured due to the ethnic conflict between the Kuki and Meitei communities in the northeastern state since May last year. (PTI)

Meghalaya submits claim over 16 villages

SHILLONG, Jan 5: Meghalaya has submitted its claims over 61 villages under the Langpih sector, which is among the six remaining unresolved areas of difference with Assam.

The regional committees constituted by Meghalaya and Assam will soon submit their respective final report after a joint visit to villages under the Langpih sector in West Khasi Hills district.

Chairman of the regional committee for West Khasi Hills, Paul Lyngdoh said, "During our meetings, we have submitted a list of 61 villages and these are being studied by the government of Assam."

"We have had detailed discussions even on those villages and the discussions have gone on a very positive note," he added.

He said that the 61 villages are mostly inhabited by Khasi and Garo populations while some are with mixed populations and a couple of villages with Nepali residents.

Lyngdoh, who is also cabinet minister, said the joint field visit with Assam counterpart was supposed to happen in the month of November. He informed that he had spoken to the chairman in charge of the Kamrup district sector Chandra Mohan Patowary, who

had expressed his inability to attend the joint visit and requested for time, which is why matters are still pending now.

"But I am pursuing the matter with him (Patowary). This is a bilateral matter and Meghalaya cannot act unilaterally. We cannot submit a report without our Assam counterpart visiting the sites along with us, but it will happen," he said while adding, "I assure you that as soon as we get the final word from Patowary, we will organize a couple of days of visits to the disputed areas and then submit our final reports. Preparatory meetings have already been held and detailed discussions have taken place both in Guwahati and Shillong. Once the field visits are made, we will submit the final report."

Lyngdoh said the committee will also seek an extension of time for submission of the final report after the government had recently fixed December 31 last year as the deadline.

Further, the chairman of the regional committee said that the field visit is just to instill a sense of confidence among people in disputed areas that the two governments are working in tandem to resolve all differences so that they live with a sense of security. (NNN)

Govt appeals to HNLC not to pull out of ongoing peace talks

SHILLONG, Jan 5: Spokesperson of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government and cabinet minister Paul Lyngdoh on Friday appealed to the Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC) not to pull out of the ongoing peace talks.

Speaking to reporters, Lyngdoh said the government has only seen the HNLC's statement conveying its decision to withdraw from the tripartite peace talks in media reports, but officially nothing has been communicated to the government as yet.

"I would appeal to the HNLC not to pull out of the peace talks because a lot of grounds have been covered initially and we would hope that good sense will prevail and we should be able to return to the negotiating table," he said. Asked, Lyngdoh said he will not be in a position to say

much on the issue since both chief minister Conrad K Sangma and deputy chief minister in-charge of home (police) Prestone Tynsong are presently out of the station.

"Certainly the government will take a call on the matter and it should happen very soon once the CM is back," he added.

He further assured that the matter will be taken priority once the CM and the deputy are back in town.

Referring to the NIA cases against the outfit, the spokesperson said, "In peace talks, the approach should be such that it should not be detrimental to any party. The interests of both parties have to be considered."

"Based on the principle of reciprocity we can take a stand on matters of details, but the general approach should be on of give and take," he asserted. (NNN)

Education can make youths skilled, efficient, says Guv

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 5: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria on Friday said that India is a young nation with the largest youth force in the world. He stressed on making the youths skilled and efficient through education. Kataria said this while attending the valedictory session of the 14th Assam Rising Youth Conclave and felicitation programme of Alok Pranvanjan Welfare Society at a hotel in the city on Friday.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Kataria said, "India is a young nation and we are fortunate to have the largest youth force in the world. We have to manage this youth power properly. They will have to be made skilled and efficient through qualitative education. We will also have to work to inspire the youth with a national spirit, only then we will be successful in taking the youth forward towards making a developed India."

Kataria also said that all the major changes that have taken place in the country have been possible only due to the strong will power of the youth and they

need to be motivated in the right direction. Although they have zeal and enthusiasm, yet their power should be channelized to help them reach the pinnacle of success. The future of the country depends on the hard work and efficiency of the youth.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the fillip for unprecedented development has been laid through the National Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Policy. The nation is rapidly moving towards the goal of self-reliance. Therefore, initiatives like startups, entrepreneurship and skill development are playing an important role," the Guv said.

"In view of this, today is not the time to wait and seek for government job, but to establish one's own enterprise and provide employment to others," he added.

It may be mentioned that 'Dainandin Barta' award was bestowed on eminent journalist Dharendra Nath Bezbaruah.

The Governor hailed D.N.Bezbaruah for his contribution to journalism and also called upon the youth to cultivate the art of writing.

Sarvodaya Public School marks 7th foundation day

HT Correspondent

MORIGAN, Jan 5: In a vibrant demonstration of unity and joy, Sarvodaya Public School celebrated its 7th foundation day on Friday, accompanied by a dazzling annual cultural program hosted at the prestigious Gandhi Bhawan auditorium.

The festivities commenced with the unfurling of the national flag, symbolising the school's unwavering commitment to patriotism and values. Vice president Parameswari Deka added a touch of reverence to the proceedings by ceremonially lighting the lamp.

School president Adhan Bora formally inaugurated the event, expressing pride in the institution's remarkable growth and achievements. The subsequent cultural program, a mosaic of talent, showcased the artistic prowess of the students, captivating the audience with their performances.

Special recognition was accorded to academic achievers, with class toppers from the 2022 and 2023 sessions being honoured during the event. The distribution of certificates for outstanding performances in both cultural and sports competitions underscored the school's dedication to holistic development.

As the evening descended, the school campus glowed with the warmth of lamps, symbolising the enlightenment and knowledge imparted to students by the institution.

The grand celebration reached its pinnacle with the resonating notes of the state anthem, leaving everyone with a profound sense of pride and unity. Sarvodaya Public School stands as a beacon of education, not only fostering academic excellence but also nurturing talents and values that shape well-rounded individuals.

Dibrugarh gears up for three-day workshop on environment and climate change



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Jan 5: The National Academy of Broadcasting & Multimedia (NABM) Delhi, the prominent training institution of Prasar Bharati, India's Public Service Broadcaster, is set to organise a comprehensive three-day workshop on environment conservation and countering climate change. The event is scheduled to take place from January 8 to 10, 2024, at the Indira Miri Hall in Dibrugarh University.

Producers from Akashvani & Doordarshan Kendras across the country are actively participating in this significant workshop.

Eminent activists in the field of

environment conservation and climate change, including Rizwan Uz-Zaman (technical consultant, Assam Climate Change Management Society), Rituraj Phukan (International Climate Change speaker and educationist), Soumyadeep Datta (director, Nature's Beckon - Environment Activist Group of North-East India), BV Sandeep (divisional forest officer, Dibrugarh), Ochintya Sarma (Chevening Rolls-Royce Science Innovation and Leadership Fellow and the Forest Man of India, Padmashree Jadav Payeng), will be actively deliberating in various sessions.

Anuradha Agarwal (additional director general - Training, Prasar

Bharati) and Ravi Kumar Joshi (deputy director general, NABM Delhi, Prasar Bharati) will also grace the occasion with their presence.

The valedictory function of the workshop is anticipated to be presided over by the vice chancellor of Dibrugarh University, Professor Jahnnabi Gogoi Nath.

The workshop aims to sensitise participants about the urgent need to counter climate change, emphasising the potential catastrophic consequences if immediate action is not taken. The discussions will align with the resolutions of COP 28, recently held in Dubai, and in harmony with the resolutions adopted at the G20 Heads of States Summit in Delhi last year, presided over by India. Participants are expected to gain insights into the intricacies of environment conservation during the workshop, enabling them to effectively design programs to inspire public engagement in afforestation and the enhancement of the remaining forest cover in the country.

Notably, Akashvani Dibrugarh has played a pivotal role in environmental initiatives, having planted approximately 20,000 trees within its listening range through its 'Green Broadcasting' initiative, earning global appreciation.

Tripura identifies land for setting up AIIMS, says Governor

Centre requested to arrange inspection to explore suitability of land for AIIMS in Tripura

AGARTALA, Jan 5: Asserting that the Tripura government is working on all-round development, Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu said on Friday that the northeastern state has requested the Centre to arrange an inspection to explore the suitability of land for setting up a new All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS).

The government has already identified a 20-acre land and requested the Centre to arrange an inspection to ascertain the suitability of the proposed land for construction of a new AIIMS, he said while addressing the first day of the



winter session of the assembly. Nallu mentioned that a proposal under the centrally sponsored scheme (CSS) for establishing a new medical college attached to Dhalai dis-

trict hospital with 100 MBBS seats is under preparation. Currently, the state has two medical colleges and a dental college operating in Agartala. The Governor said the gov-

ernment is committed to establishing the northeastern state as a transport and logistics hub for transnational trade and communication.

"The transport department is working in tandem with central ministries on various projects like a multimodal transport hub, interstate and international bus services and railway links," he said.

Nallu also mentioned that a school of logistics, communication and waterways, set up in the state with funding from the ministry of shipping, ports, and waterways, has already taken up various activities. He said the state is set to

construct a unity mall at Hapania that will provide ample space for commercial purposes.

"Under one roof, traders will be able to showcase and sell traditional handicrafts, handloom products, and textiles from various states of the country," he said.

Stating that the government has given top priority to commercial marketing of horticulture products, Nallu said there's plan to establish a centre of excellence on citrus at Taidu in Gumati district under the Indo-Israel Agri-Work plan, with an estimated cost of Rs 9.18 crore. (PTI)

Taxis stay off roads in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, Jan 5: As public transport stayed off the roads in Meghalaya on Friday, tourism minister and MDA spokesperson Paul Lyngdoh said that the rule of law must prevail.

He was responding to a question on the 48-hour protest called by the tourist taxi associations against the yet-to-be-implemented Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) which seeks to increase the punishment in hit-and-run cases.

"This is a matter of concern not just for Meghalaya, but the entire nation and of course we have seen a rise in cases of harsh driving and a lot of cases where drivers have taken undue advantage of the laws of the land. So the rule of law must prevail," Lyngdoh told reporters.

The minister said, "This is a protest that is being organised across the country. The movement of tourists is impeded across India."

Today, tourist taxis in Meghalaya stayed off the roads in support of the country-wide protest against the BNS. (NNN)

Arunachal records 2.87% increase in number of voters

ITANAGAR, Jan 5: Arunachal Pradesh has registered a 2.87 per cent increase in the number of voters, according to the final photo electoral rolls published on Friday.

The total number of electors in the northeastern state now stands at 8,82,816, including 4,33,760 males and 4,49,050 females, the Election Commission data showed.

There are six transgender voters in the state, joint chief electoral officer, Likhen Koyu said.

Arunachal Pradesh has 60 assembly constituencies.

Koyu said the main focus of revision of electoral rolls was to include the young voters, who have attained 18 years of age as on January 1 this year. (PTI)

MLA local area development fund to be hiked by ₹ 25 lakh in Tripura

AGARTALA, Jan 5: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha announced on Friday that he would increase the MLA local area development fund (MLAD) by ₹ 25 lakh. Currently, MLAs receive ₹ 50 lakh under the scheme to carry out development projects in their assembly constituencies.

"In response to MLAs' demands, I am declaring that the fund will be increased from ₹ 50 lakh to ₹ 75 lakh annually. As a result, the annual expenditure will also rise from ₹ 30 crore to ₹ 45 crore," he said during the assembly session.

However, Animesh Debbarma, the leader of the opposition from Tipra Motha and Dipankar Sen, a CPI(M) lawmaker requested the CM to raise the scheme amount to ₹ 1 crore, considering the rising costs of materials. (PTI)

DC distributes final electoral rolls to political parties

HT Correspondent

WILLIAMNAGAR, Jan 5: Deputy commissioner of Meghalaya's East Garo Hills district, Vibhor Aggarwal has issued a communique informing the general public of the publication of final electoral rolls for three assembly constituencies of the district.

These assembly constituencies are 41-Songsak (ST) AC, 42-Rongjeng (ST) AC and 43-Williamnagar (ST) AC.

The electoral rolls, according to the communique, have been prepared with reference to 1 January, 2024 as the qualifying date and queries and inspection relating to the electoral rolls can be made in the office of the deputy commissioner (election) or in the offices of the block development officers of Songsak, Rongjeng and Samanda C&RD Blocks.

The final electoral rolls have also been distributed to the political parties by the deputy commissioner (election) in the presence of additional deputy commissioner in-charge of election, Dimseritha A Sangma and sub-divisional officer (C), Rongjeng, Reuben Ch Momin on Friday.

PUBLIC NOTICE

No. SSA/IE/RT & Vol/254/2014/8911

In pursuance of the advertisement published vide No. SSA/IE/RT & Vol/254/2014/5522 Dated : 10.06.2023, it is for general information of all concerned that the date of interview for the post of (i) Resource Person (RP), (ii) Additional Resource Person (ARP), (iii) Assistant Additional Resource Person (AARP) under Samagra Shiksha Aom will be held on 22.01.2024, 24.01.2024 and 25.01.2024 from 9.30 am onwards at the State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha Aom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19.

The lists of shortlisted candidates on documents verification held on 18.11.2023 and from 20.11.2023 to 23.11.2023 for the said posts are available in the website of Samagra Shiksha Aom at <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>

The candidates are requested to attend in the interview as per the scheduled date with original document and other testimonial.



Sd/-Mission Director
Samagra Shiksha Aom
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/DF/2332/23/6-Jan-24

No wonder Chinese state media has only praise for PM: Cong after Global Times article

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: With an article in the Global Times lauding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies, the Congress on Friday said it was no wonder that Chinese state media has praised him, and alleged that it was he who accommodated interests of that country and allowed it to gain influence in India's neighbourhood.

An article in China's Global Times has said that India has become more strategically confident and proactive in creating and developing a "Bharat narrative". It praised India's significant strides in the spheres of economic, social governance and foreign policy under Prime Minister Modi.

The article published by the prominent state-run Chinese media outlet has been penned by Zhang Jiadong, the director of the Center for South Asian Studies at Fudan University, Shanghai. It highlights India's remarkable achievements over the past four years.

In a statement, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The PM's cheerleaders and drum-beaters are ecstatic on the official Chinese media's praise for him. And why shouldn't he get praise from China? After all it was he, and he alone, who -- gave a clean chit to the Chinese on 19 June, 2020 with his public statement 'Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai, na hi hamari koi post kisi dusre ke kabze mein hai'."



meinhain."

"Apart from being a grave insult to our soldiers, this lie has greatly damaged our stance in 18 rounds of Corps Commander-level negotiations and has contributed to continuing Chinese control of 2,000 square kilometres of fresh Indian territory since May 2020," Ramesh alleged.

He claimed that contradicting the prime minister, Leh's superintendent of police presented a paper stating that India can no longer access 26 out of the 65 patrolling points that it patrolled prior to 2020. Key areas such as Depsang and Demchok remain off limits to Indian troops, Ramesh claimed.

"Where the talks have led to disengagement e.g. Gogri Post and Hot Springs, India has ceded buffer zones to the advantage of

the aggressor. Access from India to the spot where a memorial to Paramvir Chakra winner Major Shaitan Singh had been put up is no longer available following the 'disengagement'. No wonder the Chinese are praising the PM," the Congress leader said in his statement.

Ramesh alleged that it was the prime minister who permitted India to hold joint military drills in Russia with the same Chinese troops who are "occupying our territory in Ladakh".

"On December 1-7, a contingent of Indian troops from 7/8 Gorkha Rifles took part in Russia's Vostok 2022 exercise in which China also participated. Was the supreme sacrifice of 20 of our brave soldiers so easily forgotten?" he said.

Ramesh claimed that the prime

minister allowed China to gain influence in the Maldives, Bhutan and Sri Lanka at India's expense.

"The new Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu's request for India to withdraw its troops from the Maldives is a major setback to Indian national security. A major Chinese buildup in Doklam area that overlooks India's strategic Siliguri Corridor continues despite claims of 'victory' in 2017," he said.

Meanwhile, Bhutan's prime minister stated that "there is no intrusion" by China into Bhutan despite continuing Indian concerns, Ramesh added.

"And, in Sri Lanka, where the PM has been mostly focused on securing contracts for his cronies, China has cemented its hold on critical national assets with a 99-year lease on the strategic Hambantota Port. Chinese intelligence-gathering ships have periodically docked at the port. These are all reasons for China to be satisfied," Ramesh said.

He alleged that the prime minister facilitated rapid imports from China despite promises of "Make in India" that have led to record trade deficits in excess of USD 200 billion in 2022 and 2023.

"To compound this, the Modi government has been dressing up the import of mobile phone parts from China with minimal value addition as a triumph of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', attempting to stoke

national pride while undermining the national interest," the Congress leader said.

He also claimed that the Modi government is moving to ease the provision of Indian visas to Chinese workers. China's economic interests are clearly safe under the Modi government, Ramesh alleged.

"In 2018, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat promised that the RSS would raise a force to fight China on the border 'within three days' if the need arose, compared with the 6-7 months he said the Indian Army required. Not only is there no sign of any mobilisation four years after the Chinese intrusion, the RSS hosted a group of Chinese diplomats at its Nagpur headquarters in early December 2023," he claimed.

"The PM stuck his neck in the sand as a response to China's intrusions, cooperated with its military, allowed it to gain influence in India's neighbourhood, increased India's economic dependence on China and permitted the RSS to facilitate its diplomats," Ramesh alleged.

Noting that the Ministry of External Affairs has said that the relationship with China is "not normal", Ramesh said what is truly abnormal is "the PM's accommodation of Chinese interests".

No wonder the Chinese state media has only words of praise for him, he said. (PTI)

AAP nominates DCW chief Swati Maliwal as RS MP, renominates Sanjay Singh, ND Gupta



NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Friday nominated Delhi Commission for Women chief Swati Maliwal as its Rajya Sabha MP and renominated Sanjay Singh and ND Gupta for the second term in the Upper House of Parliament.

The nominations were announced by the party's political affairs committee (PAC), chaired by AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

"DCW chairperson Swati Maliwal has been nominated for the first time. The PAC has decided to continue with Sanjay Singh and ND Gupta for their respective second term as Rajya Sabha members," the party said.

The committee decided to endorse two existing members for re-nomination, whereas Sushil Kumar Gupta expressed his intent to redirect his focus towards the electoral politics of Haryana, he said.

Sushil Kumar Gupta's tenure as a member of the Rajya Sabha will end later this month.

"He has conveyed his aspiration to actively engage in the vibrant electoral landscape of Haryana, and we respect his decision to pursue this path," a senior AAP leader said.

DCW chairperson Maliwal is also an active advocate for women's rights and social issues. Maliwal has been associated with various campaigns and movements aimed at combating violence against women, advocating for stricter laws, and promoting gender equality.

In 2015, she was appointed as the chairperson of the DCW, where she has been instrumental in spearheading initiatives to address issues such as acid attacks, sexual harassment, and women's safety in Delhi.

A court here has allowed Singh, who is in jail in a money laundering case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, to sign forms and documents for his Rajya Sabha renomination.

Special Judge M K Nagpal passed the order on an application filed by the AAP leader, who submitted that his present term as a member of the Rajya Sabha is expiring on January 27 and the Returning Officer has issued a notice on January 2 for the conduct of the election and nominations for the same are to be submitted by January 9.

The application sought a direction to the Tihar Jail Superintendent to allow Singh to sign the documents. (PTI)

Quake in Japan: PM Modi writes to Japanese counterpart

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote to his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida expressing India's solidarity with Japan and its people affected by the devastating earthquake on January 1.

On Thursday, Modi wrote to Kishida that India values its relationship with Japan as a special strategic and global partner, and is ready to extend all possible assistance at this hour, sources said.

Around 90 people were killed when a 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck Japan's northernmost peninsula of Noto on Monday.

The prime minister conveyed to his Japanese counterpart that he is "deeply anguished and concerned" over the earthquake and expressed "deepest condolence" to the families of those killed in the quake, the sources said.

"I am deeply anguished and concerned to learn about the major earthquake that struck Japan on January 1," Modi said.

"I express my deepest condolences to the bereaved families of those who lost their lives. We stand in solidarity with Japan and its people affected by the disaster," a source quoted Modi as writing to the Japanese prime minister.

Japan's Kyodo news agency said on Friday that the death toll in the quake rose to 92 with over 240 people still missing.

It said authorities doubled the number of Self-Defence forces' personnel taking part in earthquake rescue operations to 4,600. (PTI)

Cong govt in Karnataka spent public money in 5 states' recent polls, alleges Deve Gowda



BENGALURU, Jan 5: JD(S) patriarch H D Deve Gowda on Friday accused the Congress government in Karnataka of spending the state's "public money" to aid the party in the recent assembly elections in five states, as he targeted Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar.

The former prime minister lashed out at Siddaramaiah alleging that he could not prevent the flow of money from Karnataka, especially Bengaluru, to the Congress party in the five states to fight elections.

JD(S) joined the BJP-led NDA in September last year after former chief minister and Deve Gowda's son H D Kumaraswamy met with Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national President J P Nadda in New Delhi.

Both parties have said they would fight the upcoming Lok Sabha elections together in Karnataka.

In the elections to the 224-member Karnataka assembly in May last year, the JD(S) put up a poor show, winning only 19 seats. The Congress bagged 135 and the BJP 66.

Referring to Shivakumar, who is

also President of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, Deve Gowda said, "It is now out in the open where all he went and how much money he transported."

Taking a dig at Siddaramaiah over his statement of providing a clean government, he sought to know why he was not able stop "the illegalities" happening in Bengaluru.

"If you please do not take it otherwise, during the five state elections, how much money was taken from here? Whose wealth is this? It's public money of Karnataka," the JD(S) patriarch said at a press conference.

He said, "Our deputy chief minister (Shivakumar) and his insolence...where all he went, how much money he transported, how much money the ECI (Election Commission of India) seized, is now out in the open. From where did this money go? From here in Bengaluru."

"All the Bengaluru agencies (like Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike and Bangalore Development Authority) and irrigation portfolio are in his (DCM's) hand. It fills me with shame to see what is going on here," Gowda said.

He sought to know why Siddaramaiah was not able to stop it (corruption).

"I don't know whether Siddaramaiah has the strength to stop it. He gives lecture to the country that no one can point a finger at his administration and says that he stands by the poor, minorities and AHINDA (a Kannada acronym that stands for 'Alpasankhyataru' (minorities), 'Hindulidavaru' (Backward Classes) and 'Dalitaru' (Dalits) firmly. Yet, it (money) is flowing! Why is he not able to stop (the illegalities)?" Gowda asked. (PTI)

MHA orders CBI probe into supply of substandard medicines in Delhi govt hospitals

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The Union Home ministry has ordered a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into the supply of substandard medicines in Delhi government hospitals and whether the drugs were also distributed through mohalla clinics, sources said on Friday.

The CBI probe was ordered following a recommendation by Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena on the matter in December last year.

Saxena said the drugs allegedly "failed quality standard tests" and had the "potential of endangering lives" in hospitals run by Delhi government.

The Delhi government's Directorate of Vigilance had written to the home ministry requesting the probe.

"It also needs to be investigated whether the same drugs which have been procured by the Central Procurement Agency (CPA) are also being distributed to the patients through the 'Mohalla Clinics' or not," the communication read.

The letter said any action for supplying 'Not of Standard Quality' drugs should not be confined to the CPA and there is need to investigate the entire supply chain -- the role of the suppliers who procured from manufacturers and provided supply to the end users, that is, hospitals (patients).

"Besides, there is a need to lift the corporate veil to understand the

gravity and motives of supplying 'Not of Standard Quality' drugs," read the Directorate of Vigilance letter.

The drugs that were found to be of "substandard quality" included critical life-saving antibiotics used for the treatment of lung and urinary tract infections such as Cephalexin, according to officials.

The list also included a steroid, Dexamethasone, used for curing life-threatening inflammation in the lungs and joints and swelling in the body, anti-epilepsy and anti-anxiety psychiatric drug Levetiracetam and anti-hypertension drug Amlodipine, the officials said.

"In this context, it is not out of place to mention that the matter of 'Mohalla Clinics' was already entrusted to the CBI and a Preliminary Enquiry (PE) was also registered..." the communication read.

According to a vigilance department report submitted to the lieutenant governor, of the 43 samples of drugs sent to government laboratories, three failed the test and 12 reports were pending. Further, out of another 43 samples sent to private laboratories, five failed.

Drugs such as Amlodipine, Levetiracetam and Pantoprazole failed the test in both government and private laboratories. Cephalexin and Dexamethasone failed the test in private laboratories.

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj had demanded action against the city's health secretary in connection with the matter. (PTI)

SC adjourns hearing on Tejashwi Yadav's plea for transferring criminal defamation complaint outside Gujarat

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The Supreme Court on Friday adjourned until January 22 the hearing on Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav's petition seeking transfer of the criminal defamation complaint pending against him in a magistrate court in Ahmedabad over his alleged "only Gujaratis can be thugs" remark to a place outside Gujarat, preferably Delhi.

A bench of Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan deferred the matter after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Yadav, sought time to seek instructions to file an affidavit on withdrawal of the alleged remarks made by his client.

The top court, while hearing



the RJD leader's plea, had earlier stayed the proceedings in the criminal defamation complaint and issued notice to the Gujarat resident who has filed it.

The complaint against Yadav

was filed under sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for alleged criminal defamation.

The Gujarat court had in August conducted a preliminary en-

quiry against Yadav under section 202 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and found sufficient grounds to summon him on the complaint filed by Hareesh Mehta, a local businessman and activist.

According to the complaint, Yadav, while talking to media in Patna in March 2023, had said, "Only Gujaratis can be thugs in the present situation, and their fraud will be forgiven."

"Who will be responsible if they run away with the money belonging to the LIC or banks?" the Bihar Deputy CM had allegedly asked.

Mehta claimed Yadav's comments defamed all Gujaratis. (PTI)

Hizbul terrorist arrest probe: Larger conspiracy to target more J-K policemen, say sources

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The Delhi Police suspects that the Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist arrested on Thursday is the part of a larger conspiracy to attack more policemen in Jammu and Kashmir, sources said.

On Thursday, Delhi Police Special Cell arrested "A++" category terrorist Javaid Ahmad Matoo, who was wanted in 11 terror attack cases, including five grenade attacks and killing of at least five police personnel in separate incidents in Jammu and Kashmir. He was carrying a reward of Rs 10 lakh.

It is suspected that Matoo was using the national capital as a transit point to go to the valley via Nepal from Pakistan, police sources said. But the officials are still interrogating him about his last destination before reaching Delhi.

"Matoo is learnt to have expertise in operating rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), under barrel grenade launcher (UBGL) and AK-47. His target is very accurate," an official said, adding that he could have learnt this in training.

Delhi Police Special Cell on Thursday arrested him from Nizamuddin with a loaded pistol and an extra magazine in his possession. He was driving a stolen car when he was apprehended, police had said.



The Delhi Police has booked him under the Arms Act and conspiracy case. It is also interrogating him to get further details about the conspiracy and his further plans. The officials are also interrogating him to know the actual reason of his coming to Delhi, sources said.

A native of Sopore, Matoo was outside Jammu and Kashmir for the last 10 years.

"It is suspected that he was staying somewhere in Pakistan but entered India via Nepal. He was looking for an opportunity to go to Pakistan," a police source said.

A police official said that Matoo was a prominent member of the group headed by Abdul Qayum Nazir, who was the operational in-charge of the terrorist module in Jammu and Kashmir," the officer said. (PTI)

Bengal gov condemns attack on ED officers, exploring options to take action

KOLKATA, Jan 5: Condemning the attack on Enforcement Directorate (ED) officers by supporters of a TMC leader in West Bengal on Friday, Governor Dr CV Ananda Bose said it is the duty of a civilised government to stop "barbarism and vandalism in a democracy". He slammed the state government for failing to contain the law and order situation at Sandeshkhali where the ED officers and accompanying central force personnel were assaulted during a raid on the TMC leader's house in connection with the ration distribution scam. In a stern message to the Trinamool Congress government, Bose said, "As a Governor, I explore all my Constitutional options for appropriate action at the appropriate manner."

"The ghastly incident in Sandeshkhali is alarming and deplorable. It's the duty of a civilised government to stop barbarism and vandalism in a democracy," he said in an audio statement.

Stating that Bengal is not a banana republic, he said "Jungle Raj and gunda raj will work in a fool's paradise." The government should better open its eyes and see the reality and act effectively or face the consequences, the governor said.

"The ostrich-like attitude of the police pretending not to see the lawlessness around should go... This pre-election violence which has an early beginning, should find an early end," he said.

A few ED officers were assaulted and their vehicles were damaged allegedly by supporters of TMC leader Sheikh Sajahan on Friday when they tried to raid his residence in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district in connection with their probe into the ration distribution scam. (PTI)

ISRO to put Aditya-L1 spacecraft in its final destination orbit today

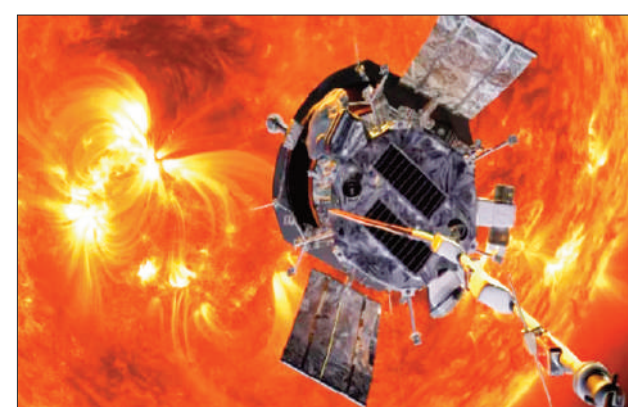
BENGALURU, Jan 5: ISRO has geared up to perform a crucial manoeuvre on Saturday to put Aditya-L1 spacecraft -- the first space-based Indian observatory to study the Sun -- into its final destination orbit, some 1.5 million kilometres from the Earth.

According to ISRO officials, the spacecraft will be placed in a halo orbit around Lagrange point 1 (L1) of the Sun-Earth system, about 1.5 million km from the Earth. The L1 point is about one per cent of the total distance between the Earth and the Sun.

A satellite in a halo orbit around the L1 point has the major advantage of continuously viewing the Sun without any occultations/eclipses, they said, adding, this will provide a greater advantage in observing solar activities and its effect on space weather in real time.

"This manoeuvre (at around 4 pm on Saturday) will bind the Aditya-L1 to a halo orbit around L1. If we don't do this, there is a possibility that it will continue its journey, maybe towards the Sun," an ISRO official told PTI on Friday.

The Polar Satellite Launch



Vehicle (PSLV-C57) launched the Aditya-L1 spacecraft from the second launch pad of Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota, on September 2 last year.

After a flight duration of 63 minutes and 20 seconds, it was successfully injected into an elliptical orbit of 235x19500 km around the Earth.

The spacecraft underwent a series of maneuvers thereafter and headed Sun-Earth Lagrange Point 1 (L1), having escaped the Earth's sphere of influence.

The spacecraft carries seven payloads to observe the photosphere, chromosphere and the outermost layers of the Sun (the

corona) using electromagnetic and particle and magnetic field detectors.

"Using the special vantage point L1, four payloads directly view the Sun and the remaining three payloads carry out in-situ studies of particles and fields at the Lagrange point L1, thus providing important scientific studies of the propagatory effect of solar dynamics in the interplanetary medium," according to the space agency.

The suits of Aditya L1 payloads are expected to provide the "most crucial information" to understand the problem of coronal heating, coronal mass ejection, pre-flare and flare ac-

tivities and their characteristics, dynamics of space weather, and propagation of particles and fields, officials said.

The major science objectives of the Aditya-L1 mission are:

Study of the Solar upper atmospheric (chromosphere and corona) dynamics; study of chromospheric and coronal heating, physics of the partially ionized plasma, initiation of the coronal mass ejections, and flares; observe the in-situ particle and plasma environment, providing data for the study of particle dynamics from the Sun; physics of the solar corona and its heating mechanism; diagnostics of the coronal and coronal loops plasma; Temperature, velocity and density; development, dynamics and origin of coronal mass ejections (CMEs); identify the sequence of processes that occur at multiple layers (chromosphere, base and extended corona) which eventually leads to solar eruptive events; magnetic field topology and magnetic field measurements in the solar corona; drivers for space weather (origin, composition and dynamics of solar wind. (PTI)

Indian Navy intercepts hijacked merchant vessel in Arabian Sea

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Indian Navy's marine commandos on Friday boarded a hijacked Liberian-flagged commercial bulk carrier in the North Arabian Sea and are undertaking a sanitisation operation, Navy officials said.

The Navy deployed a warship, maritime patrol aircraft P-8I and long-range Predator MQ9B drone in response to the hijacking of commercial vessel MV Lila Norfolk that is understood to have over a dozen Indian crew members.

Navy officials said frontline warship INS Chennai was diverted from her anti-piracy patrol and it intercepted the hijacked vessel at 3:15 pm in the North Arabian Sea.

The vessel was kept under continuous surveillance using maritime patrol aircraft P8I and Predator MQ9B drones, the officials said.

"The Indian Navy's marine commandos present onboard the mission deployed warship boarded the merchant vessel and have commenced the sanitisation operation," said an official.

MV Lila Norfolk sent a message

on the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) portal indicating that five to six unknown armed personnel boarded the vessel on Thursday evening.

Earlier, the Navy said the overall situation is being "closely monitored" in coordination with other maritime agencies in the region.

The hijacking incident comes amid growing concerns over Houthi militants stepping up attacks on merchant vessels in the Red Sea amid the Israel-Hamas conflict. The Navy said it responded swiftly to the "developing situation" and deployed a maritime patrol aircraft and diverted INS Chennai for security of MV Lila Norfolk.

"Responding swiftly to the developing situation, Indian Navy launched a maritime patrol aircraft and has diverted INS Chennai deployed for maritime security operations to assist the vessel," it said in a statement.

Though there is no clarity from the Navy on the nationality of the crew, it is learnt that over a dozen of them are Indians.



The Indian Navy remains committed to ensuring safety of merchant shipping in the region along with international partners and friendly foreign countries, it said.

"The Indian Navy remains committed to ensuring safety of merchant shipping in the region along with international partners and friendly foreign countries," the Navy said.

The UKMTO is a British military organisation that tracks movements of various vessels in strategic waterways.

The fresh incident is among a series of such maritime incidents witnessed in the strategic waters in the last few weeks.

Liberian-flagged vessel MV Chem Pluto, with 21 Indian crew

members, was the target of a drone attack off India's west coast on December 23.

Besides MV Chem Pluto, another commercial oil tanker that was on the way to India came under a suspected drone strike in the Southern Red Sea on the same day. The vessel had a team of 25 Indian crew.

In another incident, Malta-flagged vessel MV Ruen was hijacked on December 14 by pirates.

The Indian Navy on Wednesday said it continues to monitor the maritime security situation in the North and Central Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden.

"Indian Naval ships and aircraft remain mission deployed for maintaining enhanced surveillance and undertaking maritime security operations," it said.

"In the last one week, Indian Naval Task Groups deployed in the area have investigated large number of fishing vessels and boarded vessels of interest," it added.

The task groups comprised warships, surveillance planes and remotely-piloted aircraft. (PTI)

Cash courier who claimed Mahadev app money was meant for Bhupesh Baghel stands by statement: ED

RAIPUR/NEW DELHI, Jan 5: An alleged courier, arrested in the Mahadev betting app case, who claimed he had been sent to "deliver" cash to former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, has retracted his denial of having made the charges, saying he stands by the statement, the ED informed a court.

The federal agency arrested courier Asim Das last November from a Raipur hotel just before the first phase of the Chhattisgarh assembly polls. It had claimed that Das "admitted" that the seized funds (Rs 5.39 crore cash) were arranged by the Mahadev app promoters to be delivered to one politician 'Baghel' for upcoming election expenses in Chhattisgarh.

During his production before the court later last year, Das submitted that he had been framed as part of a conspiracy and that he had never delivered cash to anyone.

The Enforcement Directorate has now informed in its second prosecution complaint (charge sheet) filed before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Raipur on January 1 that Das recorded a fresh statement on December 12 last year in which he "retracted from his November 3 statement

(made) under the influence of someone who arrived with his (Das's) advocate". Das has now told the ED that "this person gave him a pre-typed document and asked him to reproduce it in his handwriting".

The man also told the agency that he "did not know to whom the retraction was forwarded and signed it, believing it would be beneficial to his case". The ED said Das stated that his first statement given to the agency on November 3 last year in which he cited Baghel's name was "true and correct".

In his November statement, the courier had told the ED that Subham Soni, a promoter of the Mahadev app, called him to Dubai in October 2023 and said he would be "provided cash which was to be delivered to Mr Bhupesh Baghel...".

Incidentally, Das' 62-year-old father Sushil Das was found dead under suspicious circumstances in a well on December 6 in Chhattisgarh's Durg district. Baghel dubbed these charges as an attempt to "malign" his image while the Congress termed it "vendetta politics" by the Centre.

The ED charge sheet has named five accused -- Asim Das, police constable Bhim Singh Yadav and Mahadev app operatives Subham Soni,

accounts department worker Rohit Gulati and Anil Kumar Agrawal alias Atul Agrawal. The Raipur court is expected to take cognisance of this supplementary charge sheet on January 10. The agency also said in its latest charge sheet that it has attached a flat and a plot located in Dubai worth Rs 99.46 crore under the provisions of the PMLA as it sought the court's permission to confiscate them. These assets belong to Vikash Chhapparia, an accused in the case, and Agrawal.

In the first charge sheet filed last year, the ED had named the two main promoters of the alleged illegal betting and gaming app -- Sourabh Chandrakar and Ravi Uppal -- among others. The two have been recently detained in Dubai based on an Interpol red notice issued at the behest of the ED and the agency is trying to deport or extradite them from the UAE to India.

The ED said that Soni, a "prominent member in the financial operations" of the Mahadev app, did not appear before it but sent an email on November 2 last year, claiming "regular bribe payments have been made in the past and so far around Rs 508 crore have been paid by Mahadev app promoters to Mr Bhupesh Baghel, chief minister of Chhattisgarh". (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

India's economy projected to grow

per cent and "we believe this will continue in 2024 and 2025 as well." Rashid noted that although inflation was relatively high for India, it didn't have to raise rates as much and inflation has come down quite a bit.

"That has allowed the government to sustain the fiscal support that it needed," he said adding that "we didn't see significant fiscal adjustments or fiscal retrenchment in India."

"Overall, domestic consumption is growing, household spending has grown, employment situation has improved quite a bit. So we are very optimistic about India's growth outlook in the near term," he said.

In response to a question on factors holding back India's economic growth, director of the economic analysis and policy division Shantanu Mukherjee cited India's GDP growth rates of four years from 2022-2025 and said: "I'm not sure that 7.7%, 6.3%, 6.2% and 6.6% is exactly holding something back."

"In a kind of abstract sense, one would run the risk of overheating an economy if you grew at much faster rates at the size and complexity of India," he said.

Mukherjee noted that the Indian government has recently modified its tax collection systems and "those have also certainly helped and given a more stable playing field for businesses and other initiatives to progress."

Highlighting risks facing the economy, he said some of those risks are more global in nature.

"India still remains a very largely farm-based economy in many senses. And being in the tropics, it is very vulnerable to climate change. El Nino is a recurrent phenomenon but exacerbated by climate change. So should there be a shock to agricultural production, this could cause a major disruption in the economy."

Mukherjee said that while he doesn't anticipate such a shock, "but should there be one, this could be problematic."

"One of the reasons that the consumer price index in India remained relatively within bounds, allowing the central bank to not raise interest rates too much, was that food prices and fuel prices remained relatively stable. So any shock on those lines would be boomeranging through the economy," he said.

Consumer price inflation in India is expected to decelerate from 5.7 per cent in 2023 to 4.5 per cent in 2024, staying within the two to six per cent medium-term inflation target range set by the Central Bank.

"The risk of a surge in inflation in the coming months cannot be ruled out, however, as potential increases in commodity prices and the adverse impact of climate events on food prices could disrupt the pace of disinflation," the report said.

The labour market situation in South Asia remained fragile in 2023 despite improvements in some countries. In India, labour market indicators improved over the year, with labour force participation increasing in August to its highest rate since the onset of the pandemic, the report said, citing the Reserve Bank of India.

The unemployment rate averaged 7.1 per cent in September, the lowest value in a year, with unemployment in rural areas falling despite weaker monsoon rains. Youth unemployment rates declined significantly during the first quarter of 2023 to the lowest value since the pandemic, it said.

The report also noted that the Reserve Bank of India has been cautious about opening the country's financial markets and has been implementing appropriate risk management systems.

The UN said global economic growth is projected to slow from an estimated 2.7 per cent in 2023 to 2.4 per cent in 2024, trending below the pre-pandemic growth rate of three per cent.

This latest forecast comes on the heels of global economic performance exceeding expectations in 2023. However, last year's stronger-than-expected GDP growth masked short-term risks and structural vulnerabilities, it said.

The better-than-expected performance for 2023 is chiefly driven by several large economies, notably the US but also Brazil, India and Mexico, Mukherjee told reporters.

The UN's flagship economic report presents a sombre economic outlook for the near term. Persistently high interest rates, further escalation of conflicts, sluggish international trade, and increasing climate disasters, pose significant challenges to global growth.

The year "2024 must be the year when we break out of this quagmire. By unlocking big, bold investments we can drive sustainable development and climate action, and put the global economy on a stronger growth path for all," UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres said. (PTI)

Transporters' unions call

across the state, with people lining up to fill fuel tanks amid fears of supply crunch. Meanwhile, the state government has invoked the Essential Services Maintenance (Assam) Act, 1980, which prohibits strikes in the state for six months from the date of issue of the notification until further orders.

The order, issued on Thursday by the additional chief secretary of the Home and Political Department, prohibits strikes by "officers, workmen, contract labourers, tankers, drivers and also khalasis involved in the service in the Oil and/or gas sector". (PTI)

Measures implemented to curb

from 5 pm to 7 pm and in the morning from 3 am to 9 am, often attributed to overspeeding. To tackle the issue comprehensively, the District Road Safety Committee (DRSC) has been established. A speed limit card will be distributed to drivers and two-wheeler riders at Hanjlangangso, which they must surrender to the police at Borpathar.

SP Sanjib Kumar Saikia appealed for cooperation from the public in adhering to these safety measures. The press conference also saw the presence of DTO Bikram Aditya Gogoi, Bokajan ADC Debahuti Bora, Bokajan SDPO Rustom Raj Brama, and local leader Jivan Chandra Pathak, all emphasising the collective commitment to enhancing road safety along NH 39.

Karbi villages celebrate annual ritual

from revered deities Hemphu, Mukrang, and Rasinja. Ahead of the ritual, men gathered at the village headman's house for sek sahadi, invoking the gods for the success of the upcoming Rongker.

On the appointed day, men and youths congregated at the village Rongker ground. Earthly altars were raised, and traditional priests including Mensing Kathar, Borsing Teron, Kensing Tisso, and Juliram Tisso conducted animal sacrifices. Fowls were offered to Hemphu and Mukrang, while Rasinja received a he-goat and hen. Rong Anglong, Lokhi, and Murti were honored with a fowl each.

Mensing Kathar, one of the traditional priests, expressed positive signs from the conducted animal sacrifices.

The sacrificial meat was later prepared with vegetables, leading to a communal feast held at sundown, fostering community bonds.

Similar Rongker rituals unfolded in On Bey village 5th Lumding road, Rongtharve ward No. 14, Rongkhehar ward No. 8 of Diphu town, Taralangso, Hemari Bey village, and various other locations, showcasing the enduring spirit of cultural traditions in Karbi communities.

Transport Workers Union in KA

Diphu town to Manja created an opportunity for autorickshaws to exploit the situation by charging higher fares than usual.

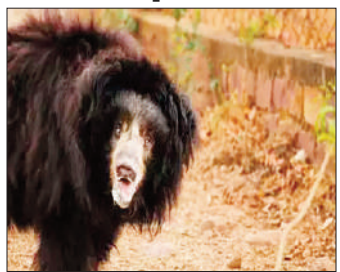
Abdul Nur, president of KAMTW&DU, expressed the union's support for the strike initiated by AMLU. He also highlighted concerns that the new hit-and-run law may discourage drivers and subject them to unjust punishments.

Nur further emphasised the potential risk of drivers facing mob violence when attempting to transport injured individuals to hospitals, calling for the repeal of the law.

Assam secures investments exceeding

offered under the scheme, including a power subsidy of ₹ 77.1 crore, electricity duty reimbursement of ₹ 31.77 crore, and a capital subsidy of ₹ 282.25 crore.

'India's oldest' sloth bear in captivity dies at 36 in Bhopal zoo



BHOPAL, Jan 5: A 36-year-old male sloth bear died due to multi-organ failure at a zoo-cum-animal rescue centre in Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal, an official said on Friday.

This bear named Bablu was the oldest one in captivity in the country at present, an office-bearer of a non-government organisation that runs a bear rescue centre at the zoo said.

"Bablu died on Thursday at the Van Vihar National Park-cum-animal rescue and rehabilitation centre," its veterinarian Dr Atul Gupta told PTI.

The bear had stopped eating three to four days back, he added. Bablu had been brought to the Van Vihar on May 6, 2006 at the age of 19 years after being rescued from a 'madaari' (street performer) in Rajasthan, the facility's assistant director S K Sinha said.

The average lifespan of a bear is 25 to 30 in the wild, he added.

Non-government organisation Wildlife SOS' press and communication officer Neel Banerjee said that after the death of female bear Gulabo at the age of 40 at the Van Vihar National Park in January 2022, Bablu was the oldest bear in the country (in captivity).

"Bablu died at our Bear Rescue Facility in Van Vihar," he said, adding that his NGO works for rescue to elephants, bears and leopards across India.

After the post-mortem, Bablu's carcass was disposed off. His important body parts have been sent to Jabalpur-based Wildlife Forensic and Health. (PTI)

Satya Pal Malik, Kapil Sibal voice concerns over EVMs, call for counting of VVPAT slips

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Former Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik on Friday said his hunch is that the BJP will remain in power till the EVMs in current form are used in the elections and called for counting of the VVPAT slips.

Malik, who is known for being critical of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, in a conversation with Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on the latter's YouTube show 'Dil Se', said the opposition should make a big issue on the use of the EVMs in the polls and alleged that the Election Commission was not looking into the matter as it was "under pressure".

The remarks come at a time when several opposition leaders have voiced doubts about the integrity of functioning of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and demanded that the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips be handed over to the voters, who could drop it in a separate box.

Dismissing Jairam Ramesh's concerns on the EVMs, the Election Commission in response to the Congress leader has expressed "full faith in the use of the EVMs in the elections" and made it clear that the latest updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) answer "adequately and comprehensively" all reasonable and legitimate aspects on the use of the EVMs in the Indian elections.

According to the Election Commission, mandatory verification of printed VVPAT slips of five randomly selected polling stations of each assembly constituency or each assembly segment is done in case of the election to the House of the People before declaring the results.

To Sibal's question on concerns about the BJP bagging the number of seats it predicts for itself, Malik said, "I want to tell you my hunch is that till this machine system goes away, the BJP cannot be removed from power. Opposition should seriously take action on this issue."

With Sibal pointing out that the Election Commission (EC) asking



those raising doubts how the EVMs could be manipulated, Malik said many people have done it and claimed that he had seen a man do it.

"That demand of the EC is wrong. When we are suspicious of it and there is a doubt. So, why don't you get polls done with the ballot paper?" Malik asked the poll body.

Sibal argued that the right to vote is the basis of democracy and it is unconstitutional if a machine decides the mandate.

"If I have a doubt and I want to know whether my vote has been cast to the desired person or not, it is my constitutional right to know. The EC does not agree to this and the court also does not agree to this," the former Congress leader said.

"I can't say that there has been manipulation but if people have a doubt then what is the harm (in counting the VVPATs)," Sibal added.

Both agreed that VVPAT slips should be handed over and put in the ballot boxes which can then be counted.

Asked why the EC was not acting on the concerns raised over the EVMs, Malik alleged that the poll body was "under pressure" and suggested that the opposition should make a big issue about this.

To Sibal's query about the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), Malik

said it needs to get its act together and not focus on small issues such as Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) president Nitish Kumar's bid for becoming the convener of the alliance.

He said that the opposition alliance could still get its act together.

"Even five days are enough. If they act correctly, things will change," he said.

Sibal said he feels that the INDIA bloc should have a secretariat and spokesperson.

During the nearly 40-minute conversation with Sibal, Malik also talked about issues such as Pujwama, the suspension of opposition MPs from the Parliament and the abrogation of Article 370.

Malik, who himself is a Jat, said there was no caste angle to the mimicry row and asserted that his community never takes offence to humour and mimicry.

A political row had broken out last month when Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Kalyan Banerjee mimicked Rajya Sabha chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar during the opposition's protest on the stairs of the Parliament against the MPs' suspension, drawing strong condemnation from the ruling BJP.

Dhankhar had given vent to his anguish in the Rajya Sabha, saying he was personally hurt as his farmer and Jat backgrounds were targeted. (PTI)

"The seminars scheduled during the summit will deliberate on global challenges and their potential solutions."

After the inaugural session on January 10, seminars will be held on various topics, such as Aircraft Manufacturing and MRO opportunities, Dholera Smart City and Gujarat's Roadmap for Viksit Bharat @ 2047. These seminars will be followed by country and state seminars, B2B, B2B and B2G meetings. On January 11, seminars and conferences will be held on topics ranging from Semiconductors and Electronics, Port-led City Development, Electric Vehicle Manufacturing and GIFT City.

On January 12, there will be 'MSME Conclave' in the main convention hall, followed by various seminars on topics ranging from circular economy, green hydrogen and clean energy.

Addressing the media, state Industries Minister Balvantsinh Rajput said that despite its small geographical size, Gujarat boasts of a remarkable 33 per cent share in exports. Furthermore, the state contributes 18 per cent to the total production of the country and holds the top position in logistics ranking. (PTI)

PM Modi to inaugurate Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit on Jan 10

GANDHINAGAR, Jan 5: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in Gandhinagar on January 10, an official said on Friday.

The event will be held at the Mahatma Mandir Convention Centre in the state capital, he said.

A day before the summit begins, the PM would also inaugurate the 'Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show 2024' at Helipad Ground near Mahatma Mandir on January 9, Additional Chief Secretary of Industries and Mines Department, S J Haider, said in a press conference. The PM will arrive in Gandhinagar on January 9, he said.

"The 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit will be held between January 10 and 12 in Gandhinagar and the PM will inaugurate the event on January 10. We are also organising 'Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show 2024' as part of the summit. It will also be inaugurated by the PM in the afternoon of January 9. The trade show will remain open till January 13," he said.

The previous Vibrant Gujarat Summit was held in 2019. Due to the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent lockdown, it could not be



organised in the last few years.

Till now, over 1.07 lakh people from 136 countries have registered themselves for the upcoming summit, Haider said.

"As against the 60,000-odd delegates who had registered themselves for the previous summit, over 1.07 lakh people have already registered themselves and the figure may increase as the registration process is still on. So far, 32 nations have agreed to be partner countries of the Vibrant Summit," he said.

Nearly 125 events, such as seminars and exhibitions, will be held during the three-day summit, Haider said, adding that efforts

will be made to make it a 'carbon neutral' event by minimising the carbon emission and neutralising the already emitted carbon by planting trees and using renewable energy.

"The delegates will also deliberate on various global issues during the summit. Countries like Germany, Saudi Arabia, UK, South Korea and Oman will organise their 'Country Seminars' at the event. Nearly 50 to 75 CEOs of top global firms will be attending the Summit as they have already given their confirmation," Haider said.

The 10th Vibrant Summit will serve as a gateway to the future, the officer said.

Working with Sriram Raghavan was always on my bucket list: Katrina Kaif

MUMBAI, Jan 5: Actor Katrina Kaif on Thursday said "Merry Christmas" turned out to be a special film as it gave her a chance to work with ace filmmaker Sriram Raghavan and also step out of her comfort zone.

Working with Raghavan, the director of critical hits "Ek Hasina Thi", "Johnny Gaddar", "Badlapur" and "Andhadhun", was always on Kaif's "bucket list", the actor said at a press conference here. "For me, working with Sriram Raghavan was always on my bucket list to do and he's been one of my favourite directors. When I heard the story, I was in awe that I was going to get to work with him in a story like this which was so incredible.

"And also it was right for me, that's why sir and I came

together for this film. He must have also seen that in the character," the 40-year-old actor said. Also starring Vijay Sethupathi, "Merry Christmas" is set over the course of one night and follows the story of two strangers.

Kaif said she started the project with an "open mind" as she knew that the movie will turn out to be a different experience for her as a creative person.

"It's a different language, it has a different pace and rhythm. For me, to enter this world that is Sriram Raghavan's world, what I need to do is to have an open mind," she said. The "Tiger 3" star revealed that Raghavan gave her a narration of the story and then told her to build a backstory for her character



Mariya.

"He asked me to write Mariya's back story, like where she was, what drove her to become the way she is and what had happened in her life. So, that whole process was extremely helpful. We worked really hard before coming on set.

"I did a lot of workshops with a few different people. Sriram sir has a workshop with us as well. So I enjoyed this kind of a process, it's not all the time that you get to rehearse the scenes with your co-actor and to be able to do that over a few days, so, for me this was a re-

ally fulfilling experience," she added.

Kaif said she was also excited to collaborate with Sethupathi, known for delivering critically-lauded performances in movies such as "Vikram Vedha", "Super Deluxe" and "96". (PTI)

Hope industry, parents rethink how they deal with child artists: 'First Act' director Deepa Bhatia

MUMBAI, Jan 5: Director Deepa Bhatia hopes that her new docu-series "First Act" helps people in the Hindi entertainment industry and parents introspect their behaviour towards child artists.

The six-episode series, currently streaming on Prime Video, sheds light on the challenges child actors face while starting out in the industry. Bhatia has written and directed the show with her actor-filmmaker husband, Amole Gupte, serving as a creative producer.

"If the show can help them think about how they negotiate and deal with children, how kind and understanding they can be, and how much room they should give to children to do their own thing, that for me will be a mission accomplished," Bhatia told PTI in an interview.

The filmmaker said the idea for 'First Act' originated in 2017 as she kept meeting parents of child actors while working on Gupte's films.

She started researching and began filming for the docu-series in 2019.

As part of her research, the editor-filmmaker met child artists, parents, casting directors, and casting coordinators, besides doing the rounds of Aaram Nagar, a locality in suburban

Mumbai, where auditions usually take place.

"I interviewed kids, who are acting, and you see a pattern like they often work for long hours, how they struggle to get a part, or how they are cheated or not, and if it's a parental dream or not," Bhatia, whose son Partho Gupte has acted in Gupte's films such as 'Stanley Ka Dabba' and 'Hawaa Hawaa', said.

"But all this is not necessarily associated with negativity and pressure. I can have a dream but I can be gentle with my child, so it depends case to case." Bhatia, who previously directed and produced the critically acclaimed documentary 'Nero's Guests: The Age of Inequality' on farmer suicides in Maharashtra, said she initially wanted to make a feature film but realised that a documentary would portray the reality of a child artist's life in a better way.

"We felt this should be explored like a documentary, where you go on the ground and check what is going on. I went with my cameraman and had conversations with people. In a documentary, you don't go with preconceived notions. You see what happens, and that becomes the truth that you try to convey. (PTI)

Harinder Sikka acquires film rights of Tarun Mehrishi's debut novel

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Harinder Sikka, whose "Calling Sehmat" was adapted into the film "Raazi", has acquired the movie rights of lawyer-entrepreneur Tarun Mehrishi's debut novel "The Portrait of a Secret". Sikka and Mehrishi will now work together to finalise the script for the screen adaptation.

Published by Penguin India, "The Portrait of a Secret" is the story of a patriot, who is faced with the impossible choice between self-preservation and duty.

Sikka said "The Portrait of a Secret" seamlessly blends fiction with reality and genuinely lives up to the word 'unput-downable'.

"The first time I read it, I could immediately see that the story held tremendous potential for screen and I am glad that we will be able to work together to mount the project at the scale that it deserves. Our authors deserve more than what they get today and this partnership will mark our first step in that direction," he said.

Protagonist Amitabh has spent a career battling India's enemies, domestic and foreign and now, in the winter of his illustrious career, as India's chief of intelligence, he is faced with his most daunting challenge yet

- averting a nuclear strike against his homeland that he knows very little about - except that it is coming.

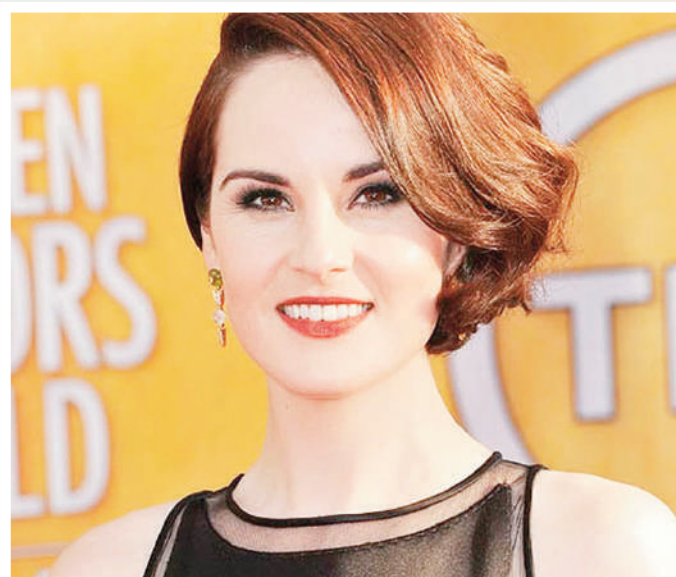
As Indian intelligence brings all of its resources to bear to uncover the truth, Amitabh's path crosses that of Kamal's, a senior IAS officer who has been investigating the theft of two priceless paintings from India and working to apprehend their thief. Their worlds collide as each realises that the other holds the key to accomplishing their missions.

Even as they begin to work together, the paintings reveal a secret that was thought to have been lost in the fires of partition.

Holding the potential to permanently alter global geopolitical equations, the discovery unleashes a global battle between the RAW, the ISI and the CIA, as each agency scrambles for control over the secret. London becomes the final battleground, innocent lives and intelligence assets built over decades ruthlessly sacrificed, for something far more valuable - control over the Indian subcontinent.

Everything is at stake till one man is forced to make a choice - one that will decide the fate of the world. (PTI)

TOPHER GRACE, MICHELLE DOCKERY JOIN CAST OF MEL GIBSON'S 'FLIGHT RISK'



LOS ANGELES, Jan 5: Actors Topher Grace and Michelle Dockery have boarded the cast of suspense thriller film Flight Risk, to be directed by Hollywood star Mel Gibson.

The movie, which is set up at Lionsgate, will feature Mark Wahlberg in the role of a pilot transporting a dangerous criminal (Grace) for trial.

As they cross the Alaskan wilderness, tensions soar and trust is tested, as not everyone on board is who they seem.

The film is based on the 2020 Black List script by Jared Rosenber.

According to American news outlet Deadline, Davis Entertainment and Gibson and Bruce Davey's Icon Productions are the producers.

Flight Risk is Wahlberg and Gibson's maiden collaboration as actor-director. The duo recently starred in biographical drama Father Stu. (PTI)

Was dying to be part of Rohit Shetty's cop universe: Siddharth Malhotra

MUMBAI, Jan 5: Actor Siddharth Malhotra on Friday said he was eager to be a part of Rohit Shetty's cop universe and his wish came true with the OTT series "Indian Police Force".

The seven-part action series, which will debut on January 19 on streamer Prime Video, marks Shetty and Malhotra's foray into long-format storytelling.

It is the next chapter in the filmmaker's cinematic universe that started with 2011 movie "Singham" and expanded with "Singham Returns" (2014), "Simmba" (2018) and "Sooryavanshi" (2021).

At the show's trailer launch event, Malhotra, 38, said there is no one better than Shetty when it comes to presenting heroes in Hindi cinema.

"As an audience and as an actor,

I've admired all his films. Even though he does comedy really well, when it comes to action and portraying the heroes in the most masculine, simple and effective way, I think Rohit Shetty has a great language in it. I was dying to be part of that cop universe," the actor said.

It was two years ago when the filmmaker discussed the idea for the show with Malhotra, he recalled.

"He said, 'I'm making something in the cop universe', and I said, 'great'. He said, 'It is for OTT'. When he showed his vision and I heard the story, everything just came through," he added.

Though "Indian Police Force" is a series and will be available on OTT, Malhotra said it has all the elements of a feature film.

"It is nothing short of Hindi cin-

ema entertainment that he brings to you. I've always loved playing real-life heroes on screen. So 'Indian Police Force', and Kabir Malik, my character is nothing short of that. I hope all our Hindi cinema lovers and everybody comes through to watch this show and celebrate our real life heroes," he added.

Also starring Shilpa Shetty and Vivek Oberoi, the show follows the officers of Delhi Police trying to catch the masterminds behind a series of bomb blasts.

Malhotra said he had a very "warm and refreshing" experience on the show.

"The atmosphere on the sets was very homely, which was very refreshing to see. It is the warmer version of the film industry, which can be harsh and practical at times," he

added.

Shilpa Shetty plays the role of Tara Shetty, a character she said she would describe as someone who is "gritty, compassionate and selfless".

"When they came to narrate the part to me, the minute they said the character is called Tara Shetty, I was like 'ok.' It was also a yes on my bucket list because I always wanted to work with Rohit, not because of the Shetty connection, but because of the grasp he has on this milieu... To be able to play a cop in his cop universe is nothing but a compliment."

Rohit Shetty has created the series and also co-directed it with Sushwanti Prakash. The show also features Shweta Tiwari, Nikitin Dheer, Rituraj Singh, Mukesh Rishi, Lalit Parimoo in pivotal roles. (PTI)



Theegala takes lead in PGA Tour season opener, Bhatia 25th

MAUI (HAWAII), Jan 5: Indian-American golfer Sahithi Theegala got off to a flying start with a stunning 9-under 64 at The Sentry to lead the field on day 1 of the PGA Tour season-opener at the Par-73 Plantation course in Kapalua. Touted as one of the rising stars, Theegala, playing the event for the second time, made 10 birdies, including six in a row from the turn, to begin his bid for a second PGA Tour title following his breakthrough win at the Fortinet Championship last Sep-

tember. Korea's Sungjae Im fired a stellar 8-under 65 to match his tournament low score at The Sentry as his 2024 PGA Tour campaign also got off to a great start. He was among the bunch lying tied second alongside reigning FedEx Cup champion Viktor Hovland, two-time major champion Collin Morikawa, a resurgent Jason Day and Camillo Villegas. The 25-year-old Im, who has two top-10s and a T13 finish last year at The Sentry, had nine birdies on the day.

Another Indian-American, Akshay Bhatia, who also had a breakthrough win in 2023 which earned him a spot in The Sentry, was lying T-25th with a round of 4-under 69. Im's compatriot Tom Kim sank an eagle and four birdies en route a 68, while debutant Byeong Hun An, also from Korea, pencilled down seven birdies against two bogeys for a joint 19th place. Si Woo Kim returned a 70 for T37, while eight-time PGA Tour winner Hideki Matsuyama carded

a 71 for a tied-46th position. Theegala, who came close to a win several times before snaring a title last year, when asked about the wait and how it had changed things for him, said, "Golf-wise, actually, it (Fortinet Championship win) really hasn't changed much. If anything, it's given me a little more validation. "As I progress in my young pro career, I realise I don't really need too much validation. It's just putting in the work and the results will come when they come. If not,

work harder and just be patient. But it's something that nobody can take away and it's just a testament to all the work," he said. "You need a couple of good breaks along the way, and I got it there. Looking back, I'm always going to be able to look back on that win and just kind of how we went about our process, and just every little thing that went into that win is always going to be used as a positive. "If I'm struggling or doing really well, I can always look back

at that and be like, 'alright, I kind of did this and that during that week', and that's something that's going to be big. I think, coming up, as I hopefully put myself in contention as much as possible," he said. On his first round in Maui and what pleased him the most, he added, "Probably 12 (12th hole). Just because I hit a great drive, almost got... just hit it in the green-side bunker there. Didn't hit a great bunker shot and I had a really gnarly 8- or 9-footer that I didn't know which way it was

going to break, grain was going all over the place. "I just aimed it dead centre and tried to hit it hard and hearted that putt, and that settled me down a little bit more, because I knew 13, 14, 15 were very gettable too, so to make that putt was nice." The Sentry is the first event of the 2024 PGA Tour season. It is the first of eight Signature Events in 2024, which offers an increased purse size of \$20 million and 700 FedEx Cup points to the winner. (PTI)

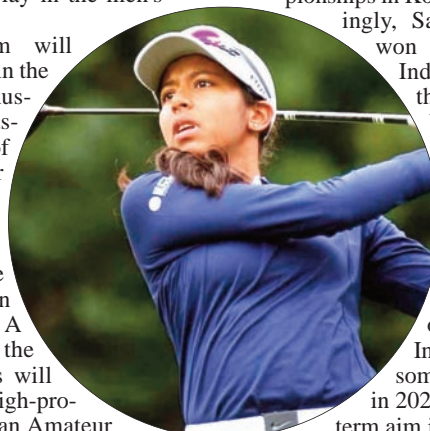
Avani to lead Indian team at major golf events in Australia

MELBOURNE, Jan 5: Talented golfer Avani Prashanth will lead a four-member Indian team, comprising two men and two women, at the prestigious Australian Masters of Amateur Championships and the Australian Amateurs this month.

The 17-year-old Avani, who has decided to hold off her plans to turn pro for some time, will feature in both events alongside Heena Kang, while Sandeep Yadav and Rohit will play in the men's section.

The team will first feature in the annual Australian Masters of Amateur Championship from January 9-12 at the Southern Golf Club. A week later, the four Indians will play at the high-profile Australian Amateur Championship at the Yarra Yarra Golf Club and Keybrough Golf Club from January 16 to 19.

Avani is the only Indian to be ranked in the Top-50 of the world and has represented the country numerous times and even won the Queen Sirikit Cup. She was fourth in the individual section of the World Amateur Team Championships in Abu Dhabi, besides winning a professional event, while being an amateur, in Europe.



Heena, one of the two golf-playing sisters, Ceerat being the other, topped the domestic IGU Order of Merit for 2023 with a string of consistent performances and will wear India colours for the first time.

Among men, Rohit, who won twice last year in India and topped the IGU Order of Merit, and Sandeep Yadav, a consistent performer, will form the Indian team.

Rohit was also the runner-up at the 2023 All India Amateur Championships in Kolkata. Interestingly, Sandeep Yadav won the 2022 All India Amateurs, the Indian Golf Union's flagship event, which is more than 100 years old.

"It is always an honour to play for India. I have had some good results in 2023 and my long term aim is pro golf, but right now these two events in Australia, which are very prestigious, are my focus," said Avani, a two-time All India Amateur winner. "I have a lot of big events coming up in 2024, and hopefully the results will be even better than 2023, which was a great year for me." Heena, who like Avani is coached by Laurence Brothridge from Leeds, UK, is hoping to make a mark in her international debut. (PTI)

Yuki Bhambri-Robin Haase pair in Brisbane International semifinals

BRISBANE, Jan 5: India's Yuki Bhambri and his Dutch partner Robin Haase on Friday entered the semifinals of the Brisbane International ATP Tour tournament, beating the American pair of Nathaniel Lammons and Jackson Withrow in straight sets.

The eight-seeded Indo-Dutch pair won 7-6 (5), 7-6 (6) in the quarterfinal match that lasted one

hour and 36 minutes.

Bhambri-Haase duo will face second seeds Lloyd Glasspool of England and Jean-Julien Rojer of the Netherlands in the semifinals.

Last year, the 31-year-old Bhambri from New Delhi won his maiden ATP title at the Mallorca Championships doubles competition, partnering with South African Lloyd Harris. (PTI)

PUNJAB WERE 152 ALL OUT IN 46.5 OVERS

Koushik's seven-for, Devdutt's unbeaten 80 give Karnataka command over Punjab

HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA), Jan 5: Pacer Vasuki Koushik's seven-wicket haul and an unbeaten fifty by Devdutt Padikkal helped Karnataka gain complete command over Punjab on the first day of their Group C Ranji Trophy match here Friday.

Koushik made good use of the conditions to grab seven for 41 that helped Karnataka bundle out Punjab for a paltry 152 in their first innings.

In reply, the hosts reached 142 for 3 at close as Padikkal made an unbeaten 80 in as many balls with 14 hits to the fence.

Padikkal added 76 runs for the second wicket with opener Ravikumar Samarth.

For Punjab, Nehal Wadhwa offered a semblance of fight with 44 off 79 balls with seven fours. At Valsad, pacers M Mohammed (5/44) and Sandeep Warrier (4/57) took nine wickets among them as Tamil Nadu skittled Gujarat for an under-par 236 in their first innings. Umang Kumar top-scored for Gujarat with 76 off 110 balls and he received good backing from Manan Hingraji (65, 159 balls). But none of the batters could convert the starts. Tamil Nadu are yet to start their first innings.

Pacer Yuvraj Singh grabbed five for 10

from 11.3 overs as Railways shot out Chandigarh for a meagre 96 and then reached 73 for no loss at close in the first innings as bad light often played a spoilsport. At Agartala, Sridam Paul made 112 off 162 balls and veteran batter Ganesh Satish chipped in with an unbeaten 59 off 129 balls as Tripura reached a satisfactory 261 for 4 against Goa in their first innings at close.

Brief scores: At Hubballi: Punjab 152 all out in 46.5 overs (Nehal Wadhwa 44, Mayank Markande 26 not out; Vasuki Koushik 7/41) vs Karnataka 142 for 3 in 33 overs (Devdutt Padikkal 80 not out, R Samarth 38).

At Valsad: Gujarat 236 all out in 72.3 overs (Umang Kumar 76, Manan Hingraji 65; M Mohammed 5/44, Sandeep Warrier 4/57) vs Tamil Nadu.

At Chandigarh: Chandigarh 96 all out in 38.3 overs (Yuvraj Singh 5/10) vs Railways 73 for no loss in 16 overs (Shivam Chaudhary 45 not out, Vivek Singh 28 not out). At Agartala: Tripura 261 for 4 in 74 overs (Sridam Paul 112, Ganesh Satish 59 not out, Sudip Chatterjee 42; Lakshay Garg 2/48). (PTI)



Berhanu, Haymanot to headline Tata Mumbai Marathon

MUMBAI, Jan 5: Defending champions and event record holders Ethiopians Hayle Lemi Berhanu and Anchi Alem Haymanot will headline the 19th edition of the Tata Mumbai Marathon, a World Athletics Gold Label Road Race, scheduled here on January 21.

Last year, Berhanu clocked 2:07:32 and Haymanot logged an incredible 2:24:15 on her debut, to win in Mumbai with new event records. Later, Haymanot improved her timing to 2:22:23 in Amsterdam while finishing sixth where Berhanu posted a season-best 2:05:48 to finish at fifth position. Speaking about returning to the Tata Mumbai Marathon, Hayle said "I won the 2023 edition of the Mumbai marathon under perfect conditions. It was indeed a surprise and unexpected win at that time. But I want to make sure that I replicate my victory in January as I'm confident of finishing on top in 2024".

However, it will not be an easy task for both runners to wrest their titles again in 2024. As many as six more men and two more

women runners, who had personal bests superior to the current Mumbai course records have entered the fray to challenge the reigning champions. The USD 405,000 prize money event will witness some of the finest athletes take centre-stage at the Tata Mumbai Marathon. With equal prize money for men and women winners, the first three in each race stand to win USD 50,000, USD 25,000 and USD 10,000 respectively.

The USD 15,000 bonus also awaits those who break the existing event records. Ethiopian Kinde Atanw (30), who is credited with a PB of 2:03:51 -- that he achieved while winning the Valencia Marathon in 2019 -- will be the leading name among the men.

Incidentally, Atanw finished third during the World 10K in Bengaluru way back in 2014 on his previous appearance in India.

Lelisa Desisa, the 2019 World Champion, together with four fellow Ethiopian runners and Eritrean Merhawi Kesenet will give Hayle Lemi a run for his money this time. (PTI)

Hockey Oly qualifiers do-or-die outing for us, we are ready for challenge: Savita



RANCHI, Jan 5: The Asian Champions Trophy victory has boosted India's morale ahead of the Olympic Qualifiers, according to captain Savita, who expressed confidence in the side's experienced players to help the women's hockey team qualify for the Paris Games.

Eight countries, including hosts India, will be vying for top three spots when the Olympic qualifiers are held here from January 13 to 19 to book berths for the Paris Games in July-August.

"The team is motivated, particularly after winning the Asian Champions Trophy," Savita was quoted as saying in a Hockey India release.

"Our preparations have been earnest and the team consists of players who have played the Olympic Qualifiers in the past and understand very well the level of performance needed to make the cut. This is a do-or-die outing for us and we are ready for the challenge."

The top three teams will qualify

for the Paris Games.

The teams in the fray include reigning Olympic silver medalists Germany, former Asian Games champions Japan, Chile and Czech Republic grouped in pool A, while hosts India are grouped in pool B along with United States, New Zealand and Italy.

"Every member of the team wants to participate in the Olympic Games. That is the ultimate dream and after arriving in Ranchi earlier this week, we have got some good training sessions in the ground," India vice-captain Nikki Pradhan said.

"There is a lot of excitement not just among the team members but among the hockey fans in Jharkhand who I am sure will turn up in large numbers to show their support for us."

India will take on United States in their opening match on January 13, followed by a match against New Zealand on January 14.

After a day's rest, India will play Italy on January 16, while the semi-finals will be held on January 18 and the final on January 19. (PTI)

Ryan Reynolds' Wrexham riding a wave of euphoria in charge through English soccer leagues

WREXHAM, WALES, Jan 5: Three years into their unlikely ownership of Welsh soccer club Wrexham and the enthusiasm of Hollywood stars Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney is far from fading. "You come off the pitch after scoring a goal," Wrexham striker Steven Fletcher says with a smile, "and Ryan texts you before my wife does."

Reynolds ushered in the new year by announcing news of contract extensions handed to two of Wrexham's top players, Paul Mullin and Elliot Lee. On New Year's Day, he used social media to send his best wishes to two opposition players injured during a match against Wrexham that afternoon.

"The love for this club and town: Indescribable," Reynolds posted to his 21.5 million followers on X, formerly Twitter, after the 4-1 win over Barrow in front of a season-high attendance of 12,233 fans at Wrexham's Racecourse Ground — a remarkable figure given the team is still only playing in English soccer's fourth tier.

Promoted from the fifth-tier Na-

tional League to much fanfare at the end of last season, Wrexham — a club that has gained global notoriety because of the profile of its owners and being the subject of a popular fly-on-the-wall TV series, Welcome to Wrexham — is now making a run at the League Two title in a bid to get up to the third division.

The team is in third place, two points off the lead after more than half of the season. Three clubs will gain automatic promotion so Wrexham fans are daring to dream again. Suddenly, the ultimate goal of Reynolds and McElhenney — getting Wrexham into the top-tier Premier League — might not be so fanciful, after all.

"The hype about the place is fantastic," said the 36-year-old Fletcher, who has played in the Premier League with Sunderland and enjoyed international soccer with Scotland. "When you come in, even for just training days, there's loads of people around the stadium. "I've played for Premier League teams and you don't see that."

For now, the promotion push can



wait.

This weekend, Wrexham's players are turning their attention to the FA Cup, a famous competition the club holds close to its heart.

The buzz around Wrexham and its celebrity owners reached new levels during a cup run around this time last year when the team beat one second-tier Championship team in Coventry and then took another, Premier League-bound Sheffield United, to a replay.

Reynolds flew in for the home match against Sheffield United, charming English soccer greats Gary Lineker and Alan Shearer in a pre-match interview on BBC television, and saw at first hand the passion of Wrexham's fans for the competition. After all, Wrexham memorably defeated then-English champion Arsenal 2-1 in the third round in 1992 for one of the FA Cup's biggest-ever shocks and reached the quarterfinals in 1997,

beating top-flight West Ham along the way.

"The club has a real history with the FA Cup and it's up to us to give them some more," Mullin said.

"Last year was phenomenal and I think it gave us more belief than we had in the first place. We were competing against better sides higher up the divisions and giving them more than a game over the times we did play them. We'll try to use the FA Cup this season to do the same."

Wrexham's opponent on Sunday is Shrewsbury, a local rival — it's about a 40-minute drive between the towns — and a team playing in the league above.

It's a match that offers a break from league play but not one that will define Wrexham's season, which is all about achieving back-to-back promotions and keeping the momentum fueled by the presence of Reynolds, the star of the Deadpool movies, and McElhenney, an American actor and director who was the creator of TV show "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia." (AP)

Pankaj Advani to take part in All India Snooker Open

MUMBAI, Jan 5: Multiple-time world champion Pankaj Advani will be among the prominent names to take part in the All India Snooker Open to be organised at the National Sports Club of India here from January 6-19.

The tournament, named Baulkline 3.0, has a prize money of ₹ 18.5 lakhs and will also feature last year's winner Laxman Rawat, runner-up Aditya Mehta and national champion Saurav Kothari, who won the inaugural edition in 2022.

Several other snooker players from across the country will also compete in the tournament.

The tournament will start with the qualifying draw with 32 players joining 32 direct par-

ticipants in the main draw.

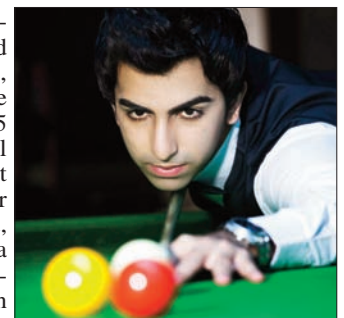
The main draw will commence on January 13.

Prominent names in the qualifying draw are Sparsh Pherwani, Mahesh Jagdale, Rovin D'Souza, Nitesh Madan, Hasan Badami, Shivam Arora and Sid-dharth Parikh.

Dhruv Haria, Vishwajeet Mohan, Anuj Uppal, Subrat Das, Vijay Nichani, Piyyush Kushwa, Shah-baaz Adil Khan, Hrithik Jain and Girish Rajasekar are also set to feature in the qualifying draw.

The winner of the competition will get ₹ 5 lakh while the runner-up will get ₹ 2.5 lakh.

The losing semi-finalists will each receive ₹ 1 lakh, while the four losing quarter-finalists will get ₹ 50,000 each. (PTI)



Extra fire was missing in opener, shift in attitude turned it around in 2nd Test: KL Rahul



CAPE TOWN, Jan 5: India didn't have "extra fire" in the lost opening Test against South Africa but a "mental shift" turned things around, said KL Rahul after the visitors won the second game to level the two-match rubber here.

India had lost the opening Test by an innings and 32 runs in Centurion but the team regrouped to secure a seven-wicket win against South Africa within two days to record a memorable draw here on Thursday. "I think we weren't really 100 per cent during our last match in terms of batting or bowling. We were prepared, but that extra edge or extra fire was missing, credit to South Africa as well, that they didn't allow us to reach to that confidence," the 31-year-old told 'Star Sports'.

Rahul lauded the team for recovering quickly from the setback.

"There was a little bit of change of the planning and attitude only. I mean we can't say that we weren't ready during the last Test match. We were ready but there are situations where the opposition really blasts you out of the Test match or we are not used

to it," Rahul said.

"Since last 4-5 years, we've been a team that's really competed and we have won series outside of India, so we weren't ready for it and it was a huge hit for us..."

"...but it speaks volumes of how much we enjoy playing Test cricket and how much we value playing for our country and how much Test victories outside of India mean to us," he added.

India faced criticism for being ill-prepared after they were bowled out for 245 and 131 in the two innings in the first Test, while allowing South Africa to score 408 in their first essay.

"...it was just a mental shift during the turnaround time of one day. We were more ready this time and we were ready for a fight. We wanted to get this win and just do our job really well."

Rahul, who scored a memorable hundred in the first Test, admitted that they were not at their best in Centurion.

"They bowled us out very cheaply in both the innings. So, we were really happy that we could bounce off so well." (PTI)

Kohli, Jadeja to vie for Sobers Trophy; Ashwin in race for ICC Test Cricketer of Year



DUBAI, Jan 5: Star batter Virat Kohli and premier all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja will vie for the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year award, while ace off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin will be in the race for the Test Cricketer of the Year.

Kohli and Jadeja will have to contest for the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy against Australian captain Pat Cummins and his team-mate Travis Head.

Ashwin will face competition from Head and his Australia teammate Usman Khawaja along with England senior batsman Joe Root, the ICC said on Friday.

Kohli made 2048 runs in 35 matches across Tests and ODIs in 2023, including the 50th one-day hundred to go past the iconic Sachin Tendulkar during the World Cup.

Jadeja amassed 613 runs and 66 wickets in 35 matches and the numbers contained his 22-wicket haul against Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy early the previous year.

Cummins garnered 422 runs and 59 wickets in 24 matches and has also led the Australians

to wins in the Ashes, WTC Final and in the ODI World Cup.

Head was in roaring form with the bat in 2023, evidenced by the 1698 runs in 31 matches that included hundreds in the WTC Final and the ODI World Cup final, and both the knocks were produced against India.

Meanwhile, Ashwin ended the year as the top Test bowler in the ICC Rankings, taking 41 wickets at a striking average of 17.02 and recording the most five-wicket hauls by anyone in Tests -- four.

Root was at the forefront of England's success in Test cricket last year. He registered 787 runs in eight Tests, finishing the year with a strong average of 65.58.

Australia opener Khawaja topped the run-scoring charts in the longest format last year, amassing 1210 runs at an average of 52.60, which included three centuries.

Nominees for the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year: Chamari Athapaththu (Sri Lanka), Ashleigh Gardner (Australia), Beth Mooney (Australia), Nat Sciver-Brunt (England). (PTI)

A load off my shoulders: Warner reunited with cherished baggy greens



SYDNEY, Jan 5: A relieved and grateful David Warner on Friday revealed that he has been reunited with his cherished baggy greens after the iconic cap mysteriously appeared in the team hotel here.

Ahead of day three in the third Test between Australia and Pakistan at the SCG, Warner took to Instagram to reveal that his two baggy greens have been found.

"Hi everyone, I am very pleased and relieved to let you all know that my baggy greens have been found."

"Any cricketer knows how special that cap is and I'll cherish this for the rest of my life. I'm very grateful to all those involved in locating it," Warner said in a video he posted on his Instagram.

"It's a load off my shoulders going into the last couple of days so I really appreciate it. Thanks to all involved and I am extremely grateful to Qantas, the freight company, our hotels and team management," he added.

According to a statement by Cricket Australia, "the bag in which they were packed was found at the team hotel (in Sydney) with all the contents inside."

However, how it got there is still a mystery.

"The movements of the missing bag are unknown despite extensive searches and the review of CCTV footage at multiple locations and the efforts of numerous parties since Tuesday," CA added.

Warner had made an emotional plea on social media for the return of his baggy greens after the backpack containing the cherished possession went missing en route from Melbourne to Sydney earlier this week.

The bag contained two caps as Warner had been given a replacement when he had lost his original Baggy Green in 2017.

However, Warner's wife had later found the original from his Test debut in 2011.

For his swansong Test, Warner wore a spare Baggy Green the team keeps on hand for emergencies. (PTI)

Australia topple India as world's No 1 Test side

DUBAI, Jan 5: Despite a seven-wicket win at Cape Town to draw their two-match series in South Africa, India were toppled from the top spot in ICC Test rankings by Australia on Friday.

Australia's impressive effort to take an unassailable 2-0 lead over Pakistan at home in the on-going three-match series has helped them move up in the rankings. The third match of that rubber is currently underway in Sydney.

"Australia's impressive run at home against Pakistan helped them take the crown of the No. 1 Test team once again, having last held the spot briefly following their WTC Final victory," the ICC stated in a release.

In the previous update, India had more points in their kitty despite being tied with Australia at 118 rating points each.

But the drawn series in South Africa meant India were leapfrogged by Australia.

"With India drawing their the two-Test series against South Africa 1-1 and Australia recording two wins in as many matches against Pakistan, the Pat Cummins-led side now top the Test rankings," the ICC said.

"It's the latest feat in a year full of them for Australia, alongside



their ICC World Test Championship Final victory and their ICC Men's Cricket World Cup triumph."

India, however, are placed at the top of the World Test Championship points table following their win at Newlands with 54.16 per-

centage points from four Tests that include two wins, one loss and a draw. South Africa are placed second followed by New Zealand at third and Australia at fourth with 50 percentage points each in the WTC table.

"The ongoing third Test between

Australia and Pakistan and the upcoming five-match Test series between India and England will likely lead to further activity in the Test Team Rankings, with the top spot on the line alongside crucial ICC World Test Championship points," the ICC added. (PTI)

South African athlete Oscar Pistorius has been released from prison on parole, authorities say

PRETORIA (SOUTH AFRICA), Jan 5: South African athlete Oscar Pistorius has been released from prison on parole and is now at home, South Africa's Department of Corrections said Friday.

The department gave no more details of Pistorius' release. The announcement came at around 8:30 a.m., indicating corrections officials had released the world-famous double-amputee Olympic runner from the Atteridgeville Correctional Center in the South African capital, Pretoria, in the early hours.

Pistorius has served nearly nine years of his 13 years and five months murder sentence for killing girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp on Valentine's Day 2013. He was approved for parole in November.

Serious offenders in South Africa are eligible for parole after serving at least half their sentence. The Department of Corrections said in a two-sentence statement announcing Pistorius' release that it was "able to confirm that Oscar Pistorius is a parolee, effectively from 5 January 2024. He was admitted into the system of Community Corrections and is now at home."

Pistorius was expected to initially live at his uncle's mansion in the upscale Waterkloof suburb of Pretoria, and a police van was seen parked outside of that house.

Department of Corrections officials had

said Pistorius' release time would not be announced in advance and he would not be "paraded" because they hoped to keep him away from the media glare that has trailed him since he shot Steenkamp multiple times through a toilet door at his home in the predawn hours of Feb. 14, 2013.

He will live under strict parole conditions until the remainder of his sentence expires in December 2029.

Steenkamp's mother, June Steenkamp, said in a statement earlier Friday that she had accepted Pistorius' parole as part of South African law.

"Has there been justice for Reeva? Has Oscar served enough time? There can never be justice if your loved one is never coming back, and no amount of time served will bring Reeva back," June Steenkamp said. "We who remain behind are the ones serving a life sentence."

"With the release of Oscar Pistorius on parole, my only desire is that I will be allowed to live my last years in peace with my focus remaining on the Reeva Rebecca Steenkamp Foundation, to continue Reeva's legacy." The Department of Corrections has emphasized that the multiple Paralympic champion's release — like every other offender on parole — does not mean that he has served his time.

Some of Pistorius' parole conditions include restrictions on when he's allowed to leave his home, a ban on consuming alcohol, and orders that he must attend programs on anger management and on violence against women. He will have to perform community service.



Pistorius will also have to regularly meet with parole officials at his home and at correctional services offices and will be subjected to unannounced visits by authorities. He is not allowed to leave the Waterkloof district without permission and is banned from speaking to the media until the end of his sentence. He could be sent back to jail if he is in breach of any of his parole conditions. South Africa does not use tags or

bracelets on paroled offenders so Pistorius will not wear any monitoring device, Department of Corrections officials said. But he will be constantly monitored by a department official and will have to inform the official of any major changes in his life, such as if he wants to get a job or move to another house.

Pistorius has maintained that he shot Steenkamp, a 29-year-old model and law graduate, by mistake. He testified that he believed Steenkamp was a dangerous intruder hiding in his bathroom and shot through the door with his licensed 9 mm pistol in self-defense.

Prosecutors said he killed his girlfriend

intentionally during a late-night argument.

Steenkamp's family did not oppose his parole application in November, although June Steenkamp said in a victim statement submitted to the parole board that she didn't believe Pistorius had been fully rehabilitated and was still lying about the killing.

Before the killing, Pistorius was held up as an inspiring role model after having had both of his legs amputated below the knee as a baby because of a congenital condition. He became a champion sprinter on his carbon-fiber running blades and made history by competing at the 2012 London Olympics. But his murder trial destroyed his image. He was accused of being prone to angry outbursts and acting recklessly with guns, while witnesses testified about various altercations he had with others, including an argument in which he allegedly threatened to break a man's legs.

Pistorius was first convicted of culpable homicide — a charge comparable to manslaughter — and sentenced to five years in prison for killing Steenkamp. After appeals by prosecutors, he was ultimately found guilty of murder and had his sentence increased, although that judgment by the Supreme Court of Appeal still didn't definitively rule that he knew it was Steenkamp behind the toilet door. (AP)

Rohit bhai helps me maintain positive frame of mind: Yashasvi

CAPE TOWN, Jan 5:

Yashasvi Jaiswal has no qualms in admitting that the South Africa series was a challenging one and said it was India skipper Rohit Sharma, who helped him maintain a positive mindset.

Jaiswal managed only 50 runs in 4 innings on bouncy tracks at Supersport Park in Centurion and Newlands in Cape Town as the two-Test series ended in 1-1 draw.

"Rohit Sharma helps me maintain a positive frame of mind and we needed to score runs quickly against new ball," said Jaiswal after his quickfire 28 off 23 balls set the tone during India's chase of 79.

"I just wanted to give a good start and that was all there in my mind as we had to win the match. In last 3 innings and even in this knock, I had done the same thing."

The 22-year-old knows that he needs to make improvements with regards to tackling bounce and lateral movement off the surface.

"Yes this tour has been a learning experience for me. Different environment and in every sense it has been an enjoyable experience. Learnt about improvements I need to make," Jaiswal said.

"The ball comes differently here and I tried giving my all but

I accept there were challenges. This experience will keep me in good stead as I am learning and would strive to improve during next series."

Jaiswal politely rebutted when asked if he would maintain his attacking style of batting in the upcoming Test series against England starting January 25 in Hyderabad.

"There's no particular style I want to adhere to and it's not that I have an attacking game only. I can change my game as per team's demands," he said.

"I would bat differently if it's first day and differently if it's final session and 70 runs needed. I try to change my game as per

team's needs."

He gets regular tips from seniors like skipper Rohit and Virat Kohli about how to tweak his game as per situation, while coach Rahul Dravid spoke to him about specific technical aspects.

"Rahul sir told me in challenging conditions if you get beaten or get hit and still batting there then you are doing well. How to leave deliveries from length, which deliveries to play," he said.

But what has been the best advice from coach?

"Basically, he wants me to bat freely and always with a smile." (PTI)