

**6** WORLD

- 'Do not care about foreign media as acceptance of people is important'
- north Korea again fires near the sea border with the South

**8** NATION

- Congress sets up election committees for 8 states
- 'Centre holding talks with NE militants, but treating civilians in J-K as militants'

## End of era of extremism in Assam: Himanta



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that era of extremism has come to an end in the state and that lasting peace has prevailed.  
 Sarma was speaking on the occasion of fourth central general meeting of All Assam Kalwar Samaj, in Dhekiajuli.  
 Sarma further said that as peace has prevailed in the state the business community could carry on without fear and apprehension and become part of the development

story of the state.  
 Affirming that Assam and Uttar Pradesh have close relationship Sarma said that ancestors of Mahapurush Shrimanta Sankardeva had come to Assam from Uttar Pradesh. "Uttar Pradesh is the birthplace Lord Shri Ram. Uttar Pradesh is the soul of the people of India. Ram temple has been built here," he said.  
 He further said that the people of Kalwar community had come here to Assam for trade and they merged (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Sheikh Hasina all set to retain PM's chair for 4<sup>th</sup> straight term

# Low turnout, BNP boycott mark Bangladesh polls

**DHAKA, Jan 7:** Bangladeshis on Sunday turned up in low numbers to cast their votes for the general elections likely to be won by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for a fourth straight term, amid sporadic violence and a boycott by the main opposition party BNP and its allies.  
 According to the initial estimates, the voter turnout was around 40 per cent but the figure could change after the final count, chief election commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal said.  
 An hour before the voting ended, the election commission had said that the voter turnout was 27.15% at 3 pm. The 2018 general election recorded an overall turnout of more than 80 per cent.  
 "The voting ended at 4 pm and the counting has started," an election commission spokesman said, adding that the results were expected by early Monday.



He said that other than some sporadic incidents of violence, the voting was largely peaceful in 299 of the 300 constituencies. The Commission suspended polling in one seat because of the death of a candidate. The Commission cancelled the candidature of a ruling Awami League candidate in north-eastern Chattogram at the fag-end of the voting hours as he "scolded and threatened" a police officer.

The development left the polls in the constituency to be contested by two rebel candidates who belong to the ruling party as well.  
 The voter turnout was low as the ailing jailed ex-premier Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) stayed away from the polls asking people to boycott it. The party alleged that no election under the current government would be fair and credible.  
 The usual election-day fervour was nowhere to be seen. Even in front of the election campaign booths, there was no presence of voters except the ruling party-backed supporters and election agents. Voters cast their votes without any disruption in the absence of long queues, leaving presiding officers with idle time. Voting was cancelled at three centres -- one in Narsingdi and two in Narayanganj. The Election (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Army to train youths from Assam for selection in armed forces

### Super 30

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Over 30 students from across Assam, selected through a rigorous process, will start preparing from Monday to join the armed forces as officers under an initiative led by the Indian Army, officials said.  
 This will be the second such programme to be rolled out in the state, with another started late last year, they said.  
 The 'Super 30' programme to motivate youths from the state to enroll as officers in the armed forces is supported by the state government and undertaken in collaboration with NGO National Integrity and Educational Development Organisation (NIEDO), defence spokesperson Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Rajnath's UK visit 1<sup>st</sup> by Indian defence minister in 22 years

**LONDON, Jan 7:** Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is set to embark upon a three-day visit to the UK from Monday, seen as significant to the bilateral partnership in the sphere of defence and security as the last ministerial level visit took place 22 years ago.  
 Singh's previously planned visit to the UK in June 2022 was called off by the Indian side for "protocol reasons", making next week's tour a highly anticipated one.  
 Besides wide-ranging talks with his UK counterpart, defence secretary Grant Shapps, Singh is expected to inspect a ceremonial Guard of (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Maldivian govt suspends 3 ministers over 'derogatory remarks' against PM Modi

**MALE, Jan 7:** The Maldivian government Sunday suspended three ministers who posted "derogatory remarks" against Prime Minister Narendra Modi as it distanced itself from their comments on social media and said these opinions are "personal and do not represent the views of the Government".  
 The development came after opposition leaders slammed the "appalling language" used by the officials against the Indian leader.  
 "Government officials who posted derogatory remarks about neighbouring India have been sus-

pending," state broadcaster PSM News reported, citing the President's Office. The Maldives government has affirmed its commitment to taking swift action against individuals on social media whose conduct undermines international relations, it added.  
 The Sun Online identified the officials who were suspended over the posts as three deputy ministers from the Youth Ministry; Malsha Shareef, Mariyam Shiuna and Abdulla Mahzooom Majid. Earlier on Sunday, the Maldivian foreign Ministry said they were aware of the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Mizoram will continue to provide assistance to refugees from Myanmar: Lalduhoma

**AIZAWL, Jan 7:** Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma has said his government would continue providing assistance to refugees from Myanmar and internally displaced people from Manipur, with support from the Centre.  
 Lalduhoma made the comments at a press conference here on Saturday upon his return from Delhi.  
 "Even though the Centre can't accord refugee status to the Myanmar nationals, it is ready to collaborate with us in providing relief to them. People from Manipur, who fled their homes due to ethnic violence, will also be looked after with the help of the central

government," he said.  
 According to officials, more than 31,000 individuals belonging to the Chin community from Myanmar have sought shelter in Mizoram since February 2021, following a military coup in their home country.  
 Over 9,000 internally displaced people from Manipur have taken shelter in Mizoram.  
 The Chin community from Myanmar and the ethnic Kuki-Zo community from Manipur share ethnic ties with the Mizos. Union Home Minister Amit Shah had on Friday informed Lalduhoma (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

**গুনোৎসব**  
শিক্ষা বিকাশের এটি প্রয়াস  
অসম চলকাবে

**GUNOTSAV 2024**  
Ensuring Quality Education

**2<sup>ND</sup> PHASE OF EVALUATION**

**9 - 12 JANUARY 2024**

**13 Districts**

Baksa, Biswanath, Chirang, Charaideo, Dhemaji, Dhubri, Golaghat, Hailakandi, Jorhat, Kamrup (Metro), Sonitpur, Tinsukia and Tamulpur Districts

Participate and nurture our students and schools on their journey towards excellence!

**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam

**TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOLS : 14,769**

- Government/Provincialized Schools
- Adarsha Vidyalayas
- Tea Garden Model Schools
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas
- Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Avasiya Vidyalayas
- Tea Garden Management Schools

**TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS : 13,32,811**

Classes I to IX

**TOTAL NUMBER OF EXTERNAL EVALUATORS : 6,122**

Ministers, MPs, MLAs, CEMs, EMs, IAS, IPS, IFS, ACS, APS, AFS, Class I & II Officials of State Govt. etc.

# IT firms may report soft Q3 as higher furloughs to weigh on revenue growth

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys will declare their Q3FY24 report card on Jan 11

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Indian IT companies are expected to report a "soft" third quarter with higher-than-usual furloughs weighing on revenue growth, industry watchers said cautioning that demand outlook commentary is likely to be unchanged as clients continue to scrutinise discretionary spends and prioritise cost optimisation.

The big earnings week for tech heavyweights is up ahead, with the top tier IT companies slated to announce their December quarter numbers this week.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys will declare their Q3FY24 report card on January 11 (Thursday) and Wipro and HCL Technologies on January 12 (Friday). All eyes will be on management commentary from the IT pack on prevailing customer sentiments across BFSI, and technology services, as well as demand scenario panning out in key markets of the US and Europe.

"We expect IT companies to report soft quarter-on-quarter constant currency revenue growth in Q3FY24 due to higher-than-usual furloughs for most companies in our coverage universe. We expect margins to be impacted due to fur-



loughs and wage hikes (rolled out by Infy, Wipro, HCLT), ICICI Securities said in its Q3FY24 results preview. The signs of improvement in IT spending in the near term remains elusive, with continued scrutiny over discretionary spends and focus on cost optimisation. ICICI Securities further said, "Though US Fed's recent commentary allays macro uncertainty, an improvement in IT spending in FY25 is already built into our estimates. We now model a slower pace of recovery than envisaged earlier, and thus cut FY25/26 rev-

enue growth estimates by 2-4 per cent for covered companies," it wrote. It pegged quarter-on-quarter growth for tier-1 IT services between -2.6 per cent and 5 per cent, while projecting 1 per cent to 3 per cent sequential growth for tier-2 players. "We expect sequential revenue growth to be lower in Q3FY24 versus Q2 due to headwinds from higher-than-expected furloughs, especially in BFSI and hi-tech, as well as continued cut in discretionary spends," it said.

It also expects revenue growth gap between large-cap and mid-

cap IT firms to narrow in Q3FY24, as larger portion of mid-cap IT has higher exposure to BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance) and hi-tech, which are impacted by higher-than-usual furloughs in December 2023. With clients continuing to scrutinise discretionary spends and focus on cost optimisation, demand commentary from IT companies shall likely remain unchanged, it reckoned.

"Given the absence of mega deal announcements in the Dec '23 quarter, we see flat order books on a YoY-basis with a dip sequentially for most companies in our coverage," ICICI Securities said.

Echoing the prognosis for a muted Q3 showing, Motilal Oswal Financial Services in its results preview said the weakness in IT services demand has been "further intensified" by higher-than-expected furloughs in third quarter of FY24. The seasonality is likely to hurt revenue growth and margin performances of both tier-1 and tier-2 IT companies.

"The industry has not witnessed any meaningful change in spending patterns, as discretionary spending continues to take a pause across enterprises. Although senti-

ment has improved, it has not yet been reflected in actions. "Our IT services coverage universe should report a median revenue growth of 0.7 per cent QoQ/2.5 per cent YoY (year on year) in 3QFY24," it said.

The banking and financial services and hi-tech space is likely to be adversely impacted in 3QFY24, while the other verticals deliver muted performance. As such, it said, there is no sign of demand recovery in the key geographies of US and Europe, although the situation has not deteriorated materially per se. The majority of the clients are exercising caution and re-prioritising their spending.

Motilal Oswal pointed out that the combination of adverse macros and higher-than-expected number of furloughs has extended the timelines for deal closures and executions across companies, leading to slower revenue conversion in the third quarter. "We expect revenue growth of Tier-1 companies to be in the range of -2.7 per cent to +4.5 per cent QoQ in CC (constant currency) terms. Revenue of Tier-2 players are expected to grow to the tune of -4.4 per cent to +3.0 per cent QoQ in CC terms," Motilal Oswal said in the report. (PTI)

# Ambani says Reliance-Brookfield to open data centre next week



**CHENNAI, Jan 7:** Billionaire Mukesh Ambani on Sunday said his firm Reliance Industries in partnership with Canada's Brookfield will open a data centre in Chennai next week, marking entry into the fast-growing market. Reliance had in July last year invested about ₹ 378 crore to enter an existing joint venture, where Brookfield Infrastructure and US-based real estate investment trust Digital Realty were already partners. The three own 33 per cent each in the venture.

Speaking at the Tamil Nadu Global Investors Meet here, Ambani, chairman and managing director of Reliance Industries Ltd, said his group is investing in renewable energy and green hydrogen as well as in setting up a data centre in the state.

"Reliance has partnered with Canada's Brookfield asset management and US-based Digital Realty to set up a state-of-the-art data centre, which will be opened next week," he said.

The Indian data centres market, which is expected to grow 40 per cent a year and draw USD 5 billion in investments by 2025, is heating up with Reliance's entry to rival Gautam Adani's Adani Group and Sunil Mittal's Bharti Airtel Ltd. in recent months.

Data centre and compute capacity requirements in India are set to jump on growing localisation of personal data, increasing access to digital services and adoption of data-intensive technologies like artificial intelligence among other drivers.

The joint venture will start the 20-megawatt greenfield data cen-

tre in Chennai next week and has also acquired 2.15 acres of land in Mumbai to build another 40-MW data centre.

Stating that Tamil Nadu has always been a land of rich cultural and intellectual heritage, Ambani said under the leadership of chief minister M K Stalin, the state has become one of the most business friendly states in the country.

"Therefore, I have every reason to believe it will soon become a trillion-dollar economy, which is the apt slogan of this summit," he said. Reliance, he said, has partnered in Tamil Nadu's growth over the years.

It opened nearly 1,300 retail stores across the state, investing over ₹25,000 crore. Jio, the telecom arm of the group, has invested over ₹ 35,000 crore in Tamil Nadu, bringing the fruits of digital revolution to 35 million subscribers in every town and village in the state.

In December, Jio completed the fastest roll-out of 5G, anywhere in the world, he said. "This will enable Tamil Nadu to reap the benefits of artificial intelligence and other breakthrough fourth industrial revolution technologies, which will further accelerate its economy."

Ambani said Reliance has committed to making new investments in Tamil Nadu in renewable energy and green hydrogen.

"We shall work closely with the state government to promote sustainable development, which is necessary to save Mother Earth from the climate crisis," he said. "I am confident that the state government will support our forthcoming initiatives with viable policies." (PTI)

# Mandatory linking of e-invoice with e-way bill to cause operational disruption

**KOLKATA, Jan 7:** Mandatory linking of e-invoice with e-way bill, applicable from March 1 for certain types of transactions, may cause disruption in operation and has created confusion among tax planners, who are seeking clarification from the authorities, experts said on Sunday.

The move was initiated after the mismatch in e-way bills and e-invoice statements was noticed in several cases, they said.

"Blocking the generation of e-way bill without e-invoice/IRN details for B2B (business to business) and B2E transactions for e-invoice enabled taxpayers," said an advisory issued by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), which manages the indirect tax portal.

Rajarshi Dasgupta, Head Tax at Aquilaw told PTI that the advisory on linking e-invoice with e-way bill will cause "technical difficulty in the hands of exporters having a turnover over ₹ 5 crore as there is no time limit relaxation for the generation of e-invoice".

"What would happen if there are multiple containers for a single consignment? How will the shipping bill numbers be captured in e-invoice, which otherwise is a future activity?" he questioned.

These updates will further increase the compliance burden on business owners, and every day the system changes and business owners are expected to comply with the same, Lexpertex India director Apurva Agarwal said.

An e-way bill is a document required for the movement of goods, and it includes details such as the name of consignor, consignee, transporter, the point of origin of the movement of goods and its destination.

The e-invoice system seamlessly integrates with the e-way bill system, generating such bills automatically if transportation details are included during e-invoice generation. However, some taxpayers generate e-way bills without linking them to e-invoices for B2B and B2E transactions, causing discrepancies between the separately entered invoice details in e-way bills and



e-invoices, explained Vedika Agarwal, indirect tax consultant at Aquilaw.

"To prevent these discrepancies, starting from March 1, e-way bill generation without e-invoice details will not be allowed. This is applicable for e-invoice-enabled taxpayers and for the transactions related to supplies under B2B (business to business) and exports," she said.

Transactions unrelated to B2B and B2E (business to employees), such as B2C (business to consumer) and non-supplies, will continue to generate e-way bills without changes, she said.

"I guess there will be a detailed clarification that will be issued soon addressing such queries," Agarwal said.

Putting HSN, a code to identify a product by the indirect tax system, in the e-way bill is also made mandatory from February 1.

Taxpayers with an annual aggregate turnover exceeding ₹ 5 crore will be required to provide at least a 6-digit Harmonized System of Nomenclature (HSN) code, while those with less than ₹ 5 crore need to provide at least a 4-digit HSN code.

"This requirement will be enforced in the e-way bill system starting from February 1. Taxpayers are advised to update their systems and ensure compliance," Agarwal said. (PTI)

# Unsold homes in Delhi-NCR fall 23 %, unsold inventories at 10-year low

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Unsold housing stock in Delhi-NCR at the end of last year has fallen 23 per cent from 2022-end level driven by high velocity of sales and restricted new supply of residential properties, according to Anarock.

Real estate consultant Anarock data showed that number of unsold units in Delhi-NCR fell to 94,803 units at the end of last year from 1,23,692 units in 2022-end.

Delhi-NCR's unsold stock is currently at a decadal low, dropping below one lakh units for the first time in the last 10 years, the consultant pointed out.

Anarock vice chairman Santhosh Kumar attributed the fall in unsold housing stock to higher sales transactions compared with new launches during the last calendar year.

In 2023, housing sales in Delhi-NCR stood at 65,625 units while new supply in the region was 36,735 units, he said.

"Developers continue to consciously restrict new supply in the region so that they can remain focused on project completions and thus reduce their previous unsold stock," Kumar said.

The current unsold stock in the Delhi-NCR region is way below the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), where the available stock has risen to more than 2 lakh units, the Anarock vice chairman said.

Anarock, one of the leading housing brokerage firms, data showed that unsold housing inventories in Gurugram declined 27 per cent to 37,575 units in 2023-end from 51,312 units at the end of previous calendar year.

In Noida, the unsold housing stock declined 15 per cent to 8,658 units at the end of last year from 10,171 units in 2022-end.

Greater Noida saw a 28 per cent fall in unsold housing inventories to 18,825 units from 26,096 units.

Unsold housing stocks in Ghaziabad dipped 19 per cent to 12,546 units from 15,475 units. Faridabad, Delhi, Bhiwadi combined had unsold housing stock of 17,199 units at the end of last year, a reduction of 17 per cent from 20,638 units at 2022-end.

Anarock noted that real estate developers did not launch many housing projects in Delhi-NCR as they focused on clearing the unsold flats in their ongoing projects.

The consultant also highlighted that a 23 per cent decline in unsold housing stock in Delhi-NCR is the highest annual decline among the top 7 cities. As per the Anarock data, housing sales in Delhi-NCR rose marginally to 65,625 units last year from 63,710 units in 2022 calendar year.

New supply in Delhi-NCR increased to 36,735 units in 2023 from 25,355 units in the previous year.

New supply was much below the sales number, leading to a significant fall in unsold inventories of residential properties, the consultant explained. (PTI)

# Over 7,500 global buyers to participate in Indusfood, 2024

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Over 1,200 exhibitors and more than 7,500 global buyers will participate in Indusfood 2024, a three-day mega food show to be held in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh. Union commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal will inaugurate the seventh edition of Indusfood 2024 on Monday, Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) said in a statement. Indusfood is India's only export-focused food and beverages trade fair showcasing domestic products to global buyers. (PTI)

"If the domestic environment gives us a better option then we will go with domestic. If yen gives a better return, we will go with yen," he said. This is part of the company's aim to diversify its borrowing portfolio and enhance the share of the green projects in the portfolio mix.

Last week, State Bank of India (SBI) raised \$250 million (about ₹ 2,000 crore) through the issuance of green bonds matur-

# NEGTA 44<sup>th</sup> Garments Fair underway in Guwahati

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** The North Eastern Garments Traders Association (NEGTA) has organized the 44th Garment Fair (Spring - Summer) from January 6 to 8 at various hotels in Guwahati. A large number of national and international brands have participated on the first two days of the garment fair. Over 50 leading business establishment from different states are participating in the fair. Buyers and sellers meets were also organized as part of the event. The 44th Garment Fair was inaugurated by NEGTA president Shekhar Agrawal, general secretary Varun Gupta, vice president Anil Kochar, former president Chandan Sethia in presence of executive members Sanjeet Jain and Deepak Agarwal along with other members of NEGTA and participants. The event began with prayers to Lord Ganesha. Speaking on the occasion president of NEGTA, Shekhar Agrawal said, "In the last few years our garments industry has suffered a lot of problems. Online business has affected our trade badly. Since its inception, North Eastern Garment Traders Association Buyers and Sellers meet, which is organised twice a year, is one of the country's reputed garment fair connecting the national and regional brands, manufacturers, designers of apparel and fashion accessories to the retailers of Northeast and their distribution channels including high street retailers, agents and distributors.

# IIFCL plans to garner ₹ 2,000 crore via maiden green bonds in 6 months

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) is planning to raise ₹ 2,000 crore through its maiden green bonds in the next six months to fund sustainable projects.

It could be a mix of both domestic and foreign issuances, depending on the cost of funds, IIFCL managing director P R Jaishankar told PTI.

The state-owned infrastructure financier said it is exploring options of yen-denominated green bonds, he said, adding, it may happen in this quarter or the first quarter of the next financial year. "Sustainable green bonds are one of our major lookouts and yen is one major currency that we are considering, and we are also looking at other currencies, but it will all depend on how cost-effective it is, including the hedging cost and the overall cost of borrowings," he said.

"If the domestic environment gives us a better option then we will go with domestic. If yen gives a better return, we will go with yen," he said. This is part of the company's aim to diversify its borrowing portfolio and enhance the share of the green projects in the portfolio mix.

Last week, State Bank of India (SBI) raised \$250 million (about ₹ 2,000 crore) through the issuance of green bonds matur-

ing in 2028 via private placement.

From the performance perspective, he said the company has been consistent both on topline and bottomline parameters.

He expects the FY24 profit to cross ₹ 1,500 crore. IIFCL reported a two-fold jump in standalone net profit at ₹ 1,076 crore in FY23 aided by an increase in lending and reduction of bad loans. The infra lender posted record sanctions and disbursements at ₹ 29,171 crore and ₹ 13,826 crore, respectively.

Since its inception, the company has given ₹ 2.5 trillion loans to 750 infra projects.

As of December 2023, the company has earned a profit of ₹ 1,189 crore with loan sanctions of ₹ 30,315 crore, exceeding the figures of last fiscal in just three quarters. Given the demand so far, he said, the loan sanction amount would cross ₹ 40,000 crore by March 2024.

He emphasized on the role that IIFCL is set to play to fund the next phase of infrastructure growth story and the slew of reforms needed to take the infrastructure sector to the next level.

Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) and net NPA ratio has been consistently falling and stood at 3.77 per cent and 0.85 per cent, respectively, as on September 30, 2023. (PTI)

# Qualcomm India expands presence in Chennai at investment of over ₹ 177 cr

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Chip designer Qualcomm on Sunday announced an expansion in Chennai with a new design centre that entails a proposed investment of ₹177.27 crore and job creation for up to 1,600 skilled professionals. The new centre will specialise in wireless connectivity solutions, with a focus on innovations that complement Wi-Fi technologies. It will also actively contribute to Qualcomm's global Research and Development endeavours in 5G cellular technology, affirming the company's commitment to be at the forefront of the wireless communications industry, according to a release. The new design centre is expected to generate jobs for up to 1,600 skilled professionals, contributing to the growth and development of Chennai's vibrant workforce, it said. "At the Tamil Nadu Global Investors Meet in Chennai today, Qualcomm Incorporated announced a significant expansion in Chennai with a new facility for their Design Centre, representing a proposed investment of ₹ 177.27 crore," the release said. Savi Soin, President, Qualcomm India, said the new design centre in Chennai plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of connectivity globally, especially in India. "The new design centre is a critical asset to support Qualcomm's commitment to make in India and design in India. This will expand our collaboration with India technology partners and accelerate the market adoption of new technology," Soin said. Mahesh Moorthy, vice president, Engineering and Qualcomm Chennai Design Center head said that the state of Tamil Nadu with its rich pool of skilled professionals, outstanding educational institutions and focus on innovation holds the key to propelling Qualcomm's technological advancements to new heights. (PTI)

Similarly, Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL) said it is expecting to deliver a "mid-single digit volume growth" on a consolidated basis in the December quarter. "In India, the operating environment continues to remain similar to Q2. Despite this, our organic business delivered steady underlying volume growth of mid-single digit," said the Godrej group's FMCG arm.

In the international market, the Indian FMCG companies also expect mid-single-digit growth based on constant currency. GCPL expects a "compelling performance" with close to double-digit volume growth and high-single-digit constant currency sales growth from its Indonesia business -- the second biggest market after India. (PTI)

# FMCG makers expect low to mid-single-digit volume growth in Q3

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Leading FMCG makers are expecting a low to mid-single-digit volume growth in the October-December quarter, with an improvement in consumer demand on a sequential basis.

Consumer demand from the rural market is lagging, though the urban markets stayed steady in the third quarter as exhibited in the September quarter, said leading listed FMCG firms such as Dabur, Marico and Godrej Consumer Products in their quarterly updates. Companies are optimistic of a gradual uptick as early signs of revival in consumption are visible with improving trends in volumes.

Besides, the makers also expect expansion in the gross margins on a year-on-year basis helped by moderating inflation as prices of key inputs such as copra and edible oil prices remained at lower levels and crude derivatives also exhibited some downward bias. This will help FMCG makers channelise more funds towards advertising and promotions.

"A significant portion of gross margin expansion will be channelled into enhancing advertising and promotion (A&P) spending. Consequently, operating profit is expected to grow slightly ahead of the revenue and



post an improvement in Y-o-Y," said Dabur India in its quarterly updates.

Marico, which owns brands such as Safola, Parachute, Hair & Care, Nihar and Livon, said the rural market offered "little to cheer" in the December quarter.

However, it remains optimistic about a gradual uptick in consumption trends in 2024 on the back of improving macroeconomic indicators, continued government spending, conducive consumer pricing across segments and other factors.

Marico also mentioned that "constraints on liquidity and profitability in the general trade (GT) channel remained an overhang for the sector, while alternate channels continued to fare well".

"In the given context, domestic volumes

grow in low single digits on a year-on-year basis with a slight sequential improvement in our core portfolio," said Marico.

Its brand Parachute Coconut Oil registered a low single-digit volume growth while Saffola Oils had an optically weak quarter owing to a high base and persistently cautious trade sentiment. "Value added hair oils posted low single-digit value growth amidst sluggishness in the bottom of the pyramid segments of the portfolio. We stayed on course in our diversification journey as foods and premium personal care scaled up well in line with aspirations," it said. Dabur India expects "to register mid to high single-digit growth during Q3 FY24" in its consolidated revenue.

"The quarter witnessed sequential improvement in demand trends although rural growth was still lagging urban growth," said Dabur, adding, "early signs of revival in consumption are visible with improving trends in volumes." Rural India contributes nearly 35 to 38 per cent of the FMCG sales in the country.

With pricing growth remaining subdued due to price increases in the base year, growth in the December quarter is large volume led, said the home-grown FMCG

maker, which owns various brands, including Dabur Chyawanprash, Dabur Honey, Dabur Pudina Hara, Dabur Amla, Real and Vatika. Its F&B segment is expected to grow in the high-single digits and HPC (Home & Personal Care) is expected to see record growth in the mid-single digit.

However, due to the delay in the onset of the winter season, Dabur anticipates the healthcare business to grow in the low to mid-single digits.

Similarly, Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL) said it is expecting to deliver a "mid-single digit volume growth" on a consolidated basis in the December quarter.

"In India, the operating environment continues to remain similar to Q2. Despite this, our organic business delivered steady underlying volume growth of mid-single digit," said the Godrej group's FMCG arm.

In the international market, the Indian FMCG companies also expect mid-single-digit growth based on constant currency.

GCPL expects a "compelling performance" with close to double-digit volume growth and high-single-digit constant currency sales growth from its Indonesia business -- the second biggest market after India. (PTI)

# 13<sup>th</sup> NC Hills Autonomous Council Election: Final day movement of polling officials



**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Jan 7: The stage is set for the 13th North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council Election as polling officials, including zonal magistrates, sector officials, presiding officials, and police personnel, completed their final day movements. This strategic deployment unfolded in two phases, with the first phase commencing on Saturday for 58 polling stations and the second phase on Sunday covering an additional 173 polling stations.

The assigned constituencies include Boraill, Jinam, Hangrum, Laisong, Wajao, Diyungbra, Garampani, Kharthong, Dihangi, Diger, Dihamlai, Semkhor, Haflong, Jatinga, Mahur, Daotuhaja, Kalachand, Langting, Hatikhali, Dehangi, Hadingma, Lower Kharthong, and Dolong. These diligent

movements set the stage for the election day on Monday, with six constituencies already declared uncontested.

In anticipation of the electoral process, repolling is scheduled for January 10 if deemed necessary, and the final election results are expected on January 12, 2024. A total of 1,15,615 voters, consisting of 57,602 males and 58,013 females, are poised to exercise their franchise across 231 polling stations.

The meticulous identification of 15 very sensitive, 36 sensitive, and 21 comparatively safe polling stations, coupled with the establishment of 16 all-women polling stations managed by female civil and police officials, reflects a paramount emphasis on ensuring a secure and inclusive electoral environment.

## RRU's SISPA to conduct cyber crime investigation training

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Jan 7: The School of Internal Security and Police Administration (SISPA) at Rashtriya Raksha University, an Institute of National Importance under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, is set to organise a comprehensive one week advance training programme on cyber crime investigation. This specialised training is exclusively designed for in-service personnel of the Assam Police.

The 7-day program, scheduled to commence on January 8 and conclude on January 12, aims to empower Assam Police personnel with advanced skills and knowledge essential for navigating the intricate landscape of cybercrime investigations. The initiative reflects Rashtriya Raksha University's commitment to enhancing the capabilities of law enforcement agencies in addressing the evolving challenges posed by cyber threats.

The curriculum of the training program will cover a wide array of topics related to cybercrime investigation, providing participants with practical insights and techniques to combat digital offenses effectively. As cyber threats continue to evolve, such specialised training programs play a pivotal role in ensuring that law enforcement remains well-equipped to safeguard against cybercrimes and protect the integrity of digital ecosystems.

## Guv Kataria visits Sri Digambar Jain Mandir in Nalbari



**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Jan 7: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria paid obeisance at the Sri Digambar Jain Mandir in Nalbari, marking a visit to the religious site in the region. The revered temple welcomed the distinguished guest, who engaged in prayer and spiritual moments during his visit. The Governor's presence added a significant touch to the religious ambience of the Sri Digambar Jain Mandir, as he paid his respects and participated in the spiritual atmosphere of the sacred place.

## Free Cervical Cancer screening camp for underprivileged women

**HT Correspondent**  
DEMOW, Jan 7: Sri-Ka-Pha Multi Speciality Hospital, located near Demow in Sivasagar district, is set to conduct a free Cervical Cancer screening camp for underprivileged women from January 16 to January 30. The initiative aims to provide essential health services to women who may face barriers to accessing such screenings. The Sri-Ka-Pha Multi Speciality Hospital, situated at Rajabari near Demow, recognises the importance of preventive healthcare and has taken this step to address the healthcare needs of the underprivileged community. The camp will not only offer Cervical Cancer screening but will also include general screenings for breast cancer. Symptomatic underprivileged individuals identified during the screening process will be eligible for further diagnostic procedures, such as mammograms.

## NFR records robust freight unloading

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Jan 7: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is witnessing a significant surge in freight unloading to ensure a steady supply of essential and other commodities. In December 2023 alone, NFR successfully unloaded 1252 freight-carrying rakes. From April to December 2023, over ten thousand such rakes were unloaded, highlighting the consistent effort to maintain a robust logistics network within NFR's jurisdiction.

Various goods, including FCI rice, sugar, salt, edible oil, fertiliser, cement, coal, automobiles, containers, and other items, were



transported and unloaded in different goods sheds by NF Railway during December 2023.

The breakdown of freight unloading in different states within NFR's jurisdiction during Decem-

ber 2023 is as follows: 705 rakes in Assam (399 loaded with essential commodities), 93 rakes in Tripura, 19 rakes in Nagaland, 6 rakes each in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram. Additionally, 211 freight rakes in West Bengal and 206 freight rakes in Bihar were unloaded during the month.

The accelerated progress in doubling and electrification projects at crucial sections across NF Railway has significantly increased the inward and outward movement of freight traffic. This has not only facilitated the efficient movement of essential commodities but has also contributed to the overall growth in freight unloading.

## Tapabori Char hosts monthly VDP meeting



**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Jan 7: In a proactive step towards community welfare, a monthly Village Defense Party (VDP) meeting was conducted at Tapabori Char under Hajo Police Station. The gathering focused on pivotal issues such as child marriage, child labour, and the prevalence of drugs within the community.

As the region prepares for the upcoming Bhogali Bihu and Republic Day festivities, special attention was given to strategies aimed at curbing these social challenges. The participants, representing various VDPs, actively engaged in discussions and proposed preventive measures to tackle the identified issues effectively.

One of the major directives issued during the meeting was the implementation of regular night duty by the VDPs. This measure aims to deter subversive activities, ensuring the safety and security of the community during the festive season. The collective efforts of the VDPs align with the broader goal of fostering a secure and harmonious environment for residents.

The meeting served as a platform for community members to collaboratively address societal concerns, reflecting the commitment of the VDPs to the well-being and progress of Tapabori Char and its residents.

## New library 'Gyananjan' inaugurated in Tezpur

**HT Correspondent**  
TEZPUR, Jan 7: A new library named 'Gyananjan' was inaugurated in memory of the late Hemanta Kumar Barua, a prominent social leader in Tezpur. Dr Biren Das, registrar of Tezpur University, along with MP Pallab Lochan Das, writer Dr Ramesh Chandra Goswami, and educationist Mahendra Nath Keot, inaugurated the library on Saturday, commemorating what would have been Barua's 62nd birthday.

Dr Biren Das, reflecting on his personal connection with Barua, expressed the irreplaceable loss due to Barua's untimely demise. He encouraged everyone to contribute to preserving Barua's memory and enrich the library established in his honour.

Educationist Mahendra Nath Keot praised Barua's life and achievements as an orator, writer, educationist, and social figure. He urged others to recognise and embrace Barua's deep sense of social responsibility. Dr

Ramesh Chandra Goswami, a distinguished guest, commended the effort to establish a library in Barua's memory, emphasising the potential of libraries to create a knowledge movement and cultivate a reading culture in society.

During the program, Dr Polashmani Saikia, principal of Darrang College, highlighted the significant contributions made by Hemanta Kumar Barua in various fields throughout his lifetime.

## CSIR-NEIST hosts awareness program on NCS-TCP for tissue culture raised plants

**HT Correspondent**  
JORHAT, Jan 7: The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)-North East Institute of Science and Technology (NEIST), Jorhat, recently conducted an awareness program on the National Certification System for Tissue Culture Raised Plants (NCS-TCP). The event aimed to disseminate information about the program's advantages, particularly in promoting the cultivation of virus-free and genetically uniform plants.

Organised by the DBT-National Institute of Plant Genome Research (NIPGR), New Delhi, in collaboration with CSIR-NEIST, the program featured Dr Subhra Chakraborty, director of NIPGR and coordinator of NCS-TCP, who emphasised the vision, mission, and crucial initiatives of the institute. She provided a comprehensive overview of the NCS-TCP program, highlighting its pivotal role in revolutionising the agriculture sector through tissue culture.

Dr Chakraborty emphasised that NCS-TCP, a unique quality management program under the Department of Biotechnology, Central Government, plays a key role in nurturing agribusiness, encouraging entrepreneurs, and safeguarding farmers. She noted that the north-eastern region, being one



of the agri-bio-diversity hotspots, has enormous potential for entrepreneurship and industry development in plant tissue culture through the NCS-TCP program.

Dr G Narahari Sastry, director of CSIR-NEIST, underscored the critical role of science and technology in developing business strategies, particularly in medicinal plants aimed at doubling farmers' income. He highlighted the transformative potential of innovative approaches in the agriculture sector, emphasising the importance of high-quality planting materials in disease and pest management.

The program brought together key stakeholders from the govern-

ment, universities, research institutes, tissue culture industry, and farmers. It included an inaugural session, expert speakers, and interactive activities aimed at fostering understanding and encouraging positive action. The primary goal was to educate and encourage participants, including tissue culture industry representatives and farmers, to enhance the implementation of the NCS-TCP program in their respective states.

The event also featured a panel discussion and interaction session, with panellists including Dr Ashutosh Pandey, scientist, NIPGR; Dr Jatin Kalita, senior principal scientist, CSIR-NEIST,

Jorhat; Dr Mohan Lal, principal scientist, CSIR-NEIST; Mahim Saikia, sub-divisional agriculture officer, Jorhat; Sharmistha Borgohain, subject matter specialist; Dr Sanjay Borthakur, head, KVK, Jorhat, Assam Agriculture University; Aditi Kashyap, ADO (Soil); and Happy Bharali, ADO, Dohotia. The session was chaired by Dr Subhra Chakraborty and Dr G Narahari Sastry, attracting more than 120 progressive farmers and tissue culture representatives from Jorhat and nearby areas. Scientists and scholars from CSIR-NEIST also participated in the program, fostering valuable interactions with the experts.

## Sonitpur district gears up for second phase of Gunotsav 2024

**HT Correspondent**

TEZPUR, Jan 7: The Education department in Sonitpur district is readying itself for the second phase of Gunotsav 2024 scheduled to commence from January 9. With self-evaluation by schools set for January 9, external evaluation will take place on January 10, 11, and 12. A substantial number of students, totaling 1,31,207 from 1105 schools in Sonitpur district, are expected to participate in this crucial academic assessment.

Preparations for the comprehensive evaluation process have been underway, with the district education department taking charge of organising training programs. The final phase of training for external evaluators occurred on January 3, while administrative officials, including the district commissioner, received their last phase of training on Friday. A total of nine master trainers, including teachers from DIET, Teacher Training College, and professors from colleges, have imparted training to external evaluators and nodal teachers during multiple rounds of training programs.

Kabita Kakati Konwar, additional district commissioner of Education and Sonitpur district coordinator of comprehensive education, along with nodal officers Ramen Medhi and Manoj Gohain, will supervise the evaluation process. A team of 558 external evaluators, including 100 each from Udalguri and Nagaon districts, as well as college teachers and government officials from the district, has been appointed to conduct Gunotsav.

District commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra has actively participated in various training programs, highlighting the importance of the Gunotsav. Schools in the district are making diligent efforts to prepare for the evaluation, aiming to showcase their best performance. The district education department has mandated that teachers from each school perform duties in other schools during Gunotsav, with only the head, principal, vice-principal, and nodal teachers remaining in their respective schools on the day of external evaluation.

## Joi Barua mesmerises Jorhat with musical extravaganza



**HT Correspondent**

JORHAT, Jan 7: Renowned singer and music composer Joi Barua, appointed as the district election icon for Jorhat election district in the upcoming Parliamentary Elections of 2024, graced an awareness program at Millennium Park, Baruah Chariali, Jorhat, on Saturday evening. The event, organised by the Jorhat district administration as part of the 'Moromor Jorhat' initiative and SVEEP activities for the summary revision of the electoral roll in 2024, aimed at encouraging voter education and participation.

Joi Barua captivated the audience with his soulful songs and engaged in interactive sessions, highlighting the significance of casting votes on the polling day. He particularly addressed first-time voters, urging them not to miss the opportunity to participate in the democratic process, which stands as one of the largest in the world.

Expressing gratitude for being appointed as the district election icon, Joi Barua actively participated in a mass signature campaign for creating voter awareness. Jorhat district commissioner Pulak Mahanta, also the district election officer, welcomed the attendees, discussing the poll process and urging voters to exercise their franchise.

The event featured a lively performance by dancers from Jorhat Kala Niketan, adding vibrancy to the awareness program. District administration officials and notable citizens graced the occasion, making it a memorable and impactful initiative towards fostering voter education and participation in the region.

## Agriculture minister graces closing ceremony of Livestock and Poultry Show 2024

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, Jan 7: Atul Bora, the minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, added prestige to the concluding event of the Livestock and Poultry Show 2024 in Guwahati. The minister's presence highlighted the significance of the event in promoting the livestock and poultry sector in the region.

As part of the comprehensive showcase, a dog show was also organised, adding an extra layer of enthusiasm to the Livestock and Poultry Show 2024. The exhibition provided a platform for participants to display high-quality livestock and poultry breeds, fostering awareness and advancements in the sector. Minister Atul Bora, acknowledging the importance of such events, participated actively in the proceedings, further demonstrating the government's commitment to the development of agriculture, animal husbandry, and veterinary sectors.

In addition to the Livestock and Poultry Show, minister Atul Bora also attended a crucial meeting of the Business Advisory Committee at the Assam Legislative Assembly. The meeting, presided over by Speaker Biswajit Daimary, saw the participation of various committee members. The discussions during the meeting revolved around key legislative matters, reflecting the collaborative efforts of the committee towards effective governance and legislative initiatives in the state.

## Ramdhenu Utsav organised at Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, Jan 7: The Ramdhenu Utsav 2024, organised by Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, witnessed the stellar staging of 'Ravan Badh' and 'Bishnu Prasad Rabha' by renowned playwright Seemant Sharma. The performances were directed by Esha C and showcased on January 6. The plays, led by the talented Vinita Devi, a recipient of the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and the National Tagore Scholar from the Ministry of Culture, captivated the audience with their profound narrative and artistic excellence. The presentation of 'Ravan Badh' and 'Bishnu Prasad Rabha' unfolded on the grand stage, leaving the audience enthralled and engaged throughout.

'Bishnu Prasad Rabha', a puppetry play, depicted the historical saga using creative storytelling, poetry, and drama.

Vinita Devi, through her direction, skillfully portrayed the significant events of the independence movement, seamlessly blending music, recitation, and drama. The puppetry presentation was a testament to Vinita Devi's prowess in delivering thought-provoking narratives through art. Her exceptional ability to bring together diverse elements of theater, music, recitation, and puppetry was evident in the successful staging of 'Ravan Badh' and 'Bishnu Prasad Rabha'.

The audience and other dignitaries appreciated the performances, acknowledging the efforts of Vinita Devi and the entire team. The plays not only entertained but also left a lasting impact on the spectators, showcasing the cultural and artistic vibrancy of the region.

Vinita Devi expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to present these plays and emphasised the importance of preserving and promoting the rich cultural tapestry of Assam.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

If one offers me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I will accept it. — Bhagavad Gita

## Unveiling the Ayodhya Verdict

As the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya approaches, Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice D Y Chandrachud sheds light on the complexities and challenges faced during the formulation of the landmark Ayodhya Ram Mandir land judgment. His insights reveal a meticulous process undertaken by the five-member constitutional bench, led by former CJI Ranjan Gogoi, to present a unified voice of the court, rather than attributing the verdict to any individual judge. CJI Chandrachud emphasized the historical conflict and diverse viewpoints surrounding the case, prompting the decision to keep the authorship anonymous. The goal was to convey a message of unity among the bench members, not just in the ultimate outcome but also in the reasons outlined in the judgment. The fear of backlash from those desiring a different outcome drove this decision, acknowledging the inherent challenge of pleasing all parties involved in the dispute. The bench, faced with the Herculean task of balancing irreconcilable interests intertwined with matters of faith, evidence, history, religion, and politics, recognized the multidimensional nature of the Ayodhya land dispute. Justice Gogoi's bench departed from the notion of a mere title dispute, delving into the realms of "mind, heart, and healing."

The examination of 11,500 records spread over 38,147 pages during the case's hearing underscored the complexity of the issue. The Ayodhya land dispute was not merely about property; it encompassed the intricacies of emotions and the need for healing. The unanimous judgment provided a template for addressing the wrongs of the past, offering a significant and relevant guide for future cases with similar complexities. The bench's departure from the previous stand that it was purely a title dispute requiring resolution based on evidence presented in court marked a paradigm shift. Beyond the year 1528 when the Babri Masjid was built, the court considered crucial aspects relevant to arriving at a fair decision. The acknowledgment that the past continues to influence the present resonates in the context of political parties, including the Congress, grappling with the dual challenge of participating in the temple's consecration while maintaining a safe distance from the BJP's attempts to capitalize on the event for political gain ahead of the 2024 parliamentary elections. The court's declaration that the issue transcended a mere 1,500 square feet of land demonstrated a profound understanding of deeper sentiments at play.

The Ayodhya verdict also had implications for other cases of a similar nature. The refusal to reopen the settled issue in the 1994 Ismail Faruqi case, stating that a mosque is not an essential part of worship in Islam, broadened the court's perspective. This decision set a precedent, implying that issues should be considered in the context in which they arise, incorporating factors previously deemed extraneous. In a parallel scenario, the Supreme Court recently dismissed an appeal against the Allahabad High Court's order rejecting a PIL seeking recognition of Mathura's Shahidgah Mosque site as Krishna Janmabhoomi. The court's broadening perspective on contextual aspects and the rejection of the appeal may serve as a template for similar cases in the future. As the nation anticipates the consecration of the Ram Temple, the Ayodhya verdict stands not just as a resolution to a land dispute but as a guidepost for future deliberations, emphasizing the importance of considering the complex interplay of history, faith, and sentiment.

# Dollarisation programme of Argentina will impose additional burden on its workers

Argentina's new president Javier Milei proposes to use US dollars as the currency of his country, while abolishing its central bank altogether. What is involved in this proposal is not just maintaining a fixed exchange rate between the dollar and the domestic currency, but an abolition of the domestic currency altogether.

The maintenance of a fixed exchange rate does not preclude the central bank of the country printing more of the domestic currency whenever there is a demand for more domestic currency, while using an array of instruments to ensure that there is no shift to dollars from the domestic currency so that its exchange rate remains fixed; but "dollarisation" means a complete shift to dollars by abolishing both the domestic currency and the central bank that is normally entrusted with the responsibility of printing it.

An example will make the difference clear. Suppose at the given level of the gross domestic product, of prices and the interest rate, the total demand for money happens to be 100 units of domestic currency, while its supply is 90; then the central bank can print 10 units of additional domestic currency with impunity, without any fear of this additional printing upsetting the fixed exchange rate vis-à-vis the dollar; but in the case of a "dollarised" economy where the dollar alone is the currency used, if the demand for dollars at the given level of GDP, of prices and the interest rate, happens to exceed the supply of dollars in the economy, then there is no question of printing any additional dollars since that can only be done by the US central bank and not by the central bank of the country in question, which in any case has been abolished altogether.

In such a case the only options available to the country are: either obtain dollars by whatever possible means (by borrowing from abroad or selling the country's assets if necessary) to maintain the level of GDP; or curtail the GDP until the demand for dollars falls to equal the supply of it; or some combination of the two. The option of obtaining a larger supply of the currency by simply using the central bank is ruled out.

A country's external indebtedness in other words goes up (or its material wealth goes down by being sold to foreigners), not just because it spends more

than its income (as is often the case under normal circumstances and expressed in a current account deficit on the balance of payments), but also because its demand for the circulating medium increases relative to the supply for it. This entails a doubling of the contractionary squeeze on the economy if the level of external debt is not to increase. Suppose to start with, the economy is in equilibrium, and then its exports rise in a particular period by 10 dollars; if its imports are 10 per cent of GDP then (ignoring other current account items), its GDP can rise only by 100 dollars without requiring any increase in its external debt. This is the first contractionary squeeze on the economy, namely the curtailment of the increase in its GDP so as to balance its external account.

But if the ratio of currency (or what is called reserve money) to the GDP also happens to be 10 per cent for the purpose of circulating the GDP, then for sustaining an increase of 100 dollars of GDP, an additional 10 dollars would be required. Since these 10 dollars cannot be domestically printed, an increase of 100 dollars in GDP cannot be sustained if external indebtedness is not to increase.

The increase in GDP in this case can only be 50 dollars, for only then will the additional demand for dollars, 5 for imports and 5 for circulating the GDP, equal the amount of dollars earned through exports. This is the second squeeze on the GDP, arising from the need for the circulating medium.

The country's dollar earnings in other words will now have to pay both for its imports and for its requirement of the medium of circulation. By abolishing the domestic currency altogether and hence the possibility of a central bank printing this domestic currency to provide for the requisite supply of the medium of circulation, and adopting instead the currency of a foreign country as its medium of circulation when that foreign country's central bank is under no obligation to print currency to satisfy our requirement for an increased amount of the medium of circulation, we introduce an additional constraint on a country's GDP which would now have to be doubly squeezed. This double squeeze would have to be effected



through cuts in welfare expenditure, cuts in salaries of government officials, cuts in pensions, cuts in wages of workers, and of course cuts in employment. In other words, the adoption of the dollar as the country's currency when these dollars are printed abroad, with the country having no control over

their supply, except to the extent that it earns them through exports alone (if its external indebtedness is not to increase or domestic assets are not to be sold to foreigners), necessarily means greatly intensified misery for its population. And if these modes of assault on the population are not employed immediately because dollars are borrowed from abroad, then that only postpones the assault; it does not prevent the assault.

Why then does a government resort to such an absurd step of replacing its own domestic currency by the US dollar? The ostensible reason in Argentina's case is the extremely high rate of inflation, running at around 150 per cent per annum. Since under capitalism the only antidote to inflation (whether this is explicitly admitted or not) is the creation of unemployment and the effecting of a wage cut, Javier Milei is resorting to this antidote with a vengeance. But the chicanery behind this needs to be exposed.

The previous right-wing president Macri had taken a large external loan to manage Argentina's balance of payments deficit, much of which was used to finance private capital flight from that country. When the time came to start paying back that loan, the balance of payments was seriously strained; and this strain was also accentuated by the flight

of capital undertaken by the Argentine rich. The depreciation of the currency that ensued caused a cost-push inflation owing to the rise in the local currency costs of imported inputs which got passed on to final goods prices.

Now, in a society where wages are indexed to prices, and workers are generally organised into strong trade unions, even a slight nudge to inflation quickly causes a sharp rise in prices, owing to the absence of the sort of "cushion" that a vast army of unorganised workers provides. It is not surprising therefore that inflation in Argentina became so rapid within a short time.

The Milei government proposes to control this inflation not by introducing curbs on capital flight, not by stabilising the exchange rate through introducing appropriate trade controls to overcome the foreign exchange shortage, not by implementing any direct price control, but by launching a massive attack on the Argentine working class and its trade unions. In other words, Milei's policy proposal amounts to a most vicious form of class attack on the working class of that country. The working class is made to bear the burden of the repatriation of wealth by Argentina's rich from that country to the metropolitan centres.

Javier Milei is the latest addition to the list of neo-fascist rulers that are coming up in various parts of the world. This upsurge of neo-fascism is a reflection of the crisis of neoliberalism, in the context of which the big bourgeoisie is entering into an alliance with fascist elements to maintain its hegemony and to attack the working class. The neo-fascist rulers that are coming up in the present conjuncture however can only change the form of the crisis, from, say, inflation to the imposition of unemployment and income compression on the workers, as is being proposed in Argentina, but cannot resolve the crisis. In fact, as the crisis intensifies and the rate of growth of exports slows down even further for countries like Argentina, the Argentine neo-fascist strategy will greatly increase the burden on the workers in the form of unemployment and income compression: the double contractionary squeeze referred to above will become even more suffocating for the people. What is needed is a resolution of the crisis by transcending the neo-liberal regime itself. (IPA Service)

## Russia offering technology knowhow to India to build small modular reactors

By Girish Linganna

The expansion of civilian nuclear cooperation between India and Russia was decided upon during External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Moscow in December 2023. Moscow is prepared to offer India its technological knowhow to develop a compact modular reactor that can generate power in capacities ranging from 75 MW to 300 MW.

But what are small modular reactors (SMRs) and how are they superior to traditional nuclear power plants? For over a decade now, discussions worldwide have been centered on SMRs, also called mini-Nuclear Power Plants (mini-NPPs). These reactors are considered to be the nuclear power stations of the future. There is nothing new about these stations in—and of—themselves. When it comes to technology, they are comparable to pressurized water reactors, often known as PWRs.

Power units of fewer than 300 MW are considered 'small' by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whereas power units with up to 700 MW are considered 'medium'.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) collectively refers to them as Small Medium Reactors (SMR). On the other hand, the abbreviation SMR is frequently used to refer to 'small modular reactors', which is intended for building in a serial fashion. In addition, there is a sub-class of very small reactors, which are known as ASMRs—installations that have a power capacity of less than 15 MW and are designed for use in extremely isolated places.

The technology behind low-power nuclear power plants is not a new development. The power of reactor units has increased from 60 MW to more than 1,600 MW since the beginning of nuclear energy. Currently, there is an approach for the development of small nuclear plants.

This is partly due to the high capital expenditures of constructing large power reactors that generate energy through the steam cycle, and partly due to the requirement to service small power grids. The capacity of these installations can be increased as required through modular construction, which uses small reactor blocks.

These installations can be built independently, or as modules inside a larger complex. When it comes to modularity, the savings predicted are projected to come from scalability. Besides, additional smaller-scale reactor installations are being developed for use in isolated places. This type of installation

requires relatively minor investments compared to the cost of constructing massive reactors, which is comparable to the capitalization of the utilities interested in acquiring them.

More than 90% of these coal-fired power plants have a capacity of less than 500 MW and some even have a capacity of less than 50 MW. This is another reason why small modular reactors (SMRs) are becoming increasingly popular.

SMRs operate on the same fundamental concept as standard nuclear reactors, generating heat through nuclear fission. This heat is converted into steam, which drives turbines and generates energy. Atoms of uranium fuel are divided into fission, producing energy. SMRs are intended to be both more efficient and safer. Many employ passive safety systems that rely on natural forces—such as gravity, convection and heat resistance to reduce the danger of accidents. Their smaller size enables faster and more flexible deployment and they may be quickly turned off when not in use. SMRs are being developed to work with renewable energy sources to provide consistent, low-carbon power supply.

To fulfil its obligations under the terms of the Paris Agreement, the Indian government has created a roadmap for a switch to carbon-free energy. India intends to implement this approach to shift its energy industry to entirely carbon-free by 2070. In this strategy, nuclear energy is given special consideration. India now has seven nuclear power facilities with 22 operational nuclear reactors, while seven more generating units (not including reactors being developed at research centres) are under construction. India is second to China in the world in terms of the total number of nuclear power units being built concurrently.

Speaking at a conference on SMRs organized by the government think-tank, NITI Aayog, in November 2023, Minister of State Jitendra Singh discussed the need to rely on building modular reactors with a maximum capacity of 300 MW.

According to Singh, the primary distinction between these reactors and high-power reactors which are built on site, is that the reactor for these units is built entirely at the plant and transported to its intended operating location, substantially simplifying construction logistics.

Small reactors have several advantages over large reactors, including their design flexibility and requirement for less space, as well as significant cost savings and shorter construction

times, while maintaining a high degree of safety, according to the minister. He underscored two concerns while emphasizing the necessity for a thorough investigation into creating tiny modular reactors: first, exchanging technologies with businesses that have developed low-power reactors; and, second, resolving the issue of sufficient funding. Russia has made significant advancements in the design of SMRs.

A 50-MW NPP based on the RITM-200 reactor is one of the most intriguing concepts. An SMR of this type is predicted to operate for 60 years using a six-year fuel cycle. Afrikantov OKBM, the developer, intends to construct the first station by 2027. The Suoyamskoye iron ore deposit area in the Chelyabinsk region and the Peshchanka gold-copper deposit territory in Chukotka are the two most promising building locations being considered. The station is a component of the national project, "Nuclear Science: Technology and Technologies", which was started by Rosatom.

There are also smaller nuclear reactors with capacities ranging from 6 MW to 10 MW. These reactors, particularly the 'Shelf' and ABV-6E versions, are intended for use in distant and difficult places. OKBM is in charge of ABV-6E development, whereas NIKIET controls the 'Shelf' reactor. NIKIET is also working on several projects using tiny power units. A transportable modular nuclear power station with a 1.2-MW gas-cooled ATGOR reactor is among the well-developed ones. This reactor has a 60-year operating life and requires nuclear fuel refilling every 10 years. It is worth noting that the reactor can be started at temperatures as low as -50°C.

Furthermore, the power plant can be launched using gas turbines, removing the requirement for external power sources. On the unit, parallel gas turbine installations can generate energy. This tiny NPP's core equipment, weighing 60 tons, may be accommodated on two-wheeled platforms readily carried by conventional semi-trucks.

Furthermore, Rosatom operates the world's only operational floating nuclear thermal power plant (FNPP) based on the Akademik Lomonosov floating power unit containing two KLT-40S reactors. Reactor installations of the KLT-40S type used as part of floating nuclear power plants have proven themselves in the Russian nuclear icebreaker fleet during many years of accident-free operation. The station's electrical capacity is 70 MW. (IPA Service)

## 2024: The year of elections and unprecedented global challenges

By: Dipak Kurmi

The challenges of 2024 are manifold, with a unique set of circumstances. The electoral landscape unfolds across more than 40 nations, commencing with January elections in Bangladesh and Taiwan. The electoral journey traverses through Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Russia, and eventually encompasses the European Union nations, along with Britain and the United States. The UK faces the imperative of holding elections before January 2025, while the American presidential polls are scheduled for November 5.

The diversity in these elections spans from tightly controlled processes, as seen in Russia, to intensely polarized ones in India, Europe, and the United States. However, three challenges persist from 2023. The Ukraine conflict has entered a stalemate, with Russia framing the absence of Ukrainian advancements in its counter-offensive as a decisive setback. President Vladimir Putin seeks to leverage this narrative as his presidential election draws near, aiming to secure another term.

The ongoing challenge revolves around the Gaza conflict and Hamas' relentless fight against Israel's all-encompassing offensive. As of now, the conflict has predominantly remained confined, with occasional attacks by Iranian allies executing a pincer move. Hezbollah strikes from the north in Lebanon have faced resistance from the US naval flotilla in the eastern Mediterranean, although they've breached south of the Litani River, contrary to UN negotiations. Simultaneously, the Houthis have effectively designated the Red Sea as a "no-go" zone for global shipping, leading to escalating freight and insurance rates as vessels opt for the longer Cape of Good Hope route. Recent events, such as the killing of an Iranian general in Syria through Israeli bombing, raise concerns about potential Iranian escalation, especially given Iran's announced enhancements to its nuclear enrichment program. Throughout, Israel maintains its longstanding stance, asserting that it will not permit Iran to acquire strategic nuclear capability, specifically nuclear devices.

The lingering challenge from 2023 involves the condition of the Chinese economy and the internal demands on President Xi Jinping to revive economic growth and ensure substantial employment opportunities for the youth. In an authoritarian Communist state, capitalizing on the lack of certain freedoms through sustained and robust growth can lead to assertive actions on the international stage should the do-

mestic social contract falter. The initial trial will manifest in the Chinese response to the anticipated triumph of the current Taiwanese vice-president, Lai Chingde, who advocates a degree of separation from China without explicitly declaring outright independence.

The US presidential election is closely monitored by China and Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin would welcome a Donald Trump victory, given his claims of swiftly resolving the Ukraine conflict. The underlying goal is to prompt Ukraine to embrace the existing situation, potentially forsaking NATO membership. This is why Mr. Putin seems poised for another season of conflict, anticipating that a Trump win would lead to Ukrainian surrender. Conversely, China would prefer Trump's defeat, considering their experience of unpredictable confrontations during his first term. This preference might also influence China's timing in pursuing its declared goal of annexing Taiwan, even by force if necessary. A foreseeable Joe Biden is viewed as a more reliable leader with control over the nuclear button compared to the unpredictable Donald Trump. Thus, the lingering question revolves around whether China would lean towards taking action against Taiwan with Mr. Biden in power.

Russia might be perceived by South Block as emerging relatively unharmed from its Ukraine endeavors. The Pan-nun incident, exposing alleged involvement of an Indian agency in a plot to harm American citizens, is straining relations with Washington. To subtly communicate a message urging the Americans to abandon the matter, what could be more fitting than having External Affairs Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar embark on a five-day trip to Russia? Interestingly, Russian happens to be his mandatory foreign language, acquired during his initial assignment in Moscow in the early 1980s.

India finds itself in a robust economic state, navigating through a tumultuous global landscape, assuming the Gaza conflict does not unexpectedly escalate to the Gulf region. Despite its imperfect execution, the Bangladeshi election is anticipated to see the continuation of pro-India leadership with Sheikh Hasina at the helm. Bhutan, facing renewed pressures, is urged to address its border concerns independently with China. Following the initial anti-India policy decisions by the newly elected Islamist government, the Maldives may eventually establish a more balanced relationship with both India and China.

The February general election in Pakistan is expected to bring forth a gov-

ernment led by Nawaz Sharif, a scenario the re-elected Indian government might choose to actively involve in. One of the key Pakistani preconditions has been the restoration of the status quo ante in Jammu and Kashmir before resuming talks. Regardless, India's Supreme Court has mandated the reinstatement of J&K's statehood in 2024. The crucial lesson India must glean from the Gaza conflict is that relying on security forces for temporary peace is never a sustainable solution. Despite the UN government's assertions of normalcy, the increasing militant attacks in that UN Territory indicate underlying troubles.

Should Prime Minister Narendra Modi secure a third term, as widely anticipated, the intricate consideration of these factors becomes imperative for him to shape a lasting legacy.

The upcoming electoral examination extends to Europe, with the European Parliament elections slated for June. A potential rightward shift across numerous nations may find reflection in this event. If, hypothetically, Donald Trump secures victory in the US, coupled with a European Parliament dominated by a provocative and xenophobic faction, the post-Second World War liberal order would confront a significant challenge. The prospect of a triumph by right-wing Marine Le Pen in the French presidential election and a rise in seats for the Nazism-inspired Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany's Bundestag cannot be discounted.

Hence, 2024 signifies a pivotal juncture where the established liberal democratic order faces scrutiny. In India, a substantial victory for the BJP could empower the party to steer the nation more decisively towards a majoritarian theocratic state. The United Kingdom might witness the conclusion of 14 years of Conservative rule, as the Labour Party is poised to assume power. Poland experiences a shift with the centrist alliance displacing the right-wing government. In Latin America, Brazil witnesses the resurgence of a socialist order, whereas Argentina undergoes a contrary outcome with a victory for the right-wing.

Therefore, the global upheaval is evident as immigration, economic struggles, and a neo-Cold War present a scenario where an acknowledged liberal model contends with diverse forms of authoritarianism, theocratic, Communist, or majoritarian governance. To maintain stability, the US, Europe, and India, in that sequence, must ensure that regressive forces do not emerge victorious. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

# What foods are best for those with dementia?

By: Charlotte Lillis

There are no specific foods that are best for a person with dementia. The best foods are those that appeal to the individual's dietary and nutritional needs. People with dementia and their caregivers can work with a healthcare professional to ensure that their nutritional needs are met. This article describes how dementia can affect a person's nutritional intake and outlines examples of food they can eat based on their individual dietary needs. It also offers tips on how to help people with dementia to eat.

## How can dementia affect nutritional intake?

A healthy and nutritious diet is essential to maintaining a person's mental and physical health and well-being at every stage of the disease. According to the Alzheimer's Association, poor nutrition can lead to the following issues in those with dementia:

- worsening behavioral symptoms
- malnutrition
- weight loss

People in the middle to late stages of dementia may have difficulty maintaining a healthy and nutritious diet due to the following reasons:

- feeling overwhelmed by the different food options available
- forgetting to eat or thinking that they have already eaten
- being unable to recognize when they are hungry or full
- being unable to recognize certain foods
- finding that foods do not smell or taste as good as they once did
- experiencing difficulties handling cutlery or feeding themselves

- experiencing difficulties chewing or swallowing food
- experiencing a lack of appetite due to:
  - insufficient exercise
  - medication side effects
  - poorly fitting dentures

Foods to help boost appetite and gain weight

Some people with dementia develop malnutrition and weight loss. Some reasons for this include:

- loss of appetite
- difficulty chewing or swallowing foods
- mouth pain or dental issues
- infections
- constipation
- depression

**Foods to help boost appetite or weight gain include:**

**Skimmed milk powder:** Adding skimmed milk powder to pureed foods or beverages, such as full fat milk, can help boost their calorie content. Some milk powders also contain added vitamins and minerals.

**High-nutrient, high calorie meal supplement drinks:** A person can ask the doctor or dietitian about the potential benefits of prescription meal supplement drinks.

**Adding high calorie foods to meals:** According to the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS), adding the following high calorie foods to meals can help to promote weight gain:

- cheese
- nuts
- seeds

**Offering milk- or fruit-based puddings:** According to the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF), these food options can provide additional nutrients. Examples include:

- stewed fruit with custard or rice pudding



- fruit and ice cream
  - tinned fresh fruits
- Foods to help manage cravings and maintain a healthy weight**

Some people with dementia may be prone to weight gain or obesity. Some reasons for this include:

- the inability to recognize the feeling of being full
- forgetting having recently eaten

• developing a craving for sugary foods, which is more common among individuals with frontotemporal dementia

Foods that may help to manage cravings and maintain a healthy weight include:

**Fruits and low calorie Jell-O:** These foods may help satisfy a person's cravings for sweet foods without adding unnecessary sugar or calories to the diet.

**Sweet condiments:** Adding small amounts of sweet condiments to savory foods can help to satisfy sugar cravings. Examples include:

- ketchup
- apple sauce
- chutneys

**High protein foods:** Protein-rich foods can help boost satiety and prevent overeating. Examples include:

- nuts and seeds
- soy products
- legumes
- eggs
- seafood
- poultry
- lean meats

**Foods for those with chewing or swallowing difficulties**

People with chewing or swallowing difficulties may find eating soft or pureed foods easier. Soft foods can include:

- mashed potato, with butter and milk for additional nutrients and calories
- bread dipped in soup
- tinned vegetables
- smoothies
- soft, lean meats cut into bite-sized pieces
- flaked fish with no bones
- stewed fruits

If a healthcare professional recommends pureed foods, it is important to remember that these can appear bland and unappetizing. When preparing pureed meals, a caregiver can try the following:

- prepare each item of food separately and place them on a preheated plate
- ensure the food is sufficiently seasoned
- adding cream, butter, or skimmed milk powder to enhance

flavor and calorie intake

Caregivers can ask the doctor or dietitian about meal supplement drinks that are high in nutrients and calories.

**Tips for helping those with dementia to eat**

Below are some tips that may help individuals with dementia to eat.

**Using adapted cutlery:** Adapted cutlery may feature soft cushioning or finger indentations to help with grip. They may also be weighted or have a nonconventional shape that helps with use.

**Using plain-colored plates:** White or plain-colored plates can help people differentiate the food, making it easier to eat.

**Offering finger foods:** Hand-held foods remove the need for utensils, helping a person maintain independence and dignity when eating.

**Offering colourful foods:** Brightly colored foods can be more visually appealing and easier to identify.

**Offering flavorful foods:** Spices and herbs can add flavor to food while limiting the need for salt and sugar.

**Offering appropriately-textured foods:** People with chewing and swallowing difficulties may prefer foods with a softer texture. Those who prefer chopped or pureed foods may require some assistance while eating. When deciding on food textures, one must consider the textures a person finds most appealing.

**Involving the person in meal preparation and cooking:** For people with dementia, participating in meal preparation can boost a sense of autonomy and independence. They may enjoy sitting in the kitchen while another cooks or helping with small

tasks, such as setting the table or folding napkins.

**Frequently asked questions**  
Below are some answers to frequently asked questions about dementia and eating.

**What foods can help fight dementia?**

It is not clear whether a particular diet can help to fight dementia. However, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) explains that researchers are currently investigating whether a diet called the Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay (MIND) diet may help to prevent or delay dementia.

The diet aims to lower high blood pressure, which is a risk factor for dementia. According to the NIA, research suggests that the MIND diet may help with cognitive function, but further research is necessary to confirm these effects. Moreover, it is not clear whether the diet is helpful for those with dementia.

**Are bananas good for dementia?**  
A 2022 review explains that bananas and other plantain fruits have anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidative, and neuromodulatory properties that may help to protect against neurological disorders, including dementia.

The researchers explain that the bioactive compounds of interest are contained within both the banana pulp and peel.

Further research is necessary to determine whether bananas can help protect against dementia and whether they are beneficial for people with dementia.

**Why might those with dementia not want to eat?**

According to the British Nutrition Foundation, people with dementia may not want to eat due to the following:

• changes in the way foods taste or smell

- difficulty communicating likes and dislikes
- difficulty recognizing hunger
- anxiety about eating
- difficulties using cutlery
- difficulties chewing or swallowing food
- reduced motivation and concentration

**Is baby food suitable for those with dementia?**

Soft foods can be preferable for some people with chewing or swallowing difficulties. Baby food may be suitable as a snack. However, it is unlikely to provide sufficient nutrients for older adults to maintain a balanced diet. Instead, a caregiver may opt for soft foods or pureed foods.

**Summary**  
People in the middle to late stages of dementia may have difficulty meeting their nutritional needs. Some people may develop symptoms that cause them to lose weight, while others may develop symptoms that cause them to gain weight.

The healthiest foods are those that help an individual to achieve their optimal weight and nutritional needs.

Foods that can assist weight gain are high in calories and added nutrients, such as dairy, nuts, seeds, and meal replacement drinks. Foods that can assist weight loss are those that promote satiety and enhance flavor without the need for additional salt, sugar, and calories.

Caregivers can also consider ways to help individuals with dementia eat or feel more independent during meal times. Examples include offering finger foods, providing adaptive cutlery, and involving the person in meal preparation. (Courtesy: *Medical News Today*)

## Ultra-processed foods are bad for you

By: Rachel Anthony

Even a few servings of ultra-processed foods can contribute significantly to your daily calorie intake, warns dietician Rachel Anthony. What are ultra-processed foods? How can they harm your health and what you can do to avoid them?

In today's world, we are constantly inundated with advertisements and images of various foods, recommendations from friends and family, influencers, etc. Most food and marketing industries frequently introduce novel food varieties, employing strategies that often attract us towards trying their latest offerings. Needless to say, the demand for ultra-processed foods has surged like never before.

**What are ultra-processed foods?**  
Ultra-processed food undergo extensive processing, deviating significantly from their natural state. This transformation involves the addition of various additives such as bulking agents, artificial sweeteners, colouring agents, preservatives, excessive amounts of oil, added sugar and salt.

All of this serves to extend the food's shelf life and altering its texture to enhance its appeal, making it highly palatable. Thankfully, not all processed foods are inherently bad. There is a clear distinction between minimally processed foods and ultra-processed foods.

Minimally processed foods are those that undergo limited processing, primarily to enhance their consumability, convenience and shelf life, while still retaining much of their natural characteristics.

Examples of minimally processed foods include items like poha, oats, freshly made fruit juices and pickles. These foods are believed to have fewer additives and maintain a closer connection to their original state. On the other hand, ultra-processed foods are heavily processed and loaded with additives, preservatives and, often, unhealthy ingredients. These foods - such as packaged french fries, doughnuts, pastries, cookies, cream biscuits, sodas and the like - typically have long lists of ingredients, many of which are artificial or highly refined.

Naturally, it's advisable to limit the consumption of ultra-processed foods due to the potential negative impact they can have on our health.

**If they are unhealthy, why are ultra-processed foods so popular?**

Ultra-processed foods are intentionally engineered to be hyper-palatable. Their wide

spread availability can make it challenging to eliminate them from our diets completely.

These foods typically have a higher calorie content, high amounts of fat, sodium, carbohydrates and are often low in protein.

They are energy-dense but lack essential micronutrients, high-quality macronutrients and dietary fibre.

**What happens when you eat ultra-processed foods?**

Even a few servings of ultra-processed foods can contribute significantly to your daily calorie intake, which can then potentially exceed 2,000 calories.

Due to their energy density and low satiety level, consuming ultra-processed foods can lead to overeating compared to fresh fruits and vegetables, which are rich in fibre and micronutrients.

Furthermore, these foods are often high in saturated fats, trans fats and refined carbohydrates, which can trigger low-grade inflammation and contribute to obesity, abdominal fat accumulation, fatty liver disease and, ultimately, the development of metabolic syndrome (the Mayo Clinic defines metabolic syndrome as a cluster of conditions that occur together, increasing your risk of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes).

These conditions include increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around the waist and abnormal cholesterol or triglyceride levels.) This places individuals at higher risk for conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Children and young adults are often the target audience for food companies. Their easy access to ultra-processed foods can contribute to increased daily consumption which, in turn, has been associated with a rising prevalence of childhood obesity. The National Family Health Survey results from 2019-2020 in India, for instance, have shown a significant increase in obesity among children under five years old in many states.

The detrimental effects of ultra-processed foods extend beyond obesity and chronic diseases. These foods can disrupt gut health by negatively affecting the gut microbiota.

Specific strains of microbiota observed in individuals who consume ultra-processed foods and have reduced consumption of fruits and vegetables have been linked to inflammatory gastrointestinal diseases. Ultra-processed foods like processed meats, soft drinks, refined sweetened foods and salty snacks may lead to irritable bowel syndrome and a subsequent decline in cognitive

abilities among kids and young adults.

Oxidative stress, initiated by high-fat and high-carbohydrate diets, can trigger a chain reaction of inflammation, leading to serious chronic and metabolic dysfunctions. Additionally, the packaging and processing methods of ultra-processed foods may introduce chemicals like phthalates, bisphenol A (BPA), and methylparaben, which can disrupt the endocrine system and lead to hormonal issues.

Hence, it is important to follow a diet involving minimally processed whole foods to support better health outcomes, especially in children and young adults. The key is to make informed choices and prioritise whole, minimally processed foods whenever possible.

**Here are some tips to help you reduce or eliminate processed foods from your diet**

1. Plan your meals and snacks ahead of time. When you have a plan, you're less likely to reach for processed convenience foods.

2. Opt for whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and legumes. These foods are minimally processed and provide more nutrients and fibre.

When you do buy packaged foods, read the ingredient labels carefully.

Avoid products with a long list of ingredients, especially if you can't pronounce some of them.

3. Cooking at home gives you more control over what goes into your meals. Try to cook from scratch using fresh ingredients as often as possible.

4. Sugary drinks like soda and fruit juices are highly processed and full of added sugars. Replace them with water, herbal tea or unsweetened beverages.

5. Snack wisely. Instead of reaching for chips or candy, choose healthier snacks like fresh fruit, nuts, yogurt or sliced vegetables with hummus.

6. Fast food is often heavily processed and loaded with unhealthy ingredients. Cut back on fast food consumption and opt for healthier restaurant options when you dine out.

7. Replace refined sugars with natural sweeteners like honey, maple syrup, or stevia in moderation when needed.

8. Use herbs and spices to add flavor to your meals instead of relying on processed sauces and seasonings.

Transitioning to a less processed diet may take time. It's okay to start gradually. Small, sustainable changes in your eating habits can lead to long-term improvements in your health and well-being. (Courtesy: *Rediff.com*)

## Navigating spinal healing: The breakthrough advantages of endoscopic spinal surgery

By: Dr Satnam Singh Chhabra

When it comes to spinal issues, finding the right solution is crucial for a quicker recovery and improved quality of life. In recent years, a revolutionary approach known as Endoscopic Spinal Surgery has been gaining prominence for its minimally invasive nature and promising outcomes.

Endoscopic Spinal Surgery is a cutting-edge technique designed to address a range of spinal problems with minimal disruption to the body. At its core, the procedure employs a slender instrument called an endoscope, equipped with a camera and light, to navigate through small incisions and directly visualize the affected area of the spine. This precision allows surgeons to perform intricate procedures with significantly smaller incisions compared to traditional open surgeries.

**Key Advantages of Endoscopic Spinal Surgery:**

**1. Minimally Invasive Precision**  
Unlike traditional open spine surgeries that require extensive incisions, Endoscopic Spinal Surgery relies on small openings, often less than an inch in size. This minimally invasive approach reduces trauma to surrounding muscles and tissues, promoting a speedier recovery.

**2. Faster Recovery Times**

Smaller incisions translate to shorter recovery periods. Patients undergoing endoscopic procedures often experience reduced postoperative pain and can resume their daily activities sooner compared to those undergoing traditional open surgery.

**3. Reduced Scarring**

The cosmetic impact of Endoscopic Spinal Surgery is noteworthy. The smaller incisions result in minimal scarring, offering a more aesthetically pleasing outcome compared to larger incisions associated with traditional surgeries.

**4. Targeted Treatment Options**

The endoscope provides a direct and magnified view of the affected area, enabling surgeons to precisely address the root cause of spinal issues. Whether it's a herniated disc, spinal stenosis, or other conditions, the targeted nature of the procedure enhances its efficacy.

**5. Preservation of Healthy Tissues**

By minimizing the need to disturb surrounding muscles and tissues, Endoscopic Spinal Surgery aims to preserve healthy anatomical structures. This preservation contributes to overall spinal stability and reduces the risk of complications associated with tissue damage.

**6. Customized Approach**

Each patient's spinal condition is unique, and

Endoscopic Spinal Surgery allows for a customized approach. Surgeons can tailor the procedure to the specific needs of the individual, addressing the nuances of their condition with precision.

**7. Potential for Outpatient Procedures**

In certain cases, Endoscopic Spinal Surgery may be performed on an outpatient basis, meaning patients can return home on the same day as their surgery. This contrasts with traditional surgeries that often require longer hospital stays.

Endoscopic Spinal Surgery represents a beacon of hope for individuals grappling with spinal issues, offering a path to healing that prioritizes precision, minimal invasiveness, and quicker recovery.

As the medical field continues to advance, this innovative technique stands as a testament to the possibilities of providing effective treatment while minimizing the physical impact on patients.

For those considering spinal surgery, exploring the benefits of Endoscopic Spinal Surgery with a qualified healthcare professional may open a clearer path toward a more comfortable and expedited recovery. (The author is the *Head Neuro and Spine Department, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi*)

## Cholesterol may not be as bad as you think: A doctor on heart health basics

By: Dr Ashwini Setva

Cholesterol is a word that evokes a visible fear of heart disease and stroke in people's mind.

In the past few decades, unfortunately, cholesterol has been demonised and probably misunderstood or poorly understood even by the medical fraternity. What follows is an oversimplification of an extremely complex topic concerning cholesterol. Cholesterol is a lipid molecule present in every cell of our body and is essential for life. One cannot live without cholesterol.

Of the total cholesterol pool in the body, only one fifth is formed by the cholesterol we ingest. The remaining 80 percent is synthesised by the body itself.

As can be seen, eating cholesterol has very little impact on the cholesterol levels in our body, as also those measured in the blood. This is because most of the cholesterol we eat is not absorbed and is excreted in stool.

**Good & Bad Cholesterol: Decoding The Binaries**

Cholesterol is an essential part of every cell in the body. It is required to produce steroid hormones including sex hormones, certain vitamins like vitamin D, and bile acids, which are essential to digest the fat that we eat.

There is no such thing as bad cholesterol. One of the biggest misconceptions is that cholesterol is "bad" and eating cholesterol

makes one fat. This could not be farther from the truth.

**So where do the terms 'bad cholesterol' and 'good cholesterol' come from?**

Cholesterol and triglycerides (another lipid molecule) are not water soluble. Therefore, to be carried to various tissues in the body, via blood, they need to be carried by special protein-wrapped vehicles called lipoproteins.

Out of these, Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL) has been implicated in the causation of the plaque that narrows the artery and causes reduction of blood supply to the organ it supplies, including heart and brain. Hence the name bad cholesterol.

On the other hand, the High Density Lipoprotein (HDL) which is supposed to be having some protective effect against the causation of heart disease is labelled as good cholesterol. It is important to understand how the so labelled 'bad cholesterol' causes the narrowing of the arteries in the body. The LDL particles deposit themselves underneath the layer which lines the lumen of the artery.

There it evokes an inflammatory response and the plaque increases in size. The question is how and in whom does the superficial layer lining the lumen of the artery, which normally is impervious to such intrusions, permit the intrusion of these particles? An appropriate analogy is that of a non-stick pan where the oil or

ghee doesn't stick to the pan itself, even when heated. However, if the nonstick teflon coating is eroded by an abrasive cleaner, the oil or the cooking fat tends to stick to that.

Similarly, if because of injurious factors like smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, and insulin resistance, the inner lining is eroded, the LDL gains entry into the layer underneath, and causes the plaque formation which narrows the artery and may even cause clotting of the blood and block the artery completely.

**Could Cholesterol Just Be A Marker Of Heart Disease?**

Among some divergent views, the view that is gaining ground rapidly is that cholesterol is certainly not as bad for the heart as previously thought.

According to Dr Aseem Malhotra, an influential British cardiologist and author of several books including *Statin Free Life*, we still do not know at what level of cholesterol there is a significant risk of developing heart disease.

Certain industry-sponsored drug trials have failed to show any clear correlation with lowering cholesterol and reduction in the risk of developing heart disease, he says.

It appears that the levels of various lipoproteins are just markers of heart disease development. But, by themselves, they may not be the cause of heart attacks.

There is, thus, a possibility that something else is going on and

there are certain other contributing risk factors operative. For example, diabetes mellitus, smoking, liberal sugar intake, high carbohydrate diet, high alcohol intake, sedentary lifestyle, lack of sleep, etc. On the other hand, people who have very low levels of cholesterol, possibly genetically determined, are more prone to develop cancer and developing certain infections because cholesterol is known to play a role in immune system.

There is a link suggested, between low cholesterol levels, especially in women, and depression. However, a cause-and-effect relationship has not been unequivocally established.

Lipid lowering agents or statins, as they are popularly known, are being prescribed to almost one billion people around the world, most of whom are generally at a low risk of developing heart disease.

There is now data available to show that reduction of the risk of heart disease is miniscule when this low-risk population is given statins. However, statins do afford some protection against a second heart attack in people who already have had a heart attack.

Further, there are many side effects of statins, like extreme exhaustion, muscle pain and liver dysfunction, which may be particularly unacceptable in low risk population, in whom the usefulness of statins in any case, is limited. (Courtesy: *The Quint*)

## Do not care about foreign media as acceptance of people is important: B'desh PM Hasina on polls

*'I have to prove credibility. Right, but, to whom, a terrorist party?'*

**DHAKA, Jan 7:** Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is expected to secure a fourth straight term in a one-sided general election, said on Sunday that she does not care about foreign media's approval of the polls as for her acceptance to people of the country is the only important issue.

Hasina's comments came after she cast her vote in the country's 12th general elections, boycotted by the main Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

According to the Election Commission's initial estimates, the voter turnout is around 40 per cent but the figure changed after the final count.

In response to a question on how acceptable the election will be (in foreign media) while the BNP is boycotting it, Hasina said that her responsibility is towards the people.

"Whether people accept this election or not it is important to me. So, I don't care about their (foreign media) acceptance. No matter what did the terrorist party say or not?" she said.



"I have to prove credibility. Right, but, to whom, a terrorist party? A terrorist organisation? No, I have my accountability to my people. (I think) whether the people accept the election or not, and that is important to me," she said.

About foreign countries' interference, she said her Awami League party does not bother who says what about the election.

"Bangladesh is a sovereign and independent country. It may be a small country, but it has a large population--- I don't bother who

says what, as the people is our main strength," she said.

The premier said they have ensured a conducive election environment confronting all the barriers.

"A conducive environment for election has been established. Your vote is very valuable, we struggled for the right to vote and I hope that all the voters will come to the polling centres and exercise their voting rights to continue the democratic trend," she said.

Hasina expressed her gratitude to the people for their help in en-

sureing a congenial atmosphere for the election.

"There were so many obstacles and hurdles, but the people of the country were cautious about their voting rights. The national election is held every five years. And people will cast their votes freely and we have been able to create that environment," she said.

About confidence in winning the election, she said, "InshaAllah, we will win the election...we will form the government. No doubt about it. We have faith and confidence in people that they will vote for Boat (her election symbol)."

Sheikh Hasina said BNP-Jamaat committed subversive acts by setting fire to trains, and buses and burning people to death to obstruct holding a peaceful election, referring to arson attacks on trains on Friday night.

"The BNP-Jamaat clique does not believe in democracy and they don't want the democratic process to continue. They don't act for the welfare of the people," she said. (PTI)

## North Korea again fires near the sea border with the South, as its leader's sister mocks Seoul

**SEOUL, Jan 7:** North Korea again fired artillery shells near its tense sea boundary with the South on Sunday, as the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un mocked the South's ability to detect its weapons launches.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff dismissed Kim Yo Jong's statement as "a comedy-like, vulgar propaganda" meant to undermine the South Korean people's trust in the military and stoke divisions.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea fired more than 90 rounds near the rivals' disputed western sea boundary on Sunday afternoon. It said South Korea strongly urged North Korea to stop provocative acts immediately.

North Korea's military later confirmed it used coastal artillery systems to carry out live-firing exercises. It said the drills were part of its military training schedules and the direction of its shells fired didn't expose any threat to South Korea.

On Friday, North Korea launched about 200 shells. South Korea also claimed that the North fired more than 60 rounds on Sunday, but its rival has denied that.

Kim Yo Jong said that North Korea on Saturday only detonated blasting powder simulating the sound of its coastal artillery on the seashore, to test the South Korean

military's detection capabilities.

"The result was clear as we expected. They misjudged the blasting sound as the sound of gunfire and conjectured it as a provocation. And they even made a false and impudent statement that the shells dropped north" of the sea boundary, Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media.

"I cannot but say that (South Korean) people are very pitiful as they entrust security to such blind persons and offer huge taxes to them," she said. "It is better 10 times to entrust security to a dog with a developed sense of hearing and smell."

Animosities between the two Koreas are running high because North Korea has conducted a barrage of missile tests since 2022 while South Korea has expanded its military training with the United States in a tit-for-tat cycle.

North Korea's artillery firings Friday prompted South Korea to have its troops on border islands fire artillery rounds near the sea boundary. The shells launched by the two Koreas fell at a maritime buffer zone they had established under a 2018 military agreement on lowering front-line military tensions.

The agreement requires the Koreas to halt live-fire exercises, aerial surveillance and other hostile acts

along their border, but the deal is now in danger of collapsing because the two Koreas have taken measures breaching it. Experts say North Korea is likely to ramp up weapons tests and escalate its trademark fiery rhetoric against its rivals ahead of South Korea's parliamentary elections in April and the US presidential elections in November.

They say Kim Jong Un likely thinks a bolstered weapons arsenal would allow him to wrest greater US concessions if former President Donald Trump returns to the White House. In her statement Sunday, Kim Yo Jong called South Korea's military "gangsters" and "clowns in military uniforms".

She also suggested South Korea's possible future miscalculation of North Korean moves could cause an accidental clash between the rivals, jeopardising the safety of Seoul, a city of 10 million people which is only an hour's drive from the land border.

On Tuesday, Kim Yo Jong issued a statement calling South Korean conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol "foolishly brave" but his liberal predecessor Moon Jae-in "very smart." South Korean analysts say she was attempting to help muster those opposing Yoon's tougher policy on North Korea ahead of the April elections. (AP)

## Blinken meets Jordan's king and foreign minister on Mideast push to keep Gaza war from spreading

**AMMAN (JORDAN), Jan 7:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met on Sunday with Jordan's king and foreign minister and visited a World Food Programme warehouse in Amman as he pressed ahead with an urgent Middle East diplomatic mission to prevent Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza from spreading.

On his fourth visit to the region in three months, Blinken stressed the need for Israel to adjust its military operations to reduce civilian casualties and significantly boost the amount of humanitarian aid reaching Gaza while highlighting the importance of preparing detailed plans for the post-conflict future of the territory, which has been decimated by intensive Israeli airstrikes and ground offensives.

After a day of talks with Turkish and Greek leaders in Istanbul and Crete, Blinken met Sunday with Jordan's King Abdullah II and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi seeking buy-in for US efforts to tamp down resurgent fears that the three-month-old war could engulf the region, ramp up aid deliveries to Gaza and prepare for the eventual end of hostilities.

Jordan and other Arab states have been highly critical of Israel's actions and have eschewed public support for long-term planning, arguing that the fighting must end before such discussions can begin.

They have been demanding an immediate cease-fire since mid-October as civilian casualties began to skyrocket. Israel has refused and the US has instead called for specified temporary "humanitarian pauses" to allow aid to get in and people to get to safety.

Blinken also toured the World Food Programme's Regional Coordination warehouse in the Jordanian capital where trucks are being packed with aid to be delivered to Gaza through both Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings.

He commended the work of the WFP and other UN agencies as well as the gov-

ernment of Jordan to get assistance into Gaza.

"The efforts right here to collect and distribute food to people in need are absolutely essential," Blinken said. "The United States has worked from day one to open access routes into Gaza."

"We continue to work on that every single day, not only to open them but to multiply them, to maximise them and to try to get more assistance, more effectively," he said. "We're determined to do everything we possibly can to ameliorate the situation for the men, women and children in Gaza."

The US has been pressing Israel for weeks to let greater amounts of food, water, fuel, medicine and other supplies into Gaza, and the UN Security Council passed a resolution on December 22 calling for an immediate increase in deliveries.

Three weeks ago, Israel opened Kerem Shalom, adding a second entry point for aid into Gaza after Rafah.

Still, the rate of trucks entering has not risen significantly. This week, an average of around 120 trucks a day entered through Rafah and Kerem Shalom, according to UN figures, far below the 500 trucks of goods going in daily before the war and far below what aid groups say is needed.

Almost the entire population of 2.3 million depends on the trucks coming across the border for their survival. One in four Palestinians in Gaza is starving, and the rest face crisis levels of hunger, according to the UN.

More than 85 per cent of people in Gaza have been driven from their homes by Israeli bombardment and ground offensives. Most live in UN shelters crowded beyond their capacity, in tent camps that have been sprung up, or on the streets.

The few functioning hospitals are over-

whelmed with the wounded as well as patients amid outbreaks of disease, as sanitation systems have collapsed.

In Greece on Saturday, Blinken said his trip would be dominated by "not necessarily easy conversations" with allies and partners about what they are willing to do "to build durable peace and security".

Blinken's visit comes as developments in Lebanon, northern Israel, the Red Sea and Iraq have put intense strains on what had been a modestly successful US push to prevent a regional conflagration since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, and as international criticism of Israel's military operation mounts.

From Jordan, Blinken will travel to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on Sunday and Saudi Arabia on Monday. He will then visit Israel and the West Bank on Tuesday and Wednesday before wrapping up the trip in Egypt.

"These are not necessarily easy conversations," he said in Greece. "There are different perspectives, different needs, different requirements, but it is vital that we engage in this diplomacy now both for the sake of Gaza itself and more broadly the sake of the future for Israelis and Palestinians and for the region as a whole."

He said his priorities are protecting civilians — "far too many Palestinians have been killed" — getting more humanitarian aid into Gaza, ensuring Hamas cannot strike again, and developing a framework for Palestinian-led governance in the territory and "a Palestinian state with security assurances or Israel".

Hours before Blinken's meetings on Saturday, Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militia fired dozens of rockets at northern Israel and said the barrage was an initial response to the targeted killing, presumably by Israel, of a top leader from the allied Hamas group in Lebanon's capital this past week. (AP)

## Snow hinders rescues and aid deliveries to isolated communities after Japan quakes kill 128 people

**WAJIMA (JAPAN), Jan 7:** Rescue teams worked through snow to deliver supplies to isolated hamlets, six days after a powerful earthquake hit western Japan, killing at least 128 people. Heavy snowfall expected in Ishikawa Prefecture later Sunday and through the night added to the urgency.

After Monday's 7.6 magnitude temblor, 195 people were still unaccounted for, a slight decrease from the more than 200 reported earlier, and 560 people were injured. Hundreds of aftershocks have followed, rattling Noto Peninsula, where the quakes are centred.

Taiyo Matsushita walked three hours through mud to reach a supermarket in Wajima city to buy food and other supplies for his family. The home where he lives with his wife and four children, and about 20 nearby homes, are among the more than a dozen communities cut off by landslides.

Power was out, and in a matter of hours, they couldn't even use their cell phones, he told Jiji Press.

"We want everyone to know help isn't coming to some places," Matsushita was quoted as saying by Jiji Press. "We feel such an attachment to this community. But when I think about my children, it's hard to imagine we can keep living here."

Late Saturday, a woman in her 90s was rescued from a crumpled home in Suzu, Ishikawa Prefecture, after 124 hours trapped in the rubble. She was welcomed by shouts of encouragement, although the darkness and a long blue sheet of plastic blocked her from view.

Chances for survival greatly diminish after the first 72 hours. Of the deaths, 69 were in Wajima, 38 in Suzu, 11 in Anamizu, and the rest in smaller numbers spread among four towns. Firefighters and other disaster officials were trying to get to nine people believed to be buried under collapsed houses in Anamizu, Japanese media reports said. Ishikawa officials say 1,370 homes were completely or partially destroyed. Many of the houses in that western coastal region of the main island are aging and wooden. Cars lay tossed on cracked, bumpy roads. Snow blanketed the debris and highways. Wires dangled from lopsided poles. (AP)

## Ex-Pak foreign minister Qureshi declared ineligible to contest election from stronghold in Punjab's Multan



**LAHORE, Jan 7:** Pakistan's former foreign minister and Tehreek-e-Insaf party's Senior Vice President Shah Mahmood Qureshi has been declared "ineligible" to contest the February 8 general elections by a poll tribunal, a media report said on Sunday.

An appellate election tribunal on Saturday rejected Qureshi's appeal against the rejection of his nomination papers, The News International reported.

While Qureshi was cleared to contest polls from the NA-214 constituency in Sindh's Umarkot city, the appellate election tribunal turned down his appeal filed against the returning officer's (RO) decision to reject his nomination papers for two National Assembly and as many Punjab Assembly seats in Multan in Punjab province.

Qureshi, 67, is currently lodged in Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi in a cipher case.

The former foreign minister had filed nomination papers for NA-150 Multan-III, NA-151 Multan-IV and PP-218, PP-219 constituencies.

Multan High Court Bar Association President Rana Asif Saeed

said the election tribunal had rejected Qureshi's appeal to restore his right to candidacy.

The tribunal had declared him "ineligible" to contest the election. Appellate Tribunal Judge Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar delivered the verdict, he said.

Earlier, ROs had rejected the nomination papers of Qureshi from NA-150 Multan-III, NA-151 Multan-IV and PP-218, PP-219, and the PTI leader had filed appeals against the rejection of his nomination papers.

However, the appellate tribunal had dismissed his appeals.

Meanwhile, the hearing of over 60 appeals continued in the election tribunal, established on the Multan Bench of the Lahore High Court on Saturday.

In Lahore, an appellate tribunal held a hearing on an appeal filed against the approval of nomination papers of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif from NA-130. It directed the petitioner to appear before the court till Sunday.

Petitioner Shahid Aurakazi did not appear on the court summons for the second time on Saturday. The court discussed the objections of the registrar's office to the petitioner's appeal and gave him a last chance to appear for arguments against the objections of the registrar's office till Sunday.

The appellate tribunal of the LHC rejected the appeal against the approval of PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz's nomination papers from PP-80 Sargodha and the nomination papers were declared valid. (PTI)

## China sanctions 5 US defence companies in response to US sanctions and arms sales to Taiwan

**BELING, Jan 7:** China announced sanctions on Sunday on five American defence-related companies in response to US arms sales to Taiwan and US sanctions on Chinese companies and individuals.

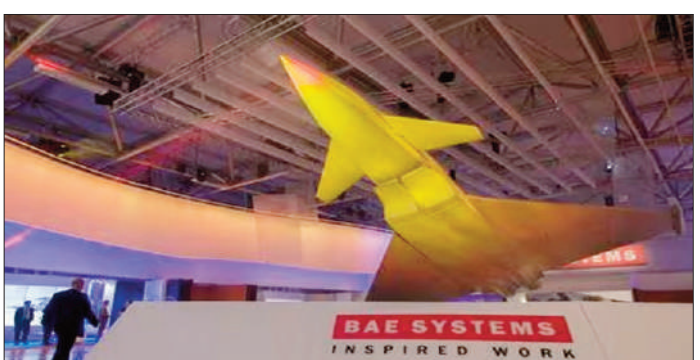
The sanctions will freeze any property the companies have in China and prohibit organisations and individuals in China from doing business with them, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement posted online.

It was unclear what impact, if any, the sanctions would have on the companies, BAE Systems Land and Armaments, Alliant Techsystems Operations, AeroVironment, ViaSat and Data Link Solutions. Such sanctions are often mostly symbolic as American defence contractors generally don't sell to China.

The Foreign Ministry said the US moves harmed China's sovereignty and security interests, undermined peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and violated the rights and interests of Chinese companies and individuals.

"The Chinese government remains unwavering in our resolve to safeguard national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity and protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese companies and citizens," the ministry statement said.

The announcement was made less than a week ahead of a presidential election in Taiwan that is being contested in large part over



how the government should manage its relationship with China, which claims the self-governing island as its territory and says it must come under its rule.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not specify which arms deal or which US sanctions China was responding to, though spokesperson Wang Wenbin had warned three weeks ago that China would take countermeasures following the US government's approval of a USD 300 million military package for Taiwan in December.

The deal includes equipment, training and equipment repair to maintain Taiwan's command, control and military communications capabilities.

The US said the sale would support the modernisation of Taiwan's armed forces and the maintenance of a credible defence.

"The proposed sale will improve the recipient's capability to meet current and future threats by enhancing operational readiness," a news release from the Pentagon's

Defence Security Cooperation Agency said.

Taiwan is a major flashpoint in US-China relations that analysts worry could explode into military conflict between the two powers. China says that US arms sales to Taiwan are interference in its domestic affairs.

The Chinese military regularly sends fighter planes and ships into and over the waters around Taiwan, in part to deter the island's government from declaring formal independence. An invasion doesn't appear imminent, but the constant military activity serves as a reminder that the threat is ever-present.

The US switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979, but it is bound by its own laws to ensure that Taiwan has the ability to defend itself. America and its allies sail warships through the Taiwan Strait, a 160-kilometer (100-mile)-wide waterway that separates the island from China. (AP)

**ZINDA JAN (AFGHANISTAN), Jan 7:** A 6.3 magnitude quake on October 7 killed and injured thousands of people in Afghanistan's west. Three months on, survivors are struggling to rebuild their lives.

Some families are living in canvas-coloured tents in Zinda Jan district, the quake's epicentre in the province of Herat, where every home was flattened.

People endure the winter conditions with the help of donations and their Islamic faith, but they're anxious about what lies ahead.

Habib Rahman, 43, was watching TV at his father-in-law's home when the quake struck. The horror still rings in his ears. He can't get it out of his head.

However many details he gave about that day would never be enough, he told The Associated Press.

Every squat mud building in Zinda Jan collapsed within minutes. Fear, shouting, panic and shock swept through villages. People used their hands to pull the living and the dead from under the rubble.

"If we look at this soil and dust, we will go beyond crazy," Habib said. "The children are psychologically affected. Sometimes I play with them to distract them from being anxious and (help them) forget about the earthquake. But they don't forget."

The winds and storms continuously knock down and tear the tents of Zinda Jan, the people's



only refuge from the bitter cold. "Give us your heart (warmth), find shelter for us," he implored. "The weather is cold. It is very cold."

Children still don't have access to a mosque or school, he said. He wonders what will happen to them, their future. He wants life to return to how it was before the quake, when villagers had their own means and resources.

Before the quake, 55-year-old Mula Dad Mohammadi had a house with six rooms, a kitchen, and space for crops, livestock and timber. Now, he shelters underneath tarpaulin and sheets with his wife and children. He is grateful for the relief efforts but wants measures for longer-term recovery. "Our farming and agriculture have been destroyed," he said.

"Our property and lives have been destroyed. What they gave us was for a temporary period — two sacks of rice and two sacks of wheat. Let us do our own farming."

The global response to the disaster was slow, with much of the international community wary of dealing directly with the Taliban-controlled government.

The world was also focused on the surprise attack by the militant Palestinian group Hamas on Israel on October 7 that triggered the ongoing war, only hours before the quake hit Herat.

The Taliban, NGOs, the UN the country's private sector and the Afghan public rallied around quake-hit communities to help with cash assistance, food, cloth-

ing, medicine, and reconstruction.

Pale blue domes resembling beehives — built in Zinda Jan with donations from the Afghan diaspora, including artists and singers — could now be seen dotting the skyline. They're sturdier than the houses normally seen in much of Afghanistan and are intended to be more earthquake-resistant.

It's the first time that this type of housing, known as super adobe, has been seen in the country. Project manager Shakib Shahabi, from a local nongovernmental organization, called the Agency for Humanitarian and Development Assistance for Afghanistan, said 37 homes have been built in 32 days.

"We have lessons learned from the implementation of this project and we're willing to share our experiences with interested organisations," he said.

Nisar Ahmad Ilias, a spokesman for the Herat governor, said 3,000 houses are being worked on in Zinda Jan. Some are 90 per cent finished and others are 20 per cent completed.

Survivors still need help because of the scale of the disaster. He urged Afghans — and the rest of the world — to step up their response.

"Natural disasters happen in other countries as well," said Ilias. "The international community, which has helped in those places, has not done it here. It is necessary for them to take more steps and stand with Afghans." (AP)

## Four active cadres of NNC-NA surrender

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** Four active cadres of Naga National Council (Non-Accordist) (NNC-NA) surrendered before Assam Rifles at Wakshing in Mon district of Nagaland on January 7, said Assam Rifles. The security force further said that the said cadres were highly active in the area since 2019.

"The relentless efforts of #AssamRifles lead to the surrender of four cadres of Naga National Council (Non-Accordist) cadres with one 9 mm Pistol at Wakshing, Mon District, Nagaland. The cadres had been highly active in the area since 2019," the Assam Rifles said.

Earlier in the month of September last year, three active members of the NSCN (K-Nikki) were captured in Nagaland with arms and ammunition in their custody.

The Assam Rifles and Nagaland Police reportedly conducted the operation on September 27 leading to their apprehension and seized items such as three 0.32 calibre pistols, ammunition, and warlike stores.

## BJP names DT Lepcha as candidate for Rajya Sabha election in Sikkim

**GANGTOK, Jan 7:** The BJP on Sunday named MLA Dorjee Tshering Lepcha as its candidate for the Rajya Sabha election in Sikkim.

In a statement, BJP's national general secretary Arun Singh said the central election committee of the party has approved the name of Lepcha for the January 19 election.

Lepcha, 66, is at present the MLA of the Gnathang Machong seat in the Pakyong district.

He was a minister in the previous SDF government, and joined the BJP along with nine other party MLAs after the 2019 assembly elections, in which the SKM came to power. As a minister, he held portfolios such as Buildings & Housing, and Transport.

Lepcha said he will try to serve the Himalayan state to the best of his abilities by raising its issues in Parliament.



"I sincerely thank PM Narendra Modi, home minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda for reposing their faith in me to serve the party and my state, Sikkim, as a representative in Rajya Sabha,"

he told a press conference.

He said that he will file his nomination papers on January 9, the last date.

The lone Rajya Sabha seat in the state is at present held by Hishey

Lachungpa of the opposition SDF. His tenure will end on February 23. He served as Rajya Sabha MP for two successive terms.

In the 32-member Sikkim assembly, SKM has 19 members, BJP has 12 and the SDF has one member.

Indicating that the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) was on board to facilitate Lepcha's election to Rajya Sabha, BJP state president DR Thapa claimed that his party has chief minister Prem Singh Tamang's support in the polls.

The SKM, which is a part of the BJP-led NDA, is yet to officially declare support for Lepcha or field a candidate. The two parties do not work together in the state, despite the alliance at the national level.

The opposition SDF has also not announced its candidate yet. (PTI)

## Manipur: 192 individuals detained in connection with violations



HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** A total of 192 persons were detained in connection with violations in different districts of the states, said Manipur Police on Sunday. The police said that movement of 195 and 183 vehicles along NH-37 and NH-2 respectively with essential items have been ensured. Besides this, the police also took strict security measures in all vulnerable locations and provided security convoy in sensitive stretches in order to ensure free and safe movement of the vehicles.

"Movement of 195 and 183 vehicles along NH-37 and NH-2 respectively with essential items have been ensured. Strict security measures are taken up in all vulnerable locations and security convoy is provided in sensitive stretches in order to ensure free and safe movement of the vehicles. A total of 139 nakas/checkpoints were installed in different districts of Manipur, both in the hill and the valley and Police detained 192 persons in connection with violations in different districts of the state," the Manipur Police wrote on micro-blogging site X.

Further, the police also informed that a total of 139 nakas or checkpoints were installed in different districts of the state.

"Search operations and area domination were conducted by security forces in the fringe and vulnerable areas of Thoubal, Imphal East and Kangpokpi districts," they added.

The police further said that during the operation, the following items such as i.3 local made MOR-Pumpi, 1 CMG with Mag and 1.32 mm pistol were recovered from Kangpokpi district.

## Tripura Congress committee undergoes rejig ahead of Lok Sabha polls

**AGARTALA, Jan 7:** Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) has undergone a major rejig in its organisational structure, a senior leader said on Sunday.

The new TPCC executive committee consists of 75 members, with six leaders serving as vice-presidents, seven leaders as general secretaries, and 19 secretaries responsible for organisational matters, a statement by the party's All India general secretary KC Venugopal said.

Prominent party leaders such as Sudip Roy Barman, who is also a CWC member (invitee), Gopal Chandra Roy, Birajit Singha, both party MLAs, and former chief minister Samir Ranjan Barman have been included in the 41-member executive committee, the statement said.

The AICC has also approved the appointment of nine presidents for district Congress committees (DCCs).

Additionally, the AICC has announced a nine-member pradesh election committee, with TPCC president Ashish Kumar Saha serving as its chairman. Heavyweights Sudip Roy Barman, Samir Ranjan Barman, Birajit Singha, Gopal Chandra Roy, and D C Hrangkhawl are members of the election committee. The presidents of four frontal organisations, including Youth Congress, Mohila Congress, and Seva Dal, have been made ex-officio members of the panel. (PTI)

## Manipur CM commends Lamphelpat Rejuvenation Project progress



HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government on Friday announced a reduction in the value-added tax (VAT) on petrol and diesel by ₹ 5.20 per litre each. Addressing reporters after a Cabinet meeting, deputy chief minister Prestone Tynsong said, the state government in February this year had al-

ready slashed VAT on petrol from 31.62 per cent or ₹ 17.60 per litre to 20 per cent, and from 22.59 per cent or ₹ 12.50 per litre to 12 per cent on diesel.

"With this decision, we have further reduced the tax percentage on petrol from 20 per cent to 13.5 percent per litre and from 12 per cent to 5 per cent per litre for diesel. The amount, if con-

verted to cash, comes to ₹ 5.20 per litre for both petrol and diesel. After reduction of VAT on the prices of both the fuels, Meghalaya will have the lowest price of petrol and diesel in the country," the deputy chief minister claimed. In line with the advice of the Government of India, the state government has decided that further reduction on the

prices of petrol and diesel has to be implemented immediately from Friday midnight, he said. The Centre had, on Wednesday, cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by a record ₹ 5 and ₹ 10 per litre respectively, a move which has evoked similar response by many states. Replying to a query, the deputy chief minister said following the decision to cut its share of taxes on fuel, the state will incur a revenue loss of about ₹ 100 crore for the next five months from November to March 31, 2022.

Pointing out the importance of having an oil depot of the state, the deputy chief minister said, "right now the government has taken serious note of this and discussion is going on with the Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) and once we have our depot, we will roughly benefit by another 1.5 to 2 per cent." Mentioning that the old depot in Umiam has remained closed for the past many years and the state government wants to revive the same, Tynsong said, meetings are being held with the oil major and the process of finding land is on.

## Union minister takes stock of central schemes in Nagaland dist



HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, Jan 7:** Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Union minister of state for power and heavy industries Krishan Pal Gurjar visited the newly created Niuland district of Nagaland on Saturday to take stock of whether the Modi government's public welfare schemes are reaching the public.

During his visit, Gurjar held a review meeting with district officials on various central government schemes being taken up by the central government and also interacted with local community members and NGOs to get a first-hand report on whether these schemes are benefiting them at Niuland DC's conference hall in the presence of Nagaland PHED minister Jacob Jimomi and Niuland DC Sara S Jamir and other officials.

Gurjar was the first Union minister to have visited Niuland district after its inauguration in June 2022. Addressing the meeting, he heaped praise on the Modi government's various welfare schemes for the public.

The minister said the Modi government wanted all the welfare schemes to reach the last man standing in society. He also spoke about special developmental plans for the Northeast region, including Nagaland, since the BJP came to power in 2014.

Later addressing the media, Gurjar said the Modi government is spending 10% of the central budget for development of the Northeast.

"Everybody must be feeling the pace of development in the Northeast since 2014," he said.

He said neither any PM paid visit to the Northeast nor any central minister paid any attention to the region before 2014.

"After 2014, PM Modi visited the Northeast several times and focused on development of the region while every 15 days, some Union minister is always on visit to the region," he added.

Saying that this was his second visit to Nagaland, Gurjar said today's visit was aimed at knowing how the Modi government's welfare schemes are being implemented in Niuland district and to interact with the beneficiaries. He expressed happiness at the way the Nagaland government and Niuland district administration are implementing the welfare schemes.

Replying to a query on any plan to resolve the perennial power crisis in the state, Gurjar said the under-construction five-megawatt solar power plant at Hovukhu village in Niuland district would greatly benefit the state.

To another question as to why there is no heavy industry in the state, Gurjar said to set any industry, there should be availability of raw materials.

"If the state government sends any proposal for setting up any industry and if there is availability of raw materials for it, the central government would consider it," he added.

## Tripura: Muslims pray for departed Hindu MLA, NCC camp commences at ST Joseph University in Kohima

**AGARTALA, Jan 7:** Hundreds of Muslims from Tripura's Ramnagar Assembly constituency on Sunday offered prayers for Surajit Datta, a BJP MLA who passed away on December 28.

Datta, a seven-time MLA, was admired by both the Hindus and Muslims for his generosity, locals said. He died at a hospital in Kolkata after a prolonged illness at age 71.

Abdul Rahim, the imam of South Ramnagar mosque, said, "Datta served both communities equally and always helped us when needed."

"On Sunday, we held a prayer for the departed soul and for the wellbeing of his family. He was like a guardian to us, supporting us in every step of life," he added.

Rahim also mentioned that a special prayer will be held in all the mosques of

Ramnagar Assembly constituency for Datta next Friday.

Mohan Dutta, the MLA's younger brother, expressed gratitude to the Muslim community for their support.

"I would like to thank the members of the Muslim community for offering prayers for my elder brother, who worked tirelessly for the wellbeing of both communities in his constituency. Our Muslim brothers came to our residence on Sunday and prayed for my brother. It demonstrates that my brother served the people of his constituency in the best possible way," he added.

"Although I have lost my brother, our doors will remain open for everyone. Our family does not discriminate people based on their caste, creed, or religion. We serve all people," he added. (PTI)

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Jan 7:** A Combined Annual Training Camp (CATC) for NCC cadets from schools and colleges of Nagaland commenced at St Joseph University in Kohima's Chumukedima under the aegis of 25 Nagaland Battalion NCC, Mokokchung, said an official statement on Sunday.

As per the statement, more than 670 personnel including 621 cadets from Kohima, Dimapur, Mokokchung, Mon, Tuensang, Longleng, Shamator, Noklak, Wokha, Phek, Peren, Chumukedima, Tsemnyu and Kiphire districts of Nagaland, are participating in the 10 days long training camp from January 4 to 13.

"Brigadier Dipankar Saha, group commander, NCC Group Kohima visited the camp and inspected the arrangements. He reviewed a Guard of Honour and visited 'Know Your NCC' information kiosk," the statement added.

The visiting dignitary was formally welcomed by Rev sister Thianes Mary, DMI, deputy registrar and Rev sister Chinnammal,

head of administration by presenting a Naga Shawl.

During his address the group commander highlighted the aim of camp i.e., to inculcate camaraderie, sense of discipline and cohesiveness amongst cadets apart from giving an experience of camp life and training in basic military skills.

He also exhorted the cadets to make use of the varied training activities being organised in the camp and informed the cadets, about employment opportunities in Indian Defence Forces, Police and other state Government departments.

This was followed by a health awareness capsule by Dr T Temsu, director, Blood Bank, District Hospital, Dimapur, on benefits of Blood Donation.

He urged the young cadets to come forward and save lives by donating blood.

A total of 82 cadets voluntarily donated blood in the donation camp organised at the camp site.

## Arunachal CM calls for preservation of tribal cultures

*'The Si Donyi celebration has brought alive the profound connection with our indigenous culture'*

**ITANAGAR, Jan 7:** Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu has asserted that his government is committed to preserve the vibrant culture of various tribal communities in the state.

He attended the golden jubilee celebration of the Si-Donyi festival of the Tagin community at Daporijo in Upper Subansiri district on Saturday and said the state government has been working steadfastly to protect indigenous culture.

Expressing gratitude to the festival organising committee for inviting him to join the celebration along with Union earth science minister Kiren Rijiju, Khandu said he has taken note of suggestions provided by the Tagin Cultural Society for the preservation of vibrant Tagin culture and identity.

"The Si Donyi celebration has brought alive the profound connection with our indigenous culture...We will steadfastly work on it, as we should not erode our culture with changing times," the chief minister said.

Laying the foundation stone for the Si Donyi festival ground on the occasion, Khandu asked the authorities to design it in such a way that the entire complex showcases the rich, vibrant tradition and cultural heritage of the Tagin community.

Khandu lauded the people for supporting developmental projects initiated by the state and central governments, which, he claimed, have changed the overall scenario of the district.

Talking about connectivity, he said that a



portion of the Trans Arunachal Highway that will connect the district with the rest of the state will be completed by April this year, according to a CMO communiqué.

"Those executing the project have informed me that the road will be completed

within the next two months and one bridge on the highway will be ready by April," Khandu said.

The government has proposed to establish an airport near Dumorjo, he said.

The chief minister expressed optimism

# Congress sets up election committees for 8 states

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** The Congress has set up election committees for several states, including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh, besides a political affairs committee for Madhya Pradesh.

The move comes ahead of the Lok Sabha polls slated this year.

"The Congress president has approved the proposal of the constitution of Pradesh Election Committees of Rajasthan, Kerala, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura, and Pradesh Election Committee and Political Affairs Committee of Madhya Pradesh, with immediate effect," an official communication from the party said.

Rajasthan PCC chief Govind Singh Dotasra was appointed the chairman of the Pradesh Election Committee in the state. The committee has as its members former chief minister Ashok Gehlot.

Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya, Mohan Prakash, C P Joshi, Harish Choudhary, Ram Lal Jat, Pramod Jain Bhaya, Pratap Singh Khachariyawas, Mamta Bhupesh, Bhajan Lal Jatav, Murari Lal Meena, Ashok Chandna, Neeraj Dangi, Zubair Khan, Dheeraj Gurjar, Rajkumar Sharma, Rohit Bohra,



Indra Meena, Dungan Ram Gedar, Shimla Devi Nayak, and Lalit Yadav are also part of the same committee. Besides them, the president of the Youth Congress, the NSUI president, the chief organiser of Seva Dal, and president of Pradesh Mahila Congress, are members of the committee.

K Sudhakar was appointed the chairman of Pradesh Election Committee for Kerala.

The Kerala committee includes senior leaders like A K Antony, K C Venugopal, Ramesh Chennithala, Vayalar Ravi, V D Satheshan, K Suresh, Shashi Tharoor, and Mulla-palli Ramachandran, among others. Telangana Chief Minister A Re-

vanth Reddy was announced the chairman of Pradesh Election Committee of the state headed by him. The committee includes deputy chief minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu as its member, as well as, Uttam Kumar Reddy and V Hanumantha Rao. In Himachal Pradesh, PCC chief Pratibha Singh was made the chairperson of the Pradesh Election Committee, which has chief minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu, deputy chief minister Mukesh Agnihotri and senior leaders like Anand Sharma, Viplove Thakur, Asha Kumari, Ram Lal Thakur, Thakur Kaul Singh, Dhaniram Shandil, and Chander Kumar as members, among others.

Jitu Patwari will head the Pradesh Election Committee for Madhya Pradesh with Digvijaya Singh, Vivek Tankha, Suresh Pachauri, Kantilal Bhuria, and former chief minister Kamal Nath as members. The party also set up a Political Affairs Committee for Madhya Pradesh which will be headed by Jitendra Singh, the AICC in-charge for the state.

Patwari will be the convener of the panel, which includes Kamal Nath, Digvijaya Singh, Arun Yadav, Vivek Tankha, and Nakul Nath. PCC chief Deepak Bajaj was appointed the chairman of Pradesh Election Committee of Chhattisgarh. It will have former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel and former deputy chief minister T S Singh Deo as its members, besides Charan Das Mahant and Tamradhwaj Sahu.

In Manipur, K Meghachandra Singh was appointed the chairman of the Pradesh Election Committee with former chief minister Ibobi Singh and former deputy chief minister Gaikhangam as its members, among others. S Spongmeren Jamir was appointed the chairman of the Nagaland Pradesh Election Committee, while Asish Kumar Saha the chairman of the Tripura Pradesh Election Committee. (PTI)

# Centre holding talks with NE militants, but treating civilians in J-K as militants: Mehbooba

**SRINAGAR, Jan 7:** PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday the Centre was holding talks with militants in the northeast, but treating ordinary civilians in Jammu and Kashmir as militants.

"We will not surrender, we will not raise the white flag. If you talk to us with dignity, we will respond with respect. However, if you talk through batons like you did in Bafliaz, it will not work," Mufti said at a function at Bijbehara in Anantnag district.

The PDP president was addressing a gathering of party workers and supporters at the mausoleum of her father and PDP founder Mufti Mohammad Sayeed on his eighth death anniversary.

Mehbooba Mufti said while the Centre was holding talks with the militants in the Northeast, it had branded ordinary civilians in Jammu and Kashmir as militants.

"There (in the northeast) you talk to militants while in Jammu and Kashmir you have branded ordinary people as militants. You have filled the jails by carrying out (indiscriminate) arrests. The Enforcement Directorate, NIA, SIA raids ... does anyone treat their own people like this?" she asked.

The former chief minister said the Centre should learn from the approach taken by her late father in dealing with separatists.

"Learn something from Mufti sahib ... he tried to connect the hearts of people. He gave a way to separatists also so that they can live within this country with dignity. Mufti never said a wrong thing.... he always held on to one flag only... but he only said the people of Jammu and Kashmir want peace with dignity," she added.

The highlight of the function was the return to the PDP of party co-founder Muzaffar Hussain Baig and his wife Safina Baig, who is chairperson of District Development Council Baramulla, after nearly four years.

Baig, while addressing the gathering, said Mufti Mohammad Sayeed was the first person who spoke about the healing touch policy after the eruption of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir.

"As far as Mufti's politics is concerned, he was the first Muslim home minister of India. Till date no other Muslim has been made home minister of the country. He was the first person who talked about healing touch after the eruption of mil-

itancy ... he said the militants were our own children who are being misled by another country," he added. Baig said the PDP founder gave a message of harmony, rising above various divides in the society.

"He gave a message of harmony, rising above the urban-rural divide, the Pahari-Gujjar differences or the Hindu-Muslim divide. I will pray to Allah to have mercy on all of us and grant us a life of dignity," he added. The return of Baigs to the PDP assumes significance as it comes less than four months ahead of Lok Sabha elections.

Baig offered fatiha (special prayers) at the mausoleum of Sayeed at Bijbehara in the south Kashmir district. Baig, who was a co-founder of the PDP in late 1990s, was made patron of the party following Sayeed's death in 2016.

A former deputy chief minister, Baig quit the party in 2020 and was tipped to join the People's Conference led by Sajad Lone.

While Baig's wife, Safina, did join Lone's party, the former Lok Sabha member from Baramulla did not make an official announcement about his status. (PTI)

# ED assault case: Bengal Gov asks authorities to arrest TMC leader, probe his links with terrorists

**KOLKATA, Jan 7:** Expressing concern that TMC leader Sahajahan Sheikh, the prime accused in the case of assault on ED officials, may have "crossed the border", West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose has instructed authorities to arrest him immediately and investigate his alleged connections with terrorists.

His remarks that Sheikh has links with terrorists drew sharp criticism from the ruling TMC on Sunday.

The statement issued by Raj Bhavan late Saturday night highlighted that the governor, upon receiving a complaint in the Peace Room, instructed the police chief to arrest the culprit promptly.

"On receipt of a complaint in the Peace Room of Raj Bhavan that Sahajahan Sheikh is supported by some political leaders with the connivance of some police officers, Hon'ble Governor instructed the Police chief to arrest the culprit forthwith and report compliance," the statement said.

The governor emphasised on the need

to ascertain Sheikh's whereabouts and take appropriate action.

The complaint alleging that Sheikh may have "crossed the border" and "liaison with the terrorists" may be "enquired into immediately", the statement added.

Responding to the governor's comment, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said, "We don't know what is the basis of his remarks. According to the Constitution, the governor works in consultation with the state government. So how can he make such remarks without any concrete report or evidence? He is not here to run a parallel government."

Incidentally, the Bengal BJP had also alleged the involvement of cross-border elements and Rohingyas in the mob attack on the Enforcement Directorate offices.

"We have been alleging that cross-border elements and Rohingyas were involved in the Friday's attack on ED officials. We support what the governor has said. If Sahajahan is arrested, it will

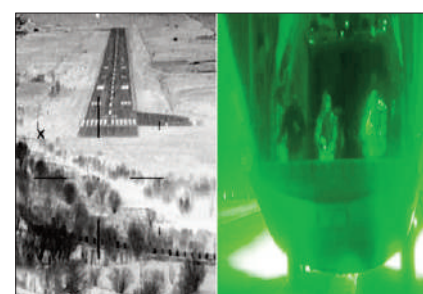
unveil a big nexus between those involved in corruption and terror," BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar said.

Amid a political uproar over the assault on an ED team in West Bengal, the family of the TMC leader and the central agency filed police complaints against each other on Saturday. The complaints were related to a raid during which the ED officials were attacked and injured by a mob.

The police also lodged a suo motu case against the ED officers, who were conducting the raid in connection with the alleged ration distribution scam. The charges included molestation, forcible entrance and theft.

The ED issued a lookout notice for Sahajahan due to concerns that he might flee the country following the incident in which three ED officers were injured and several vehicles were damaged by a mob at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district, close to the Bangladesh border, on Friday. (PTI)

# IAF's C-130J aircraft makes night landing at Kargil advanced landing ground



**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** For the first time, a C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) carried out a night landing at the high-altitude Kargil advanced landing ground near the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan.

The night landing of the tactical lift aircraft with the elite Garud commandos on board at the Kargil airstrip demonstrated the IAF's operational capabilities in the strategically crucial sector, people familiar with the matter said.

The night landing was carried out recently. While IAF aircraft have operated from the

advanced landing ground before, it was the first time that a transport plane made a night landing.

"In a first, an IAF C-130 J aircraft recently carried out a night landing at the Kargil airstrip. Employing terrain masking enroute, the exercise also dovetailed a training mission of the Garuda," the IAF said on 'X'.

The Kargil airstrip is located at an altitude of around 10,500 feet.

The defence ministry has also been focusing on enhancing infrastructure at almost all airfields along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), including the Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) as per operational requirements.

It is especially boosting infrastructure at the Daulat Beg Oldi Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) as well as the Nyoma airstrip.

The Daulat Beg Oldi ALG is located close to the LAC at an altitude of 16,700 feet and is known as the highest airfield in the world.

Temperatures in Daulat Beg Oldi drop up to minus 40 degrees Celsius during harsh winter months. The Nyoma airfield is located at a height of around 13,000 feet. (PTI)

# Cong urges people to participate in Yatra Experts bat for preserving 19th century market in Mysuru

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** The Congress on Sunday invited people, civil society organisations and all movements that stand for justice and protecting Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution to join the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipur to Mumbai starting January 14. In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh appealed to people to participate in the Rahul Gandhi-led Yatra.

"The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is the Congress party's campaign led by Rahul Gandhi for economic, social and political justice for every Indian," Ramesh said. Across the country, there are crores of citizens, lakhs of organisations and thousands of movements who fight for justice at the grassroots, he said.

"Every day, they work for better opportunities for youth, to empower women, for workers and farmers, for the equal rights of Dalits, Adivasis, and backward communities, and many more marginalised sections and groups," Ramesh said.

The Congress invites each individual, every civil society organisation and all movements that stand for justice and protecting Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution to join the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipur to Mumbai on 14th January, 2024, the Congress general secretary said.

"Together, let us strengthen our commitment to deliver the Constitution's promise of justice to each Indian. Nyay Ka Haq Milne Tak!" Ramesh said.

The yatra, which will end in Mumbai on March 20 or March 21, will cover 6,713 km and its participants will travel on buses and foot.

The yatra being organised ahead of the 2024 general elections will cover 110 districts, 100 Lok Sabha seats and 337 assembly segments in 66 days. (PTI)

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Conservation architects and other domain experts have pitched for preserving a late 19th century market in Mysuru and called for carrying out development projects while remaining "sensitive to the built heritage" of the city in Karnataka.

The historic Devaraja Market, constructed in the heart of the city in the 1880s by the Mysore royals, is facing an uncertain future for many years and marked for demolition for a redevelopment project, according to INTACH Bengaluru Chapter.

Seeking to highlight its architectural and historical value and to emphasise on preservation of historical markets, a series of events -- a symposium, a heritage walk and urban sketching -- was held in Mysuru on Saturday.

Hailed as a 'heritage city', Mysuru is dotted with iconic buildings largely constructed by the Wadiyars -- the royal family of the erstwhile Mysore state, including the Mysore royal palace, Lalitha Mahal Palace, old railway station, Mysore University building, and many other iconic landmarks.

During the symposium hosted by the Bengaluru Chapter of the Delhi-based Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) at the Wadiyar Centre for Architecture (WCFA), the current scion of the royal family, Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar eloquently made a case for preserving the Devaraja Market, built by his ancestors.

Conservation of this market and other heritage buildings in Mysuru are integral to the identity of the city, he asserted in a virtual address at the event, according to a statement issued by INTACH Bengaluru Chapter.

Wadiyar, a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, the US, also suggested that "restoration" is important from the point of view of sustainability.

Preserving and reinvigorating built heritage is important so that the legacy can be passed to future generations, he had told PTI in 2018 and also advocated for preserving the built heritage of Bengaluru.

Other experts, including a structure engineer from Pune, concurred during the symposium that the Devaraja Market is a city icon, and "can be restored" and form a "nucleus" for insensitive development of Mysuru.

The theme of the discussion was 'Markets as Living Heritage: The Case for Conservation and Revival'.

Sanghamitra Basu, a conservation architect who recently retired as a faculty

from IIT, Kharagpur, said, "Conservation is not (an act of) mummification," adding that amenities could be added to old structures with due sensitivity to the architectural fabric.

She shared the example of the restoration of Byward Market in Ottawa, Canada, which was to be demolished but when restored, it became one of the city's major centres for both tourists and local economic activities.

"It is important to have a management plan," she was quoted as saying in the statement.

Gurugram-based conservation architect Shikha Jain, who has worked on heritage-led development projects around the country, joined the event virtually.

"The economy of Jaipur depends on the cultural heritage which sits in the core of the city," she said.

Accordingly, the government agreed to restore these traditional markets which are now active, dynamic economic centres in Jaipur city, Jain added.

S Raghunath of BMS College of Engineering in Bengaluru shared examples where he has helped restore buildings

that suffered "Grade 4-level damage", including Dr S Radhakrishnan's house in Mysuru and the Octroi post in Bengaluru.

"Devaraja Market has Grade 2-level of damage," he said, and asserted that it can be restored.

Pune-based Ranjit Patil, who has over four decades of experience as a structural engineer, also said the building "can be restored".

He suggested that the restoration could be funded through a CSR (corporate social responsibility) activity.

A joint statement was presented to the deputy commissioner of Mysuru after the conference which highlighted the feasibility of restoration and the central importance of traditional markets like Devaraja Market to the image of Mysuru as a heritage city, the statement said.

Bengaluru-based architect Yashaswini Sharma said the unique architectural features along with artisanal and material heritage of Devaraja Market as also of Lansdowne Building (built in 1890s), "cannot be replaced, and the significance of these buildings in the historical landscape of the core area of Mysuru cannot be undermined".

Even the idea of "reconstructing in same 'heritage' style" after demolishing the original building is "ironical, especially when the original is salvageable", Sharma said.

"One cannot reconstruct 'heritage'," she added. (PTI)

# After PM visit, celebs pitch Lakshadweep as must-travel destination; slam Maldivian leaders' remarks

**MUMBAI, Jan 7:** Indian cine stars such as Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar and Shradha Kapoor along with other prominent personalities on Sunday appealed to fans to "explore Indian islands" and coastal destinations, amid row over disparaging remarks by Maldivian ministers after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Lakshadweep.

In social media posts, Kumar, cricketer Hardik Pandya and veteran player Venkatesh Prasad also urged people to support the Indian tourism sector as they condemned the comments by Maldivian ministers on X that have triggered a row with Internet users pitting Lakshadweep and Maldives as rival tourist destinations.

The Maldivian government on Sunday distanced itself from "derogatory remarks on social media platforms against foreign leaders and high-ranking individu-

als".

In an X post, Salman Khan said it was "cool" to see Modi enjoy the clean and stunning beaches of Lakshadweep.

"... and the best part is that yeh hamare India mein hai," the "Tiger 3" star wrote.

Tiger Shroff said the Lakshadweep islands had captured his heart.

"The rich culture, tranquil beaches, and the genuine warmth of its people create an enchanting allure. Join me in celebrating the inclusivity and unparalleled beauty of these islands - a treasure trove waiting for us to explore!" he posted.

Shradha Kapoor and other stars shared posts on X using the hashtags 'Explore Indian Islands' and 'Lakshadweep'.

"All these images and memes making me super FOMO now. Lakshadweep has such pristine



beaches and coastlines, thriving local culture, I'm on the verge of booking an impulse chhutti. This year, why not #ExploreIndianIslands (sic)?" Shradha shared on X.

Akshay Kumar, who rang in the New Year in the Maldives with his family, condemned the "hateful and racist" remarks by prominent public figures from the Maldives. "Surprised that they are doing

this to a country that sends them the maximum number of tourists... We are good to our neighbours but why should we tolerate such unprovoked hate?"

"I've visited the Maldives many times and always praised it, but dignity first. Let us decide to #ExploreIndianIslands and support our own tourism," the actor wrote on the microblogging site.

Speaking in the same vein, former cricketer Venkatesh Prasad posted, "A deputy minister using such language for our country, Maldives is a largely poor country largely dependent on upmarket tourism with over 15% tourists from India."

"India has very many unexplored beautiful coastal towns, and this is a great opportunity to develop many of them into tourist destinations," he added in his X post.

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar said he rang in his 50th birthday in Sindhuburg and the coastal town in Maharashtra offered everything "we wanted, and more".

"Gorgeous locations combined with wonderful hospitality left us with a treasure trove of memories. India is blessed with beautiful coastlines and pristine islands. With our 'Atithi Devo Bhava' philosophy, we have so much to ex-

perience, so many memories waiting to be created," Tendulkar added.

Pandya said it is "extremely sad" to see what's being said about India.

"With its gorgeous marine life, beautiful beaches, Lakshadweep is the perfect get away spot and surely a must visit for me for my next holiday," he added in his X post.

Filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar and actors John Abraham, Kangana Ranaut, and Randeep Hooda were also among some of the Indian film personalities to promote Lakshadweep through social media.

Ranaut called Lakshadweep an "almost untouched, unexplored and unexploited natural island".

Hooda, who shot his upcoming film "Veer Savarkar" in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, said he was awed by the pristine beauty and the rich history of the region.

"Incredible India is not just a

tag, our beautiful country has some of the most incredible and stunning locales and #Lakshadweep is an example of it - a heaven like place in India itself! Can't wait to explore this beautiful Indian island," Kartik Aaryan wrote on X.

"With the amazing Indian hospitality, the idea of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' and a vast marine life to explore. Lakshadweep is the place to go," said Abraham.

Modi was in Lakshadweep on January 2 and 3 to inaugurate several projects. The prime minister, who also went snorkelling to explore undersea life, posted pictures of his undersea exploration on X and early morning walks on the pristine beaches.

"For those who wish to embrace the adventurer in them, Lakshadweep has to be on your list. During my stay, I also tried snorkelling - what an exhilarating experience it was," he wrote. (PTI)

# Shrikant Shinde, Sukanta Majumdar among 5 MPs selected for Sansad Ratna Awards

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Five Lok Sabha members, including the BJP's Sukanta Majumdar and Shiv Sena's Shrikant Eknath Shinde, have been selected for the Sansad Ratna Awards this year, its organisers announced on Sunday.

The BJP's Sudheer Gupta, NCP's Amol Ramsing Kolhe and Congress' Kuldeep Rai Sharma are the other three MPs selected for the awards to be presented at a function in the national capital on February 17.

The Sansad Ratna Awards are presented annually to the top-performing parliamentarians based on their performance, while the Sansad Maha Ratna Awards are presented once in five years for consistency in performance during the term of the Lok Sabha.

Chennai-based non-profit charitable trust Prime Point Foundation instituted these honours at the instance of former President of India APJ Abdul Kalam, who himself inaugurated the first award event in 2010 in Chennai.

Prime Point Foundation's founder and chairman K Srivivasan said these awards are based on comprehensive performance, with nominees being selected by a distinguished jury committee



chaired by Arjun Ram Meghwal, Minister of State for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, and T S Krishnamurthy, former chief election commissioner of India.

The performance data is sourced from the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha websites and the PRS Legislative Research. This is the only award presented by civil society to honour top-performing parliamentarians in India.

Sansad Ratna Awards committee chairperson and Prime Point Foundation's trustee secretary Priyadarshini Rahul said N K Premachandran (RSP, Kerala),

Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury (Indian National Congress, West Bengal), Bidyut Baran Mahato (BJP, Jharkhand), and Heena Vijayakumar Gavit (BJP, Maharashtra) have been selected for the Sansad Maha Ratna Awards for the entire 17th Lok Sabha.

"Recognising the continued consistent top performance of Supriya Sule (NCP, Maharashtra), Shrirang Appa Barne (Shiv Sena, Maharashtra) and Bhartruhari Mahtab (BJD, Odisha), the Sansad Maha Ratna Awardees of the previous 16th Lok Sabha, the jury committee

has decided to honour them for their exemplary performance in the 17th Lok Sabha as well and these three MPs would be honoured with the Sansad Utkrishat Mana Ratna Award," she added.

She further said that all the awardees have been selected transparently by the jury committee based on their performance in initiating debates, private member bills and questions raised by them in Parliament.

Considering the importance of Parliamentary committees, three Standing Committees have also been selected for the Sansad Maha Ratna Awards, starting with the current 17th Lok Sabha.

The Agriculture Committee, chaired by P C Gaddi Gowdar (BJP, Karnataka), the Finance Committee, chaired by Jayant Sinha (BJP, Jharkhand), and the Transport and Tourism Committee, currently chaired by Vijayasai Reddy (YSR Congress, Andhra Pradesh) and formerly by T G Venkatesh (BJP, Andhra Pradesh), have been nominated for their consistent contributions based on sittings and the reports presented by them, relying on the data commensurate with the term of the 17th Lok Sabha. (PTI)

## Mighty bulls, dauntless tamers set to exhibit their prowess at Jallikattu 2024 season

**CHENNAI, Jan 7:** Madurai, known for its fragrant jasmine buds, is all set to rededicate its valour and love for the traditional sport of Jallikattu or bull embracing, this Pongal 2024 season.

Scores of mighty tenacious bulls, trained to dodge being tamed, and dauntless men with a passion for taming bulls and guided by their instinct have registered online for the grand events at Avaniyapuram, Palamedu, and Alanganallur, in Madurai district where the Jallikattu arenas spring to life during Pongal (mid-January harvest) festival.

Madurai district Collector M S Sangeetha, who supervised the arrangements, said the Avaniyapuram Jallikattu will be held on January 15, on Pongal day, followed by similar events at Palamedu on January 16, and Alanganallur on January 17.

The three-day event will hog the attention of the entire state during the festival holidays.

Both the bulls and the athletic youngsters, who take part in the sport, have been training for the event and are on a nutritious diet.

"We have been taking part in the



Alanganallur Jallikattu, the major event in the state, annually and our animals have been put on a regimen of swimming, walking and are provided a healthy diet to increase their strength and stamina, to emerge as winners," Pandi, a bull owner from Madurai said.

The bulls are also trained to pounce as they step out of the Vaadivaasal (entry point where the animals are released into the arena).

"We train the bulls to vigorously shake their heads with lengthy horns to deter the youth from grabbing the hump," Durai, another bull tamer said.

For their part, the youth are trained by seniors on how to approach a pouncing bull and how to

handle the animal in the arena, keeping in mind their safety and that of the animal as a priority.

The district administration has allowed online registration of bulls and tamers for the sport and mandated the submission of fitness certificates.

"The rules on preventing cruelty to animals during the conduct of the sport will be strictly enforced. Also, adequate precautions will be exercised to ensure the spectators do not get injured during the event," a senior official said.

Apart from deploying a heavy posse of police, the administration has roped in the fire and rescue services personnel and arranged separate medical teams for men and animals to attend to any injuries during the event, he said.

As a token of appreciation for the valour displayed during the sport, coveted prizes like a car and motorcycle are offered to the best bull that evades and the best man who tames a large number of bulls.

The maiden Jallikattu for this season was held in Thachankurichi village in Pudukkottai district on Saturday. About 500 bulls participated in this event. (PTI)

## Cong resurrection improbable in near future if not impossible, claims book

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** The India of the last decade has left the Congress-run India so far behind that it has become an existential crisis for the party to resurrect itself enough to even remain as principal opposition, let alone return to power, claims a new book.

In "What If There Was No Congress: The Uncensored History of Independent India", political communicator Priyam Gandhi-Mody takes a look at how different India would have been, if there was no Congress at the helm for the most part of the last 80 years.

The book, published by Rupa, revisits some of the key events that shaped India's political history over the last 80 years - Partition, Kashmir, governance, scams, democracy and its interruptions, economic policy, intellectual colonisation and foreign policy - and also seeks to provide a roadmap to the India of tomorrow.

"The people of the country continue to choose progress over corruption, truth over manufactured lies, security over terrorism and growth over stagnation. In my opinion, the Congress's resurrection is improbable in the near future, if not impossible," Gandhi-Mody claims. (PTI)

## PG medical admission counselling to be carried out only in online mode: NMC

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Counselling for post graduate medical admissions will be done only in online mode now and colleges will have to declare fees for each course beforehand, the National Medical Commission (NMC) has said underlining that no college will admit candidates on their own.

Medical education regulator NMC recently notified the "Post-Graduate Medical Education Regulations, 2023" according to which all rounds of counselling for all PG seats will be held on online mode by state or central counselling authorities.

There shall be common counselling for admission to post-graduate courses in medicine for all medical institutions in India solely based on the merit list of respective exams, the new regulations states.

"All rounds of counselling for all seats will be held on online mode by state or central counselling authority and no medical college/institution will admit any candidate themselves," he said.

"While entering details in seat matrix, medical colleges shall mention the amount of fees for each course, failing which seat will not be counted," the regulations stated.

Some changes in the examination system have also been introduced which include formative



assessment and option of multiple-choice questions in university examinations, Dr Vijay Oza, president of Post-Graduate Medical Education Board of the NMC said.

"This is to bring objectivity in examination and match international standards," he said.

Another change has been made in the District Residency Programme (DRP) to facilitate its implementation for better training of students.

Previously, a district hospital was defined as a 100-bedded hospital. In the new regulations, the requirement has been reduced to

50 beds, Dr Oza explained.

"Under the DRP, doctors can be trained in a district hospital which shall be a functional public sector/government-funded hospital of not less than 50 beds instead of the previous requirement of 100 beds," the regulations read.

The DRP aims to train post-graduate students in district health systems and hospitals to strengthen healthcare services at the grass-roots level.

According to the new regulations, once a medical college is granted permission to start PG courses or seats, the course will be treated as recognised for the purpose of registration of qualification for students.

This will solve many difficulties faced by students to register their degree after passing postgraduate examinations, Dr Oza said.

According to the new regulations, undergraduate medical colleges can start postgraduate courses from the third year now. Previously it was from the fourth year in clinical specialties.

Existing or proposed non-teaching hospitals owned and managed by government can start post graduate courses without having undergraduate colleges. This will facilitate government to start post graduate medical colleges in smaller government hospitals/district hospitals, Dr Oza said.

There will be a minimum standard requirement document which will prescribe requirement of infrastructure and faculty clinical material etc. for postgraduate institute.

All students will have to undergo courses in research methodology, ethics and cardiac life support skills.

"For better implementation of these regulations, there is provision of penalty clause which includes monetary penalty, reduction in number of seats (admission capacity) or complete stoppage of admissions," the regulations stated. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Low turnout, BNP boycott

Commission ordered the arrest of industries minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun's son on charges of electoral fraud in Narsingdi, according to reports. Shots were fired during a clash between supporters of two candidates running for the Chattogram-10 seat. Two people - Shanto Barua, 24, and Jamal, 35 - were shot and taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

Two people were injured after a clash between supporters of the Awami League candidate and an independent candidate at a polling centre in Jamalpur's Sharishabari. Four persons, including a child, were injured after two crude bombs exploded near a voting centre in Dhaka's Hazaribagh. A total of 119.6 million registered voters were eligible to vote at Sunday's polls in more than 42,000 polling stations, according to the country's Election Commission. More than 1,500 candidates from 27 political parties were contesting in the election, besides 436 independent candidates.

Over 100 foreign observers, including three from India, monitored the 12th general election, which is being held under tight security. More than 7.5 lakh members of law enforcement agencies and security forces have been deployed to ensure law and order during the polls.

Prime Minister Hasina cast her vote at Dhaka City College polling centre soon after the voting started. Her daughter Saima Wasad accompanied her. Hasina, 76, has been in power since 2009 and her Awami League won the last election in December 2018. She is set to secure a fourth consecutive term as prime minister and a fifth overall term in the one-sided election.

"Polling in the country is going on very well. I hope all the people will come to vote and establish their rights. Maintain the democratic flow in the country and work for the socio-economic development of people," Hasina told reporters after casting her vote. She alleged that the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-Jamaat-e-Islami alliance does not believe in democracy. "People will vote as they wish. And we were able to create that voting environment. Although the BNP-Jamaat alliance has caused many incidents, including arson attacks," she said. In response to a question, Hasina told reporters that India is a "trusted friend" of Bangladesh.

"We are very lucky...India is our trusted friend. During our Liberation War, they supported us not only after 1975, when we lost our whole family - father, mother, brothers, everyone (in a military coup) - and only we two (Hasina and her younger sister Rehana) survived... They gave us shelter. So, we have our best wishes to the people of India," she told reporters. In August 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his wife and their three sons were assassinated in their home by military officers. His daughters Hasina and Rehana survived the purge as they were abroad. In response to a question on how acceptable the election will be while the BNP is boycotting it, Hasina said that her responsibility is towards the people. "Whether people accept this election or not it is important to me. So, I don't care about their (foreign media) acceptance. No matter what the terrorist party says or not?" she said. Hasina's ruling Awami League (AL) is expected to win the election as the BNP of former premier Khaleda Zia, 78, who is under house arrest as a convict of graft charges, boycotted the polls. The BNP boycotted the 2014 election but joined the one in 2018.

The 27 political parties that contested the elections include the opposition Jatiya Party (JPA). The rest are members of the ruling Awami League-led coalition, which experts dub as "satellite parties." The BNP is observing a 48-hour nationwide general strike which began at 6 am on Saturday and will end at 6 am on Monday. It had called upon voters to shun the election to mark the beginning of an end of what it calls a "fascist government." (PTI)

## End of era of extremism

with the soil, water and air of this place. The chief minister also said that if Modi remained the Prime Minister of the country for another ten years then countries like America and China will be behind India. "The people of the country want Narendra Modi to become the Prime Minister of the country for the third time, India should become a world leader. Narendra Modi should be made the Prime Minister of India again to establish himself as a leader. He said," Sarma said. In his speech, the chief minister also mentioned the heritage and independence of Dhekiajuli. In the open meeting organised under the chairmanship of Santosh Jaiswal, president of the central committee of All Assam Kalwar Samaj, former deputy chief minister of Bihar State Tarkishore Jaiswal, Ashok Singhal, MLA of Dhekiajuli assembly constituency and cabinet minister of the state Government were also present.

## Army to train youths

While the first program was started in Dibrugarh in November last year, the second one will begin in Tamulpur on Monday. "There is a sizeable presence of youths from Assam in the lower ranks but officer-level personnel are very few. This program has been conceptualised by the Eastern Command of the Indian Army to motivate and enable talented students to join the armed forces as officers," he said.

Lt Gen (ret'd) Rana Pratap Kalita, who had retired as the head of the Eastern Command last month, had also earlier stressed on encouraging more youths from the state to join the armed forces in the officer cadre.

It will be a residential training programme to be held at the Army Station in Tamulpur, and two batches of students will be inducted this year. The next intake will be in April, the spokesperson said. "All students who qualify the written examination will be mentored for the next phase of selection by the Service Selection Board (SSB)," he said. Last week, the Army signed an agreement with NIEDO, which will conduct the training.

The students have been selected through an exhaustive selection process, which included written examinations and interviews. Lt Col Rawat said, "We are hopeful that these students will serve the nation through the armed forces," he added. NIEDO CEO Rohit Srivastava said, "The programme for the first batch in Dibrugarh under the 2nd Mountain Division started in November. And, this is the first batch of Tamulpur under the 107 Brigade of 21 Mountain Division. The students were chosen on the basis of merit with no reservation policy." He said that though the program is named 'Super 30', more than 30 students have been accommodated because of their excellent performance in the selection test. (PTI)

## Maldivian govt suspends

"derogatory remarks on social media platforms against foreign leaders and high-ranking individuals". "These opinions are personal and do not represent the views of the government of Maldives," it said in a statement, amidst uneasy relations between the Maldives and India after Mohamed Muizzu assumed charge as the new president in November. A row erupted on social media last week when a minister and some other leaders in the Maldives used derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Modi after he posted a video of him on a pristine beach in Lakshadweep.

The Maldivian government said it believes that the freedom of expression should be exercised in a democratic and responsible manner, and in ways that do not spread hatred, and negativity, and hinder close relationships between the Maldives and its international partners. It warned that relevant authorities of the Government will not hesitate to take action against those who make such derogatory remarks.

Former president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih condemned the use of "hateful language" against India by the Maldivian government officials on social media. "I condemn the use of hateful language against #India by Maldivian government officials on social media. India has always been a good friend to Maldives and we must not allow such callous remarks to negatively impact the age old friendship between our two countries," he said in a post on X. Earlier on Sunday, former president Mohamed Nasheed described the remarks as "appalling" and asked President Muizzu's government to distance itself from these comments. "What appalling language by Maldives Government official @shiuuna\_m towards the leader of a key ally, that is instrumental for Maldives' security and prosperity. @MMuizzu gov must distance itself from these comments and give clear assurance to India they do not reflect gov policy," he posted on X. Former Vice President Ahmed Adeb "strongly condemned" the derogatory and racist comments made by a group of Maldivian politicians towards prime minister Modi. "We established the Maldives tourism industry based on the principles of hospitality, tolerance, peace, and harmony. Through strategic positioning and collaborations with global brands and investments, including those from India, we have successfully positioned Maldives as a premier luxury resort destination," Adeb said. "I strongly condemn any derogatory and racist comments made by a group of Maldivian politicians towards His Excellency PM Modi @PMOIndia and beloved citizens of India," he added. He commended the Maldives Government for distancing itself from the views expressed by these officials and emphasizing that they do not reflect the government's position. "Considering the global economic challenges and the vulnerability of the Maldives tourism industry and economy, it is crucial for us to maintain a friendly and humble approach while fostering positive relations, with all nations," he posted on X. Maldives National Party in a post on X wrote that it "condemns racist and derogatory comments made by a government official" against a foreign leader. "This is unacceptable. We urge the government to take necessary action against those involved," it added. (PTI)

## Mizoram will continue to

that the Centre won't deport Myanmar nationals who sought refuge in the state since February 2021, until normalcy is restored in the neighbouring country, an official release said. The chief minister also expressed hope that the Centre will cancel the move to fence a portion of the India-Myanmar border. The Union government had recently said it plans to fence a 300-km stretch of unfenced boundary with Myanmar and end the free movement regime, which allows people living on both sides of the international border to travel within 16 km into each other's territory without visa. (PTI)

## Rajnath's UK visit 1st by

Honour and undertake visits to Mahatma Gandhi and Dr BR Ambedkar memorials in London. A community interaction with members of the Indian diaspora in the UK is also expected to be part of his three-day itinerary. "This visit is significant in terms of both optics and substance. In terms of the former, this is the first visit of India's defence minister to the UK in 22 years - the last visit was by then defence minister of a previous BJP-led government, George Fernandes, to London on 22 January 2002," said Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, senior fellow for South and Central Asian Defence, Strategy and Diplomacy at the London-based think tank International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). As a defence analyst who has been championing such a visit in his high-level discussions over the years, Roy-Chaudhury believes Singh's proposed visit next week indicates an improvement in India's political relationship and the building of trust with the UK following British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's visit to India for the G20 Summit in September last year.

"In substantive terms, the visit will seek to deepen military cooperation and defence industrial partnerships with the UK by building on the November 2023 Defence Consultative Group (DCG) meeting in Delhi at the level of Secretaries and the inaugural meeting of the 2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue at the level of Joint Secretaries in October 2023," he said. "The UK is no longer one of India's top five strategic partners. However, the resumption of a strong India-UK defence technological and industrial partnership could take place through the delivery of ongoing projects on aero-engines with Rolls-Royce; naval electric propulsion with GE (Naval) UK and Rolls-Royce; and ground-based air defence system with MBDA (UK)," he said. "Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is likely to visit one of these arms manufacturing sites during his visit to the UK," he noted. It will be a keenly watched visit, taking place against the backdrop of ongoing Indian concerns over pro-Khalistan violence in the UK as well as some contentious legacy issues on UK defence supplies to India. However, analysts believe with this opportunity for a dialogue at the ministerial level, the focus should be on the operationalisation of the Narendra Modi-led government's Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat agenda in the defence sector. An enhanced India-UK defence partnership dates back to the April 2022 Indian visit of former prime minister Boris Johnson, who announced the creation of an Open General Export Licence (OGEL) for India which the UK government said would "reduce bureaucracy" and help in "slashing delivery times for defence procurement". (PTI)



## Some people had issue with 'Animal' but box office proves nothing beyond love for movies: Ranbir

**MUMBAI, Jan 7:** Actor Ranbir Kapoor says some people may have issues with "Animals" but the box office success of his latest release proves that love for movies can conquer everything.

"Animal" is a crime action film that became one of the highest-grossing Hindi films of 2023 despite being labeled misogynistic and brutally violent by some viewers and critics.

The film is directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga and releases on December 1. It earned over \$9 billion globally.

Speaking at the success party of Animals on Saturday night, Ranbir Kapoor expressed his gratitude to the director for letting him be a part of his vision.

"I want to thank everyone for being here today to celebrate 'Animals.' It's a movie that some people had issues with, but I feel like the love, the success and the numbers (that it received) prove that. "Nothing can Beyond a love of movies. Nothing can top movies," the actor said

at the event.

The success celebration was attended by Reddy Vanga and Animals actors Anil Kapoor, Bobby Deol, Rashmika Mandanna, Triptii Dimri, Prem Chopra, Suresh Oberoi, Saurabh Sachdeva and Siddhant Karnick.

The director thanked the cast and crew of "Animals" for their contribution to the film's success against the backdrop of a troubled father-son relationship.

"Every character in the film is very special and compelling and it was made possible due to the hard work of everyone. Thank you to the producers, lyricists, musicians, thank you all," said the actor, who is famous for his previous film "Arjun Ray" said the controversial Reddy Vanga. " and "Kabir Singh."

Del, who plays the vicious mute gangster Abrar Haq, is one of the highlights of "Animals," and he credits Reddy Vanga for the film's success.

"It's all amazing. None of this would have been possible without Sandeep Reddy Vanga. He created this film with a strong vision," he said.

Dimri, who commented on the character of Rannvijay's mistress Zoya in the film, echoed Dell's sentiments.

"I would like to thank Mr. Sandeep from the bottom of my heart for giving me this opportunity and believing in me," she said.

Anil Kapoor calls heroine Mandana the "lucky mascot" of the film.

"Cinema is a director's medium. It's Sandeep's vision. Rashmika is the lucky mascot. 'Pushpa' and now 'The Animal', are always lucky. I told you Bobby, this Will change your life," he added.

Ranbir's wife actor Alia Bhatt, mother and actor Neetu Singh, father-in-law filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt, actors Vivek Oberoi, Radhika Madan and film producers Anis Bazmee and Farah Khan also attended the event. (PTI)

## LAUGH RE LAUGH THEATRE FEST

### Asrani, Padmini Kolhapure, Rakesh Bedi to tickle Delhiites' funny bone

**NEW DELHI, Jan 7:** Veteran actors Asrani, Padmini Kolhapure and Rakesh Bedi will come together to tickle the audiences' funny bone with comedy plays "Baap Ka Baap" and "Zamaana Kya Kahega?" here in the national capital, starting January 13.

The two plays, part of the "Laugh re Laugh Theatre Festival", will be held at Kamani Auditorium. It is organised by Kanupriya Theatre Company (KTC).

"The world today needs laughter and joy, and we wanted to start the year with an experienced stellar cast that can do just that. We aim to create not just a play, but a complete experience for our audience with dance, drama & comedy," said

Aakash Yaduvanshi, co-founder and co-director of KTC, in a statement.

While "Zamaana Kya Kahega?", a musical play interspersed with over 20 dance performances, is a romantic-comedy featuring Bedi and Delnaz Irani as the accidental lovers; "Baap Ka Baap" starring Asrani, Kolhapure, Naveen Bawa and Chitrashi Rawat is the story of emotional bonding between a loving father and his son.

"Zamaana Kya Kahega?" is a romantic comedy that takes place in 2007, a time where the newly-launched internet cafes play cupid in the love story of two strangers - Yash and Payal -- played by Bedi and Irani. This play has been suc-

cessfully performed over 50 times in Delhi-NCR.

On the other hand, "Baap Ka Baap" is the story of emotional bonding between Jawan, a loving father who raises his son Bacha single-handedly and sacrificing his own needs of companionship and love.

"Jawan's only ambition in life is to see his son getting married. However, fate has something different for them... Watch out how their moralities, social taboos, their love, their ambition, and their duty is challenged and rediscovered," read the description of the play.

The tickets, ranging from ₹ 450 to ₹ 3,000, are available for purchase on BookMyShow. (PTI)

## JAVED AKHTAR BELIEVES SUCCESS OF FILMS LIKE 'ANIMAL' IS 'DANGEROUS'

**MUMBAI, Jan 7:** In an apparent swipe at Sandeep Reddy Vanga's "Animal", veteran lyricist and writer Javed Akhtar has said that commercial success of films with problematic scenes is a "dangerous" trend.

The 78-year-old screenwriter expressed his concerns about the current state of cinema at the Ajanta Ellora International Film Festival in Aurangabad early this week. He, however, did not mention the name of "Animal".

"I believe it's a testing time for the young filmmakers today as to what kind of characters they want to create that the society will applaud. For instance, if there's a film in which a man asks a woman to lick his shoe or if a man says it's okay to slap a woman, and if the film is a super duper hit, then that's very dangerous," Akhtar said.

He was apparently referring to a key scene in "Animal", where the film's lead character Rannvijay (Ranbir Kapoor) asks his mistress Zoya (Triptii Dimri) to lick his shoes to prove her love for him.

While it has set the cash registers ringing, grossing close to Rs 900 crore globally, "Animal" has been labelled misogynistic and brutally violent by a section of viewers and critics.

The veteran screenwriter believes the onus is on the audiences today to decide which films to accept and reject.

"Nowadays, I

feel that a bigger responsibility is on the audiences than filmmakers. The audiences have to decide what kind of movies should be made, and what kind of films should not be made. Also, what kind of values and moralities should be shown in our films, what should we reject, that decision is in your hands. The ball is currently in the audience's court," he added.

Akhtar also said writers face a big challenge about the representation of a hero on celluloid.

"Today, the writers face a big challenge about what kind of a hero should be presented on screen. This confusion is there because there's a confusion in society itself. When society is clear about what is right and wrong, then you get great characters in a story. But when society is unable to understand what is right and what is wrong, then you can't create great characters," he said.

"There was a time when life was simple, rich people were considered bad, and the poor people were considered good. But today, we all have that thought in our head, 'Kaun Banega Crorepati?' Hence we can't make the rich people look bad since we ourselves want to be rich. So, who should we say bad? And we don't want to go jail either, we have a lot of constraints on us," he added. (PTI)

## 'Salaar: Part 1 - Ceasefire' to release in Japan

**HYDERABAD, Jan 7:** "Salaar: Part 1 - Ceasefire" is scheduled to hit Japanese theatres this summer, the makers have announced.

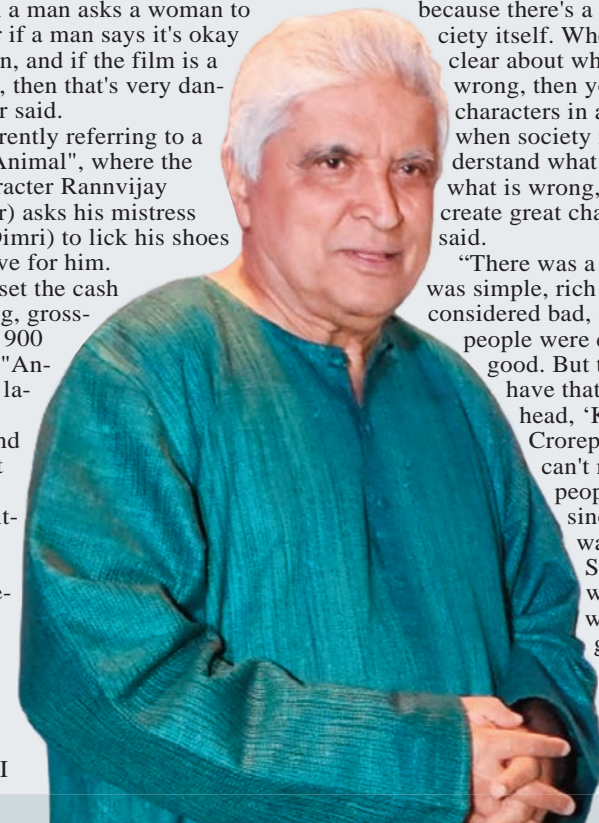
Directed by Prashanth Neel and produced by Hombale Films, the movie will be released in the island country by Japanese film distribution company Twin.

"#SalaarCeaseFire is coming to theatres across Japan this Summer. Release by @movietwin2," the makers said on the official X page of "Salaar" on Saturday.

It will also be released in Latin America in Spanish on March 7.

Starring Prabhas and Prithviraj Sukumaran in the lead, "Salaar: Part 1 - Ceasefire" released in Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi on December 22.

It has grossed Rs 650 crore at worldwide box office. Set in the fictional city of Khansaar, the film revolves around two friends Deva (Prabhas) and Vardha (Prithviraj). It also stars Shruti Haasan, Eshwari Rao, Jagapathi Babu and Sriya Reddy. (PTI)



## Was initially worried about my language skills: Vijay Sethupathi on finding acceptance in Bollywood

**MUMBAI, Jan 7:** Actor Vijay Sethupathi says he initially thought his career up north would be limited to a couple of films as he wasn't confident about his language skills, but little did the actor know that there was a new audience waiting to welcome him with open arms.

The 45-year-old actor, regarded as one of the dependable performers in both commercial and indie space in south cinema, is now among the most sought-after names in Hindi film industry following his roles in web series "Farzi" and Shah Rukh Khan-starrer "Jawan".

He made his Hindi film debut with 2023 movie "Mumbaikar", directed by Santosh Sivan, and then signed Zee Studios' silent feature "Gandhi Talks".

"It is a huge blessing and I didn't expect

this. I didn't have this much confidence. I was worried about my language (skills). When they approached me for 'Mumbaikar' or 'Gandhi Talks', I was like I'm going to do only that and it's not going to be many films," Sethupathi told PTI in an interview here.

"Then 'Farzi' and 'Jawan' came. So, it was really surprising for me. I didn't expect that they would give me so much love. I'm grateful for the love," he added.

Many of Sethupathi's films such as "Pizza", "96", "Vikram Vedha", "Master" and Malayalam movie "Super Deluxe" had already found audience in the North, but when he started doing Hindi projects, the actor said he was worried he will be trolled for his accent in Raj Nimomoru and Krishna DK's "Farzi" in which he played a Special Task

Force officer named Michael Vedanayagam.

"I thought people would troll me for my Hindi. I remember I would ask Chesta (Goswami, assistant director of 'Farzi'), 'Will they troll me?' She was like, 'They will like you'. They liked my gaalis (abuses). Once people connect with you, they connect."

The National Award winner credited the flurry of film offers from Bollywood filmmakers to fans.

"They created this energy and that energy went to so many directors and writers who thought they needed this person to play this role. It's a mass energy that made writers think of me," he said.

Sethupathi will next appear in Sriram Raghavan's "Merry Christmas", where the actor plays the lead role opposite Katrina Kaif. The thriller is set to release in theatres

on January 12.

The actor said he was excited when he received the offer to work with Raghavan as he liked the filmmaker's earlier movies "Ek Hasina Thi", "Badlapur" and "Andhadhun". "About seven years ago, one of my friends gave me a DVD of 'Ek Hasina Thi' and recommended that I watch the film. I saw the film and it was very nice," he recalled.

After watching Raghavan's 2015 neo-noir action-thriller "Badlapur", Sethupathi said he hoped the movie would be remade in Tamil where he would play Nawazuddin Siddiqui's character.

"I had watched 'Badlapur' in a theatre, and I thought somebody will remake that film in Tamil and I'll get to play Nawazuddin's role. Later, I met him (Raghavan) in Melbourne. I saw 'Andhadhun' and I didn't expect that I'll

get a chance to work with him. It was really a wonderful and most memorable experience that I've had."

"Merry Christmas" is set over the course of one night and follows the story of two strangers.

"I didn't have any expectations. I just wanted to work with this man (Raghavan) because I love his craft. After I met and spent so many days with him, I love him as a person also. The respect became so high," the actor added.

In the film, Sethupathi plays the role of Albert, a character he described as a "nice and innocent man".

"He is just searching for love in his life. He fought with his fate and finally, he won," he said. "Merry Christmas" is presented by Tips Films and Matchbox Pictures. (PTI)

THE CURRENT GENERATION HAS MORE FACILITIES AND OPTIONS IN SPORTS

# NEW GENERATION OF ATHLETES IS NOT HUNGRY ENOUGH, SAYS MARY KOM

MUMBAI, Jan 7: Six-time world champion boxer MC Mary Kom feels the new generation of athletes is not hungry enough like her to achieve success and gets satisfied with just one big achievement.

The Olympic bronze medalist also said that she is "super fit" at 41 years of age and hungry to "achieve more and more".

"I will fight (on), that fighting spirit only Mary Kom has... I have that something unique from other sports stars," Mary Kom, who has not ruled out turning pro in the coming years, said during an event on Saturday.

"I am 41 years (old), I cannot fight any international (amateur) competition from this year because there is that age limit. But I want to continue for one, two or three years," she said.

Mary Kom added that the current generation, despite having more facilities and options in sports as compared to when she



took up boxing, is not hungry enough.

"I am super fit, I want to achieve more and more, that hunger I have. This young generation, they (become) one (time) champion and finished, they are satisfied, (they) settle down. This is the difference," she said.

"If, like me, they have that spirit and that hunger, we will have so many medals in our country," Mary Kom added.

Incidentally, India returned with the richest-ever haul of 107 medals from the Asian Games in Hangzhou last year with many athletes winning multiple medals.

Mary Kom said she was pleased with the rise in number of young women taking up boxing.

"My hard work has paid off and now there are so many Mary Kom's coming up. I feel so proud to be a girl, a mother, an Indian... so many are following

my footsteps," she said.

The boxing icon added that while training and right kind of guidance was crucial for young athletes, hunger and inner drive is what makes the difference.

"Training is tough. Inner hunger and drive are most important. Now, facilities are better. In 2001 when I started my career, no one knew women in boxing," she said.

Mary Kom opined it requires a lot more determination to clinch a medal in individual sport compared to team events.

"(In) football, cricket and basketball (you) still have a chance... in individual sport, you lose and finish in one second. It comes from inside, chahе kuch bhi ho jaye medal lena hai (you have to win a medal irrespective of what happens). If you're not willing, (nothing) can happen," she added. (PTI)

*Puducherry in command against Delhi in Ranji Trophy*



NEW DELHI, Jan 7: Pacer Gaurav Yadav ripped through the Delhi batting line-up with a seven-wicket haul in a devastating spell as Puducherry shot the home side out for 148 on the second day of their Ranji Trophy Group D match here on Saturday.

In reply, Puducherry were 113 for 2 in 29 overs at close of play with Paras Ratnaparkhe and Paras Dogra batting on 31 and 18 respectively.

Senior pacer Ishant Sharma and Himanshu Chauhan took a wicket apiece for Delhi.

Puducherry trailed by 35 runs with eight first-innings wickets in hand.

Earlier in the day, Gaurav Yadav added five more wickets to his overnight two as he almost single-handedly decimated the Delhi batting line-up. Abin Mathew took two wickets while Saurabh Yadav got one. Harsh Tyagi top-scored for Delhi with a 49-ball 34.

On the opening day on Friday, only 19 overs could be possible due to poor visibility arising out of fog and haze, with the home side being reduced to 40 for 4.

On Saturday, 72.5 overs were bowled.

Brief Scores: Delhi 148 all out in 62.5 overs (Harsh Tyagi 34; Gaurav Yadav 7/49) vs Puducherry 113 for 2 in 29 overs (Paras Ratnaparkhe 31 batting; Ishant Sharma 1/28).

In Dehradun: Madhya Pradesh 323 all out in 109.3 overs (Saransh Jain 100, Venkatesh Iyer 89; Swapnil Singh 4/56) vs Uttarakhand 170 for 6 in 68 overs (Dikshanshu Negi 44 batting; Kumar Kartikeya 4/51).

In Jammu: Jammu and Kashmir 100 vs Himachal Pradesh 109 for 1 in 26.3 overs (Prashant Chopra 48 batting).

In Vadodara: Baroda 351 all out in 96.5 overs (Mitesh Patel 116, Atit Sheth 57; Rajesh Mohanty 4/74) and 43 for 1 in 13 overs vs Odisha 178 all out in 58.2 overs (Govinda Poddar 68; Atit Sheth 3/50). (PTI)

## ASPL final: KAMSFC to take on United Chirang Duar FC today

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 7: The stage is set for the final showdown of the Assam State Premier League (ASPL) - 2023-24 of the Assam Football Association (AFA) here at Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) stadium on January 8. Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC (KAMSFC), 2015 ASPL defending champion will clash with United Chirang Duar FC. In the first semi final KAMSFC defeated Dima United FC with 5-2, and in the second semi final United Chirang Duar FC defeated Eleven Star Club with 2-0.

The final match is expected to be witness by a host of dignitaries including Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma; HAD Minister Jugen Mohan; State Sports Minister Nandita Garlosa; Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang; CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region Promod Boro; president of All India Football Federation (AIFA), Kalyan Chaube; MLA and president, AFA, Nobo Kumar Doley and secretary Dr. Sangrang Brahma.

onship.

"As the ASPL is the biggest football fair in Assam hosted by AFA and the final match will be witnessed by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, HAD Minister Jugen Mohan; State Sports Minister Nandita Garlosa, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang; CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region Promod Boro; president of All India Football Federation (AIFA), Kalyan Chaube; MLA and president, AFA, Nobo Kumar Doley and secretary Dr. Sangrang Brahma."

He further said, "We appealed to all football lovers and KAMSFC fans to come and support and cheer for the Club. As the support of fans is the strength for the club."

Gate will be open from 3 pm. The kick off time is 5 pm, he informed me.

Former secretary, KAMSFC, George Rongpi said local boys are given priority. Local players like Harbamon Timung, Tenson Tisso and Gogen Hanse are playing for the Club.

Assistant Coach, Horen Ingti Kathar said the KAMSFC has already become league champion by securing at the top of the points table. The club is now qualified for 3rd division of I-League. But it is also important for the club to win the final to be crowned for the ASPL championship.



## In or Out: Rohit, Virat T20 selection dilemma continues

CAPE TOWN, Jan 7: Their eyes trained on the big-ticket T20 World Cup in the Americas in June, the national selectors aren't finding it easy to pick just one among Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for the upcoming Afghanistan series.

As of now, there are chances that both the stalwarts will be kept in the squad but possibly with a rider that form during the IPL will be the main parameter for selection in the T20 World Cup team.

Another round of discussions could take place, and it could be the BCCI bigwigs taking the final call. Chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar had flown into South Africa during the second Test to talk to the two veterans, and both have made themselves available. But there are too many external factors, and eventually, the BCCI's all-powerful secretary Jay Shah might be required to take a decision.



There are only five days to go for the first T20I against the visiting Afghanistan and the BCCI is yet to announce the squad for the three-match series starting January 11. Agarkar has left for India and possibly the squad will be announced once he is back, in next 24 to 48 hours. It is understood that the team's balance could be an

issue if both Rohit and Kohli are included in the playing XI.

"If you have Rohit, Shubman Gill, Virat, Suryakumar Yadav and Hardik constituting your top five then where is your left-hander? Now, let's assume you drop Kohli and play Gill at No.3 with Yashasvi Jaiswal opening with Rohit. Can Ajit take that bold call,"

a former national selector told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

If the selectors include both Rohit and Kohli, the two people who would miss out are Ruturaj Gaikwad and Ishan Kishan, the latter being a left-handed keeper-batter and a top-order batting option. Having both Rohit and Kohli also means that the think tank plays Jitesh Sharma as the keeper besides including Rinku Singh. In that case, one can only fit in five bowlers with Hardik Pandya (after he is back from his injury layoff) needing to bowl four overs in each game. "The flexibility will always be an issue but there would always be external factors that need to be countered. Did you see ICC promoting the tourney with Kohli's giant billboard video in New York. MI handle put that aerial advert of Rohit and Shaheen Shah Afridi. So there will be external pressure," a former BCCI official bearer said. (PTI)

## In South Africa, fuller length doesn't work: Mukesh

CAPE TOWN, Jan 7: He should have played ahead of Shardul Thakur and Prasidh Krishna in the Test series opener against South Africa but when Mukesh Kumar finally got his chance at Newlands, the Indian team realised what exactly it missed during the mauling in Centurion.

While the seasoned duo of Mohammed Siraj (7 wickets) and Jasprit Bumrah (8 wickets) did the bulk of the damage, Mukesh was the ideal third seamer with four wickets in the second Test, which included two top-order dismissals in the second innings.

He was bowling slightly back of length but was still able to



move the ball late.

"I think I have been able to fulfil the role assigned by the team management. I am satisfied with my bowling and best part is that I have worked hard and tried my best," Mukesh told reporters about his performance during India's series-leveling win.

A smart operator, Mukesh had quickly realised that despite being comparatively lesser in terms of pace generated by the two senior speedsters, he can't bowl too full on South African tracks.

"There's a lot of difference between bowling on these kind of tracks compared to Indian pitches," said Mukesh.

He elaborated his strategy. "In India, when you try to bowl fuller length the ball moves in the air, but here, if you try to bowl too full, you get smashed."

"So we decided that we will bowl between 6 to 8 metre length (back of length). And since there is lot of bounce on offer you can get wickets." (PTI)

## IOA cannot exercise control over WFI; UWW should lift ban: WFI chief tells world body chief Lalovic

NEW DELHI, Jan 7: The WFI has reminded United World Wrestling that as per the international body's rules and the IOC charter, the Indian Olympic Association "cannot exercise any control" on the newly-elected body, and asked the UWW to immediately lift the provisional suspension it imposed in August last year.

The newly-elected Wrestling Federation of India chief Sanjay Singh, whose body was suspended by the sports ministry three days after it came to power and an IOA ad-hoc panel was re-instituted to run the sport, in his letter to UWW president Nenad Lalovic has also said that any influence by the IOA in wrestling should be deemed "illegal" by UWW.

"Pursuant to the election, the newly-elected body has taken charge of the WFI and is managing its affairs, and we await the lifting of the provisional suspension imposed by the UWW," said Sanjay Singh in his letter to Lalovic on Friday, a copy of which is with PTI.

"We understand that we continue to be an affiliated member of the UWW. However, there is a provisional suspension imposed by the UWW which was to be vacated after holding of the elections of the WFI as mentioned in your letter dated 23rd August 2023."

Sanjay, who won the polls on December 21 by a huge margin, also drew UWW's attention to a Delhi High Court order which prohibits IOA's interference in the affairs of the National Sports Federations.

"We would also like to draw your attention to a judgment of the High Court of Delhi against the

IOA which was passed on 16th August 2023, which stated that the IOA cannot exercise any control of authority over a National Sports Federation. Any influence by the IOA would be illegal, NSF's are independent entities."

Sanjay, a close associate of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, also pointed out that when the Indian courts, the UWW rules and the Olympic charter all profess autonomy of NSF's how could the IOA breach those rules.

"As can be seen whether it's the Courts in India, the UWW rules or the Olympic Charter, all three mandate the autonomy of the NSF's and the IOA even otherwise cannot be any controlling factor to accept or reject an election of a NSF which would be as per its own constitution."

"Hence, we request you to accept the elections of the WFI as has been done in the past many decades by the UWW and lift the provisional suspension of the WFI. The IOA also does not and cannot approve any election of any other NSF in India as well. It would not be fair to put the WFI as an exception for something that is not even legally correct," he added.

He said the elections were held in a free and fair manner under the directives of the Supreme Court and the IOA was notified at every step.

"All this (elections) was done transparently and the IOA was well aware of the entire process as the same was being done from the office of the IOA only. All successful candidates were also issued due certificates of election by the Returning Officer," he said. (PTI)

The Union Minister met athletes at the 'Khelo India Women's Kickboxing League' in Dibrugarh

## TOPS scheme has boosted stellar performance by Indian athletes: Sonowal

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Jan 7: The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush, Sarbananda Sonowal visited the ongoing 'Khelo India Women's Kickboxing League' in Dibrugarh on Sunday where he interacted with the participating athletes and wished them success. The minister also spoke on the occasion to encourage sports towards attaining a fit body and mind.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal said, "Sports as a discipline has got a tremendous boost under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The whole country enjoys a conducive environment for the players and athletes to play sports and excel at it. Thanks to



the rejig in the policy framework, the athletes found a springboard to use for better performance. Schemes like TOPS has delivered stellar per-

formance by Indian athletes at the top global sporting events like Olympics, Asian Games, World Championships among others. Today, we take pride in

our sports, as the athletes deliver a truly inspiring performance that is at par global standard. It was not easy to overcome years of neglect that sports endured under successive Congress governments who gave minimum to no attention to uplift or upgrade the sporting arena in the country.

Under the inspiring leadership of Prime Minister this has now become a thing of past as talent from all across the country are being provided avenues to prove their mettle and deliver inspiring performance for their country." Adding further on the women power in sports, Sarbananda Sonowal said, "It is indeed a matter of great pride for all of us, as countrymen, to witness stellar performances from the women of India in the sport-

ing arena. The indomitable mental strength, display of fighting spirit and delivery of excellence in various sports has been inspiring everyone. The tremendous potential of Nari Shakti has been underlined for greater exposure in multiple fields including sports."

"Today, girls from interior parts of India are delivering world class performances bringing laurels for the country. I am happy to interact with the players at the ongoing Khelo India Women's kickboxing league here today where the girls exuded confidence to deliver top class performance and add positively to the initiative by Modi ji to enable 'Nari Shakti' to become a solid force of reckoning in the nation building towards a new Bharat."



Government of Assam

জনেগাৰ চৰকাৰ  
my GOV  
मेरी सरकार



## New Impetus to Growth in **KARBI ANGLONG**

### INAUGURATION OF NEW PROJECTS

Total Project Cost

**₹168  
Cr**



**Chief Guest**  
**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam

### THE PROJECTS

	<b>Extension of Kajir Ronghangpi VIP Guest House</b> Taralangso, Diphu	<b>₹557</b> lakh
	<b>Sertalin Auditorium with 3000 seating capacity</b> Taralangso, Diphu	<b>₹3,500</b> lakh
	<b>Beautification of Langkung Phang Fishery</b> Taralangso, Diphu	<b>₹255</b> lakh
	<b>Rangsina Sarpo Ahongjai Permanent Open stage</b> Taralangso, Diphu	<b>₹550</b> lakh
	<b>Beautification of Kuleng Abi Fishery</b> Taralangso, Diphu	<b>₹200</b> lakh
	<b>Construction of Rongbong Artu, Karbi Capital Complex</b> Taralangso, Diphu	<b>₹686</b> lakh
	<b>Landscaping and Beautification of Karbi People's Hall, Taralangso</b> Nothengpi and Helipad	<b>₹378</b> lakh
	<b>Construction of Cheleng Athepai in memory of Jirlong Ariso</b> Taralangso, Diphu	<b>₹422</b> lakh
	<b>Sing Mirjeng VIP Gallery</b> Taralangso, Diphu	<b>₹99</b> lakh
	<b>New Market Complex at Rongkhelan</b> Rongkhelan, Diphu	<b>₹1000</b> lakh
	<b>Sarsing Teron Langkung Habe Multi-purpose Sports complex</b> KASA Stadium, Diphu	<b>₹7500</b> lakh
	<b>Construction of Song Bey Inter-state Bus Terminus</b> DM Road, Diphu	<b>₹1200</b> lakh
	<b>Construction of Truck Terminus</b> Diphu, Near Cremation Ground	<b>₹500</b> lakh

In august presence of  
**Shri Tuliram Ronghang**  
CEM, KAAC



**Taralangso, Diphu**  
**8 January 2024**  
**11 AM**

