

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- Apparent Israeli strike kills senior Hamas figure in Beirut
- Bangladesh deploys armed forces ahead of Sunday's general election
- SC declines SIT or CBI probe into stock price manipulation allegations against Adani group
- Discussions started on next meeting of INDIA bloc: Tejashwi

12 killed in bus-truck collision in Golaghat dist

Picnic plan turns sour ● Prez, PM, others condole tragedy ● Modi announces ex-gratia

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Jan 3: At least 12 people, including three children, were killed and 38 others suffered injuries in a head-on collision between a coal-laden truck and a bus in Golaghat district on Wednesday.

Among the deceased, 10 died on the spot and two at Jorhat Medical College and Hospital.

The accident took place at Balijan near Dergaon on National Highway-715 when the bus with 49 people on board collided with the goods vehicle, official sources said.

Out of the 12 people who died, six were women. All of them were from Basa Bharaluwa village. A police officer said that among the 12 who died, 10 had been sent to CHC, Dergaon and seven of the injured had received first aid at the CHC.

According to an official from the Dergaon Police Station, the accident took place around 4:30 am when the bus, which was on its way to Tilinga Mandir in Tinsukia district for a picnic, collided with the truck.

The truck was coming from the direction of Jorhat and on the wrong side, as a portion of the four-lane highway was damaged. The bus was on the right track. There was fog and both the vehicles were speeding, sources said.

Dr Purnima Barua, superintendent of



JMCH stated that 32 of the injured had been sent to JMCH, out of which two had died.

She further said that four had been admitted to the ICU with serious injuries and three had been referred to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital. The rest were receiving treatment at the hospital.

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi condole the loss of lives in the accident, and prayed for the

speedy recovery of the injured.

"The news of the death of many people in a road accident in Golaghat, Assam is extremely sad. I express my deepest condolences to the bereaved families and pray for the speedy recovery of those injured," Murmu said in a post in Hindi on X.

Modi announced an ex-gratia of ₹ 2 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased, and ₹ 50,000 each for the injured.

"Pained by the loss of lives due to a road mishap in Golaghat, Assam. Condolences to the bereaved families. May the injured recover at the earliest. The local administration is providing all possible assistance to those affected," the Prime Minister's Office said on X.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and transport minister Parimal Suklabaidya also expressed deep anguish over the incident.

Suklabaidya also ordered an inquiry into the accident, and asked top officials of his department to reach the accident spot in Golaghat district to extend all possible assistance.

"A probe will reveal whether there was proper signage on the road... We will take necessary steps and if needed, file an FIR against the responsible persons," he said.

A magisterial inquiry into the incident has already begun.

"The drivers of both the vehicles are dead now. So, we don't know the exact circumstances leading to this accident. The probe will find out the details," a police officer said.

"Immediately after the incident, villagers reached the site and pulled out many injured persons from the bus. They also arranged for ambulances and sent them to hospital. We really appreciate their gesture," Golaghat (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Over ₹ 10,300 crore siphoned off by cyber criminals since 2021: I4C

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Over ₹ 10,300 crore were siphoned off from the country by cybercriminals since April 1, 2021, of which agencies managed to successfully block around ₹ 1,127 crore in the country, Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) said Wednesday.

Over 4.52 lakh cyber crime cases were reported on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) in 2021, which rose by 113.7 per cent in 2022, with 9.66 lakh cases being reported on the portal, director of I4C Rajesh Kumar told reporters in an interaction here.

I4C is a body established by the Ministry of Home Affairs to provide a framework and eco-system for law enforcement agencies for dealing with Cybercrime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

Kumar said over 15.56 lakh cases were reported on NCRP in 2023, translating into 129 cyber crime cases reported per lakh population, which shows a "deceleration" of growth rate to 60.9 per cent as compared to 2022.

"₹ 10,319 crore has been reportedly lost in India from April 1, 2021 to December 31, 2023... We have managed to block ₹ 1127 crore, of which 9-10 per cent has been reported in the accounts of the victims," Kumar said.

Giving details of cyber criminals, officials said around 50 per cent of cyber attacks are being committed by "gangs" operating from Cambodia, Vietnam, China and other countries. Citing difficulties in restoring amounts to the accounts of victims, Kumar said the government is framing new Standard Operating Procedures which are likely to come out soon to make it easier for victims to claim their money.

Right now, a victim has to get a court order to get their money back with states like Gujarat and Karnataka leading the way where people are approaching Lok Adalats and magistrates to get their money.

Highlighting trends of cyber criminals, Kumar said regions near Delhi are using Sextortion, online

bookings, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

HT BRIEFS

Sub Inspector held

GUWAHATI: A complaint was received at this Directorate of Vigilance & Anti-Corruption, Assam, alleging that sub inspector (UB) Ibotombi Singh, of Rangia Police Station in Kamrup district had demanded ₹ 10,000 as bribe from the complainant to meet travelling and other expenses that would be incurred for depositing as witness in a Departmental Proceeding initiated against the complainant. Later the Sub Inspector had reduced the amount of bribe to ₹ 5,500. Unwilling to pay the bribe, the complainant approached this Directorate for taking necessary legal action against the above-mentioned public servant. Accordingly, a trap was laid today, on Wednesday by a team from the DVAC at Rangia police station. The alleged accused Ibotombi Singh was caught red handed, in presence of independent witnesses immediately after he accepted ₹ 5,000 as part of the demanded bribe from the complainant in the police station. The tainted bribe money has been recovered from his possession and has been seized accordingly in presence of independent witnesses.

Dog bites

NOIDA: A domestic help working in a group housing society near Noida was bitten by a dog, prompting a police case against the pet-owner for negligence on Wednesday. The incident took place around 5 pm at the Galaxy Royal Society in Gaur City 2 area under the Bistrakh police station limits, they said. The 34-year-old domestic help was bitten by a German Shepherd breed dog while she was waiting in the gallery of the 18th floor of Tower B of the society where she worked, according to the complaint lodged by her husband. The main door of the neighbouring apartment was ajar and the dog came out of the house, pouncing on the domestic help and leaving her severely injured before the pet-owner gained control on the canine. "A similar incident had happened two months ago with a maintenance staffer of the society by the same dog," the complainant claimed, urging the police for "strict action" under "criminal case" against the owner of the German Shepherd. He also alleged that the pet owner "intimidated" the domestic help against filing a police complaint.

KYF organiser juggles election campaign for BJP amid golden jubilee preparations

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 3: Amidst a hectic schedule overseeing the preparation for the Golden Jubilee celebration of the Karbi Youths Festival (KYF), Richard Tokbi, the executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and general secretary of the Reception Committee for the 50th KYF, found time to engage in an election campaign in Hangrum MAC Constituency in Dima Hasao.

He was seeking votes for BJP candidate Noah Daime in the upcoming NC Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) voting scheduled for January 8.

On Tuesday, the EM attended an election rally in support of BJP candi-



date Noah Daime. In his speech, he appealed to the voters of the constituency to cast their votes for the lotus flower symbol, supporting Noah Daime for unbridled peace and development in the con-

stituency, in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for inclusive growth.

EM Tokbi stated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is an astute leader, and (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Heroin worth over ₹ 4.5 cr seized in Assam, two held

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Assam Police on Wednesday seized heroin worth around ₹ 4.8 crore and apprehended two drug peddlers from Cachar district, said, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Sarma informed that the Cachar District Police carried out an operation against the transportation of narcotic substances from a neighbouring state.

The police team recovered 600 grams of heroin from the possession of two persons, he said.

"Based on credible information, @cacharpolice conducted a special operation against the transportation of narcotic substances from a neigh-

bouring state and recovered 600 gms of suspected heroin. Two persons have been apprehended in this connection. Well done @assampolice," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

A senior official said the total value of the seized drugs will be nearly Rs 4.8 crore.

Recently, in a significant operation against the drug menace, the police in Karbi Anglong destroyed drugs worth over ₹ 27 crore. The narcotics, including 12,550 kg of heroin, 189.35 kg of ganja, 2.8 kg of morphine, and 2098 tablets, worth ₹ 27.55,16,500 were meticulously burned in an open area at 9 Mile (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Tiger, bison sighted at record altitude in Sikkim

GANGTOK, Jan 3: A tiger has been sighted at a height of 3966 metres in Sikkim's Gangtok district, which is a national record in terms of high altitude where the wild cat is seen roaming. Forest and Environment Department officials said on Wednesday.

A gaur or Indian bison was also found at an altitude of 3568 metres in East Sikkim, which is a world record, the officials said adding that the herbivore mostly remains below 1800 metres. Camera traps captured the male tiger at Kyongnosla Wildlife Sanctuary recently.

The Forest and Environment Department, in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), had (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Be it Kejriwal or Soren, every corrupt leader will be punished: BJP

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: The BJP on Wednesday assailed Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Jharkhand counterpart Hemant Soren for repeatedly skipping the ED summons and asserted that every "corrupt leader" will be "punished" for their misdeeds under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rule.

The party also questioned why Kejriwal did not approach the courts if he felt the action against him was politically motivated.

"Gone are the days when corrupt leaders used to rule over the honest citizenry of the country. The only place for the corrupt leaders is behind bars and it is our firm resolve that every corrupt leader will be punished as per law," BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has zero tolerance for corruption and the probe agencies have been given a "free hand" to work independently and take action against graft without any bias, the BJP leader stressed.

Bhatia said that leaders will have to face the "consequences of their misdeeds and corruption" they have indulged in, "be it Kejr-

wal, Soren or anyone else". "Such dramas will not help because Kejriwal knows that handcuffs are coming closer to him," he alleged at a press conference at the BJP headquarters here.

The "power of law" and the people's faith are with the central probe agencies, he said.

The BJP's reaction came after AAP convener and Delhi chief minister Kejriwal skipped the third summons issued by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Delhi excise policy case and sent a written reply calling the notice illegal.

Jharkhand chief minister and JMM leader Soren has also skipped as many as seven summons issued by the ED in a money laundering case. "Outright dishonest and sinister Arvind Kejriwal is shaking in fear and making one after another lame excuse to skip ED summons," Bhatia claimed.

"It won't be wrong to say that Kejriwal is afraid today because he knows that his arrest is imminent, he is aware that he is the kingpin and has no answers (to ED's questions). That's why he is trying to evade the process of law," the BJP spokesperson (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



Minister Ajanta Neog at the launch event of Nari Adalat and Palma at Srimanta Sankardev International Auditorium in Guwahati on Wednesday. HT photo

'The festival has strengthened the people of the area financially'

Chandubi Festival marks 14th anniversary with vibrant celebrations and folk dances

HT Correspondent

BOKO, Jan 3: The five-day-long Chandubi Festival, which started from the first of January and continued until the fifth of January this year, celebrated its 14th anniversary with colorful folk dances, ethnic food, and locally produced wines and beers.

The festival was inaugurated by Palashbari constituency MLA Hemanta Thakuria in the presence of RHAC chief executive member (CEM) Tankeswar Rabha, vice chairman Ramakanta Rabha, executive member Sumit Rabha, Nagarmal Swargiary, Rashmi Bala Rabha, members of the All Rabha Students Union (ARSU), along with many other invited dignitaries and people from the area. The opening of the festival also saw the



release of the souvenir 'Lokeia' by Gaurikanta Bhauyan, a teacher and creator of the Khipath, along with other invited guests.

Throughout the festival, the Fes-

tival Celebration Committee organised various ethnic sports competitions, including Baghol Competition, Chagalchari competition, Khutikhel, Lewatana, and

many other Rabha tribe's ethnic sports competitions. Meanwhile, tourists enjoyed daily performances of different tribes' folk dances, including Garo, Boro, Hajpong, Bihu, Rabha, and many others.

"We invite cultural groups from different states every year in an effort to blend the civilisation and culture of other states with the culture of our Rabha people. Therefore, it is important to consider that the Rabha people can learn about the civilisation and culture of other states and the teams from other states can learn about the Rabha tribes. We believe that this will help our Rabha tribes to move forward," emphasised Ashok Nongbar, the founder secretary of the Chandubi Festival and general secretary of (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Active Covid cases in country recorded at 4,440

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Five new Covid fatalities have been recorded in the country and 602 fresh cases of the virus, the health ministry said on Wednesday. The number of active cases of the infection has been recorded at 4,440. While two new fatalities have been recorded from Kerala, one each has been reported from Karnataka, Punjab and Tamil Nadu, according to the ministry's data updated at 8 am.

In Kerala, one of the deceased was a 66-year-old man who was suffering from chronic liver disease, multiple organ dysfunction syndrome and sepsis, while the other one was a 79-year-old woman who had coronary artery disease and sepsis.

The number of daily cases of Covid had dropped to

double-digits till December 5, 2023 but cases have again gone up after emergence of a new variant and cold weather conditions.

The daily numbers were in lakhs during the peak of the pandemic, which began in early 2020 and has seen more than 4.5 crore people getting infected and over 5.3 lakh deaths in about four years since then across the country. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease stands at over 4.4 crore with a national recovery rate of 98.81 per cent, according to the ministry's website.

According to the website, 220.67 crore doses of Covid vaccines have so far been administered in the country. (PTI)

SOFTER RISE IN ORDERS, OUTPUT

India's manufacturing sector growth falls to 18-month low in Dec

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: India's manufacturing sector growth fell to an 18-month low in December amid softer increase in factory orders and output, despite minimal inflation, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI survey, conducted by S&P Global, showed that there were softer, albeit sharp, increase in factory orders and output, while business confidence towards the year-ahead outlook strengthened.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 56 in November to an 18-month low of 54.9 in December.

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

The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to purchasing managers in a panel of around 400 manufacturers.

"India's manufacturing sector continued to expand in December,



although at a softer pace, following an uptick in the previous month. Growth of both output and new orders softened, but on the other hand, the future output index rose since November," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

Despite a loss of growth momentum, the sector still expanded strongly in December. New business gains, favourable market conditions, fairs and exhibitions collectively induced an-

other sharp increase in manufacturing production during December, according to panellists.

The December data showed a 21st consecutive increase in international order receipts at goods producers in India.

"Companies noted gains from clients in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America. New export sales expanded at a moderate pace that was the joint-slowest in eight months," the survey noted. On the prices front, input costs

rose at the second-slowest rate in nearly three-and-a-half years and charge inflation softened to a nine-month low.

Among the items reported to have been up in price were chemicals, paper and textiles. Little changed from November, however, the rate of inflation was negligible by historical standards and was the second-weakest in just under three-and-a-half years, as per the survey.

"Rates of increase in input and output prices were broadly unchanged," Bhandari added.

HSBC India PMI data showed a general lack of pressure on the capacity of manufacturers at the end of the third fiscal quarter. Subsequently, employment was largely stable in December.

When assessing the year-ahead outlook for production, Indian manufacturers were at their most upbeat for three months. Anecdotal evidence highlighted advertising, better customer relations and new enquiries as the main factors boosting business confidence in December, the survey said. (PTI)

Gold plunges ₹ 230; silver tumbles ₹ 400

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Gold prices plunged ₹ 230 to ₹ 63,970 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a bearish trend in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal ended at ₹ 64,200 per 10 grams.

Silver also tumbled ₹ 400 to ₹ 78,400 per kilogram, while it had closed at ₹ 78,800 per kg in the previous close.

In the international markets, gold and silver were trading lower at USD 2,059 per ounce and USD 23.60 per ounce, respectively.

Following a strengthening in the dollar index and a sharp rise in US treasury yields, gold prices came under pressure, Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,059 per ounce, down by USD 14 from the previous close in the global markets.

Traders might refrain from placing aggressive bets before the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) December meeting minutes and US jobs openings data, which will be released on Wednesday, for more clarity on the Fed's monetary policy interest rate outlook, Gandhi said. (PTI)

Hindenburg row: Gautam Adani says truth has prevailed

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Billionaire Gautam Adani reacting to the Supreme Court judgment on allegations levelled by a US short-seller against his conglomerate, said on Wednesday that truth has prevailed and his group would continue to contribute to India's growth story.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that there was no ground to order an investigation by a SIT or CBI into allegations against the Adani group, and that capital market regulator SEBI must conclude its probe within three months.

"The Hon'ble Supreme Court's judgement shows that: Truth has prevailed. Satyameva Jayate," Adani said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. "I am grateful to those who stood by us." (PTI)

11 players have expressed interest in transshipment port project in Great Nicobar Island: Govt



NEW DELHI, Jan 3: The government has received expressions of interest (EOIs) from 11 players for the ₹ 41,000-crore international transshipment port project at Great Nicobar Island in the Bay of Bengal, Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Wednesday.

Last year, the Ministry of ports, shipping and waterways in a statement said the project is expected to be completed with an investment of ₹ 41,000 crore (USD 5 billion), including investment from both government and public-private partnership (PPP) concessionaires.

"11 players have submitted expressions of interest for the international transshipment port project at Great Nicobar Island," the ports, shipping and waterways minister said.

The EOI was sought on January 28, 2022.

The proposed port in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands will have the ultimate capacity to handle 16 million containers per year, and in the first phase, to be commissioned by 2028 at a cost of ₹ 18,000 crore, it will handle more than 4 million containers.

Other projects planned around the transshipment port include an airport, a township and a power plant.

The project is located on the international trade route, with existing transshipment terminals like Singapore, Klang and Colombo in proximity.

The project focuses on three key drivers, which can result in making it a leading container transshipment port -- strategic location in terms of proximity (40 nautical miles)

with the international shipping trade route, availability of natural water depth of over 20m and carrying capacity of transshipment cargo from all the ports in the proximity, including Indian ports, as per the statement.

The proposed facility is envisaged to be developed in four phases.

The estimated cost for Phase 1 of the proposed transshipment port is around ₹ 18,000 crore, which includes the construction of breakwaters, dredging, reclamation, berths, storage areas, building and utilities, procurement and installation of equipment and development of the port colony, with core infrastructure going to be developed with the government support.

Public-private partnership (PPP) will be encouraged for this project via landlord mode. The PPP concessionaire will have the flexibility to develop a storage area, container handling equipment and other infrastructure based on the concessionaire's own market and business assessment, subject to the minimum guaranteed traffic.

The concessionaire would be awarded a long-term PPP concession of 30 to 50 years (based on requirement), will be responsible for the provision(s) of port services and shall have the rights to levy, collect and retain charges from port users.

Currently, nearly 75 per cent of India's transhipped cargo is handled at ports outside India. Colombo, Singapore and Klang handle more than 85 per cent of this cargo, with more than half of it handled at Colombo port. (PTI)

ABF celebrates decade-long drive for inclusive employment

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Axis Bank Foundation (ABF) is marking a significant milestone as it celebrates a decade of transformative efforts dedicated to empowering over 24,000 youths with disabilities across semi-urban and rural India. In collaboration with Youth 4 Jobs (Y4J), ABF's unwavering commitment has provided comprehensive training and created job opportunities, fostering sustainable livelihoods for the differently-abled.

ABF and Y4J's joint initiative have successfully addressed challenges faced by youths with speech and hearing impairments, locomotive disabilities, and low vision. Notably, the partnership boasts an impressive placement rate of 60%, underscoring the success of their Sustainable Livelihood Programme. This programme focuses on cultivating a robust skill development ecosystem, with the flagship initiative named WISE (Work Integrated Soft Skills and English).

The WISE programme stands as a beacon, mobilizing youths with disabilities to acquire essential skills, confidence, and capabilities necessary for securing jobs in various sectors. Industries such as retail, e-commerce, IT, and hospitality have become accessible to these individuals, thanks to WISE. Moreover, the program not only provides extensive training but also promotes inclusivity in the workplace by conducting workshops to sensitize employers.

Through 860 workshops, 472 companies have been sensitized on the importance of inclusion, contributing to a significant growth in the number of first-time employers. The program's operations expanded from 2 training centers across 2 states to 22 centers in 16 states and Union Territories, showcasing remarkable growth.

Surya Roshni launches cutting-edge home appliances

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Celebrating its 50th year of operation, Surya Roshni is set to redefine the consumer durable landscape. Renowned as the largest branded manufacturer of lighting products in India, the company continues to uphold its reputation by unveiling a cutting-edge range of home appliances. Addressing the evolving aspirations of today's consumers, Surya introduces BEE Star labelled new Ceiling Fans that not only enhance home décor but also contribute to substantial energy savings. Speaking on the occasion, Jitendra Agrawal, CEO - lighting and consumer durables, Surya Roshni, applauded the exceptional team for their concerted efforts, dedication, and innovation.

ENGINEERING WORKS AT LUMDING DIVISION
Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/132 of 2023, dttd. 28-12-2023. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work.
Brief Description of Item: Special repairs in the staff quarters colony road with improvement in water supply in quarters under the jurisdiction of ADEN/Badarpur Ghat. Tender Value: ₹ 1,46,48,092/-
Earnest Money: ₹ 2,23,300/- Date & time of Closing of above tender at 15:00 hrs. on 30-01-2024 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 30-01-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 29-01-2024 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>.
DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Bajaj Finance Ltd announces exciting digital FD at up to 8.85%

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Bajaj Finance Ltd ushered in the new year with a bang by launching a Digital Fixed Deposit (FD) experience. The company is offering exclusive interest rates of up to 8.85% for deposits booked through its user-friendly app and website.

Encouraging depositors to think 'digital-first,' Bajaj Finance aims to transform the saving experience for its customers. The frictionless journey on the Bajaj Finserv app and website ensures a simple, safe, and seamless process for near-instant FD booking. The emphasis on a digital approach reflects the company's commitment to adapting to the evolving preferences of its clientele.

Effective January 2, 2024, Bajaj Finance is setting the bar high by offering up to 8.85% per annum to senior citizens for a tenure of 42 months on FDs booked via their app and web platforms. Depositors



below 60 years can still enjoy an impressive interest rate of up to 8.60% per annum. These rates are applicable to fresh deposits and renewals of maturing deposits, up to ₹ 5 crore, for a tenure of 42 months. Sachin Sikka, head - fixed deposits & investments at Bajaj Finance, highlighted the consumer-friendly policies and attractive interest rates that define customer experiences with Bajaj Finance FDs. The exponential growth of their deposit book over the past two years underscores the trust customers place in the Bajaj brand. The digital-first approach, coupled with higher interest rates exclusively on the Bajaj Finserv App and Web, brings the FD opening experience into the digital age. Apart from fixed deposits, the Bajaj Finance app offers an Investment Marketplace, providing customers access to a wide array of mutual funds. This diversified approach aligns with the company's commitment to offering comprehensive financial solutions.

Aditya Birla Health Insurance unveils 'Activ One'

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Aditya Birla Health Insurance Co Limited ("ABHICL"), the health insurance arm of Aditya Birla Capital, India's leading, well-diversified financial services provider, announced the launch of 'Activ One,' a simplified and comprehensive health insurance plan that empowers its policyholders with tailor-made solutions to meet not just their health insurance needs but also enables them to be the healthiest version of themselves.

Loaded with industry leading features such as 100% health returns, claim protect, no sub-limits, super reload and super credit, Activ One is ABHICL's most comprehensive product yet, offering customers a one-stop-solution for their health insurance and their health insurance needs. Commenting on the launch,

Mayank Bathwal, CEO, Aditya Birla Health Insurance, said, "Activ One is a result of us being good at listening to our stakeholders - our customers, advisors, distributors and partners.

Based on their inputs and insights, we developed Activ One, that addresses the needs of every consumer - across their different health or life stages, and at stages of battling chronic ailments. With seven variants built into one product, we are offering the Power of One, to all. At ABHI, our vision has always been to incentivize wellness, encouraging policyholders to embrace a healthier lifestyle and holistic well-being. Through Activ One, we want to ensure that our policyholders experience a simplified and comprehensive healthcare solution that is personalised, rewarding and worry-free."

Commenting on the launch,

India's wheat output may touch new record of 114 million tonnes in 2023-24

This year's wheat crop will be ready for harvest from April onwards

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Wheat production is expected to touch a new record of 114 million tonnes in the ongoing 2023-24 crop year on higher coverage and provided weather conditions remain normal, a top food ministry official said on Wednesday.

The last leg of sowing of wheat, the main rabi (winter) crop, is underway and will continue till next week. Till last week, wheat was planted in 320.54 lakh hectares, as per the official data.

Wheat production stood at a record 110.55 million tonnes in the 2022-23 crop year (July-June), compared to 107.7 million tonnes achieved in the previous year.

"We expect that total area under cultivation of wheat will increase this year and God willingly if the climate is alright the production will be 114 million tonne that's what the agriculture ministry has indicated informally to us," Food Corporation of India (FCI) chairman and managing director Ashok K Meena told reporters.

Area sown to wheat crop is also showing an increase compared to the last year. There was a deficit of one per cent in some states but that will also be made up in the first week of January, he said.

"If that is the level of production, we are very confident that we will be able to procure more than our requirement and also additional stocks needed for the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) for next year," he noted.



When asked if the central nodal agency plans to step up procurement considering the opening wheat balance of 76 lakh tonnes to be on April 1, which is just enough to meet the buffer requirement, the FCI chief said: "We will try our best to provide minimum support price to all farmers. Because of the open market sale, the indications are prices have stabilised and are not higher than it was last year.

"Since the wheat MSP is higher by 7 per cent than the last year, we hope that lot of farmers will

Star Cement charitable trust inaugurates 'Star Upaban' project

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 3: An MoU was signed on Wednesday between Star Cement Ltd, Dimoria College and Daffodil College of Horticulture at an inauguration programme of "STAR UPABAN" Project at NEDFI Auditorium.

Under this project, an entrepreneurship development programme will be initiated to create an environment for enthusiastic youths to earn their livelihood through skill development in nursery sector. Chandra Mohan Patowary, minister of environment & forest, east coast policy affairs, welfare of minorities, Govt of Assam was present during the programme.

Star Cement Officials, targeted beneficiaries, representatives from welfare and development committee, Sonapur Sahitya Sabha, Nagarik Mancha, local community, youth organisations joined the programme.

The minister also launched Project Tejaswini with 25 girls from Assam Deaf Association for implementation of a skill building and livelihood programme under which they will prepare traditional dresses of different tribes and communities. The programme will be led by Mukul Dutta, chairperson of Indian Deaf Association-Assam chapter in collaboration with Star Cement.

Speaking on the occasion Vinit Kumar Tiwari, chief executive officer, Star Cement Ltd said "Education and training are the most im-

portant components to create jobs for any economy. It is very important to bridge the skill gap and support the spirit of entrepreneurship not only in urban areas, but also in rural areas. At Star Cement, our vision is to actively contribute to the social and economic development of the communities in which we operate. Through this project 'Star Upaban' our endeavour is to lift the burden of poverty weighing down the underserved and foster inclusive growth. In doing so, build a better, sustainable way of life for the weaker and marginalized sections of society. It is our CSR objective to offer long-term, transformative solutions that empower these communities to thrive amid changing times."

Pradeep Purohit, chief operating officer of Star Cement Ltd said "Through 'Star Upaban' project, we aim to motivate youth and equip them for both jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, enabling job creation and economic progress. Around 50 youths will be covered under this program where the youths will be trained on nursery development through Daffodil College of Horticulture and Dimoria College for one month and after completion of training, interested youths will be supported with all equipment required for nursery development at free of cost."

Chief manufacturing officer of Star Cement, Sundaram Srinivasan was also present at the

event, he added "It is our pleasure to help the communities in which we serve and live our purpose to share the strength. Be it in the form of providing infrastructure support or skill centres for the people, Star Cement is strongly committed for uplifting the communities and villages, where it serves."

The support will be provided to target beneficiaries for one year including land preparation, one month's training on nursery development etc at free of cost. The Cost will be borne by Star Cement under CSR initiative and technical support and guidance will be provided by Daffodil Nursery and Dimoria College. The project is named as "STAR UPABAN".

Star Cement Limited is the leading cement company in North-Eastern India and one of the fastest growing cement brands in West Bengal & Bihar, acquiring strong foot hold in the Indian construction industry. Star Cement Ltd. has established itself as the most accredited brand in the region for providing high-quality cement and fair pricing.

In terms of capacity, Star Cement currently has an aggregated installed capacity of 5.7 MTPA. With the expansion of the Guwahati Grinding unit, the capacity will increase to 7.7MTPA & in FY25 the aggregated capacity will become 9.7MTPA with our Silchar plant.

Manipur's Addble Solutions joins ONDC network

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Imphal-based digital commerce platform Addble Solutions Pvt Ltd on Wednesday announced that it has gone live on the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) as a seller network participant.

Addble Solutions is the first tech company from East and Northeast to join the e-commerce network, empowering sellers across the region and beyond to connect with buyers nationwide, the company said in a statement.

"We are thrilled to be at the forefront of this digital commerce revolution in India. Joining ONDC as a Seller Network Participant aligns perfectly with our mission to democratize digital commerce," Addble founder Yaikhomba Ningthemcha said.

Through Addble's platform, sellers from diverse categories such as grocery, food and beverages, agriculture, beauty and personal care, home appliances, fashion, furniture and kitchen items, and health and wellness can utilise the ONDC Network, the company said.

Commenting on the association, ONDC managing director and CEO T Koshy said, "We're delighted and excited to have Addble going live on ONDC. This is a significant step forward for ONDC's expansion and inclusivity, especially for the North-east region."

Addble's reach in East and Northeast India will open doors for countless sellers in the region, fostering a diverse and vibrant e-commerce ecosystem, he added.

The ONDC initiative, backed by the Government of India, aims to create an open, democratic and buyer-driven e-commerce system in the country.

"By joining ONDC, Addble empowers sellers to break free from traditional marketplace monopolies and offer their products and services on a level playing field, giving buyers more choice and competitive prices," the company said.

Addble Solutions, based in Manipur's Imphal West district, is a cloud-based IT firm that provides B2B digital commerce platform to companies, taking care of their entire sales management, inventory and other verticals. (PTI)

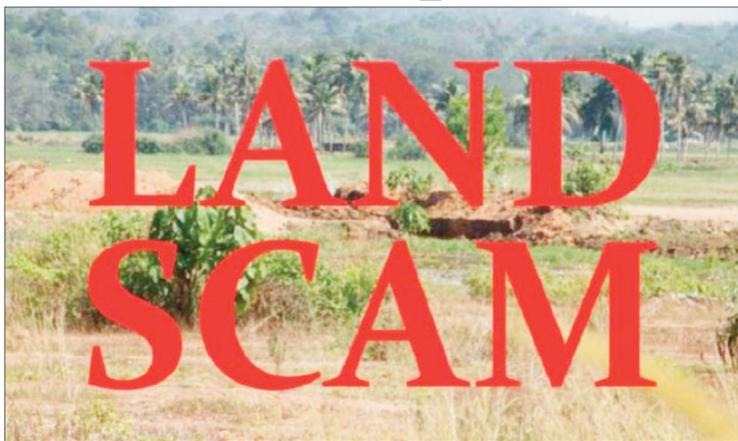
Massive land scam unearthed in Rupahihat

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 3: A sprawling land scam has been unveiled in the Rupahihat revenue circle, where several hundred bighas of exclusive (Ek Sona) and special exclusive (Vishesh Ek Sona) land belonging to indigenous Assamese Hindu families have purportedly been registered and transferred overnight to certain Muslim individuals. This alarming revelation came to light after an investigation conducted by Krishak-Sramik Unnayan Parishad (KSUP), a prominent farmers' organisation in the state, prompting urgent demands for a high-level probe into the matter.

The affected areas, including Kabaimari, Colony Jalah, Lalunggaon, Telia Bebejia, and other villages, have allegedly fallen prey to a group of land revenue supervisors, lat mandals, and authorities associated with the revenue circle for over half a decade. The organisation, headed by president Mukul Bora and secretary Utpal Boruah, submitted two separate memorandums along with supporting documents to state Revenue minister Jogen Mohan and district commissioner, Nagaon.

According to the farmers' organisation, the officials responsible, both past and present, have grossly violated existing Land Acts during



the registration and transfer processes. The land, which expired on December 17, 2013, should only be sold through registration documents ten years after the expiry date. Contrary to this, documents submitted with the memorandum revealed that the land, expired on December 17, 2013, was permitted for sale or purchase on April 4, 2014.

The organisation's memorandums call for a thorough, high-

level investigation into the entire episode, urging the concerned department's minister to scrutinise the actions of the former and current circle officers of the revenue circle, as well as other lat mandals involved in the affected areas.

Utpal Boruah, the organisation's secretary, reported that state Revenue minister Jogen Mohan promptly announced a high-level probe into the substantial land scam in the district. Furthermore,

the minister assured personal oversight of the investigation into this large-scale land scandal.

In a concerning development related to the land scam, Prabhakar Kalita, a notable social activist and the executive president of Batadrava Than Management Committee, received death threats over the phone. Subsequently, the activist lodged a First Information Report (FIR) at Nagaon Police Station in connection with the threats.

Preparatory meeting for Republic Day celebrations conducted in Gossaigaon

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Jan 3: A preparatory meeting for the upcoming Republic Day celebrations took place on Tuesday at the conference hall of the SDO-Civil office in Gossaigaon. The meeting, presided over by Aranyak Saikia, IAS, SDO-Civil, aimed to garner support and cooperation from all stakeholders to ensure an engaging and smooth observance of Republic Day.

Saikia encouraged suggestions from participants to enhance the program's appeal and stressed the importance of each department fulfilling its assigned duties effectively. Reflecting on the progress made in addressing the grievances of Gossaigaon sub-division residents, Saikia reviewed last year's meeting's outcomes and discussed steps taken to alleviate problems. He sought comprehensive progress reports from department heads, political parties, and local intellectuals.

Key topics addressed during the meeting included

the beautification of the Bhoibrabil to KVK road, the incomplete crematorium at Uttarpara, the construction of a flyover connecting Habrubil Market over National Highway-31(c), issues of artificial flooding in various parts of Gossaigaon sub-division, the reconstruction of parks in Gossaigaon, and the construction of four bridges in Bhoibrabil.

The meeting featured a presentation on the overall progress report of various departments, including Horticulture, the Department of Handloom and Textiles, Library, and Water Resources, through a PowerPoint presentation.

Notable attendees included former MLA Hemendra Nath Brahma, 29 West Kokrajhar Dhruba Kumar Brahma Narzary, former chairman of GTC Khanin Das, president of Gossaigaon Shiksha Sahitya Sabha, representatives from NGOs and organisations, political party representatives, Hiren Kumar (SDPO, Gossaigaon), and personnel from SSB, CRPF, and local intellectuals.

Guwahati Airport records surge in passenger traffic & flights in 2023

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati witnessed a notable increase in passenger traffic and flight operations during 2023. The airport handled approximately 5.6 million passengers, marking a significant rise from the 4.6 million recorded in 2022. Among these, about 2.9 million were arriving passengers, and 2.7 million were departing passengers.

In terms of aircraft movements, Guwahati Airport managed about 46,600 flights in 2023, indicating an increase of 5,600 flights compared to the previous year. The arrivals and departures were evenly distributed, with approximately 23,300 aircraft arriving and the same number departing. The airport introduced new domestic connections to Jaipur and Bhubaneswar in 2023, while the sole international addition was the connectivity to Bangkok. The highest single-day passenger count in 2023 occurred on December 24, reaching 19,290 passengers. This remarkable growth reflects the airport's increasing role as a key hub in the region.

50 tonnes of pumpkins exported to Kolkata

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Jan 3: In a positive start to the new year, farmers from Mahkhuwa Chapori, under the Nitaipukhuri Agriculture Circle of Rajabari Gaon Panchayat in Thowra constituency, achieved a significant milestone. Hemanta Taw, working in collaboration with the Agriculture Department, successfully cultivated pumpkins in 50 acres of land. The venture saw its first phase culmination on January 1, 2024, with the export of 50 tonnes of pumpkins to Kolkata. Thowra MLA Sushanta Borgohain extended his congratulations and appreciation to Hemanta Taw and the Agriculture Department for this notable accomplishment.

Cycle rally held

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 3: Assam Rifles organised a cycle rally on the occasion of new year, featuring troops and civilians on Tuesday at Lokra, as stated in a press release. In celebration of the commencement of the new year, Assam Rifles orchestrated a remarkable cycle rally in collaboration with the local civilian population at Lokra, situated in the picturesque district of Sonitpur.

This event served as a testament to the harmonious coexistence between the armed forces and the community, as military personnel and civilians joined forces to partake in a spirited cycling adventure. The rally traversed the scenic landscapes of the state, weaving through lush greenery and capturing the essence of the region's natural beauty. The collective pedaling not only symbolised unity but also served as a catalyst for promoting a healthy and active lifestyle among participants. Against the backdrop of new year festivities, this event not only strengthened the bond between the armed forces and the local community but also left an indelible mark, fostering a sense of camaraderie and shared celebration in Lokra. The event was attended by 101 people with full zeal and enthusiasm.

International Puppet Festival 2024 to take place from Jan 9

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Bangalore's International Arts & Cultural Foundation, a non-profit organisation renowned for pioneering avant-garde festivals across India, proudly presents the India International Puppet Festival 2024. This exclusive 4-day event, taking place from January 9 to January 12, focuses on showcasing the unique and culturally rich puppetry heritage of North East India. Curated by Srivatsa Shandilya, director of IACF, this year's festival aims to revive the North Eastern puppetry tradition, recognised as the cradle of storytelling through the captivating art of puppetry.

Suspected heroin seized

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: In response to credible information, the Cachar Police took decisive action by conducting a special operation targeting the transportation of narcotic substances from a neighbouring state. The operation resulted in the successful seizure of 600 grams of suspected heroin. As a result of police intervention, two individuals have been apprehended in connection with this illicit activity.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma commended the operation, sharing the news on social media (formerly Twitter): "Based on credible information, @cacharpolice conducted a special operation against the transportation of narcotic substances from a neighboring state and recovered 600 gms of



suspected heroin. Two persons have been apprehended in this connection. Well done, @assampolice!"

Two arrested in cattle theft case

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: In a commendable operation orchestrated by inspector Samir Kower and the Nagaon Police team from Samaguri OS, two individuals involved in a cattle theft case were apprehended. The team's diligent efforts led to the recovery of six stolen cattle and the seizure of three vehicles associated with the criminal activity. Subsequently, legal action has been initiated against the arrested individuals, marking a significant step towards addressing and resolving the case.

Foundation day observed

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 3: Natyapeeth, the leading amateur drama group, celebrated its foundation day on January 1 at Hindu Dharma Namghar Samaj with a day-long program. In the morning, Dr Dilip Baruah, the president, hoisted the flag. The cultural festivities commenced with Natyapeeth chorus. Dr Jyoti Prasad Saikia, VC of Birangana Sati Sadhani Rajyik Vishwavidyalaya, and Dr Anil Saikia, an academician and folk artist, extended their greetings to the members for completing another successful year. Prasanta Sarma, president of Natyapeeth Drama School, delivered the welcome address. Dr Dilip Das, secretary of Natyapeeth, was felicitated by Dr Dilip Baruah, Monica Saikia, Dr Sukalyan Das, Ananga Mohan Sarma, Jugal Bora, and others for achieving his doctorate degree from Dibrugarh University this year. Natasha Borthakur, a student of DPS, Nazira, presented a Kathak dance with wonderful elegance.

Thowra MLA active in NCHAC election campaign



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Thowra MLA Sushanta Borgohain has been actively engaged in campaigning for the party's candidate, Suanhangiem Hrangkhoh, in Dolong constituency in preparation for the upcoming North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) elections. The campaign was held in Kashipur village.

Governor extends condolences for lives lost in road accident

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria expressed his heartfelt sympathies for the lives lost in the tragic road accidents involving a passenger bus and a truck at Balijan area in Dergaon, Golaghat district, in the early morning on Wednesday.

In a statement released here, the Governor conveyed, "I am deeply saddened by the loss of lives resulting from a road mishap in Golaghat district. My sincere condolences to the bereaved family members during this challenging time. I wish a swift recovery to those who sustained injuries in the accident."

The Governor also mentioned that the local administration is actively providing all possible assistance to those affected.

"May the departed souls rest in eternal peace, and may their memories be a source of solace to those left behind," the Governor added.

Aaranyak launches 'Prakriti Parichay' at Help Aid Academy



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Aaranyak has introduced a new environmental education initiative called 'Prakriti Parichay' with the objective of instilling environmental stewardship in students. The program aims to cultivate a sense of responsibility, sustainability, and ecological awareness through joyful learning, focusing on concepts related to environment, wildlife, nature conservation, and environmental challenges.

The inaugural session of the program took place at Help Aid Academy in Chandrapur, involving 42 students from Kurkuria village. The students' cognitive abilities were assessed through engaging quizzes based on their attention

during presentations and discussions, promoting critical thinking and creative expression.

Aaranyak's environmental expert and educator, Tanvi Hussain, along with Wasima Begum, emphasised the importance of securing wild habitats and natural resources, drawing parallels with safeguarding one's home. The students actively participated in an ecological game called 'Web of Life', designed to illustrate the interconnectedness of different components in the environment and the impact of the absence of certain organisms on ecological balance.

Anil Das, Aaranyak's coordinator in K9 Sniffer Dog Unit, highlighted the significance of different species in the ecosystem, using ex-

amples from the services provided by the K9 Squad in wildlife conservation and surveillance.

The program, conducted in collaboration with Help Aid Academy, targeted marginalised students from tea garden communities in Kurkuria village, providing evening classes after regular school hours. The academy, committed to making Kurkuria village 100 percent literate, also engages in a community nursery program for capacity building and accepts plastic waste from students in exchange for evening classes. As part of the program, Aaranyak presented the academy with its annual calendar themed on wetlands, designed by the media publication & communication division.

Demow Model Hospital celebrates zero death in snake bites



HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Jan 3: Demow Model Hospital CUM-CHC, located at Demow Konwar, achieved a significant milestone in snakebite treatment by preventing deaths for the third consecutive year. Dr Surajit Giri, an anaesthesiologist and snake bite specialist at Demow Model Hospital, and his team have successfully averted fatalities from snakebites from 2021 to 2023. In recognition of this achievement, Demow Model Hospital commemorated the 'Hattric Year of Zero Death in Snake Bite'.

A meeting was organised on Wednesday at the first floor of Demow Model Hospital to mark

this accomplishment. The gathering included Dr Bhupendra Kumar Das, joint director of Health Service Sivasagar, Dr Udayaditya Rajkoner, chief medical and health officer, Dr Gayatri Senapati, nodal officer for snake bite in Sivasagar, Dr Rupam Borkotoky, deputy superintendent of Demow Model Hospital, and Dr Prasanta Pratim Sarma, deputy superintendent of Demow CHC.

During the meeting, the dignitaries delivered speeches emphasising the importance of timely medical intervention in snakebite cases. Dr Surajit Giri addressed the attendees, highlighting the need for immediate transportation of

snakebite victims to the hospital without unnecessary movement of the affected body part. He stressed the success of the treatment protocol, attributing it to patients reaching the hospital within an hour of the snakebite.

Dr Giri shared insights into snakebite scenarios, noting that not all cases require anti-venom, with 85 percent of snakebites being painless. He commended the Venom Response Team and urged community participation. Financial support for medication was proposed for economically disadvantaged patients, as 95 percent of snakebite cases belong to families with limited resources. Dr Surajit Giri reported the statistics for snakebite cases treated at Demow Model Hospital: 464 patients with zero deaths in 2021, 573 patients with zero deaths in 2022, and 630 patients with zero deaths in 2023. Notably, patients from various districts sought treatment at the hospital.

The celebration included a cake-cutting ceremony in which Dr Bhupendra Kumar Das, joint director of Health Service Sivasagar, inaugurated the event. The occasion brought together doctors, nurses, office staff, media representatives from Demow, and other dignitaries.

Winter field gear gifted to staff in Laokhowa-Burhachapori WLS

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Reaffirming its unrelenting commitment towards the conservation of wildlife and habitats, the region's premier biodiversity conservation organisation, Aaranyak, in association with the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), on Wednesday gifted 200 sweaters, 200 woollen caps, and four life jackets to Nagaon Wildlife Division for use by frontline Forest Department staff deployed in Laokhowa-Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary (LBWLS).

The field gear was handed over in a function held in the wildlife sanctuary to the divisional forest officer of Nagaon Wildlife Division, Jayanta Deka, by the secretary-general and CEO of Aaranyak, Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, who is also the senior advisor of IRF for Asian Rhinos.

The event was graced by the two forest range officers of Laokhowa-Burhachapori WLS, Aaranyak's Executive Committee member and renowned conservationist Kaushik Barua, Anupam Sharma of WWF, local wildlife enthusiast associated with IRV 2020 Dr Samarjit Ojha, Dilwar Hussain, a wildlife lover associated with LBWLS.

These field gears will be very handy for the frontline forest staff during the winter season in their efforts for the protection of wildlife in



Laokhowa-Burhachapori sanctuary, including two stray one-horned rhinos that are now roaming around in the wildlife sanctuary. It was recently cleared of encroachers in a massive eviction drive carried out by the Forest Department with support from the district administration.

A public meeting preceded the distribution of these field equipment. The meeting, attended by the additional deputy commissioner, prominent local residents, villagers, forest department officials and staff, including the DFO

Jayanta Deka, two range officers, Aaranyak representatives Dr Bibhab Kumar Talukdar and Kaushik Barua, Anupam Sharma of WWF, Dr Samarjit Ojha, Dilwar Hussain. The objective of the meeting was to mobilise public support for the proposed translocation of one-horned rhinos to Laokhowa-Burhachapori WLS.

"It was heartening to see local people halting the ongoing efforts to bring back one-horned rhinos to Laokhowa-Burhachapori WLS," said Dr Talukdar.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

To tell a lie is an art.
-Oscar Wilde

Delay in execution of criminal laws

In a surprising turn of events, the Narendra Modi government has decided to re-evaluate the implementation of three new criminal laws, known as Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA). The laws, set to replace the Indian Penal Code, have faced severe backlash, particularly from truck drivers who initiated a nationwide three-day strike on January 2. Despite successfully sidelining opposition members through suspensions in the Lok Sabha, the government faced a significant roadblock as the truckers' strike disrupted supplies across the country. The uproar prompted the Centre to acknowledge the potential political impact of the laws and defer their implementation until further discussions with the All India Motor Transport Congress. In a press release, the government stated, "The decision to invoke Section 106(2) of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita will be taken only after consultation with the All India Motor Transport Congress." The striking drivers subsequently called off their protest, signalling a temporary truce.

However, the All India Motor Transport Congress remains steadfast in its resistance to the new laws, likening them to Pandora's Box. The laws, which have already received Presidential assent, are poised for notification, but the Centre's hesitation indicates a looming political storm ahead of the Lok Sabha General Election in 2024. PM Narendra Modi, seeking a third term, is now compelled to engage in detailed discussions with representatives from various sectors before the laws can be operational. Despite the laws being on the verge of notification, the Centre's decision to buy time suggests potential hurdles, including citizen protests and operational challenges, could jeopardize Modi's political fortunes. Initial reports hinted at a potential notification before Republic Day on January 26, 2024, but the current standoff with the Motor Transport Congress has cast doubt on that timeline. With general elections approaching, there is insufficient time for comprehensive talks, and any agreement with the Motor Transport Congress would necessitate parliamentary amendments. Moreover, the implementation process faces additional obstacles, including training for police, civil administration, and judicial officials to grasp the intricacies of the new laws. A robust online mechanism is also required, with talks ongoing with judicial authorities and the National Judicial Academy in Bhopal. Even if the Modi government proceeds with notifying the laws by January 26, their immediate implementation appears unlikely. The proposed 12-month period for implementation will involve consulting impacted sections, especially those with potential political ramifications.

PM Modi's legal gambit, containing both hope and potential pitfalls, is set to be a contentious issue, as witnessed in the recent truck drivers' protest. Once enacted, cases under the new laws can be registered, but the first judgment may not be expected for three years post-notification. The Narendra Modi government's reconsideration of implementing three new criminal laws, following a nationwide truckers' strike, highlights the potential political ramifications and widespread opposition. Despite successfully sidelining opposition in the Lok Sabha, the government faces a significant challenge in navigating the complexities of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA). The decision to defer implementation until discussions with the All India Motor Transport Congress underscores the delicate balance the government must strike ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha General Election. PM Modi's attempt to buy time indicates the intricate challenges involved, including parliamentary amendments, citizen protests, and comprehensive training for officials, reinforcing the controversial nature of these impending laws.

Assam's path to peace: A tripartite accord and the journey ahead

By: Dipak Kurmi

The recent tripartite agreement sealed by the Union government, the Assam government, and the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) signifies a potential conclusion to a tumultuous and armed struggle spanning over four decades in Assam. In this agreement, ULFA, the most prominent insurgent group in the entire northeast, commits to renouncing violence, surrendering arms, dissolving the organization, abandoning their camps, and actively participating in the democratic process.

In return, both the Union and state governments pledged to initiate development projects totaling ₹ 1.5 lakh crores, accompanied by a special package of ₹ 5,000 crores earmarked for the state. Furthermore, the accord incorporates provisions for applying the existing principles in future delimitation exercises, ensuring the protection of the interests of the indigenous people of the state.

The roots of the Assam agitation can be traced back to the influx of refugees from Bangladesh in the seventies. This surge triggered concerns among a segment of the Assamese population who feared the potential erosion of their culture, language, and identity. As is often the case with insurgencies, the perceived threat to the indigenous community served as a catalyst, prompting those inclined to resist such encroachments to take action. Established in 1979, ULFA set its sights on a significant goal - establishing a sovereign state in Assam for the indigenous people. During the eighties and early nineties, ULFA experienced notable success as a popular insurgent group, even administering a quasi-government in its strongholds.

ULFA's militant tactics, allegedly involving heinous acts like murders, extortion, and abductions, faced a robust retaliation from the authorities. During the insurgency period, an estimated 10,000 lives were lost, including around 500 security personnel in clashes with their fellow citizens. The government's relentless pressure and the realization that violence wouldn't pave the way for peaceful resolutions in a democratic setup prompted a significant faction of the militant group, led by Arabinda Rajkhowa, to express their willingness to engage in negotiations with the government to address their legitimate grievances. The culmination of nearly 12 years of discussions, the new peace deal reflects a substantial shift from the earlier confrontational approach.

The stakeholders involved in the agreement have expressed optimism that it marks the beginning of a new era for the people of Assam. Home Minister Amit Shah hailed the signing day as a "momentous occasion for the people of Assam," emphasizing that approximately 10,000 citizens from both sides had lost their lives during the insurgency. As part of the accord, a substantial development package will be allocated to Assam, with the Union home minister assuring that every clause of the pact will be diligently implemented. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma celebrated the accord, highlighting its potential to provide political security and constitutional safeguards for the indigenous people through delimitation and land rights. Notably, a representative from ULFA expressed confidence that the accord would usher in enduring peace in Assam, accompanied by an apology for any wrongdoing on their part.

The peace process is not without uncertainties that could potentially derail it. A formidable ULFA faction, under the leadership of Paresh Baruah, staunchly opposes the notion of engaging in talks, and it's crucial to bring them into the fold for a comprehensive resolution. While the government demonstrates its commitment to implementing the accord, there remains the risk of local-level actors who may not share the same seriousness, posing a potential threat to its success. A sincere approach to the accord coupled with vigilant follow-up in its execution is imperative to garner the trust of the people. Once this trust is established, the journey back to peace becomes a more attainable path. *(The writer can be reached at dipaknews@gmail.com)*

Russian economy exhibited surprising resilience despite sanctions in 2023

The year 2023 was a challenging one for Russia. It was marked by major events with mixed repercussions across multiple spheres. The war remained the most defining feature for Russia throughout the year. The two most crucial factors that Western sanctions were designed to influence must be evaluated for their utility.

Oil Windfall Fuels War Machine: Economic mobilization and the military production ecosystem have contributed to Russia's unexpectedly strong economy, which is expected to see a 2-3% rise in GDP this year. On the economy front, indications are growing that Russia is getting better at circumventing sanctions. For instance, Bloomberg reports that as much as 99% of Russian oil exports are sold at prices higher than the \$60-per-barrel ceiling, which is \$24 lower than the average market price over the past 12 months.

Companies in the G7 cannot do business with Russia if the price of oil imported by sea exceeds \$60 per barrel. This includes such services as marine transport and insurance. Also, with a convoluted system of exceptions, the European Union has effectively prohibited all Russian oil imports, forcing Moscow to rely on China and India.

The sanctions were meant to limit Russia's ability to accrue money from selling oil at high prices, which would make it harder for Russia to pay for any potential military actions against Europe. The goal of these sanctions was to check a sharp rise in oil prices that would upset a large section of the European people and, inadvertently, benefit Russia politically. Several European countries - including Austria, Hungary, Poland, Finland and Slovakia - depend on Russia for 50%-100% of their oil and gas imports. One side-effect, though, was that it has altered the financial framework that governs oil and maritime trade - with Russia and China, for instance, using different currency, transshipment modes and so on in a way that some experts think would be hard to undo after the war, or if the sanctions regime were lifted.

As Iran and North Korea have done in reaction to such sanctions, Russia protects itself by using a large 'shadow fleet' of tankers whose ownership and insurance are unclear. Tankers turn off their digital transponders and, in international seas, Russian oil is moved from one ship to another to hide where it came from.

For the Kremlin, what matters is the money coming in and going out in roubles. This shows how easily the country can pay for its huge financial spending - such as going to war and giving more money and gifts to needy people before the March presidential elections.

The three main parts of the budget are the tax on oil extraction, the export fees on oil and petroleum products and the profit tax, which replaced the extraction tax in some oilfields. The gas business is also struggling.

The money made from these sources in October was more than in any other month in 2021, and there is a strong upward trend.

Even though Russia has a lot of structural problems, it will not go bankrupt any time soon and it will be able to pay for its war until at least 2025, when a new US government takes office. Because of this, Defence Minister Shoigu talks openly about the need to keep up the special military action until that date.

Despite Losses, Defences Hold: From Russia's point of view, the situation on the front has stabilized and is not nearly as bad as it was when the Kremlin lost territory it had taken in the Kherson and Kharkiv regions and could not count on solid lines. The Russian army is still a combat-ready and effective military force, thanks to a dense network of field fortifications, even though it has a lot of problems.

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for success, which were to take the city of Tokmak and threaten the ground link with Crimea with artillery.

The Ukrainian counter-offensive has stopped for now. Also, after the end of spring, when the roads get muddy, the "mud season" makes it impossible to progress. Even though Russia suffered many casualties, its defences held, showing that it could handle the Ukrainian army's Western military technology, which was mostly outdated and only available in small amounts.

Along with modern and very dangerous electronic warfare tools, the Russians use drones in large enough numbers that Ukraine cannot compete with because Russia has a strong economy. Currently, neither side can get around rationing the short artillery ammunition supply. Conversely, Russia is ahead of Ukraine and the West in the new phase of the "war of bases".

The West is behind schedule in its attempts to boost production of munitions. The EU has already said that it will not be able to meet its March goal of sending one million gun shells and rocket launcher fuel to Ukraine. During the first year of the war, Russia

fired 10 times that many rounds into Ukraine. It is said that the Russian military-industrial complex will make 2.5 million gun shells in 2024. They have been able to increase war production in two to three shifts.

From the Russian point of view, this may not be enough for a full-on war and large-scale offensive actions, but it is still at least twice or three times what Ukraine will get. On top of that, Ukraine still publicly wants to take back occupied land and has to share American weapons with Israel. Also, the Russians found safety in North Korea at the most critical time: North Korea is known to have sent Russia a million shells.

Also, the West is still having a hard time stopping the flow of important technologies needed to make high-tech Russian weapons, such as the Kinzhal, Iskander and so forth and cheap Iranian drones, such as Shahid. Russia does several things to get around Western limits, including routing important imports through third countries or transshipment points, hiding Customs data and using civilian middlemen to send goods with two uses to military-industrial firms. Companies based in Kyrgyzstan, China, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, which are not party to Western bans, have become important hubs for re-exporting Western technologies.

In general, 2023 was a year of varying fortunes for Russia. While the economy exhibited surprising resilience, everything else was eclipsed by the war in Ukraine. *(IPA Service)*

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Girish Linganna

Hit and Run Bill will bring a sense of responsibility on Indian roads?

By: Dr. Satyavan Saurabh

Hit-and-run cases are those where the driver of the vehicle that causes a road accident flees the scene. It is also proposed to increase the jail term to seven years and a fine for causing death by negligent driving in the Indian Judicial Code, which amounts to culpable homicide. The existing provision under section 304A of the IPC provides for "imprisonment of up to two years or fine or both". These proposed provisions are likely to prove to be a deterrent to errant drivers, who often get away with paying fines or serving lesser jail terms.

At present, the accused in hit-and-run cases are prosecuted under Section 304A after their identification and hence they get away with even minor punishment in most of the cases. The new provisions under Section 104 (2) make it mandatory for anyone who causes death to a person by negligence or culpable homicide not amounting to murder and flee the scene of the inci-



dent or fail to report the incident. The police officer or magistrate immediately following the incident shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years.

The hit-and-run case has become a common cause of road accidents in India. In simple terms, hit-and-run accidents can be described as a case where a person while driving hits another vehicle and runs away from the spot. It is the driver's criminal and civil responsibility to report a road accident involving his vehicle. As hit-and-run cases are on the rise in India, it is essential to understand the Motor Vehicles

Act, which explains the laws imposed on anyone involved in hit-and-run accidents. Road accident statistics show how roads have become unsafe places for everyone. Hit-and-run cases account for more than 30 percent of all road accidents in India, but only 10 percent of drivers involved in hit-and-run accidents are booked. Lack of concern for the safety of another person and reckless driving are common. The Motor Vehicles Act, of 1988 contains a law that gives strict punishment to a person involved in a hit-and-run accident. IPC sections 279, 304A, and 338 are imposed on victims of hit-and-run incidents. According to government data,

a total of more than one lakh people died in hit-and-run cases on Indian roads in four years due to reckless driving and hit-and-run cases. Generally at present police investigating officers are trained in IPC-related sections and are hardly aware of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act. Therefore, it becomes all the more important that the police officers also understand the provisions of the MV Act to make it more effective." The proposed bill also provides for the provision of a provision prohibiting speedy or reckless driving, endangering human life, or causing injury to any other person.

The same provision of the IPC for causing hurt or likely to cause hurt has been retained. The punishment for such an offense is imprisonment for up to six months or a fine of up to Rs 1,000 or both. It is well known that India has the highest number of accidents in the world. India is one of the most-prone countries, with approximately 1,50,000 deaths, which is 10% of all deaths related to motor vehicles

worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, India has the highest number of road accidents worldwide. Even China, the most populous country, is lagging behind us in this matter.

According to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways report; About 5 lakh road accidents occur in India every year, in which about 1.5 lakh people die. As far as road safety is concerned, discipline is essential. If implemented in the right spirit, the law can not only change the road habits of everyone by imposing harsher penalties but can also try to inculcate a sense of responsibility among the citizens. It will provide an efficient, safe, and corruption-free transportation system after the passage of the bill. Along with this, there is also a provision in the law if the general public assaults the driver during an accident, then they should also be punished. Then the driver of the vehicle will guarantee it and will take the victim to the hospital in case of emergency.

Iran and Hamas are having differences on many of the objectives of war

By: Girish Linganna

The war on Gaza, which has been going on for nearly three months since 'Operation Aqsa Deluge', has revealed that the divisions that exist within the factions that sparked it will be the most prominent aspect of the scene when it is over, provided they continue to play a role. The differences in opinion that exist between the Iranian position and that of Hamas about the motives and objectives of this war are brought to the forefront in recent days.

As more information becomes available, it becomes clear that the statements made by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) spokesperson, Major-General Ramadan Sharif, about 'Operation Aqsa Deluge' and its reasons are not accurate. When asked about the motivation behind the operation, he replied that it was a reaction to the murder of Qassem Soleimani, who had previously served as the leader of the Revolutionary Guard.

Hamas reaffirmed that the causes and motivations for 'Operation Aqsa Deluge', the dangers that threaten Al-Aqsa Mosque and all of the activities taken by the Palestinian resistance are in response to the ongoing aggression of the occupation against its people and its sacred sites. The position taken by Iran provokes inquiries into the schisms that exist within the Iranian position.

Following the launch of the surprise attack on Israel by Hamas, the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, expressed his admiration for what he referred to as the "destructive earthquake"

for Israel, stating that Iran acknowledged the hands of those who plotted the strike. Iran, on the other hand, denied any involvement in the attack, which led to the deaths of 2,000 persons and the seizure of more than 240 hostages.

This duality in the Iranian position - with the Iranian leadership denying involvement in the attack on Gaza and claiming today that the goals of 'Operation Aqsa Deluge' are to avenge Soleimani's killing - proves that the leadership is divided. However, the essential side is in what this battle has revealed about the untruth of the deceitful slogans raised by Iran and its supporters in the region, particularly Hezbollah, regarding Palestine and the Palestinian cause, as well as their aim to drive Israel into the sea.

This war has proved that these slogans are untrue. Esmail Qaani, adviser to the commander of the Quds Force in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, made a statement recently in which he threatened to destroy Tel-Aviv if Israel encroached on Iranian land. This statement is indicative of the illusions that Iran and Hezbollah have marketed to the public and their environment.

Does anyone know for certain that Israel will launch an attack against Iran? There is a possibility that Iran's unwavering backing for the so-called 'Axis of Resistance' can act as a reminder of the country's ongoing assistance for Hamas and its support for the organization while addressing the attack. Qaani's statement about destroying Tel-Aviv may be part of a media provocation.

Iran was a strategic ally of Israel before the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The situation shifted following the Islamic Revolution when Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile to assume authority.

The Islamic Republic of Iran evolved into a theocratic regime that espouses anti-Israel rhetoric. The Palestinian issue became a fundamental element of the country's interests and gained great support among the Islamic circles and within intellectual and Leftist communities.

Iran played a significant role in providing support to Hamas throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st Century. This support was mostly motivated by a shared hatred for the same opponent rather than shared religious or political

ideas. The relationship, on the other hand, became strained in 2012 as a result of Hamas's refusal to support Bashar al-Assad, Iran's partner in the Syrian civil war. As a reaction, Iran cut back on its support for the violent actions of the Hamas movement and stopped providing financial assistance to the organization.

The reorganization of the political landscape between Iran and Hamas, particularly since 2017, was brought about by the normalization of relations between several Arab countries and Israel. The statement made by the spokesperson of the IRGC reshapes the roles between Iran and Hamas. This statement demonstrates that Iran's funding of the military wing of Hamas over the years has not been in vain.

This is despite Iran's efforts to convince the international public not to accuse it of the attack on October 7. There is still considerable uncertainty over Iran's actual level of cooperation and its intentions. Nonetheless, a more thorough understanding of Iran's changing position can be obtained by concentrating on the fundamental causes, such as the intricate Israel-Palestine conflict, regional power dynamics and internal political issues.

Razi Mousavi, a senior military adviser for the IRGC, was assassinated by the Israeli forces this week. Mousavi had a significant role in organizing military and logistical support to militants supported by Tehran across Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Iran has pledged to take military action. Time will tell what it will be if the Iranian explanation of the Al Aqsa Deluge is accurate. *(IPA Service)*



Climate action plan and Indian cities

By: Ramanath Jha

Climate action plan and Indian cities amongst the standout challenges confronting Indian cities, climate change has become the most critical concern. Over time, climate change will have severe outcomes around the world. The worrying part for urban local bodies (ULBs) is that the consequences of climate change will manifest themselves heavily in cities. Already, Indian cities are witnessing urban floods, cyclones, harsh winters, and oppressive heat waves with increasing frequency and intensity.

Apart from the loss of human lives and its impact on urban health, these events take a heavy toll on municipal infrastructure, livelihood, and the general economic well-being of municipalities. Since cities are now home to more than half of the global population and are destined to get demographically even bigger, what happens in cities will largely determine the future of worldwide efforts at addressing challenges related to climate change. Cities have an added responsibility since they consume three-fourths of energy and generate about 75 percent of the worldwide global CO₂ emissions. They have undoubtedly emerged as the key contributors

to climate change. For cities to play a major role in the fight against climate change, ULBs must prioritise action on building resilience against climate change and consider it a key municipal responsibility. Unfortunately, the words mandating the 'preparation and implementation of Climate Action Plan' do not appear in most Indian municipal statute books. States would do well to include post-haste the preparation, implementation and monitoring of climate action plans as an obligatory municipal function.

Many countries have local climate plans (LCP) mandated by law. In Europe, for instance, Denmark, France, Slovakia and the United Kingdom (UK) have made the adoption of LCPs compulsory. In the UK, LCPs have been in existence since 2008, where local planning authorities have a statutory responsibility to include in their local planning documents "policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority's area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change". Advice in many countries is also forthcoming about how city governments can integrate climate change-related issues into other local policy processes. There is also evidence to suggest that the exis-



tence of national regulation has a substantial impact on leading cities to the task of local climate planning. As cities prepare to brace themselves for the consequences of climate change, they must do their homework thoroughly. They would be required to develop a comprehensive city action plan (CAP) for measuring, planning, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The cities would have to come up with a CAP for mitigation as well as adaptation. The former involves plans for reducing the flow of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere in a given time frame. Such reduction would be achieved by reducing the sources of these gases—burning fossil fuels for electricity or transport, and conducting economic activities in a sustainable manner. The latter

involves adjusting to actual or expected future climate and requires reducing the risk of the harmful effects of climate change that comprise extreme weather events. The mitigation and adaptation strategies must be broken down into specific implementation projects backed by financial resources. In Maharashtra, cities are already mandated to prepare an annual Environmental Status Report (ESR) that updates data on transport, air pollution, noise pollution, solid waste, open spaces, water, sewerage, etc. The ESR could as well be expanded to include data that would allow informed decisions on climate change.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is the first Indian city to prepare a climate action plan. The MCAP (Mum-

bai Climate Action Plan) 2022 aims at intensifying BMC's focus on tackling climate change and increasing Mumbai's climate resilience. MCAP is framed as a policy document, leveraging scientific knowledge backed by data and an evidence-based planning approach. It identifies urban flooding, coastal risks, urban heat, landslides, and air pollution as the major vulnerability areas of the city and outlines ways of mobilising resources to move from action planning to strategic projects. The MCAP also spells out an institutional mechanism in the form of a 'Climate Cell' to coordinate the implementation and monitoring of all activities related to climate change. The MCAP highlights that while the BMC would be at the forefront of the mitigation efforts and attempts towards building city resilience, the state, all city institutions and all citizens are vital stakeholders and each has significant roles to play. Apart from the BMC, the industry, academia, non-government organisations, community-based organisations, residential societies, and individual citizens would have to join the monumental task of mitigation and adaptation. The Government of India and state governments are expected to give clear policy directions and financially support

the local governments. Additionally, they have to demonstrate their serious intent by doing all that is necessary for subjects and areas that fall within their domain. Since climate change will impact cities worldwide, though, with varying intensity in different areas, cities need not work in silos but share their experiences and learn from the experiences of others. Such sharing of best practices is already happening. For instance, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40) links about a hundred big cities and brings them on a single platform to address climate change and share urban initiatives to reduce GHG emissions. Similarly, the Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) has launched a global network of more than 1,500 cities in 86 countries committed to building a sustainable and low-carbon future. Within the country, the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) have crafted India's first national coalition platform to mainstream eco-based services and nature-based solutions to build urban climate resilience. At the state level, cities could have a common platform of chief executives sharing best practices and inputs regarding climate change planning-related knowledge.

Updating, sharing, and disseminating climate-related experiences would require institutional support for the capacity-building of all stakeholders. This will have to be an ongoing effort, as the impacts of climate change would be dynamic, requiring periodic revisions in the targeted action and corresponding capacities. Since all city stakeholders need to get involved in the effort, and since many aspects of current urban living run contrary to the requirements of sustainability, lifestyles would need to be modified or eschewed to bring living in line with the protection and conservation of the environment and environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB). Conscious efforts towards conserving water, generating less waste, greater use of public transport, increased use of green energy and promoting greenery and urban agriculture in homes are some of the climate-friendly practices that individual citizens would have to be encouraged to adopt. Climate action plans will have greater applicability if they comprise annual emission reduction targets and establish a multistakeholder action plan regarding strategies for heat, cyclones, and landslides. Indeed, the colossal task facing humanity would not brook absentees. (Courtesy: ORF)

What is the carbon footprint of a war?

By: Benjamin Neimark

We know that war is bad for the environment, with toxic chemicals left polluting the soil and water for decades after fighting ceases. Much less obvious are the carbon emissions from armed conflicts and their long-term impacts on the climate.

Colleagues and I have estimated that the US military alone contributes more greenhouse gas emissions than over 150 countries, but too often discussions of the links between militaries and climate change focus only on future risks to global security in climate-affected settings.

There are many tepid attempts by militaries to green their war machines — developing electric tanks or navy ships run on biofuels — yet there is very little discussion of how they contribute to climate change, especially during war.

Militaries are not very transparent and it is extremely difficult to access the data needed to run comprehensive carbon emissions calculations, even in peacetime. Researchers are essentially left on their own. Using an array of methods, colleagues and I have been working to open this "black box" of wartime emissions and demand transparent reporting of military emissions to the UN's climate body, the UNFCCC.

Here are some of the ways militaries create emissions, and how we go about estimating them.

Direct and indirect emissions

Some military emissions are not necessarily specific to wartime, but dramatically increase during combat. Among the largest sources are jet fuel for planes and diesel for tanks and naval ships.

Other sources include weapons and ammunition manufacturing, troop deployment, housing, and feeding armies. Then there is the havoc that militaries cause by dropping bombs, including fires, smoke and rubble from damage to homes and infrastructure — all amounting to a massive "carbon war footprint".

In order to account for all of this carbon, researchers must begin with basic data surrounding direct "tailpipe" emissions, known as Scope 1 emissions. This is the carbon emitted directly from



burning fuel in the engine of a plane, for instance. If we know how much fuel is consumed per kilometre by a certain type of jet plane, we can begin to estimate how much carbon is emitted by a whole fleet of those planes over a certain amount of missions.

Then we have emissions from heating or electricity that are an indirect result of a particular activity — emissions from burning gas to produce electricity to light up an army barracks, for instance. These are Scope 2 emissions.

From there, we can try to account for the complex "long tail" of indirect or embodied emissions, known as Scope 3. These are found in extensive military supply chains and involve carbon emitted by anything from weapons manufacturing to IT and other logistics.

To understand combat emissions better, my colleagues have even proposed a new category, Scope 3 Plus, which includes everything from damage caused by war to post-conflict reconstruction. For example, the emissions involved in rebuilding Gaza or Mariupol in Ukraine will be enormous.

Concrete problems
Our most recent research, looking at the US military's use of concrete in Iraq from 2003 to 2011, illustrates some of the calculations involved. During its occupation of Baghdad, the US military laid hundreds of miles of walls as part of its urban counterinsurgency strategy.

These were used to protect against the damage caused by bombs planted by insurgents, and to manage civilian and insurgent movements within the city by channelling residents through authorised roads and checkpoints.

However, concrete also has a massive carbon footprint, accounting for almost 7% of global CO₂ emissions. And the concrete walls in Baghdad alone — 412km — were

longer than the distance from London to Paris. Those walls caused the emission of an estimated 200,000 tonnes of CO₂ and its equivalent in other gases (CO₂e), which is roughly equivalent to the total annual car tailpipe emissions of the UK, or the entire emissions of a small island nation.

Ukraine war has the carbon footprint of Belgium

In Ukraine, colleagues have begun the colossal task of adding up all the above factors and more in order to calculate the carbon effects of Russia's invasion. This work is revolutionary as it attempts to do the very difficult task of accounting for the emissions of war in almost real time.

These researchers estimate the carbon footprint of the first year of the war to be in the region of 120 million tonnes of CO₂e. That's roughly the annual emissions of Belgium. Ammunition and explosives alone for around 2 million tonnes of CO₂e in that period — equal to almost 1 billion beef steaks (150g), or 13 billion kilometres of driving.

A focus on conflict emissions is particularly timely given the Ukraine and Israel-Gaza wars, but also because of draft legislation concerning the 27 legal principles on the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts (Perac) that was passed by the UN general assembly in December 2022. While Perac is a major step forward, it still has little to say about greenhouse gas emissions during conflict.

Governments should adhere to their obligations to transparent and accurate reporting of military emissions. People are beginning to link armed conflict, greenhouse gas emissions and environmental protection, but the topic remains under-researched and unreported and unreported — it's time to shine a spotlight on this hidden aspect of war. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Philippines environmental group raises concerns over plastic pollution at INC3

By: Zumbish

Civil society groups have addressed the urgent need to combat plastic pollution at the ongoing third session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution. One such organisation, BAN Toxics, expressed concerns over plastic pollution crisis Philippines is grappling with.

"The Philippines is at a critical juncture in the battle against plastic pollution. Our country's unique biodiversity, alongside the health, welfare and sources of livelihood of our people, deserve protection, and we must act decisively," said Jam Lorenzo from BAN Toxics' Policy Development and Research Unit, at the seven-day event that began at the United Nations Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya on November 13, 2023.

The Philippines is said to have the largest share of plastic waste dumped in the ocean in 2019. Around 36.38 per cent of global oceanic plastic waste came from the country in year 2019 and this scale is considerably more in comparison to India, the second-largest plastic polluter, having accounted for about 12.92 per cent of the total the same year, according to Earth.org in June, 2023.

A World Bank report from March 2021 talked about Philippines' high dependence on single-use plastics that include multilayer sachets and pouches.

By: Ovokeroye Abafe

Drinking straws that are made from materials like paper and bamboo are often promoted as more eco-friendly than their plastic counterparts. However, a new study has found that these supposedly sustainable straws contain potentially toxic chemicals called polyfluoroalkyl and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

These substances, commonly known as "forever chemicals", are a large group of over 4,000 synthetic chemicals that are used in a wide range of products due to their water- and fat-repellent properties. They can be found in everyday items such as non-stick cooking pans and fast-food packaging.

PFAS can linger in the environment for thousands of years, and exposure to certain levels of PFAS has been linked to ill health both in people and in animals.

The study, conducted by researchers in Belgium, analysed commercially available drinking straws of various types and recorded PFAS concentrations in 39 separate brands. PFAS were discovered in almost all of

the paper and bamboo straws tested. They were detected in plastic and glass straws too, but at a lower frequency.

Perfluorooctanoic acid was the most common PFAS detected in the straws. The manufacture of perfluorooctanoic acid has been banned in the European Union since 2020 on safety grounds. However, it can be found in old or recycled consumer products and persists in the environment.

The presence of PFAS in plant-based straws could, at least in part, be due to factors like unintentional contamination from plants grown in soil polluted by PFAS and from the use of recycled paper containing PFAS in the production of straws.

Detecting forever chemicals
The researchers used two methods to detect PFAS in the straws. First, they measured whether 29 types of common PFAS were present and quantified their amounts in the straws using a sensitive method called liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry. They found 16 of the 29 target PFAS at detectable concentrations.

A screening approach was

then used to detect any other PFAS compounds in the straws. This revealed the presence of two additional PFAS compounds — trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) and trifluoromethanesulfonic acid (TFMS).

TFA occurred in five of the eight paper-based straw brands tested and TFMS in six of them. Both compounds were measured in one bamboo straw. Given TFA's limited industrial applications, the researchers suggest that its presence in straws potentially stems from the breakdown of halogenated hydrocarbons. These hydrocarbons are commonly used as industrial solvents, intermediates in synthesis and even as dry cleaning agents.

In contrast, the sources of the TFMS in straws are uncertain. However, they are known to be associated with sites where firefighting foams have been used. **Should we be concerned?**
People could be directly exposed to PFAS in straws as they leach into our drinks during use. Discarded or recycled straws could also result in indirect exposure through contaminated soils, water, plants and other con-

sumer products derived from recycled materials. This is concerning. PFAS exposure poses considerable health risks to people, wildlife and the environment.

Research indicates that pregnant women who are exposed to these substances may experience reduced fertility and heightened blood pressure. Their children could face developmental effects like low birth weight, early puberty and even an increased risk of some cancers.

PFAS exposure has even been shown to compromise the immune system's ability to fight infections. In 2020, research from Denmark found that the severity of COVID infections seemed to be aggravated by exposure to some PFAS.

Exposure to PFAS has also been linked to a reduced reproductive ability in birds, and the development of tumours and disrupted immune and kidney function in other species of animal.

For example, research on the Cape Fear river in North Carolina in 2022 revealed that all 75 American alligators (a protected species) tested had PFAS in their blood serum. The levels of PFAS in the alligators'

stresses the need to avoid incentivising environmentally harmful waste disposal methods under the current EPR model and emphasises the importance of covering the entire lifecycle of plastics," it shared. "Further, reducing plastic use is the most effective strategy, and the implementation of EPR should focus on sustainable production, consumption and zero waste, with a priority on upstream solutions."

Despite these aforementioned mechanisms, Lorenzo stated, there is a shared recognition that further strides are needed in terms of effective implementation, greater policy action and stakeholder involvement to achieve results. "The situation makes it more crucial than ever to push for a comprehensive national single-use plastic ban to curb plastic waste. There have also been several bills filed in both the lower and upper houses to cut down on plastic waste," he added.

BAN Toxics is an independent non-government environmental organisation that works for causes like advancement of environmental justice, health and sustainable development in the area of chemicals and wastes, with focus on women, children and others.

It is also a member of the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), a network of grassroots groups representing over 1,000 organisations from 92 countries working towards a Zero Waste world. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Saleh Aroui died in an apparent Israeli strike which hit a building in a suburb of the Lebanese capital, Beirut, that is a Hezbollah stronghold

Apparent Israeli strike kills senior Hamas figure in Beirut and raises fears conflict could expand



BEIRUT, Jan 3: An apparent Israeli strike in the Lebanese capital of Beirut killed Hamas' No. 2 political leader on Tuesday, marking a potentially significant escalation of Israel's war against the militant group and heightening the risk of a wider Middle East conflict.

Saleh Aroui, who was the most senior Hamas figure killed since the war with Israel began, was also a founder of the group's military wing. His death could provoke major retaliation by Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah militia. The strike hit an apartment in a building in a Shiite district of Beirut that is a Hezbollah stronghold, and Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has vowed to strike back against any Israeli targeting of Palestinian officials in Lebanon.

Hezbollah and the Israeli military have been exchanging fire almost daily over the Israeli-Lebanese border since Israel's

military campaign in Gaza began nearly three months ago. But so far the Lebanese group has appeared reluctant to dramatically escalate the fighting. A significant response now could send the conflict spiraling into all-out war on Israel's northern border.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said the strike was carried out by an Israeli drone, and Israeli officials declined to comment. Speaking to reporters, Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari did not directly mention Aroui's death but said, "We are focused and remain focused on fighting against Hamas." "We are on high readiness for any scenario," he added.

The killing comes ahead of a visit to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, even as the United States has tried to prevent a spread of the conflict, repeatedly warning Hezbollah - and its regional supporter, Iran — not to escalate the

violence.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the assault in Gaza until Hamas is crushed and the more than 100 hostages still held by the militant group in Gaza are freed, which he has said could take several more months. At the same time, Israeli officials have increasingly warned in recent days of stepped-up action against Hezbollah unless its cross-border fire stops.

Netanyahu and other Israeli officials have repeatedly threatened to kill Hamas leaders wherever they are. The group's Oct. 7 attack from Gaza into southern Israel killed around 1,200 people, and some 240 others were taken hostage.

Israel claims to have killed a number of mid-level Hamas leaders in Gaza, but this would be the first time it has reached into another country to target the group's top leaders, many of whom live in exile around the region. Aroui was the deputy of Hamas' supreme political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, and headed the group's presence in the West Bank. He was also a key liaison with Hezbollah.

Tuesday's blast shook a residential building in the Beirut suburb of Musharafieh, killing four people, according to the Lebanese news agency. Hamas confirmed that Aroui was killed

along with six other members of the group, including two military commanders.

Haniyeh said the movement was "more powerful and determined" following the attack. "They left behind them strong men who will carry the banner after them," he said of those killed. Hezbollah called the strike "a serious attack on Lebanon, its people, its security, sovereignty and resistance."

"We affirm that this crime will never pass without response and punishment," it said. Since the Gaza conflict began, Lebanese have feared their country could be pulled into a full-fledged war. Hezbollah and Israel fought a monthlong war in 2006, when Israeli bombardment wreaked heavy destruction in southern Lebanon.

Israel's air, ground and sea assault in Gaza has killed more than 22,100 people in Gaza, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. The count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

The campaign has driven some 85% of Gaza's population from their homes, forcing hundreds of thousands of people into overcrowded shelters or teeming tent camps in Israeli-designated safe areas that the military has nevertheless bombed. Israel's siege of

the territory has left a quarter of Gaza residents facing starvation, according to the United Nations.

Israel announced Monday that it would withdraw five brigades, or several thousand troops, from Gaza in the coming weeks. Still, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said it would be a mistake to think that Israel is planning on halting the war.

"The feeling that we will stop soon is incorrect," he said Tuesday. "Without a clear victory, we will not be able to live in the Middle East."

Israel has said it's close to achieving operational control over most of northern Gaza, where ground troops have been battling militants for over two months. But Gallant said several thousand Hamas fighters are believed still to be in the north, and residents reported clashes in several parts of Gaza City, as well as in the nearby urban Jabaliya refugee camp.

Fierce fighting has continued in other parts of the Palestinian territory, especially the south, where many of Hamas' forces remain intact and where most of Gaza's population has fled.

Palestinians reported heavy airstrikes and artillery shelling in the southern city of Khan Younis and farming areas to the east. The Palestinian Red Crescent said Israel bombed its headquarters in the city, killing five people. (AP)

Japanese transport officials and police begin on-site probe after fatal crash on Tokyo runway

TOKYO, Jan 4: Transport officials and police began separate investigations at Tokyo's Haneda Airport on Wednesday, a day after a large passenger plane and a Japanese coast guard aircraft collided on the runway and burst into flames, killing five people.

The accident occurred on Tuesday evening when the Japan Airlines flight JAL-516 plane landed on one of Haneda's four runways after the coast guard aircraft — a Bombardier Dash-8 — had also entered, preparing to take off. Both sides said they received a go-ahead from aviation officials.

An orange fireball erupted from the aircraft, and the JAL plane continued down the runway covered in flames while spewing gray smoke. Within 20 minutes, all 379 passengers and crew members slid down emergency chutes and survived. The pilot of the coast guard plane, which exploded, evacuated with injuries but five crew members aboard the coast guard plane were killed. Transport safety officials were focusing on communication between air traffic control officials and the two aircraft to determine what led to the collision.

Police began a separate probe into possible professional negligence. On Wednesday, Tokyo police said that investigators examined the debris on the runway and were to interview the involved parties.

The Japan Airlines A350 had flown from Shin Chitose airport near the northern Japanese city of Sapporo, and the coast guard Bombardier was preparing to depart for Niigata to deliver relief supplies to residents in the central Japan regions hit by powerful earthquakes on Monday that killed more than 60 people.

On Wednesday, six experts from the Japan Transport Safety Board examined what remained of the aircraft, the board said. TV footage showed the severely damaged A350's wings among the



charred, broken parts of fuselages. The smaller coast guard plane looked like a mound of rubble.

Transport safety investigators plan to interview the pilots and officials from both sides, as well as air traffic control officials to find out how the two planes simultaneously ended up on the runway, JTSA said.

The two sides had different understandings of their permission to use the runway. JAL Managing Executive Officer Tadayuki Tsutsumi told a news conference late Tuesday that the A350 was making a "normal entry and landing" on the runway. Another JAL executive, Noriyuki Aoki, said the flight had received permission to land from aviation officials.

The air traffic officials gave the JAL liner landing permission, while telling the coast guard pilot to wait before entering the runway, NHK television reported Wednesday. But the coast guard pilot said he also had been given permission to take off. The coast guard said officials were verifying that claim. All passengers and crew members left their baggage and slid down the escape chutes within 20 minutes of the landing as smoke filled the cabin of the burning aircraft — an outcome praised by aviation experts. Videos posted by passengers showed people covering their mouths with handkerchiefs as they ducked down and moved toward the exits. Some passengers told news media they felt safe only after reaching a grassy area beyond the tarmac. (AP)

Bangladesh deploys armed forces ahead of Sunday's general election

DHAKA, Jan 3: Authorities in Bangladesh on Wednesday deployed Armed Forces to assist the administration in holding the January 7 national election in a free, fair, and peaceful manner as tensions spiked in the country ahead of the polls being boycotted by the main opposition BNP.

"Members of the armed forces will be stationed at nodal points and other places in every district, sub-district, and metropolitan area," said a statement of the Inter-Service Public Relations, the media wing of the military. The Army was deployed in several districts on Tuesday, but they began work in Dhaka at 8 am on Wednesday at the Zia Colony and Sainik Club neighbourhoods in the Dhaka Cantonment.

"They will assist the Election Commission and the local administration to ensure peace and discipline from January 3 to 10. Apart from the armed forces, members of the Coast Guard, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) will also be on election duty."

The Bangladesh Navy will operate in 19 districts, including Bhola and Barguna, while the Border Guard Bangladesh will take on the sole responsibility in 45 bordering upazilas. The BGB and Army will work in 47 bordering upazilas and coordinate with the Coast Guard in four coastal upazilas, the ISPR said.

The Bangladesh Air Force will provide helicopter support to the polling centres in the Hill Tracts. They have already prepared enough of them to meet the needs of the election.

The Armed Forces Division has formed a combined cell, including law enforcers and representatives from different ministries, which will be active until January 10. The January 7 polls are being boycotted by the main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by former prime minister Khalida Zia, as its demand for an interim non-party neutral government to organise the voting was rejected by the government headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Hasina is also the president of the ruling Awami League. The BNP boycotted the 2014 election but took part in the 2018 polls, which party leaders later said was a mistake, alleging that the voting was marred with widespread rigging and intimidation.

Meanwhile, the BNP and its allies were criticised by ruling Awami League's General Secretary Obaidul Quader on Tuesday, who said that the January 7 polls will be participatory, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported. Calling the BNP's leaflet distribution mysterious, Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, said that the activists of the main opposition party might carry out an attack anytime.

"But they will not be able to thwart the election no matter how hard they try," he was quoted as saying in the report. On Monday, Prime Minister Hasina said the BNP is boycotting Sunday's general election because they found no scope to rig the polls.

Claiming that the BNP had tried to foil the 2014 parliamentary election through violence but failed, Hasina said, "Now they are out to thwart the 12th parliamentary election slated for January 7 for which they are once again burning people to death through arson violence and subversive acts." The BNP has called for civil disobedience against the Hasina-led dispensation, urging people not to pay taxes and utility bills to press its demand for a non-party interim government for election oversight by amending the country's Constitution.

It is also carrying out an anti-election street campaign, calling for intermittent strikes and transport blockades, saying no election under the incumbent government led by Hasina would be fair or neutral.

According to a media tally, 11 people died, 386 vehicles were torched, and four trains were derailed from tracks in the past two months in political violence. The US and other major Western countries called for dialogue between the ruling Awami League and particularly with the BNP to ensure an inclusive and credible election, which, however, saw no headway due to reluctance from both sides. With the BNP boycotting the election and no other credible opposition party against it, Hasina's Awami League is likely to gain the upper hand and will likely form the government for the fourth consecutive term. Inspector General of Police

Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun is visiting the divisional headquarters of the police and holding meetings with local police high-ups. He has already visited Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Khulna divisions and will visit Mymensingh, Chattogram, and Barishal within a day or two.

Following a meeting with local police in Jessore, the police chief affirmed that law enforcement will be on standby to maintain a conducive atmosphere for smooth voting and is ready to handle any situation for fair and festive elections. During the electoral campaign from December 18 to December 30, a total of 213 cases related to pre-poll violence were filed, leading to the arrest of 235 individuals across the country, as per police statistics. According to law enforcers, at least 100 pre-poll violence incidents have taken place in the last 13 days.

Besides, the law-and-order coordination cell of the public security division under the Home Ministry has received around 501 election-related complaints in 14 days. (PTI)



Ukraine trains its sights on Russian border region, seeking to stir up discontent

KYIV, Jan 3: The Russian military said on Wednesday it shot down 12 Ukrainian missiles over Russia's southern Belgorod region bordering Ukraine, as Kyiv's forces seek to embarrass Russian President Vladimir Putin and puncture his argument that life in Russia is going on as normal despite the 22-month war.

Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said the situation in the regional capital, also called Belgorod, "remains tense." The city came under two rounds of shelling Wednesday morning, Gladkov wrote on Telegram.

"Air defense systems worked," he said, promising more details about possible damage after inspecting the area later in the day. Wednesday was a national holiday in Russia.

The Russian side of the border with Ukraine has come under frequent attack in recent days. During the war, Russian border villages have sporadically been targeted by Ukrainian artillery fire, rockets, mortar shells and drones launched from thick forests where they are hard to detect.

Lately, as missiles and drones have fallen on Ukrainian cities, Kyiv's troops have aimed at the Belgorod regional capital, which lies roughly 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city.

Belgorod, which has a population of around 340,000 people, is the biggest Russian city close to the Ukrainian border. It can be reached by relatively simple and movable weapons such as multiple rocket launchers.

On Saturday, shelling of Belgorod killed more than two dozen people. The attack was one of the deadliest on Russian soil since Moscow's full-scale invasion. Russian officials said the death toll reached 26, including five children, after a new salvo of rockets Tuesday.

Hitting Belgorod and disrupting city life is a dramatic way for Ukraine to show it can strike back against Russia, which in military terms outnumbers and outguns Kyiv's forces.

Putin on Monday lashed out against the Belgorod attacks. "They want to intimidate us and create uncertainty within our country," he said, promising to step up retaliatory strikes.

The Russian government has tried to counter the successful strikes by describing the Ukrainians as "terrorists" who are indiscriminately targeting residential areas while insisting the Russian military only aims at depots, arms factories and other military facilities.

Ukrainian officials never acknowledge responsibility for strikes on Russian territory. (AP)

ISIS trying to establish foothold in Pak: Ministry of Interior tells Senate



ISLAMABAD, Jan 3: Pakistan, which is witnessing an influx of Tehreek-i-Taliban terrorists in significant numbers in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's tribal districts, is also facing a threat from the Islamic State (ISIS) which is trying to establish a foothold in the country, the Ministry of Interior has said.

The ministry's statement came as the Senate was briefed about the escalating influence and activities of the TTP following the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the inaction of the interim Afghan government led by the Taliban against the banned group. The interior ministry, in a written response during question hour, highlighted the TTP's reorganisation and operational expansion during the peace talks in 2022, which has significantly increased its militant activities.

"It has given significant rise to its activities and is seeking the support of other militant groups to increase strength and capabilities. It is mostly concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially merged districts, with footprints in Balochistan and trying to activate its network in the country," it said. It said that the arrival of TTP in significant numbers continues in merged districts, along with the recruitment, training and placing of suicide bombers, is a cause of concern.

The ministry said Daesh — an Arabic acronym for the self-proclaimed Islamic State militant group — was also trying to establish a foothold in Pakistan and resorted to terrorist activities against Shias and religious minority communities to ignite sectarian strife. It said fencing along the western borders of Pakistan had largely been completed to further strengthen the

state mechanism of curbing the illegal movement from across the border. However, it pointed out that the two organisations, particularly the TTP, continued to sabotage the fence. Pakistan started fencing its porous borders with Afghanistan in March 2017, after facing a spate of deadly attacks from Afghanistan-based militant groups in the previous year.

The barrier, being built on the 2,640-km border, also known as the Durand Line, is near completion. It passes through rugged mountains, densely forested valleys and narrow rock passages.

Militants have ramped up their attacks since they revoked a ceasefire with the Pakistani government in November 2022.

In the deadliest attack on security forces in the outgoing year, at least 23 Pakistan Army soldiers were martyred and more than 30 troops wounded on Dec 12 after militants belonging to the Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan stormed a compound used by the military in Dera Ismail Khan's Daraban area. The ministry also said data of 1.45 million registered refugees was updated and expanded through the issuance of smart identity cards. "The cards contain basic information, including biometric data, and are compatible with the local systems," it said.

About dismantling the communication networks to combat online extremism, it said the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority was actively monitoring cyber-space.

"A total number of 16,522 complaints were forwarded to social media platforms for blocking of radical/sectarian, anti-state and terrorist content during 2022," it said. (PTI)

HC in Pak reserves its verdict on ECP's appeal against restoration of PTI's electoral symbol

PESHAWAR, Jan 3: A High Court in Pakistan on Wednesday reserved its verdict on the review pleas filed by the election commission against its decision to suspend the electoral watchdog's declaration of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party's organisational polls as void and the revocation of its election symbol.

The election symbol of jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party is a cricket bat.

The former cricketer-turned-politician's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party faces uncertainty over its electoral symbol as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) last month rejected its intra-party elections and deprived the party of its cricket

bat symbol. Barrister Gohar Khan, a close aide of Imran Khan, was elected as the party's new chairman in the internal elections in December.

The party challenged the verdict in the Peshawar High Court which on December 26 suspended the ECP's declaration of the PTI's intra-party polls as unconstitutional as well as the subsequent revocation of the party's iconic symbol. The election commission challenged the high court verdict.

The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Wednesday reserved its verdict on review pleas filed by ECP against the high court's decision to suspend the electoral watchdog's declaration of PTI's intra-party polls as void and the re-

vocation of its election symbol, the Dawn newspaper reported. The court reserved its verdict after hearing arguments from both the PTI and ECP counsels.

A day earlier, the ECP counsel presented his arguments, while the PTI lawyers remained absent. Subsequently, the court issued a notice to the PTI for the completion of arguments. During the hearing on Wednesday, presided over by Justice Ejaz Khan, ECP counsel Sikandar Basheer Mohmand and PTI lawyers Qazi Anwar and Shah Faisal appeared in court.

PTI counsel Anwar stated that the ECP was not a judicial institution, adding that seeking court intervention for or against its verdict consti-

Rescuers race against time in search for survivors in Japan after quakes leave 62 dead

The quake set off tsunami warnings, followed by waves measuring more than 1 meter (3 feet) in some places

SUZU (JAPAN), Jan 3: Japanese rescue workers and canine units searched urgently through rubble on Wednesday ahead of predicted bitter cold and heavy rain in what the prime minister called a race against time after powerful earthquakes killed at least 62 people in western Japan. Dozens are believed trapped under collapsed buildings.

Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas were shaken by a 4.9 magnitude aftershock early Wednesday — one of dozens that have followed Monday's magnitude 7.6 temblor centered near Noto, about 300 kilometers (185 miles) from Tokyo on the opposite coast. The quake set off tsunami warnings, followed by waves measuring more than 1 meter (3 feet) in some places.



The first 72 hours are especially critical for rescues, experts say, because the prospects for survival greatly diminish after that.

"More than 40 hours have passed. This is a race against time, and I feel that we are at a critical moment," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters. "We have received reports many people are still waiting for rescue under collapsed buildings."

Noto's narrow peninsula has added to the challenges in reaching some communities. Water, power and cellphone service were still down in some areas.

Naomi Gonno says she and her children got out of their house just as it came crashing down. But her children were screaming "Granma," and Gonno saw that her mother was trapped under the smashed house, with only her hand visible. She was able to squeeze her way out through a tiny space, Gonno said.

"I can't believe we're still alive," she said. "We are living in fear." Relief officials handed out water, blankets, food and other supplies. Search dogs joined military personnel and firefighters trying to find dozens of peo-

ple who are thought to be trapped, although the exact number is unclear.

Weather forecasts warned of heavy rain in Ishikawa, leading to worries about landslides and further damage to half-crumbled homes. Temperatures were expected to drop to around 4 degrees Celsius (39 degrees Fahrenheit) overnight.

Of the deaths, 29 were counted in Wajima city, while 22 people died in Suzu, according to Ishikawa prefectural authorities. Eleven deaths were reported in other nearby towns, and three were still awaiting official confirmation in Wajima, meaning the overall toll would likely grow to at least 65 people. Dozens of people have been seriously injured, including in nearby prefectures. Ishikawa Gov. Hiroshi Hase

encouraged everyone to use masks, antiseptic and soap to guard against the spread of infectious diseases as evacuees shelter together. Ensuring adequate water supplies and toilets for those who were displaced is a priority, he said.

Nearly 33,000 people are staying at evacuation centers, and some said they were hungry and cold, unable to sleep and afraid. When Monday's quake hit, Yasuo Kobatake ran out of his house with just one sock on. The shaking threw him to the ground, and a concrete wall came crashing down, barely missing him, he said.

He was eating only rice balls and a few sips of water in paper cups at the elementary school where he and others were sheltering. They slept on cushions, with no blankets. (AP)

HNLC withdraws from tripartite peace talks with Centre, Meghalaya govt

Outfit claims its demand for general amnesty to cadres remains unmet

SHILLONG, Jan 3: The outlawed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), a militant outfit in Meghalaya, on Wednesday withdrew from the tripartite peace talks with the Centre and the state government stating that its demand for general amnesty to their cadres was not met, a statement by the outfit said.

In a letter to Centre's interlocutor AK Mishra, outfit's self-styled chairman and commander-in-chief Bobby Marwein said, "We deeply regret to inform you that we are reluctantly withdrawing ourselves from the peace talks with your government. This decision has been made due to the unfortunate circumstance that our general demands have not been met."

Marwein added, "It is with a heavy heart that we witness the peace process reaching such a critical point."

A copy of the letter was also sent to Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma.

Contrary to the state government's condition of no armed violence or threats, the outfit recently issued a death threat to Gavin Mylliemngap, an MLA of the ruling National People's Party in Meghalaya.

This threat came after the gov-



ernment decided to shut down a state-run cement company at Sohra in East Khasi Hills district.

In a statement, outfit general secretary Sainkupar Nongtraw said, "If the government proceeds with the shutdown of MCCL, it would be appropriate for MLA Sohra Gavin to assume responsibility. Just as you and your government dare to bury MCCL alive, we will hold you accountable by our own actions. Traitors of the people should be punished with death."

The tripartite peace talks, which began last year, came to a standstill after the state government asked the top leaders of the outfit to participate in the delib-

erations.

During their first meeting in June last year, the outfit demanded the withdrawal of all cases against its cadres before talks could proceed further.

The meeting held at Umiam, 17km from Shillong, was attended by Mishra, interlocutors of the state government Peter Dkhar and Ronnie Wahlang, and Sadon Blah as the HNLC's representative.

In 2021, the HNLC leadership authorised its vice-chairman and foreign secretary to also participate in the ongoing talks.

In the same month, the NIA had filed a chargesheet against four members of the outlawed or-

ganisation for allegedly triggering a bomb on the premises of Star Cement Factory in East Jaintia Hills district in December 2020 for their failure to pay ransom, an official said.

Investigation revealed that the explosion was carried out by outfit after the company's owner failed to pay the 'illegal tax' demanded by Marius Rynjah alias Hep Koit, the 'finance secretary' of the outfit, the official added.

The four persons named in the chargesheet are Emmanuel Suchen of Lumshnong in Meghalaya's Jaintia Hills district and three others who are residents of Moulvibazar district in Bangladesh including outfit chairman Bobby Marwein, general secretary Sainkupar Nongtraw and Rynjah.

Talking to PTI, Blah had said the general amnesty would involve the withdrawal of all cases against the outfit's cadres, including the NIA case against four of the top leaders.

Since its formation almost three decades ago, the outfit has carried out armed attacks, IED blasts, and other unlawful activities, resulting in the injury and death of hundreds of civilians and armed personnel in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills region. (PTI)

3 Arunachal products to get GI tag

ITANAGAR, Jan 3: Three items of Arunachal Pradesh have received the prestigious geographical indication (GI) tag, officials said on Wednesday.

These are adi kekir (ginger), carpet handmade by Tibetan settlers and wooden items made by the Wancho community, they said.

Adi kekir is a variety of ginger produced in the East Siang, Siang and Upper Siang districts of the state. It is known for its taste and size.

Handmade carpets prepared by the Tibetan refugees, who live in various parts of the state are famous for their typical designs, motifs and textures.

Wanchoo wooden craft items are unique as they feature human heads, tobacco pipes with head-shaped bowls and drinking mugs with warriors carrying heads. The artisans also create sculptures of Lord Buddha, animals, and dolls.

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is supporting the initiative of the state government to promote these products and is also providing financial assistance to those involved in their production, officials said.

Of the 18 such products supported by NABARD for GI registration, six products have already received the certification so far. Earlier, Yak Churpi, cheese prepared from the milk of Arunachali yak, Khamti rice, a variety of sticky rice produced in Namsai district and Tangsa textile of Changlang district received the GI tags.

"It is a proud moment for us and we will enhance our efforts in the state," a senior NABARD official said.

GI Tag is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin. (PTI)

Manipur CM holds meeting with Meitei Pangal community on Thoubal firing



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday met civil society organizations and members of the Meitei Pangal community at his official residence in Imphal and expressed his sorrow on the firing in Lilong Chingjao area in Thoubal district on January 1 that had claimed five lives.

Cadres of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had gunned down four persons and injured another 10 in the minority-dominated Lilong Chingjao area on the night of January 1.

"Held a meeting with CSOs of the Meitei Pangal community at my official residence today in the presence of Hon'ble MP (RS) Sanajaoba Leisemba, Hon'ble Minister Shri K Govindas, Hon'ble MLA of Lilong, Shri Abdul Nasir and my officials. Express my deep sorrow for the unfortunate incident that happened at Lilong on 1st Jan," said Manipur CM in a post on 'X'.

According to police officials, some PLA cadres had arrived at the house of one person in Lilong Chingjao village, who has several narcotics cases pending against him. Within minutes around 1,000 people gathered outside his residence to chase away the cadres. The latter opened indiscriminate fire on the locals, killing four and injuring another 10 in the process.

The incident was seen as the fallout of a dispute over money collected through illegal drug trade, the officials said.

The state government had deployed additional security personnel in the area. CM Singh on Tuesday had also warned people not to take the law in their hands and said that those involved in the ongoing violence will be responsible for any stringent action taken by the, including the reimposition of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

Meanwhile, the chief minister said that the religious leaders of the Meitei Pangal community as well as civil society organizations would perform the last rites of the five people killed in the firing.

"We have come to an understanding where the religious leaders and CSOs of Meitei Pangal community have agreed to take the remains of the victims for their last rites," he further said in the post on 'X'.

Manipur Rajya Sabha MP Sanajaoba Leisemba, minister K Govindas and Lilong MLA Muhammad Abdul Nasir and other government officials also participated in the meeting.

Arunachal gov presents citation to Assam Rifles battalion



ITANAGAR, Jan 3: Arunachal Pradesh Governor KT Parnaik presented a citation to the 40 Assam Rifles battalion on Wednesday for its work in maintaining the peace and security in Longding district.

Col Sunil Lunthi, Subedar Major Suresh Prasad and Rifleman SR Jena received the citation on behalf of the force, a Raj Bhavan statement said.

The unit has immensely contributed to ensuring the safety and well-being of the local population, Parnaik said.

"In an era where security challenges are ever-evolving and complex, 40 Assam Rifles has consistently demonstrated the highest levels of professionalism, commitment, and courage as well as contributed significantly to nation building through empowerment schemes for the local population, sports, training local youth for recruitment in army and paramilitary forces, environmental protection and assisting the civil administration," he said.

The Governor commended the unit for effectively performing their operational role, maintaining extremely good relations with the civil administration and creating an excellent bonhomie in their area of deployment, the statement said.

He said that the local people have given good feedback about the battalion, it added. (PTI)

Ambulance, other agencies not to use sirens similar to police

IMPHAL, Jan 3: Manipur government, in an order passed on Wednesday, asked ambulances and any other agencies not to use sirens similar to those used by the police and other law enforcing agencies in terms of type and sounds.

The state home department issued the order keeping the prevailing law and order situation of the state and for effective maintenance of the law and order situation in the state.

The state government viewed the matter regarding the issue arising out of the use of sirens with similar sounds being used by ambulance and police and other law enforcing

agencies, creating lots of confusion and panicky situations among the general public.

Considering the sensitive nature of the use of the same sirens by different authorities and to avoid any kind of misunderstanding that may occur amongst the general public, all sirens fitted in the ambulances and any agency other than the police and law enforcing agencies should not be similar with those used by the latter, the order stated.

The state transport department will issue necessary orders in this regard too, the order of the home department signed by its commissioner T Ranjit Singh added. (NNN)



One more injured dies, toll rises to 5 in Thoubal

IMPHAL, Jan 3: One more person who was injured in firing by a banned organisation in Lilong Chingjao area in Manipur's Thoubal district died on Wednesday, taking the toll in the incident to five, officials of the hospital where he was admitted said.

The deceased was one of the 10 people who were injured in the firing by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) cadres on Monday night.

All of them were undergoing treatment in a private hospital in Imphal. Four others were gunned down on Monday.

The shooting was seen as the fallout of a dispute over money collected through illegal drug trade, government officials said.

The Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), the political wing of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), issued a statement claiming that the gunmen belonged to the outfit and they were holding an internal inquiry into the incident. Both organisations are banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. (PTI)

Noted educationist passes away in Imphal

IMPHAL, Jan 3: Noted educationist and doctor, K. Paochunbou Niumai was laid to rest in Imphal on Wednesday. He had passed away on Tuesday.

He resided with his family in Chingmeirong East in Imphal.

Niumai, who hailed from the Liangmai Naga tribe, was born in Konphung village of Tamenglong district in 1948. He is survived by his wife, two sons, six daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren. Paochunbou was a votary of giving importance to education and healthcare. He founded a number of education institutions and worked hard to uplift the standard of education and healthcare facilities in rural areas, especially in Tamei sub-division.

He was also a philanthropist, who established or helped found non-governmental organizations to support and help people who are downtrodden.

Paochunbou was a prolific author and his research focused on medicinal plants, tribal history, and innovative healthcare. His extensive publications, spanning medicinal guides to tribal history, reflect his commitment to holistic healthcare



and community development. Paochunbou was also the chairman of the Manipur chapter of the Peace Coalition of Northeast India (PCNI). He was also an expert member of the advisory committee, of the Composite Regional Centre at Guwahati during 2002-2007. He also served as vice president of Manipur Voluntary Health Association (MVHA) and president of All Manipur NGOs Forum,

Imphal (AMNF). He was also advisor of the All Manipur NGO Partners' Consortium on HIV/AIDS.

He was a member of the State Biodiversity Conservative Board of the Manipur forest department. He founded the Oriental Rural Development Organisation (ORDO). Paochunbou was also nominated as a member of the State Medicinal Plants Board. (NNN)

Meghalaya bags 2nd runner up position in ODOP Awards

State awarded for its effort in promoting One District One Product initiative

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 3: Meghalaya has achieved the second runner up position at the ODOP Awards, 2023. State chief minister Conrad Sangma made this announcement in a post on 'X' on Wednesday.

The state has bagged the award for its efforts in promoting the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative. The ODOP Awards, 2023 was organized by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade under the Union ministry of commerce and industry.

"Meghalaya was declared 2nd Runner Up in the ODOP Awards 2023 organised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. The award is in recognition for our state's efforts in promoting the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative," Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma said in a post on 'X'.

The ODOP is an initiative of the



central government to facilitate and promote balanced regional development across all districts of the country. It aims to select, brand, and promote one product from each district of the country to attract investment to enhance manufacturing and exports as well as generate employment opportu-

nities in the district. The initiative also aims at ensuring holistic socio-economic growth across all regions and providing an ecosystem for innovation and use of technology at the district level to make them competitive at the domestic and international market. Sangma also said that the state is

promoting its One District One Product initiative through mission mode programmes, unique brand creation, GI tagging and marketing initiatives, thus enabling the products produced in different districts to be globally competitive.

He also said that the award also reflects his government's commitment towards 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' or self-reliance through innovation, quality assurance and global collaborations.

"The award received by the State highlights the Government of Meghalaya's commitment towards Aatma Nirbhar Bharat by building agri value chains through innovation, quality assurance, and global collaborations enabling our unique produces to reach both domestic and international markets," the CM said on 'X'.

He also expressed his gratitude to the Union ministry of commerce and industry for their constant support and recognizing the efforts of the state.

অসম চৰকাৰ
নগাঁও জিলাৰ গৃহৰক্ষী বাহিনীৰ অধিনায়কৰ কাৰ্যালয়
নগাঁও

নং. এন এইছ ডি. ১৫/২০১৫-২৩/৫৬০

হিয়াৰ দ্বাৰাইনগাঁও, মলিগাঁও আৰু হোৱাইজিলাৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণ প্ৰাপ্ত সমূহ গৃহৰক্ষী জনোৱা হয় যে, সাহায্য ও শাৰীৰীক সক্ষমতাৰ পৰীক্ষাত অৱতীৰ্ণ হ'বৰ বাবে যি সকল গৃহৰক্ষীয়ে গৃহৰক্ষী কাৰ্যালয়ত আবেদন কৰিছিল সেই সকল গৃহৰক্ষীক অৱ ইং ১০/০১/২০২৪ জানুৱাৰী তাৰিখে পৰীক্ষা অৱশিষ্ট কৰা হ'ল। গতিকে সমূহ গৃহৰক্ষীক উক্ত পৰীক্ষাত নিৰ্দ্ধাৰিত তাৰিখত অৱতীৰ্ণ হ'বৰ বাবে জনোৱা হ'ল।

- ১। বুনিয়াদি গৃহৰক্ষী প্ৰশিক্ষণ প্ৰমাণ পত্ৰ (Original)।
- ২। স্কুল চাৰ্টিফিকেট বা জন্ম প্ৰমাণ পত্ৰ (Original)।
- ৩। ভোটাৰ পৰিচয় পত্ৰ, আধাৰ কাৰ্ড (Original)।

স্থানঃ- নগাঁও জিলা গৃহৰক্ষী বাহিনীৰ কাৰ্যালয়, আমনি।
সময়ঃ- পূবা ৭ বজাৰ পৰা।
তাৰিখঃ- ১০/০১/২০২৪ জনুৱাৰী।

স্বাক্ষৰ
জিলা অধিনায়ক
গৃহৰক্ষী বাহিনী, নগাঁও

Janasanyog /D/15764/23/4-Jan-24

অসম লোকসেৱা আয়োগ
ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022.

No. 76SPC/DR-21/4/2022-23

NOTIFICATION

It is for information to all concerned that the Assam Public Service Commission will hold the Interview/Viva-Voce for the post of Assistant Manager (Human Resource) in Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) (Advt. No.07/2023, dated 30th March/2023) as per programme given below at its office at Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22. The detailed programme for the Interview/Viva-Voce is given below:

Sl. No	Name of the Post & Department	Date of Interview/ Viva - Voce	Reporting Time
1	Assistant Manager (Human Resource) in Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL)	10 th January, 2024	9:00 AM

Kindly note that the candidates appearing the interview/viva-voce must bring the following testimonials in original alongwith self attested photocopies in chronological order, thereof for verification/scrutiny on the day of the interview:

- H.S.L.C Admit/Pass Certificate as a proof of age.
- H.S.L.C Marksheet and Pass Certificate.
- H.S.L.C Marksheet and Pass Certificate
- Degree Marksheet and Pass Certificate (if applicable)
- MBA/PGDM Degree Marksheet (All Semester) and Pass Certificate.
- CGPA Conversion Formula of the respective universities
- Permanent Residential Certificate/Employment Exchange Registration/Voter ID.
- State Government Employees of Assam must submit No Objection Certificate from their respective employer or Permanent Residential Certificate/Employment Exchange Registration/Voter ID as domicile proof.
- Caste/PwBD certificate/BPL Card (if applicable).
- Declaration Form A ("May be downloaded from APSC's website")
- Any other documents that may be relevant for their candidature.

No intimation letter to the eligible candidates shall be sent separately by post. The intimation letters shall be uploaded on 06-01-2024 in the APSC's website (www.apsc.nic.in). The candidates shall have to download their own intimation letter from the aforesaid website.

Sd/-
Under Secretary,
Assam Public Service Commission
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22

Janasanyog /D/15773/23/4-Jan-24

SC declines SIT or CBI probe into stock price manipulation allegations against Adani group

SEBI investigation inspires confidence

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: In a significant win for the Adani Group, the Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to transfer the probe into allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian corporate giant to a special investigation team or the CBI, saying market regulator SEBI was conducting a "comprehensive investigation" and its conduct "inspires confidence".

Holding that the power of the court to enter the regulatory domain of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in framing delegated legislation was limited, the apex court directed the market regulator to complete the two pending investigations expeditiously, preferably within three months. The term delegated legislation or secondary legislation refers to laws made by individuals or bodies authorised by the legislature to create detailed regulations under a specific Act of Parliament.

A bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said reliance placed by the petitioners on newspaper articles or reports by third-party organisations like Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting

Project (OCCRP) to question a comprehensive investigation by a specialised regulator does not inspire confidence. The bench, also comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, noted that SEBI has completed 22 out of the 24 investigations into allegations levelled against the Adani Group.

Reacting to the verdict, billionaire entrepreneur Gautam Adani said truth has prevailed and his group will continue to contribute to India's growth story.

"The Hon'ble Supreme Court's judgement shows that: Truth has prevailed. Satyameva Jayate," Adani said in a post on X. "I am grateful to those who stood by us," he added. In its 46-page judgement, the bench said, "The facts of this case do not warrant a transfer of investigation from SEBI. In an appropriate case, this court does have the power to transfer an investigation being carried out by the authorised agency to an SIT or CBI."

"Such a power is exercised in extraordinary circumstances when the competent authority portrays a glaring, wilful and deliberate inaction in carrying out the investiga-



tion. The threshold for the transfer of investigation has not been demonstrated to exist," the verdict penned by the CJI said.

The apex court delivered its verdict on a batch of petitions on the Adani-Hindenburg Research row over allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian business conglomerate.

The Supreme Court said the SEBI's status report and the details of the 24 investigations do not indicate inaction by the market regulator.

"In fact, to the contrary, the course of conduct by SEBI inspires confidence that SEBI is conducting a comprehensive investigation," the bench said. It said the allegations of conflict of interest levelled against some members of the court-appointed expert committee are "unsubstantiated and are rejected".

"SEBI and the investigative agencies of the Union government shall probe into whether the loss suffered by Indian investors due to the conduct of Hindenburg Re-

search and any other entities in taking short positions involved any infringement of the law and if so, suitable action shall be taken," the bench said.

It said the court must refrain from substituting its own wisdom for the regulatory policies of SEBI and the scope of judicial review, when examining a policy framed by a specialised regulator, is to scrutinise whether it violates fundamental rights, any provision of the Constitution, any statutory provision or is manifestly arbitrary.

"No valid grounds have been raised for this court to direct SEBI to revoke its amendments to the FPI (Foreign Portfolio Investors) regulations and the LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) regulations which were made in exercise of its delegated legislative power," it said.

"The procedure followed in arriving at the current shape of the regulations does not suffer from irregularity or illegality. The FPI regulations and LODR regulations have been tightened by the amendments in question," the bench said. (PTI)

Discussions started on next meeting of INDIA bloc: Tejashwi

PATNA, Jan 3: Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav on Wednesday said that discussions were on among leaders of the INDIA bloc on the next meeting of the coalition, where some key decisions were expected.

Yadav was approached with queries here by journalists who wanted his take on reports in a section of the media that a meeting was likely to be held in the virtual mode.

The young RJD leader, who along with his father and party president Lalu Prasad, has been present at all meetings of the newly-formed coalition held so far, said, "There are discussions with regard to the date and the modalities. It will be made known to all when a headway is made."

One of the key decisions expected at the meeting is defining the role of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) president, who had junked the BJP around two years ago vowing to defeat the NDA in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls by bringing the opposition together.

The longest-serving chief minister of Bihar has been maintaining that he was past all "personal ambitions", though his detractors claim that he had felt slighted when, at the last meeting of the INDIA bloc in Delhi on December 19, a couple of leaders proposed that the octogenarian Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge be declared the Prime Ministerial candidate.

Kumar later told reporters that he had no objections to the proposal regarding Kharge, who, however, backed down saying such a decision should be put on hold and the focus should be on winning enough seats to form the next government.

Kumar, who is in his early 70s, took over as the national president of the JD(U) a week after the INDIA meet, in an indication that he would be approaching the Lok Sabha polls with a lot of fire in his belly.

Riding high on the prospects of a "second Mandal wave", following the caste survey conducted by his government and the subsequent hike in quotas for the deprived social groups, Kumar seems intent on replicating the experiment nationally by pressing the demand for a country-wide caste census.

To this end, he is likely to address a rally in adjoining Jharkhand, which was carved out of Bihar in 2000, in his first public outreach outside his own state in recent times.

In the last couple of days, there has been a strong buzz that the INDIA coalition may agree to make Kumar the 'convener' and settle for the designation of 'chairman' for Kharge.

Kumar, who insists that he considers a formal designation a trifle, however, has been vocal in his criticism of the pace at which things were progressing in the opposition coalition and stressing the need for finalising seat-sharing arrangements "at the earliest, without wasting much time".

Meanwhile, the BJP which has an axe to grind against Kumar who stripped it of power in August 2022, claimed that the JD(U) leader was being taken for a ride. BJP OBC Morcha national spokesperson Nikhil Anand said in a statement: "By making him the convener, the RJD, with the help of old ally Congress, is plotting to compel Nitish Kumar to give up the chief minister's chair and make way for Tejashwi". (PTI)

Jaishankar holds 'useful' conversation with Ukrainian counterpart Kuleba

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: External affairs minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday held a "useful" conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba focusing on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Kyiv's peace formula and ways to advance bilateral ties.

The phone conversation came days after Jaishankar paid a five-day visit to Russia during which he held extensive talks with foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and called on President Vladimir Putin.

"A useful conversation with FM @DmytroKuleba of Ukraine today. Discussed advancing our bilateral cooperation in the year ahead. Exchanged views on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine," the external affairs minister said on X. On his part, Kuleba said he conveyed to his Indian counterpart the "peace formula" and Ukraine's plan for the 'Global Peace Summit' of leaders.

"My first call in 2024 was with @DrSJaishankar on Ukrainian-Indian relations. I informed my counterpart of Russia's recent escalation of terror and mass air attacks, which caused civilian suffering and destruction," he said in a post on X.

"We discussed further cooperation on the Peace Formula. In this regard, I informed my counterpart of Ukraine's vision for the Global

Peace Summit of leaders," he said.

"We agreed to hold the first meeting of the India-Ukraine Inter-Governmental Commission since 2018 in the near future," Kuleba said.

He added that the "rejuvenation of this primary mechanism of our bilateral ties will allow us to jointly move forward in a comprehensive manner."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy put forward a 10-point "peace plan" for ending the conflict that included punishing those responsible for the war crimes, withdrawing all Russian troops from Ukraine, and restoring his country's territorial integrity. Under the plan, he also called for ensuring energy security, food security, and nuclear safety.

India has been maintaining that the Ukraine crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue.

At a bilateral meeting with Putin on September 16, 2022 in the Uzbek city of Samarkand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Today's era is not of war" and nudged the Russian leader to end the conflict.

In May last year, Modi held in-person talks with Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Hiroshima.

Jaishankar visited Russia from December 25 to 29. (PTI)

Truck drivers coming back to work, normalcy would return in a day or two: AIMTC



NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Truck drivers, who went on strike to protest against the new stringent law on hit-and-run cases, have started coming back to work and normalcy will return in a day or two, truckers' body All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) said on Wednesday.

AIMTC on Tuesday appealed to protesting truck drivers to end their strike after the government assurance that the decision to invoke stringent jail and fine provisions

for hit-and-run cases under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) will be taken after consultation with the truckers' body.

Representatives of AIMTC met Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Tuesday to raise the issue of stringent provisions for hit-and-run cases.

"We had not given any strike call...striking drivers are coming back to work and normal operations would be restored in one or two days," AIMTC general secre-

tary N K Gupta told PTI.

Gupta said the strike by truck drivers in some places was a spontaneous reaction to the new laws and "the drivers need not worry now and should join the work and contribute to the growth of the economy".

Some truck, bus and tanker operators had begun a three-day strike on Monday in several states to protest against the "stringent punishments" provisions.

Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, set to replace the Indian Penal Code, drivers who cause serious road accidents due to negligent driving and run away without informing authorities face up to 10 years in prison or a fine of ₹ 7 lakh.

The punishment in such cases was two years in the British-era Indian Penal Code (IPC).

On Tuesday, long queues of motorists were witnessed at many places in Punjab and a few parts of Haryana over fears that stocks would run dry soon in the wake of truckers' strike. The situation was normalising at petrol pumps on Wednesday in Punjab where fuel supplies were being replenished with fresh stocks. (PTI)

PM receives enthusiastic welcome at BJP-organised women's convention

THRISSUR (KER), Jan 3: Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a warm and enthusiastic welcome as he arrived in the central Kerala city on Wednesday to attend a BJP-organised women's convention.

Thousands of people, including fervent BJP supporters, lined both sides of his nearly two-kilometre roadshow from the General Hospital junction to the venue, creating a vibrant atmosphere.

The Prime Minister, who reached Kochi international airport after launching various projects in Lakshadweep, arrived at the helipad at Kuttanalore in a helicopter. From there, his cavalcade travelled to District Hospital Junction at Thrissur, where he commenced a roadshow. Starting at 3.40 pm, the roadshow featured the Prime Minister in an open vehicle, waving both hands to the crowd lining the road. People, especially youngsters, crowded terraces and balconies of multi-storey buildings to catch a glimpse of Modi and wave to him.

Modi, adorned in a traditional Kerala shawl, greeted the crowd on both sides of the road from the open vehicle.

Accompanying him in the decorated open jeep were BJP state President K Surendran, actor-turned-BJP leader Suresh Gopi, and state Mahila Morcha President Niveditha Subrahmanian.

As the Prime Minister arrived, party workers welcomed him by showering him with flowers and greeting him with thunderous slogans. Modi reciprocated by waving back at the people with a wide smile. (PTI)

Sometimes one ends up in exile while waiting for coronation: Ex-MP CM Chouhan

BHOPAL, Jan 3: Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said sometimes one ends up in "vanvas" while waiting for "rajtilak" (coronation).

After the BJP's landslide victory in the Madhya Pradesh assembly polls held in November 2023, the party chose Mohan Yadav as the chief minister, replacing Chouhan who served as the state's CM for four times.

Chouhan, while addressing a gathering in Shahganj town under his Budhni assembly seat on Tuesday evening, got emotionally and said he will continue to be among the people, especially his sisters.

"I will not go anywhere. I will live here and die here," Chouhan said when a

couple of women sitting in the audience shouted "bhaiyya (brother), don't go anywhere leaving us alone."

The former chief minister said all the works started by the previous BJP government, including the Ladi Behna Yojana (for women's welfare), housing scheme for beneficiaries of the Ladi Behna scheme, a scheme of one job in each family and promises made to farmers, will be fulfilled by the present government.

"The new government will take forward all these works. There must be some big objective somewhere, sometimes by the time 'rajtilak' takes place, one even ends up in 'vanvas' (exile). But all this happens to fulfil some or the other objective," Chouhan told the gathering.

He said the present ruling dispensation will implement all these schemes as there is BJP's government in the state and not of the Congress.

The former CM also noted that children who were among the audience had come to show their love for "mama" (maternal uncle - as Chouhan is popularly referred). Earlier, a large number of BJP workers and women welcomed Chouhan on his arrival in Shahganj.

Chouhan won the election from Budhni assembly seat by a margin of more than 1.04 lakh votes over his Congress rival Vikram Mastal.

In the November 2023 state elections, the BJP bagged 163 of the 230 assembly seats, posting a resounding victory and retaining power in the central state. (PTI)

Kejriwal skips ED summons; BJP accuses Delhi CM of lacking faith in administrative, judicial system

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: The BJP on Wednesday accused Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of not having faith in the country's administrative and judicial system after the AAP leader skipped a third ED summons in connection with an excise policy-linked money laundering case. Kejriwal on Wednesday skipped for the third time the summons issued by the Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi excise policy case. The AAP alleged that the repeated notices were part of a conspiracy to arrest him and stop him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls.

Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh -- like Kejriwal -- also used to call ED notices wrong but had to appear before the agency. Today, despite efforts, let alone getting bail, they are getting reprimanded in every court, said Virendra Sachdeva, the BJP's Delhi unit chief.

"The way Kejriwal is avoiding the ED sum-

mons clearly shows that he does not have faith in the administrative and judicial system of the country and, after that, the question arises whether he has any moral ground left to remain the chief minister," he alleged. If Kejriwal finds the ED notices wrong, he should go to the courts but he will not do that, the BJP leader claimed. "He knows that his case is a clear case of corruption and it is almost impossible to get relief from the courts," Sachdeva said.

The BJP leader said Kejriwal should explain how the notice served to him in the same case on the basis of which Sisodia and Singh are in jail can be legally wrong. Kejriwal earlier skipped the ED's summonses for November 2 and December 21, calling those "illegal" and "politically motivated". On Wednesday, he sent a written reply to the agency, calling the notice illegal. (PTI)

Karnataka CM lashes at BJP leaders over protest against arrest of Hindu activist

BENGALURU, Jan 3: Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday lashed out at the BJP over its protest against the arrest of a Hindu activist in Hubballi in connection with a 31-year-old case related to Ram temple agitation, saying leaders of the opposition party need to understand that assigning caste and religious labels to criminals is extremely dangerous.

He recalled that even when the BJP government was in power in the state, the Lokayukta police had arrested the then Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and sent him to jail.

"Is that Hubballi criminal suspect any greater Hindu or devotee of Rama than Yediyurappa? So, was the government at that time anti-Hindu? Not even the leaders of the BJP's parent organisation called the government that arrested Hindu Yediyurappa anti-Hindu, did they? Why this outcry now?", Siddaramaiah said.

"The Congress government is becoming more popular day by day. Out of desperation, BJP leaders are rallying around a criminal suspect", the chief minister said.

Siddaramaiah said it should not have come to a point where a national party has to defend a criminal suspect.

"If any BJP leaders have a little wisdom, they should please read out the list of charges against this person from Hubballi and then decide whether to fight for him. Since Hindus are the majority in the population, they are also the majority in prisons. Does that mean BJP should fight for all of them because they belong to the Hindu religion?", he asked.

The increase in criminal activities in the state is due to the BJP's illegal actions and their tendency to colour crime and criminals with caste and religion, the chief minister alleged. (PTI)

PM reaches out to Muslim-dominated Lakshadweep, says it is small in size, big in heart

KAVARATTI, Jan 3: Reaching out to the people of the Muslim-dominated Lakshadweep, which witnessed massive protests by opposition parties against reforms introduced by his government, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the archipelago is small, but its heart is large.

The Prime Minister was here to inaugurate and lay the foundation for various projects worth ₹ 1,150 crore in the Union Territory.

The development projects cover technology, energy, water resources, healthcare and education sectors.

The projects were launched at a function attended by hundreds of islanders including women and children whom Modi referred to as his "kudumbangal" (family members) in Malayalam.

Kavaratti to meet the citizens.

"Even though the geographical area of Lakshadweep is small, the hearts of the people are as deep as the ocean. I am overwhelmed by the love and blessings I am receiving here. I express my gratitude to you all," said Modi, who reached the islands on Tuesday.

He announced the development of a special plan for Lakshadweep under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, focusing on its unique attractions.

Emphasising its potential, he highlighted two blue-flag beaches and upcoming water villa projects on Kadmat and Suheli islands.

Lakshadweep is emerging as a top cruise tourism destination, experiencing a five-fold increase in tourist visits compared to five years ago, he said.



assuring that its beauty surpasses many global destinations.

"Once you witness the beauty of Lakshadweep, other destinations in the world will pale before it," he said. The Prime Minister mentioned steps taken for Haj Yatris that have benefited the people of Lakshadweep too.

He noted the ease for Hajji visa and digitalisation of the visa process and permission for women to go on Haj without 'Mehram'.

These efforts have led to a significant rise in the number of Indians going for 'Umrah', he added. The Prime Minister assured the people of Lakshadweep that the Central government remains committed to enhancing their quality of life, travel convenience and business opportunities. At the function, Modi handed over laptops to students under the Laptop Scheme and gave away bicycles to school students under 'Beti Bachao Beti

Padhao'.

He also handed out PM Kisan Credit Cards to farmers and fishermen. During his address, Modi took a dig at the previous non-BJP governments at the Centre, stating that their only priority for decades was the development of their own political parties.

"Far-off states, border areas, or those in the middle of the ocean were not given any attention...In the last 10 years, our government has made border areas and locations at the edge of the sea its priority," he said.

He assured the islanders that those who tried to snatch away their rights would not be spared.

The islands had witnessed massive protests by opposition parties against various reforms introduced by the island administration in various sectors, including education. Talking about the steps taken for the development of the Union Territory, he informed about achieving saturation of PM Awas Yojna

(Gramin), ensuring free ration for every beneficiary, distributing PM Kisan Credit Cards and Ayushman Cards, and developing Ayushman Arogya Mandir Health and Wellness Centre.

He recalled the guarantee given by him in 2020 about ensuring fast internet within 1,000 days.

"In 2020, I gave a guarantee that you will get a fast internet facility within the next 1,000 days. Today, the Kochi-Lakshadweep Submarine Optical Fibre Project has been inaugurated. Now, internet in Lakshadweep will be available at 100 times higher speed," the PM said. Modi had announced the project in his Independence Day speech in August 2020. The project will improve facilities like government services, medical treatment, education and digital banking, he said, adding the potential of developing Lakshadweep as a logistics hub will get strength from this. (PTI)

Fulfilled vow on women empowerment with reservation bill, says PM Modi; targets Left, Congress

THRISSUR (KERALA), Jan 3: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday lashed out at the Congress and Left parties, alleging that they had delayed the Women's Reservation Bill, whereas the BJP had ensured the passage of the quota legislation that would empower women.

In a fiery speech at a women's convention organised by the BJP in central Kerala, Modi also launched a scathing attack on the INDIA alliance, alleging that it is impeding the growth and progress of the state.

With the Lok Sabha elections round the corner, he confidently declared that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would emerge victorious in Kerala.

The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam has now become law, the PM said, emphasising that he has fulfilled his commitment to the cause of women empowerment.

"Regrettably, after independence, the Leftist Congress government undermined the strength of our women," the PM alleged.

"The Congress and other parties delayed the reservation bill in the Lok Sabha. However, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam has now become law. Modi has fulfilled his commitment," he said.

Asserting that the progress of the poor, women, youth and farmers will ensure national growth, he also said there is a buzz around "Modi's guarantee", apparently referring to the Centre's developmental initiatives.



The Prime Minister also said he guaranteed freedom from triple talaq for Muslim women and fulfilled it honestly.

Speaking about the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Modi said that Kerala recognises the BJP as the party capable of amplifying its development, dismissing the support that the Left parties and Congress-led alliances could garner.

He accused the INDIA Alliance of hindering the state's growth, attributing India's overall dynamic development to the alliance's alleged dislike for him.

"BJP will defeat the INDIA Alliance in Kerala," Modi said, underscoring the party's commitment to overcoming the perceived obstacles posed by the alliance.

The Prime Minister insisted that the state's advancement hinges on aligning with the BJP, urging the

community of BJP's commitment to their welfare.

Highlighting various schemes for women introduced by the Central government, Modi confidently declared that the BJP would open its "account" in Kerala in the general elections this year.

He criticised the UDF and LDF, alleging that despite their apparent differences, they function as a single entity and are "partners in corruption".

He also touched upon contentious issues, such as the controversies surrounding the Thiruvananthapuram and the alleged mismanagement of the Sabarimala pilgrim season by the LDF government.

Modi accused the state government of avoiding accountability with regard to the use of funds allocated by the central government, hinting at the allegations of financial sanctions against Kerala.

"The people of Kerala now know that only the BJP-led NDA can bring development to the state," Modi said.

Amid ongoing tensions between international sports figures from India, such as the champion wrestlers, and the Central government, Modi strategically positioned himself between two prominent sports personalities, former Indian Athlete and BJP MPPT Usha and Indian Women's Cricket Team captain C Minnu Mani.

Modi expressed confidence that the 'Modi Guarantee' would contribute to the growth of young sports persons in the country. (PTI)

He reassured the Christian com-

electorate to choose development over what he portrayed as a hindrance to progress.

Addressing the massive gathering at the 'Women Power with Modi' event, the PM expressed optimism that the winds of change from Thiruvananthapuram would sweep across Kerala, bringing about a transformation.

Modi, the key campaigner for the BJP in the upcoming parliamentary elections, reiterated his commitment to working the 'Modi Magic' and emphasised the 'Modi Guarantee'.

In Thiruvananthapuram, actor-MP Suresh Gopi is a leading candidate for the BJP, given the significant Christian voter base of over 30 per cent, which the party has been wooing in recent times.

He reassured the Christian com-

Senior diplomat Jaiswal assumes charge as MEA spokesperson

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Senior diplomat Randhir Jaiswal on Wednesday assumed charge as the new spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) succeeding Arindam Bagchi.

Bagchi has been appointed India's permanent representative to the United Nations (UN) and other international organisations in Geneva.

Jaiswal, a 1998 batch Indian Foreign Service officer, was serving as India's consul general in New York in his previous posting.

In his over two decades of service, Jaiswal served in Cuba, South Africa, Portugal and at India's permanent mission to the UN in New York.

He also served as a joint secretary at the MEA's headquarters in New Delhi looking after India's relations with countries in western Europe.

"The baton passes on! Shri Randhir Jaiswal assumes charge as the Official Spokesperson of @MEAIndia as Shri Arindam Bagchi proceeds on overseas assignment," a post on X by MEA spokesperson said. (PTI)

Manual scavenging: HC pulls up Guj govt over non-payment of compensation to 16 dead workers' kin

AHMEDABAD, Jan 3: The Gujarat High Court on Wednesday pulled up the state government over the non-payment of compensation to the kin of 16 sanitation workers who died during manual scavenging between 1993 and 2014 and directed it to explain the reason in an affidavit.

The court of Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal and Justice Aniruddha P Mayee also wanted to know from the state what steps it has taken to adopt the 2013 anti-manual scavenging law, and whether the government was in a position to do away with the practice or still taking the help of sanitation workers for it. The court was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Ahmedabad-based NGO Manav Garima, seeking the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

When the petitioner's lawyer informed the court that the family members of 16 deceased manual scavengers were yet to be paid the compensation as per the Supreme Court guidelines, the court pulled up the government and said the latter could not go on making payments to some and leaving out the others. It directed the principal secretary of the urban development and urban housing department to file his personal affidavit to bring

on record the reasons for non-payment of compensation to the families of the 16 workers whose names were included in the list of deceased submitted by the petitioner.

The court also took note of another recent incident of manual scavenging in Bhavnagar city where a sanitation worker of the civic body died of asphyxiation while another suffered serious injuries after entering a sewage tank on the campus of the Central Salt and Marine Chemicals Research Institute (CSMCRI) on November 10, 2023. It permitted the petitioner to implead the civic body as a respondent with a direction for it to file an affidavit to bring on record details concerning the incident. The court also directed the principal secretary to submit a report regarding the same.

"This is a hide and seek, let us be clear about this. If the list (of victims) was there...you have to give at least this much explanation as to why you have not paid them, reason has to be there," the Chief Justice observed.

"What steps have you taken to adopt the zero manual scavenging policy...have you got the requisite machines, are you in a position to do away with manual scavenging, or are you still taking help of these people...we want a clear answer," she asked. In a civil application

filed in April last year in connection with a 2016 PIL, the petitioner claimed that the government had failed to implement the provisions of the 2013 law that prohibits manual scavenging and sought its direction for its proper implementation.

The high court had in 2016 directed the government to pay Rs 10 lakh compensation to the families of each of the deceased manhole workers on the PIL by the NGO. The Supreme Court had in its order in October 2023 raised the compensation amount to Rs 30 lakh in case of deaths and disabilities due to manual scavenging.

When the NGO moved the plea in April 2023, families of 26 out of 152 manhole workers who died between 1993 and 2014, and 16 workers who died after the filing of the main petition in 2016, were not paid compensation by the government, it claimed.

In the meanwhile, the government paid compensation to some but left out 16 which was brought to the notice of the court on Wednesday.

Despite section 7 of the 2013 Act prohibiting local authorities or their agencies to engage people for hazardous cleaning of sewer in underground drainage lines or septic tanks, they have continued to do so, causing several deaths, the petitioner said. (PTI)

India registered 9.3 lakh cancer deaths, second highest in Asia: Lancet Study

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: India registered about 12 lakh new cancer cases and 9.3 lakh deaths in 2019, becoming the second highest contributor to the disease burden in Asia for that year, according to a new study published in The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia journal.

Researchers found that India, along with China and Japan, were the three leading countries in Asia in terms of number of new cancer cases and deaths, where they say cancer has become a more significant public health threat with 94 lakh new cases and 56 lakh deaths in 2019.

Of these, while China contributed the most with 48 lakh new cases and 27 lakh deaths, Japan recorded about 9 lakh new cases and 4.4 lakh deaths, the international team of researchers including those from the National Institute of Technology Kurukshetra and All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Jodhpur and Bathinda, said.

"We examined the temporal patterns of 29 cancers in 49 Asian countries between 1990 and 2019 using estimates from the Global Burden of Disease, Injuries and Risk Factors 2019 Study (GBD 2019)," they wrote in their study.

They found that in Asia, the leading cancer was that of tracheal, bronchus, and lung (TBL), resulting in an estimated 13 lakh cases and 12 lakh deaths. It was also



found to be most frequent in men and third most frequent in women.

Specifically among women, cervical cancer is ranked second or among top-5 cancers in several Asian countries. The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, introduced in 2006, has proved to be effective in preventing the disease and reducing HPV-related deaths, the researchers said.

Overall, in the continent and individual countries, TBL, breast, colon and rectum cancer (CRC), stomach and non-melanoma skin cancer were among the top five most frequent cancers in 2019 with few countries having leukemia, prostate, liver and pancreatic cancers in the list, they said in their study.

Further, smoking, alcohol consumption and ambient particulate matter (PM) pollution remained dominant among the 34 risk factors for cancer, they said.

"The rising cancer burden due to

increasing ambient air pollution is concerning in Asia," they wrote.

Five of the top 10 countries with regards to population-weighted annual average of PM2.5 in 2019 are present in Asia - India, Nepal, Qatar, Bangladesh and Pakistan, they said quoting the State of Global Air Report, produced annually in collaboration with the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's (IHME's) GBD project.

The researchers said that the primary reasons for increasing air pollution in Asia were industry-led economic growth along with urbanisation, rural-to-urban migration and increasing usage of motor vehicles.

They also said that a high prevalence of smokeless tobacco (SMT) such as khaini, gutka, betel quid and paan masala is a public health concern in South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, with India alone accounting for 32.9 per cent of global deaths and 28.1 per cent of new cases of lip and oral cavity cancer in 2019.

"More than 50 per cent of the oral cancer burden has been attributed to smokeless tobacco, whose prevalence has grown in recent times in South Asia, including India," the team wrote.

SMT not only increases the risk of oral cancers but also enhances the risk of esophageal and pancreatic cancer, they said.

They wrote that improved water

and sanitation can help reduce the transmission of *Helicobacter pylori* (H. pylori) and, in turn, potentially lower the risk of stomach cancer.

The researchers wrote that as countries underwent development, they observed a common pattern of reducing cancer burden in younger age groups and increasing cancer burden associated with increasing life expectancy.

They found a reduced burden of cancers such as leukemia among those under 5 years of age between 1990 and 2019.

Simultaneously, they found a raised burden of cancers associated with longer lifespans such as prostate, pancreatic and breast cancer over the same time period.

"More availability of screening might not improve the survival rates if cancer treatments are either unavailable or unaffordable," the team wrote.

In the low- and medium-income countries (LMICs) of Asia, oncologic infrastructure is either scarce or unaffordable, particularly in rural areas. Combined with a weak referral system, patients end up getting delayed diagnosis and treatment, leading to lower survival rates, the researchers said.

Therefore, along with timely availability of cancer screening and treatment, its cost-effectiveness or coverage of treatment expenses must also be a policy priority, they said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

12 killed in bus-truck

superintendent of Police Rajen Singh said. The impact of the collision was so powerful that the bus landed a few metres away, with its right portion shattered to pieces. When contacted, Transport Commissioner Ankur Jain said he along with a team are on the way to Golaghat, and they will start their investigation as soon as they reach. "We will find out the fault so that such an incident never occurs again," he said. The stretch of the highway where the accident took place has been cleared for normal vehicular movement, an official added. (With inputs from PTI)

Over ₹ 10,300 crore

OLX related crimes to trick the victims. Gangs operating from Jharkhand, etc. are using KYC expiry, Android banking Malware-type online scams to siphon off money from gullible individuals.

He said other major cyber crimes are duping people of their money using investment applications and websites offering part-time jobs and Ponzi schemes, illegal lending applications and customer care centres. There were also cases of Android malware fraud by seeking OTPs to take control of victims' systems, impersonation by taking over social media accounts and sextortion. Listing recent successes against cyber criminals, Kumar said the Indian agency managed to thwart a major cyber attack targeting the G-20 website. Every minute 66 lakh hits were made using bots through a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack to disable it with hits.

Another success was when Indian agencies managed to bring back citizens from Myanmar, where they were taken in the lure of employment opportunities and held back against their will to commit cyber frauds across the globe, he said. Recently, a new software, 'Pratibimb', has been made accessible to state police forces on a project level that will enable them to locate cybercriminals operating in their area.

The use of this software, coupled with quick reaction, has seen a massive reduction in cyber criminals operating from Jharkhand's Deoghar and Jamtara areas. "The software gives the location of origin of the call, jurisdictional police officer takes action on that along with this information about the point of sale of SIM.

"Police officers in Jamtara and Deoghar are taking action on such information, which has resulted in 454 arrests last month," Kumar said. (PTI)

Heroin worth over

Diphu-Manja road. The operation was carried out under the supervision of key officials, including superintendent of police (SP), Karbi Anglong, Sanjib Kumar Saikia; ADC, Chandan Burghain; 20 Bn CRPF commandants, Swarn Singh; additional SP (Crime), Nayanmoni Burman, and others. (With inputs from PTI)

KYF organiser juggles

chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is a visionary leader. "Under their leadership, more development will be implemented in Dima Hasao," he added. Candidate Noah Daime, president of the BJP Local Committee Henagaing Newme, secretary of the BJP NC Hills District Committee Robert Riame, along with Sarkari Goan Buras and Goan Buras, participated in the election meeting. It's worth mentioning that the chief executive member (CEM) of KAAC, along with EMS, MACs, and MLA Darsing Ronghang, are camping in Umrangso to seek votes for BJP candidate Samsing Engti from the Garampani MDC constituency. In last month December, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) had announced the names of all their 28 candidates for the forthcoming Members of Autonomous Council (MAC) election to the 13 NC Hills Autonomous Council, scheduled for January 8, 2024. According to an official statement, the selection was done by the committee formed by the BJP. The declaration was made formally in the office of the BJP Assam Pradesh on Tuesday. In this election, a few new candidates were included, such as Mohet Hojai, Niranjan Hojai, Rupali Langthasa, S T Jem Hrangkhoh, and Namrang Jeme.

"Apart from this, several new faces were seen in constituencies like Mahur, Langting, Dautuhaja, Maibang (E), and Maibang (W). In the prestigious Haflong constituency, where the BJP has never won an election so far, the saffron party has chosen the present president of BJP Dima Hasao," the statement added.

On the other hand, Congress also released a list of its party candidates for the said election. Earlier, the election commissioner, Alok Kumar, had said that due to the unavailability of electronic voting machines (EVMs), the election would employ traditional ballot papers. He further informed that the deadline for filing nominations in all 28 constituencies is December 21, with application scrutiny slated for the following day.

The total voters count in Dima Hasao district's constituencies is 1,41,124, with 70,485 men and 70,639 women, he said. "Withdrawal of candidature can be done until December 22, and the final list of candidates will be published on the same day. Polling hours are set from 8 am to 4 pm on January 8, while the counting of votes will take place on January 12. In the event of re-polling requirements, it is scheduled for January 10," Kumar added.

Tiger, bison sighted

jointly laid camera traps across high-altitude regions of Sikkim to understand the impact of climate change on large mammals, officials said. It is the third sighting of a tiger in Sikkim in recent years. While one was seen in North Sikkim at an altitude of 3602 metres in 2019, another was sighted in 2023 from Pangolokha Wildlife Sanctuary at 3640 metres. The highest altitude recorded for tigers in the world is in Bhutan at 4,400 metres above sea level. The gaur or Indian bison was captured by camera traps at an elevation of 3568 metres in Pangolokha Wildlife Sanctuary, the officials added. Gaur is the world's largest cattle species and is endemic to south and southeastern Asia, and most of its population is in India. The animal plays an important role in the food chain being an important prey for large carnivores such as tigers, common leopards, and Asiatic wild dogs. Other animals photographed via camera traps include Sambar deer, Dhole or wild dog, Himalayan Black Bear, Musk Deer, Serow (a goat-like animal), Mithun (a cattle) and Goral (another goat-like mammal). (PTI)

Migrant workers day

to big cities, and from Satgaon Parish alone, there are over 2600 migrant workers who are Catholic believers. Later, a Holy Mass was held, followed by a fellowship meal. The program was attended by Fr Albert Thyriang, Fr Justin, Fr Charles Sangma, Sister Mary Hasda (Headteacher of Satgaon ME School), Nitendra Cheran, and others.

Be it Kejriwal or Soren,

told reporters at a press conference at the party headquarters. The BJP leader said it would have never happened in the history of independent India that someone "ordered" a probe agency to withdraw its summons.

"But a corrupt and sinister Arvind Kejriwal tells ED to withdraw its summons. Arvind Kejriwal, you are not above the law," he charged, saying it is the right of the probe agencies to take action against corruption "as per evidence". Bhatia contended that if Kejriwal felt that the ED had issued summons to him out of any alleged "political vendetta", he should have approached the court seeking relief.

"Why didn't he approach court so far if the ED's summonses are politically motivated? He is not able to muster the courage (to approach court) because he knows the truth that he is the kingpin of the liquor scam," Bhatia further said. Former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, arrested in connection with the case earlier, were just his "puppets", he said. Kejriwal, who once used to talk about eradicating corruption in India, has himself become a "corrupt termites" in politics, and he has a misconception that he is above the law, Bhatia alleged. "Arvind Kejriwal, you have mastered the art of deceit, corruption and propaganda and this has become synonymous with you," he charged. On AAP's allegation that the BJP-led Centre is hatching a conspiracy to arrest Kejriwal to stop him from campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls, Bhatia said probe agencies are "honestly biting corrupts like eagles, seeking from them details of people's hard-earned money". "If you have not done any dishonesty, what is there to be scared of... Kejriwal should have appeared before the ED and answered its questions," the BJP leader said, asking the AAP national convenor to "let the truth come out". Bhatia also targeted the INDIA bloc of opposition parties, questioning their "silence" on the issue of corruption, and slammed Soren, whose party Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) is one of the constituents of the opposition alliance, for skipping the ED's summons. "Hemant Soren evading the summons clearly reveals the same mindset that I have just discussed in the case of Arvind Kejriwal that first you loot, indulge in corruption and then when questions are asked and you are made accountable for your misdeeds and corruption, you evade the summons," the BJP leader said. Referring to media reports claiming that Soren plans to step down as Jharkhand chief minister and install his wife Kalpana Soren as his successor in view of his "imminent arrest", Bhatia said, "They (JMM) are preparing for the consequences of an arrest that could be made by the investigative agency as it comes under its domain. "But who have they selected (to replace Soren)? It's again someone from his own family. All this is media speculation but it reveals the dynastic mindset (of the JMM leadership)," the BJP spokesperson said. "The BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have always said that INDI alliance is synonymous with corruption. Their leaders are either in jail or on bail. And it is so because an honest government has given a free hand to the probe agencies so that they are not scared of anyone," Bhatia said. "I would only say with full confidence that no corrupt (person) is above the law and no corrupt (person) will survive," he said. Those who have committed corruption will be in jail no matter how many excuses they make. Their right place is behind bars, the BJP spokesperson said. (PTI)

Chandubi Festival marks

Kamrup District ARSU. It is worth mentioning that there are many folktales about Chandubi Lake. The lake is surrounded by hills in both Assam and Meghalaya states. According to one folktale, five hills in the surrounding area drowned during the earthquake in the year 1897. 'San' means five in Khasi language, and 'dubi' means drowned, hence the name Chandubi Lake. Ashok expressed regret, stating, "The number of participants in the festival will be slightly reduced this year due to the 'Gonotsav' organised by the Education Department of the Government of Assam. However, we expected that around 10,000 to 20,000 people will attend the festival every day." "The festival has strengthened the people of the area financially. Around five thousand people live in the area surrounding Chandubi Lake, including Rajapara, Senimari, Kothalguri, Jrommkhuriya, Rankhamar, Bherberhi, Harigarh, Jupanbari, and many other villages," said Dhananjay Rabha, finance secretary of the festival committee.

Rabha also mentioned, "During the festival, people in the area sell various items like locally produced vegetables, bamboo ornaments, indigenous local food items, rice beer and wines, local fruits, Rabha traditional dresses including Kangbang, Kemlet, Pajar, Patani, gamocha, etc."

Dhananjay Rabha regretted that the festival is held every year with the financial assistance of the people in the area, adding, "However, despite being only 65 km from Dispur, the state government has not taken any special steps to preserve and develop Chandubi Lake as a tourist destination"

"Every year, the state government spends on various programs and festivals, but they never show any interest in saving and making the lake attractive. However, according to the state tourism minister Jayanta Mallabaruah, Chandubi is one of the nine lakes recognised by the Government of Assam, including Chalachala, Bildara, Kapla, Deepar, Chandubi, and four others." Rabha also mentioned that from last year, Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) has slightly financially assisted in the festival.

Ashok Nongbag, the founder secretary of the Chandubi Festival, said, "Save Chandubi, Save Heritage" is our main motto of our festival, which started in the year 2010. The main objective of organising the festival is to motivate and create awareness to save the nature of the Chandubi Lake cum wetland."

'We are careful about making sure violence in Aarya is not gratuitous'

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: The writer-director said in the world of his show, no crime will go unpunished, which is why they were careful about how they depict violence.

"We are very careful about making sure that the violence is not gratuitous or just for the sake of it. She (Aarya) is doing certain things because she wants to protect her children. She is going to get justice at the end of it," Madhvani told PTI in an interview.

"We are very careful about making sure that the violence is not gratuitous or just for the sake of it. She (Aarya) is doing certain things because she wants to protect her children. She is going to get justice at the end of it," Madhvani told PTI in an interview.

According to Madhvani, it's fitting that Sen's Aarya gets shot at by an unseen assailant in the trailer of the third season, the first part of which started streaming on Disney Hotstar in November.

The first season of the show, which is the official Hindi adaptation of the Dutch series 'Penzoza', co-created by Sandeep Modi, released in 2020 and followed the journey of the titular character getting pulled into the world of crime and drugs after her husband Tej Sareen (Chadrachud Singh) is murdered.

Aarya was full of laughter and joy but in season two, she wanted to run away and in season three, she doesn't laugh, observed the director.

"She's not doing it because she wants to, or wants revenge, or likes bloodshed. She's doing this because that's the only way to protect the children. What we are

looking at is not violence, we are looking at a story about a character. In this case, Aarya is doing certain things for a greater reason and unfortunately, nothing is going right," Madhvani added.

According to the creator, the moral choices the characters in "Aarya" are being forced to make is what keeps the viewers interested in the drama.

"You need to put your character through all of this. The conversation is not that she is enjoying the violence, it's about is she right or wrong? Should she be doing this or not? Was she forced into this? That's what keeps you interested."

What also keeps fans hooked is the catchphrase "Apne panje baahar nikalo".

This one-liner is spoken by Daulat, Aarya's confident played by Sikandar Kher, in every season of the show each time in a different context.

Madhvani, whose roots lie in advertising, described the popular dialogue as a "war cry".

"We all need this kind of a slogan. Coming from advertising, it's very important to have a baseline. A lot of times we are in the room because we are also such Hindi film fans from Manmohan Desai to Mukul Anand.

"We are fans of dialogue 'baazi'. When we are writing, we put a dialogue 'baazi' audit, that every episode should at least have such two-three lines which we can also use in the trailers. Not all lines hit you, but those that do are called 'T-shirt slogans'," he explained.

Like her character, Sen too went through a lot while working on the third season of "Aarya". The actor suffered a massive heart at-



tack and underwent angioplasty last March.

The director, a self-confessed Sen fan, said he has huge respect for her.

"Just to have spent time with her, hung out with her, chatted with her has been one of the milestones of my life. I'm grateful she's back, she's healthy. She was on the ramp two weeks after what she went through. Hats off to her energy and strength."

Madhvani said many fans of the show, including his friends, were not happy when the makers premiered only the first four episodes of the series. The decision, he said, was made by Disney Hotstar.

"Even my eye doctor said 'What is this? Why have you only released four episodes?' I had a chat with Gaurav Banerjee (from Disney Hotstar) and some people felt that it helps in sustaining interest and longevity."

Asked if "Aarya" will return for another run, the producer said the greenlighting power of more seasons rests with the audience.

"Please love the show. Please ask for more and as you ask for more, we are hoping that Disney Hotstar will come to us and say 'Hey, listen. The audience wants more'," he said. (PTI)

Naseeruddin Shah, Vijay Varma, Fatima Sana Shaikh to star in 'Ul Jalool Ishq'

MUMBAI, Jan 3: Actors

Naseeruddin Shah, Vijay Varma, Fatima Sana Shaikh and Sharib Hashmi are teaming up for celebrity designer Manish Malhotra's film production 'Ul Jalool Ishq'. It will be directed by Vibhu Puri, known for 2015 film 'Hawaizaada'. The upcoming film also marks the return of lyricist-music composer duo Gulzar and Vishal Bhardwaj, who will score the soundtrack of the movie.

'Ul Jalool Ishq' marks Malhotra's third production after 'Bun Tikki' and 'Train From Chhapraula' under the banner Stage 5 Production.

Malhotra made the announcement on Instagram on Tuesday. "Bewakoofiyaan, Nadan galtiyan, badi bhoal hai ishq, Sach Poochiye toh mere huzoor ul jalool hai ishq! I am so happy to announce our @stage5production 3rd film production.

"A beautiful film UL JALLOOL ISHQ written and directed by @vibhupuri, shooting of the film starts

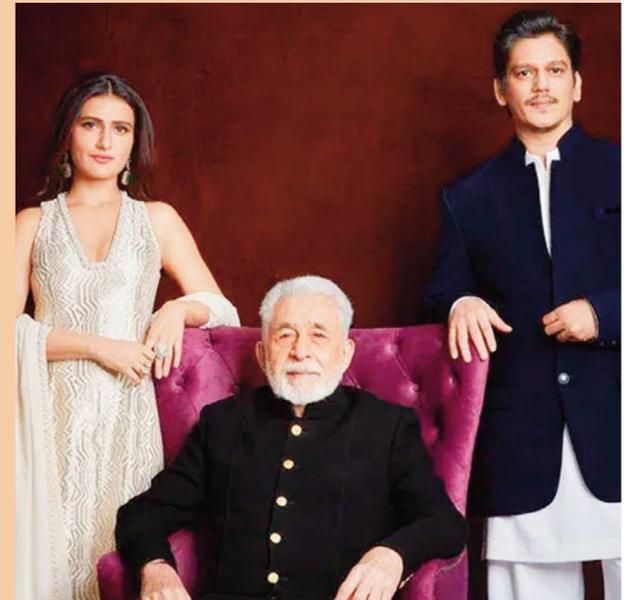
9th January with this supremely talented cast @naseeruddin49 @itsVijay-Varma @fatimasanaishaikh @mrfilmistaani," the designer-producer wrote.

Malhotra also gave a shout-out to Gulzar and Bhardwaj, who have collaborated on several films including 'Maqbool', 'Omkaara', 'Haider' and 'Ishqiya'.

"An honour to work with @gulzar.official for his poetic lyrics and @vishalbh-bhardwaj for his timeless melodies, produced by @malhotra_dinesh @stage5production," he added in his post.

Malhotra announced the launch of his production house in September 2023.

The first project under Stage 5 Production is Tisca Chopra's 'Train From Chhapraula', starring Radhika Apte and Divyendhu. The second film 'Bun Tikki', directed by Faraz Arif Ansari, stars Shabana Azmi, Zeenat Aman, and Abhay Deol. (PTI)



Saif-Kareena join Indian Street Premier League as Kolkata team owners



MUMBAI, Jan 3: Actor couple Kareena Kapoor Khan and Saif Ali Khan have joined the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) as the owners of team Kolkata.

The ISPL is India's first tennis ball T10 cricket tournament that will be played inside a stadium. It is scheduled to be held from March 2 to March 9 here.

Kareena, who shared the announcement on Instagram, said cricket is a long-running tradition in the family. Legendary cricketer and former Indian captain Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi was the actor's father-in-law.

Mumbai, Jan 3 (PTI) Actor couple Kareena Kapoor Khan and Saif Ali Khan have joined the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) as the owners of team Kolkata.

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It will be a historic moment: Dipika Chikhlia on Ram temple consecration ceremony

MUMBAI, Jan 3: The festival of Diwali is coming early this year, says "Ramayan" star Dipika Chikhlia, who is looking forward to attend the historic consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22. Chikhlia, who became famous for her role as Goddess Sita in Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayan" 36 years ago, confirmed that she has been invited for the grand ceremony. She is likely to be accom-

panied by Arun Govil, who had essayed the role of Lord Ram in the classic television show, which spanned 78 episodes on Doordarshan. "Yes, we have been invited to Ayodhya on January 22... It will be something magical and a historic moment," Chikhlia told PTI in an interview. "I have always said that I am very blessed that I could play Sita ji in 'Ramayan'. It has been a very divine experience to be a part of

something as magical as 'Ramayan'. I enjoyed my journey throughout. I was one of those few actors who played Sita... but I continued to remain Sita ji till date. So I think we have all been very blessed," she added. The temple spread over 70 acres will be open to the public after Prime Minister Narendra Modi does the "pran pratishtha", or the consecration ceremony of the Ram Lalla idol, on January 22. Besides

Chikhlia and Govil, several film personalities, including Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit, Anupam Kher, Akshay Kumar, Rajinikanth, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Chiranjeevi, Mohanlal, Dhanush, Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Ajay Devgn, Sunny Deol, Prabhas, Yash and Rishabh Shetty, have also been invited for the ceremony. "I want to tell everybody that January 22, 2024 is the new date for Diwali." (PTI)

Have one more album in me, but I would probably choose acting: Selena Gomez

LOS ANGELES, Jan 3: Actor-singer Selena Gomez says going forward she would like to focus more on acting as she might just hang up her boots after her next potential album.

While she had fun on music tours, Gomez said she realised acting would be something to "settle on" eventually while working on the popular Disney Channel sitcom "Wizards of Waverly Place" (2007).

Known for various collaborative singles such as "We Don't Talk Anymore", "Taki Taki", and "Calm Down

(Remix)", the 31-year-old also has albums "Revival", "Rare", and "Revelacion", which came out in 2021, to her credit.

"I started having a lot of fun with music and then touring was really fun. But I was doing my TV show at the same time (Wizards) and I just found it really fun.

"I just kept going but the older I get, the more I'm kind of like, I would like to find something to just settle on. I do feel like I have one more album in me, but I would probably choose acting. I am going to

wanna chill because I'm tired," she said in Tuesday's episode of the "Smartless" podcast.

Gomez, who will next be seen in the fourth season of Hulu's "Only Murders in the Building", said she always wanted to be an actor.

"I never really intended on being a singer full-time but apparently that hobby turned into something else. I don't think I'm the best singer but I do know how to tell stories and I love being able to make songs," she added. (PTI)



MALIK ANNOUNCED HER RETIREMENT ON DEC 21

WFI WITHOUT SANJAY SINGH IS ACCEPTABLE TO US: SAKSHI MALIK

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Sakshi Malik on Wednesday insisted that she has no issues with the newly-elected Wrestling Federation of India if Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh-loyalist Sanjay Singh is kept away from the body.

Malik had announced her retirement from the sport on December 21 in protest against the election of Sanjay Singh as WFI President.

The 2016 Rio Olympic Games bronze medallist also claimed that her mother has been receiving threat calls from former WFI chief Brij Bhushan's supporters.

Malik, 31, said they will accept a WFI without Sanjay Singh but ruled out her own involvement in running of the federation.

"We don't have any issues with the new federation except one man, Sanjay Singh. We don't have any issue if the new body comes back without Sanjay Singh. We do not have any issue with the ad-hoc committee as well," Malik told reporters.

"The government is like parents for us and I would request them to make wrestling safe for the upcoming wrestlers. You have seen how Sanjay Singh has been behaving. I don't want Sanjay Singh's interference in the federation," she added.



"I can only make a request. If the ministry says he won't come back it will be better. Everybody saw the kind of power abuse by Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh after the WFI elections. He announced junior nationals at his home without much delibera-

tion." Sanjay Singh had defeated 2010 CWG gold medallist Anita Sheoran by a huge 40-7 margin. Prem Chand Lochab, who was from the Sheoran panel and had the backing of Malik, Bajrang Punia and Vinesh Phogat,

was elected secretary general. Sakshi also requested the ad-hoc panel to conduct age group nationals at the earliest. "I don't want that any young wrestler suffers because of us. The ad-hoc committee has already announced senior nation-

als and I request the ad-hoc committee to announce the U15, U17 and U20 nationals."

Interestingly, hundreds of junior wrestlers on Wednesday assembled at Jantar Mantar to protest against Malik, Phogat and Punia, who they blamed for the mess in Indian wrestling.

Malik then revealed that her family is getting threats. "For past two-three days, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's goons have become active. My mother is getting threats through phone calls. People are calling and saying that a case will be registered against someone in my family. People on social media are abusing us but they should remember that they have sisters and daughters at their home."

Asked if she would consider becoming a sports administrator, Malik replied in a negative.

"I am disturbed. We just want that junior wrestlers to not suffer. As of now I don't have it in my mind. We are being blamed for junior wrestlers' loss and that's incorrect. If women are involved in running of sport, that will be good," she said.

When informed about junior wrestlers' protest against them at Jantar Mantar, Malik said, "I have given 18-20 years to wrestling. Only I know what I have gone through in the last few months." (PTI)

Greenwood one of three Getafe players sent off in 2-0 loss to Rayo Vallecano in Spanish league

MADRID, Jan 3: Mason Greenwood was accused of insulting a referee in the Spanish league on Tuesday, becoming one of three Getafe players sent off in a 2-0 loss to Rayo Vallecano.

The referee said in his post-match report that Greenwood insulted him in the 50th minute with an expletive in English, something that the British player and the Spanish club denied.

"He doesn't speak Spanish very well, he told me that he was saying something else," Getafe coach José Bordalás said in his post-match interview. "He was frustrated because the referee was not calling any fouls on him, but he never offended anyone. It was just a comment that he made."

Referee Jorge Figueroa Vázquez also said in his report that, after being sent off, Greenwood made a gesture pointing to his head and expressing his disagreement with the decision.

Greenwood is playing with Getafe on a loan from Manchester United, which he left at the end of last season following a criminal investigation into a possible attempted rape that was closed by prosecutors.

Getafe also lost defender Damián Suárez for allegedly insulting the assistant referee moments after he was substituted in the 70th.

The hosts had been playing a man down from the 40th after forward Juanmi Latasa was sent off with a second yellow card. Sergio Camello scored in first-half stoppage time and shortly after halftime to help Rayo end an eight-match winless streak in the Spanish league. The result left Rayo in 11th place. Getafe stayed eighth. Real Sociedad overcame a red card to its goalkeeper in the first half to salvage a 1-1 home draw against Alaves. Martín Zubimendi scored with a shot from inside

the area six minutes into stoppage time to secure the draw against the fellow Basque Country team.

The result extended a 25-match winless streak on the road for Alaves, which also conceded in stoppage time while playing with an extra man in a 1-0 loss to leader Real Madrid at home in the previous round. Luiz Rioja converted a 76th-minute penalty kick to give the visitors the lead.

Zubimendi got the late equalizer after reaching a loose ball inside the area and sending a low shot into the net.

Sociedad played a man down from the 36th after a blunder by goalkeeper Álex Remiro. He left his area to intercept a long cross but misjudged the bounce of the ball, having to use his hand to keep it from going over his head and reaching an Alaves player in front of the open net. Sociedad coach Imanol Alguacil had to replace forward André Silva with reserve goalkeeper Unai Marrero.

Forward Takefusa Kubo had nearly evened the match moments earlier with a shot from outside the area that hit the crossbar. The hosts were awarded a penalty in the 88th but the call was reversed after video review.

The draw moved Alaves to 15th place, four points from the relegation zone.

Sociedad stayed sixth, three points from fifth-place Athletic Bilbao. Sociedad was coming off three consecutive scoreless draws in all competitions, while Alaves had lost three in a row in the Spanish league.

It hadn't scored in four straight league matches. Alaves forward Giuliano Simeone, son of Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone, entered the match in the 70th to make his first appearance since breaking his leg in a friendly in the offseason. (AP)

AC Milan beat Cagliari 4-1 to reach Italian Cup quarterfinals



MILAN, Jan 3: Luka Jovic scored two goals to help AC Milan beat Cagliari 4-1 in the Italian Cup on Tuesday.

Milan has won the Italian Cup five times but it last lifted the trophy in 2003 and hasn't reached the final since 2018. The Rossoneri will face either Atalanta or Sassuolo in the quarterfinals.

Milan coach Stefano Pioli was under pressure after a poor run that had seen his team eliminated from the Champions League at the group stage.

The Rossoneri also had a lengthy injury list and rested a number of star players — starting with four teenagers — but hadn't lost to Cagliari at San Siro since 1997.

Jovic opened the scoring in the 29th minute following a delightful assist from Théo Hernandez and the duo combined again shortly before halftime.

The two goals took Jovic's tally to five in his past six matches. It took the Serbia forward until December to score his first goal for Milan after joining from Fiorentina at the start of the season.

Teenager Chaka Traoré extended Milan's lead early in the second half, with his third Rossoneri goal in his first start for the team.

Rafael Leão capped a great night for Milan in stoppage time, shortly after Paolo Azzi netted a consolation for Cagliari. (AP)

Wayne Rooney fired as manager after 15 games at second-tier Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND, Jan 3: England great Wayne Rooney was fired as the manager of second-tier club Birmingham on Tuesday after 15 games.

Rooney earned only two wins since his controversial appointment in October. Birmingham was sixth in the Championship when he started, and has fallen to 20th.

The club was taken over last summer by a company owned by American businessman Tom Wagner, and it got rid of popular coach John Eustace, who had been in charge for 15 months and steered the club away from relegation.

"Birmingham City has today parted company with manager Wayne Rooney and first-team coach Carl Robinson," the club said in a statement. "Despite their best efforts, results have not met the expectations that were made clear at the outset. Therefore, the



board feels that a change in management is in the best interests of the football club."

Birmingham lost at Leeds 3-0 on Monday, and supporters called for the removal of Rooney, the former Manchester United and England striker.

NFL great Tom Brady became a minority owner of the club in August.

Rooney thanked Wagner, Brady and club CEO Garry Cook for the opportunity but said he wasn't given enough time.

"Football is a results business

— and I recognize they have not been at the level I wanted them to be," Rooney's statement read. "However, time is the most precious commodity a manager requires and I do not believe 13 weeks was sufficient to oversee the changes that were needed."

The 38-year-old Rooney added that it "will take me some time to get over this setback" but that he eventually will "prepare for the next opportunity in my journey as a manager."

He had joined Birmingham in early October after one full season in charge at D.C. United in Major League Soccer. Rooney previously was manager of second-tier Derby.

Birmingham last played in the Premier League in 2011, the same year it won the English League Cup — one of two major trophies the club has captured in its 148-year history. (AP)

West Ham and Brighton settle for 0-0 draw in Premier League

LONDON, Jan 3: Defensive-minded West Ham held off late pressure from Brighton to settle for a 0-0 draw that extended its Premier League unbeaten run to four games on Tuesday.

One point was enough for Brighton to climb over Manchester United into seventh place, while the Hammers stayed in sixth.

Both teams were missing starters through injury, illness and suspension.

West Ham was also without forward Mohammed Kudus, who was called up by Ghana for the Africa

Cup of Nations.

West Ham hasn't allowed a goal in its past four league matches — three of which were victories.

Brighton substitute Jakub Moder blazed a shot over the bar from close range in the 87th minute at London Stadium.

The visitors threatened again minutes later but goalkeeper Alphonse Areola stretched to save Adam Lallana's shot from distance.

Just before the hour mark, Brighton's João Pedro beat several defenders but shot straight at Are-

ola.

Tomas Soucek then missed on the other end, shooting wide in the 61st minute after Saïd Benrahma's cross fell to him.

Evan Ferguson provided a spark off the bench for Brighton. The 19-year-old Ireland striker shot just wide shortly after replacing Danny Welbeck.

Brighton midfielder James Milner made his 632nd top-flight appearance to tie Ryan Giggs for second-most in the Premier League. Milner could pass all-time leader Gareth Barry next season.

"It's quite a big number. It's taken a long time," Milner said before the game. "I think it's a nice thing but it's a big game for us tonight. We want to start the year with a win."

The 37-year-old Milner is in his first season at Brighton after eight years with Liverpool. He debuted with Leeds in the 2002-03 season at age 16.

Both teams face second-tier opponents in the third round of the FA Cup. Brighton plays at Stoke on Saturday. West Ham hosts Bristol on Sunday. (AP)

Suryakumar doesn't quite know what to do in ODIs but he is a freak in T20 cricket, says Hussain

DUBAI, Jan 3: Suryakumar Yadav is a bit clueless in 50-overs cricket but the swashbuckling batter "is a freak" who is absolutely in command in the shortest format and will be the one to look out for at the T20 World Cup later this year, feels former England skipper Nasser Hussain.

Since beginning his T20I journey for India in 2021, Suryakumar has quickly established himself as one of the best batters in the shortest format of the game, scoring four centuries and 17 fifties from 60 T20Is. His impressive run got him the No.1 spot in the ICC Rankings for T20I batters in 2022, which he has held on to since. However, the big-hitting batter has struggled to make a similar impact in ODIs.

"The person for the world to watch out for at the moment in T20 is Suryakumar Yadav," Hussain was quoted as saying by the ICC. "I mean, the bloke is a freak. The cliché of Mr. 360, but some of the shots he plays... and he is a bit of a freak because in fifty-overs cricket, he doesn't quite know when to go, when not to go, what to do. But in T20 cricket, he absolutely knows what to do every single time almost, and it's a fun game, T20 cricket and watching SKY, that is absolutely fun," Hussain added.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to take place in the Caribbean and USA in June, and Hussain has backed South Africa to win their maiden ICC trophy.

"I haven't thought too much



about this actually... but I'm going to go with South Africa.

"England are (reigning) champions, but not playing particularly well at the moment. It's in the Caribbean and West Indies are going OK, then you have Pakistan, so can I choose all of these sides?"

South Africa put some record-breaking performances in the World Cup last year before they lost to eventual champions Australia in the semifinals.

"I'm going to go for South Africa versus England in the final." "I'm following (fellow commentator) Simon Doull a little bit here. Before the (50-over) World Cup, he tipped them to win it and it was a little bit left field. I mean, it's still South Africa, one of the great cricketing nations, sporting nations, but I thought that was a good shout from Doull. And they played some brilliant cricket in that World Cup."

Hussain feels Cricket South Africa's T20 league — the SA20, which was launched last year — has benefited the national team.

"I think their (domestic) SA20 competition has really elevated some of their players and they have now got that depth and that class and that talent."

South Africa were without the injured pace duo of Anrich Nortje and Sisanda Magala at the ODI World Cup but the two are expected to be available for the T20 event. "I don't know where he is with his injury at the moment, but someone like Anrich Nortje is what they were missing maybe in those vital games, towards the end of the World Cup."

"So I think, maybe, if Nortje can get fit for the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and with their dynamic batting line-up, I'm going to look for South Africa," Hussain added. (PTI)

Jangam CC and Phoenix CC win in Premier Cricket in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 3: Jangam CC secured a convincing victory over Gaenz CC, defeating them by 161 runs in a match held at Durbar Field on Wednesday. In this 6th Assam Premier Club Cricket Tournament, Abhishek Shah (74), Mrinal Dutta (62), and the man of the match, Arfan Wakil Rahman (47), played crucial roles in helping Jangam post a formidable total of 279/9 in 40 overs. Gaenz struggled in their innings and were eventually bowled out for 118/9 in 30.1 overs, with Abdul Salam contributing 25 runs.

Jangam's Jabab Khan took 3/15 wickets. In the other match, Phoenix CC emerged victorious by defeating Cricket Club of Sivasagar by 7 wickets. CCS faced a tough challenge as they were dismissed for just 96 runs in 21.2 overs. Wasim Akram Haque top-scored with 29 runs, and Julian Konwar added 16 runs. The man of the match, Harpal Shaikia, played a key role in their downfall, taking 3/13, while Dennis Ahmed contributed with 2/26. Phoenix successfully chased down the target, reaching 97/3, with Madhurya scoring 38 runs.

Siraj sizzles with six wickets as India bowl out South Africa for 55



CAPE TOWN, Jan 3: Mohammed Siraj produced a spell to remember as India bundled out South Africa for 55, their lowest total against the visitors, inside lunch on day one of the second Test here on Wednesday.

In a straight spell of nine overs, Siraj picked a career-best 6 for 15 as the South African batters made a beeline back to the dug-out, unable to counter the disconcerting bounce and the movement, both inward and outward, that he extracted off the surface.

It was also South Africa's lowest total in Test cricket since their readmission into international cricket in 1991.

Before Siraj's special effort, the only Indian in country's 92 year Test history to take five wickets before lunch was left-arm spinner Maninder Singh, who achieved the feat against Pakistan in Bengaluru back in 1986-1987.

On a humid Wednesday morning, South African batters found what a great leveller the game of cricket is with Siraj ripping the heart out of the Proteas batting with a masterclass of pace, swing and seam movement. The Proteas innings ended in just 23.2 overs.

David Bedingham (12) and Kyle Verreyne (15) were the only two batters to hit the double digits as the South African supporters in stands were stunned into silence.

Jasprit Bumrah (2/25 in 8 overs) also kept the pressure from the other end as Indian skipper Rohit Sharma kept his promise of making opposite number Dean Elgar's life miserable in his farewell Test.

Mukesh Kumar (2/0) also wrapped the tail up and proved that he is way better than a bits and pieces Shardul Thakur in these conditions.

Having been pilloried for conceding 400 plus runs in the heavy defeat at the Centurion, even the biggest of Indian supporters wouldn't have envisaged such a roaring comeback from the bowlers.

Siraj kept the ball on fuller lengths between 4-6 metres and with bounce got most balls to jag back in.

From the other end, Bumrah hit the back of length area as Rohit set completely attacking fields, albeit of different nature.

When Siraj bowled initially, there was a leg-slip placed while

for Bumrah, Rohit himself stood at short leg.

The procession started with Aiden Markram going on a 'fishing expedition' to a delivery that moved in air and shaped away with the opener closing his bat face. Yashasvi Jaiswal took a fantastic catch at third slip to send back Markram.

The stodgy Elgar played one to his stumps off Siraj who angled one across on fuller length, not giving him enough room to play the cut shot.

Bumrah got young Tristan Stubbs into a tangle and the simple catch was gobbled up by skipper at short-leg.

Tony De Zorzi's affinity to whip balls off the hips was exploited as he was caught down the leg-side.

Unlike Centurion, there were plans in place and David Bedingham, who was fed on the backfoot in the first Test, was enticed to go for a drive on length and extra bounce did the trick.

Once Marco Jansen edged Siraj to give him his fifth scalp, one knew that South Africa would have one of their most embarrassing mornings since return to international cricket in 1991. (PTI)

Fresh protest erupts in Indian wrestling

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: The ongoing crisis in Indian wrestling took a new twist on Wednesday when hundreds of junior wrestlers assembled at Jantar Mantar for a symbolic three-hour protest against the loss of one crucial year of their careers, a situation for which they blamed top grapplers Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat.

Loaded in buses, the junior wrestlers arrived from different parts of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi, catching the police unawares.

Close to 300 of them came from Arya Samaj Akhara in Chhaprauli, Baghpat while many others came from the Virender Wrestling Academy in Narela. The security personnel struggled to control them as they shouted slogans against Punia, Malik and Phogat.

Braving cold conditions, the junior wrestlers arrived at Jantar Mantar at 11am and left after three hours with a warning that if the government does not lift the WFI suspension within 10 days, they will start returning their awards.

The protesters were carrying banners that read: 'UWW (United World Wrestling) save our wrestling from these 3 wrestlers'.

Another banner read: 'Kar Diya Desh Ki Kushti Ko Barbaad: Sakshi Bajrang, Vinesh Phogat'.

Soon after the election of new office-bearers, the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) announced the hosting of the Under-15 and Under-20 Nationals in Gonda, UP but the ministry suspended the body, leading to the cancellation of the proposed tournament.

Several wrestlers, who could have competed in the junior categories for one last time, lost the opportunity.

"It was a symbolic protest. We are giving 10 days' time to the government to revoke the suspension of the new WFI and allow it to hold age group nationals.

"If they don't do it, we will start returning our Arjuna and other awards to the government just like Bajrang and Vinesh have done," said Greco-Roman wrestler Sunil



Rana, who is an Arjuna awardee and a bronze medalist from the 2023 Asian Games.

Muzaffarnagar stadium coach Pradeep Kumar said, "More than 90 per cent of Akharas (training centres) in UP are with us in this protest. There are only three wrestlers on one side and lakhs on the other. They have spoiled the careers of lakhs of wrestlers across the country."

"These people have no respect for national awards. They are leaving them on the roads," Kumar added, referring to Punia and Phogat returning their government honours.

"They kept saying that they were protesting for women and junior wrestlers but they have spoiled careers of lakhs after earning all the laurels. Their protest is only to get top WFI posts. Once that happens, they will stop all protests," added Kumar.

Ironically, almost a year back at the same protest site, the top three wrestlers had managed to draw huge support for their cause when they called for the arrest of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, accusing him of sexually harassing women wrestlers.

Thousands of people from different sections of society, including farmers' groups, social workers, politicians, women's groups and members of the wrestling fraternity, came out to support Sakshi, Vinesh and Bajrang.

The three are now facing protests from within their community, with those assembled at Jan-

2022 winner Suryakumar Yadav again in running for ICC Men's T20 Cricketer of Year

DUBAI, Jan 3: India star Suryakumar Yadav was on Wednesday named as one of the four nominees for the ICC Men's T20 Cricketer of the Year 2023.

The 33-year-old Indian, who won the accolade in 2022, dominated 2023 in the shortest format with 733 runs from 17 innings at an average of 48.86 and strike rate of 155.95.

Suryakumar's first innings of just 7 to start 2023 against Sri Lanka was a mere speed bump in another prolific year, making scores of 51 (36 balls) and 112 not out (51 balls) in the next two matches.

With a range of his inside-out drives and clever play behind the wicket, Suryakumar's knock of 112 off 51 balls included nine sixes and seven fours, equating to almost a boundary every three deliveries.

His first boundary came off just the fourth ball of his innings, and it took just 45 balls to reach three figures. The effort was the second-fastest hundred for India in men's T20s behind Rohit Sharma's 35-ball effort against the same opponent in 2017, and India were clear 91-run winners.

Consistent scoring in 20s to 40s continued, before an innings of 83 (44 balls) against the West Indies in Providence proved his class. He ended the series against the West Indies with a knock of 61 (45 balls) in Florida.

Suryakumar flourished despite the burden of captaincy, taking the reins of a young Indian side towards the end of the year.

He made half-centuries against Australia (80 off 42 balls) and South Africa (56 from 36 balls), before posting an even 100 against the Proteas off just 56 balls in their final T20 of the year in Johannesburg.

The other three nominees are Sikandar Raza of Zimbabwe (11 innings, 515 runs at 51.50, strike rate 150.14; 17 wickets at 14.88, economy 6.57), Alpeesh Ramjani of Uganda (55 wickets at 8.98, economy 4.77) and Mark Chapman of New Zealand (17 innings, 556 runs at 50.54, strike rate 145.54). (PTI)

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GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
Department of School Education

GUNOTSAV 2024

Ensuring Quality Education

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

TOTAL SCHOOLS TO BE COVERED : 16,796

- GOVERNMENT/ PROVINCIALIZED SCHOOLS
- ADARSHA VIDYALAYA
- TEA GARDEN MODEL SCHOOLS
- KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYA
- NETAJI SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AVASIYA VIDYALAYA
- TEA GARDEN MANAGEMENT SCHOOLS

TOTAL STUDENTS TO BE EVALUATED : 15,38,371

CLASSES I TO IX

TOTAL EXTERNAL EVALUATORS : 7,008

MINISTERS, MPs, MLAs, CEMs, EMs,
IAS, IPS, IFS, ACS, APS, AFS, CLASS I & II OFFICIALS OF STATE GOVT. ETC.

PHASES OF EVALUATION

1ST PHASE (3 - 6 JANUARY 2024)
BARPETA, BAJALI, HOJAI, KARIMGANJ, KAMRUP,
KARBI ANGLONG, KOKRAJHAR, LAKHIMPUR,
NAGAON, SIVASAGAR, SOUTH SALMARA-MANKACHAR
AND UDALGURI DISTRICTS

EXTERNAL EVALUATION
4 - 6 January 2024

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

Janasanyog/DF/2310/23/4-Jan-24

National Programme for Control of Blindness & Visual Impairment

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION

Restoring Vision, Transforming Lives

Intensified Cataract Surgery Campaign Programme Begins in Assam

(21 December, 2023 to 20 January, 2024)

- In Financial Year 2022-23, National Programme for Control of Blindness & Visual Impairment (NPCB & VI), Assam completed 1,54,713 cataract surgeries across various Health Institutions.
- Financial Year 2023-24 sets a more ambitious target: 2,03,100 cataract surgeries for Assam, set by the Government of India.
- The ongoing intensified Cataract Surgery Campaign aims to achieve this target.
- The campaign aims to tackle the cataract surgery backlog, reducing the adverse impact on individuals' quality of life and lessening the socio-economic burden on families and the nation.

Be a part of this impactful initiative as we strive to bring back the gift of clear vision and improve lives across Assam. Join us in restoring hope, one surgery at a time.

Call 104 for health related information
Call 108 for Ambulance service

For more details contact District NPCB & VI Cell
NHMD/2023-24/1733