

6 WORLD ● Blinken in Israel looks to planning for post-war Gaza ● PM Hasina pays homage to Bangabandhu after election victory 7 REGION ● Over 1138 members join UPPL in Kumarikata ● ULFA peace deal expected to boost state's economy: Sonari MLA

Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee Honouring the skills of Vishwakarma brothers and sisters Collateral-free loan of up to ₹3 lakh under PM Vishwakarma, 18 traditional trades included Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

Present situation in Manipur could have been avoided: CM

'I have to protect and implement the Constitution, which is my responsibility'

IMPHAL, Jan 9: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday said that the present situation in the state could have been avoided had there been no problem of narcotics and illegal immigrants. Singh said that he will resign if the government measures against the use of drugs and its campaigns against the influx of unauthorised immigrants to contain the situation in the state are found to be unconstitutional. The chief minister, who was speaking at a programme held on the 190th death anniversary of Manipuri ruler Maharaja Gambhir Singh, said out of the state's 30 lakh population, 1.5 lakh youths are addicts. "The war on drugs was declared (by the state government) to save the present and future generations. If there were no drugs, no poppy cultivation and no illegal immigration the present situation would not have occurred. "Out of a population of just 30 lakhs(in the state), 1.5 lakh of youth are affected by drugs. The state gets less rainfall



due to deforestation for poppy cultivation and water bodies have dried up," he said. Singh continued, "What exactly was the fault and unconstitutional act of the Manipur government which led to the attacks and burning houses of ordinary people? If there was anything that was unconstitutional in the government act against drugs and campaign against the influx of illegal immigrants I will immediately resign. I have to protect and implement the

and symposiums to discuss social issues and history of the state. In Manipur around 15,496 acres are under poppy cultivation, according to official figure. The state has 398 km of international border with Myanmar, much of which is unfenced and porous. More than 2000 illegal immigrants were identified in 2023. The state is being rocked by ethnic violence since May 3 last year when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for ST status. More than 180 people have been killed and several hundreds injured in it. The chief minister later posted on X that Maharaja Gambhir Singh protected Manipur by launching a war against Burmese invaders. "Due to his sacrifices, our generation continues to flourish today with dignity and pride ... "Let us draw inspiration from his courage & patriotism and work towards further protecting the nation," he wrote. (PTI)

Tripura CM initiates effort to include Kokborok in Roman Script for CBSE exams

AGARTALA, Jan 9: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Tuesday said his government will write to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) urging it to allow students to write Kokborok papers in Roman script. He gave the assurance while replying to leader of opposition Animesh Debbarma's demand for the government's stand on the introduction of Roman script for Kokborok, the major tribal language in the state, during Zero Hour in the assembly. Currently, Kokborok in Bengali script is taught in state government educational institutions, including 97 Vidyajyoti schools in which CBSE curriculum has been introduced. Around 5,000 students who have studied in various English medium schools are facing problems in the CBSE examinations as they did not learn Bengali, Debbarma said. The CM, who also holds the education portfolio, said the government has already constituted a three-member committee led by



former MLA Atul Debbarma to look into the matter of selection of script for Kokborok. "Let the committee submit its findings, then we will take a decision on the script for Kokborok," he said, adding that the state lacks books in Roman script as well as trained teachers for preparing questions and evaluating answers in the script. However, the opposition leader, who was not satisfied with the

CM's reply, said the CBSE, which is set to start its examination from February 15, will not wait till the committee submits its report. "Therefore, I urge the chief minister to write a letter to the CBSE for allowing Roman script for Kokborok," he said. Saha then assured the assembly that the government will write to the CBSE, requesting it to allow students of Kokborok to write their answers (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Active covid cases in country recorded at 3,919

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: India has logged 475 new cases of covid, while the number of active cases of the infection stood at 3,919, the health ministry said on Tuesday. Six deaths -- three from Karnataka, two from Chhattisgarh and one from Assam -- have been reported in a span of 24 hours, according to the ministry's data updated at 8 am. The number of daily cases had dropped to double-digits till December 5, 2023 but cases began to increase after emergence of a new variant and cold weather conditions. After December 5, 841 new cases were reported on December 31, 2023 which was 0.2 per cent of the peak cases reported in May 2021, official sources said. Of the total active cases, a large majority of these (around 92 per cent) are recovering under home isolation. "The currently available data suggests that the JN.1 variant is

neither leading to an exponential rise in the new cases nor a surge in the hospitalisation and mortality," the sources stated. India has witnessed three waves of Covid-19 in the past with the peak incidence of daily new cases and deaths being reported during the Delta wave in April-June 2021. At its peak, 4,14,188 new cases and 3,915 deaths were reported on May 7, 2021. Since the pandemic began in early 2020, more than 4.5 crore people have got infected and over 5.3 lakh have died since then across the country. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease stands at over 4.4 crore with a national recovery rate of 98.81 per cent, according to the ministry's website. According to the website, 220.67 crore doses of covid vaccines have so far been administered in the country. (PTI)

Manipur NGOs meet Congress leader Jairam Ramesh

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: In a pivotal development on Tuesday, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh convened a crucial meeting with representatives from NGOs in Manipur, advocates for reconciliation and peace in the strife-ridden state. Boipuo Koirang and L Pishak Singh, who represent the United NGOs Mission-Manipur, a consortium encompassing 103 grassroots organisations across the state, engaged in discussions with Ramesh during the meet. Addressing the pressing need for reconciliation and dialogue among diverse sections of Manipuri society, Ramesh took to social media platform X to share insights from the meeting. The Congress leader emphasised the urgency of these initiatives in promoting unity and understanding. "Boipuo Koirang and L. Pishak Singh representing United NGOs Mission-Manipur, a consortium of 103 grassroots organisations across the state met me this afternoon. They underscored the urgency of initiating the reconciliation and dialogue (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

₹ 100 cr drugs seized, 4 arrested in Assam

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: In the biggest drug haul in Assam different types of the contraband valued at over ₹ 100 crore was recovered in Karimganj district in the southern tip of the state on Tuesday and four peddlers were arrested, the police said. The operation was conducted jointly by the special task force of Assam police and Karimganj district police. The drugs were brought into Assam from Mizoram and three persons from that state were among the four arrested, the police said. "This is probably the largest drug seizure in eastern India in terms of market value. The drugs confiscated is worth at least ₹ 100 crore in the market," STF deputy inspector general Parthasarathi Mahanta told PTI. He was quick to add that prices of narcotics have gone up due to continuous and effective operations and aggressive actions by Assam Police. Asked about details of the operation, Mahanta said "We got an input about movement of drugs from Mizoram and initiated the operation. We intercepted a car bearing Mizoram registration plate at Suprakandi under Nilambazar police station (in Karimganj) at around 2.15 pm on Tuesday." The police team searched the vehicle and recovered 5.1 kg of heroin, 64,000 Yaba tablets and four packets of foreign cigarettes concealed inside the side body panels of its trunk, he added. Among the four arrested is a woman from Mizoram. She along with two others apprehended had from Thenzawl in Mizoram, while the fourth in an inhabitant of Karimganj itself, the DIG said. Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in his post on 'X' lauded the Assam Police and termed it the biggest drug haul in the state. Reacting to Sarma's appreciation, Assam director general of police Gyanendra Pratap Singh said, "Grateful for the appreciation and recognition Sir. Our commitment to fulfil your resolve of a drug free Assam is unwavering." (PTI)

13th NC Hills Council election concludes with 85.78 per cent voter turnout

HT Correspondent HAF LONG, Jan 9: The recently held elections in Dima Hasao district for the 13th NC Hill Autonomous Council witnessed enthusiastic participation with 87 candidates in the fray and a substantial 85.78 per cent voter turnout. Notably, 1-Haflong constituency reported the lowest turnout at 75.51 per cent. Despite the serene polling atmosphere, no untoward incidents were reported as of the latest update. Some polling stations experienced delays, leading to an extension of polling time. A total of 1,11,645 voters exercised their democratic right during the 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM polling window. The BJP gained an early advantage by fielding 28 candidates, securing victory in 6 seats uncontested. The INC contested with 24 candidates, TMC with 11, AAP with 5, and the remaining 27 were independent candidates. Out of the 28 seats, the election covered 22, exclud-



ing the 6 constituencies without a contest. The polling process involved 280 stations, categorised as 22 very sensitive, 92 sensitive, and the rest considered comprehensively safe. Rigorous security measures, including CCTV cameras and micro-observers, were implemented in highly sensitive stations, while sensitive stations had micro-observers accompanied by videographers and security teams from both central and state police. All ballot boxes have

Assam Budget for FY'25 to be tabled on Feb 12

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: The Assam budget for 2024-25 will be presented by finance minister Ajanta Neog on February 12, an official said on Tuesday. The third Budget Session of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma-led Assam government will begin from February 5. The Assam Legislative Assembly has issued a notification calling the sitting of the House at 9:30 am on February 5. When contacted, Assam Assembly principal secretary Hemen Das told PTI that the Budget Session will conclude on February 28 and it will have a five-day break for sittings of the Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs). "The annual budget for next fiscal will be presented on February 12," he added. The Assam Cabinet on November 16 last year had recommended holding the Budget Session of the present Assembly from February 5 to present the state's financial statement for the 2024-25 fiscal. (PTI)

KSA's two-day convention and unity rally stir controversy

DIPHU, Jan 9: The central committee of the Karbi Students Association (KSA) on Tuesday organised a two-day convention and a Student's and Youth Unity rally at Diphu Club on January 8 and 9. Sumit Timung, the general secretary of the KSA central committee, explained that the convention aimed to establish a new body as the existing one had expired per the adhoc committee's mandate. Timung said that the adhoc committee, formed on February 9, 2022, was given a six-month extension to manage the KSA central committee. "However, the term of the adhoc committee expired, necessitating the formation of a new body as the KSA central committee faced a constitutional void," he added. The convention concluded with the dissolution of the present body and the induction of 18 new members into the new body. Jensung Timung was appointed as president, and Sumit Timung was re-appointed as general secretary. However, tensions arose as Timung accused KSA president



Thomson Rongpi of leading the association in a disorderly direction. Later, a Student's and Youth Unity rally in the evening saw participation from various figures, including CPI(ML) general secretary Robi Kumar Phangcho, KNCA general secretary Protima Engphi, KSA former adviser Among Engti, and general secretary Sumit Timung, alongside president Jensung Timung. In response, a press conference held by KSA president Thomson Rongpi and adviser Laichan Englung clarified that the KSA Convention and Unity rally were not organised by KSA. Instead, they asserted (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

'It is not only a means of involving citizens but also to bind the entire country' Northeast being cited as example of Modi's development model: Jitendra Singh

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's governance reforms have helped in "mainstreaming" the Northeast, which is now being cited as an example of his development model, Union minister Jitendra Singh said on Tuesday. Addressing the regional conference organised by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) in Guwahati, he said that path-breaking decisions were taken by the Modi government for the development of the Northeast and the impact of those were now visible in the quality of life of the people of



the region. "The reforms were brought in by the central government for ease of governance and ease of delivery of service. Northeast today is being cited as an example of Modi's development model," said

Singh, the MoS for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. "Mainstreaming has to happen at the level of thoughts and best practices with the best example being the Swachhata campaign when ₹ 1,162 crore was raised by just selling garbage, which brought positive changes across the country," he added. Singh said several districts of the region have received the PM's Award for excellence. The two-day conference was organised on e-governance. Singh also spoke on the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Modi inaugurates Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show

A total of 20 countries are participating in the show

GANDHINAGAR, Jan 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday inaugurated the Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show 2024 on the eve of the main summit.

The show is an exhibition spread across 2 lakh square metres in multiple halls at the Helipad Ground Exhibition Centre here.

A total of 20 countries are participating in the show, which was inaugurated ahead of the tenth edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit. The summit will also be inaugurated by the prime minister.

Modi, who is on a three-day visit to his home state, arrived at the venue at 3 pm and undertook a tour of stalls with Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and other dignitaries.

Students from local colleges were present in large numbers to



greet the PM and other officials at the inauguration.

Earlier in the day, the PM met heads of states and senior officials from Mozambique, Timor, Timor-Leste at the Mahatma Gandhi Mandir, which will also host the main summit.

He also held meetings with

global CEOs, including Sanjay Mehrotra of Micron, DP World's chairman Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem, Toshihiro Suzuki, senior officials from Deakin University, Vincent Clerc of AP Moller Maersk.

The trade show will be open for business on Wednesday and Thurs-

day, and then for the general public for two more days.

Australia, Tanzania, Morocco, Mozambique, South Korea, Thailand, Estonia, Bangladesh, Singapore, UAE (United Arab Emirates), UK, Germany, Norway, Finland, Netherlands, Russia, Rwanda, Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam will present information about their industries at the exhibition. It has 1,000 exhibitors specifically from the research sector. The show also consists of 13 halls dedicated to an equal number of themes such as 13 different themes, including 'Make in Gujarat' and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

Women empowerment, MSME development, new technology, green and smart infrastructure, sustainable energy are the special focus areas for the show. (PTI)

Market rebound loses steam in fag-end trade

Sensex, Nifty eke out slim gains

MUMBAI, Jan 9: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty on Tuesday closed moderately higher after a fag-end sell-off minimised the handsome gains posted in early trading.

Besides, investors opted for profit-taking ahead of the start of corporate earnings season and macroeconomic data announcements later this week, traders said. After rising sharply during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex trimmed most of the gains during the fag-end trading and ended marginally higher by 30.99 points or 0.04 per cent at 71,386.21. During the day, it jumped 680.25 points or 0.95 per cent to 72,035.47.

The Nifty also gave up most of the intra-day gains and closed 31.85 points or 0.15 per cent up at 21,544.85. During the day, it climbed 211.45 points or 0.98 per cent to 21,724.45.

"Markets witnessed a roller coaster ride on Tuesday and ended almost flat, in continuation to the prevailing consolidation phase. Firm global cues triggered a gap-up start in Nifty, which further strengthened with renewed buying in select heavyweights however a sharp cut in the latter half trimmed the gains," said Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd. Larsen & Toubro was the biggest gainer on the Sensex chart, rising 1.55 per cent, followed by Bharti

Airtel, HCL Tech, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma and Tata Steel.

On the other hand, Nestle, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.37 per cent, and the midcap index rose 0.07 per cent.

Among the sectoral indices, realty jumped 2.52 per cent, power rallied 1.10 per cent, auto (1.02 per cent), healthcare (0.90 per cent), capital goods (0.89 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.68 per cent).

In contrast, FMCG, telecommunication, bank and consumer durables were the losers.

"Positive sentiments in the Indian IT sector, fuelled by a US tech rally and demand on emerging technologies, overshadowed the anticipated muted Q3 results of the sector."

"Market optimism about potential softening of US inflation is driving expectations of near-term rate cuts, bolstering overall sentiment. But in-between profit-taking is emerging due to mixed cues from Asian markets as well as high valuation concerns," said Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services. (PTI)

Airtel partners with Adani Energy Solutions

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Airtel Business, the business-to-business (B2B) division of Bharti Airtel, has announced a strategic collaboration with Adani Energy Solutions Limited (AESL) to facilitate the deployment of over 20 million smart meters. The partnership aims to leverage Airtel's robust nationwide communications network and transformative smart metering solutions to enhance the efficiency and digitization of the power sector.

Airtel Business will be responsible for delivering reliable and secure connectivity across AESL's smart meter deployments, utilizing technologies such as Narrowband Internet of Things (NB-IoT), 4G, and 2G. These technologies will ensure real-time connectivity and seamless transfer of critical data between smart meters and headend applications. The solution will also integrate Airtel's Internet of Things (IoT) platform, known as 'Airtel IoT Hub,' providing advanced analytics, diagnostic capabilities, and real-time insights. This empowers consumers with enhanced control over their energy consumption.

Adani Energy Solutions currently holds an order book exceeding 20 million smart meters from power utilities in Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Uttarakhand.

The collaboration with Airtel is expected to play a pivotal role in supporting the digitization efforts of the power sector under India's ambitious Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS).

Ganesh Lakshminarayanan, CEO of Airtel Business (India), expressed the significance of smart metering in India's policy reform measures, emphasizing their role as critical building blocks for smart grids and fundamental enablers for the digitalization of the power sector. Airtel anticipates that its NB-IoT technology will play a crucial role in connecting and managing smart

meters at scale, ensuring enhanced coverage, reliability, and security.

Kandarp Patel, CEO of Adani Energy Solutions Ltd., highlighted the transformative impact of India's RDSS on power delivery.

He emphasized that the partnership with Airtel marks a crucial step toward achieving a smarter and more efficient grid.

The collaboration harnesses the synergies between AESL's domain expertise in the Transmission and Distribution (T&D) sector and Airtel's extensive nationwide network, along with a comprehensive suite of IoT offerings, including NB-IoT and 4G LTE.

This powerful combination is expected to enable the seamless deployment of the current order book of over 20 million smart meters across India, providing consumers with real-time consumption data and control while simultaneously reducing inefficiencies in the distribution network.

PFC gets RBI's nod to set up finance company in GIFT City

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Power Finance Corporation (PFC) on Tuesday received approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to set up a wholly-owned finance company in the GIFT City in Gujarat.

The entity at the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) will present new business opportunities for PFC and contribute to the growth of the country's power sector. PFC Chairman and Managing Director Parminder Chopra said in a statement.

According to a regulatory filing, PFC is in receipt of the no objection letter from the RBI for setting up a finance company as a wholly-owned subsidiary in the GIFT City. "The GIFT City platform provides a conducive environment for international lending activities and a world-class infrastructure. We are confident that PFC will leverage these advantages to carve a niche for itself in the global market," she said. (PTI)

Gold remains flat at ₹ 63,200 per 10 grams; silver climbs ₹ 450

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Gold price remained flat at ₹ 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday, according to HDFC Securities.

However, silver climbed ₹ 450 to ₹ 76,750 per kilogram. It settled at ₹ 76,300 per kg in the previous trade.

"Gold prices steadied on Tuesday in the Delhi markets, trading flat at ₹ 63,200/10 grams, unchanged from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the futures trade, the February contract of gold rose ₹ 261 to ₹ 62,356 per 10 grams on the MCX. Also, the March contract of silver

advanced ₹ 176 to ₹ 72,603 per kilogram on the exchange.

In the global markets, gold and silver are trading marginally higher at USD 2,031 per ounce and USD 23.10 per ounce, respectively.

Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,031 per ounce, up by USD 2 from the previous close in the international markets. Navneet Damani, senior VP of commodity research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said gold traded steady after inching lower in the previous session as stronger-than-expected US labour data saw markets reconsider expectations for early monetary policy interest rate cuts. (PTI)

Zee Entertainment says working towards successful closure of merger with Sony

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Zee Entertainment on Tuesday said it is "committed" to the merger with Sony Pictures Networks India and is working towards a "successful closure" of the transaction that will create the country's largest media house worth USD 10 billion.

The deadline of completion of the merger with Sony Pictures, now known as Culver Max Entertainment Private Ltd (CMEPL), has been extended for a month till January 21 after Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) sought an extension under the Merger Cooperation Agreement signed between them two years before.

"We wish to reiterate that the company is committed to the merger with Sony and is continuing to work towards a successful closure of the proposed merger," ZEEL said in a filing to the stock exchanges.

The filing was submitted in response to a clarification sought by the bourses on reports that Sony might call off the deal.

The Merger Cooperation Agreement between the two parties was signed on December 22, 2021.

On December 17, 2023, the Subhash Chandra family-promoted ZEEL sought an extension in deadline for completion of the merger from Sony Group Corporation (SGC) firm CMEPL and Bangla Entertainment Pvt Ltd (BEPL) under the agreement. Subsequently, the deadline, which was to end on December 21, 2023, was extended by a month.

According to industry sources, the fate of the USD 10 billion-merger is hanging by a thread, with the two parties yet are unable to fi-



nalise an agreement as the end of the one-month grace period looms.

The parties are yet to come to an agreement over MD and CEO Punit Goenka leading the merged entity as Sony has expressed concerns after market regulator Sebi barred him from holding managerial posts at Zee group entities in connection with a fund diversion case. While Sebi's order has been stayed by the Securities Appellate Tribunal, Sony is not comfortable with Goenka leading the merged entity due to the stringent corporate governance policies that are followed in Japan.

The contentious issue for the completion of the deal is not just about Goenka leading the merged entity but also about how the Indian firm is able to meet the other closing conditions, an industry source.

The proposed merger of ZEEL, BEPL and CMEPL has already received regulatory approvals from the fair trade regulator CCI,

bourses NSE and BSE, shareholders and creditors of the company.

In August last year, the Mumbai bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) also gave a go-ahead to the merger.

According to reports, the bone of contention between ZEEL and Sony is about who should lead the merged entity.

Under the agreed terms and conditions, Goenka is to lead the merger entity. However, Sony Group is insisting on making way for its Sony Pictures head N P Singh, as per the reports.

The majority of the board of directors of the combined entity would be nominated by the Sony Group.

The combined entity will own over 70 TV channels, two video streaming services (ZEE5 and Sony LIV) and two film studios (Zee Studios and Sony Pictures Films India), making it the largest entertainment network in India. (PTI)

Rupee gains 3 paise to settle at 83.11 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Jan 9: Rising for the fifth straight session, the rupee appreciated 3 paise to close at 83.11 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, tracking positive equity market and foreign fund inflows. Crude oil prices hovering around USD 77 per barrel and recent weakness in the US dollar also supported the domestic unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 83.07 and traded between the peak of 83.04 and the lowest level of 83.13 against the greenback during the session. It finally settled at 83.11 (provisional) against the dollar,



registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous close. The domestic currency settled 1 paise higher at 83.14 on Monday, a day after gaining 9 paise. Analysts said investors will keep a close watch on domestic inflation numbers as well as the data from the US to be released later this week. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the

greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.17 per cent higher at 102.10 on Tuesday. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 1.50 per cent to USD 77.26 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex rose 30.99 points, or 0.04 per cent, to settle at 71,386.21 points. The Nifty advanced 31.85 points, or 0.15 per cent, to 21,544.85 points. Exchange data showed that foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought shares worth ₹ 16.03 crore on Monday, a day after purchasing equities worth ₹ 1,696.86 crore in the preceding session. (PTI)

12th phase of 'Sagar Parikrama' starts today

Covering West Bengal coastal regions

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: The 12th phase of 'Sagar Parikrama' which aims to resolve issues of fishermen and other stakeholders and facilitate their economic upliftment through various schemes, covering coastal regions of West Bengal, will kick-start on Wednesday, the government said on Tuesday.

According to the Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Ministry, the phase-12 of 'Sagar Parikrama' programme will cover Digha, Shankarpur Fishing Harbour, Sultampur Fishing Harbour (at Diamond Harbour) and Ganga Sagar.

Union minister for fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying Parshottam Rupala, junior minister L Murugan and various officials from the governmental bodies and organizations will participate in the event, an official statement said.

During a two-day journey till January 11, the minister will hold interactions with fishermen, fish farmers and other key stakeholders. Campaigns for Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) and other events will take place throughout West Bengal coastal regions, it said.

West Bengal is endowed with six agro-climatic regions having diverse aquatic resources with more than 8 lakh hectares of inland water bodies and a coastline of 158 km. There is great diversity in fishery sector from cold water to marine and everything in between (inland, brackish water, wetland).

According to the ministry, the fishing industry is regarded as a rising star, with enormous potential for fostering inclusive growth through economic empowerment of the fisher folk.

The Centre took Sagar

Parikrama Yatra initiative to better understand the issues, experiences, and aspirations of fishermen, as well as to understand the circumstances in fishing villages and highlight the schemes available to fishermen in coastal areas, it said.

The first phase of 'Sagar Parikrama' had started from Mandvi, Gujarat on March 5, 2022 and so far covered eleven phases in Gujarat, Daman & Diu, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Andaman & Nicobar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Puducherry, and Odisha.

The eleven phases of the Sagar Parikrama Yatra represent a significant journey over numerous coastal regions, confronting varied hardships and encountering distinct cultures, the ministry added. (PTI)

Jindal Advanced Materials commits ₹ 1,000 cr investment in Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Composite materials manufacturer Jindal Advanced Materials has pledged an investment of about ₹ 1,000 crore to set up a plant in Tamil Nadu, its first in south India. As part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the state government, it will set up a manufacturing plant over an area of 250 acres, the company said in a statement on Tuesday. Jindal Advanced Materials has signed an MoU with the Tamil Nadu government to set up a new manufacturing plant at a strategic investment of nearly ₹ 1,000 crore, the statement said, adding that the investment will be spread across seven years.

The project, which will come up in Trichy,

is the company's first manufacturing facility in south India and is expected to generate up to 3,000 job opportunities, it said.

"This MoU is instrumental in elevating our customer service experience in the South. Tamil Nadu's robust infrastructure, Trichy's proximity to the port for enhanced trade opportunities, and the existing ecosystem in infrastructure and aerospace sectors position us well to expand our commitments further," Jindal Advanced Materials Director C P Agrawal said. Part of the O P Jindal Group, Jindal Advanced Materials is a leading manufacturer of high-performance and innovative composite materials. (PTI)

Tata Power Renewable Energy plans to invest ₹ 70,800 cr in Tamil Nadu



NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd (TPREL) plans to make investments worth ₹ 70,800 crore for renewable energy projects in Tamil Nadu.

The company, part of Tata Power, has signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the Tamil Nadu government to support the development of the state's renewable energy landscape and accel-

erate the country's clean energy transition, a regulatory filing said on Tuesday.

The MoUs were signed on Monday. Under the first MoU, TPREL plans to explore opportunities to develop 10,000 MW of renewable energy power projects across solar, wind, hybrid, RTC (Round The Clock), peak, Firm and Dispatchable Renewable Energy (FDRE) over the next five to seven years.

These renewable projects will be located over 50,000 acres of land in Tamil Nadu with an investment potential of nearly ₹ 70,000 crore. This initiative has the potential to generate around 3,000 green job opportunities, according to the filing.

The second MoU is to increase the investment commitment to up to ₹ 3,800 crore to set up 4 GW of solar cells and solar modules plant in two phases at Gangaikondan in Tirunelveli district.

On July 4, 2022, the company had signed an MoU wherein the investment was pegged at ₹ 3,000 crore and now, it is proposed to be increased to ₹ 3,800 crore.

Overall, the company would set up an additional 300 MW each of cells and module line using the latest TOPCon technology, bringing the total plant capacity to 4.3 GW.

The investment of ₹ 800 crore is to be made over the next two years. (PTI)

XTECH TMT receives quality appreciation from BIS

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: XTECH TMT REBAR received the prestigious 'certificate of appreciation' from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) on continuously achieving & maintaining BIS Quality Standards on both finished products as well as raw materials.

"It is a huge motivation for the Xtech Quality Team - who are relentlessly putting their effort to ensure 100% production conforming to relevant Indian Standards. Xtech Steel TMT Rebar is a leading manufacturer of Assam and supplying its products like TMT Rebar black wire, nails & coils in the markets of North Eastern Region since 2008." a PR stated.

Crayons bags event management mandate for Nua-O District Festival

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Advertising solutions provider Crayons on Tuesday said it has bagged the event management mandate for Nua-O District Festival in Odisha.

Odisha's 30 districts will be included in the celebration, and Crayons has been assigned to oversee Clusters II (Bargarh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, and Sundargarh) and V (Gajapati, Ganjam, Rayagada, Koraput, and Malkangiri), a company statement said.

Crayons has won the event management mandate for the coveted Nua-O District Festival by the government of Odisha's department of sports and youth services, it stated. (PTI)



স্বদেশম্ অয়ম্
অসম চৰকাৰ
সমবায় বিভাগ

দ্বিতীয় সমবায় মেলা ২০২৪

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স্থান : গণেশ মন্দিৰ ইনড'ৰ ষ্টেডিয়াম খেলপথাৰ,
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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder.
- George Washington

A tale of Justice

In a significant and damning verdict, the Supreme Court of India has exposed the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) role in the release of 11 convicts involved in the rape cases during the Gujarat riots of 2002. The decision has come 22 years after the horrific events, revealing a shocking truth about the party's actions just ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This ruling forces the BJP to confront its tarnished image and challenges their credibility, making their 'Nari Shakti Vandan' slogan ring hollow in the eyes of the electorate. The rapes occurred during the tenure of Narendra Modi as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, and the convicts were later sentenced to life imprisonment by a competent court in Maharashtra. The case was transferred due to suspicions of the Gujarat government's complicity in the riots. However, the BJP-led Gujarat government, with the approval of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Centre, issued remission orders leading to the release of the convicts. This move sparked widespread outrage and protests across the country. The recent Supreme Court ruling, delivered by a division bench led by Justice BV Nagarathna and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, declared that the State of Gujarat was not the 'appropriate government' to decide on the remission issue since the trial occurred in Maharashtra. The court directed the convicts to surrender within two weeks and ordered the Gujarat and Central governments to submit all relevant records.

Justice Nagarathna's judgment emphasized the rights of victims and their families to justice, stating, "A woman deserves respect, however high or low she may otherwise be considered in society or to whatever faith she may follow or whatever creed she may belong to. Can heinous crimes against women permit remission?" This underscores the ethical dimensions of releasing rape convicts and exposes the communal mindset of the RSS-BJP leaders, who supported Hindu rioters while denying justice to a minority rape victim. The court also pointed out the fraudulent actions of one of the convicts, declaring the Gujarat High Court's order as a nullity and non-est in law. It deemed the remission order as an abuse of power and usurpation by the Gujarat government, emphasizing that the exercise of power was a violation of the rule of law. The ruling has ignited strong reactions from political leaders across the spectrum. Congress leader Shashi Tharoor called it a "bloodstained blot" on the Gujarat government, asserting that the BJP had resorted to fraudulent means to secure the release of rapists and murderers. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge criticized the BJP's "Beti Bachao" slogan, claiming it has turned into "doshi bachao," highlighting the party's abandonment of justice for women.

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi demanded apologies from the BJP governments in Gujarat and at the Centre, alleging their role in releasing the rapists and killers of the victim's family members. The CPI(M) labeled the Supreme Court decision as a "hard slap" on the state government, echoing the sentiments of various opposition parties and eminent personalities. As the released victims go into hiding from their villages, the BJP government now faces the challenge of implementing the Supreme Court order and bringing them back to prison. This entire episode is poised to impact the upcoming Lok Sabha election campaigns, forcing the BJP to address serious questions about its commitment to justice and governance.

India and Pakistan have taken right decision in latest talks on nuclear facilities

By: Tirthankar Mitra

India and Pakistan are nuclear-weapon countries engaged in a troubled relationship that is a cause of concern for the populace and leadership of both the countries. The moot point is whether the duo can live side by side in some safety and not the technological achievement both have reached to arm themselves thus.

Of late, the 33rd consecutive exchange of the list of nuclear installations is a step in the right direction. It would be too early to say that this is an all clear sign to the citizens of both the countries. But together with the nuclear installations' locations, the exchange of prisoners and fishermen is a pointer to a thaw. It is a testament to the endurance of the diplomatic protocol established more than three decades ago. Indo-Pak relations has had many highs and lows.

The old timers will recall a teary eyed Pakistani President Ayub Khan lending his shoulder to the cortege of Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri who passed away after inking the treaty in Tashkent ending the hostilities 1965 war between the two countries. The Lahore bus journey with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on board was another attempt to usher in peace.

But the initiative of Ayub Khan floundered when his successor launched Operation Searchlight to stifle the people's verdict in the then East Pakistan only to make way for the creation of Bangladesh with Indian military cooperation. Kargil stopped the endeavour of peace process of the Lahore bus trip in its tracks.

The recent exchange marks a shared realisation of the catastrophic consequences that a nuclear conflict may unleash. It is rooted in the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities which was arrived at in 1988.

Both countries prefer maintaining a studied silence in respect of the details of the nuclear

facilities on their soil. What is commendable about the exchange is the degree of transparency achieved over a critical area.

Of course, differences on broader geopolitical challenges remain. But it is indeed a go ahead signal fostering dialogue on nuclear related concerns.

The exchange of civilian prisoners and fishermen twice a year adds a human dimension to the matter. Grievances will arise and will be addressed but the human factor in the exchange of citizens of both the countries lends the issue a soft touch.

Individuals were caught in the cross current and their rescue will add to the reservoirs of goodwill for each other to a considerable extent. It is beyond the grand narrative of the statecraft.

It highlights the concern of both the countries who seek to sink their differences. Indeed it reflects a concern for humanitarian matters, the absence of formal dialogue between the two countries post 2008 Mumbai attack notwithstanding.

The high level talks may have come to a halt for now. But back-channel contacts and intelligence driven interactions have done a commendable job. Indeed a pivotal role has been essayed. One has to make haste slowly to carry it forward now. The exchange of lists is a glimmer of hope. It comes in the wake of terrorist attacks and a complex historical backdrop.

India and Pakistan are navigating a complex route. It requires delicate diplomatic handling. Can peace prevail over confrontation? The answer lies in picking up a tortuous path in a tumultuous relationship. A small but crucial step has been taken. Diplomatic threads must endure to make the endeavour for peace a lasting initiative.

Both countries must be aware that hostilities are not quite affordable. Let both the nations strive to find out ways for living as good neighbours without constant worries. (IPA Service)

Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita and the challenges on Indian roads

Every December 25 in India is not just Christmas but also Good Governance Day, a tradition since 2014 in honor of the late Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. Last year on Good Governance Day, the government introduced the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) to replace the archaic Indian Penal Code 1860, marking a significant legal shift.

The urgency to present the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) as a home-grown replacement for a 163-year-old colonial law on Good Governance Day appears to have driven a swift process. The BNS made its debut in the Lok Sabha on August 11, 2023, underwent scrutiny by the parliamentary standing committee on home affairs, and was later withdrawn by the government. It resurfaced as the Bhartiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita Bill in Parliament on December 12, 2023.

In a remarkable turn of events, both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha gave their approval within a fortnight, with 146 suspended Opposition members highlighting the pre-election political tensions. Their absence, while not questioning the legality of the BNS, paints a picture of heightened discord.

A fundamental tenet of good governance is the adherence to the rule of law, wherein laws such as the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) play a crucial role in addressing contemporary needs and legitimizing judicial decisions. Both the outdated Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the recently introduced BNS meticulously outline and categorize over 300 punishable crimes, assigning specific punishments to each offense.

In a surprising turn of

events, shortly after the public announcement and presidential approval of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), it sparked unexpected fury and civic activism among vehicle driver unions. The streets saw a halt in bus and truck services on January 1 and 2, accompanied by intermittent strikes from taxi unions. This upheaval caused widespread disruptions in the flow of goods and public transportation.

The crux of their discontent centered around the newly introduced sub-section 2 of Section 106, prescribing a substantial escalation in penalties, including up to 10 years of imprisonment and fines, for individuals accidentally causing harm while driving recklessly or negligently and subsequently fleeing the scene without reporting to the police - a colloquially termed "hit and run" incident.

The imperative to address "hit and run" incidents is crystal clear. In 2021, out of the 1.1 million recorded unnatural deaths (as per the latest available data from the National Crimes Bureau), 12% were attributed to road accidents, with one-third of these falling under the category of "hit and run" cases. Swift medical intervention has the potential to save lives in such situations.

So, what's behind the sudden discontent with the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)? The root cause appears to be the disproportionately harsh penalties outlined in the new sub-section, triggering widespread dissatisfaction.

In the realm of justice, the principle of proportionality guides that the punishment for crimes must align with their severity. A noteworthy point of contention arises when considering that im-



prisonment up to 10 years, a penalty reserved for offenses against the State or dacoity, applies to voluntary and intentional violations of the law. Intent, and negligence are crucial factors in legal matters, takes center stage. Interestingly, the unintentional causing of death during a robbery, an intentional transgression, carries a comparatively lighter sentence of up to seven years' imprisonment, reflecting the nuanced interplay between severity and consequence in the legal landscape.

Examining the legal landscape, we find that the specific offense of rash and negligent driving carries a penalty of up to six months of imprisonment and a fine. In contrast, Section 106, Sub-section 1, stipulates a potential imprisonment term of up to two years for a doctor found guilty of rash or negligent actions leading to the unintentional death of a patient.

Notably, the existing provision under Section 106 for the broader offense of causing unintentional death through "any rash or negligent act" imposes a more severe penalty - up to five years of imprisonment, coupled with a fine. The intriguing question arises: why do

doctors seem to enjoy a privileged status with a milder punishment? Following these benchmarks, one could argue that a proportional penalty for rash and negligent driving resulting in accidents, compounded by a failure to report the incident, should fall between two years (mirroring the doctor's penalty) and five years (in line with other offenses).

Regrettably, the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) aimed to encourage adherence to the law by maximizing punitive measures. This "Hobbesian" strategy reflects a mindset reminiscent of the medieval era - a stark departure from the progressive trajectory India embraced long ago.

Studies, including those conducted at the National Institute of Justice in the US, highlight that simply increasing the severity of punishments does not necessarily improve law compliance.

A more effective approach to encourage vehicle drivers to act responsibly and report unfortunate incidents is to incentivize socially appropriate behavior. One proposed alternative is to offer a limited imprisonment term of two years (similar to the penalty for

doctors) for those who promptly report the incident. In contrast, a more extended sentence of up to five years could be reserved for individuals found both "rash and negligent" and socially irresponsible enough to evade responsibility after committing the offense.

Truck, bus, or taxi drivers are often not from the local community. The potential danger of facing harm, including the risk of injury or even loss of life, at the hands of locals angered by an accident, serves as a motivating factor for drivers to consider fleeing from the scene.

Lacking the privileges enjoyed by owner-drivers of private vehicles; these drivers find themselves vulnerable to the whims of the crowd that assembles at an accident scene, often driven by a desire for swift, vigilante justice. Moreover, an extended potential imprisonment doesn't necessarily deter habitual offenders or those shielded by wealth and privileges. Effectively disciplining this group of wayward drivers requires an impartial investigation, supported by advanced digital policing and resolute prosecution - elements that are currently far from universally implemented.

The ones most likely to bear the brunt of the intensified penalties under Section 106 (2) of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) are the less privileged drivers responsible for fatal accidents. In a landscape of 362 million registered vehicles compared to an adult population of approximately 793 million, the surge in licensed women drivers is noteworthy. Anticipating a rise in personal vehicles due to increasing incomes and improved road infrastructure, the need for a

swifter expansion of safer transportation infrastructure becomes evident. This includes controlled access to highways, road segregation with protected walkways, strategically placed pedestrian underpasses and overpasses, accident management services, a national police portal for accident reporting, obtaining a digital token as proof of a report, and enhanced public awareness about police station jurisdictions along highways to facilitate recourse to law enforcement.

Acknowledging the complexity of the situation, the government swiftly addressed the concerns by assuring protestors of further consultations before the enforcement of Section 106, Sub-section 2 of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The outcome was the prompt withdrawal of the agitation within a mere three days. This stands in stark contrast to the prolonged agitation against the well-intentioned yet inadequately communicated farm laws in 2020-2021, which ultimately led to their repeal by the government a year later.

As the influence of Good Governance Day 2023 diminishes, and with a year available to address shortcomings, the upcoming version of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) should emphasize aligning the proportionality of punishment with the gravity of the crime. Unless every facet of the rule of law machinery improves efficiency, relying solely on punitive measures may exacerbate the challenges faced by all vehicle drivers entangled in unintentional and tragic road accidents. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Making 'Malinithan' a major tourist destination

By: Amar Krishna Paul

Let's start with a beautiful statement of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, former President and Missile Man of India. He opines in an analytical article in the "Bhagavatam Sevarpanam": "Spirituality is the post-graduate study of religion and we should rise from religion to spirituality."

That is, we have a glorious past from a spiritual point of view. We should preserve our over 5,000 years old civilisation. A part of our ancient glory can be witnessed, even today, at Malinithan in the foothills of Likabali, Lower Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is only 7 kilometres away from Silapathar town, Dhemaji district of Assam.

Situated in the picturesque and lush-grassy greenery, Malinithan is also known as 'Malini-sthaan' or the 'Abode of Malini'. Historically, it is one of the oldest temples of India, an archeological site and famous pilgrimage destination in the North-eastern region of the sub-continent.

The temple is situated on a hill that rises to a height of 21 metres, which affords a commanding view of the plains around it, including the Brahmaputra river, and the site is visited by thousands of devotees and tourists.

Of late, the temple has been renovated by the Government of Arunachal. The active members of Malinithan Vikash Parishad are doing a highly commendable service. They are organising the much coveted Malinithan Mela, an annual mega tourism festival, from January 10 to January 14, 2024. Celebrations like Malini Mela, with participation of all, including people from neighbouring states, will promote cross-border cultural exchange for peaceful coexistence, communal harmony and brotherhood for all-round development of the state and the region. This tourist destination has many relics on stones with ruins of temples and valuable sculptures. These are associated with the legendary love story between Lord Krishna of Dwaraka, Gujarat and Rukmini, princess of erstwhile King Bhismaka of Kundlinagar near Roing divisional town of Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The site has a temple ruin dating back to 10th & 14th century AD of rich sculptural and architectural value. Beautifully designed and decorated basement of temple, divine images, icons and deities - animal motifs and floral designs, carved columns and panels have been unearthed.

According to established scriptural injunctions, on the way to Dwaraka from Bhismaknagar, Krishna and Rukmini rested here. They were offered choicest flowers by Malini, who is also known as Maa Durga.

There is a very interesting legend of Lord Krishna, his consort Rukmini, Lord Shiva and Parvati associated with it. As per legend, here was an ancient kingdom called Vidarbha or Bhismaknagar, which was ruled by king Bhismaka (located near Roing, Lower Dibang Valley). King Bhismaka had a son and daughter named Rukma and Rukmini. Rukmini fell in love with Krishna, but her brother wanted her to marry his childhood friend Shishupala, the prince of Chedi.

After knowing about Rukmini's proposed marriage to Shishupala against her will, Krishna travelled to Bhismaknagar and eloped with Rukmini before her marriage. On their way from Bhismaknagar to Dwaraka, they rested in this place with a beautiful garden where Lord Shiva and Parvati were spending some time together. Lord Shiva and Parvati greeted Lord Krishna and princess Rukmini with a warm welcome and garlands made of beautiful flowers from their garden. Lord Krishna was highly amazed by the eternal fragrance of the flowers, and addressed Parvati as 'Sucharu Malini'. This means a lady who strings garlands beautifully. Thus, the site was named as Malinithan.

"Malinithan was a cultural centre of Northeast India in the remote past," stated in a release of Arunachal Tourism, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. After Kamakhya temple in Guwahati, Malinithan is one of India's most famous shakti peeths.

The people of the region had attempted to construct a cultural bridge between the hills and the plains through the holy centre of Malinithan from the early medi-

eval period. It was once an important religious centre of Aryan culture from where the wave of Aryan civilisation spread to other parts of its neighbourhood. The malinithan temple was most likely constructed in 1968. Dashabhuj Mahisasmardini Durga, Surya, Dancing Ganesh, Kartika, and Nandi bull are among the five sculptures made of hard granite stone that have been discovered at the site. Malinithan's major goddess is Dashabhuj Durga.

The malinithan temple was constructed in Orissa's classical tradition, with sculptures dating from the 13th and 14th centuries A.D. To attract tourists, the Arunachal Government built a museum near the malinithan temple which houses archaeologically significant sculptures and other items. On November 24, 2023 a media report said that as many as 15 destinations in the Northeast have been selected for development under the central government's Swadesh Darshan 2.0 Scheme, aiming to boost tourism in the region rich in cultural and natural heritage. These include one from Manipur and two each from the seven other states in the northeast.

The move aims to not only boost tourism in the eight states but also help in further development in the region. NE states,

some of which share borders with other countries, are known for their pristine beauty, blessed with majestic hills, scenic waterfalls, criss-crossing rivers and adventurous treks, and many of these sites have not been explored by domestic tourists.

The Central Tourism Ministry officials shared details on Swadesh Darshan 2.0 Scheme and updates on the PRASHAD Scheme during the 11th edition of the International Tourism Mart (ITM) in Shillong from November 21-23, 2023. The ministry on its opening day had announced that it has sanctioned Rs 29.32 crore for development of four key iconic religious tourism sites in Meghalaya under the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) scheme - Nartiang Shakti Peeth, Nongsawlia Presbyterian Church, Aitnar Pool and Charantala Kali Temple.

Nartiang Shakti Peeth is a centuries-old Durga temple in West Jaintia Hills and believed to be a Shakti Peeth; while Nongsawlia Presbyterian Church is located in Sohra in East Khasi Hills; Aitnar Pool hosts a popular festival in West Jaintia Hills; and Charantala Kali Temple is the West Garo Hills district dedicated to Goddess Kali, according to officials. Nacho and Mechuka have been selected from Arunachal Pradesh;

Shillong and Sohra from Meghalaya, Aizawl and Champai from Mizoram; Jorhat and Kokrajhar from Assam; Moirang (Bishnupur) in Manipur; Nuland and Chumukedima in Nagaland; Gangtok and Gyalshing in Sikkim; and Agartala and Unakoti in Tripura.

To sum it up, Malinithan is testimony to the flourishing rich cultural heritage of Arunachal Pradesh and Upper Assam. It is associated with the legendary love story of Lord Krishna and princess Rukmini. The temple of Orissan architecture of 10th to 14th Century AD reflects as a leading centre of Shaktism as well.

According to a report of Republic TV news channel, over 60 per cent of the total tourists of the country make their travels in religious sites. Therefore, the Tourism Ministry, Government of India, may formulate a goal-driven comprehensive plan to promote Malinithan as a major tourist destination like Kamakhya dham of Guwahati in the upcoming International Tourism Mart in 2024. This move will not only generate employment generation alone, it will also boost the State border economy as a whole. (The author is a Guwahati-based writer and analyst on Current Affairs who can be reached at amarkrishnaghy@gmail.com)

POST BAG

Laws for Artificial Intelligence

Sir/Ma'am

Artificial Intelligence is the demon that will one day devour all our jobs and we would be mere spectators to this debacle. This demon is not a "millennial" one; its birth goes way back to the 1950s. There is still a lot to be understood before we saddle up this demon. This demon is growing stronger and the leash that we have right now will no longer be able to hold back this demon. We need more stringent laws for Artificial Intelligence as we can see that it is spreading like wildfire as people and institutions are now heavily dependent on Artificial Intelligence. Almost all the developed countries have laws or regulations regarding AI which marks the territory for AI and it cannot trespass that. India is the only exception where we cannot see regulation of any kind for Artificial Intelligence. We are a population of 1.44 billion people and if any problem crops up regarding AI it will be much bigger and almost impossible to regulate. The sooner the policymakers realize this, the better.

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What to know about the duration of ovulation

By: Veronica Zambon

Ovulation is a process in which the body releases an egg from an ovary in preparation for sperm to fertilize it. Ovulation lasts only around 1 day.

It is part of the menstrual cycle, which most females experience from the onset of puberty until menopause. In this article we discuss how long ovulation lasts, what happens during it, signs and symptoms, how to track ovulation, and when to see a doctor?

How long does it last?

The body triggers the release of an egg from the ovaries. Once that egg starts its journey towards the uterus, it only stays viable for 1 day. However, sperm can live in the uterus and fallopian tubes, the tubes that connect the ovaries to the uterus, for up to 6 days. This means that there are around 6 days of the menstrual cycle during which people can become pregnant.

What happens during ovulation

The body produces the highest amounts of the hormone estrogen during ovulation.

This high surge of hormones causes the ovaries to release the egg into the fallopian tubes. The egg travels through them toward the uterus. Estrogen has already caused the uterus to thicken in preparation for implantation.

Once the ovaries release the egg, the levels of estrogen in the body begin to fall.

Signs and symptoms

There are several signs and symptoms that a person is currently experiencing ovulation.

These include:

- cervical fluid, also called vaginal discharge, that looks like raw egg white
- slight decrease in basal body temperature, followed by a sharp increase after ovulation
- the cervix will change position to being high, soft, and open

Some people may experience the following signs and symptoms:

- light spotting
- light cramping or pain on one side of the pelvis
- breasts feeling tender
- increased sex drive
- a heightened sense of smell, taste, or vision

How ovulation affects fertility

People can usually only get pregnant if they are having unprotected sex just before or during ovulation. People are most likely to get pregnant if they have sex within a day or two of ovulation.

However, it is possible for people to become pregnant if they have sex up to several days before ovulation because the sperm can swim

up the fallopian tubes to wait for the ovaries to release the egg.

The best way to become pregnant is to have frequent unprotected sex before and during ovulation. Some people may use signs and symptoms of ovulation as a way to avoid becoming pregnant.

Fertility awareness methods, which people may also know as natural family planning or the rhythm method, may help people plan their sexual activity around their ovulation so that there is less of a chance they will get pregnant.

However, a person who does not want to get pregnant should consider using birth control, which is much more effective at preventing pregnancy.

There are several ways in which people can track their ovulation to determine when they are at their most fertile:

- the cervical mucus method, in which people check their vaginal discharge each day
- the calendar method, in which people note their menstrual cycle on a calendar
- ovulation predictor kits, which track LH hormone levels, as a surge in LH triggers ovulation. Note that these may be inaccurate in some people, including those with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

In contrast, for individuals who do not wish to conceive, various methods of birth control are much more effective.

According to Planned Parenthood, using condoms is 85% effective, using a birth control pill or patch is 91% effective, and using a birth control implant or hormonal intrauterine device (IUD) is 99% effective.

What prevents ovulation?

Hormonal birth control and certain health conditions can prevent ovulation.

There are several hormonal birth control methods that prevent the ovaries from releasing an egg.

These include:

- birth control implant
- progesterone IUD
- NuvaRing
- birth control shot
- the pill
- birth control patch

Some health conditions that may prevent ovulation include:

- polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- eating disorders that prevent the brain from secreting certain hormones
- genetic conditions, such as Turner syndrome

Overview of the menstrual cycle

There are four stages of the menstrual cycle:

- the follicular phase
- ovulation
- the luteal phase
- menses

The follicular phase

This phase typically occurs from days 0–14 of the menstrual cycle. If a person has a menstrual cycle that is not 28 days, it is because the follicular phase is either longer or shorter than 14 days.

During this phase, the hormone that the body produces the most is estrogen. This helps thicken the uterine lining, making it possible for a fertilized egg to implant itself there. The higher amount of estrogen also makes it easier for sperm to enter the reproductive system. The estrogen changes the cervical mucus, making it easier for sperm to gain entry.

Ovulation
Ovulation occurs 14 days before the start of menses, the blood that comes out during a period.

If a person has a 28-day cycle, this means that ovulation occurs on day 14. People with a varied cycle will experience ovulation at different times. Day 1 of the menstrual cycle is the first day of a period, or menses.

During ovulation, the amount of estrogen the body produces is at its highest.

This surge in estrogen triggers a surge in LH, which then stimulates the ovary to release an egg. The cervix also produces more watery mucus to better accommodate sperm.

The luteal phase

In a 28-day cycle, this phase starts on day 14, and ends on day 28. Instead of mainly producing estrogen, the body produces more of a different hormone, progesterone. During the luteal phase, progesterone triggers the uterine lining to secrete substances that support a pregnancy.

The progesterone also decreases the amount of cervical mucus the body produces. The fertilization window has passed, so receiving sperm is no longer a priority for the body. The higher amount of progesterone also increases the body's temperature.

If sperm fertilizes the egg, then the body maintains the higher levels of estrogen and progesterone as the egg implants itself into the uterine lining. However, if this does not happen, then the levels of estrogen and progesterone rapidly decrease as the body prepares for menses.

Menses

The drop in levels of estrogen and progesterone causes the uterine lining to shed. Menses typically happens on day 1 of the menstrual cycle.

Most menstrual blood is arterial, which means that the blood contains oxygen. Only 25% of the blood is venous, which means that it does not contain any oxygen. Venous

blood tends to be darker in color than arterial blood. The menstrual blood also contains tissue debris. A process called fibrinolysis prevents the menses from containing clotted blood unless a person experiences a heavy flow.

How to track the menstrual cycle

By tracking the menstrual cycle, people can learn whether their periods are regular or irregular and whether their symptoms are any cause for concern. The easiest way to track the menstrual cycle is by marking when a period starts and ends on a calendar.

It may also be useful to track:

- any premenstrual symptoms such as cramping and bloating
- when bleeding begins
- the heaviness of the bleeding
- any period symptoms
- when the bleeding ends

A person may consider tracking their menstrual cycle with an app. Several apps that track the menstrual cycle are available to download. Some are free and may be capable of tracking certain symptoms.

When to see a doctor

It is important to see a doctor if there are signs that something unusual is happening during the menstrual cycle. Some signs that a person may need to make an appointment with a doctor are:

- having had unprotected sex, then missed a period
- having menstrual bleeding that is heavy enough that a person needs to change maxi pads or super tampons every hour
- having a period that lasts longer than usual, or longer than 7 days
- experiencing light-headedness, dizziness, or a fast pulse during a period
- having clots or a gushing sensation
- reaching 16 years of age and not having gotten their first period
- having severe pain before or during a period
- bleeding between periods
- feeling sick or having a temperature when using a tampon
- being unable to engage in everyday activities because of symptoms before or during their period
- having a period more frequently than every 21 days or less frequently than every 45 days
- experiencing feelings of anxiety or depression around the time of a period

These symptoms may be a sign that something unusual is happening in the body that is causing a change in the menstrual cycle.

Ovulation is a process where the ovaries release eggs in preparation for fertilization. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Menstrual Leave: India first needs to get rid of the taboo of menstruation

By: Sameena Dalwai

Every time I buy sanitary napkins, the shopkeepers wrap them in newspapers and then put them in black plastic bags. When I wave away the newspaper, they are very reluctant to hand them over. Everyone – men and women – looks uneasy that I am carrying the brightly coloured packets of Stayfree in my hands, as any other medicines or toiletries.

Many countries are currently discussing legal provisions for menstruation leave. Earlier this year, Spain became the first country in Europe to implement a national menstruation leave. Asia is ahead: Japan, Indonesia, South Korea and Taiwan offer menstruation leave in disparate formats. In India, Bihar introduced a menstrual leave of two days in the 1990s. Now, with the issue raised in the Indian parliament, before we discuss the implementation of such a leave, we should first establish the need to do so.

Let us begin with the deep-seated taboo and silence about menstruation. What is it about menstruation that makes us so uncomfortable?

Worried about stains we wear black, speak of it in hushed tones, and stay behind closed doors. Our gods don't allow visits from menstruating women and some gods prohibit any women within the menstruating age. Our pickles might go bad, and kitchens get polluted. Nobody dares to test these theories, so deep-seated is our prejudice.

It was not always like this. Mother cults existed across the globe. Men did not know that they had any part in procreation. Children were born to women and mothers were revered. Menstrual blood, the vagina and the womb were worshipped since the survival and growth of tribes depended upon them.

However, the development of agriculture settled the wandering tribes on patches of land and inheritance became vital. From hunters of animals, men became owners of land. They needed progeny to pass their property to. That was a problem, since motherhood is a matter of fact but fatherhood is a matter of opinion. The need for men to have biological children and to be certain of their parentage made marriage imperative. How to make

sure that women will stay married, that they would covet marriage? By making them objects or ornaments, branding them as unproductive and an economic burden. They are to be passed from clan to clan as a tool of perpetuating lineage, the ancestry that is not their own. Their bodies must be covered and hidden. Their bodily fluids branded as dirty and polluting. All religions agree upon the fear and disgust of the female body.

Maybe change occurred at the turn of the century. Some of my students now ask for sanitary pads openly and their male classmates do not bat an eyelid. Are they rebels, I wonder, or just pragmatic? Are they able to raise their parents along with themselves? My eight-year-old daughter, a hopeless bookworm, gives me lectures on fertilisation, eggs, sperm and foetuses.

When I asked, "Shall I explain menstruation to you?" she replied, "I will tell you, Ma. The wall of the uterus is thrown out through the vagina (which is another hole, Ma) and then you use cloth pads to soak it up." All of this is regaled with the usual enthusiasm and sparkle of new knowledge. She is aware and ready. I live in awe of the next generation.

I compare this to the experiences of my generation: horror at finding the first spots of blood, the panic that you have some rare illness, the shame of stains in school, the worry that the boys who are watching your backside will find out. How much easier life would have been if we could have treated this as a natural process of growing up! Now, let us come to the question of why menstrual leave is needed. A survey of Indian female students in the Global Journal of Health Sciences in 2015 reported that a staggering 70.2% had dysmenorrhea. This means period cramps and pain in the lower abdomen or pelvis. Women who experienced mild pain on average absented for one-and-a-half days a month while the average was 2.1±1.2 and 2.5±1.3 days for those who experienced moderate and severe forms of dysmenorrhea respectively. About 23% of dysmenorrheic women experienced pain for 2-3 days and the rest for 1-1.5 days.

Period pain can be excruciating – almost like a knife inserted into you is being twisted. You may not be able to get out of bed or eat a meal, and

may suffer diarrhoea and nausea throughout. Even non-dysmenorrheic women tend to face tiredness, back pain, lethargy, headaches (menstrual migraine) and muscle aches.

Hence, emotionally you wish to burrow down and stay with yourself. Facing people and making conversation feels like an unnecessary effort, let alone going to work and facing office politics! Many women heroically prod through the discomfort. They do not want to "seem less". The impact of discourses such as, "If you want equality, then why ask for special treatment?" looms large.

But we know the difference between formal and substantive equality. Further the wise amongst us realise that men are, in fact, trying to come to our level – our efficiency, multi-tasking, emotional labour and care – and failing miserably. Men, historically, have tried to control women so that they can compensate for their inability to bear children.

Popular discourse tells us that women become irritable and irrational before, during or after their periods. The term PMS is used callously by men to berate women. "Why are you reacting like this? Are you PMS-ing?" Ironically, it is only PMS that makes women attain the 'rationality' of modern capitalism where everyone is supposed to look out for themselves first. Women become self-centred for two days; they may eat before others in the family, go to sleep rather than putting the kids to bed, say no to extra work in office. It is during menstruation, delivery, and breastfeeding that women feel closest to nature, to Mother Earth. It is a state of heightened sensitivity. You sense the hunger in the eyes of the beggar woman with a tiny baby, you weep over the killing of a Palestinian child. That sensitivity that would save mankind from itself is mostly missing from our 'rational' political dealings.

Ecofeminism tells us that women and nature are associated not in passivity but in creativity and the maintenance of life. Investing in women, engaging and empowering women, will lead to sustainable agriculture, food production and a long-lasting ecosystem in the world. Maybe it is time some serious investment is made into women's bodies and lives. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Benefits of Hydra Facial

By: Shahnaz Husain

Hydra Facial is one of the most popular non-invasive skin treatments that use special devices to cleanse and hydrate your skin. It usually uses Hydra Peel Tip, a pen-like device with patented technology for cleansing, exfoliating, extracting, and hydrating the skin with serums to get rid of the skin's dead skin cells creating an instant "wow factor" in terms of brightening and firming skin.

This system uses a vortex swirling action to deliver hydration and remove dead skin, dirt, debris, and impurities while cleaning and soothing your skin. This magical painless treatment tackles everything from dehydration to discoloration, aging to acne, and uneven skin texture.

The treatment starts with loosening and opening the pores and then prepping the skin using a mix of glycolic acid, salicylic acid, and several botanical ingredients for better cleansing. Once the pores are open enough, the

professional uses vacuum-powered extraction equipment that gets rid of the dirt and oils clogged inside the pores. It is a non-invasive procedure and is practically painless.

Hydration and Nourishment

As it is renowned for its hydrating properties, this contains hydrating serums containing antioxidants, peptides, and hyaluronic acid directly into the skin. A powerful moisturizing agent, hyaluronic acid, attracts and retains water, promoting deep hydration and helping to plump the skin.

Pore Refinement

For those struggling with enlarged pores, Hydra Facial offers a solution. The treatment includes a gentle extraction process that helps clean out pores, reducing their size and minimizing their appearance. Clearing out debris and oil from the pores contributes to a refined and more polished complexion.

Fine Line and Wrinkle Reduction

The hydrating and rejuvenating effects of Hydra Facial extend to addressing fine lines and wrinkles. The

treatment helps stimulate collagen production, a key protein responsible for skin elasticity.

Improved Skin Texture and Tone

Exfoliation and hydration work well to enhance the overall texture and tone of the skin. By sloughing off dead skin cells and replenishing moisture, Hydra Facial promotes a smoother, softer, and more even skin surface. This dual action contributes to a noticeable improvement in skin texture and tone after just one session.

One of the remarkable aspects of Hydra Facial is its versatility. Also, whether you have sensitive, oily, or combination skin, Hydra Facial is generally safe and effective for various skin types.

The customizable nature of the treatment allows skin care professionals to adjust the intensity based on individual skin needs, ensuring a personalized and comfortable experience. (The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal Queen of India)

The Hindi film songs that feature working women

By: Ashwini Deshpande

This piece is a musical thread linking two of my abiding areas of interest: women's work and Hindi film songs. Through my research I have been arguing that blanket assertions such as "Indian women don't work (for a living)" reflect a superficial understanding of the conditions that define women's work, and a gross underestimation of Indian women's agency.

These arguments presume a static unwillingness to enter the paid workforce on the part of women, and/or their inability to transcend barriers imposed by conservative social norms. As I show in my work, women enter paid work when there is work available, despite the onerous and lopsided cultural norms that place almost the entire responsibility of domestic chores on women.

Where do Hindi film songs enter the picture? Like countless others, I strongly believe that Hindi film music is not only an independent genre in its own right, but that the range of situations and emotions depicted in Hindi film music is immense and extraordinary. Hindi films have also served as a barometer of sorts of the socioeconomic state of a large part of the nation. If indeed Indian women don't "work", songs that show working

women should either be non-existent or few and far between. Is that really the case?

It is true that most film songs (whether filmed on men or women) depict either private emotions such as various shades of love, longing, despair, separation, grief, happiness – experienced solo or between romantic partners, or siblings, or parents and children – or public emotions of nationalist pride or expressions of religiosity. Songs that show people engaged in their livelihood activities constitute a smaller set within the universe of Hindi film songs, and this holds for songs filmed on men or women.

Since this piece is about women, we should note that each character depicting a working woman does not necessarily have a song in the film showing her in her work settings. For instance, in Piku, Deepika Padukone plays an architect, but there is no song that shows her working as an architect. Fortunately, there are several songs that show women in their work/professional settings, outside of domestic chores or care work. Presented below is a partial list.

Women in desk jobs at the office

La Ra Lappa: This delightful song from the 1949 film Ek Thi Ladki, shot in an office, has the

classic battle-of-the-sexes repartee between the women and men which appears timeless. The women in the stanza "aaj ka ke gentlemen" accuse the men of throwing their weight around without doing much substantial work. The men retort in the next stanza that women are basically lazy. All they do is dress up and complain. The women in the next stanza warn them "one day we will take over these spaces".

Jaane Kahan Mera Jigar Gaya Ji: This adorable duet picturised on Yasmin and Johnny Walker from the 1955 film Mr. and Mrs. 55 shows a budding office romance. Yasmin, in a stylish Western dress, is not coy when under the table, she tells Johnny Walker that matters of love are delicate, conveyed through hints and gestures (literally through the eyes). With her dimpled, mischievous smile she says, "I could teach you (the delicate language of love), but first bow to me."

Jaanamani Jaanamani from the 1976 film Chhoti Si Baat shows Vidya Sinha in office work. It starts as a film-in-a-film song picturised on the superhit reel life/real life pair of Hema Malini and Dharmendra that takes Amol Palekar on a flight of fancy imagining a life of romance with Vidya Sinha. (The song is noteworthy also for the unusual musical pairing of Asha Bhosle with

Yesudas). Lamha Lamha Zindagi Hai from the 2006 film Corporate shows Bipasha Basu as a corporate executive, dressed in trouser suits, working in an office.

Hey Ya! Deepika Padukone works in the same office as Farhan Akhtar in Kartik Calling Kartik (2010). Heer to Badi Sad Hai from the 2015 film Tamasha shows Deepika Padukone shown working in a corporate office, including winning accolades for her work, as everyone claps.

Women in the medical profession: nurses or doctors

Tum Pukar Lo from the 1969 hit Khamoshi, has Waheeda Rehman playing a nurse in a psychiatric hospital. This song doesn't fully make the cut for this list as it does not actually show her performing nursing duties, but it is set in the hospital setting.

Mera Yaar Yila De: This haunting song from Saathiya (2002) describes Vivek Oberoi's hunt for Rani Mukerji, but includes a lot of footage of her at work at medical clinics.

Hass Nach Le from the 2016 Uda Punjab shows Kareena Kapoor playing a doctor who runs a drug rehabilitation clinic.

Women as sportspersons

Badal Pe Paoon Hai from Chak De! India (2007) is the background song showing the journey of the Indian women's hockey team to the world championship

in Australia.

The team are not only underdogs in the global race but most of the individual players are themselves from marginalised sections within the Indian population. The sight of the India T-shirts and the national tricolour with this effervescent song in the background is guaranteed to give every Indian goosebumps.

Dhaakad is another inspirational song, this one from Dhangal (2016) shows the journey of two intrepid girls who go on to become wrestling champions beating boys. The rap-like song starts with the umpire telling a boy, "Be careful, she is a girl," to which she responds, "Beware, don't treat me like a girl."

Women in the media

Dilli Dilli from No One killed Jessica (2011): Rani Mukerji plays a journalist who plays a critical role in ensuring justice for Jessica Lal. The song shows her at work in several shots. Khabar Nah Priyanka Chopra works for the fashion and lifestyle magazine Verve in Dostana (2008). The song shows her at work in different settings.

Pal Pal Har Pal: Vidya Balan plays a radio jockey in Lage Raho Munnabhai (2006), and the song opens with her in the studio.

Rani's Intro Theme: Alia Bhat plays the spunky Rani, a TV anchor and journalist in the 2023

superhit Rocky aur Rani kii Prem Kahaani. This Bangla rap introduces her getting ready and getting to work in the newsroom.

Women as Police Officers

Mardaani Anthem: In Mardaani (2014), Rani Mukerji plays a police officer who is a crusader against sexual exploitation of women. In this song, we see her performing stunts, chasing criminals and rescuing women.

Women as politicians

Salaam Kijiye: Suchitra Sen plays a politician in Aandhi (1975), a film that got banned during the Emergency in 1975, as Sen's character was allegedly loosely based on Indira Gandhi, then India's Prime Minister. This song shows the public mocking her while she is on a campaign trail.

Women as crooks, spies

Sab Janta Ka Hai: Shabana Azmi and Neetu Singh play pickpockets in the 1977 film Parvarish. They are female Robin Hoods who steal from the rich and give to the poor. The (forgettable) song rails against private wealth and hails the notion of people's ownership.

Bunty Aur Babli Title Track: Rani Mukerji plays an unscrupulous and ambitious swindler with the perfect swag and aplomb in the 2005 blockbuster Bunty aur Babli. As the superb lyrics by Gulzar tell us, "Aisa koi saga

nahi, jisko thaga nahi" (they did not spare anyone, not even their closest kin).

Ae Watan: In Raazi (2018), based on a real-life story, Alia Bhatt plays a spy in the guise of a school teacher.

Women as school teachers

Tumse Milke Dilka Jo Haal: In a longer than life, dream-like sequence, Shah Rukh Khan expresses his love for the glamorous school teacher Sushmita Sen in a fun multi-starrer song in Main Hoon Na (2004).

Madamji Go Easy: In Hichki (2008), students play unkind pranks on Rani Mukerji's character, a school teacher with Tourette's Syndrome. I would like to end by mentioning a film that showcases an unrecognized but very important work category.

Tera Mera Saath Rahe: This song shows Nutan in Saudagar (1973) doing mostly domestic chores. She plays the wife of a gurg (jaggery) seller. It is her labour that converts date palm juice into delicious jaggery, the sale of which is the source of their livelihood. Her husband does not recognise her input into gur-making and leaves her for a younger woman, who is not as skilled at making gur. As his jaggery sales and income plummet, he realises his first wife's economic value and begs for her to take him back. She refuses. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

French prime minister resigns following recent political turmoil over immigration

PARIS, Jan 9: French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne resigned on Monday following recent political turmoil over immigration, paving the way for President Emmanuel Macron to seek fresh momentum by appointing a new government in coming days.

The shakeup was widely seen as an attempt by the 46-year-old centrist Macron to head off a looming lame-duck status. Macron's term is to end in 2027, and he won't be able to run for president for a consecutive third term in line with the French Constitution.

In her resignation letter, Borne suggested she resigned at Macron's request, citing the president's "will" to "appoint a new prime minister."

Borne's resignation followed the passage late last month of contentious immigration legislation backed by Macron aimed at strengthening the government's ability to deport some foreigners, among other measures.

Macron's centrist alliance was able to pass the measure only after making a deal with the conservative Republicans party, which many observers saw as the government's shift to the right. The tough negotiations and heated parliament debate raised questions over the ability of Borne's government to pass future major bills.

Political observers also suggested that Macron, a staunch supporter of European integration, wants his new government to get ready for June's European Union elections.

Borne, 62, had been appointed in May 2022 after Macron's reelection for a second term. She was France's second female prime minister.

The following month, Macron's centrists lost their majority in parliament, forcing the government into political maneuvering and using special constitutional powers to be able to pass laws.

Last year, Borne faced mass protests often marred by violence against unpopular pension changes. The bill to increase the retirement age from 62 to 64 was enacted into law in April, angering many people across the country.

She also faced days of riots which erupted across France at the beginning of the summer, triggered by the deadly police shooting of a teen.

Macron's office announced his acceptance of Borne's resignation in a statement, and the president posted on X, formerly Twitter, that Borne's work "has been exemplary every day."

"You have implemented our project with statewomen's courage, commitment and determination. Thank you from the bottom of my heart," he wrote.

The statement from Macron's office said Borne will continue in her duties until a new government is appointed.

French media outlets reported Monday evening that Education Minister Gabriel Attal, 34, was the favorite for the job. If named, he would be the youngest prime minister in France's modern history.

Other names often mentioned include Minister for the Armed Forces Sébastien Lecornu and former Agriculture Minister Julien Denormandie, a longtime supporter of Macron who helped him launch his political movement.

Under the French political system, the prime minister is appointed by the president and accountable to the parliament. The prime minister is in charge of implementing domestic policy and coordinating the government's team of ministers.

The president holds substantial powers over foreign policy, European affairs and defense. He is also the commander-in-chief of the country's armed forces. (AP)

Sri Lanka to join US-led naval operations against Houthi rebels in Red Sea

COLOMBO, Jan 9: Debt-ridden Sri Lanka's navy is preparing to join a US-led operation to protect merchant vessels sailing in the Red Sea against attacks by Houthi rebels, a Sri Lankan navy spokesman said on Tuesday.

The attacks by Houthi rebels have targeted commercial shipping vessels transiting through the critical Bab el-Mandeb Strait that links markets in Asia and Europe following the October 7 attack by Hamas and Israel's subsequent war against the militant group in Gaza.

The US and its allies launched Operation Prosperity Guardian to protect ship traffic, and warships from the US, France, and the UK are patrolling the area.

No date has been set for sending the Sri Lankan ships and the area they will patrol has not been finalised, said navy spokesman Capt. Gayan Wickramasuriya.

The decision to send the ships drew criticism from opposition lawmakers in the island nation. Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa blamed the government for spending LKR 250 million (USD 777,000) to send ships to fight Houthi rebels in the Red Sea when Sri Lankans are experiencing severe economic hardships at home.

State Minister of Defense Pramitha Tennakoon defended the move, saying the government wants to fulfill its "global responsibilities" and noting that "Sri Lanka is against any form of terrorism".

He added that Sri Lanka would incur no additional costs by joining the operations, as the country's ships are already patrolling its vast maritime area in the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lanka is struggling to get through the worst economic crisis in its history. The country declared bankruptcy in April 2022 with more than USD 83 billion in debt — more than half of it to foreign creditors. Its economy was plunged into crisis, with severe shortages of food, fuel and other necessities.

Strident public protests led to the ouster of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The IMF agreed in March last year to a USD 2.9-billion bailout package.

Sri Lanka hopes to restructure USD 17 billion of its tens of billions of outstanding debt.

Over the past year, severe shortages of essentials like food, fuel and medicine have largely abated, and authorities have restored power supplies. But public dissatisfaction has grown over the government's efforts to increase revenues by raising electricity bills and imposing heavy new income taxes on professionals and businesses.

Last week, the government increased the rate of the valued added tax and extended it to cover many essential items, including cooking gas, fuel, medicine and others. (AP)

Hindu Americans hold car rally in Houston ahead of Ram temple's consecration in Ayodhya

HOUSTON, Jan 9: Members of the Hindu American community on Sunday held a huge car rally across Houston, stopping at 11 temples along the way amid bhajans and slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram' in view of the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya later this month.

Temple officials received a formal invitation from Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) to attend the consecration ceremony being held in Ayodhya on January 22.

Over 500 enthusiastic riders, carrying saffron banners with an image of the Ram temple, the Indian flag and the US flag, participated in the rally in a 3-mile-long line of 216 cars escorted by eight policemen on bikes.

The rally was flagged off at Sri Meenakshi Temple by Houston philanthropist Jugal Malani and it concluded late afternoon at Sri Sharadamba Temple in Richmond.

Criss-crossing across Houston's busy roadways, the procession, led by a truck, covered 100 miles with stopovers



at eleven temples over six hours.

Around 2,000 devotees, both young and old, and some teary-eyed, welcomed the procession with bhajans at the temples.

"The chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' and sounds of conches ensured full sensory overload for each and every person present at the temples. And yet again the vastness of Shri Ram's influence and unwavering devotion of his followers was undeniable. But the best part was experiencing this perspective with fellow Ram 'bhakts'," said Kusum Vyas, founder of Living Planet Foundation.

The rally, a first of its kind, was or-

The United States has pressed Israel to scale down its offensive in Gaza to more precise operations targeting Hamas

Blinken in Israel looks to planning for post-war Gaza as bombardment, fighting continue to rage

TEL AVIV, Jan 9: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken held talks in Israel on Tuesday as he seeks a plan for Gaza's post-war future, while Israel's military pushed ahead with its offensive in the beleaguered territory. Heavy bombardment and fighting shook refugee camps, sending Palestinians scrambling to find safety and hampering aid groups' efforts to get relief to the population.

Blinken arrived in Israel after saying he had secured commitments from four Arab nations and Turkey to help in rebuilding Gaza after the war, something they'd been reluctant to promise before a stop in fighting.

But the U.S. and Israel remain deeply divided over how Gaza will be run when - and if - its current Hamas rulers are defeated. American officials have called for the Palestinian Authority, which currently governs parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to take over in Gaza and for negotiations to resume on the creation of a Palestinian state. Israeli leaders have staunchly refused both.

Blinken is also trying to prevent the conflict from spreading after an escalation in fighting between Israel and Hezbollah and threats by Israel to step up military action to put an end to almost daily fire across the border from Lebanon by the militant group.

The United States has pressed Israel to scale down its offensive in Gaza to more precise operations targeting Hamas. But the pace of death and destruction has remained largely the same, with several hundred Palestinians killed a day, according to health officials in Gaza. Israel has vowed to keep going until it has destroyed Hamas throughout the territory, in response to the Oct. 7 attack during which militants killed some 1,200 people, mainly civilians, in southern Israel and kidnapped around 250 others.

Still, after three months of fighting, Hamas has continued to put up a fierce fight.

The Israeli military says it has dismantled Hamas infrastructure in northern Gaza, where large swaths of the cityscape have



been demolished. But fighting continues there against what Israel says are pockets of militants. The offensive's focus has shifted to the southern city of Khan Younis, where ground troops have been fighting militants for weeks, and a number of urban refugee camps in central Gaza.

"The fighting will continue throughout 2024," military spokesman Daniel Hagari said.

Throughout the night and into Tuesday morning, Israeli artillery shelling and gunfire echoed through the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, where troops have been pushing in from the north, said one resident, Saeed Moustafa. They were facing heavy resistance from gunmen in the camp, he said.

Like other refugee camps in Gaza, Nuseirat was built to house Palestinians who were driven out of homes during the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, and over the decades it has been built up into a densely populated town housing refugees and their descendants.

Families in Nuseirat's northern neighborhoods were fleeing to other parts of the camp, Moustafa said by phone, with the sound of sporadic gunfire in the background.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry issues an alert saying China has launched a satellite and urging caution

TAIPEI, Jan 9: Taiwan's Defense Ministry issued an alert on Tuesday saying China has launched a satellite and urging caution days before the island's elections. Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary elections on Saturday that China has described as a choice between war and peace. The bilingual alert sent to residents' mobile phones cautioned in English that there was a missile flyover. The Defense Ministry later issued a statement apologizing to the public for the faulty English translation and clarifying that China had launched a rocket carrying a satellite -- not a missile.

The ministry said the Chinese rocket flew over southern Taiwan at high altitude.

Chinese state media reported that the country launched a satellite called Einstein with a Long March 2C rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province in southwestern China. Broadcaster CCTV said the satellite entered orbit and the launch was a success.

The alerts went off in the middle of an international news conference by Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. He clarified it was a satellite launch, told journalists not to worry, and proceeded with the news conference.

"We need to stay responsible;

we need to stay moderate in order to prevent (a) conflict from happening between Taiwan and China," he said. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who was in the southern city of Kaohsiung, urged the public not to worry, according to local media. Beijing views Taiwan, which is about 160 kilometers (100 miles) off China's east coast, as a renegade province that must come under its control.

Beijing has intensified its military harassment of the island inhabited by 23 million people in recent months, sending military vessels and aircraft near it almost daily. Beijing has also been flying balloons -- which are feared to be used for surveillance -- near the island despite Taiwan's complaints.

China has repeatedly expressed its disdain for the front-runner in Taiwan's presidential election, current Vice President William Lai of the Democratic Progressive Party. Beijing has called Lai "a destroyer of peace" and a separatist, and favors the more China-friendly Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, whose presidential candidate is Hou Yu-ih.

A third candidate from the smaller Taiwan People's Party, Ko Wen-je, is also running in Saturday's election. (AP)



Dog meat production and sales will soon become illegal in SKorea

SEOUL, Jan 9: South Korea's parliament on Tuesday passed a landmark ban on production and sales of dog meat, as public calls for a prohibition have grown sharply over concerns about animal rights and the country's international image.

Some angry dog farmers said they plan to challenge the bill's constitutionality and hold protest rallies, a sign of continued heated debate over the ban.

The bill would make slaughtering, breeding and sales of dog meat for human consumption illegal from 2027 and punishable by 2-3 years in prison. It doesn't provide any penalties for eating dog meat.

Dog meat consumption, a centuries-old practice on the Korean Peninsula, is neither explicitly banned nor legalized in South Korea. Recent surveys show more than half of South Koreans want dog meat banned and a majority no longer eat it. But one in every three South Koreans still opposes a ban even though they don't consume it.

The National Assembly passed the bill by a 208-0 vote. It will become law after being endorsed by the Cabinet Council and signed by President Yoon Suk Yeol, considered formalities since his government supports the ban. "This law is aimed at contributing to realizing the values of animal rights, which pursue respect for life and a harmonious co-existence between humans and animals," the legislation says.

The bill offers assistance to dog farmers and others in the industry in shutting down their businesses and shifting to alternatives. Details are to be worked out among government officials, farmers, experts and animal rights activists.

Humane Society International called the legislation's passage "history in the making."

"I never thought I would see in my lifetime a ban on the cruel dog meat industry in South Korea, but this historic win for animals is testament to the passion and determination of our animal protection movement," said JungAh Chae, executive director of HSI's Korea office.



Farmers were extremely upset by the bill's passage. "This is a clear case of state violence as they are infringing on our freedom to choose our occupation. We can't just sit by idly," said Son Won Hak, a farmer and former leader of a farmers' association.

Son said dog farmers will file a petition with the Constitutional Court of Korea and hold demonstrations. He said farmers will meet on Wednesday to discuss other steps.

There is no reliable official data on the exact size of South Korea's dog meat industry. Activists and farmers say hundreds of thousands of dogs are slaughtered for meat each year. The anti-dog meat campaign received a huge boost from the country's first lady, Kim Keon Hee, who has repeatedly expressed her support for a prohibition. She has become the subject of withering criticism and crude insults during demonstrations by farmers. (AP)

After laying the wreath, Sheikh Hasina stood in solemn silence for some time as a mark of profound respect for the memory of Bangabandhu, who was assassinated on August 15, 1975.

Earlier in the morning, the prime minister along with her younger sister Sheikh Rehana and daughter Saima Wazed went to the Banani graveyard and paid tributes to those killed on August 15. (PTI)

PM Hasina pays homage to Bangabandhu after election victory

DHAKA, Jan 9: Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina on Tuesday paid glowing tribute to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after her party's landslide victory in the 12th parliamentary election.

The 76-year-old leader, ruling the nation since 2009, won a fifth overall term in the one-sided election on Sunday, which witnessed a low turnout.

She paid homage by placing a wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu inside the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Mujibur Rahman's younger daughter and the prime minister's younger sister, Sheikh Rehana, later also separately placed a wreath at the portrait.

The prime minister's daughter Saima Wazed and Sheikh Rehana's son Radwan Mujib Siddiq were present on the occasion.

After laying the wreath, Sheikh Hasina stood in solemn silence for some time as a mark of profound respect for the memory of Bangabandhu, who was assassinated on August 15, 1975.

Earlier in the morning, the prime minister along with her younger sister Sheikh Rehana and daughter Saima Wazed went to the Banani graveyard and paid tributes to those killed on August 15. (PTI)

A Communist candidate gets approval to run in the Russian presidential election

MOSCOW, Jan 9: Russia's national elections commission on Tuesday registered the Communist Party's candidate to compete with President Vladimir Putin in the March election that Putin is all but certain to win.

Nikolai Kharitonov joins two other candidates who were approved for the ballot last week. Kharitonov, a member of the lower house of parliament, has opposed some of Putin's domestic policies but not Russia's military operation in Ukraine.

Although the Communist candidate typically gets the second-highest vote tally, Kharitonov does not present a significant challenge to Putin. As the party's candidate in the 2004 election, he tallied just 13.8%.

Putin has dominated Russian politics since he was first elected to the presidency in 2000.

The commission last week approved Leonid Slutsky of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party and Vladislav Davankov of the New People Party for the March 15-17 vote. (AP)

Imran Khan arrested in connection with attack on Pakistan Army headquarters on May 9

ISLAMABAD, Jan 9: Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan was on Tuesday arrested in a case related to the attack on the Pakistan Army headquarters in Rawalpindi on May 9 last year, soon after his release warrant was issued in the cipher case.

An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Rawalpindi had summoned the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder, who is already behind bars in cipher and graft cases, in May 9 cases on Tuesday. However, Khan attended the court's proceedings via video link as he could not be produced in the court by Adiala jail authorities owing to security concerns.

During the hearing of the cases, police sought physical remand of the 71-year-old founder in the GHQ attack case, however, ATC Judge Malik Aijaz Asif turned down the request, Geo News reported.

The judge directed the police to interrogate Khan in Adiala prison, it added. On Monday, the special court formed to hear cases under the Official Secrets Act had issued his release orders in the cipher case.

Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain issued the release order of Khan, stating that the former premier's bail had been approved and he shall be released if not wanted in any other

case. Despite having the release order, Khan remains behind bars due to being arrested in the Toshakhana and 190 million pound Al-Qadir Trust scandal.

On May 9, 2023, violent protests erupted after the arrest of Khan by paramilitary Rangers in Islamabad. Over 20 military installations and state buildings, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi, were damaged or torched in the violent protests that followed Khan's arrest in a corruption case. The party ran into trouble after the May 9 violence by its supporters.

Khan and several of his party leaders have been facing numerous cases since the ouster of the party from power in April 2022 and later in the wake of the May 9 violence.

Khan was ousted through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022. He was incarcerated on August 5 last year, after an Islamabad court sentenced him to three years in prison in the Toshakhana case. He was lodged in the Attock District Jail to serve his prison term.

Later, his sentence was suspended by the Islamabad High Court, but then he was arrested in the cipher case and remained in the Attock jail on judicial remand. He was later shifted to Adiala jail. (PTI)

Over 1138 members join UPPL in Kumarikata

Growing support for ruling UPPL party as diverse political backgrounds unite

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 9: In a significant development, a total of 1138 individuals, including members from various political parties and social organisations such as BPF and Congress, joined the ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL). The grand joining ceremony took place at Kumarikata under Darrangajuli block committee in Tamulpur district, witnessing a public meeting to welcome the new members.



Party president and chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro, state cabinet minister Urkha Gwra Brahma, and BTR executive member Ranjit Basumatary extended warm welcome and felicitations to the new members.

lighted the ongoing sustainable development initiatives.

CEM Pramod Boro stated that the BTR government has launched various developmental projects benefiting the common masses across the Bodoland region. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to achieving all-round development in the days to come.

Welcoming the newly joined members to the UPPL family, CEM Pramod Boro expressed optimism that the party would continue to garner massive support, unity, and integrity in the future. The grand joining ceremony reflects the growing popularity and acceptance of the UPPL party among the communities in the Bodoland Territorial Region.

Silchar Municipality pioneers cashless transactions with Paytm services launch

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Silchar Municipality has taken a significant stride towards modernising cashless transactions by launching the state's first Paytm service for the hassle-free payment of municipal taxes through a digital platform using QR codes. The event took place at the conference hall of Silchar Municipality on Monday, organised by the Silchar Municipality Board.

Silchar municipality to deposit house tax, betterment fees, trade license fees, and other municipal taxes online through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system. An agreement has been signed between Silchar Municipality and Paytm, enabling payments through scanning QR codes or using ATM cards at the municipal counter initially. Paytm has provided Electronic Data Capture (EDC) machines to the municipality, and the development of an app is currently underway, expected to be completed within the month. Once complete, citizens can conveniently pay their taxes from the comfort of their homes by downloading the app. Dr Rajdeep Roy, during the Paytm service launch, highlighted that India is among the countries where people commonly transact money through digital platforms, fulfilling the vision of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that India leads the world in the highest amount of money transacted through digital modes. Dr Roy commended Silchar Municipality for taking the lead in introducing digital payments for government fees and dues, making it the first municipality in the state to embrace this initiative.

MLA Dipayan Chakraborty expressed pride in the success of cashless transactions initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, overcoming opposition. He also called for cooperation to free illegal encroachments in various areas of Silchar city.

The event saw relevant speeches from MLAs Mihir Kanti Som, Nityabhushan Dey, Rohan Roy, and others. The executive officer of Silchar Municipality, Rajiv Roy, explained the objectives and purposes of the occasion.

Guwahati Airport's special initiative

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, has undertaken a special initiative to provide essential items aimed at deterring wild elephant herds in the Rangamati and Mirza areas of South Kamrup district. The distributed items include flashlights, kerosene oil, and other necessities.

The chief airport officer, Utpal Barua, along with finance controller Mantu Kumar, HR manager Arnav Phanglocha, and corporate communication officer Ruma Devi, actively participated in the distribution of charging flashlights and other essential items to help local residents chase away elephants in rural villages. Approximately 30 people from Rangamati Bakrapara village, led by Jayant Sharma and Dimbeswar Sharma, received the aid. Additionally, around 50 people in Mirza, led by Anup Jyoti Das and Pankaj Kumar Das, benefited from this community support initiative.

Assam Rifles distributes sports items

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 9: In a significant move to encourage sports excellence, the Assam Rifles in Lokra, as part of the Assam Rifles Civil Action Programme, conducted a thorough selection of football players from Sonitpur district. Following a comprehensive assessment, a talented team has been meticulously chosen to represent Assam in the upcoming AR Sentinels of NE Football Tournament 2023-24.

Demonstrating their commitment to empowering athletes, the Assam Rifles took the initiative to distribute football items and essential amenities to the selected team. This thoughtful gesture, falling under the broader AR CAP program, not only highlights the development of sporting talents but also underscores the crucial role of community support in nurturing regional representation on the football stage.

The distributed resources aim to equip the team for success, fostering a sense of pride as they embark on the journey to compete in one of the region's premier football tournaments.

A total of 20 players and 2 coaches were selected to participate in the upcoming tournament.

Seminar organised in Gauhati University

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Addressing the sensitive topic of disability, the North Assam Chapter of Saksham organised a state-level seminar on Monday, at Gauhati University. The seminar aimed to provide a platform for discussions on the challenges faced by differently-abled individuals, fostering awareness, understanding, and influencing positive changes in attitudes and behaviors towards their inclusion in society. Dr Arup Jyoti Kalita, the honorary secretary of Saksham North Assam Prant, stated the importance of sensitising various stakeholders, including social workers, students, instructors, and the general public, about the issues confronted by people with disabilities.

The seminar began with a devotional song performed by Abhilash Barthakur, a talented divyang youth. Dr Ranjan Kakati, director of Students' Welfare at Gauhati University, welcomed the attendees and resource persons, expressing his anticipation for an insightful discussion. Chandrasekharji, the national sangathan mantri of Saksham, highlighted the impact of disability on families and provided insights into the

overall disability scenario in India. He also shared information about Saksham's efforts during the seminar. Kishor Thakuria, director of the Department of Social Justice, Government of Assam, participated as a special speaker, highlighting the significant percentage of the population represented by specially-abled individuals and acknowledging their creative and productive potential. He outlined various government initiatives aimed at enhancing the welfare of the divyang community. Dr Ashok Purnaik, executive director of AIMS Guwahati, shared his personal experiences and discussed the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Dr Pranab Kalpa Hazarika, a renowned rehabilitation expert, served as a resource person, detailing the legislative protections for specially-abled individuals. He highlighted the paradigm shift, with discrimination against them now recognised as a violation of basic human rights. Dr Hazarika conducted an interactive technical session addressing disability issues in state and potential solutions. The closing remarks and a summary of the seminar's key takeaways were presented by Dr Malomoni Hazarika, a retired medical officer and Saksham volunteer.

ARYA initiative distributes agricultural inputs to beneficiaries

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Jan 9: The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Gossaigaon, under the Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture (ARYA) program, organised a day-long input distribution program at the Zonal Research Station, Gossaigaon. The event, held in collaboration with ICAR ATARI zone VI Guwahati, AAU Jorhat, DBT Biotech KISAN, TERI, Guwahati, and DBT Biotech KISAN under Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, aimed to provide various agricultural and sericulture tools and equipment to beneficiaries.

The distributed tools included 3 in 1 solar cum manual cum electric operated eri silkworm spinning machines (10 nos), electric grinding machines (9 nos), digital weighing balance (12 nos), power sprayers of different capacities (5 liters - 7 nos and 16 liters - 15 nos), chaff cutter (4 nos), and paddy pedal threshers (75 nos). These tools were handed over to farmers, farm women, and young entrepreneurs engaged in scientific eri silkworm rearing, mushroom production, and pig farming under the supervision of subject matter specialists (SMS) at KVK, Kokrajhar.

The distribution event was presided over by Puja Basumatary, SMS (Horticulture); Poma Sarmah, SMS (Community Science); Priyanka Bora; Dr. Muzaharul Islam, SMS (Animal Science); and SMS (Agronomy). The program, hosted by KVK Scientist Poma Sarmah, highlighted the purpose and objectives of the initiative, presented by Dr SK Paul, i/c KVK Kokrajhar. Laljit Gowary, a guttery farmer, and Abdul Wasid Sheikh, a duckery state government awardee, were honoured with traditional Aronai during the event.

BSF conducts pre-recruitment training for youth in bordering areas

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 9: In line with its unwavering dedication to safeguarding the nation's borders, the Border Security Force (BSF) is actively involved in the upliftment of the border population. To this end, a pre-recruitment training program has been organised collaboratively by the 31st Battalion of BSF under BSF Guwahati Frontier and the non-governmental organisation 'Seemanta Chetna Manch, Purvottar' at Chilarai stadium, Golakganj, in the Dhubri district. The initiative is specifically designed for girls residing in the bordering areas along the Indo-Bangladesh International border.

Forces, and state police. Experienced officials and women trainers are actively involved in imparting the necessary skills and knowledge during the training.

A total of 115 girls from the bordering areas are benefiting from this pre-recruitment training program. The primary objective is to motivate and inspire local youth to consider joining the Indian Armed Forces, Central Armed Forces, and state police, instilling in them a sense of pride in serving the nation. The Border Security Force remains committed to enhancing the capabilities of the border population and contributing to the upliftment of the country's future.

NFR achieves significant growth in freight loading

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Northeast Frontier Railway continues its upward trajectory in freight loading, demonstrating consistent growth by loading 0.883 million tonnes in December 2023. The cumulative freight loading for the current financial year, from April to December 2023, has now reached an impressive 7.536 million tonnes. Fertiliser and P.O.L (Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants) loading showed substantial progress during the April to December 2023 period, with fertiliser loading increasing by 26.1%, and P.O.L items witnessing a remarkable growth of 39.4%. Other commodities like ballast experienced a significant upsurge, marking a 57.1% increase, while miscellaneous commodities recorded a growth of 27.8%, compared to the corresponding period in the previous financial year.

The dedicated efforts of NF Railway, operating tirelessly to serve its customers and ensure the timely delivery of essential commodities, underscore the economic activities flourishing in the region. The consistent rise in freight loading reflects the region's thriving economic landscape.

Recognising the potential of local youth and their pivotal role in the nation-building process, the 31st Battalion under BSF Guwahati Frontier is conducting pre-recruitment training from Sunday to Wednesday, with a particular focus on girls. The training aims to prepare youth for written competitive examinations and physical fitness tests for recruitment in the Central Armed Forces, Indian Armed



Forces, and state police. Experienced officials and women trainers are actively involved in imparting the necessary skills and knowledge during the training.

Solar fence protects 170 families, crops in HEC-hit village in Udalguri



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 9: A 7-km long community-managed single-strand solar-powered fence, installed by Aaranyak in collaboration with the Forest Department, is set to safeguard the lives, properties, and livelihoods of approximately 170 families and protect around 500 bighas of cropland in the No 3 Kundarbil village of Udalguri district, known for human-elephant conflicts (HEC).

ground. He expressed gratitude to Aaranyak and the Forest Department for their support in mitigating HEC and ensuring the well-being of the local residents.

Aaranyak's solar fence expert, Anjan Baruah, led the installation of the single-strand fence with support from Aaranyak's Abhijit Saikia, Mandeep Basumatary, Dibakar Nayak, and Bikash Tossa, along with the active involvement of the villagers. During the inauguration, Baruah interacted with the villagers, providing detailed explanations on maintaining the fence for longevity and promoting harmonious coexistence between humans and elephants. Prior to the handover to the community, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the solar fence committee, Forest Department, and Aaranyak. The inauguration ceremony was attended by a team from the Forest Department, led by Bir Bahadur Mogor from Shantipur Beat, VDP secretaries Tanka Bahadur Sonar and Dhan Kumar Ray, and social worker Sanjay Daimary. Representatives from Aaranyak, including Rabiya Daimari, Reshma Narzary, Rupam Gayary, and Pradeep Barman, also participated in the ceremony. The meeting was presided over by Raju Ray and moderated by Krishna Darjee of the solar fence committee.

proven tool for mitigating HEC, was officially handed over to the community during an inauguration ceremony on December 28. The installation of this solar fence was funded by the SBI Foundation under a project focused on mitigating human-elephant conflict in the region.

The solar-powered electric fence, a

No.DPRD/BTC/(Gen)-23/2023/59

Dated Kokrajhar the 6th Jan., 2024

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders with a validity period of 180 (One hundred eighty) days from the date of receipt in prescribed from affixing non-refundable court fee stamps of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed F-2 form are hereby invited from the Govt. registered PWD (Roads/ Building), Irrigation, Water Resources, PHE others Govt. Contractor's under Class-I (A, B, C), Class-II and Class-III category from approved firm/suppliers of 2020-21/2021-22 according to tender limit of eligibility for the following works and will be received in the office of the undersigned up to 2.00 pm on 29/01/2024 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2.15 pm in the presence of willing contractors or their authorized agents.

Sl. No.	Name of Dev. Block	Name of Scheme	A/A Amount (In Rs. lakh)	Tender Amount (in Rs. lakh)	Earnest Money (ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	Cost of Tender	Time for completion in days
01	Rowta	Const. of Community Toilet at Dinapur Shiva Mandir	14.28912	14.28912	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 450/-	6 months

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent up to 12.00 Noon on all working days from 09-01-2024 to 29-01-2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment of in the form of Banker cheque/ Demand draft of any nationalized Bank (Preferable SBI) duly pledged to the Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar. The Cost of tender (Non-Refundable) must be in the form of Demand Draft/ Banker Cheque of a Nationalized Bank drawn in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar and payable at SBI, Kokrajhar to be deposited 0.03%. The Contractor should submit valid Registration certificate, 6STIN, PAN Card, Voter Card, Aadhar Card, Caste Certificate and Labour License along with the tender. In case of the office remain closed in tender receiving/ opening day the same will be received/ opened on the next working day.

Note:-

- The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar does not bind himself to accept the lowest tender and also reserves the right to reject all tenders without assigning any reason.
- Payment will be made subject to availability of fund under appropriate Head of Account No claim what so ever in this regard will be entertained.
- Taxes will be deducted as per relevant provision of Act.
- Contractors will have to submit their tender with upto date registration certificate and item of annexure should be with the tender otherwise tender will be treated as cancelled.
- The tenderer should submit their tender with upto date GSTIN certificate and PAN Card failing which the tender may be treated as cancelled.

Sd/- Director,
 Panchayat & Rural Development,
 BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1117

E-AUCTION PROGRAMME FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY 2024

E-Auction programme for sale of Railway Scrap materials under jurisdiction of Tinsukia Division is hereby fixed for the month of FEBRUARY 2024 on 06-02-2024, 13-02-2024, 19-02-2024, 22-02-2024, 26-02-2024 & 29-02-2024. Interested bidders may participate in E-auction through IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in.

Sr. Materials Manager, Dibrugarh
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers with a smile

E-AUCTION FOR PARKING CONTRACT AT TINSUKIA DIVISION

E-Auction for awarding license of parking contract at various stations over Tinsukia division. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Trips/Days.: 1096.

Auction Catalogue No. TSK-Parking-18		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	PARKING-TSK-SPK-MX-7-23-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three wheelers and Four Wheelers at location Sapekhati in Tinsukia Division
AA/2	PARKING-TSK-MRG-MX-8-22-2 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three Wheelers and Four Wheelers at location Margherita in Tinsukia Division
AA/3	PARKING-TSK-DBRT-MX-1-22-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers and Four Wheelers at location Dibrugarh Town Railway Station in Tinsukia Division
AA/4	PARKING-TSK-NCH-MX-9-22-2 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three Wheelers and Four Wheelers at Nakachari Rly Station in Tinsukia Division for the period of 03(three) years.
AA/5	PARKING-TSK-NMT-MX-10-23-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three Wheelers and Four Wheelers at location At Namtali in Tinsukia Division for a period of 03(three) years
AA/6	PARKING-TSK-MRHT-MX-3-22-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three wheeler and Four Wheelers at location at Moranhat Railway station in Tinsukia Division
AA/7	PARKING-TSK-BFD-MX-6-22-2 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three wheelers and Four Wheelers at Borhat in Tinsukia Division for a period of 3(three) years.
AB/1	PARKING-TSK-JTTN-PCCV-29-23-1 (Parking - Passenger Carrying Commercial Vehicles)	Parking Lot for Goods carrying Commercial Vehicle at Jorhat Town Goods Yard for a period of 03 (three) years

Auction Start Date & Time: 11.00 hrs. of 24-01-2024. Auction Close Date & Time: 12.40 hrs. of 24-01-2024. Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in

Divisional Commercial Manager (I/C), Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers With A Smile

MP slams Centre, state govt on HNLC issue

SHILLONG, Jan 9: Meghalaya Congress chief and MP from Shillong Vincent, H Pala on Tuesday slammed the Centre and the Meghalaya State government for their "lack" of seriousness in taking forward the peace talks with the Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC).

This came days after the HNLC had announced its decision to withdraw from the peace process following the government's failure to address their five core demands which include lifting of the ban and providing general amnesty to the outfit's leaders and cadres.

The Congress leader also appealed to the HNLC not to run away from the peace process but to instead demand for new negotiators to pursue their issues with the government.

Speaking to journalists, Pala said, "It is unfortunate to see when the HNLC is ready to come to the table but there is no seriousness on the part of the BJP government at the Centre as well as the State."

Criticizing the Central government's failure, he said, "If you see all these issues, it is only the government's big promises in the manifesto but when it comes to reality



they always don't care for the people of North East."

Pala claimed that the Congress had tried its best to minimize activities of undergrounds by bringing peace and said, "You have seen what happened in Assam when Tarun Gogoi was there, he brought ULFA into the negotiating table and Assam is prosperous and Assam is doing good now. In between also when Congress was in power, we tried to minimize all the undergrounds, we brought peace but today again in spite of all those again this BJP government now

don't take it seriously. It is very unfortunate."

Stating that the opposition are not privy to the negotiation between the government and HNLC, he however said, "We have not been invited, we have not been informed and we have not been briefed, so the details I think you should get from them rather from us."

Extending full support to the peace talks, the Congress chief said, "I fully support the peace deal whatever conditions are there, our people are very small in number

we cannot afford to lose our brothers and sisters because of guns, we cannot afford to lose peace only because of ego, we cannot afford to lose peace only because of people in the BJP does not bother about the people of Meghalaya."

Appealing to the HNLC not to pull out of the peace talks, Pala said, "I urge the HNLC to have patience. I appeal to the HNLC that whatever decision they are taking is a big decision, it matters to the economy of the state, it matters to the life of the people, and it matters to so many things within the state. I appeal to the HNLC not to just stop the negotiation. Continue the negotiation and try to see and convince if required, they can also put or demand new negotiators. I think it is also important for them to take it seriously. I request them not to run away from the negotiation and I request them to come forward and be more proactive."

"I don't know what is the reason, why all these failures and whom to blame but I feel that we need peace in Meghalaya, we need peace in the Bri U Hynniewtre and the State and the country as a whole," he said. (NNN)

BJP set to win Sikkim RS seat uncontested'

The scrutiny of the nomination papers to take place today

GANGTOK, Jan 9: BJP nominee DT Lepcha is set to win the Rajya Sabha election in Sikkim uncontested with no other candidate filing the nomination papers, officials said on Tuesday.

Lepcha, the MLA of Gnathang Machong in Pakyong district, would have anyway won the election with the ruling SKM extending support to him. The BJP and the SKM together account for 31 of the assembly's total 32 seats.

The stipulated time for the filing of nomination ended at 3 pm, and only Lepcha's papers were received by the office of the Returning Officer, the assembly secretariat said. The scrutiny of the nomination papers will take place on Wednesday, it said.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang and BJP state unit president DR Thapa accompanied Lepcha when he filed his nomination papers at the assembly.

Lepcha was a minister in the previous SDF government, and held portfolios such as Buildings & Housing, and Transport. In the 32-member Sikkim as-



sembly, SKM has 19 members, BJP has 12 and the SDF has one member.

BJP did not win any seat in the last assembly elections, in which the SKM came to power. Lepcha along with nine MLAs of the SDF switched over to the BJP, making it the second largest party in the assembly overnight. Later, the BJP also won by-elections to two seats, taking its tally to 12.

Lepcha's Rajya Sabha nomination is being considered as his reward for helping the BJP become a major player in the Himalayan state.

The lone Rajya Sabha seat in the state is at present held by two-term MP Hishay Lachungpa of the opposition SDF. His tenure will end on February 23. The polling for the election was scheduled on January 19. (PTI)

MPCC terms MDA a total failure

SHILLONG, Jan 9: Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) president and MP from Shillong, Vincent H Pala on Tuesday termed the National People's Party-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government a total failure.

Speaking to reporters, Pala said, "Be it MDA-1 or MDA-2, I am talking from the point of commitment, they promised work to 5 lakh people but I think not even 1 lakh has been achieved. At least if you divide that 5 lakh by 5 years so how many have been employed, zero. They promised coal in their manifesto, zero. They have made a fanfare that they are given a mining license, zero. Rather they gave us so many Coke plants, it has become poison for the people and with that Coke plants people today are having an orange festival without oranges. Today people are having a pine festival without pines."

"The decision they have taken only for the sake of money and greed, they have spoiled the entire West Khasi Hills, the entire Jaintia Hills and the entire border. I think it (the MDA government) is a total failure. Nobody will be happy. Not only for the last 10 months but before (last five years) also," he added.

On the other hand, Pala said that the ego of the party leaders had given the ruling National People's Party (NPP) a second chance to form the government in Meghalaya.

"But somehow because of the gap between the leaders, because of the ego of the leaders from the Congress, they (NPP) got a second chance (to form the government again)," Pala told reporters after a party meeting held here.

He expressed confidence that the people of Meghalaya will "rethink given the failures" of the NPP-led MDA government.

"But people will definitely realise and definitely will rethink right from the coming elections of the Lok Sabha," Pala said. (NNN)

Committee formed to study removal of Kuki-Chin tribes from ST list

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Manipur government has formed a committee, consisting of all recognized tribes in the state, for a recommendation, which is a prerequisite to process inclusion or removal of a tribe from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list of India.

The recommendation was necessitated when the Manipur government was asked by the Centre to examine a representation seeking the deletion of the "Nomadic Chin-Kuki" from the list of Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Manipur.

Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh, on Tuesday (January 09), said that they (Nomadic Chin-Kuki) were included in the ST list of India, but how it was included (in the list) have to be re-examined before giving any comment/recommendation to this effect.

"We have formed a committee consisting of all recognized tribes in the state then only we would be able to send the recommendation to the Centre," the Manipur CM said in reply to a question posed by a reporter.

In Manipur, there are 34 government-recognized tribes.

The union tribal affairs ministry has taken the measures in reply to a representation seeking to delist the "nomadic Chin-



Kuki" from the ST list that was made by Maheshwar Thounaojam, national secretary of the Republican Party of India (Athawale), who is based in Imphal.

In a letter dated December 26, 2023, sent to the union government, Thounaojam claimed that the addition of a few entries in Manipur's ST list over the years — such as "Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes", "Zou", and "Any Kuki tribes" — is objectionable.

Since then the union government in an office memorandum to Manipur said the process of inclusion or exclusion from the ST list requires the proposal to originate from the concerned state government.

Hence, it was sending the representation to the Manipur government for its recommendation.

Cache of arms and ammunition recovered

IMPHAL, Jan 9: Manipur police in Churachandpur district on Tuesday recovered a cache of arms and ammunition in a joint operation with the Assam Rifles.

An official source said 13 weapons including one 9mm carbine, one 9mm pistol, five single barrel rifles, one tear gas gun, eight hand grenades, five improvised mortars ammunition and other war like stores were recovered in the operation conducted in the general area of Khotuh village under Henglep police station.

The operation was conducted acting on specific intelligence regarding the presence of arms and ammunition in the area, police said.



The recovered items have been handed over to Henglep police station for further investigations, the police added.

The police and with the central security forces have

been conducting combing operations in the fringe and vulnerable areas across the violent affected districts of the state to recover illegal weapons in the possessions of the miscreants and those

weapons, ammunition and explosives looted from the armouries of the police and security forces during the initial stage of the outbreak of the violence on May 3 last year.

A total of 5,669 different types of sophisticated arms and around 500,000 rounds of ammunition were looted from police stations and armouries by mobs and individuals.

Maximum number of arms and ammunition were looted in Imphal West, Imphal East and Churachandpur districts, according to the police report. The ethnic violence triggered on May 3 last year and has since left at least 200 people dead and 50,000 displaced. (NNN)

India International Puppet Festival 2024 commences

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: The India International Puppet Festival 2024 has kicked off with the noble objective of reviving the traditional puppet dance heritage of the North East. Organised by the International Art and Cultural Foundation (IACF), Bangalore, a remarkable organisation dedicated to promoting and preserving endangered folk arts, the festival is supported by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. This four-day event will unfold in various parts of Assam.

The festival commenced on Tuesday and will run until January 12, featuring performances at four schools across Assam. Vatsya Shandilya, the director-general of IACF, attended the puppet dance program at Down Town School in Guwahati. The primary goal is to revive the rich toy traditions of the North East.

During the event, Binita Devi, who received a National Tagore Scholarship from the Ministry of Culture, Govern-

ment of India, showcased the enchanting art of puppetry. Binita Devi not only conducts puppet dance workshops but also imparts knowledge about toy dancing to school students. The program included both plays and dances through puppetry, creating engaging stories for the new generation, especially school children. Binita Devi demonstrated puppetry techniques to the students, showcasing the intricacies of this traditional art form. Writer Ajay Mulik presented the play 'Lobong-Latika', and Binita Devi directed the Bagumba dance through puppetry, adding a captivating dimension to the event.

Maya Fernandez, the principal of Down Town School, highlighted the importance of puppet dancing for students and praised the puppetry art displayed during the event. The India International Puppet Festival 2024 serves as a commendable initiative to revive and celebrate the cultural heritage of puppetry in the North East.

Tripura performing well in implementation of rural schemes: Minister

AGARTALA, Jan 9: Union minister Kapil M Patil lauded Tripura for its implementation of different rural schemes, noting that gram panchayats and block development offices have coordinated well in extending benefits to people.

Patil, who is on a two-day visit to the northeastern state, held a review meeting of the panchayat department on the implementation of various centrally sponsored schemes.

"Tripura has performed well in the implementation of MGNREGA, PMAY (G) and schemes meant for drinking water, sanitation and electricity. The gram panchayats and block development offices have been

working together to provide benefits to people," the Minister of state for panchayat raj said on Monday.

He said that Tripura was sanctioned 4.12 lakhs houses the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana — Gramin, of which 3.15 lakh houses have already been completed.

Under MGNREGA, Patil said the state has generated 18.71 crore person days during the last five years.

Patil also stated that property cards will soon be issued under the Swamitva scheme.

"Tripura has completed all the ground work to implement the scheme," he told reporters. (PTI)

Himanta reviews preparations for president's visit to Assam

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday reviewed the preparations for the day-long visit of President Droupadi Murmu to the state on January 17.

The chief minister reviewed various aspects of the visit, such as security, health facilities, and road communication.

"Ahead of Hon'ble President of India Smt Droupadi Murmu's visit to Diphu, HCM Dr @himantabiswa chaired a meeting with the top officials of various departments and reviewed the preparations," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) posted on 'X'.

He instructed the officials to ensure a smooth and safe trip for the president, it added.

The president will be attending the golden jubilee celebrations of the Karbi Youth Festival at Tarlangao in Diphu. (PTI)

Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra to reach Nagaland on Jan 15

TRAVEL THROUGH FOUR DISTRICTS

KOHIMA, Jan 9: Rahul Gandhi will arrive in Nagaland on January 15 evening and travel through at least four districts of the state as part of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said here on Tuesday.

He will reach Nagaland a day after the launch of the Yatra in Manipur on January 14 and go to Assam on January 18, he told reporters here.

Gandhi will spend the night in Khuzama village, which is on the border with Manipur, after entering Nagaland and hold a rally in the heart of Kohima the next day. He will later go to Kohima, Wokha, Zunheboto and Mokukchung districts for the Yatra, Venugopal, who is here along with other AICC leaders for a preparatory meeting, said.

"The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra which will cover 6500 km from Imphal to Mumbai has nothing to do with politics. It does not have any connection with the Parliamentary election due this year. Its objective is to seek justice for the youth, women, the poor and the farmers and highlight peoples' sentiments, their issues through a bigger platform," he said.

Venugopal blamed the BJP-led government at the Centre for not paying attention to fulfill the aspirations of the youth of the country. "The women are



faced with continuous harassment in every sphere of life. At the same time the gap between the rich and the poor is widening everyday as the entire government is concentrating on making one or two people extra rich by totally neglecting the poor people of the country.

"The BJP-led government has even diluted the MGNREGA, which was meant for the uplift of the poor in rural areas," he said.

The Congress is taking up the issues of the common people in the Yatra, he said and asked all like-minded people, intellectuals and civil society to join it.

For Nagaland the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will be "historic" as it will give the state Congress the opportunity to strengthen and rebuild itself from the grassroots level, he said.

NPC president S. Supongmeren Jamir and former president K. Thier were present at the meeting. (PTI)

PM Modi holds bilateral meeting with President of Timor-Leste, discusses ways to further boost ties

GANDHINAGAR, Jan 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a bilateral meeting with President of Timor-Leste Jose Ramos Horta here on Tuesday with the discussions covering cooperation in various fields including health, traditional medicine, energy, IT, fintech and capacity building, an MEA official said.

PM Modi reached Ahmedabad on Monday night.

On Tuesday morning, he reached the Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre in Gandhinagar to hold bilateral meetings with world leaders, a day before the inauguration of the 10th edition of Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit.

"Had an excellent meeting with President @JoseRamosHorta of Timor-Leste. The fact that our meeting is taking place in Mahatma Mandir, Gandhinagar, makes this meeting even more special considering Gandhi Ji's influence on President Horta's life and work. We discussed ways to further bilateral and cultural ties between our nations," Modi said in a post on X after the meeting.

"Furthering the Delhi-Dili connect! PM @narendramodi held a productive meeting with President @JoseRamosHorta of Timor-Leste in Gandhinagar," Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on X.

PM Modi congratulated President Horta for Timor-Leste's up-



coming membership of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), he said.

"The PM invited Timor-Leste to join the International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. Discussions covered bilateral cooperation in various fields including development partnership in health, traditional medicine, energy, IT, fintech, capacity building among others," he said.

During the day, PM Modi will hold bilateral meetings with various world leaders.

At around 3 pm, he will inaugurate the Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show, the PMO said.

In the evening, Prime Minister Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan will lead a road show from outside the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport here, officials said.

The 3-km-long roadshow will start in the evening after the PM receives the UAE President at the airport, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic-East), Ahmedabad city, Safin Hasan.

On Wednesday, PM Modi will inaugurate the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, a global forum for business collaboration, knowledge sharing and strategic partnerships for inclusive growth and sustain-

able development, a statement issued by the PMO said.

After inaugurating the summit on Wednesday, Modi will hold a meeting with CEOs of top global corporations.

He will then travel to the GIFT (Gujarat International Finance Tec) City in Gandhinagar where he will interact with prominent business leaders in the Global FinTech Leadership Forum.

There are 34 partner countries and 16 partner organisations for this year's summit, a press release said.

Further, the Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region will utilise the Vibrant Gujarat platform to showcase investment opportunities in the North-Eastern regions, it said.

The summit will host various events including seminars and conferences on globally relevant topics such as Industry 4.0, Technology and Innovation, Sustainable Manufacturing, Green Hydrogen, Electric Mobility and Renewable Energy and Transition towards Sustainability.

In the Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show, companies will display products made from world class state-of-the-art technology. E-mobility, start-ups, MSMEs, blue economy, green energy and smart infrastructure are some of the focus sectors of the trade show, the release said. (PTI)

Railways land-for-jobs case ED files charge sheet against Lalu Prasad's family, others

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday filed its first charge sheet in the railways land-for-jobs linked money laundering case, naming former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi and her MP daughter Misa Bharti among others, official sources said.

RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav's another daughter Hema Yadav (40), an alleged "close associate" of the Yadav family Amit Katyal (49), railway employee and alleged beneficiary Hridayanand Chaudhary, two firms A K Infosystems Pvt. Ltd. and A B Exports Pvt. Ltd., through their common director Shariqul Bari, have also been named in the charge sheet.

The complaint arraying a total of seven accused has been filed before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Delhi and the court has listed the matter to be heard on January 16, the sources said.

Katyal was arrested in this case by the ED in November last year while Lalu Prasad Yadav was summoned by the agency but is yet to depose. However, his son and Bihar deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav has deposed once before the agency. He has been asked to appear again before it.

Rabri Devi (68), RJD Rajya Sabha MP Misa Bharti (47), and two other daughters of Lalu Yadav and Rabri Devi—Chanda Yadav and Ragini Yadav—have been questioned in this case by the ED.

The alleged scam pertains to the period when Prasad was the railway minister in the UPA-1 government.

It is alleged that from 2004 to 2009, several people were appointed to Group "D" positions in various zones of the Indian Railways and in lieu, these people transferred their land to the family members of the then railway minister Prasad and a linked company named A K Infosystems Private Limited.

A K Infosystems Private Limited is allegedly a "beneficiary company" in the case and its registered address in south Delhi's New Friends Colony was being used by Tejashwi Yadav, the ED had said earlier. Katyal has been a director of this company, as per the agency.

A B Exports Pvt Ltd is a "shell" or fake company

owned by Tejashwi Yadav and Chanda Yadav and its registered address is also the New Friends Colony located bungalow.

The ED alleged Rabri Devi and Hema Yadav sold four land parcels "illegally" acquired from appointees in the Railways to Meridian Construction India Ltd., a company related to Syed Abu Dojana, a former RJD MLA, and the "proceeds of crime" so obtained by Rabri Devi and Hema Yadav were further transferred through a maze of transactions to A B Exports Pvt Ltd and Bhagirathi Tubes respectively.

"Rabri Devi and Hema Yadav sold these land parcels for ₹ 3.5 crore against the acquisition cost of ₹ 7.5 lakh, thus deriving huge gains," the ED earlier claimed.

The agency, in the charge sheet, has requested the court to prosecute the accused for the offence of money laundering and sought confiscation of assets attached by it in this case earlier.

The money laundering case, filed under the criminal sections of the PMLA, stems from a complaint lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The CBI has filed a charge sheet in this case earlier.

Lalu Prasad, Rabri Devi and Tejashwi Yadav have been granted bail by a trial court in October in the CBI case.

According to the CBI, no advertisement or public notice was issued for appointment, but some residents of Patna were appointed as substitutes in different zonal railways in Mumbai, Jabalpur, Kolkata, Jaipur and Hazipur.

As a quid pro quo, the candidates, directly or through their immediate family members, allegedly sold land to Prasad's family members at highly discounted rates, up to one-fourth to one-fifth of the prevailing market rates, the CBI alleged.

Assets worth more than ₹ 6 crore belonging to Rabri Devi, Misa Bharti and linked companies were attached by the ED last year as part of this investigation.

The agency had raided the premises of Chanda Yadav, Ragini Yadav, Hema Yadav, and Abu Dojana in Patna, Phulwari Sharif, Delhi-NCR, Ranchi and Mumbai in March 2023. (PTI)

Take Bilkis Bano case seriously: Pawar to Maharashtra govt

MUMBAI, Jan 9: NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Tuesday appealed to the Maharashtra government to take seriously the case of Bilkis Bano, who was gangraped and her seven family members murdered in 2002, and keep in mind what the Supreme Court has said about the "heinous crime".

The Supreme Court on Monday quashed the remission granted by the Gujarat government to 11 convicts in the case, while slamming the state for being "complicit" with an accused and abusing its discretion.

It ordered all the convicts, who were released prematurely on Independence Day in 2022, back to jail within two weeks.

Excoriating the Gujarat government, the apex court said it "usurped" the power of the Maharashtra government to grant remission to the convicts.

After Bilkis Bano voiced apprehension over tampering with evidence and risk to witnesses, the Gujarat High Court had transferred the trial in the case from Ahmedabad to Mumbai.

The 11 convicts in the case can approach the Maharashtra government with request for remission of their sentences.

Addressing a news conference, Pawar said, "Looking at what the woman has gone through and that seven members of her family were killed, I feel the Maharashtra government will take this case seriously."

"My request is to take this case seriously and keep in mind what the Supreme Court has said about whoever is involved in this heinous crime. The Maharashtra chief minister and home minister should take this case seriously," Pawar said.

The government should take such a decision that a message goes out that such crimes are not accepted in the society, he added.

Bilkis Bano was 21 years old and five months pregnant when she was raped while fleeing the horror of the communal riots that broke out after the Godhra train burning incident in February 2002. Her three-year-old daughter was among the seven family members killed. (PTI)

Shiv Sena (UBT) moves SC flagging 'highly improper' meeting between Speaker, Maha CM DISQUALIFICATION ROW

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Shiv Sena (UBT) of Uddhav Thackeray has denounced in the Supreme Court the "highly improper" meeting between Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and state Legislative Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar, barely three days before the deadline set by the apex court for the latter to decide cross-petitions filed by rival Sena factions seeking disqualification of several of each other's MLAs.

According to news reports, Narwekar met Shinde at 'Varsha', the chief minister's official residence on January 7. The Supreme Court had on December 15, 2023 extended the deadline for Narwekar to decide the disqualification petitions from December 31 to January 10.

"It is respectfully submitted that it is highly improper for the Speaker to meet Eknath Shinde just three days prior to deciding the disqualification petitions, inter alia, filed against Sh. Shinde," Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sunil Prabhu said in an application filed in a pending petition.

The application, filed on January 8 through advocate Nishanth Patil, said the speaker, as the adjudicating authority under the 10th Schedule of the Constitution (relating to disqualification under the anti-defection law), is required to act in a "fair and impartial manner".

"The conduct of the Speaker must inspire confidence and justify the constitutional trust reposed in its high office. However, the present act of the Speaker raises questions about the fairness and impartiality of the decision-making process," Prabhu said in his application.

The application said the act of the speaker in meeting Shinde days before he is expected to announce his decision on the disqualification petitions is in violation of the legal maxim that justice must not only be done, but must also be seen to be done.

"Therefore, the Petitioner is constrained to file the present application to place on record before this Court these significant recent developments which are important for just adjudication of the present case," it said.

Newspaper clippings were attached to the appli-

cation in order to highlight the meeting between Narwekar and Shinde.

While extending the deadline for deciding the disqualification petitions till January 10, the Supreme Court had said the sanctity of the 10th Schedule of the Constitution should be maintained.

The top court had also asked the speaker to decide the NCP's petition seeking disqualification of nine MLAs of the Ajit Pawar group by January 31, 2024. The 10th Schedule of the Constitution is designed to prevent defection of elected and nominated members of Parliament and state legislatures from political parties on whose ticket they win, and contains stringent provisions against it under which they can be disqualified.

The delay in deciding the disqualification petitions against Shinde and Shiv Sena MLAs loyal to him had come under strict scrutiny by the apex court which had come down hard on the assembly speaker at previous hearings, saying the proceedings cannot be reduced to a charade and that he cannot "defeat" its orders.

The top court had passed the order while hearing two petitions filed by the Uddhav Thackeray faction of the Shiv Sena and the Sharad Pawar bloc of the NCP, seeking a direction to the speaker to expeditiously decide the disqualification proceedings.

The Thackeray faction had moved the apex court in July 2023, seeking a direction to the speaker to expeditiously adjudicate the disqualification petitions in a time-bound manner.

The plea by Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) MLA Sunil Prabhu, who as the chief whip of the undivided Shiv Sena had filed the disqualification petitions against Shinde and other MLAs in 2022, alleged the speaker was deliberately delaying the adjudication despite an apex court verdict asking him to decide them within a "reasonable" time.

Later, a separate plea was filed by the Sharad Pawar faction of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) for a direction to the speaker to expeditiously decide the disqualification petitions against deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar and party MLAs loyal to him. (PTI)

With new signage and social media messages, Delhi Metro starts travel safety drive

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: From new signages inside trains to messages on social media, the Delhi Metro has started a new safety campaign in the wake of a recent incident in which a woman suffered fatal injuries after her saree got caught in a train door.

In addition, digital screens mounted at major stations and those in trains are also playing awareness videos specially made to educate commuters about precautions to be taken to ensure their safety while boarding and alighting a train, according to a senior official of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC).

The new signage is akin to the sticker-type signage already seen inside the train coaches. It depicts a saree-clad woman urging passengers to ensure their clothing or belongings do not get caught in the doors. The message is displayed in both Hindi and English.

The move comes in the wake of the incident



that took place on December 14 at the Inderlok Metro Station here. The 35-year-old woman, Reena, succumbed to injuries later at Safdarjung Hospital.

She was dragged along the platform as her sari got caught in the door of a metro train. The woman is survived by her 12-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son.

The DMRC already makes announcements in trains advising passengers to take care of their clothing or belongings while boarding or de-boarding, the official said.

"In the wake of the recent incident, additional measures are also being taken to install such

(safety message) signages on train doors and gates of Platform Screen Doors (PSDs) across the network," the official said.

At the Central Secretariat and the Chandni Chowk metro stations, digital screens are playing videos seeking to build awareness among passengers on metro travel safety.

The videos also warn that closing a door using a bag, foot or any other object is a violation. The official said Section 67 of the Delhi Metro Railways (Operation and Maintenance) Act, 2002, states that obstruction of metro trains can attract punishments such as imprisonment for a term ex-

tending up to four years, or a fine which may extend to Rs 5,000 or both.

The Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety (CMRS) is holding an inquiry into the December 14 incident.

The DMRC has said that it would provide a compensation of Rs 15 lakh to the next of kin of the passenger. In addition, the transporter has said it would bear the education expenses of her two children.

A DMRC official earlier said a train door makes three attempts to shut. If it remains obstructed, the respective door remains in "open condition and the train doesn't move". The door is closed again by a train operator or a train controller as applicable. If a door fails to close, then it is isolated, he had said.

Asked how many such cases of commuters obstructing doors are reported in a month by the DMRC, the official said, "One-two such cases are observed through random surveillance daily." (PTI)

Rajasthan govt to probe corruption during Cong regime: CM Bhajan

JAIPUR, Jan 9: Rajasthan chief minister Bhajan Lal Sharma on Tuesday said his government will probe the alleged corruption that took place during the tenure of the previous Congress regime and get the culprits punished.

Addressing the "Viksit Bharat Sankalp Bharat" camp in Udaipur, Sharma said, "The previous government had given protection (to those involved) in the cases of corruption. The corruption they have done or the corruption that has happened through them -- we will get that investigated and if anyone is found guilty, our government will also get him punished."

He said the "fraud" going on in the name of Indira Rasoi has been stopped and Shri Anna (millets) has been included in the scheme. Earlier, 450 grams of grains were given on the plate under the scheme, Sharma said, adding that his government has increased the amount to 600 grams for the same price.

He said the previous BJP regime in Rajasthan, led by Vasundhara Raje, had launched the Annapurna Rasoi scheme and set up such facilities at hospitals, railway stations and bus stands for the common man, but the subsequent Congress government changed the name of the scheme to Indira Rasoi and raised bogus payments.

Transport unions strike: '95 per cent of buses being operated'

CHENNAI, Jan 9: About 95 per cent of buses in Tamil Nadu were being operated on Tuesday amid the strike call given by various transport unions, including those affiliated to the CPI(M) and AIADMK, officials said.

The state government buses were operated in several parts including Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore and Kanyakumari districts, benefiting the commuters, they said. In Chennai, the Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) authorities ensured the buses were operated as usual and that the strike did not impact the public much.

"The MTC buses were being operated as scheduled from 6 am and the public are requested not to panic," a senior transport official said. "About 80 per cent" of the buses were being run in the state, he said without divulging further details.

The trade unions had announced the strike demanding the implementation of a "6-point charter of demands." It includes the initiation of talks for enhanced wages (15th wage revision pact), filling vacant posts, and release of pending Dearness Allowance for those in service and retired workers. Transport Minister S S Sivasankar had earlier said the demands will be met in due course when the financial situation improves.

Trade union affiliated to the ruling DMK, the Labour Progressive Federation (LPF) is not a part of the strike. Main opposition

AIADMK's Anna Thozhirsanga Peravai (ATP) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) are among those participating in the strike.

After inspecting the operation of bus services to various districts from the Kilambakkam terminus, and earlier at Koyambedu, here, the Transport Minister said all SETC buses were being operated to their full utility and said the strike did not impact the regular services anywhere in the state.

"It's difficult to implement the hike in Dearness Allowance (DA) during the present economic crisis. It will be implemented when the situation improves," he said and blamed the previous AIADMK regime for the present crisis.

He flayed former Chief Minister and AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami for stopping the DA to transport workers for 65 months during the previous AIADMK rule and for not revising the wages of the transport workers. "He is now shedding crocodile tears for the transport workers by demanding the state government to settle the DA arrears pending for 96 months," the Minister told reporters.

The DMK government which effected an increase in salaries was now bearing a monthly expenditure of ₹ 40 crores, Sivasankar added.

Asked about the alleged attempt by a section of protesters to prevent the bus crew from operating the vehicle in certain districts, the

Minister said stringent action would be taken on those preventing the willing workers from discharging their duties.

"They may have a right to strike work in support of a genuine demand after giving prior notice, but it is the government's responsibility to maintain services so that the public is not put to hardship," Sivasankar said.

He appealed to the transport workers to give up strike and resume work as Chief Minister M K Stalin has issued orders to recruit drivers and conductors, the process of which has already commenced. Also, the chief minister had issued appointment letters on compassionate grounds to 800 people in the department.

According to Additional chief secretary, state transport department, Phanindra Reddy about 94 per cent of the state transport services were being maintained on day one of the strike. "We hope to improve further during the day," he said.

The MTC buses were operated as scheduled across Chennai today, though people anticipating a drastic cut in services, rushed to suburban train and metro rail stations to reach their places of work.

"I didn't want to risk being asked to disembark from the bus if the transport crew suddenly decided to join their colleagues striking work. So, I boarded the MRTS from Velachery," N Sridhar, who normally takes a bus to Parrys from Pallikaranai, said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Tripura CM initiates

in Roman script. Kokborok, the mother tongue of most of the tribes of the northeastern state, does not have its own script. (PTI)

Manipur NGOs meet

among different sections of society in Manipur," wrote on micro-blogging site X. Highlighting the party's commitment to peace in Manipur, the Congress also posted on social media claiming that The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, a significant undertaking, is a step in the right direction. "The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is a step in that very direction," Ramesh added.

Northeast being cited

System (CPGRAMS), and said, "It is not only a means of involving citizens but also to bind the entire country. Initiatives such as the Civil Services Day, Good Governance Index and regional conferences have given a massive outreach to the Northeast."

"Under the leadership of the prime minister, the government is making several strides in the field of IT and new age technologies for better delivery of good governance to citizens," he added.

The objective of the conference was to bring national and state level public administration organisations on the same platform to share experiences in innovations in public administration, transforming future public solutions for improving quality of life, good governance, e-Governance, digital governance, among others, according to an official statement. (PTI)

KSA's two-day convention

that it was organised by All India Students Association (AISA), CPI (ML), Students & Youth for Justice (SYJ), and Revolutionary Youth Association (RYA). Rongpi further criticised the activities allegedly carried out by CPI (ML) and called for an end to attempts to divide the KSA. He emphasised that KSA was formed to stand for the cause of the Karbi society and not for the benefit of any political party.

The Manja branch committee unintentionally participated in the convention, Rongpi stated, and he urged Sumit Timung to return to KSA as he is still the general secretary. Responding to allegations from Amlog Engti, former general secretary KSA and CPI(ML) leader, KSA adviser Laichan Engng stated that Engti had contested the KAAC election twice, losing on both occasions. He questioned Engti's motives in trying to divide KSA, asserting that the CPI (ML) had confined KSA general secretary Sumit Timung for party work.

'SAAHASI: DATELINE SINGAPORE': SHORT FILM EXPLORES REPORTAGE OF 2012 DELHI GANGRAPE



SINGAPORE, Jan 9: A group of 20 Singapore-based Indian professionals have joined hands for a short film, narrating how two journalists belonging to different schools of thought reported about the 2012 Delhi gangrape victim who was airlifted from New Delhi to a hospital in the city state in an effort to save her life. Titled "Saahasi: Dateline Singapore", the 27-minute short is directed and produced by Zafar Anjum. It was released on YouTube on January 5. According to Anjum, the idea of "Saahasi" came from Singaporean journalist Gurdip Singh. "I was attracted to the idea because the film had a kernel of truth in it. It tries to shine a spotlight on the slide that we have seen in media ethics in many parts of the world. There are many strands in the story in that sense and we have tried our best to give a sensitive treatment to

all the elements," the filmmaker said.

A 23-year-old physiotherapy intern, who came to be known as "Nirbhaya (the fearless one)", was raped and assaulted by six men inside a bus in south Delhi on December 16, 2012, before being thrown out of the moving vehicle. She died from her injuries on December 29 in Singapore's Mount Elizabeth Hospital, where she was flown by air-ambulance.

Singh, who has reported from Southeast Asia for over four decades, said this was "one of the most unfortunate assignments" of his career. Singh also features as himself in the short film. Sunita Lad Bhamray, executive producer and writer of "Saahasi", described the short as a bold step into uncharted territories, demonstrating a commitment to pushing creative boundaries. (PTI)

Jackie Shroff and family invited for Ram temple consecration ceremony

MUMBAI, Jan 9: Veteran star Jackie Shroff and his family on Tuesday officially received an invitation to attend the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

The 66-year-old actor shared the images from the temple officials' visit to his residence with the invitation. "We are blessed to be a part of the most auspicious Shri Ram JanmBhoomi Mandir Praan-Pratishtha Ceremony on 22nd January at Ayodhya. Grateful to each and every one who is involved and has contributed since so many decades, to bring this historical day in the lives of us Indians.

"Thanks to the respected Dignitaries of the incredible organisation..RSS, Shri Sunil Ambekar ji, Shri Ajay Mudpe ji and our dear friend Mahaveer Jain who visited and graced our home with the auspicious invitation," Shroff posted on Instagram.

Last week, veteran star Rajinikanth also personally received the invitation to attend the consecration ceremony.

Prominent cinema stars, including Amitabh Bachchan, Ajay Devgn, Sunny Deol, Prabhas, Madhuri Dixit, Anupam Kher, Akshay Kumar, Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor, are also expected to be part of the ceremony. (PTI)



DIDN'T SEE MYSELF ON SCREEN GROWING UP: ALAQUA COX ON PLAYING FIRST DEAF, NATIVE AMERICAN SUPERHERO

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Alaqua Cox, who is deaf and comes from an indigenous community, hopes that her portrayal of Maya Lopez in Marvel's series "Echo" paves the way for better representation of people of colour and diverse abilities in Hollywood.

Born out of Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) show "Hawkeye", the new series focuses on Lopez, a deaf, amputee and a Native American character.

"I never imagined myself being a superhero because I grew up seeing average superheroes, who were not people of colour. Being a person of colour and with a disability, it is just so crazy to me that I have this opportunity," Cox told PTI in an interview.

The 26-year-old actor first played Lopez in "Hawkeye", the 2021 series starring Jeremy Renner and Hailee Steinfeld, and made such an impact with her performance that Marvel decided to go ahead with a solo series about the character.

"Hawkeye" was also her first acting gig.

"I found out in the middle of filming that I'll be getting my own show. And I was like, 'No way. This is crazy. I cannot believe it.' And I didn't believe it at first. Of course, I was overwhelmed at first because that was my first time on set and I'm learning all these new things that I did not know before.

"And then they threw this at me and I came from a supporting actor to going number one on a call sheet. I just feel very proud of that moment," Cox said.

The actor, who was born and raised on the Menominee Indian Reservation in Wisconsin, said she wants to make people like her feel represented on the screen.

"My hope is that with diverse communities like us, we can do anything. I'm a disabled, deaf and indigenous person, and I have all these attributes, but now I'm a superhero... It doesn't matter how I am, what colour I am, what disability I have, I can still achieve greatness."

Historically in Hollywood, Cox said characters of deaf persons were portrayed by those who didn't have the disability but now things are changing. "I know I didn't see myself on the



screen a lot growing up, because a lot of the deaf roles were portrayed by hearing people, and they always used sign language wrong. So the deaf people might have a sour attitude toward it because they don't think that they can do anything.

"But now we have more deaf people in Hollywood taking on deaf roles. And so I hope that they will be able to see themselves within these roles and know that they can go for anything," she added.

"Echo", created by Marion Dayre, follows Lopez as she is pursued by Wilson

Fisk aka Kingpin's (Vincent D'Onofrio) criminal empire. When the journey brings her home, she must confront her own family and legacy.

Besides sharing the indigenous roots and disability with her character, the actor said she had another similarity with the character.

"Maya is a very complicated person, she's full of rage and I don't blame her. She grew up with a lot of traumatic events that happened to her. In my childhood, since I was three years old, I've had surgeries that lasted a long part of my life because of my amputated leg. I was in the hospital a lot. (PTI)

Coincidence 'Main Atal Hoon' is releasing ahead of Ram temple consecration ceremony: director

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: It's a "good coincidence" that "Main Atal Hoon", a biopic on former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is set to hit the screens days before the Ram temple consecration ceremony, says director Ravi Jadhav.

The upcoming film, starring Pankaj Tripathi in the title role, offers an insight into the life of Vajpayee, including his role in the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, Pokhran nuclear test, and India-Pakistan ties.

Produced by Vinod Bhanushali, Sandeep Singh, and Kamlesh Bhanushali, "Main Atal Hoon" was previously set to be released on December 25, 2023, on Vajpayee's 98th birth anniversary. It will now arrive in cinema halls on January 19, three days before the ceremony on January 22 in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

Asked if it was a coincidence that "Main Atal Hoon" was set to release days ahead of the Ram temple consecration ceremony, Jadhav told PTI: "It's absolutely a coincidence. It's a good coincidence, I would say that this film is coming now."

The filmmaker, known for National Award-winning movies such as "Natarang" and "Balgandharva", said the team has been working on the film for the past three years.

"We wanted to release the film on December 25. Some post-production work was left on the film, that's why we are (now) releasing it on January 19. We would have delayed the film

even by six months if we were not satisfied. We are now satisfied," he added. Bhanushali, who has been invited to the ceremony along with Singh, said they feel fortunate to bring Vajpayee's life story to the big screen.

"I will say that I am a bad actor because I am not able to express my happiness (that this film is releasing now). As a studio, we feel this is our best film as yet. We are blessed to be able to make a film on a leader like Atal ji. I was wondering why no one made a film on him till now. We haven't chosen this film, Atal ji has chosen us..." he said.

"We didn't know the ceremony would be held on January 22, we were only working on our film. Be it Article 370, nuclear test, friendship with Pakistan or Ram Janmabhoomi, all these incidents are part of Atal ji's life. He has lived through these events and that's what we have made the film on," the producer said.

Tripathi, regarded as one of the most versatile actors in the film industry today, said his main aim with "Main Atal Hoon" was to not let the character look like "a caricature or an imitation."

"I focused on channelling his personality and philosophy. I was quite worried about doing justice to this role. I anyway don't know mimicry. I thought it would be better to bring out his consciousness and essence. Once you are able to do so, you will be able to understand the personality and try to enact some of his mannerisms as the

Indian viewers also want you to look like the real-life character you are playing," he said.

The National Award winner, known for films such as "Mimi", "Stree", "Bareilly Ki Barfi" as well as web series "Mirzapur" and "Criminal Justice", said a two-hour movie can hardly cover Vajpayee's "vast" life.

"His life is so vast that it's impossible to sum it up in a two-hour film. In terms of a series, Ataj ji's story demands five-six seasons if you have to get into the details. The story of his childhood to college alone would span around two seasons.

"Ravi ji and Rishi Virmani have chosen some of the most important chapters of Atal ji's life for the film. A biopic is challenging as it has to have a beginning, a middle and an end in two hours. But the beginning, the middle and the end of a life is vast. Film should flow like a story and there were many challenges during the writing and performing but we have tried to do full justice," Tripathi added.

Singh said they initially wanted to release the film on December 25, 2023. "But we were not ready. It's an honour for us that the Ram temple will be open to the public after the release of our film. We are lucky and blessed," he said.

The producer also praised Tripathi for boarding "Main Atal Hoon" without a bound script.

"Pankaj ji said yes to this film in an instant and this is the first film which

he did without asking for a bound script. He did this film on trust. When I took this film to Vinod, he gave it a preference over all the other projects they were working on..." he added.

Jadhav has directed "Main Atal Hoon" from a script by Utkarsh Naithani. Bhavesh Bhanushali and Sam Khan serve as co-producers on the movie. KGF: Chapter 2, the real heroes behind the screen have started cornering the limelight.

Ujwal Kulkarni, the editor of the movie, has caught the attention of the country for his work as an editor. The young man is all set to edit Prashanth Neel's upcoming film Prabhas-starrer 'Salaar'.

The 20-year-old from Kalaburagi used to edit short films and make fan edits. Prashanth Neel liked his edit of 'KGF: Chapter 1', took him to make a teaser cut for 'KGF 2'. Impressed by Ujwal's work, Neel had put editing work of the entire movie in Ujwal's hands. Ujwal started his stint at editing with videos and photos of his brother who was an aspiring actor back at home. He developed passion in the work as he fell in love with moving pictures. The young editor loves music and is also a fan of Hollywood director Christopher Nolan and the 'Narcos' franchise.

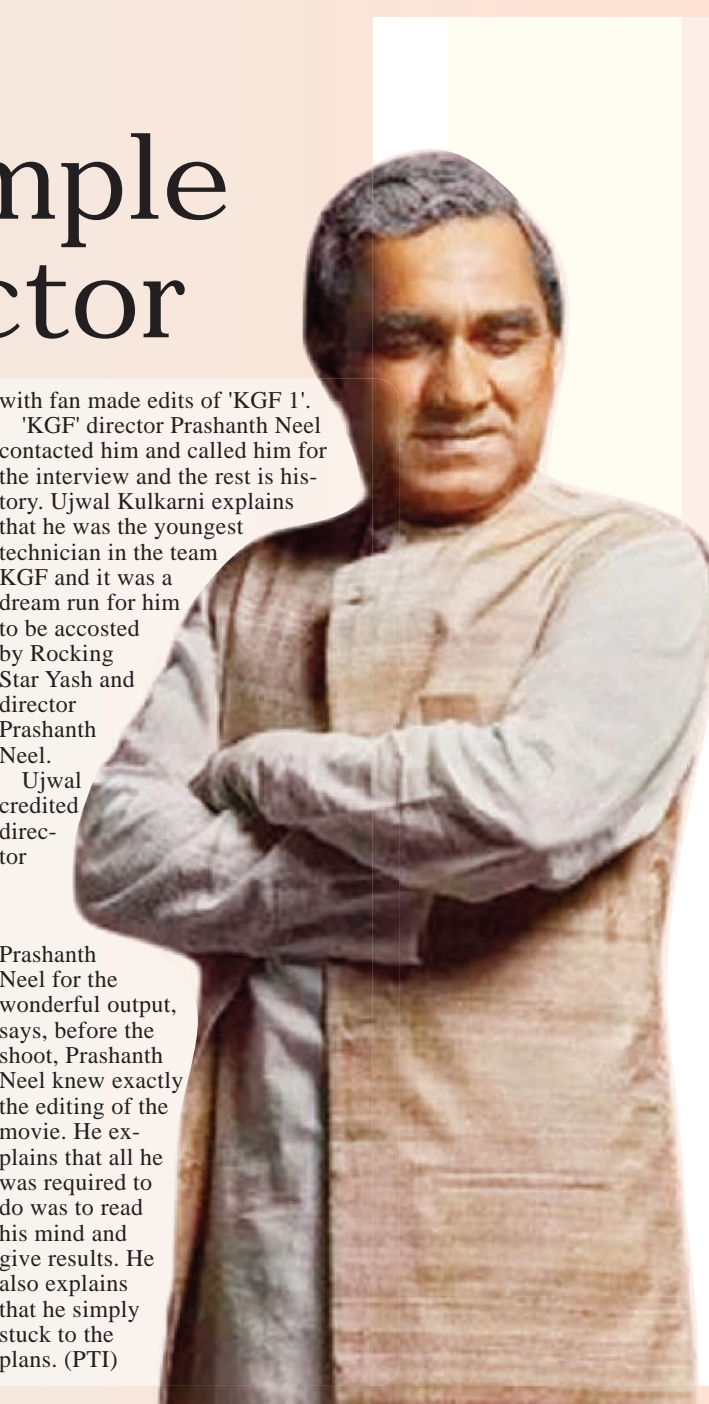
He came to Bengaluru after his friends advised him. Ujwal Kulkarni worked with the editor Harish Komme in the super hit Kannada movie 'Mufti'. During this time, he came out

with fan made edits of 'KGF 1'.

'KGF' director Prashanth Neel contacted him and called him for the interview and the rest is history. Ujwal Kulkarni explains that he was the youngest technician in the team KGF and it was a dream run for him to be accosted by Rocking Star Yash and director Prashanth Neel.

Ujwal credited director Prashanth Neel for the wonderful output, says, before the shoot, Prashanth Neel knew exactly the editing of the movie. He explains that all he was required to do was to read his mind and give results. He also explains that he simply stuck to the plans. (PTI)

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Ghana newcomer Iñaki Williams eager to make family proud at Africa Cup of Nations

BILBAO (SPAIN), Jan 9: Following a World Cup when emotions ran high but the goals failed to flow, Iñaki Williams is eager to lead Ghana deep into the Africa Cup of Nations.

Williams, the son of Ghanaian parents who migrated to Spain before he was born, declared his sporting allegiance five months before the 2022 World Cup.

The Athletic Bilbao forward was unable to score in three group-phase games as his side failed to advance to the knockout rounds in Qatar, leaving him

with a bittersweet experience when his excitement to represent Ghana was not matched by his performances.

Now, Williams is confident he will enjoy more success at Africa's biggest soccer tournament in the Ivory Coast next week.

"I am heading into this tournament with a different outlook," the 29-year-old Williams told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

Williams says he is more prepared and integrated into his new

team. Since the World Cup, he has played seven more games for Ghana between qualifiers and friendlies, and he scored his first and only goal to earn a 1-0 win over Madagascar in November in a 2026 World Cup qualifier.

"In Qatar, my teammates barely knew me both on and off the field," he said. "But now they know that I am a hard-working and easy-going teammate and that I am here to help the team. The entire group has welcomed me with open arms."

Williams' younger brother

Nico, who is also a forward with Athletic, played for Spain at the World Cup.

They are both popular in their native Bilbao, where the team has had few Black players because it only fields players from Spain's northern Basque Country region or adjoining areas.

Both Williams boys were born in the industrial city of Bilbao in the north, where they have played for Athletic since their youth.

Their parents' story is quite different.

They had to walk barefoot through the Sahara Desert during a long and perilous journey seeking a better life in Europe, and the mother was pregnant when the couple were detained while trying to enter Spain.

They eventually received political asylum after taking advice from a charity worker who told them to say they had fled a civil war in Liberia.

Williams played in a friendly for Spain in 2016. But when Ghana was interested in him, he decided to change allegiance,

with Spain no longer calling him. His decision was influenced in part by a conversation with his grandfather, who encouraged him to join the "Black Stars."

"I know what it meant to him for me to play for Ghana," Williams said about his grandfather, who recently passed away. "I am very excited because I know that he will send down all his strength from heaven."

"I am going to fulfill the dream of many of my family members, who feel very proud of me," he said about playing at the

tournament. "I don't know what emotions I am going to feel, but I am sure they will be intense."

Williams admits he was nervous to see how the Ghana fans would receive him, saying he was "a bit scared" after having played for Spain.

"Now they see that I am committed and that I have worked very hard during qualifying, and I feel just like any other member of the team," Williams said. "Everyone is showing confidence in me and my teammates are helping me a lot." (AP)

RIVALS MEET THREE TIMES IN A MONTH

Madrid and Atletico kickoff Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia

MADRID, Jan 9: With Real Madrid enjoying good momentum and Atletico Madrid on a bit of a slump, the city rivals meet in the semifinal of the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday in the first of three matches between the clubs in less than a month.

After the Super Cup, Madrid and Atletico will clash again on Jan. 18 in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey, and then on Feb. 4 at the Santiago Bernabé Stadium in their second Spanish league match of the season.

Madrid has won its last five games in all competitions and is enjoying an unbeaten run of 19 consecutive matches. The team's only loss this season came against Atletico in the Spanish league, 3-1 at the Metropolitan stadium, which is where the Copa's single-elimination game will take place next week.

It's also where Atletico won 20 in a row across all competitions to tie a club record in a streak that ended with a 3-3 draw against Getafe in the Spanish league in December.

Diego Simeone's team went on a strong run after that home win against Madrid, advancing to the knockout rounds of the Champions League and getting near the top of the Spanish league. But it has hit some speedbumps re-



cently, winning only two of its last five matches in all competitions. One of its two recent losses came at Girona, the second-place team at the league's halfway

point. The 4-3 defeat dropped Atletico to fifth place, outside the Champions League places. It sits 10 points behind leader Madrid.

Atletico and Madrid also met

in the 2020 final, with Madrid winning on penalties in what marked the first time the Super Cup was taken to Saudi Arabia in a lucrative multi-year deal for the

clubs and the Spanish soccer federation.

The Super Cup's new "final four" format pits together the top two teams in the Spanish league last season and the last two Copa del Rey finalists.

The other semifinal will be played on Thursday between Barcelona and Osasuna, last season's runner-up to Madrid in the Copa del Rey.

Atletico forward Antoine Griezmann enters the game tied with Luis Aragonés as the club's all-time top scorer with 173 goals. Madrid remains without some of its main players because of long-term injuries, including goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and central defenders Éder Militão and David Alaba. Young Turkey international Arda Güler made his debut in a Copa del Rey match this past weekend and could have more minutes in Saudi Arabia. Vinícius Júnior, Rodrygo and Jude Bellingham are set to lead Madrid's attack.

Barcelona beat Madrid in last year's Super Cup final to win its first title since the arrival of coach Xavi Hernández and the departure of Lionel Messi.

Xavi's team arrives at this year's tournament under pressure after a series of lackluster performances that recently drew jeers from its home fans. (AP)

KAMSFC beat United Chirang Duar FC to clinch ASPL title



HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 9: Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC (KAMSFC) has emerged champions in the Assam State Premier League (ASPL) 2023-24, Assam Football Association (AFA) by defeating United Chirang Duar FC.

Throughout the full 90 minutes, the blue giants played with an attacking 4-3-3 formation. The blue giants secured their first goal in the 15th minute, with Clavan scoring assisted by Robinson Khongsai.

However, the visitors equalized the score from a free kick after a Morning Star player was booked for foul play. The visitors quickly scored their second goal with a header from a corner. At the end of the first half, the visitors were leading 2-1.

In the second half, the visitors took dominance, but the blue giants held on, and a few minutes before the end of the stipulated 90 minutes, Bishnu Banali Bordoloi of Morigoan, a former Hyderabad FC reserve team, managed to find an equalizer for the blue giants with an assist from Mukesh Timung, the Morning Star academy recruit. The 90-minute match ended in a 2-2 draw. An additional 30 minutes were played, and in the first 15 minutes, both sides failed to break the deadlock. Resuming after a water break, the blue giants changed their game strategy to a 4-2-4 formation, pushing four players forward. Vimal was replaced by Singdoulie Khongsai.

In the last 6 minutes, the blue giants scored three goals to seal the fate of the visitors. Singdoulie

Khongsai, with an assist from Mukesh Timung, scored the third and fourth goals for the blue giants in the 113th and 114th minutes, respectively. The visitors, not losing hope, fought hard and found their third goal in the second half of the 30 minutes of additional time.

The fifth and winning goal was scored by Bishnu Bordoloi in the 117th minute through an assist from Mukesh Timung. The match concluded with a 5-3 victory for the blue giants.

Bishnu Bordoloi received a cash prize of Rs.25,000 as the best player of the league, while the custodian of the blue giants, Gojen Hanse, was adjudged the best goalkeeper and awarded a cash prize of Rs.15,000. Lal Minglu of Dima United received the highest scorer award and was given a cash prize of Rs.25,000.

The blue giants Morning Star was awarded the champions trophy and a cash prize of Rs.3 lakhs handed over by AIFF president Kalyan Choubey, while the runners-up Chirang Duar FC was also awarded a trophy and a cash prize of Rs.2 lakhs handed over by AFA president Naba Kumar Doley. The prize distribution ceremony was attended by KASA general secretary, Dr. Pankaj Teron. The final match was witnessed by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma; HAD minister Jogen Mohan; KAAC CEM, Tuliram Ronghang; All India Football Federation president Kalyan Chaubey, Assam Police Football coach Jowel Bey; AFA president MLA Naba Kumar Doley, and AFA secretary Dr. Sangrang Brahma.

Hockey India appoints Herman Kruis as high performance director

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Hockey India (HI) on Tuesday announced the appointment of Herman Kruis as the new high performance director with the Dutchman serving in the position till September.

He will oversee the national junior and senior programmes of HI, including the coaches education pathway among other tasks, an HI release said.

Kruis, who is from the Netherlands, has over two decades of coaching experience, and was earlier appointed as coach of Indian men and junior women's teams to oversee their preparations for the FIH Men's Junior World Cup and FIH Women's Junior World Cup respectively.

In his vast coaching experience, Kruis has worked with Den Bosch ladies – a club based out of the Netherlands – as their head coach and during his tenure the team won the European Cup eight times in a row.

He was also the head coach for the Netherlands indoor women's hockey team from 2006 to 2008 and he was also the head coach for the Netherlands outdoor team from 2008 to 2010.

In his most recent stint, he was the chief coach of the Belarus indoor and outdoor team from 2016 to August 2023.

Kruis is a certified FIH coach-educator.

"He will oversee the various programmes run by Hockey India including the junior and senior programmes," said HI president Dilip Tirkey.

Expressing his delight on being appointed as the high performance director, Kruis said, "The Indian teams are on the cusp of creating history and I look forward to utilizing my expertise in helping the teams and Hockey India in achieving their goals for this year." (PTI)

Srikanth shocks Christie to enter second round of Malaysia Open

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 9: India's Kidambi Srikanth progressed to the second round of Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament with a come-from-behind win over world number 5 Indonesian Jonatan Christie here on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old from Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, who has been going through a lean phase for quite sometime, notched up a stunning 12-21 21-18 21-16 win over sixth seed Christie in the opening round match that lasted an hour and five minutes.

The former world no. 1 will face Hong Kong's NG Ka Long Angus next.

A 2021 world championships silver medallist, Srikanth has

often struggled to sustain the pressure in a three-game match to make a number of early exits but he looked in fine fettle on Tuesday as he kept attacking despite losing the opening game, to come out victorious.

Srikanth always had some tough battles against the Indonesian, whom he had defeated six times in 11 meetings.

Playing the first match of the new season, Srikanth didn't have a good start as he lagged 4-7 initially and though he managed to make it 8-7 briefly, all hopes went up in smoke when Christie blazed off nine straight points to leave him stranded.

With Parupalli Kashyap in the coach's chair, Srikanth opened



up a 4-0 lead in the second game but Christie again zoomed ahead to grab an 11-7 advantage at the break. The Indonesian also held

a 17-14 cushion at one stage but Srikanth then went on to win seven of the next eight points to roar back into the contest.

In the decider, Srikanth again found the going tough as Christie dominated the rallies, moving from 5-0 to 14-9.

The Indian, however, used his attacking returns and perfect placements to make Christie twist and turn as the tide started to change.

The Indonesian also made a few unforced errors as Srikanth turned the tables with a seven-point burst to move to 16-14. The Indian kept things tight thereafter and punched the air after his opponent went long again. (PTI)

I don't go to ground as cricket in South Africa is too political: Brian McMillan

CAPE TOWN, Jan 9: As an active international cricketer, Brian McMillan tried his hand at teaching Afrikaans and science in school, and discovered he was good at it.

Then, disillusioned with the "politics" in South African cricket administration, McMillan decided to stay away from the game after his retirement as a player, and chose to join his family business instead. There too, he tasted success, as the all-rounder par excellence of his time evolved into an epitome of versatility outside of cricket. In between, there was also the small matter of completing an MBA course and working with companies like Canon.

For seven years since South Africa's return to international cricket, McMillan was a big part of the team: a mean third seamer, who was quicker than expected, a very useful batter, and a fielder with bucket-like hands that pouched anything coming his way in the slip cordon.

He was the glue that held the Proteas team before the phenomenon called Jacques Kallis hap-



pened to South African cricket.

However, over the years McMillan has stayed away from the ground and South African cricket establishment, concentrating on his family business while keeping a tab on cricketing developments on TV. "Fortunately, I have my family business and we are into finance, telecom, printers and production machines. When I was playing, I had worked for companies like Canon."

He was the glue that held the Proteas team before the phenomenon called Jacques Kallis hap-

pened to South African cricket. "I did my MBA after cricket and before that taught Afrikaans and science in school to supplement my income while I was playing." With his all-round skills, he would have been sought-after in IPL but he simply said "it is what it is." "Before me Clive Rice, Graeme Pollock, Barry Richards and Mike Proctor could have made money," he said.

But why doesn't he go to the ground or associate himself with CSA? "I don't go to the ground as it is too political for me and I have

my viewpoints on that. I really love the game and I have my viewpoints on that," McMillan said.

"I follow the IPL quite closely and there are a lot of youngsters coming through. Fortunately, for India, they have got an extremely good side and it was really surprising that they didn't win the World Cup," he said.

McMillan did have his issues with the "Black Lives Matter" movement and his contrarian viewpoints didn't earn him friends.

"I certainly don't believe in their selection policies. BLM don't believe in it. It's a Marxist thing. I believe all lives matter, how people interpreted it in this country... they didn't have any knowledge to what BLM stood for," he said.

"You can have your own viewpoints, doesn't really matter, entitled to their viewpoints but I don't support it because if BLM falls in category of 'All Lives Matter' then I am okay... colour, culture and creed. "It's a case of equal opportunities, and hence, I don't support SA cricket as I don't believe there's equal opportunities," he was straight in his assessment. (PTI)

Ove Chingthur FC beat Guwahati Town Club 3-0

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 9: Ove Chingthur FC of Dongmukak, Karbi Anglong defeated Guwahati Town Club by 3-0 in the ongoing Jwhlwao Swmba Basumatary Assam Club Championship 2023-24 of Assam Football Association (AFA) at BGR playground Bongaigaon. With the win, Ove Chingthur FC has reached the semi-final. Ove Chingthur FC's, Monjit Narzary scored two goals and Brendish Tigga scored one. The team manager is Jising Ronghang, Coach Rostom Engti and the physio is Bikrom Kro. The club is owned by Si-im Ronghang.

Vondrousova withdraws from Adelaide tourney with a hip problem

ADELAIDE, Jan 9: Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova withdrew from the Adelaide International on Tuesday citing a right hip injury, five days before the Australian Open starts in Melbourne.

The No. 7-ranked Vondrousova pulled out of the tournament hours before her scheduled first-round match against Russian qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich.

Taylor Townsend will take her place in the draw. Sixth-seeded Jelena Ostapenko was broken while serving for the match at 5-2 in the third set and missed two match points in the next game before finally fending off Sorana Cirstea 2-6, 6-2, 6-4.

The 2017 French Open champion will next play Caroline Garcia, who beat local wildcard entry Taylah Preston, Australia, 6-4, 1-6, 6-3.

"I feel like I was sleeping in

the first set," Ostapenko said. "I'm not a morning person; I needed time to get into the match. When I start to take time and be a bit more calm, I play better."

Czech qualifier Katerina Siniakova upset former No. 1-ranked Karolina Pliskova 6-2, 6-1, winning 10 consecutive games after dropping serve early. Two days after helping Germany win the United Cup final, Laura Siegemund needed almost three hours for her 6-7 (1), 6-4, 6-4 win over seventh-seeded Liudmila Samsonova, recovering breaks in the second and third sets.

In the ATP tournament in Adelaide, Australia's Jordan Thompson followed up his win over Rafael Nadal last week in the Brisbane International quarterfinals with a 6-2, 6-2 over Facundo Diaz Acosta to move into second-round match against No. 4-seeded Lorenzo Musetti. (AP)

Shami, para archer Sheetal draw rousing applause at ceremony

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: India's best-performing athletes were on Tuesday conferred with the national sports awards by President Droupadi Murmu in a regal ceremony where cricketer Mohammed Shami and para archer Sheetal Devi walked in to a rapturous applause at the Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Shuttlers Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy were chosen for the coveted Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award for a breakout 2023, during which they won their maiden Asian Games gold -- a first for India in badminton --, while also clinching the Asian Championships title and the Indonesia Open Super 1000 title.

The duo is currently playing in Malaysia Open Super 1000 and therefore skipped the function.

The awards ceremony, usually held on August 29 to commemorate the birth anniversary of hockey legend Major Dhyan Chand, was deferred because of the Hangzhou Asian Games from September 23 till October 8 last year. An atmosphere of gaiety pervaded the Rashtrapati Bhawan as 26 athletes and para-athletes were finalised for the Arjuna Awards this year, with teenager pistol ace Esha Singh the only one to miss the ceremony. The 19-year-old Esha is competing in the Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Jakarta and,

on Monday, had qualified for the Paris Olympics after winning the individual and team gold in 10m air pistol. The imprint of the Asian Games last year, and India's record haul of 107 medals there, was evident in the ceremony as a majority of the athletes, who walked to the dais, were medal winners in Hangzhou. The Durbar Hall reverberated with the claps of the dignitaries when para archer Sheetal Devi, winner of three gold medals at the Para Asian Games in Hangzhou, walked up to collect her Arjuna.

The 16-year-old is the only international para-archery champion without upper limbs due to a rare medical condition called Phocomelia. The President held Sheetal's award and the scroll as the teenager soaked in the atmosphere and the splendour of the hall.

Murmu then walked down the podium to present the Arjuna to wheelchair-bound para-canoeist Prachi Yadav, winner of gold in Hangzhou, once again drawing a huge round of applause.

Shami, who is currently recovering from an ankle injury, was there to receive the honours and the crowd duly acknowledged his achievements by giving him and his art the pride of place with an ovation. The pace bowler took 24 wickets in seven World Cup games last year. "My aim is to keep my-



self fit as far as possible, as the next two tournaments and series are big. I will focus on fitness," he told PTI at a sports ministry reception last night.

Also receiving a huge round of applause was the newly-crowned chess Grandmaster R. Vaishali, the elder sister of precocious chess talent R. Praggnanandhaa. Vaishali was honoured for becoming the third woman from the country after Koneru Humpy and Dronavalli Harika to turn GM. Other sporting bigwigs who were chosen for the Arjuna award this year were wrestler Antim Panghal, a former junior world champion and bronze-winner at the senior event last year, boxer

Mohammad Hussamuddin (bronze-winner at last year's world championship), and athlete Parul Chaudhary. Among the notable Dronacharya awardees this year is chess coach RB Ramesh, who has groomed Praggnanandhaa.

While the Khel Ratna comes with a cash prize of ₹ 25 lakh, the Arjuna and Dronacharya awards include a cash prize of ₹ 15 lakh. **The recipients (2023 awards):** Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award for 2023: Chirag Shetty and Satwik Sairaj Rankireddy (badminton).

Arjuna Awards: Ojas Pravin Deotale (archery), Aditi Gopichand Swami (archery), Murali

Shreshankar (athletics), Parul Chaudhary (athletics), Mohammad Hussamuddin (boxing), R Vaishali (chess), Mohammed Shami (cricket), Anush Agarwalla (equestrian), Divyakriti Singh (equestrian dressage), Diksha Dagar (golf), Krishan Bahadur Pathak (hockey), Sushila Chanu (hockey), Pawan Kumar (kabaddi), Ritu Negi (kabaddi), Nasreen (kho-kho), Pinki (lawn bowls), Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (shooting), Esha Singh (shooting), Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu (squash), Ayhika Mukherjee (table tennis), Sunil Kumar (wrestling), Antim Panghal (wrestling), Naorem Roshibina Devi (wushu), Sheetal Devi (para archery), Illuri Ajay Kumar Reddy (blind cricket), Prachi Yadav (para canoeing). Dronacharya Award (regular category) for outstanding coaches: Lalit Kumar (wrestling), RB Ramesh (chess), Mahaveer Prasad Saini (para athletics), Shivendra Singh (hockey), Ganesh Prabhakar Devrukkhar (mallakhamb).

Dronacharya Award (life-time category) for outstanding coaches: Jaskirat Singh Grewal (golf), Bhaskaran E (kabaddi), Jayanta Kumar Pushilal (table tennis).

Dhyan Chand Award for lifetime achievement: Manjusha Kanwar (badminton), Vineet Kumar Sharma (hockey), Kavitha Selvaraj (kabaddi). (PTI)

Shooting: Rudrankksh, Mehuli combine to win Gold in Asian Olympic Qualifiers



JAKARTA, Jan 9: The pair of Rudrankksh Patil and Mehuli Ghosh won the 10m air rifle mixed team event to maintain the Indian shooting contingent's dominance in the Asian Olympic Qualifiers here on Tuesday.

Rudrankksh and Mehuli triumphed after prevailing over China's Shen Yufan and Zhu Mingshuai 16-10 in the final.

In the 10m air pistol mixed team event, however, India settled for the silver medal with the duo of Arjun Cheema and Rhythm Sangwan finishing second behind Vietnam's Thu Vinh Trinh and Quang Huy Pham in the battle for the top prize. They lost 11-17.

The team of Rhythm and Arjun topped the qualification round with a total score of 582, finishing ahead of the second-placed combo (580) from Vietnam, but they could not get the better of their opponents when it mattered the most.

Earlier in the day, the pair of Rudrankksh and Mehuli was second in the qualification, shooting a total score of 631.3 to finish behind Yufan and Mingshuai, who aggregated 632.3.

A second Indian pair of Elavenil Valarivan and Arjun Babuta finished sixth overall with a score of 629.0.

In the mixed team pistol event, the first series was tied and the two pairs split points.

A 10.9 by Pham in the next gave Vietnam an early lead. They would go on to win the next three as well

to open up a 9-1 gap in the race to 16.

The Indian pair of Arjun and Rhythm came back to win the sixth series and tie the seventh and eighth but Trinh and Pham won the ninth and 10th to go 15-5 ahead.

Rhythm and Arjun then fought back admirably to win the next three and close the gap at 11-15, but they lost the 14th series narrowly to go down 11-17.

India also won the junior event in the mixed team air rifle discipline when Isha Anil Taksale and Ummamahesh Maddinani defeated the Chinese pairing of Chu Ziqing and Pan Bowen 17-11 in the gold medal match-up.

In the same event, the pair of Abhinav Shaw and Anvii Rathod defeated local favourites Masayyu Putri Fadillah and Paskalis Steven Farrel Saverio 16-10 to claim bronze.

At the end of day two of competitions, India's tally stood at an impressive six gold, two silver and two bronze, for a total of 10 medals.

On Monday, young Indian shooters Varun Tomar and Esha Singh secured two Olympic quota places for the country with gold medals in the men's and women's 10m Air Pistol events of the Qualifiers.

The duo's qualification took the total number of Indian shooters bound for Paris to 15, equalling the highest-ever tally that was achieved in the Tokyo Games.

Manish, Siddharth enter pre-quarterfinals of ITF Mandya Open

MANDYA, Jan 9: Indians Manish Ganesh and Siddharth Vishwakarma registered easy wins to enter the men's singles pre-quarterfinals of the ITF Mandya Open here Tuesday. Ganesh breezed past Neeraj Yashpaul 6-1, 6-1, while Vishwakarma overcame Adil Kalyanpur 6-3, 6-1 to reach the round of 16. However, local man SD Prajwal Dev, who was recently added to the Indian Davis Cup team to face Pakistan, suffered a disappointment in the men's doubles round of 16. Prajwal and his partner Nitin Kumar Sinha, seeded second in the event, were leading 5-4 against Indo-Koren pair of Woobin Shin and Karan Singh in the first set. But Sinha had to withdraw from the match after developing stomach cramps. The eight seeded Prajwal will meet Korea's Yunseok Jang in the singles first round match on Wednesday. Results Singles (Round of 32): Siddharth Vishwakarma beat Adil Kalyanpur 6-3, 6-1; Manish Ganesh beat Neeraj Yashpaul 6-1, 6-1. Doubles (Round of 16): 4-Parikshit Somani/Manish Sureshkumar beat Siddhant Banthia/Giles Hussey (GBR) 6-4, 6-3. (PTI)

Sivasagar Premier Club Cricket: Griffon CC emerge champion

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 9: Griffon Cricket Club emerged champion in the Sivasagar zone of Assam Cricket Association's Premier Club Cricket Championship 2023-24 defeating Phoenix CC by a slender margin of 17 runs in a low scoring final in the Durbar Field here on Tuesday.

Electing to bat first, Griffon scored only 115 runs in 31 overs. Amit Basfor 25, Sivam Ghosh 20, and Yaser Ali scored 19 for Griffon.

Mrinmoy Dutta (3/32) was the most successful bowler for Phoenix.

In reply, Phoenix CC were all out for 98 runs in 29.4 overs. Abhinob Konwar (28) top scored for Phoenix. Rajinder Lal 4/44, Utpal Saikia 3/12 and Bharat Newar 3/13 were the bowlers for Griffon. Sivam Ghosh of Griffon Club was adjudged 'Man of the Series' and 'Best Batsman', Utpal Saikia was the 'Man of the Match' while Subhom Ghosh of

Demow CC was the 'Best Bowler'. Jennifer Rahman of Phoenix emerged as the 'Best Fielder'. Rajesh Poul and Abhijit Chowdhury, Dibrugarh, were the umpires on Tuesday.

The prizes were given away by Punaram Mili, Manoj Kr Borthakur, Manoj Bhagwati, Prasanta Borthakur and Inamul Hazarika, the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and executive member respectively of Sivasagar Sports Association.

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