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DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2024

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**Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat**

Steps on to overcome NEP challenges: Guv • Female education a priority of govt: CM

## Assam among top five states in NEP execution

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Jan 30: Assam is among the top five states in the country in the progress of implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Governor Gulab Chand Kataria said on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters after a review meeting of NEP implementation in higher education institutions at Assam Administrative Staff College, Khanapara, he said some challenges were still there in enforcing it completely and work was on to overcome those.

"Assam is among the top five states so far as progress in implementing the policy is concerned. We have invited the vice-chancellors today to ask them about the problems being faced in enforcing the NEP," he said.

Earlier, addressing the review

meeting, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that female education is a priority area of the current government and it's planning to introduce several measures for its promotion.

"Promotion of female education has always been a priority area for the current dispensation in the state and that numerous far-reaching measures can be expected in this regard in days to come," an official statement quoted him as saying.

Sarma expressed his gratitude towards the state Governor for the latter's role in holding the review meeting today.

He said the Governor has been relentlessly pursuing the state administration and the higher educational institutions across Assam to implement the provisions of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 since the very beginning of



his tenure here.

The chief minister raised concerns about the not-so-satisfactory gross enrolment ratio in higher education in Assam as was high-

lighted in the recently published All India Survey on Higher Education. "Gross enrolment in the state is stuck between 17-18 per cent range despite massive investments in

higher education in the past decade or so," the Sarma remarked.

He also stressed upon the need for a holistic approach so that the state can attain a more desirable gross enrolment ratio in days to come. "It is the duty of all concerned to see that higher education is made more accessible and affordable for all those who are eligible, irrespective of his or her socioeconomic status," he added.

He further hinted at exploring the possibility of introducing a new system of scholarship for pursuing courses in higher education in institutions by eligible students across the state.

The chief minister said higher educational institutions' campuses should become an epicentre of students' welfare and institutions may look into the possibility of creating a post of (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Parl's Budget Session begins today; last of present LS

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** The Budget Session of Parliament, the last of the present Lok Sabha, begins on Wednesday with President Droupadi Murmu addressing a joint sitting of the lower and upper Houses, and the government urging opposition parties to cooperate in the smooth conduct of the proceedings.

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Interim Budget on February 1 ahead of the Lok Sabha elections likely to be held in April-May.

The new government will present the full budget after it assumes office.

Parliamentary affairs minister Pralhad Joshi told a meeting of floor leaders of political parties in Parliament that Sitharaman will also present the Budget for Jammu and Kashmir, which is under the President's Rule.

Joshi said the main agenda of the 17th Lok Sabha's brief session, set to conclude on February 9, was the President's Address, presentation of the Interim Budget and the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address with a reply by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Opposition leaders raised a host of issues during the meeting of floor leaders chaired by defence minister Rajnath Singh.

Congress leader K Suresh said the party would raise the issue of unemployment, high inflation,

agrarian distress, and the situation in ethnic violence-hit Manipur during the session.

Trinamool Congress leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay said the finance minister should include the pending dues to West Bengal on account of various central schemes in the Interim Budget.

"It is unfortunate that a chief minister has to sit on a dharna to demand timely allocation of central dues to the state," he said.

Samajwadi Party leader S T Hassan demanded steps to strengthen the Places of Worship Act that freezes the status of religious places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947, and prohibits their conversion while ensuring the maintenance of their religious character. Hassan's demand came in the wake of demands to hand over the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi to the Hindu community.

Emerging from the customary all-party meeting, parliamentary affairs minister Joshi described the interaction as "very cordial" and said the government was ready to discuss every issue during the brief session.

Joshi said the government did not have any legislative agenda for the Budget Session and its thrust would be on the President's Address, debate on the Motion of Thanks, presentation of the Interim Budget and the budget for (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Sela tunnel to be inaugurated after third-party safety audit: Official

**GUWAHATI, Jan 30:** The strategic Sela Tunnel Project, which is set to provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, will be inaugurated only after a third-party safety audit, a BRO official said.

The audit is expected to be completed by mid-February this year, following which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to inaugurate the tunnel, Border Roads Organisation (BRO) Additional Director General (East) P K H Singh said in an interview with PTL.

"The construction work for the tunnel, situated at an elevation of 13,000 feet, is nearing completion, while physical and environmental audits, already provisioned in the contract, have been conducted and positive results have been received," he said.

Following the Silkyara tunnel incident in Uttarakhand, however, the BRO DG had ordered a third-party audit of the Sela tunnel as it is strategically important due to its proximity to the Line of Actual Control (LAC), Singh said. The tunnel, located near Sela Pass, was necessitated as the Balipara-Charidwar-Tawang Road remains closed for an extended period due to snowfall and landslides caused by heavy rainfall, he pointed out. "The tunnel is aimed at enhancing the army's capabilities at the LAC," he added. It will ensure speedy deployment of troops, weapons and machinery to the forward areas along the India-China border, Singh said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## KCS celebrates 47th foundation day

**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, Jan 30: The Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) marked its 47th foundation day with grand celebrations held at Karbi People's Hall in Taralango on Tuesday.

The commemorative event commenced with floral tributes to the statue of Ru Rangsin Sapo, hailed as the Father of Karbi Music, followed by heartfelt condolences to departed members of KCS.

The ceremonial hoisting of the KCS flag took place in the presence of its members, led by president Chandrasing Kro.

In a noteworthy collaboration, KCS, in partnership with the US NGO "Cultures of Resistance," presented the Cultures of Resistance Award for 2023 to the esteemed Karbi singer and lyricist, Pokhila Lekthepi. In addition to the celebratory activities, KCS members actively participated in a post-Karbi Youth (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Govt committed to enhance road infrastructure in Assam: Himanta

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Jan 30: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday informed that the government is committed to bridge road infrastructure gaps in the state and ensure seamless connectivity throughout Assam.

He said that developments of roads under multiple schemes are ongoing in the state to bring people closer.

"We are committed to bridge road infrastruc-

ture gaps in the State and ensure seamless connectivity throughout Assam. Development of roads under multiple schemes are ongoing in the state to bring people closer," he wrote on micro-blogging site X. Sharing details of the ongoing projects on X, Sarma highlighted multiple schemes aimed at fostering connectivity throughout Assam aiming to reduce travel times, enhance accessibility, and boost economic development across the state. As per

## Assam Police refutes ULFA-I spy allegations amid identity controversy

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Jan 30: In a recent development, the Assam Police refuted claim made by the banned outfit United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) (ULFA-I), which released a video accusing the police of planting a spy within the organisation.

The allegations of espionage have ignited a dispute between the Assam Police and the banned outfit (ULFA-I).

The controversy took an unexpected turn as the individual in question, identified as Manas Borgohain, countered the police's denial in a subsequent video.

"It has come to notice that there are speculations about one Manas Borgohain, who is in the custody of ULFA (I). The said Manas Borgohain is not and was never a part

of the Assam Police. The Recruitment Merit List shown by some media portals, actually refers to Manashjyoti Burhagohain (not Borgohain) who is presently posted as a PSI in Karimganj and was recruited in 2021," the Assam Police said in an official statement. The police also shared his photograph with date and GPS stamp for reference.

ULFA (I) initially asserted in a video that a spy had been infiltrated into their organisation by the Assam Police. However, the Assam Police promptly dismissed these claims, labeling them as baseless. In a follow-up video, Manas Borgohain, reaffirming his affiliation as a sub-inspector (SI) with the Assam Police, stated, "I am a Sub-Inspector with the police, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Training program aimed at enhancing rural income held in Diphu

**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, Jan 30: A comprehensive training program aimed at enhancing rural income through the conservation and utilisation of plant genetic resources in Karbi Anglong was successfully conducted at AAU-Zonal Research Station in Diphu, on Monday.

The initiative, titled "Plant Genetic Resources of Karbi Anglong: Conservation and Utilisation for Enhancing Rural Income," was organized in collaboration with ICAR-National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources, New Delhi.

Sponsored by ICAR-National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources, the program was meticulously organised by AAU-Zonal Research Station, Diphu.

Dr K Dayamoy Singha, chief scientist at AAU-Zonal Research Station, emphasised the importance of preserving and utilising indigenous crops in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts.

He informed the attendees about the biodiversity of these crops, highlighting their nutritional, medicinal values, and significant antioxidant content, making them valuable in both national and international markets.

Principal scientist and nodal officer for North Eastern Hills (NEH), Dr SK Malik, along with Technical Officer from ICAR-NBPGR, New Delhi, OP Dhariwal,



shared insights into the importance of indigenous crops naturally growing in the region.

They also encouraged farmers to cultivate traditional crops and explore the market demand for these commodities on both national and international levels, ultimately contributing to the income of small and marginal farmers through unique agricultural products.

The training program was attended by Pr Scientist (Econ), Dr M Maibangsa; Technical Officer, Taposhree Das; and Scientist, Dr Neethi Baruah. As part of the initiative, agricultural implements were distributed to the participating farmers, providing practical support for the implementation of the knowledge gained during the training.

## India ranks 93 out of 180 countries in corruption perceptions index: Report

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** India ranked 93 out of 180 countries on the corruption perceptions index for 2023 as its overall score remained largely unchanged, according to a Transparency International report. The index, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people, uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

In 2023, India's overall score was 39 while in 2022, it was 40. India's rank in 2022 was 85.

"India (39) shows score fluctuations small enough that no firm conclusions can be drawn on any significant change. However, ahead of the elections, India sees further narrowing of civic space, including through the passage of a (telecommunication) bill that could be a 'grave threat' to fundamental rights," the report said.

In South Asia, both Pakistan (133) and Sri Lanka (115) grapple with their respective debt burdens and ensuing political instability, it said.

"However, the two countries have strong judicial oversight, which is helping to keep the government in check. The Supreme Court of Pakistan strengthened citizens' right to information by expanding this right under Article 19A of its Constitution to previously restricted institutions," it said.

The report said as Bangladesh (149) emerges from the least developed country (LDC) status, with economic growth supporting a continued reduction in poverty and improving living conditions, the flow of information on the public sector is hindered amidst an ongoing crackdown against the press.

Noting that China (76) has made headlines with its aggressive anti-corruption crackdown by punishing more (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

'Quality compliance is a major issue faced by us. To overcome it, branding is most important'

## 'Branding' vital for small tea growers

**GUWAHATI, Jan 30:** For small tea growers, who contribute over half of the total tea produced in the country annually, the need for 'branding' is among the most crucial thing of the hour, speakers at a conclave said here on Monday.

As quality compliance remains an issue for these tea planters, branding of their product will help overcome the allegation of poor quality leaves produced by them to a large extent, they maintained.

They were participating in a discussion on 'Small Tea Holder Revolution in Assam and India' on the inaugural day of the two-day Bicentenary Assam Tea International Conference 2024.

"Quality compliance is a major issue faced by us. To overcome it, branding is most important," Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty of the Confederation of Indian Small

Team Growers Association (CISTA) said.

The small tea growers contribute over 50 per cent of the tea produced annually in the country, but allegations of poor quality leaves are frequent against us, he claimed. Chakraborty maintained that proper branding can help in addressing quality compliance issue to a large extent.

Speaking on similar lines, Sidharth Thard, who runs a tea manufacturing consultancy, said, "Small tea growers are mostly viewed as 'backend producers' and they face the problem of low price realisation, which severely impacts their income and livelihoods."

"While there are no easy answers to their problems, branding is definitely one way of addressing it at least partially," he maintained. Thard, who is also a tea



planter, identified 'gap of knowledge' as another factor in low price realisation for green leaves produced by small growers.

He said many small growers are not even aware of solutions available for problems they face, like pest control or other best

practices. Focus has to be on quality improvement of green leaves for higher prices, even if it means some decrease in production, Thard added.

Former chairman of Tea Board India PK Bezboruah, who was the moderator for the session, main-

tained 'price' can serve as a great driver for better quality leaves.

"Some of the small growers produce high quality green leaves and these have fetched very good prices. In such a scenario, 'price' becomes the driver for quality production," he added.

Value addition through innovation while creating a niche market for the tea produced by the small growers is a new market being tapped, Upamanyu Borkakoty, an entrepreneur in creating value-added products, said.

"Our idea is to create not just a brand for the small tea growers but go beyond it. We have started off with something which can perhaps serve as a pilot project in this regard for the industry," he said. Borkakoty maintained that revenue has gone up by up to 600 times for small growers when his company (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



# India to share PM GatiShakti with neighbouring countries

India has rolled out the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in seven countries

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** India will share the PM GatiShakti initiative with some of the neighbouring countries free of cost as the infrastructure planning tool is helping in effective planning and implementation of projects, a top government official said on Tuesday.

The initiative was launched to develop an integrated infrastructure to reduce logistics costs.

Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that as India has rolled out the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in seven countries, the country similarly wants to showcase and integrate the PM GatiShakti initiative also.

"We want to showcase it and roll out and integrate and provide it



free of cost to some of our neighbouring countries and eventually to other countries in the global south as a part of India's commitment to the global south," Singh

said here at a function. Over 1,400 layers of data, including those related to land, ports, forests, and highways, are available on the PM GatiShakti portal.

He also said that the department is working to enhance the usage of the portal for area planning in all the districts of India.

Area planning includes development of certain types of infrastructure around projects like a dam or a port.

"The idea is to ensure some kind of planning of infrastructure for that entire hinterland linked to that investment. That is an exercise we have just started. We intend to roll it out across the districts so that all the District Collectors have access to these data of this platform," Singh said.

It will empower them to plan better for their respective jurisdictions in terms of hard or social infrastructure like school and hospitals. (PTI)

## Sensex declines over 1 pc on heavy selling in Reliance, others



**MUMBAI, Jan 30:** Benchmark equity indices declined on Tuesday, a day after recording sharp gains, with the BSE Sensex falling over 1 per cent due to selling in Reliance Industries, ITC and Bajaj Finance.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 801.67 points or 1.11 per cent to settle at 71,139.90. During the day, it plummeted 865.85 points or 1.20 per cent to 71,075.72.

The Nifty declined 215.50 points or 0.99 per cent to 21,522.10.

Among the Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance fell by 5.03 per cent after its December quarter earnings failed to cheer investors.

Titan, UltraTech Cement, Bajaj Finserv, Reliance Industries, ITC and NTPC were among the other major laggards.

Tata Motors, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, Power Grid, Tech Mahindra and Tata Consultancy Services were the gainers.

"Selling intensified towards the end as investors further slashed their positions in key stocks ahead of the Budget while weakness in several Asian indices also contributed to the overall fall.

"With just one day left for the Budget, investors want to play it safe although there would not be any big-bang announcement by the

government in this budget. Focus would rather shift to US Fed policy but indications are that it may maintain the status quo on interest rates, which could unsettle investors further," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.53 per cent while smallcap index climbed 0.18 per cent.

Consumer durables declined 2.40 per cent, capital goods dipped 1.24 per cent, power (1.12 per cent), FMCG (1 per cent), utilities (0.92 per cent) and industrials (0.77 per cent). Realty emerged as the only gainer.

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

European markets were trading with gains. The US markets ended higher on Monday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.21 per cent to USD 82.57 a barrel on Tuesday.

The BSE benchmark jumped 1,240.90 points or 1.76 per cent to settle at 71,941.57 on Monday. The Nifty climbed 385 points or 1.80 per cent to 21,737.60.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 110.01 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

## Rupee rises 5 paise to 83.11 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, Jan 30:** The rupee appreciated 5 paise to 83.11 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, following a weak greenback against major currencies overseas amid a muted trend in domestic equities.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.14 against the greenback. Moving in a very tight range, the unit hit an intraday low of 83.15 and a high of 83.11 against the greenback.

The local unit finally settled at 83.11 against the dollar, higher by 5 paise (provisional) from its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee depreciated 5 paise to 83.16 against the US dollar.

According to Anuj Choudhary, research analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the rupee gained on Tuesday on the softening of the US Dollar and a decline in crude oil prices from higher levels.

However, weak domestic markets capped sharp gains. The US Dollar eased slightly on rising risk appetite in global markets.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on month-end Dollar demand from importers and concerns over geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the Red Sea.

"Any recovery in the US Dollar or crude oil prices may also weigh on the rupee. However, a rise in risk appetite in global markets may support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary said.

"Investors may remain cautious ahead of the US FOMC meeting and India's Budget later this week. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 82.90 to ₹ 83.40," he added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent lower at 103.55.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, surged 0.27 per cent to USD 82.62 per barrel. (PTI)

## Navi Mumbai businessman loses ₹ 60 lakh in cryptocurrency trading fraud



**THANE, Jan 30:** A 59-year-old businessman from Navi Mumbai township in Maharashtra has allegedly been duped of ₹ 60.23 lakh after being lured to invest in forex and cryptocurrency trading for lucrative returns, police said on Tuesday.

The police have registered a case against five persons in this connection. The accused last month contacted the victim, a resident of Kalamoli area who runs a logistics business, and lured him to invest in forex and cryptocurrency trading, promising high returns, Navi Mumbai cyber cell's senior police inspector Gajanan Kadam said.

The victim subsequently invested ₹ 64,70,024 through various links provided by the accused.

When the businessman sought returns on his investment, the accused initially gave evasive replies. After the victim's persist-

ent follow-up, the accused returned only ₹ 4,46,878 to him and later became unresponsive, the official said.

Based on the victim's complaint, the cyber cell police on Monday registered a case against five persons under sections 419

(cheating by personation) and 420 (cheating) of the Indian Penal Code, the official said.

He said people unfamiliar with the complex financial instruments like forex and cryptocurrency are advised to exercise caution and thoroughly research any investment platform or person before committing funds.

Lucrative guarantees of high returns should raise suspicion, the official said, adding that people should seek advice from qualified professionals before making investment decisions and avoid investing through unreliable links or unfamiliar websites. (PTI)

## Uber launches operations in Jammu and Kashmir

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Ride-hailing firm Uber on Tuesday said it has started operations in Jammu and Kashmir with the launch of services in Srinagar.

Uber will offer Uber Go and outstation cab service Uber Intercity in the Valley.

"Uber's launch in Srinagar is in line with its expansion plans in India, with an aim to increase its footprint and product offerings to regional markets. Residents of Srinagar and visiting tourists can now book Uber Go and Uber Intercity rides for their mobility needs," Uber said in a statement.

Intercity rides can be booked to tourist destinations around Srinagar, including Gulmarg, Sonmarg, and Pahalgam, the company said.

"With the global ride-hailing app now available in Srinagar, tourists as well as locals will now find a trusted ride in and around Srinagar with a few taps on the app. The launch of our service will also create meaningful earning opportunities for drivers and will support the economic growth of local communities," Head of Supply and Regional Operations at Uber Shiva Shailendran said.

Earlier this month, Uber launched the Green-Autos service in Ayodhya. It also partnered with the Airports Authority of India (AAI) to launch the app-based car aggregator service across airports - Surat, Indore, Bhubaneswar, Varanasi -- this month.

Uber is an American transport mobility company that entered India in 2013 and now has services available across 125 cities in the country. (PTI)

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Uber is an American transport mobility company that entered India in 2013 and now has services available across 125 cities in the country. (PTI)

## Europe's economic blahs drag on with zero growth at the end of last year

**FRANKFURT, Jan 30:** Europe's economy failed to expand at the end of 2023, with the stagnation now lasting for more than a year amid higher energy prices, costlier credit and lagging growth in powerhouse Germany.

Zero economic growth for the October-to-December period of last year follows a 0.1 per cent contraction in the three months before that, according to figures released on Tuesday by EU statistics agency Eurostat.

That extends a miserable run of economic blahs: The 20 countries that use the euro currency have not shown significant growth since the third quarter of 2022, when the economy grew 0.5 per cent. And the start of this year looks no better, with indicators of business activity still flashing red for contraction. Plus, disruptions to shipping in the Red Sea have constricted global trade through the Suez Canal, a major route between Asia and Europe, surging shipping costs and threatening to boost inflation.

The eurozone "is still struggling to find a bottom," said Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg bank.

The figures on Tuesday underlined the growing divide between Europe and the United States, whose economy grew 0.8 per cent in the fourth quarter compared with the previous three-month period, or an annual pace of 3.3 per cent — better than expected.

Not all the news is bad. For one thing, unemployment is at record lows and the number of jobs rose in the July-to-September quarter.

Energy prices also have come down from recent spikes — though they remain higher than before Russia invaded Ukraine — and storage levels of natural gas, which is used to heat homes, power factories and generate electricity, are robust. With gas storage 72 per cent full and most of the winter heating season



nearly over, fears of higher utility bills and another energy crisis have eased.

While the economy has stagnated, inflation also has declined rapidly from its painful double-digit peak, falling to 2.9 per cent in December. But people's pay and purchasing power are still catching up to the levels lost through the price surge.

Meanwhile, the anti-inflation medicine applied by the European Central Bank — sharply higher interest rates — has curbed business investment and real estate activity like construction and home sales.

Europe's biggest economy, Germany, also has been bogged down with higher fuel prices for energy-intensive industries after Russia cut off most of its natural gas to the continent. And Germany is facing a lack of skilled workers and years of underinvestment in infrastructure and digital technology in favour of balanced budgets.

While the incoming numbers "don't point to a significant improvement" and could signal another slight contraction in the first three months of this year, the eurozone should benefit from falling inflation that is restoring consumer purchasing power and expected lower

interest rates, according to economists at Oxford Economics.

Analysts expect the ECB to cut interest rates this year — some predicting as early as April, and others thinking the central bank may wait until June to ensure inflation is definitely under control.

But risks remain, including the attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on ships in the Red Sea, where 12 per cent of global trade passes, amid Israel's war on Hamas.

Transport costs have risen as shipping companies route vessels around the southern tip of Africa, adding a week or more to voyages. With higher shipping costs and delays to products from clothes to keyboard components, concerns are growing of new consumer price spikes if the conflict in Gaza drags on or escalates.

The trade disruption could add as much as 0.5 per cent to core inflation, which excludes volatile fuel and food prices, Oxford Economics said. Core inflation is closely watched by the ECB.

"We think the impact on core inflation will be enough for the ECB to wait a little bit longer," delaying lower rates to June, Oxford Economics analysts said in a note. (AP)

## Atharva Foundation Mumbai donates ambulance in Arunachal

**GUWAHATI, Jan 30:** Atharva Foundation, Mumbai has extended its support for the welfare of martyred soldiers families, ex-servicemen, and armed forces personnel by donating ambulances to the Northeastern states.

This generous contribution aims to improve healthcare access and emergency medical services for the brave individuals who have served in the armed forces and kin of martyred soldiers families. Atharva Foundation has been actively involved in various philanthropic initiatives, focusing on education, healthcare, and social welfare. The organisation's commitment to creating a positive impact in society has garnered widespread recognition and appreciation across the country.

In this regard, Atharva Foundation chairman and MLA Borivali, Mumbai Sunil Rane and team visited RSB Itanagar on January 24 and handed over the key of an ambulance to Air Cmde R D Musabi (Retd), director-cum secretary Rajya Sainik Board, Itanagar Arunachal Pradesh in the presence of Maj General Jarken Gamlin (Retd) AVSM, SM, VSM along with Ex-servicemen and armed forces personnel. Moreover, laptops were gifted to the daughters of martyred soldiers at the hands of chairman Atharva Foundation Sunil Rane.

In addition, Sunilji Rane and team met Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen Kaiwalya Trivikram Parnaik, PYSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd) and discussed about the initiatives taken by Atharva Foundation for the welfare of armed forces personnel in the North East States.

## Auto detailing studio in Guwahati

**GUWAHATI, Jan 30:** The Gateway of North Eastern States Guwahati has recently come up with a New and one of a kind auto detailing studio, "Carl'st" at Bihbari Charali, Beltola in Guwahati.

"Carl'st" is one of the biggest and trusted car denting & painting services in the entire Northeast region which provides multiple services under one roof. Owner of "Carl'st" Mohit Agarwal said we provide services like painting & denting, accidental repair, under body painting, car exterior & interior cleaning, protection film (PPF), window heat rejection tinting and tinting, denting, painting, full vehicle restoration, underbody coatings, premium washing and cleaning, interior trim painting, premium washing and restoration, hassle free garage settlement and many such services related to any model and company car at affordable rates. Agarwal further said these services help in increasing the aesthetic life of a car which in turn gives better resale value too.

## NAME CORRECTION

I, Abdul Sattar of the below mentioned address do Herby solemnly affirm and declare that my actual and correct name is Abdul Sattar. That my name has been recorded in my School documents as Md Abdul Sattar in place of Abdul Sattar. That Md Abdul Sattar and Abdul Sattar are the same and one person. That this Affidavit is required to be produced before the authority concerned as a piece of document.

Sd/-  
Abdul Sattar  
SO- Bakkar Ali  
Vill-Nadirkash  
PS- Dalgao, Dist- Darrang

## 'Irregularities' in diesel engine Toyota suspends dispatch of 3 models in India

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Toyota Kirloskar Motor is temporarily suspending the dispatch of its three models -- Innova Crysta, Fortuner and Hilux -- in the country after "irregularities" were found in the certification tests for the diesel powertrain.

Toyota Industries Corporation (TICO), a company affiliated with Toyota Motor Corporation (TMC), on January 29, 2024, announced that irregularities in horsepower output certification tests were found on three diesel engine models. In case of India, such engines are used in Innova Crysta, Fortuner and Hilux.

"The irregularities concern the smoothing of power and torque curves but did not lead to any over-

stating or over-claims on horsepower, torque or other powertrain related values," a Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) spokesperson said in a statement when contacted over the issue.

The issue does not have any impact on the emissions or safety of the affected vehicles, the company stated.

"Toyota is working with relevant authorities to re-confirm the data used for the certification of the affected vehicles. As such, in case of TKM also the dispatch of affected vehicles will be temporarily suspended," the automaker noted.

TKM would, however, continue to take new orders for the three models, it said. For cars that have



already been dispatched but have not yet been delivered to the customer, the company will carefully explain to customers about this condition, the company stated.

"Thereafter, we will proceed with registration and delivery for customers who opt to receive their vehicles," it added.

It further stated: "We would like

to reassure our existing customers by stating that we believe their vehicles are unaffected by these irregularities, as this did not result in any variations in horsepower, torque or other powertrain-related values."

Additionally, this has not compromised the emissions or safety of their vehicles, TKM said.

"Nevertheless, TKM sincerely apologises for any inconvenience and concern this irregularity may cause to our customers and other stakeholders," it said.

The Innova Crysta, Fortuner and Hilux account for almost a third of TKM's total sales in India.

Ten models use the affected engines globally, including six in Japan. (PTI)

## ELECTRICAL WORKS AT MALIGAON

Tender No.: DYCEE-PS-MLG-HQ-11-23-24. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:  
Name of work: (A) At Maligaon - Electrical work in connection with Development of Facade, circulating area etc. of Rang Bhawan. (B) At Maligaon - Electrical work in connection with Development of Balcony and Toilet's complex in Rang Bhawan. (C) At HQ(Maligaon) - Electrical work in connection with Development of Old Sports hostel of NFRSA Complex, Maligaon. (D) At Maligaon-Electrical work in connection with Development of hostel and stadium at NFRSA Complex, Maligaon. (E) At Maligaon: Electrical work in connection with Development of Dormitory of NFRSA Complex, Maligaon. Tender Value: ₹64,17,871/-  
Earnest Money: ₹1,28,400/- Date & Time of Closing Tender: 15:00 hrs. on 19-02-2024. For details visit [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)  
DYCEE/PS/MLG/HQ  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
Serving Customers With A Smile



## Swasthya Manthan 11: NHM organises comprehensive health review workshop

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 30:** National Health Mission, Assam, organised Swasthya Manthan-11, a comprehensive review and orientation workshop held on Tuesday, at the Assam Water Centre in Guwahati. The event saw the participation of key figures, including Dr M S Lakshmi Priya, IAS, mission director – NHM, Assam, Pankaj Chamuah, ACS, OSD, NHM, Assam, Dr Kareng Rongpi, in-charge DHS, zonal administrative officers, state programme officials, and district health teams, alongside representatives from partner organisations. The one-day workshop drew participants from all districts, under the guidance of the joint director of Health Services. Notable attendees included MDR & CDR nodal officers, district programme managers, district quality consultants, district family planning coordinators, hospital administrators, and other concerned district officials. The focal point of the workshop was a district-wise review of health performance, with a particular emphasis on family planning, quality assurance, and maternal and child health. Discussions re-



involved around strategies to enhance the overall health status of the state's population. A meticulous identification of facility-wise gaps was conducted during the meeting, with subsequent presentations and detailed discussions on facility-wise improvement plans. The overarching goal was to identify any necessary course corrections at the district level and provide the required support to enhance health indicators. In recognition of outstanding achievements, the best-performing districts – Charaideo, Dhubri, Tin-

sukia, Nagaon, Kamrup, and Dibrugarh – were felicitated for their various activities under the Family Planning Division. Additionally, facilities certified under the NQAS received awards. The dedication and excellence of MPWs from each district, as well as outstanding performers at the state, district, and development partner levels, were also acknowledged and felicitated by Dr M S Lakshmi Priya, IAS, mission director – NHM, Assam. Under the proactive initiative of Dr M S Lakshmi Priya, IAS, mission director – National Health Mission

Assam, a sequential series of Swasthya Manthan events unfolded. Commencing with Swasthya Manthan - 1 on June 8, 2022, and progressing through Swasthya Manthan - 10 on November 29, 2023, these strategically organised workshops marked significant milestones. Each of these gatherings played a crucial role in providing a platform for collaborative discussions and planning to enhance healthcare in Assam. The specific dates for each event are as follows: Swasthya Manthan - 1 on June 8, 2022, Swasthya Manthan - 2 on August 2, 2022, Swasthya Manthan - 3 on September 27, 2022, Swasthya Manthan - 4 on October 31, 2022, Swasthya Manthan - 5 on December 28, 2022, Swasthya Manthan - 6 on March 4, 2023, Swasthya Manthan - 7 on April 26, 2023, Swasthya Manthan - 8 on June 3, 2023, Swasthya Manthan - 9 on September 29, 2023, and Swasthya Manthan - 10 on November 29, 2023. These gatherings underscored a sustained commitment to addressing healthcare challenges and continuously improving health outcomes in the state.

## Conference of Elders of Ancient Traditions & Cultures witnesses global cultural exchange

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Jan 30:** Delegates from 33 countries participated in the 8th Triennial Conference of Elders of Ancient Traditions and Cultures organised by the International Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCS) in Dibrugarh, Assam.

The five-day conference witnessed a cultural exchange between the countries, where the delegates from 33 countries were seen trying to understand the other cultures on one platform.

On the third day of the conference, indigenous traditional rituals were performed by the communities. The Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, headed by their main priest, performed the traditional rituals (puja) where they were seen appealing the 'Sun God' in their traditional hymns.

Caribbean rituals of South America were also performed in the international conference. They performed the entire rituals with water and a small plant.

Many other rituals were performed in the international conference. While talking to this correspondent, Barata from Ghana said that he loves the cultural ex-



change program. "For the first time, I visited India, Assam, and I would love to visit it again. India is a land of spirituality that has deep roots in our culture," he added.

Kanyon Coyote, Indian Canyon Nation, California, said, "We are the native people of America following our indigenous faith, but after colonisation, they forcefully took our things. For the first time, we have come to Assam, India, and are enjoying the environment and

people over here. I love India because of its diverse culture."

Digant Dash, the global coordinator of ICCS, said, "Under one umbrella, the cultures of the world come together. We are happy to see the cultural integration and the exchange of cultures. The rituals of the traditional cultures were performed in the conference."

RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale was present during the rituals in the international conference.

## Lecture series to be held at MSSV

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Jan 30:** The department of Political Science, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya is planning to organise a series of lectures on socio-political issues of contemporary relevance in the varsity. As part of this initiative, the department will organise the first lecture on the subject 'The Hidden Paradox of Education and Democracy: Political Mobilisation vis-a-vis Social Implementation and Education Quality in Democratic Regimes' on February 1 at the varsity auditorium here. Dr Nani Gopal Mahanta, advisor to Education, Government of Assam, will attend the program as the keynote speaker and deliver his lecture on the topic. Dr Harekrishna Bora, head of the department of Political Science, will deliver the welcome address, and Mridul Hazarika, vice-chancellor of MSSV, will also address the occasion, as stated in a release.

## Three drug traffickers apprehended

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Jan 30:** Three drug traffickers, disguised as daily wage earners, were arrested by Sivasagar Police led by OC Kalpajyoti Sarma from a rented house in Dhali Ali on Monday. They were Abu Hanif, Salima Khatun (wife), and Mofidul Islam. Police personnel, in the guise of buyers, seized ₹ 4 lakhs and 10 drug-filled containers from their possession. Two of them were remanded to police custody while one was sent to jail. The gang was operating in the district with notorious drug traffickers Raju Ali, Suber Ali, and Nazari Fakir, it is suspected.

## Drama festival to promote tribal youth talents

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, Jan 30:** A two-day-long ethnic drama festival was organised by the director of Cultural Affairs, Guwahati, in cooperation with the district administration from January 27 and 28 at Morigaon Gandhi Bhawan. To develop the talents of tribal youth by providing a platform for the ethnic drama festival 'Janajatiya Natya Utshab' was organised by the director of Cultural Affairs here. The director of Cultural Affairs invited four ethnic drama groups from four tribes-dominated districts – Kokrajhar, Dhemaji, Goalpara, and Morigaon - to perform their dramas here. The artists of Liragi Theater Group of Kokrajhar performed the Bodo drama 'Makhandra' directed by Sanjib Kumar Brahma, the Ranjumuk Guthi of Goalpara performed Rabha drama 'Tikkar' directed by Sudarshan Rava, Dumar Natya Guthi of Dhemaji performed Mising drama 'Maru-The Uthas' directed by Joy Prakash Pegu, and Sand Drama Group of Jagoirad, Morigaon performed Tiwa drama 'Laku-Faku' directed by Adisan Deuri. Earlier, a felicitation program was held where DCO Rajib Koiri felicitated four noted local tribal artists in the program, as stated in a press release by DCO.

## Student secures 24<sup>th</sup> rank nationwide in paragraph writing contest

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Jan 30:** Bhargab Krishna Hazarika, the son of Pankaj Hazarika and Parishmita Hazarika and a student of class 5 at Santipur Kamal Borah LP School, secured the 24th rank nationwide in paragraph writing in the Project Veer Gatha 3.0 contest. The contest was organised last year. Regarding Bhargab Krishna Hazarika's achievement, a felicitation program was organised at Santipur Kamal Borah LP School on Monday. Nirmal Dutta, retired chief engineer of NEEPCO, presided over the felicitation meeting. Durga Madhab Dehingia, CRCC, anchored the felicitation meeting. Bhargab Krishna Hazarika was felicitated with a phulam gamosa and a certificate from Santipur Kamal Borah LP School. The people present at the felicitation program provided cash, a gamosa, and a certificate to Bhargab Krishna Hazarika. In the felicitation meeting, Bokul Dutta, headmaster of Demow Higher Secondary School, Thowra MLA Sushanta Borgohain, Amrit Konwar, BEEO Demow, along with other dignitaries, were present on Monday.

## Assam Rifles executes installation of water filtration plant

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 30:** In a significant stride towards community welfare, Assam Rifles successfully completed the renovation of the building and installation of a water filtration plant at Hosanna Orphanage in Dima Hasao on Monday, as stated in a press release. This initiative, aimed at enhancing the living conditions for the 35 students and 15 staff members at the orphanage, reflects Assam Rifles' commitment to sustainable development and social responsibility. The water filtration plant ensures access to clean and safe drinking water, promoting the health and well-being of the children and the staff. Assam Rifles has diligently worked to improve infrastructure and contribute to the betterment of communities. The renovation and newly installed water filtration plant at Hosanna Orphanage stands as a testament to the organisation's dedication to creating a positive impact in Dima Hasao district. The orphanage home extends its heartfelt gratitude to all stakeholders involved, including local authorities, Child Welfare Committee



chairman Rajat Moni Thaoson & district child protection unit in-charge, Susanta Langthasa, and the dedicated team members who worked tirelessly to make this project a reality. The impact of this initiative goes beyond the physical infrastructure; it symbolises the collaborative efforts towards fostering a healthier and happier community.

## Union Minister inaugurates 'I Love Duliajan' selfie point

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 30:** In a momentous event, the Union minister of state for Petroleum & Natural Gas and Labour & Employment, Rameswar Teli, inaugurated an 'I Love Duliajan' Selfie Point at Duliajan on Monday, in the presence of Anor Ali Haque, RCE, Oil India Limited (OIL), Sanjay Verma, ED (EA-asset manager), Gauranga Borgohain, CGM (HR-Establishment), Rajendra Singh Garbhal, CGM (HSE), other officials of OIL, and local residents. This initiative aims to enhance community engagement and provide a unique space for residents to connect with their beloved town. During the inauguration ceremony, minister Rameswar Teli expressed his appreciation for OIL's swift execution of the project. He acknowledged OIL's consistent support in implementing various developmental projects for Duliajan and emphasised that the selfie point would serve as a symbol of welcome for everyone entering Duliajan. This initiative is part of OIL's ongoing efforts to contribute to the overall development of Duliajan and provide the community with recreational spaces that reflect the town's spirit and pride.

## Awareness program on HIV (P&C) Act, 2017 conducted in Hailakandi

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 30:** In a collaborative effort between the District Legal Services Authority, Hailakandi, and Disha Cluster Cachar, a sensitisation community awareness programme on the HIV (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 was successfully organised. The event took place at the Conference Hall of SK Roy Civil Hospital and saw enthusiastic participation from hospital staff, NACP cadres, and officials.

The programme was inaugurated by Sanjay Hazarika, the esteemed District & Sessions Judge of

Hailakandi. The event aimed at promoting awareness and understanding of the provisions of the HIV (P&C) Act, 2017. Serving as resource persons were Bidyabrata Acharyya, secretary, DLSA, Hailakandi, and Anup Kumar Dutta, CPM DISHA, who shared valuable insights and knowledge on the legal aspects and community involvement in HIV prevention.

The collaborative initiative proved to be a significant step towards community empowerment and legal awareness, emphasising the importance of informed participation in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS.

## Rameswar Teli inaugurates life-size statue of Mahatma

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Jan 30:** A life-size statue of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled in the heart of Dibrugarh town at Thana Charali area on Monday evening on the eve of the 76th death anniversary of the Father of the Nation. The Mahatma Gandhi Park, where the statue has been installed, has also been completely renovated with a water fountain and illumination.

Union minister of state for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Rameswar Teli, unveiled the statue in the presence of Dibrugarh MLA Prasanta Phukan, Dibrugarh Municipal Board chairman Saikat Patra, vice chairman Ujjal Phukan, and others. The entire cost of the project, including the statue, water fountain, lighting, and park renovation, incurred an expenditure of ₹ 12 lakh. The project was implemented by the Dibrugarh Municipal Board.

Speaking at the event, Union minister Rameswar Teli talked about the role of Mahatma Gandhi in attaining India's independence and his ideals that continue to inspire generations.

"Mahatma Gandhi was the guiding light of our freedom movement struggle, and his philosophy of non-violence and truth remains relevant today. This statue will serve as a constant reminder of his vision for a united and harmonious India. The statue will serve as a constant source of inspiration for us and future generations to uphold his values." The citizens of Dibrugarh also expressed their appreciation for the project.



## Diphu man arrested for posting derogatory comment

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Jan 30:** On Monday evening, a 28-year-old youth, Salman Uddin Ahmed, a resident of Santipara, was arrested by Diphu Police for posting derogatory remarks about Lord Ram on social media. The arrest came in response to Ahmed's offensive Facebook post on January 22, 2024, where he commented on a news item shared on the platform. The news item highlighted the religious fervour and enthusiasm during the celebratory event of Ram Mandir Pran Pratishtha at Ayodhya in Diphu, Karbi Anglong. Ahmed's comment contained derogatory words that offended the sentiments of a particular community. In response, Diphu Police took suo moto action and registered case no (06/24) against the accused Salman Uddin Ahmed. He has been charged under Section 153A/500/506/295-A of the IPC and Section 67 of the IT Act.

## KAAC EM Bili Mohan Khaklary distributes ration card

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Jan 30:** On Tuesday, more than 640 ration cards were distributed to beneficiaries under the South West Langher LAMPS, Kachomari, Rajapathar. The event was graced by Bili Mohan Khaklary, executive member (EM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) for Food & Civil Supplies, who served as the chief guest.

The gathering also included Madhuram Lektie, EM of KAAC, Hemsing Teron, chairman of Bakulia Municipal Board, Anita Saikia, vice chairman, Noren Timung, VDC chairman, Darsing Rongpi, president of BJP Langher Mondol Committee, and various others.

## Body of minor found

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Jan 30:** The body of a minor girl, suspected to have been raped and murdered, was recovered from the Ruipi Langso waterfall area under Dolamara Police Station in Karbi Anglong.

The minor was traveling back to Dolamara with a man named Dilip Rongphar on a motorcycle on January 26. The minor had been staying with a family for education and had visited her village for Christmas Eve and Christmas.

## All Assam Tribal Sangha's 39<sup>th</sup> Triennial Session concludes

### Cultural procession and open session held; tribal leaders addresses key issues

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Jan 30:** The 39th Triennial Session of the All Assam Tribal Sangha (AATS) at Katori HS School Field came to an end on Monday night. The cultural procession in the forenoon session was participated in by troupes from Mising, Deori, Sonowal Kachari, Mech Kachari, Tiwa, Lalung, Boro, Naga, Rabha, Hajong, and most of the tribal communities.

The open session of the 39th Triennial Conference of All Assam Tribal Sangha (AATS) began with a dance performance by the Nyishi cultural troupe. Addressing the session as the chief guest, the Education and Tribal Welfare minister Dr Ranaj Pegu said that the tribal people of the state had to do a series of movements and stirs in the state demanding justice from the authority, and now the present government has been generous enough to

listen to their grievances, and as many as eight Autonomous Councils have been formed for as many communities. It helps in delivering justice to every community through their own representatives. He added that a series of welfare schemes like the Basundhara Mission have added in a big measure to the welfare of the tribal population in every district. It was presided over by Sukumar Basumatary, president, AATS.

Earlier, inaugurating the open session, the CEO of Rabha Autonomous Council, Tankeswar Rabha, paid glowing tributes to Jananayak Bhimbar Deori. In his speech, he said that the AATS has all along been working as the voice of the tribal people of Assam, highlighting their land problems, cases of discrimination against them, autonomy problems, and many other struggles of the tribal people in



Assam. The present government, he added, has been proactive in solving the problems faced by the tribal population in the state. The present government has accorded constitutional status to the Deori Autonomous Council and Sonowal

AC. Tribal people, he added, are protectors of forest land, and not encroachers, and hence the government would do well to grant them land pattas who are now in forest areas. AATS will continue to fight for their legitimate demands

regarding land rights. Upper Assam people do not know the unbelievable aggression of immigrants and Muslims in Goalpara, Dhubri, Morigaon, etc., districts. The new rights and regulations set by the government. AATS has never shown any dislike or disrespect towards any other community or class of people. The stronger the tribal people, the stronger the state, he concluded.

The delegates' meeting adopted some resolutions, including AATS's opposition to granting ST status to the advanced and more populous communities in the state, which it feels will deprive the ST population of their legitimate rights and privileges guaranteed by the constitution. AATS demands adoption of strict measures to prevent non-tribal communities from grabbing lands in tribal belts and inclusion of tribal-dominated areas

laying outside tribal belts. It also adopts a resolution demanding that the Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar SS School be upgraded to a degree college.

Atul Borthakur, principal, Katori HS School, released the souvenir 'Masenja' published by the Reception Committee. The session was attended by Sushanta Borgohain, MLA, Thowra, LAC, Punaram Mili, president, reception committee, Krishna Kanta Meeh, secretary, reception committee, Aditya Khaklari, secretary, AATS, Biju Pegu Mising AC, Pranobiyoti Mesong, Tiwa AC, Nripen Khandia, Nikhil Rabha Student Union, Sanjeev Hajong, Hajong SU, Temson Teron, prez Karbi SU, Debajit Thengal, prez, Pradip Manse, Suen Modahi, Chandan Sonowal, Nongpiom Gamgi, Sinphow Janjati Unnayan Parishad, and several tribal and student leaders.











The verdict comes nine days before the February 8 general elections

## Imran Khan, former FM Qureshi sentenced to 10-year prison term for leaking state secrets

**ISLAMABAD, Jan 30:** Jailed former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan was sentenced to 10 years in prison by a special court on Tuesday for leaking state secrets, in a major blow to his bid to return to power in the February 8 general elections.

The decision to sentence Khan and ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was announced by special court Judge Abul Hasanat Zulqarnain during the hearing of the case held at the special court in Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi established under the stringent Official Secrets Act.

The 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician is already serving a three-year jail term after being convicted of corruption.

Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has faced numerous troubles starting with the denial of its election symbol, the cricket bat, to the rejection of nomination papers of Khan, Qureshi, 67, and a number of other party leaders.

The controversy first emerged on March 27, 2022, when Khan—less than a month before his ouster in April 2022—while addressing a public rally waved a letter before the crowd, claiming that it was a cipher from a foreign nation that had conspired with his political rivals to have his government overthrown.

Khan did not reveal the contents of the letter nor did he mention the name of the nation it came from. But a few days later, he accused the US of conspiring against him and alleged that Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Affairs Donald Lu had sought his removal.

The cipher was about former Pak-



istan ambassador to the US Asad Majeed's meeting with Lu.

The case was filed against Khan and Qureshi on August 15 last year by the Federal Investigation Agency, which accused both of violating the secrecy laws while handling the cable sent by the Pakistan embassy in Washington in March 2022.

The verdict comes nine days before the February 8 general elections, which the PTI is contesting amid a state crackdown and without an electoral symbol.

Both Imran and Qureshi have been in jail in the run-up to the elections. While Imran's candidature was rejected, Qureshi was cleared to run for an NA seat from Thar. But today's conviction means that both of them have been disqualified from contesting elections for the next five years, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Both Khan and Qureshi had pleaded not guilty to their involvement in the offence related to the alleged misuse of diplomatic cable for political purposes.

The PTI leaders confirmed the development by saying that it was a

"sham case with no access to media or public."

"Legal team will challenge the decision in a higher court and hopefully will get this sentence suspended, given the poor proceedings of a case when Islamabad High Court had annulled proceedings twice, ordered access to media and public but on the contrary, access of legal team was denied, and a decision reached in a haste," the party said in WhatsApp message.

"God willing kaptaan and vice kaptaan will be back soon, and this sentence will be (thrown) in the dustbin in the appeal stage," the party said.

This is Imran's second conviction as he was also convicted in the Toshakhana corruption case on August 5, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. It was Qureshi's first conviction. The Islamabad High Court had suspended his sentence. However, a division bench had later rejected Imran's petition seeking the suspension of the conviction.

At today's hearing held in the Adiala Jail, Khan and Qureshi were given a questionnaire under Section 342 (power to examine the accused)

of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

After Imran recorded his statement, the court asked him about the whereabouts of the cipher (diplomatic cable), to which the former prime minister replied: "I have said the same in my statement that I do not know. The cipher was in my office." The judge then sentenced the two leaders to 10 years in jail in the case. After announcing the verdict, the judge stepped out of the courtroom, at which Qureshi protested that his statement was not recorded.

PTI leader Gohar Khan said that the special court judge had announced the verdict in haste, adding that proceedings were not being conducted in accordance with the law and the Constitution.

"He asked questions himself and the way our witness was cross-examined, you cannot find any such examples in history," he said while speaking to the media outside the Islamabad High Court.

Speaking to the media, Khan's sister Aleema Khan alleged that someone was "giving instructions" to Judge Zulqarnain.

Aleema said the sentence was given due to the fear of Donald Lu, a senior US State Department official, and ex-army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa being summoned for cross-examination.

Speaking to Geo News, PTI counsel Barrister Ali Zafar said he would file an appeal tomorrow in the Islamabad High Court, calling it a "blessing in disguise."

"The case was going good but in recent days the judge changed everything and this was a mistrial. A criminal trial needs to be a fair trial," he said. (PTI)

## Israeli undercover forces dressed as women and medics storm West Bank hospital

**JENIN (WEST BANK), Jan 30:** Armed Israeli forces disguised as women and medical workers stormed a hospital on Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinian militants in a dramatic raid that underscored the spillover of deadly violence to the territory during the war in Gaza.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said Israeli forces opened fire inside the wards of the Ibn Sina Hospital in the town of Jenin. The ministry condemned the raid and called on the international community to pressure Israel's military to halt such operations in hospitals. A hospital spokesperson said there was no exchange of fire, indicating that it was a targeted killing.

The military said the militants were using the hospital as a hideout. It alleged that one of those targeted in the raid had transferred weapons and ammunition to others for a planned attack, purportedly inspired by the Hamas assault on southern Israel on October 7. The military did not provide evidence backing that claim.

Footage said to be security camera video from the hospital that circulated on social media showed about a dozen undercover forces, most of them armed, dressed as women with Muslim headscarves or hospital staff in scrubs or white doctor's coats. One in a surgical mask carried a rifle in one arm and a folded wheelchair in the other. The forces were seen patting down one man who knelt against a wall, his arms raised.

Israel has come under heavy criticism for its raids on hospitals in Gaza, which have acted as a shelter for displaced people and also as a critical yet struggling lifeline for the tens of thousands of Palestinians wounded in the war. Gaza's health care system, which was already feeble before the war, has been on the verge of collapse, buckling under the scores of patients, the lack of resources—including fuel and medical necessities blocked by Israeli restrictions—and the repeated fighting surrounding and inside hospitals.

Israel says militants use hospitals, especially in Gaza, to hide out or to launch operations from. The military has found underground tunnels in the vicinity of hospitals, and says it has located weapons and vehicles used in the October 7 attack on hospital grounds.

The war was triggered by Hamas' attack, when hundreds of militants stormed across the border, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting about 250 others. The attack set off a blistering air, sea and ground offensive that has killed more than 26,000 people in Gaza and wounded more than 65,000, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The ministry count does not distinguish between fighters and noncombatants, but it says about two-thirds of the dead are women and minors. The fighting has sparked a hu-



manitarian catastrophe, displacing 85 per cent of the tiny coastal enclave's population, leveling vast swathes of it, and pushing a quarter of residents to starvation, according to the United Nations. That crisis may soon be exacerbated, the UN has warned, over a spate of funding freezes to the main aid provider to Palestinians in Gaza following Israeli claims that a dozen of its workers participated in the October 7 assault.

Since October 7, violence in the West Bank has also surged as Israel has cracked down on suspected militants, killing more than 380 Palestinians, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most were killed in confrontations with Israeli forces during arrest raids or violent protests. The Israeli military says it has arrested nearly 3,000 Palestinians in the West Bank over the past four months. The military said Tuesday that forces killed Mohammed Jalameh, 27, who it said was planning an imminent attack. The two other men killed, brothers Basel and Mohammed Ghazawi, were hiding inside the hospital and were involved in attacks, the military claimed. The military did not provide details on how the three were killed. Its statement said Jalameh was armed with a pistol, but made no mention of an exchange of fire.

Hospital spokesperson Tawfiq al-Shobaki said there was no exchange of fire and the three were killed by Israeli forces in a targeted killing. He said the Israelis attacked doctors, nurses, and hospital security during the raid. "What happened is a precedent," he said. "There was never an assassination inside a hospital. There were arrests and assaults, but not an assassination."

He said Basel Ghazawi had been a patient in the hospital since October with hemiplegia, or partial paralysis. Hamas claimed the three men as members, calling the operation "a cowardly assassination." The raid took place in Jenin, long a bastion of armed struggle against Israel, where the internationally-backed Palestinian Authority and its security forces have little of a foothold. The city had been the frequent target of Israeli raids even before the war began. (AP)

## Ukraine's strikes on targets inside Russia hurt Putin's efforts to show the war isn't hitting home

**MOSCOW, Jan 30:** The wail of air raid sirens is commonplace in Belgorod, a Russian border city whose residents are on edge following a Ukrainian missile attack on an New Year's holiday weekend that left dozens of people dead and injured.

A spectacular explosion rocked a huge fuel export terminal on the Baltic Sea southwest of St. Petersburg this month from a Ukrainian drone, forcing the energy company Novatek to suspend operations for several days.

Last week, an apparent drone attack in the Black Sea port of Tuapse in the southern Krasnodar region hit one of Russia's largest refineries and ignited a fire, while another big refinery in the Volga River city of Yaroslavl, north of Moscow came under attack early Monday, but officials said there was no damage.

There also have been strikes on a gunpowder factory in the Tambov region and arms producers and military facilities in the Bryansk, Smolensk and Tula regions. Attacks like these are dealing a heavy blow to President Vladimir Putin's attempts to reassure Russians that life in the country is largely untouched by the nearly 2-year-old war.

"Ukraine has increased its capacity to strike back against Russia," Michael Kofman, a military expert with the Carnegie Endowment, said in a recent podcast. "You see increased Ukrainian attacks against Russian critical infrastruc-



ture, retaliatory attacks against cities like Belgorod and greater strikes against Russian military base in Crimea," he said.

As Putin ramps up his campaign ahead of the presidential election in March, he wants to maintain an air of normalcy. But the increasingly frequent Ukrainian attacks have raised the visibility of the war on Russian soil, and there are other signs the conflict is increasingly challenging the Kremlin's tight control of the political scene.

Thousands across Russia have signed petitions supporting the longshot presidential bid of liberal politician Boris Nadezhdin, who has made ending the war his main campaign issue. Wives of some soldiers rounded up in a partial mobilization in 2022 have pushed for their discharge. And despite a tight ban on protests, hundreds rallied in Bashkortostan province, clashing with police to protest the jailing of a local activist.

Certainly the December 30 strike on Belgorod marked a bloody escalation in the minds of many Russians. A barrage of missiles struck the city of 340,000, which is about 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of the Ukrainian border, on a holiday weekend when people were out shopping, ice skating and watching New Year's festivities. Officials said 25 people were killed, including five children, and over 100 were injured.

Residents described seeing victims with horrific injuries and pools of blood staining the sidewalks. One resident told the RBC news outlet he saw a baby carriage hit by shrapnel, the bloodied parents lying next to it. A drug store clerk said injured pedestrians ran into his pharmacy, seeking help. "I'm seeing requests on social networks from people who write: We are scared, please help us get to a safe place!" said regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov, adding that several hundred people were evacuated, including over 1,000 children heading to camps in neighbouring regions. Holiday and religious festivities were muted or cancelled entirely.

The shelling damaged nearly 600 apartments and scores of private homes, and shrapnel peppered over 500 cars. Bus stops are being reinforced with concrete blocks and sandbags.

Residents say they flinch at any loud noise these days and are afraid to go outside. Schools in the city and near the border have switched to online classes until mid-February. (AP)

## Kishida says he's determined to break Japan's ruling party from its practice of money politics

**TOKYO, Jan 30:** Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stressed on Tuesday he was determined to make a clear break from money politics as he renewed an apology for the latest major corruption scandal in the governing party, which has eclipsed his key policies such as strengthening the military and Japan's alliance with the United States.

His policy speech had been due last week when the new parliamentary session opened, but Kishida broke with tradition and instead faced an intensive session on the scandal first.

Kishida said he must admit that factions in the Liberal Democratic Party seemed to work for money and favours rather than policy, and he promised to lead reforms. "I humbly regret, and made a determination to have policy groups make a complete break from money and personnel affairs," he said.

Kishida gave no further explanation about the scandal or how the money was spent. Opposition lawmakers have pressed for him to disclose details. Kishida said he needed to regain public trust, citing challenges including a deadly earthquake on New Year's Day and the economy.

Kishida pledged to "further expand and deepen" the Japan-US

relations, which he called the linchpin of Japan's diplomatic policy, including by meeting President Joe Biden on a state visit to Washington in April. He said Japan needs to further strengthen Japan-US alliance to reinforce Japanese security and to play a greater role in regional peace and stability.

Under the national security strategy adopted in December

2022, Kishida announced plans to double defense spending in five years for drastic military buildup that include strike capability amid growing threat from China and North Korea. He did not clarify in his speech on Tuesday how his government plans to secure the funding.

Public support ratings for Kishida's administration have dropped to around 20 per cent, and while his leadership tenure may be shortened, the LDP is most likely stay in power because the largely fractured opposition parties are not seen as a viable alternative.

The LDP has governed postwar Japan almost without interruption and has repeatedly had corruption scandals followed by promises for cleaner politics. The latest scandal centres on political funds raised through party event tickets

bought by individuals, companies and organisations. Dozens of LDP lawmakers, most of them belonging to a faction previously led by assassinated former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, were accused of systematically not reporting funds in violation of the Political Funds Control Law. The money was alleged to have gone into unmonitored slush funds.

Prosecutors recently indicted 10 people, including three lawmakers, though cases were dropped against political heavyweights. Kishida on Monday admitted at least 37 lawmakers are now correcting the accounting of their political funds.

Governing lawmakers say proceeds from fundraising events provide key income to help cover election costs and other political activities, and deny they hid or pocketed unreported income. Experts say the Political Funds Control Law has many loopholes.

Kishida has announced the dissolving of his faction following the scandal and he has established an internal task force to make reforms, but half of its members are linked to the scandal, raising questions about how much it can achieve.

Critics say the real problem is not the factions but the behind-the-scenes dealings often based on lawmakers' connections with voters in their electoral districts. Kishida doesn't have to call a parliamentary election until 2025, but his party has set a leadership vote for September. (AP)

## Macron gets a ceremonial welcome as he starts a 2-day state visit to Sweden

**STOCKHOLM, Jan 30:** French President Emmanuel Macron was welcomed on Tuesday with pomp and ceremony at the start of a two-day state visit to Sweden during which he will meet Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the Scandinavian country's monarch, King Carl XVI Gustaf.

Macron and his wife, Brigitte, were greeted by the king in the inner courtyard of the downtown Stockholm royal castle that is the official residence of the Swedish royals.

There, Macron and Carl Gustaf reviewed members of the Grenadier Guards that had lined up. Macron noted that it had been too long since a French president visited Sweden—the last time was in 2014, when Francois Hollande travelled to the Scandinavian country.

Later on Tuesday, Macron is to discuss the future of European security at a military academy in Stockholm, together with Kristersson and the king. Russia's war on Ukraine and Sweden's NATO application are likely to be on the table.

After more than a year of delays, Türkiye earlier this month completed its ratification of Sweden's bid to join NATO, meaning Hungary is now the last member of the military alliance not to have given its approval. All NATO countries must agree before a new member can join the alliance.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Sweden and neighbouring Finland abandoned their traditional positions of military non-alignment to seek protection under NATO's security umbrella. Finland joined the alliance last year. (AP)

**HONG KONG, Jan 30:** Hong Kong began public consultation on a local National Security Law on Tuesday, more than three years after Beijing imposed a similar law that has all but wiped out dissent in the semi-autonomous city.

The new law could expand the government's ability to prosecute residents for offenses like collaborating with foreign forces to influence legislation or "publish misleading statements", and to close down civil society organisations. Some of its provisions threaten criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world.

Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, calls for the city to enact a national security law, but it's been delayed for decades because of widespread public opposition based on fears it would erode civil liberties. In 2003, an attempt to pass a version of the law sparked street protests that drew half a million people, and the legislation was shelved.

But the city's crackdown on political opposition likely clears the way for the bill to pass easily. Since 2020, many of the city's leading pro-democracy activists have been arrested, silenced or forced into exile. Dozens of civil society groups have been disbanded, and outspoken media outlets like Apple Daily and Stand News have been shut down.

The draft text will be written later based on input from public consultation, which will begin Tuesday and will end on February 28. But the city released a 110-page document Tuesday outlining its plans for the legislation.



City leader John Lee called the legislation a "constitutional responsibility". "We shouldn't wait any longer," he said during a news conference. "The threats to national security, they are real. We have experienced all these threats. We have suffered from them badly."

Both the Hong Kong and Beijing governments have hailed the previous National Security Law for restoring stability after the massive pro-democracy protests in 2019.

Lee said a local version is still necessary to keep Hong Kong safe against "potential sabotage" and "undercurrents that try to create troubles", in particular surviving ideas about Hong Kong independence. Lee also said that some foreign agents may still be active in Hong Kong.

He said other countries, including the UK, UK, and Singapore, have similar laws to safeguard security and Hong Kong would draw from them. Critics worry authorities will use a domestic national security law as another tool to crack down on dissidents, further eroding freedoms that were promised to the former British colony when it returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

The Beijing-imposed security law criminalised subversion, advo-

## 5 terrorists killed as Pakistani security officials thwart coordinated attack on Balochistan province's Mach jail

**KARACHI, Jan 30:** At least five terrorists of a banned group were killed when Pakistani security forces thwarted at least three coordinated attacks with rockets and sophisticated weapons by militants on a high-security jail in the country's restive Balochistan province, authorities said on Tuesday.

A senior police official said at least 15 rockets were fired at the Central Mach Jail on Monday night where some dangerous militants and death row prisoners have been incarcerated. Balochistan's caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai said the Pakistan Army and Frontier Constabulary Balochistan acted swiftly to thwart the attacks during the night.

"Five militants of the Balochistan Liberation Army were killed by security forces during the attack," he said. "They fired rockets at the Mach jail building but couldn't hit the target," he added.

Unconfirmed reports said at least two policemen were killed while a truck driver was injured in the attack but there was no official confirmation of casualties or injuries. The rockets were fired from nearby mountains and exploded in different areas of Mach town.

After firing rockets, terrorists attacked a camp of the security forces near the central jail and also entered the Mach railway station. Announcements were then made from loudspeakers for the people to remain indoors as the firing continued, the official said.

The Inspector General Prisons in Balochistan, Shuja Kasi, confirmed that rockets hit the walls of the residential colony of the Mach jail.

"Mortar shells and rockets exploded close to the walls of the colony," he said, adding that no casualty was reported so far. He said at present 800 prisoners were kept in Mach Jail, including some death-row prisoners. The minister claimed the terrorists were affiliated with the Aslam Acho group, with the Majeed Brigade of the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) group later claiming responsibility for the attack.

One security official said the gun battle between the heavily armed terrorists and forces had lasted for a couple of hours before they fled into the surrounding mountains before daylight broke.

He said no damage was reported to any of the installations. The attack was an apparent retaliation for Pakistani strikes on what the country said were insurgent hideouts in Iran earlier in January.

The BLA threatened to launch attacks on security forces in Balochistan and elsewhere following Pakistan's January 18 strikes on their camps in Iran that left at least nine persons dead. The strikes were made in response to an Iranian strike in Pakistan that appeared to target a different Baloch militant group with similar separatist goals. (PTI)



## Areca nuts worth ₹ 14.32 crore seized in Kohima



**KOHIMA, Jan 30:** Areca nuts worth ₹ 14.32 crore have been seized in Kohima, officials said on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off about illegal smuggling of areca nuts from Manipur to Nagaland, the Assam Rifles conducted a checking on National Highway 29 recently, they said.

During the check near Jakhama, four pickup vehicles and five trucks were found transporting areca nuts without any documents, they added. A total of 120 ton of areca nuts were seized during the checking. The seized nuts and the vehicles along with those arrested were handed over to the state customs department, officials said. (PTI)

## Meghalaya Assembly budget session to begin on February 16

**SHILLONG, Jan 30:** The budget session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly will commence from February 16.

This was informed by a notification issued by Meghalaya Governor, Phagu Chauhan on Tuesday.

Accordingly, the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) will be chaired by the speaker of Meghalaya Assembly, Thomas A Sangma on February 2.

The BAC will sit to settle the calendar for the budget session, 2024 of the Assembly, commissioner and secretary, Andrew Simons informed. (NNN)

## Massive fire in Sikkim; no casualty reported

**GANGTOK, Jan 30:** A major fire gutted two wooden houses and partially damaged two buildings in Sikkim's Gangtok district, an official said on Tuesday.

There was however, no report of any casualty in the fire, the official said.

The fire broke out at around 9:30 pm on Monday night in a wooden house at Mandi Bazaar opposite the old shopping complex at Singtam, which is about 27 km from the state capital Gangtok.

Deputy chief fire officer of the Singtam Fire Station, Mathew Rai said that it took five fire tenders to douse the flames, which spread rapidly during the night.

"Although there were no casualties reported there has been significant loss to property", said Rai.

Indian Army personnel from Bardang and local people also helped with the rescue operations. The rescued families were all shifted to safer locations. The cause of the fire is still being investigated.

The two RCC buildings were partially damaged in the fire while, the two wooden houses were completely burnt.

Officials of the Gangtok district administration reached the spot this morning and are assessing the damages. The ex-gratia payments were also handed out to the affected families. (PTI)

# Mawrah Multipurpose Reservoir to boost tourism: CM Sangma

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 30:** Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma on Tuesday said that the Pondage Multipurpose Reservoir in the Mawrah village in East Khasi Hills district will go a long way in tending to the need for water of villagers as well as boost tourism in the state. The chief minister said this while inaugurating the Pondage Multipurpose Reservoir during a function organised at Mawrah on Tuesday.

Speaking on the occasion, CM Sangma said that the multipurpose water reservoir has been created from a wasteland by the state soil and water conservation department. The project could take shape in just two years because of the support by locals and efforts of the officials of the department.

The Pondage Multipurpose Reservoir in Mawrah has been created in 6.5 hectares of wasteland at a cost of ₹ 1.5 crores. Currently, locals in collaboration with government officials are engaged in planting trees along the catchment area together with activities aimed with recharging the ground water of the area.



"Inaugurated the Mawrah Multipurpose Water Reservoir under the Sohra Civil Subdivision. In just 2 years, with community support and commendable efforts by the Soil & Water Conservation Department, the area is now transformed to a beautiful water body which was revived from a wasteland. The reservoir is also supporting the water needs of surrounding villages," CM Sangma said on 'X'.

"At present measures such as afforestation on the catchment, ground water recharge and other activities are being carried forward, giving a facelift to the area," he further said on 'X'.

The Meghalaya state government had joined hands with the Asian Development Bank in 2022 to create 1000 such Pondage Multipurpose Reservoirs across the state to generate water-based livelihoods and

boost the tourism sector in the state.

"The Mawrah Multipurpose Water Reservoir constructed under the RIDF XXVI scheme of @NABARDOnline with funding support from the State Scheme to complete the project has become a successful Model Water Conservation Effort of the Government. Congratulate the community and the team for their outstanding work in transforming the area," Sangma also said on 'X'.

## Manipur govt fails to release ₹ 38.60 crore as farmers' compensation

**IMPHAL, Jan 30:** Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) on Tuesday alleged that the Manipur government has failed to release ₹ 38.60 crore, which the Centre sanctioned to compensate farmers who are affected by the ongoing violence in Manipur.

Denouncing the non-release of the sanctioned amount, the farmers' wing of COCOMI set a February 10 deadline to the government to release the amount to the beneficiary farmers.

If not, the farmers' wing will join hands with the farmers to launch intense forms of agitations, Laishram Kiran, the co-ordinator of COCOMI farmers' wing warned the government, during a press conference held at the UCM office in Imphal today.

He said that the Centre had already sanctioned ₹ 38.60 crore to the Manipur government for paying compensation to the farmers of the state who are affected by the ongoing



crisis.

The fund is meant for on-ward distribution to the farmers in the fringe areas, who could not carry out their farming activities owing to the violent conflict.

All the people across the state are suffering because of the prevailing conflict and the delay in releasing the fund added another hardship to the distressed farmers, he said.

The farmers are under immense hardship and to relieve them from this hardship, they needed the fund to be given to them as compensation, the co-ordinator also said.

He reminded and said that the chief minister and the minister concerned had on many occasions assured that the compensation would be released at the earliest to ease their suffering of the farmers.

However, the farmers are yet to receive the compensation.

Attending the press conference, COCOMI coordinator Somerendro Thokchom said that they will fully support the agitations to be launched by its farmers' wing if the state government fails to release the fund to the beneficiary farmers within the stipulated time.

Agricultural activities could not be undertaken in 5,127 hectares in Manipur due to ethnic violence as per an independent survey conducted by a farmer based body.

It is estimated that the total income loss for the state in the agricultural sector this year could be around ₹ 226.50 crore. Of this, the highest loss will be in rice production to the tune of ₹ 211.41 crore which accounts for 93.36 per cent of the total agriculture and allied activities followed by livestock farming.

The Centre had given a ₹ 38.60 crore compensatory package to provide relief to affected farmers. (NNN)

## Tripura govt gives nod to opening of fair price shops



**AGARTALA, Jan 30:** The Tripura government has decided to give licences for opening of 51 new fair price shops in the state, state food and civil supplies minister, Sushanta Chowdhury said on Tuesday.

At present, there are 1,060 fair price shops and 9.76 lakh ration card holders in the eight districts of the state.

"The government has decided to provide 51 new dealerships of fair price shops to improve the service delivery system for ration card holders. Under the new guidelines, there will be a new ration shop for 400 ration cards," Chowdhury said.

Each ration shop at present serves 900-1,200 ration card holders, which causes inconveniences for the people to get ration materials on time, he said.

"Things will improve once the new ration shops are in place. People will not have to travel long distances to get the supplies from ration shops as a result," he added.

Chowdhury said the government has also decided to provide an additional 5 kg of rice to each ration card holder in February and March at a price of ₹ 13 per kg for APL (above poverty line) card holders.

Families having BPL (below poverty line) and priority group cards will get the additional 5 kg of rice free of cost. At present, BPL and priority group card holders get 35 kg of rice per month free of cost, while APL card holders get 20 kg per month.

Chowdhury said the government was working to replace the existing paper cards with PVC ones. (PTI)

## 1<sup>st</sup> mega job expo begins in Mokokchung

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Jan 30:** The 1st Mega Job Expo, 2024 to promote job opportunities in Nagaland began at the Fazl Ali College in Mokokchung on Tuesday.

Organised by the Mokokchung district planning and development board (DPDB) and Mokokchung district skill committee under the theme 'Connecting Careers', the two-day job expo also aimed to provide opportunities to job seekers to explore potential career paths and secure gainful employment. The job fair seeks to bring together employers and job seekers on a common platform.

The Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland has partnered with the Business Association of Nagas and Fazl Ali College to organise the mega job expo.

Speaking on the occasion as the special guest, adviser to the water resources department and Mokokchung DPDB chairman, Tongpang Ozukum lauded the organisers for their initiative in organising the mega job expo keeping in mind Nagaland's employment scenario.

He said though Nagaland is a small state, it has a huge number of government employees in the government employment sector, almost reaching the saturation point.

Ozukum said the government is now trying to scale down government employees as the major portion of development funds is utilised in the payment of salaries to the employees.

He urged the youth to seek different opportunities provided by private sectors.

"It is only when we enjoy working in a diverse environment that we get the opportunity to know other and understand the real meaning of work culture and value of money," he said.

Emphasising the importance of skills in today's world, Ozukum encouraged the youths to pursue a career that suits their skills and grab the opportunity to interact with recruiting agencies. He hoped that the mega job expo would benefit many job seekers.

The organisers said the primary objective of the job expo is to facilitate employment opportunities for unemployed youths of the state.

A total of 28 partnering companies are offering job opportunities to the unemployed youths at the two-das mega expo.

## Sikkim climber Manita Pradhan conquers Mt. Aconcagua

**GANGTOK, Jan 30:** Manita Pradhan, a 38-year-old climber from Sikkim, has conquered Mt Aconcagua, the highest peak in the continent of South America.

She reached the top of the 6,962-meter-tall peak in the Andes mountain range in Argentina on Monday, according to a statement issued here.

Scaling Mt Aconcagua is part of her quest to conquer the "Seven Summits", the highest mountains on each of the seven continents of the earth. This latest triumph comes after Pradhan's previous achievements in successfully climbing Mt Everest (2021), Mt Elbrus (2022), and Mt Kilimanjaro (2022). With four summits conquered, Pradhan's sights are now set on the remaining three peaks - Mt Denali, Mt Vinson Massif and Mt Carstensz Pyramid. In the statement, Pradhan said, "I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the honourable chief minister of Sikkim Prem Singh Tamang and Soreng MLA Aditya Golay Tamang for their support and motivation for my Project Seven Summit." (PTI)

## Manipur Govt, CM pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi on death anniversary

**IMPHAL, Jan 30:** Manipur Governor, Anusuiya Uikye and chief minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday paid rich tributes to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary.

The Governor and CM laid wreaths at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Imphal.

Uikye urged people to follow the principles of Gandhi.

"The principles of Mahatma Gandhi were filled with the spirit of love, non-violence, kindness, mutual brotherhood and forgiveness and I appeal to all to follow and remember his teachings," a statement from Raj Bhavan said quoting Uikye. The chief minister also urged the people to follow the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi. (PTI)

## 1 killed in gunfight in Manipur

**IMPHAL, Jan 30:** At least one village volunteer was killed and another injured after their camp came under attack from unidentified gunmen in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Tuesday, police said.

The incident took place at the camp situated near Kadangband village in Lamshang area in the adjoining Imphal West district.

"After the unknown gunmen launched the attack, the village volunteers retaliated, resulting in a gunfight in which one village volunteer was killed and another was injured."

"Following the retaliation, the attackers retreated, regrouped and attacked again. The gunfight is underway," a police officer said.

After the eruption of the gun-battle, several women, children and elderly from Kadang-

band and neighbouring Koutruk village fled to safer areas, he said.

Additional security personnel have been sent to the area to bring the situation under control, the officer said.

The injured person has been taken to the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal. Koutruk and Kadangband villages have been severely hit by the ongoing ethnic violence, and have witnessed several gun-battles between armed groups of the two warring communities.

Manipur has been witnessing an ethnic strife between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis since May last year, resulting in the deaths of over 180 people. (PTI)

## Animals at Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary to be evaluated

**Evaluation in 2021 estimated wildlife sanctuary to have 105-140 gaurs**

**AGARTALA, Jan 30:** Estimation of animals at the Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary in the South Tripura district will begin on February 19, an official said on Tuesday.

The last estimation at the sanctuary was conducted by the state forest department in 2021. That exercise, which went on for over a month, estimated the number of gaurs in the sanctuary at 105-140, he said.

The estimation is conducted every three years to know the actual population so that corrective measures can be taken, he added.

A Mumbai-based agency has been roped in to assist in the exercise, deputy conservator of forest, wildlife, Krishna Dulal



Roy told PTI.

"Once the estimation is complete, which is expected by March, we will know the actual

number of wild animals. We will seek help from the Tripura University's biodiversity and forestry department to analyse

the data obtained," he said.

"There has been no report of the killing of gaurs in and around the sanctuary over the last few years due to alertness on the part of forest guards and support of locals. Therefore, we are sure about the growth in the number of gaurs," said another forest official.

However, he expressed concern over the rising encroachment of land in the 294 sq km sanctuary.

"Rubber plantations on six hectares and cannabis plantations on 11 hectares of land have been destroyed by the department. Over the last two years, 16 hectares of land encroached for farming and living have been recovered," he added. (PTI)

No.DPRD/BTC/(Gen)CLF/Ud/-255/2024/03.

### SHORT NOTICER INVITING TENDER

Dated Kokrajhar the 29<sup>th</sup> Jan., 2024

Sealed tenders with a validity period of 90 (Ninety) 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 21-02-2024 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	Udalguni	Const. of CLF Centre at Katual Chowk	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
02	Kalaigaon	Const. of CLF Centre at Swarnamakha	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
03	Bhergaon	Const. of CLF Centre at Chitralekha Khasiachuba near VCDC Office	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
04	Khairabari	Const. of Community Hall at Hirimba CLF	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
05	Udalguni	Const. of CLF Jaikhang Paneri Centre at Simaluguri village	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
06	Mazbat	Const. of CLF Centre at Gelabil	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
07	Rowta	Const. of CLF Centre at Kajiamati	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
08	Kalaigaon	Const. of CLF Centre at Changapathar	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
09	Bhergaon	Const. of CLF Centre at Rajagarh VCDC	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 months
10	Mazbat	Const. of CLF Centre at Potabil village	19.98	19,98,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	@ 600/-	3 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 30-01-2024 to 21-02-2024 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, GSTIN, PAN Card, Voter Card, Aadhar Card, Caste Certificate and Labour License along with the tender. In case 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 enclosed with the tender otherwise tender will be treated as cancelled.
- The tenderer should submit their tender with up to date GSTIN certificate and PAN Card failing which the tender may be treated as cancelled.

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

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1269



# BJP sweeps Chandigarh mayoral polls; opposition allies AAP, Cong cry foul

**CHANDIGARH, Jan 30:** The BJP swept the Chandigarh mayoral polls on Tuesday, retaining the three top posts in a setback to the AAP and the Congress which had contested the elections as allies.

Councillors from the two INDIA bloc parties created a ruckus in the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation House as the result for the mayor's post was declared, and boycotted the next phase – elections to the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor.

BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar defeated the AAP's Kuldeep Kumar for the mayor's post, polling 16 votes against the 12 won by his rival. Eight votes were declared invalid.

BJP nominees Kuljit Sandhu and Rajinder Sharma were declared elected to the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor, respectively.

Opposition councillors alleged there was tampering with the ballot papers at the elections, a charge rubbished by the BJP. On social media, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal expressed "serious concern" over the "cheating" in "broad daylight".

An AAP councillor said the party will approach the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Tuesday's elections too were held on the directions of the high court after a



postponement on January 18.

The AAP and the Congress accused presiding officer Anil Masih of making some marks on the ballots during the counting, rendering them invalid. They argued that the "invalid" ballots tilted the balance in the BJP candidate's favour.

"The worst fears of unabashed tampering by the BJP's councillor-presiding officer in a premeditated and planned intrigue to murder democracy have come true in the Chandigarh mayoral elections," Congress leader Pawan Kumar Bansal alleged.

He claimed that the Congress-AAP agent was not allowed to examine the ballot papers.

"The presiding officer an-

nounced rejection of eight votes, declared the BJP candidate the winner and went away. BJP members rushed to the table and tore off the ballot papers," he alleged.

Congress councillor Gurbax Rawat alleged that the presiding officer did not call the party's election agent when the ballot box was opened for counting. "We do not accept the result," he said.

AAP councillor Prem Lata said they will approach the high court against the result.

"A fraud was played on us. No free and fair election took place," another councillor said.

BJP councillor Saurabh Joshi rubbished the opposition allegations and said if the councillors

have any objections, they can challenge the result.

The newly elected mayor was to hold the elections to the two most senior posts after him. With the opposition parties boycotting this phase of mayoral polls, these posts also went to the BJP.

The BJP has 14 councillors in the 35-member corporation. Its Chandigarh MP Kirron Kher also has voting rights as an ex-officio member.

The AAP has 13 councillors and the Congress seven. The Shiromani Akali Dal has one councillor. In Punjab, the AAP and the Congress have indicated that they are reluctant to contest the Lok Sabha polls together even though they are both in the INDIA grouping. But they agreed to contest together in mayoral elections in Chandigarh, the Union Territory that serves as the capital of both Punjab and Haryana.

As part of the alliance in Chandigarh, the AAP contested for the mayor's post while the Congress fielded candidates for the two other posts.

AAP leader Kejriwal tweeted on X, "If these people can stoop to this level in a mayoral poll, they could go to any extent in the national elections. This is very worrying."

## ED seizes ₹ 36 lakh, BMW SUV from Soren's Delhi's house

**NEW DELHI/RANCHI, Jan 30:** The Enforcement Directorate will question Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Wednesday in Ranchi in a money laundering case probe linked to an alleged land scam and has seized ₹ 36 lakh, a BMW SUV and some "incriminating" documents after it searched his house in the national capital, official sources said here.

A day after an ED team visited the JMM executive president's Delhi home and agency officials said he was "untraceable", Soren reached his official residence in the Jharkhand capital on Tuesday and chaired a meeting of his alliance MLAs, ending the over 24-hour-long suspense over his whereabouts.

The opposition BJP had claimed the chief minister was "absconding" fearing action by the ED.

Sources said the ED has informed state authorities and central security forces about the composition of its team that will move from its zonal office on Airport Road in Ranchi to Soren's camp office at his residence on January 31 before 1 pm, the sources said.

The questioning will continue from where it ended on January 20. About 16-17 questions were put across to Soren and his statement was recorded, in a written and audio-video format, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the sources said.

The ED investigators had spent about seven hours at the CM residence that day.

In Delhi, the federal agency

searched the 5/1 Shanti Niketan building of the JMM leader in the southern part of the national capital on Monday and camped there for almost 13 hours to question him about this money laundering case linked to an alleged land deal case in Jharkhand. The sources said the ED teams seized about ₹ 36 lakh in cash, a Haryana-registered BMW SUV under a name that the ED considers "benami" and some "incriminating" documents during the day-long operation.

The CM has informed the agency that he is ready to depose before them on Wednesday at his residence in the state capital around 1 pm.

A party official said in Ranchi that all the legislators of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led ruling alliance in Jharkhand have been asked not to leave the state capital.

"I reside in your hearts," Soren told reporters in Ranchi when asked about his "absence".

Soren is being questioned as part of a probe into an alleged "huge racket of illegal change of ownership of land by the mafia" in Jharkhand, according to the central probe agency.

The ED has so far arrested 14 people in the case, including 2011-batch IAS officer Chhavi Ranjan who served as the director of the state's Social Welfare Department and deputy commissioner of Ranchi.

An employee of the Jharkhand land revenue department, Bhanu Prasad Prasad, was also arrested by the agency in the case. (PTI)

## 15 PFI workers get death sentence in killing of BJP leader in Kerala

**ALAPPUZHA (KER), Jan 30:** A Kerala court on Tuesday sentenced to death 15 persons associated with the now-banned Islamist outfit Popular Front of India (PFI) in connection with the murder of BJP OBC wing leader Ranjith Sreenivasan in this district in 2021, the special prosecutor of the case said here.

The sentence was pronounced by Mavelikkara Additional District Judge V G Sreedevi.

The family of the slain leader and the BJP welcomed the judgement, with the saffron party hailing Sreenivasan as a "great martyr" who got justice today.

According to special prosecutor Prathap G Padickal, although 14 out of the total of 15 persons convicted in the case were produced before the court on Tuesday, the judge orally stated that the sentence would also apply to the convict who was not produced today.

When the remaining convict, who is currently hospitalised due to an illness, is produced in court, the sentence against him will be pronounced, he said.

The court had convicted the 15 men on January 20.

Reacting to the verdict, the family of Sreenivasan said they were satisfied with it.

"This was an exceptionally rare case, and our loss is immense. We express our gratitude to the prosecution and investi-



gating officers for conducting a thorough and honest investigation into the incident, ultimately resulting in the imposition of the maximum punishment," Sreenivasan's wife told reporters.

The prosecution had sought the maximum sentence for the convicts, saying they were a "trained killer squad" and the cruel and diabolical manner in which the victim was killed in front of his mother, infant, and wife brings it within the ambit of the "rarest of the rarest" of crimes.

Sreenivasan, the BJP OBC Morcha state secretary, was brutally attacked and killed in his home on December 19, 2021, in front of his family, by activists affiliated with PFI and Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI).

According to the prosecutor, the court

found that out of the 15, accused one to eight were directly involved in the case.

It also found four men (Accused number nine to 12) guilty of murder because they, along with those directly involved in the crime, came to the spot armed with deadly weapons.

Their objective was to prevent Sreenivasan from escaping and stop anyone entering the house after hearing his screams.

The court had accepted the prosecution's argument that they were also liable for the common offense of murder under IPC Section 149 (Every member of unlawful assembly guilty of offence committed in prosecution of common object), Padickal said.

The court found three persons (Accused number 13 to 15) who hatched the conspiracy for this crime to be convicted of murder.

As a result, the court had found all the 15 accused in the case guilty of murder. They were also found guilty under various other sections of the Indian Penal Code.

Responding to the court verdict, BJP state president K Surendran said the deceased Sreenivasan "got justice."

"Finally, truth prevails-- Ranjith Sreenivasan, the great martyr got justice today...we are happy with the judgement," and welcome it wholeheartedly, he added. (PTI)

## K'taka Cong chief dismisses as false reports Sonia may be offered RS seat from State

**BENGALURU, Jan 30:** Karnataka Congress chief D K Shivakumar on Tuesday dismissed as false and speculation some media reports which claimed that former party President Sonia Gandhi may be offered a Rajya Sabha seat from the State, and clarified that no such discussions have taken place.

There have been reports in a section of media that Sonia Gandhi may not contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, and she may be given a Rajya Sabha seat from Karnataka.

"All such information is false; no such discussions have happened. You (media) are writing such speculations, no such discussions have happened," Shivakumar, also the deputy chief minister, said in response to a question on such reports.

Sonia Gandhi had won the 1999 Lok Sabha elections from Ballari in Karnataka, defeating veteran BJP leader late Sushma Swaraj.

Meanwhile, Shivakumar hit out at BJP and JD(S) for the row over removal of Hanuman flag flying from the 108-ft flagstaff at Keragodu village in Mandya district.

Such things are being done to create disturbance and law and order situation, he said.

Alleging that innocent villagers are being misused, Shivakumar said, "in old Mysuru region (south Karnataka) people of all castes and religions are living with peace and brotherhood. Now they are trying to do a new experiment, let them do."

Stating that the Panchayat in Keragodu had obtained an undertaking from the local organisation concerned that they will not hoist anything other than national and Kannada flag, he said the government is committed to protect and respect the national flag and the Constitution.

The authorities in Mandya on Sunday hoisted a national flag, replacing the "Hanuman Dhwaja".

Replying to a question that BJP is planning to distribute Hanuman flag to every household, he said: "BJP had run a 'Har Ghar Tiranga' campaign, what happened to it, why have they left the Tiranga now? They are in the central government, let them bring in a law replacing Tiranga with Hanuman Dhwaja."

Taking a dig at JD(S) leader H D Kumaraswamy for joining the protest in the district headquarters city of Mandya against the removal of Hanuman flag, Shivakumar said, "he (Kumaraswamy) seems to have almost merged his party with the BJP, let them do anything, it is their party matter. He can wear any flag (shawl) of any colour."

"BJP doesn't have a base in Mandya, so they are using JD(S)' strength there," he said. "Let's see who will eat into whom."

Kumaraswamy on Monday took part in the protest, wearing a saffron shawl, as he blamed the Congress government for the disturbance in Keragodu, while accusing it of failing to handle the situation. (PTI)

## We don't require Nitish Kumar: Rahul

**PURNEA (BIHAR), Jan 30:** Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday asserted that the 'Mahagathbandhan' will continue fighting for social justice in Bihar, and the alliance does not need chief minister Nitish Kumar for the cause.

Speaking at a rally in Purnea district, where his 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' entered during the day, Gandhi also said Dalits and backward classes don't get due representation in all sectors of the country.

Kumar on Sunday took oath as the chief minister of Bihar for a record ninth time after a dramatic volte-face, ditching the 'Mahagathbandhan' and the opposition bloc INDIA and forming a new government with the BJP, which he had dumped less than 18 months ago.

"The 'Mahagathbandhan' (grand alliance) will fight for social justice in Bihar; we don't require Nitish Kumar for that purpose, we don't require him at all," the Congress leader said.

Congress is a part of the 'Mahagathbandhan', which also comprises the RJD and Left parties.

"Our country needs a caste-based census to determine the exact population of Dalits, OBCs and others," Gandhi said. (PTI)

## Willing to discuss every issue: Govt ahead of Budget session



**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** The government on Tuesday told floor leaders of various parties that it was ready to discuss every issue in the upcoming Budget session of Parliament.

Emerging from the customary all-party meeting convened by the government on the eve of the Budget session, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi described the interaction as "very cordial" and said the government was ready to discuss every issue during the brief session.

The session will be the last one of the present Lok Sabha before parliamentary elections are announced.

Defence Minister and Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha, Rajnath Singh, parliamentary affairs minister Joshi and his deputy Arjun Ram Meghwal represented the government at the meet.

Congress' K Suresh, TMC's Sudip Bandyopadhyay, DMK's T R Baalu, Shiv Sena's Rahul Shewale, Samajwadi Party's S T Hasan, JDU's Ram Nath Thakur and TDP's Jayadev Galla were among the leaders present at the meeting at the Parliament House complex.

Congress MP Pramod Tiwari, who represented the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha

Mallikarjun Kharge, said he raised the issue of the "violent attack" on the Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi in Assam and the state government's curbs on it.

An "unwritten dictatorship" prevails in the country, he said and accused the central government of misusing probe agencies such as the CBI and the ED to target opposition leaders such as Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and RJD supremo Lalu Prasad.

Tiwari said he raised these issues after consulting opposition parties.

It is a customary practice ahead of every session to convene a meeting as leaders of different parties highlight the issues they want to raise in Parliament, and the government offers them a glimpse into its agenda and seeks their cooperation.

It will be a short session this time, between January 31 and February 9, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman set to table an interim budget ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. The new government will present the full-fledged budget.

The session will begin with President Droupadi Murmu's address to a joint sitting of both Houses. (PTI)

## ED questions Tejashwi Yadav in 'land-for-jobs' scam

**PATNA, Jan 30:** Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav is being questioned by ED sleuths here in connection with the agency's money laundering probe into the alleged land-for-jobs scam, officials said.

The former Bihar deputy chief minister reached the ED office around 11.35 am, they said.

His father and RJD supremo, Lalu Prasad was questioned by the probe agency's officials for over nine hours on Monday regarding the same case.

The central probe agency had on January 19 issued fresh summons for questioning Prasad and Yadav.

Earlier in the day, RJD MP Manoj Jha asserted that the BJP's top leadership is "afraid" of opposition parties,

and it is targeting them by "misusing" central investigation agencies.

"The BJP is using the ED, CBI and IT Department against those it is afraid of... That is why it is trying to break (opposition parties) through these central agencies," he told PTI.

Shakti Singh, RJD's Member of Legislative Council (MLC), claimed, "It's a known fact that Tejashwi Yadav was a minor at the time when the alleged scam took place. BJP leaders are ruffled as he provided a large number of jobs to people in the previous 'Mahagathbandhan' government in Bihar."

The RJD was a key constituent of the 'Mahagathbandhan'. (PTI)

## PM Modi pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary.

He said on X, "I pay homage to Pujya Babu on his Purnima Tithi. I also pay homage to all those who have been martyred for our nation. Their sacrifices inspire us to serve the people and fulfil their vision for our nation."

Another X handle, which often shares anecdotes and developments linked to the prime minister's life, posted some pages from Modi's personal diary carrying quotes from Gandhi.

The handle '@modiarchive' said, "We bring to you pages from @narendramodi's personal diary, which demonstrate that not only did he extensively read Mahatma Gandhi, but he also wrote down Gandhi's quotes in his personal diary as something of inspirational value to him. These entries continued to guide his interactions later on." (PTI)

## Maintaining healthy weight could reduce risk of pregnancy complications, study finds



**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Supporting women of childbearing ages to maintain a healthy weight could reduce the risk of developing pregnancy complications such as hypertension, having C-section delivery, or birthing heavier babies, new international research published in BioMed Central (BMC) Medicine journal has found.

While previous studies have correlated mother's weight with pregnancy complications, researchers said they have addressed previous confounding issues like education and lifestyle to identify clearer causal links between an increased maternal weight and developing complications while being pregnant.

It was important to better understand this, because being overweight occurs frequently in women of childbearing age and this work showed that having a healthy weight may improve health outcomes of mothers and children, according to study author Janine Felix, associate pro-

fessor and epidemiologist, Department of Paediatrics, Erasmus MC, The Netherlands.

The findings could be key to advising future policies and ensuring women of childbearing age live healthy lives, the team said.

"A lot of research has identified correlations between a mother's weight and health conditions in pregnancy, but these can make it very difficult to determine what is cause and what is effect, creating a confusing picture for mothers,

clinicians and healthcare workers.

"We used a range of more robust approaches, giving clear evidence of where the mother's weight caused the health condition and where it did not," explained Rachel Freathy, study author and associate professor at the University of Exeter, UK.

To better understand how mother's weight influenced a wide range of pregnancy-related complications, the team of researchers combined data from 14

studies in Europe and North America.

Overall, they included the body mass indices (BMI) of more than 4 lakh mothers in their analysis. BMI is calculated by dividing one's weight in kilograms by their height in metres squared (kg/m<sup>2</sup>). They employed three different methodologies, with different strengths and weaknesses, to improve the current evidence, they said.

"By comparing results from different methods that have different limitations we have more confidence when all three agree that we have the causal effect," said the study's corresponding author, Deborah Lawlor, professor of epidemiology, University of Bristol, UK. The team also compared their results with those coming from correlating father's BMI with the pregnancy complications. If the results in mothers were truly causal, the researchers would not expect to see a correlation in fathers. If they did, then it suggested both mothers and fa-

thers' results are confounded, they said explaining their hypothesis. They also performed a genetic analysis, called Mendelian randomisation, which they said was unlikely to be affected by confounding.

The researchers found that a higher mother's BMI impacted 14 out of 20 pregnancy complications they studied, such as the risk of high blood pressure in pregnancy, pre-eclampsia and pregnancy diabetes.

For example, they found that for every one kg/m<sup>2</sup> increase in maternal BMI, there was a 10 per cent increased risk of pre-eclampsia, a pregnancy condition characterised by hypertension and fluid retention and albuminuria (excess protein in urine because of kidney malfunction).

Other complications the team investigated included those regarding delivery such as needing a caesarean section or induction of labour, giving birth to heavier babies and requiring neonatal intensive care admission. (PTI)



## ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

## India backs two-state solution to resolve Israel-Palestine conflict: Jaishankar

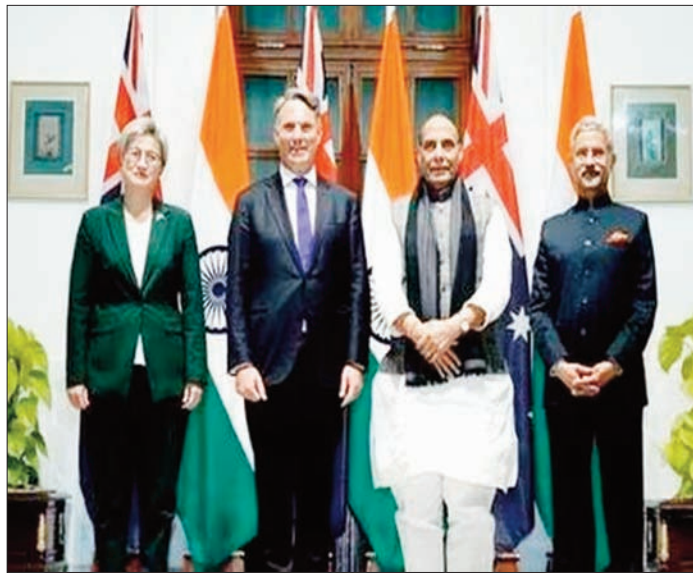
**MUMBAI, Jan 30:** India favours a two-state solution to end the decades-long Israel-Palestine conflict, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday as the latest war in the Gaza Strip, ignited by the Hamas' brutal attacks inside the Jewish state in early October, shows no sign of coming to an end.

He said the conflict in West Asia must be viewed in totality and termed the Hamas' deadly incursions inside Israel nearly four months ago as a terrorist attack.

Replying to a question at an interaction with students of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Mumbai, Jaishankar, "It is certainly the view of India, and a very large number of countries that (the problem can be) only be done (resolved) through a two-state solution that there has to be a Palestinian state side-by-side with the state of Israel."

"So, for us today, there are all the aspects. We cannot take one aspect and say that's the only aspect because if you see the debate in the world in a way that is what people are doing," he said.

The diplomat-turned-politician maintained that if there are six issues out there, and if anyone takes



one or two and if the rest four don't matter then such an approach won't work in resolving the conflict.

"I think that is not helpful. I think we have to look at the totality of all these issues and strike the right balance and that is really in a way what we are trying," he added.

Jaishankar said what happened on October 7, 2023, was a terrorist

attack, referring to Hamas militants launching a series of assaults inside Israel after storming across the border. About 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the attacks, while nearly 250 Israelis and other nationals were taken hostage by Hamas.

"I don't think there should be confusion on that and as a country which has itself experienced so

much terrorism, I think it's important that we recognise that and we expressed that solidarity (with Israel) as another victim of terrorism," noted the External Affairs Minister.

On Israel's strong response to the Hamas attacks, which triggered a war in the Gaza Strip, he said when any country responds, it is equally important to observe international laws, and called for avoiding civilian casualties.

The nearly four-month-long war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of the Gaza Strip, a tiny but densely populated Palestinian enclave, and displaced nearly 85 per cent of the territory's population.

Israel says its air and ground offensive has killed more than 9,000 militants.

"Every effort should be made to ideally avoid or limit civilian casualties," Jaishankar insisted.

Where there is a situation in which civilians are affected, which is the case today (in Israel-Hamas war) very manifestly in Gaza, there has to be some kind of sustainable humanitarian corridor which will deal with it, Jaishankar said. (PTI)

## Teacher shoots dead two colleagues at Jharkhand school over 'love affair'

**GODDA (JHARKHAND), Jan 30:** A teacher allegedly shot dead two colleagues at a government school in Jharkhand's Godda district over a "love affair", before turning the gun on himself and suffering serious injuries, police said on Tuesday.

The incident took place at Chatra Upgraded School in Poraiyahat area, around 300 km from Ranchi, during school hours around 11 am, a senior police officer said.

Godda Superintendent of Police Nathu Singh Meena told PTI, "The bodies of two teachers, including a woman, were found lying in a pool of blood in a room at the school, while the accused teacher was also found

seriously injured."

As students and teachers of the school heard the gunshots, they rushed to the room but found it was locked from inside, following which they informed the police, the SP said.

"The police reached the spot and broke open the door but by then both the teachers, who were shot in their heads, had died. The accused teacher tried to die by suicide by shooting himself on the right side of his head," Meena said.

"Prima facie, it seems to be a case of a love affair. According to villagers and school students, both the male teachers had alleged romantic relationships with the woman teacher," the of-

ficer said.

The deceased were identified as Sujata Mishra (35), who was a resident of Poraiyahat, and Adarsh Singh (40), who hailed from Chandoli in Uttar Pradesh, while the injured teacher was identified as Ravi Ranjan (42), a resident of Poraiyahat Main Market, another police officer said.

He said the accused teacher shot three bullets at Singh and one bullet at Mishra.

Two country-made pistols were seized from the place of occurrence but only one pistol was used in the shooting, he said. The injured teacher was admitted to Godda's Sadar hospital in a serious condition. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Assam among top five

"Director of Students' Welfare" for that purpose. "Students resorting to agitation for matters ranging from educational and course-related issues to political subjects, among others, are a reflection of an educational institution's failure," he added.

He further asked the heads of higher educational institutions to draw up institutional development plans taking into consideration the demands and requirements of the contemporary educational scenario in the country.

The chief minister exuded confidence Assam would be able to get itself counted as a role model in implementation of provisions of NEP 2020 in letter and spirit. He urged upon the vice-chancellors of universities across the state to do everything within their capacity so that students can look upto them as role models in leadership and welfare of all subordinates.

"It is incumbent upon the vice-chancellors to see that their respective institutions are doing justice to the purposes behind their establishments," the chief minister stated. Stating that there is no place for irregularities in recruitments to fill up vacancies in contemporary Assam, Sarma appealed to the heads of higher educational institutions across the state to root out all kinds of nepotism and favouritism from their respective campuses.

Sarma called upon the concerned government officials and heads of higher educational institutions to work upon a uniform academic calendar. (With inputs from PTI)

## Parl's Budget Session

Jammu and Kashmir. "They have given suggestions, but since this is the last session of the present Lok Sabha. We have said, we will give them an opportunity in the next session," Joshi said. NCP president Sharad Pawar, JD(U)'s Ram Nath Thakur and TDP's Jayadev Galla were among the leaders present at the meeting at the Parliament House complex.

Congress deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha Pramod Tiwari, who represented the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, said he raised the issue of the "violent attack" on the Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi in Assam and the state government's curbs on it.

An "unwritten dictatorship" prevails in the country, he said and accused the central government of misusing probe agencies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate to target opposition leaders such as Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and RJD supremo Lalu Prasad.

Tiwari said he raised these issues after consulting opposition parties. It is a customary practice ahead of every session to convene a meeting as leaders of different parties highlight the issues they want to raise in Parliament, and the government offers them a glimpse into its agenda and seeks their cooperation. (PTI)

## Govt committed to enhance

details shared by Sarma read. Sarma also informed that under Assam Secondary Road Network Improvement Project (ASRIP) focusing on enhancing road corridors, covering a total length of 247 km in 8 packages. "Notable roads include Dhorod Ali, with bridges over Subansiri. The project has so far utilised ₹ 380 crore to date," it added.

The chief minister also said that the Assam South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Corridor Connectivity Corridor (ASCCIP) encompasses 6 road corridors covering 312.5 km in 11 packages.

"The development extends to areas such as Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, BTR, and Barak Valley. An amount of ₹ 534 crore has been utilised till 2023," it read further.

## Assam Police refutes

specifically assigned to SB. My roll number is 36." Following this statement, Borgohain proceeded to level grave accusations, implicating senior officials from the Assam Police Department in orchestrating and carrying out the purported espionage mission.

## Sela tunnel to be

The foundation of the project was laid by the prime minister in February 2019, with a cost estimation of ₹ 697 crore, but work got delayed due to various reasons, including the COVID pandemic. Construction work had started in April 2019 and the first blast took place at tunnel 2 portal 4 on Oct 31 of the same year, he said.

The project comprises two tunnels, with the first being a single-tube tunnel of 980 metres in length, and the second being 1.5-km-long with an escape tube for emergencies, Singh said. The BRO is engaged in constructing 7.1 km of approach roads to tunnel 1, 340 metres of approach roads to tunnel 2 and 1.3 km of roads between the two tunnels. The Sela tunnel has been constructed with the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) and the final breakthrough in tunnel 1 was recorded on January 22.

"When the tunnel was being constructed, in the final phases of installations, a major cloudburst took place in the higher reaches in July last year, delaying the construction of the approach roads and thereby, the expected time frame for completion of the project," the official said.

The BRO will also construct a 100-metre-long departmental tunnel on the Sela-Chhabelra-Banga Janga Gompa (BJG) axis for the organisation's use to transport men, materials and machines, he said.

There is also a proposal to construct a ₹ 10,000-crore underwater tunnel under Brahmaputra River from Tezpur but the project is still under consideration by the Union government and a final decision is yet to be taken, Singh said. The BRO has also constructed the now operational Nechipu tunnel in West Kameng district of the state at an altitude of 1,630 metres. It was inaugurated by defence minister Rajnath Singh in September last year.

This double-lane 500-metre long-tube tunnel is located in an area where traffic used to be severely affected due to dense fog but after becoming operational, it has not only reduced travelling time but also provides a safe route to travellers, including defence personnel, Singh said. (PTI)

## KCS celebrates 47th

Festival cleaning drive at Talarangso, contributing to the upkeep and maintenance of the area following the festival's conclusion on January 19. The event showcased a blend of cultural festivities, recognition of talent, and community service, reflecting the multifaceted contributions of the Karbi Cultural Society.

## 'Branding' vital for small

marketed their tea after value addition and innovation. "When the growers realise that better quality leads to higher price, they will focus on the quality aspect more," he added. Karuna Mahanta, a small tea grower, said low price realisation remains the chief concern for his ilk. "We are dependent on the bought leaf factories to sell our green leaves. But the price paid to us is low," he claimed.

While admitting that quality has to be ensured, Mahanta also advocated for fixing the minimum price for green leaves. (PTI)

## India ranks 93 out

than 3.7 million public officials for corruption over the last decade, the report said a closer study of the cases with guilty verdicts found that public officials often use corruption as a way to drive up their income. However, the country's heavy reliance on punishment rather than institutional checks on power raises doubts over the long-term effectiveness of such anti-corruption measures, the report said.

The report said as the Asia Pacific region faces a big 2024 election year, with people coming out to vote in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, South Korea and Taiwan, the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) reveals another year of little to no meaningful progress towards curbing corruption.

"For five years in a row, the average CPI score for the region stagnates stubbornly at 45 out of a possible 100. Very few countries show sustained turnarounds that indicate significant changes in corruption levels and several historically at the top are slowly declining," it said.

Seventy-one per cent of the countries across Asia and the Pacific have a CPI score below the regional average score of 45 and the global average of 43 out of 100.

These weak scores reflect the lack of delivery by elected officials on anti-corruption agendas, together with crackdowns on organised civil society and attacks on freedoms of press, assembly and association, the report said.

"Countries with continued high scores, such as New Zealand (3) and Singapore (5), maintain their positions at the top of the index globally, followed closely by other countries with stronger corruption control mechanisms, such as Australia (14), Hong Kong (14), Japan (16), Bhutan (26), Taiwan (28) and South Korea (32)," it said. The bottom of the index includes fragile states with authoritarian regimes, including North Korea (172) and Myanmar (162). Afghanistan (162) continues to face one of the worst humanitarian crises in history. (PTI)

## R-Day tableau on Dhordo tourism village wins first place

**AHMEDABAD, Jan 30:** Gujarat chief minister Bhupendra Patel on Tuesday announced that the state's tableau on Dhordo tourism village showcased during the Republic Day parade in New Delhi has bagged first place in the people's choice category.

A total of 25 tableaux were presented by the states, Union Territories and various ministries of the country during the parade on the 75th Republic Day.

As per a release issued by the state government, Gujarat's tableau has been ranked number one in the people's choice category for the second year in a row by garnering 32 per cent votes in the public voting conducted through the MyGov platform.

In a post on 'X', the chief minister said, "I am extremely happy to inform you that the Gujarat tableau displayed in the parade organised at Kartavyapath, New Delhi as part of the Republic Day celebrations has bagged the first place in the people's choice category."

The Gujarat tableau also bagged second place in the judges' choice category, he said.

The tableau, which was based on the theme 'Dhordo: Global Identity of Gujarat's Border Tourism', covered interesting aspects of the art and culture of Kutch, he said.

"It is a matter of great pride for all of us that the tableau from Gujarat has bagged the first position in the people's choice category for the second year in a row. Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi had dreamt years ago that the white desert of Dhordo would become a global tourism hub," Patel wrote.

Thanks to the development of Kutch under the guidance of the Prime Minister, Dhordo was recently adjudged as the "Best Tourism Village" by UNWTO, he said, adding that the tableau reflected various cultural aspects of Kutch, such as Rann Utsav, traditional mud house called as Bhunga and handicrafts.

"Congratulations to the team involved in the production and presentation of this tableau and to all Gujaratis. I also express my gratitude to all the citizens who voted for Gujarat's Tableau. Jay Jay Garvi Gujarat," Patel said in his post. (PTI)

## From topping Maldives' tourist arrival figures, Indians slip to 5<sup>th</sup> spot amid diplomatic row

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** From being the top tourist group visiting Maldives, Indians have slipped to the fifth position in the last three weeks, amid a diplomatic row between New Delhi and Male, according to official data.

Official figures released by the Maldives Ministry of Tourism showed a notable drop in the number of Indian travellers visiting the island nation.

Over 2 lakh Indians visited Maldives annually in the last three years, the highest from any country post-COVID 19 pandemic, the data showed.

However, the travel hotspot for Indians is now facing a backlash after three ministers from the Maldives cabinet made derogatory comments against Prime Minister Narendra Modi following his visit to Lakshadweep earlier this month.

According to the statistics, Maldives received over 1.74 lakh tourists till January 28 this year, of which only 13,989 were Indians.

Russia topped the chart with 18,561 tourists from the country visiting Maldives, followed by Italy (18,111), China (16,529) and UK (14,588).

Germany is at the sixth spot followed by USA, France, Poland and Switzerland.

Over 17 lakh tourists visited the island nation in 2023, of which maximum were Indians (2,09,198) followed by Russians (2,09,146) and Chinese (1,87,118).

The number of Indian visitors to Maldives was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 and over 2.11 lakh in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open



for international tourists during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited that country during that period.

In 2018, India was the fifth-largest source of tourist arrivals in the Maldives with 90,474 visitors. In 2019, India reached the second spot with 1.66 lakh Indians visiting that country.

Many netizens on social media claimed that they have cancelled their scheduled trips to the Maldives because of the row, with the hashtag "Boycott Maldives" trending on X for several days this month.

Joining the 'boycott campaign', EaseMyTrip, an online travel aggregator, had announced it has suspended all flight bookings to the island nation on its website "in solidarity" with India.

Meanwhile, the government of the Maldives had suspended three of its deputy ministers after they criticised Modi for his post on X following his visit to Lakshadweep, inferring that it

was an attempt to project the Union Territory as an alternative tourist destination to the Maldives.

The Maldivian foreign ministry had said that the government is aware of the "derogatory remarks" made on social media platforms against foreign leaders and that their personal views do not represent the country's position.

Situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is home to nearly 1,200 tiny coral islands that stretch along a length of 871 kilometres. From personalised spa treatments to adventure sports activities to world-class cuisine, the island nation offers myriad experiences, making it a great choice for visitors.

The beautiful beaches and the island experience, coupled with affordable airfare that is even cheaper than the cost of travel to some Indian cities, have been a big draw for Indian tourists. (PTI)

## Self-reporting of mental illness less than 1 pc in India: IIT, Ohio University study

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** The self-reporting rate of mental illness in India is less than one per cent and the private sector is a major provider of mental health services in the country, a recent study by Indian Institute of Technology, Jodhpur and USA's Ohio State University found.

The study has been published in the International Journal of Mental Health Systems and has been co-authored by Dr Alok Ranjan, Assistant Professor, School of Liberal Arts (SoLA), IIT Jodhpur and Dr Jewel Crasta, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA.

"The findings revealed that self-reporting rates for mental health problems were notably low. The

study revealed that the self-reporting of mental illness was less than one per cent based on the 75th Round National Sample Survey, 2017-18. The survey completely relied on the self-reporting of the individuals," Ranjan said.

The data was collected from 5,55,115 individuals (3,25,232 rural and 2,29,232 urban), from randomly selected 8,077 villages and 6,181 urban areas, including 283 outpatient and 374 hospitalisation cases due to mental disorders in India.

"Stigma in society acts as a significant barrier to reporting mental health issues. In today's society, the reluctance to report mental health issues persists due to the prevailing stigma. Individuals, fearing social



judgement, often choose silence over seeking help. Destigmatising mental health is crucial to fostering an environment where seeking support is embraced," he added.

The study shed light on the significant out-of-pocket expenses incurred by individuals seeking mental health services, largely due to reliance on the private sector.

"The study was done based on the logistic regression models and it shows that the individuals with higher incomes were 1.73 times more inclined to report health problems compared to those with lower incomes."

"The research revealed that self-reporting of mental disorders in India is considerably lower than the actual burden of the disease. This disparity suggests a significant gap in identifying and addressing mental health issues," Ranjan said.

Besides low self-reporting of mental disorders, the study has flagged socio economic disparities, dominance of the private sector, limited health insurance coverage and high out-of-pocket expenditure, among top concerns about mental illness.

"The study uncovered a socioeconomic divide, with self-reporting of mental disorders being 1.73 times higher among the richest income group population compared to the poorest in India. The private sector emerged as a major provider of mental health services, accounting for 66.1 pc of outpatient care and 59.2 pc of inpatient care.

"A mere 23 per cent of individuals hospitalised for mental disorders had health insurance coverage at the national level. The study revealed that average out-of-pocket expenditures for both hospitalisation and outpatient care were significantly higher in the private sector than in the public sector," Ranjan said.

The 2017 National Mental Health Survey by The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS), indicated that around 197.3 million individuals had a mental disorder in India. (PTI)

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# FANS HAVE TOLD ME NOT TO TAKE 4 YEAR-BREAK AGAIN, SAYS SHAH RUKH KHAN

**MUMBAI, Jan 30:** Superstar Shah Rukh Khan, who was on a four-year hiatus before he returned to the movies last year, says fans' love for his three films "Pathaan", "Jawan" and "Dunki" is a sign that they don't want him to stay away from the big screen for a long time.

Shah Rukh was speaking at the fan meet-and-greet for "Dunki", his last film of 2023. He had started the year with "Pathaan" and followed it up with "Jawan". All three films turned out to be commercial successes.

For someone who has been working continuously for 33 years, taking "such a big gap" was new for him, the 58-year-old actor said.

"Normally, you feel a little nervous and you feel that, 'I hope I've got the film right'. Previously, some of my films didn't do well so I thought I'm not making good films. But I think more than my films, it was the love of the people for 'Pathaan', 'Jawan' and 'Dunki'..."

"This whole country and people

outside of India have actually taken me to their heart more than the films and said that, 'Don't take a break for four years, two to four months are fine'. So, I'm very, very thankful to all of you, to the

alise that what I do is right and I should keep on doing it," Shah Rukh said at the event on Monday.

"Dunki", directed by Rajkumar Hirani, opened to mixed reviews upon its release on December 21. The comedy drama, based on an illegal immigration technique 'donkey flight', also stars Taapsee Pannu, Vicky Kaushal, Boman Irani, Vikram Kochhar and Anil Grover.

Every film has a different destiny and Hirani's movies talk about the matter of the heart, added Shah Rukh.

"Those films aren't made so that people gather in the cinemas to watch them on a weekend and make a lot of noise. Those are films that talk about our lives and what I liked the most about 'Dunki' was about home and family."

"The whole being that you may leave your home, but home never leaves your heart. It's about where you belong... In India, these roots are really strong... People cherish this thought... It's a very touching film," he said.

At the event, Shah Rukh also gave a shout-out to the cast and crew of "Dunki". (PTI)

# JAMIE DORNAN SAYS HE WENT INTO HIDING AFTER 'FIFTY SHADES' RIDICULE

**LONDON, Jan 30:** Actor Jamie Dornan says he was forced to go into hiding after he was "ridiculed" by the reviews for the 2015 hit "Fifty Shades of Grey". The erotic romance film, which was panned by the critics, released in the UK after Dornan earned acclaim for his performance as a serial killer in the series "The Fall".

The actor said he and his family hid out at the home of his "Fifty Shades" director Sam Taylor-Johnson after the backlash. "I think I hid," Dornan admitted. "I [was] coming off the back of career-altering reviews for The Fall and Bafta nominations, and all this madness that The Fall brought, to just ridicule, almost." The film's director, Sam Taylor-Johnson, 56, and her actor husband, Aaron, 33, let Dornan and his family stay at their country abode.

He told BBC Radio 4's Desert Island Discs: "They let us have their place in the country and we sort of hid there for a while and just shut ourselves from the world a bit and then sort of came out the other side." However, he couldn't hide forever, as he had two more movies to film in the trilogy, in which he portrayed sadist Christian Grey alongside Dakota Johnson, 34, as Anastasia Steele, the literature student who becomes his lover.

"It [the film] just made so much money that two and three were like greenlit overnight. It was a strange thing because then you are like, there is a bit of ridicule here and I'm now contractually doing two more of them and knowing that there'd be much more of that damnation to come..." the star of The Tourist revealed. The trilogy — completed by 2017's Fifty Shades

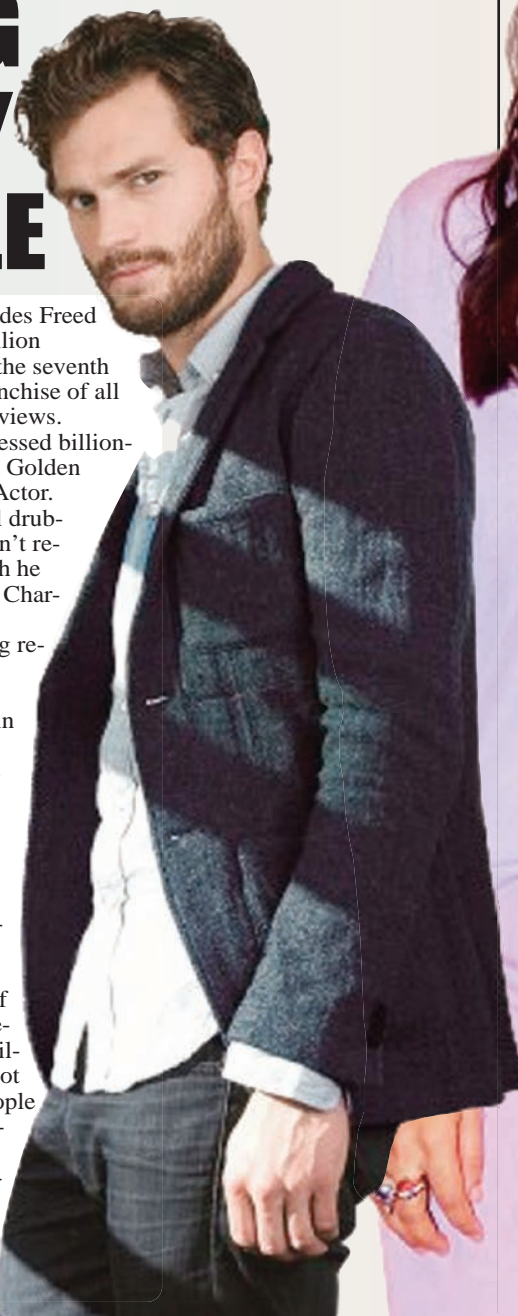
Darker and 2018's Fifty Shades Freed — made a whopping \$1.32 billion (£1.13bn) at the box office, the seventh highest-grossing R-rated franchise of all time, despite the negative reviews.

Dornan's turn as kink-obsessed billionaire also earned him his first Golden Raspberry award for Worst Actor. However, despite the critical drubbing, Dornan insists he doesn't regret taking on the part, which he inherited after original actor Charlie Hunnam dropped out.

"I've just had very glowing reviews for recent work. And there wouldn't be any that don't mention Fifty Shades in them... A lot of reviews are like: 'He's great, but lest we forget when he wasn't great here...' Like, give us a chance!" he laughed.

"[But] regret that I did them? No."

Slamming his critics, Dornan previously told Radio Times magazine: "I knew there was going to be a lot of hostility about the project because there was a lot of hostility around the books, and a lot of it is literary snobbery. People like to (criticise)... very successful things: if you have something that's hugely successful and sold as many copies as those books did, while critics didn't like them. (AGENCIES)



# Some magic happened there: Vishal Bhardwaj on 20 years of 'Maqbool'



**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Some magic happened there, says Vishal Bhardwaj about his much acclaimed "Macbeth" adaptation "Maqbool", which completes 20 years of its release on Tuesday.

The film, the first of his Shakespeare trilogy, didn't do well in theatres, didn't make much money and there was no

actor willing to take on the title role -- finally played by Irrfan.

"Maqbool", which also starred Tabu, Pankaj Kapur, Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri, set the Shakespearean tragedy in the Mumbai underworld. "When I look back, the one thing that I feel very nice and proud of is that I could achieve a timeless quality in that film. It is not just because of me but the whole unit and actors... Some magic happened there," Bhardwaj told PTI in an interview.

He credits the film, which

released on January 30, 2004, for making him a "star filmmaker" overnight.

"Even now, when you watch the film, it does not feel dated. I have to sometimes remind myself that it's already 20 years because it feels like I was struggling just recently to make Maqbool. It didn't do well in theatres. It didn't do any business but so much appreciation," he said.

Vishal Bhardwaj, 58, started out as a music composer in the film industry and turned to direction with Makdee in 2002. (PTI)

# Would still be unemployed if not for OTT, says Neha Dhupia

**MUMBAI, Jan 30:** Neha Dhupia on Tuesday said she would have remained "unemployed" as an actor if it weren't for the opportunities that came her way from OTT platforms.

The 43-year-old actor, known for movies such as "Singh Is Kinng", "Ek Chalis Ki Last Local" and "Phas Gaye Re Obama", forayed into the digital space in 2016 with podcast "#NoFilterNeha" and two years later, starred in Karan Johar's segment of Netflix anthology "Lust Stories".

"I took a two-three-year break, I was busy doing other stuff, having children... that keeps you very busy. Then I was like, 'I can become a producer', (but) becoming a producer is a difficult thing in the industry," Dhupia said during a panel discussion during the 'Champions of Change' conclave here.

"If it wasn't for OTT, then I would still be unemployed. All of last year, I did one feature film and I love going to cinemas to watch films. At the same time, I did three other OTT shows and they kept us happy and consumed," she added.

According to the actor, most creative people have the fear of losing out on potential audiences, if they don't like the content.

"The fear actors and producers have is that the audience should not leave watching our work midway... We don't want them to go away."

"They have the ability to pause that fear but at the same time, there's a will to hold on to the consumer. We want them to watch our content. The fact that we keep producing great content will help us in growth," Dhupia said. Her last feature film appearance was 2022's "A Thursday", which got a direct-to-digital release on Disney+ Hotstar. (PTI)

# Took permission, sent deserving remuneration: A R Rahman over AI use to recreate late singers' voice

**MUMBAI, Jan 30:** Music composer A R Rahman has said that his team took due permission to use an AI software for recreating the voices of late singers Bamba Bakya and Shahul Hameed for a track in veteran actor Rajinikanth's new film "Lal Salaam".

The two artists, who had worked with Rahman on multiple projects before their deaths, are credited as playback singers for the track "Thimiri Yezhuda".

"The mesmerizing voices of Bamba

Bakya & Shahul Hameed in #ThimiriYezhuda from #LalSalaam made possible by @timelessvoicesx AI voice models.

"This marks the first time in the industry that a late legend's voice has been brought back to life," the official handle of music studio Sony Music South posted on X on Monday.

Commenting on the studio's post, Rahman said his team had taken the permission from the families of Bakya and Hameed to recreate their voices

for the song.

"We took permission from their families and sent deserving remuneration for using their voice algorithms... technology is not a threat and a nuisance if we use it right... #respect #nostalgia," he wrote.

Bakya, who crooned popular numbers such as the latest 'Ponni Nadi' in Mani Ratnam's "Ponniyin Selvan", died in September 2022 at the age of 42. He had also sung the tracks "Pullinangal" from Rajinikanth's "2.0",

"Kalame Kalame" from Vijay's "Bigil" and "Simtarangan" from "Sarkar".

Prior to his death in 1998, Hameed worked extensively with Rahman for films such as "Gentleman", "Jeans" and "Kadhalan".

Rajinikanth's "Lal Salaam" is directed by his filmmaker-daughter Aishwarya Rajinikanth. The film, which also features Vishnu Vishal and Vikranth, will release on February 9. (PTI)





# Won't be afraid to play all-spin attack in Vizag: England coach McCullum



**VISAKHAPATNAM, Jan 30:** Tom Hartley has not only won the opening Test for England but more importantly dented the psyche of the Indian batters, who might have to face an all-spin attack in the second Test starting here on Friday.

England beat India by 28 runs in the opening Test with debutant Tom Hartley bagging seven in the second innings having gone for plenty in the first.

McCullum is eagerly waiting to have a look at the track and judge how it would behave.

Although traditionally a high-scoring ground, it has seen domination by the spinners lately, deeming that the conditions are likely to suit the latter.

On the same note, McCullum warned that if the pitch indeed favours the spinners, the Three Lions would not be afraid to field an all-spin attack, hinting that uncapped spinner Shoaib Bashir, who missed out on Hyderabad due to visa delay, could be handed his debut. However senior most spinner Jack Leach's knee injury will be a concern.

However in Hartley, Joe Root, Rehan Ahmed and Shoaib Bashir, he would still have four spinners and he can replace Mark Wood

with an extra batter.

"If the wickets continue to spin as much as what we saw in the first Test as the series goes on, look, we won't be afraid to play all spinners or a balance of what we've got," the former New Zealand skipper was quoted as saying to SEN Radio.

"Bash (Bashir), he was obviously with us during our camp in Abu Dhabi, and he really impressed with his skill set. He fitted in seamlessly within the group, and he's a guy who's got an immense amount of enthusiasm, albeit at a young age and pretty limited in his first-class experience." "When he arrived, boys gave him a huge cheer, and he got to witness something pretty special with the fellas bowling us to a Test win. He comes into calculations for the next Test match," added McCullum.

McCullum was all praise for the manner in which Ben Stokes handled a relatively inexperienced spin attack with such ease.

Hartley managed to grab nine wickets in his debut Test, including mesmerising figures of seven for 62 in the second innings.

Although the 24-year-old was hammered for 131 in the first innings, especially by young opener

Yashasvi Jaiswal, he overcame the obstacles in the subsequent innings, as McCullum believes that allowing him to play with freedom was a real sign of leadership from Stokes.

"He's only played a handful of first-class games and was probably a bit of a punt, selection-wise. But, we saw something in him that we thought would work over there, and he's a tough character."

"The way that the skipper handled him was quite remarkable, and he obviously brought us to a Test win. I thought that was a real sign of leadership."

"It was a clear message to not just Tom, but those that are around the squad, that when we talk about freedom, taking the game on and trying to come in and make a difference, you're not going to be cast aside or taken off the crease from the first sign of danger. I thought it was a magnificent decision by the skipper to do that. And, I think it allowed Tom to feel like he belonged and he knew what his role was."

McCullum also admitted that the selection of Hartley did raise some eyebrows, especially since he had only 40 First-Class wickets in his kitty in 20 outings. (PTI)

## Zeeshan Ali to double up as non-playing captain in Davis Cup tie against Pakistan: AITA



**ISLAMABAD, Jan 30:** India coach Zeeshan Ali will double up as the non-playing captain of the national Davis Cup team in its historic tie against Pakistan scheduled on February 2 and 3 here, after Rohit Rajpal failed to travel with the side due to personal reasons.

This was confirmed to PTI by All India Tennis Federation (AITA) secretary general Anil Dhupar.

However, it has been learnt that Rajpal didn't travel to Pakistan due to medical issue in the family.

"Our non-playing captain Rohit Rajpal couldn't travel with the team due to some personal reasons. I am happy to inform that today we have appointed Zeeshan Ali, a very senior player, as the captain of the side," Dhupar told PTI on Tuesday here.

"He (Zeeshan) will be the captain for this tie and firmly believe that India would put up a strong performance under his captaincy in Pakistan."

The Indian Davis Cup team has travelled to Pakistan for the first time in 60 years. The 10-member contingent, including five players, support staff and coaches, arrived here on Monday for the World Group 1 play-off tie, to be held between February 3-4 at the grass courts of Pakistan Sports Complex.

The Indian Davis Cup team had last travelled to Pakistan

way back in 1964 when the visitors won 4-0 in Lahore.

In 2019, India were scheduled to travel to Pakistan for the Davis Cup tie but AITA managed to shift the contest to a neutral venue, Kazakhstan, citing diplomatic tensions between the two countries.

In the absence of the country's top-ranked singles player Sumit Nagal -- fresh from his second round finish at the Australian Open -- and Sasikumar Mukund who pulled out of the tie last month itself, world No. 463 Ramkumar Ramanathan will spearhead the Indian contingent. Besides Mukund, Yuki Bhambhani, who is now a full-time doubles player, might play the singles if required.

The India team also consists of N Sriram Balaji, Niki Poonacha and Saketh Myneni with Divijay Pratap Singh, who made his debut against Morocco in India's last Davis Cup assignment in Lucknow in September, being the reserve player in the squad.

Pakistan's contingent's challenge will be headlined by two 43-year-olds. Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi, ranked World No. 127 in doubles and Aqeel Khan, who had played a lot of ITF tournaments across Indian cities even a decade and half back.

Also there is 23-year-old Muzammil Murtaza, ranked 1679, who will be a part of the team. (PTI)

## Bhanwala finishes 10<sup>th</sup>, Sidhu 11<sup>th</sup> in 25m rapid-fire pistol at ISSF Shooting WC

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** India's Anish Bhanwala and Vijayveer Sidhu on Tuesday shot identical scores of 579 in qualification round to finish 10th and 11th respectively and failed to qualify for the final of the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP), on the penultimate day of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cup stage in Cairo (Egypt).

Abhinav Choudhary, the third Indian in the field, shot 569 to finish 22nd at the Egypt International Olympic City Shooting range as the top six shooters made the final round in the season-opening event.

Abhinav Choudhary, the third Indian in the field, shot 569 to finish 22nd at the Egypt International Olympic City Shooting range as the top six shooters made the final round in the season-opening event.

All three Indian contenders in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P), namely Anjum Moudgil, Priya Brijpal Singh and Ashi Chouksey, survived the elimination round and will try to qualify for the finals on Wednesday.

On the final day of competitions on Wednesday, three Olympic event finals are scheduled. Other scores of the day: Men's skeet: Muneek Battula — 119 (15th), Abhay Singh Sekhon — 119 (13th), Anant Jeet Singh Naruka — 115 (33rd). Women's skeet: Raiza Dhillon — 114 (11th), Ganemat Sekhon — 112 (15th), Aareba Khan — 108 (22nd). (PTI)

## Musheer Khan's 131 powers India U-19 to 295/8 against New Zealand in World Cup

**BLOEMFONTEIN, Jan 30:** Musheer Khan played New Zealand attack with his second century of the ICC U-19 World Cup while opener Adarsh Singh struck 52 as India posted a stiff 296-run target in their Super Six contest, here on Tuesday.

On a perfect batting wicket here at the Mangaung Oval, Musheer tore apart the Kiwis bowling line-up to become the first batter in the current competition to breach the 300-run mark, going past Pakistan's Shahzaib Khan with his stupendous effort.

En route his 131, Musheer blasted 13 fours and three sixes off just 125 balls and once showed admirable temperament to up the ante just when it was required.

Busy at the crease constantly, the 18-year-old Musheer motored on from one end unleashing strokes in all directions, while he began with an upper-cut for a four.

His innings was spruced with



fine running between the wickets and ended in the death overs when he was looking to accelerate.

But it was a shaky start for the Indians, who lost the previous game's centurion Arshin Kulkarni (9) early on.

The dismissal, however, also brought the pair of Musheer and

Adarsh together who carried out a fine recovery job with a 77-run stand. Adarsh took charge of attacking the bowlers as he looked good while driving on the rise and also played the pull-shot with elan.

It was only unfortunate that he failed to keep a drive in check when Zac Cumming (1/37) teased

him with one outside off.

A thick edge off Adarsh's bat flew to Oliver Tewariya at point in the 18th over, which ended the charge for the left-handed Indian opener who made 52 off 58 balls with six fours.

There also was some disappointment in store for India captain Uday Saharan who failed to convert his start and was dismissed for 35 (57 balls, 2 fours). He had three fifties on trot before this game.

Saharan, nevertheless, did a fine job of consolidating the innings for his side, putting on 87 with Musheer which also happened to be the best stand for India in this game. However, Musheer's century and Adarsh's contribution at the top notwithstanding, India lost wickets in a flurry towards the end to fall short of breaching the 300-run mark, finishing at 295 for eight.

For New Zealand, seamer Mason Clarke returned 8-0-64-4. (PTI)

## Indian IM Divya Deshmukh alleges sexism by spectators at Tata Steel Masters in Wijk Aan Zee

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Indian chess player Divya Deshmukh has alleged that she endured sexist behaviour from spectators at the recently-concluded Tata Steel Masters in Wijk Aan Zee, Netherlands, saying they "focused on irrelevant things like her hair, clothes and accent" during the tournament.

The 18-year-old International Master from Nagpur, who won the Asian women's chess championship last year, shared a lengthy social media post calling out the misogyny that women players face routinely while elaborating on her unpleasant experience in Wijk Aan

Zee.

"I have been wanting to address this for a while but was waiting for my tournament to be over."

"I got told and also myself noticed how women in chess are often just taken for granted by spectators," Deshmukh said.

"Most recent example of this on a personal level would be in this tournament, I played a few games which I felt were quite good and I was proud of them."

"I got told by people how the audience was not even bothered with the game but instead focused on every single possible thing in the world:

my clothes, hair, accent and every other irrelevant thing," she wrote in an Instagram post on Sunday.

Deshmukh finished 12th in the Challengers section with a score of 4.5 at the Tata Steel Masters.

The teenager said while male players were getting their share of spotlight purely for their game, the women were judged for aspects which had nothing to do with their ability on the chess board.

"I was quite upset to hear this and I think is the sad truth that people when women play chess they often overlook how good

they actually are, the games they play and their strength," she said.

"I was quite disappointed to see how everything was discussed about in my interviews (by the audience) except my games, very few people paid attention to it and it is quite a sad thing."

"I felt it was unfair in a way because if I go to any guy's interview there would be way less judgement on a personal level, actual compliments about the game and the player," she asserted.

Despite the progress made in women's sports in terms of pay

scale, female athletes are still subjected to sexist behaviour and are often asked about their outfits.

Deshmukh said women players are under-appreciated in general and often endure hatred.

"...every irrelevant thing is focused on and hated on while guys would probably get away with the same things. I think women face this on a daily basis and I'm barely 18."

"I have faced so much judgement including hatred over the years for things that don't even matter. I think women should start getting equal respect," she added. (PTI)

## Thailand Masters: Jolly-Gopichand enter women's doubles second round, to face Crasto-Ponnappa

**BANGKOK, Jan 30:** Indian pair of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand had to sweat it out to get the better of Hong Kong's duo of Lok Lok Lui and Wing Yung NG as they entered the second round of the women's doubles event at the Thailand Masters badminton tournament on Tuesday.

The sixth seeded Indian pair battled it out for one hour and 14 minutes to beat its first-round opponents 16-21, 21-10, 21-18.

Jolly and Gopichand will play the unseeded compatriots, Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, in the next round.

Crasto and Ponnappa defeated Chinese Taipei duo of Ling Fang Hu and Xiao Min Lin 21-13, 21-17 in the opening round.

In men's singles, India's Sameer Verma and S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian qualified for the main draw after emerging winners in their first two qualifying matches.

Verma first beat USA's Howard Shu 21-9, 21-16 in the opening round of men's singles qualification round before getting the better of Chinese Taipei's Kuan Lin Kuo 16-21, 21-16, 21-15 in the next to enter the main draw.

Subramanian accounted for the veteran Indonesian Tommy Sugianto 9-21, 21-17, 21-12 and then beat Korakrit Laotrakul of Thailand 20-22, 21-10, 21-14 to make it to the main draw. Verma will play eight seed NG Ka Long Angus of Hong Kong in his opening round, while Subramanian will be up against Malaysia's Jun Hao Leong. (PTI)

## Bhutia demands AIFF president's resignation, blames him for mess as Ex-Co dismiss Prabhakaran

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Former national captain Bhaichung Bhutia on Tuesday demanded the resignation of All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Kalyan Chaubey, holding him responsible for the "current mess" in the administration of the game in the country even as Shaji Prabhakaran was dismissed as secretary general for the second time.

The AIFF's Executive Committee on Tuesday removed Prabhakaran from the post of secretary general, more than two months after the emergency committee did the same on November 7 for "breach of trust".

A single bench of the Delhi High Court had on December 8 ordered an interim stay on his sacking. In its latest order of January 19, the High Court pointed out that Prabhakaran was dismissed by the emergency committee of the AIFF whereas the federation's constitution provides that only the executive committee

has the power to do that.

The HC, however, had said that the stay order of December 8 "does not act as a bar on the AIFF to hold the meetings of the executive committee for the purpose of terminating the tenure of the petitioner (Prabhakaran)".

"Yes, Shaji Prabhakaran was sacked as secretary general by the executive committee in the meeting on Tuesday," a source told PTI. Bhutia attended Tuesday's executive committee meeting of the AIFF called here to discuss the dismissal of Prabhakaran, who was not initially invited for the meeting but later allowed to join it virtually.

"I told the executive committee members that Kalyan Chaubey and treasurer Kipa Ajay should also resign. Shaji Prabhakaran should not be made the only scapegoat. All three of them are equally responsible for taking decisions without the approval of executive committee," Bhutia told



PTI. "All three of them were taking the decisions and if Shaji has to be removed, the president and treasurer should also be removed," said the legendary striker.

"Indian football is in a mess,

there is politics in the sport, cutting out each other after little over one year of taking charge, it is not good. The national team has been left in the lurch during the Hangzhou Asian Games as well as in the Asian Cup where there was

inadequate training time for the team." Another source confirmed Bhutia's version and added that Prabhakaran asked the executive committee members to explain what constituted the "breach of trust". "He (Prabhakaran) asked the executive committee to explain what constituted breach of trust on the basis of which he was dismissed. He said he had not committed any financial irregularities or fraud. He also said that there was no emergency committee constituted for the AIFF and how can there be a reference to the emergency committee for my dismissal," the source said.

"Prabhakaran also said that he would have, in any case, resigned because his relationship with the president was nearing breaking point," AIFF vice president NA Haris then intervened and said that the matter is sub-judice.

Bhutia, who lost in the AIFF presidential poll in 2022, also said that he did not know what consti-

tuted the "breach of trust" which led to Prabhakaran's dismissal.

"I am an executive committee member but I don't know what was the breach of trust Shaji had committed. I am not told nor briefed about it."

Bhutia said that he proposed live streaming of the AIFF annual general or executive committee meetings for the sake of transparency. "Nowadays, even the Supreme Court and High Court case hearings are streamed live, so what is the problem in doing the same for AIFF AGM or executive committee meetings. So, I proposed live streaming of AIFF meetings."

Talking about the Indian team's group stage exit in the AFC Asian Cup in Doha, Bhutia said, "Asian Games and Asian Cup are the two most important tournaments for India and both were disasters, not due to players or coach but because of the AIFF top brass. (PTI)



# Injuries to Rahul and Jadeja cause major selection headache for Vizag Test

**NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Untimely injuries to Ravindra Jadeja and K L Rahul have given a major selection headache to India as they seek to bounce back in the second Test against England, following a rare defeat at home.

Both Jadeja and Rahul were among India's main performers in the first innings of the Hyderabad Test before England turned the tables on the formidable hosts.

Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury while going for a quick single during the Hyderabad Test while Rahul has complained of pain in his right quadriceps. The duo's unavailability adds to the woes of the home side, which was clearly stunned by England's 'Bazball' strategy.

Jadeja, with his exceptional all-round abilities, makes himself almost irreplaceable and Rahul too has been among India's standout batters across the ODI and Test format since returning from a surgery in September. Virat Kohli remains unavailable due to personal reasons and after a shock reverse in the series opener, the management will be missing him even more in Visakhapatnam where the second Test begins on Friday.

Rohit Sharma and Rahul Dravid have enough options to choose from with selectors adding three players to the squad -- Sarfaraz Khan, Sourabh Kumar and Washington Sundar. A straightforward selection will be Rajat Patidar, who was also a part of the 15 in Hyderabad. He could take Rahul's place in the middle-order with



Kuldeep Yadav replacing Jadeja as the third spinner alongside R Ashwin and Axar Patel.

Another option for India is to do what England did in the opener, play only one pacer for four spin choices. In that case, Mohammed Siraj could make way for Kuldeep and the team can accommodate either Sarfaraz Khan or Washington to solidify the middle-order.

Sourabh, who also bowls left-arm spin like Jadeja and is a decent batter with a couple of first-class hundreds to his name, can be a dark horse in that race. The ACA-VDCA Stadium in Visakhapatnam has staged two Tests till date and the pitch is usually a bat-

ting friendly one at least in the first innings.

Batting first at the venue back in 2019, India had racked up 502 in the first innings against South Africa with Mayank Agarwal getting a double hundred and Rohit scoring a brisk 176 in his first innings as a Test opener.

Spin legend Anil Kumble feels wrist spinner Kuldeep's presence in the eleven will be helpful.

"If India feel that they need only one fast bowler then having Kuldeep will certainly help. He will have variations but England will come and do the same things they did in Hyderabad," Kumble told the host broadcaster. "The wicket could be a turning

one and we are expecting the pace to be quicker than this. This was slow but it was a good wicket if you applied yourself. India certainly need to buckle up with their approach to playing against spin.

"I also felt that they were certainly rattled by the way England approached their batting and with that, they have to come up with plans, some unconventional ones. They never tried any variations so that's something I am sure they will be looking to do," he said referring to the spin trio being put under pressure with England's relentless sweeping tactic.

Having showed plenty of promise in his four-Test career, left-handed batter Washington who bowls right hand off-spin, also makes a strong case for selection.

Since making his debut in the iconic Test win at the Gabba, he featured in three games in the previous home series against England in 2021. Washington managed an 85 not out and 96 not out in five innings over the course of that series and picked up two wickets in a rubber dominated by front-line spinners Ashwin and Axar.

Former selector Sarandeep Singh, during whose tenure Washington made his debut Down Under, said the all-rounder is a utility player but he would not want to tinker too much with the playing eleven.

"It is pretty simple for me. Rajat Patidar comes in for Rahul and Kuldeep comes in for Jadeja. We don't need to copy England and play four spinners. Playing with two pacers and

three spinners has been our strength at home. We need to stick to it," said the former India spinner.

However, he reckons it would be better for the team's cause if Rohit drops himself to number 3 and an under-fire Shubman Gill opens the innings alongside Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Gill, who himself had expressed the desire to play at three, has not been able to replicate his white ball form in the traditional format after having taken veteran Cheteshwar Pujara's place in the top-order.

"Gill is not a number three player. He should open. Rohit is one of the best players of spin and can drop down to accommodate Gill at the top," Sarandeep added.

Former India opener Wasim Jaffer also expressed similar views.

"Gill and Jaiswal should open and Rohit should bat at no.3 in 2nd test in my opinion. Waiting to bat for his turn isn't helping Shubman, it's better he opens the inn. Rohit plays spin really well, so batting at no.3 should not worry him too much," Jaffer posted on X. (PTI)

## Rohit is past his prime, India missed Kohli in Hyderabad Test: Boycott

**LONDON, Jan 30:** Former England opener Geoffrey Boycott feels India skipper Rohit Sharma is "past his prime" and the hosts badly missed the peerless Virat Kohli in the series opener against England in Hyderabad.

Despite enjoying a strong position after the first innings, India lost by 28 runs against England in the first Test to trail 0-1 in the five-match series.

In the absence of Kohli, the onus was on Rohit to shoulder the responsibility in the batting department but he could only manage 24 and 39 in two innings as the Indian batting crumbled big time while chasing 231 on a fourth day pitch. And Boycott believes it is a golden chance for England to beat India in their own backyard after 12 years.

"This India team are ripe for the taking and England have a golden chance to be the first side to topple them on their own patch for 12 years," Boycott

wrote in his column for 'The Daily Telegraph'.

"India badly miss Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja has a hamstring injury and will not play the second Test. Their captain Rohit Sharma is nearly 37 and past his best. He makes pretty cameos but has scored only two Test hundreds at home in four years. They are also weak in the field. They dropped Ollie Pope on 110 and that cost them 86 runs. It lost them the match." The Indian spin trio of Ravichandran Ashwin, Jadeja and Axar Patel looked a pale shadow of themselves on a spin-friendly but not exactly dust-bowl of a Hyderabad wicket. The English batters came out with a perfect tactical play, using sweeps and reverse sweeps to great effect to counter the threat. "England bamboozled India with their sweeps and reverse sweeps and to lose after taking a 190-run lead will be mind-blowing for India. It has never happened to them before on their own pitches

where they thought they were invincible," Boycott wrote. India were dealt a big blow after the Hyderabad defeat as Jadeja and KL Rahul have been ruled out of the second Test starting in Visakhapatnam on February 2, due to injuries.

While Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury during play on Day 4 of the first Test, Rahul complained of pain in his right quadriceps. Because of the balance that he brings into the playing, Jadeja's absence will be massive feels the legendary opener.

"Jadeja is a huge blow. He is a great all-rounder, top bowler, brilliant fielder and was their best batsman in the first Test. Kohli is their talisman. He is a magnificent batsman who averages 60 on Indian pitches but he also gives them great energy in the field. He is a big loss and England must make the most of it before he comes back for the third Test," Boycott wrote. (PTI)

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