## **Embarking On A New Era**

The Hills Times extends heartfelt gratitude to our readers, contributors, hawkers, advertisers, and wellwishers as we celebrate our silver jubilee. The blessings you have showered upon us throughout the years have been constant. The trust you place in us is the superpower that will keep us going in the years to come.

Issue No.1



DIPHU. KARBI ANGLONG RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862 TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024

## Projects worth ₹168 crore for Karbi Anglong inaugurated

## **Do not snap links with** traditional belief: CM

#### HT Bureau

Vol.No.XXV

DIPHU, Jan 8: Stating that a society cannot progress for long by severing ties with their ancestral forms of belief and practises. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has called upon the Karbi youths to see that the ancestral forms of belief of their community don't lose their relevance in the society.

Mentioning about the profound history of the Karbi community Sarma said that history of the community dates back to 3000 BC and that the Karbi society has been moving forward through the practise of Honghari faith, the traditional belief system based on clan and ancestors.

## HTBRIEFS

**Regional meet** GUWAHATI: A two-day re-

gional conference on e-governance with the objective to empower people through digital transformation will be held here from Tuesday, an official statement said. Governor Gulab Chand Kataria will inaugurate the meet in presence of Union Minister for Science & Technology, Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions Jitendra Singh. The department of administrative reforms and public grievances (DARPG) is organising the meet in collaboration with the government of Assam. Delegates from all the Northeastern and eastern states will attend the conference

#### Dip in rainfall

**NEW DELHI:** The Terai region of Uttarakhand has recorded a significant reduction in rainfall and a noticeable shift in temperature patterns over a 40-year period starting from 1981 and this might negatively impact crop production in the area, according to a new research. The research conducted by scientists at the G B Pant University of Agriculture and Technology in Uttarakhand found out that



ering of Karbi traditional belief The Chief Minister inaugurated multiple projects costing a total of practitioners- Karbi Aronbarim ₹ 168 crore for Karbi Anglong in Armu Chingrum Amei at Sports Diphu. He also attended the gath- Authority (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## **Mizoram CM likely to** meet Himanta this month to discuss border issues

AIZAWL, Jan 8: Mizoram chief states exchanged fire along the minister Lalduhoma is likely to inter-state boundary, leading to the meet his Assam counterpart Hideath of six policemen and a civilmanta Biswa Sarma this month to ian from Assam. More than 60 discuss border issues between

the two states, an official said here on Monday. A discussion between them is expected during the North Eastern Council (NEC) plenary session to be held in Meghalava's capital Shillong on January 19, he said.

"The two leaders will discuss the border issues to resolve the long-standing dispute between the two states," the official said. The proposed NEC plenary ses-

sion will be chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Mizoram shares a 164.6 km-

long border with Assam. The dispute had taken an ugly turn in July 2021 when police forces of the two

- ₹ 12 crore Truck terminus at Diphu- ₹ 5 crore Jorhat grenade blast

#### Projects 3000 seating capacity Sertalin auditorium at Taralangso- ₹35 crore

- Sarling Teron Langkung Habe multi purpose sports complex- ₹75 crore
- Extended arm of the Kajir Ronghangpi VIP Guest House at Taralangso- ₹ 5.57 crore
- Revamp of Langkung Phang Fishery at Taralangso - ₹ 2.55 crore
- Rangsina Sarpo Ahongjai Permanent Open Space at Taralangso-₹ 5.50 lakh
- Revamp of Kuleng Abi Fishery at Taralangso- ₹ 2 crore
- Rongbong Artu, Karbi Capital Complex at Taralangso - ₹ 6.86 crore
  - Beautification of Karbi People's Hall at Taralangso - ₹ 3.78 crore
- Cheleng Athepai in the memory of Jirlong Ariso at Taralangso -₹ 4.2 crore
- Sing Mirjeng VIP Gallery at Taralangso- ₹99 lakh
- ▶ New market complex at Rongkhelan in Diphu- ₹ 10 crore Song Bey inter-state bus terminus at DM Road in Diphu

## 13<sup>th</sup> NCHAC Poll records 55.16 % voter turnout

PAGES 12 PRICE ₹8

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 8: Around 55.16 tested. Meanwhile, the INC conper cent voters exercised their franchise till 3 PM during the election to the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) in Assam on Monday, said an official statement on Monday.

"By 3:00 PM, a noteworthy 55.16 per per cent voter turnout was recorded, underscoring active civic engagement in the region," the statement added.

Amidst the peaceful polling atmosphere, there were no reported untoward incidents up to the time of this report. However, in some polling stations, delays were encountered, leading to an extension of the polling time. A substantial total of 1,11,645 voters exercised their democratic right during the crucial election, conducted from

8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. The BJP gained an early advantage, fielding 28 candidates and se-

curing victory in 6 seats uncontested with 24 candidates. TMC with 11. AAP with 5, and the remaining 27 were independent candidates

Out of the 28 seats, the election covered 22, excluding the 6 constituencies without a contest. The polling process involved 280 stations, with 22 marked as very sensitive, 92 as sensitive, and the rest deemed comprehensively safe.

Stringent security measures, including CCTV cameras and microobservers, were implemented in highly sensitive stations, while sensitive stations had micro-observers accompanied by videographers and security teams from both central and state police.

As polling officials begin their return from various stations across the district, attention now turns to the result declaration scheduled for 12th January 2024. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## **India-Maldives** diplomatic row: **Maldivian envoy** summoned

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The Maldivian envoy to India was on Monday summoned to the external affairs ministry and was conveyed strong concern over remarks in social media against Prime Minister Narendra Modi by a number of ministers of the Maldives, sources said. The government of the Maldives on Sunday suspended three deputy ministers for derogatory social media posts against Modi.

The three deputy ministers used disparaging comments against Modi for his post on 'X' following his visit to Lakshadweep, inferring that was an attempt to project the Union Territory as an alternative tourist destination to the Maldives.

According to Maldivian media reports, deputy ministers in the youth ministry, Malsha Shareef, Mariyam Shiuna and Abdulla Mahzoom Majid, have been suspended over their posts. In New Delhi, official sources (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

people were also injured in the violent clash that took place in the disputed area near Mizoram's Vairengte village. The two states have held several rounds of talks since then and agreed to maintain peace along the

boundary and resolve the dispute through dialogue.

The border dispute between the two neighbouring states stemmed from two colonial demarcations in 1875 and 1933. Mizoram claims that 509 square miles area of the inner line reserved forest, notified in 1875 under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) 1873, falls with its territory, while Assam, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

#### HT Correspondent JORHAT, Jan 8: A Jorhat police team arrested two persons from Nitaipukhuri area under Demow Police Station of Sivasagar district on charges of their involvement in the grenade blast incident at the Military Station, Lichubari, Jorhat on

December 14, 2023 night. It may be mentioned here that Ulfa (I) had claimed responsibility for the explosion sometime after the incident on December 14 night.

Jorhat superintendent of police Mohan Lal Meena told newspersons here on Monday that Rajpal Gogoi and Biplab Barua were apprehended on Sunday and were brought to Jorhat.

The duo reportedly have admitted during interrogation that they had kept a grenade near a power sub-station nearby the National Highway 715 (formerly 37) at Teok in Jorhat district on December 14 and it was later collected by Biraj Kachari and Achyut Gogoi, who were directly involved in the grenade lobbing incident at



Lichubari, and already arrested on December 28, 2023.

case: Duo in police net

Meena said that Biplab had collected two grenades from near a bridge at Demow as per instruction of Aiseng Asom, an Ulfa (I) leader and he along with Rajpal Gogoi had come in a Wagon R car to drop the grenade at Teok which was later picked up Biraj Kachari and Achyut Gogoi and used for causing the blast at Lichubari here.

The SP said that Biplab further revealed that another grenade was

delivered at Rajmai area in Siyasagar district and Siyasagar police were investigating the matter. He (SP) said that the police probe

was underway to find out the source of the grenades and how it was brought to the spot from where Birai had collected.

Meena further said that police from technical analysts found that an amount of ₹ 5000 was transferred to Biraj Kachari by Rajpal Gogoi earlier from his mobile phone at a shop in Demow.

the minimum temperature in the region has risen noticeably, while the maximum temperature has not changed significantly, indicating a narrowing range of temperatures. This shift could cause crops to mature prematurely, leading to reduced crop yields, according to the study published in the "Mausam Journal" of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) last week. "The actual decrease in rainfall, sunshine hours and evaporation over 40 years in the Terai region of Uttarakhand is about 58.621 mm, 1.673 hour and 1.1 mm," the study said. The decrease in these climate factors could be attributed to reasons such as population growth, urbanisation, global warming, increased pollution leading to dimming effects and an increase in the number of cloudy days, the scientists said.

## Forum of oppn parties in Assam to support 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'

GUWAHATI, Jan 8: The united forum of 15 opposition parties of Assam, includ-Forum Assam (UOFA). ing the Congress, will support Rahul Gandhi's formed in line with the Indian National Developmen-'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', which will commence on tal January 14 from Manipur, (INDIA). Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) The AJP, Raijor Dal, CPI(M), CPI, Jatiya Dalpresident Lurinjyoti Gogoi

said on Monday. Asom, NCP, RJD, Janata Dal The decision to extend (U), TMC, CPI(ML) and the support to the procession, AAP are among the UOFA which will culminate in alliance. Mumbai, was taken at a All the parties of the bloc meeting of forum leaders, will cooperate during the held in the virtual mode on proposed vatra's eight-day

Sunday, Gogoi said in a

18 to 25, Gogoi, general secretary of the UOFA, said. Congress is a part of the 15-party United Opposition "To defeat the BJP and the AIUDF. the opposition forum has decided to participate in the 'Bharat Jodo Inclusive Alliance Nyay Yatra'," he said.

Details programme on the participation of opposition parties in the Assam leg of the procession will be worked out soon at a meeting of the forum.

"Representatives of the opposition parties will also meet Gandhi during the vatra in the state," the AJP chief tour of Assam from January added. (PTI)

## Govt to invest ₹60,000 cr in river cruise tourism, green vessel development by 2047: Sonowal



KOLKATA, Jan 8: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday said the government would invest ₹ 60,000 crore by 2047 in river cruise tourism and development of green vessels.

"We are going to invest ₹ 45,000 crore in river cruise, which will take the passenger capacity from 2 lakh to 15 lakh by 2047," he said on the sidelines of the first

Inland Waterways Development Council meeting here. Sonowal also said the government aims at investing another ₹ 15,000 crore in green transport over the next 10 years to develop 1,000 vessels and ferries.

"In total, there will be a ₹ 60,000-crore investment by 2047, and it will be through the public-private partnership (PPP) model. The projects will help generate thousands of jobs," the Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways said.

The council meeting, represented by officials of around 20 states and Union territories, also saw the unveiling of 'Harit Nauka' - guidelines for green transition of inland vessels and the River Cruise Tourism Roadmap 2047.

The day-long meeting, held on a cruise vessel, was conducted by Sonowal to streamline and advance the development of waterways involving states and central government agencies. The sessions covered topics such as fairway development, private sector engagement and best practices, optimising cargo transport efficiency in Inland Water Transport (IWT), fostering the promotion and development of ecofriendly vessels for passenger transportation, exploring the economic advantages of river cruise tourism, among others.

An official of the Inland Waterways Authority of India said the meeting was attended by West Bengal transport secretary. The state government has also sought help for dredging of some rivers, he said.

"We will assist in dredging and building approximately 20 community jetties, which will be handed over to the state," the official added. (PTI)

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### মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, অসম Chief Minister, Assam

CMS.7/2024/1432 Dispur 16 Puh, 1430 Bhaskarabda 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 2024

#### MESSAGE

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to you and the entire team at The Hills Times on the momentous occasion of completing 25 years of dedicated journalism. This milestone is a testament to your unwavering commitment to providing insightful and impactful news coverage to the people, particularly in the three hill districts of Assam.

As the famous saying, "A newspaper is the first rough draft of history" exemplifies the role of the newspaper, The Hills Times, over the past quartercentury, has been playing a pivotal role in chronicling the history, culture, and developments of the region. The power of journalism lies in its ability to inform, educate, and empower the public. The Hills Times has consistently exemplified these principles, contributing significantly to the democratic ethos by keeping the citizens well- informed about local, regional, and national events.

In an era where the media landscape is evolving rapidly, sustaining a newspaper for 25 years is a remarkable achievement. Your resilience, passion, and commitment to journalistic excellence have not only stood the test of time but have also become a source of inspiration for others in the field.

Hope in the coming years also, The Hill Times continues its impressive journey to keep the people informed and enable the state to fulfill the aspirations of the people flagged in the media.

On this commemorative occasion, I wish The Hill Times team a greater success. Keep bringing to us good development stories and keep expanding your readership by being the voice of the voiceless. I extend my best wishes for your continued successes.

mer (Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma)

### BUSINESS

1.55 per cent, commodities declined

1.44 per cent, bankex (1.42 per

cent), metal 1.40 per cent, financial

services (1.05 per cent), telecom-

munication (0.93 per cent), IT (0.90

Power, realty and services were

"The market witnessed wide-

spread selling as the euphoria over

early rate cuts may diminish due to

the better-than-expected non-farm

payroll data from the US and the consequent rise in the US 10-year

"In the near term, investors' trade

positions will be more inclined to-

wards the upcoming result season.

While the outset may be tempered

by lower expectations in the IT sec-

tor, the overall forecast for earnings

growth remains optimistic, project-

ing double-digit figures," said

Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit

In Asian markets, Seoul, Shang-

hai and Hong Kong settled lower.

Japan's Nikkei was closed for a hol-

lower. The US markets ended mar-

European markets were trading

"The market witnessed wide-

spread selling as the euphoria over

early rate cuts may diminish due to

the better-than-expected non-farm

payroll data from the US and the

consequent rise in the US 10-year

trade positions will be more inclined

towards the upcoming result season,'

said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at

Financial Services.

ginally up on Friday.

per cent) and teck (0.77 per cent).

the gainers.

yield.

iday.

## Coal production from captive, commercial mines likely at 187 MT in FY25

As per the latest figures, 50 captive and commercial coal mines are in operation

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The government on Monday said that coal production from captive and commercial blocks is likely to be 186.63 Million Tonnes (MT) in the next fiscal.

The production will be further enhanced to 225.69 MT in FY26, the coal ministry said in a statement.

"As per the present plans of the ministry, production targets from such mines will be touching 383.56 million tonnes by FY 2029-30," the coal ministry said in a statement.

In the 2024-25 fiscal, coal production from such mines is

Honda Motorcycle commissions 6.5 lakh additional production capacity at Ĝujarat plant

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) on Monday said it has commissioned a third assembly line at its Vithalapur (Gujarat)-based manufacturing plant.

The third line will add an additional production capacity of 6.5 lakh scooter units, taking the total capacity of the facility to 19.7 lakh units per annum.

"To serve customers more efficiently with speed, undertaking this capacity expansion plan will increase HMSI's total annual production volumes significantly," HMSI President, Managing Director & CEO Tsutsumu Otani said in a statement

The Vithalpur plant produces scooter models for domestic as well as export markets, which will help the company to continue leading the trend of scooterisation not just in India but across the globe, he added. HMSI rolls out its scooter models like Dio, Activa 125 and Dio 125 at the Vithalapur facility.

The plant also has a dedicated engine line that serves as a base to manufacture global engines (250cc and above category of two-wheelers) to serve markets like Thailand, the US, Europe, and Japan.

India is one of the most important production bases for Honda globally in two-wheeler manufacturing capacity, the company stated.

Currently HMSI has four manufacturing plants in the country located at Manesar (Haryana), Tapukara (Rajasthan), Narsapura



expected to rise to 186.63 MT, In December 2023, the total coal production from captive the government said

## **Bandhan Multi Asset Allocation Fund launched for investors**

<u>HT Bureau</u>

GUWAHATI, Jan 8: Bandhan Mutual Fund announced the launch of the Bandhan Multi Asset Allocation Fund, an open-ended scheme that enables investment across diverse asset classes including Indian Equities, International Equities, Arbitrage, Fixed Income, Gold and Silver. Studies have established that asset allocation, rather than security selection or market timing, is the dominant factor impacting return variability. This new fund will adopt a multi-asset allocation strategy to optimize reward and risk by diversifying investments across various asset classes, each offering unique advantages in terms of growth, stability, and inflation protection. The New Fund Offer (NFO) is set to open on Wednesday, January 10, and will close on Wednesday, January 24. Investments in the Bandhan Multi Asset Allocation Fund can be made through licensed mutual fund distributors, investment advisors, online platforms, directly or at

https://bandhanmutual.com/nfo/bandhan-multiasset-allocation-fund/.

Highlighting the importance of a multi-asset allocation approach, especially at a time when select segments in equity markets have provided very strong past returns potentially leading to build-up of concentration risks for some investors, Vishal Kapoor,

equities dented overall sentiment, forex dealers said.

83.16 against the greenback during the session.

ported the local unit.

from its previous close.

CEO of Bandhan AMC, commented, "Asset Allocation helps investors avoid behavioural pitfalls, such as market timing and performance chasing which can result in shorter holding periods, portfolio imbalances and eventually sub-optimal returns. Seasoned investors recognise that no single asset class has been a winner for consecutive periods, and hence, diversifying across asset classes brings greater stability and consistency of returns. Bandhan Multi Asset Allocation Fund is crafted to offer investors a sophisticated, transparent, and effective way to achieve a well-diversified portfolio investing in 5 major asset classes and across 13 sub-asset classes. By expertly integrating major asset classes into a single well-curated fund, the fund aims for potential long-term growth, with relatively lower volatility. Investors seeking a long-term well-rounded portfolio for relatively stable returns may find this very attractive."

Target allocation for this Fund includes about 50% to Indian Equities across Large-cap, Mid-cap and Small-cap stocks, 15% to International Equities across the U.S., other developed markets as well as emerging markets, 15% to fully hedged Arbitrage strategies, 10% towards actively managed high-quality Fixed Income and 10% towards domestic Gold and Silver. The portfolio would be systematically rebalanced half yearly to the targeted allocation.

since Halloween.

#### and commercial coal mines rose 38 per cent to 14.04 MT from 10.14 MT in the year-ago pe-

riod, it said. As per the latest figures, 50 captive and commercial coal mines are in operation.

The total coal production from captive and commercial coal mines in the April 1-December 31, 2023 period was 98 MT, as per the statement.

In 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched the auction process for 41 coal blocks for commercial mining, a move that opened India's coal sector for private players. (PTI)

# Gold slips ₹250; silver slumps ₹400

**NEW DELHI, Jan 8:** Gold prices slipped ₹ 250 to ₹ 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid a decline in precious metal prices internationally, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had settled

at ₹ 63,450 per 10 grams in the previous close.

Silver also slumped ₹ 400 to ₹76,300 per kilogram. In the pre-₹ 76,700 per kg.

In the futures trade on the MCX, the February contract of gold plunged ₹ 355 to ₹ 62,202 per 10 grams. Also, the March contract of silver tumbled ₹ 415 to ₹ 72,172 per kg on the bourse.

In the overseas markets, both



22.95 per ounce, respectively.

"Following strong US labour market data which stoked investor anticipation that the Federal Reserve might delay interest rate cuts led to a decline in gold prices," Saumil Gandhi, senior analvst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said

Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,029 per ounce, down by USD 16 from the previous close in the international markets.

US Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Producer Price Index (PPI) clarity on the Fed's monetary policy interest rate path ahead," commodity research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

## Sensex, Nifty tumble nearly 1 pc on global weakness

vious trade, silver closed at

gold and silver were trading lower



"Focus this week will be on the data which could provide further Navneet Damani, Senior VP of

MUMBAI, Jan 8: Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty surrendered early gains to close with deep losses on Monday, snapping their two-day winning streak as investors pared exposure to banking, metal and FMCG stocks amid a weak trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 670.93 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 71,355.22. During the day, it fell 725.11 points or 1 per cent to 71,301.04. The Nifty declined 197.80 points

or 0.91 per cent to 21,513.

"Nifty snapped a two-session rally to end lower after opening with marginal gains. Global stocks slipped on Monday ahead of a busy week of inflation and economic data and amid the diminishing prospect of a cut in US interest rates in the first quarter. Stocks fell ahead of a corporate reporting season where robust results are needed to justify high valuations," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities.

Among the Sensex firms, State Bank of India, ITC, Nestle, Asian Paints, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Hindustan Unilever were

the major laggards. In contrast, HCL Technologies, Power Grid, Sun Pharma, NTPC, Bajaj Finance and Titan were the gainers.

In the broader market, the BSE yield. In the near term, investors' midcap gauge declined 0.87 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.36 per cent. Geojit Financial Services. (PTI)

Among the indices, FMCG fell

KOSPI

ated their hiring in December. Average hourly pay for workers also rose, when economists had been forecasting a dip.

Such strong numbers are good news for workers, and they should keep the economy humming. That's a positive for corporate profits, which are one of the main factors that set prices for stocks.

Wall Street's worry is the strong data could also convince the Federal Reserve that inflation remains a hazard. But another report on Friday showed that growth for finance.

real estate and other companies in

HONG KONG, Jan 8: European ▼ 6.47 markets opened weaker while Asian stocks retreated on Monday after Wall Street logged its worst week CNH/KRW

The futures for the S&P 500 edged 0.1% lower and that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 0.3%, after Congressional leaders reached an agreement on overall spending levels for the current fiscal year that could help avoid a partial government shutdown later this

month. Oil prices fell after Saudi Arabia on Sunday cut oil prices to Asian



(Karnataka) and Vithalapur (Gujarat). (PTI)

### DGCA revises duty time limitations norms for flight crew

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Aviation safety regulator DGCA on Monday came out with revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms for flight crew, entailing increased weekly rest periods to 48 hours, extension of night hours, and limiting the number of night landings to only two as against six earlier.

These regulations have been instrumental in managing fatigue-related aviation safety risks for more than a decade now, an official statement said.

Airlines are required to comply with the revised norms latest by June 1. it said.

With a view to address and mitigate concerns on pilot fatigue through a data-driven approach, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) collected and analysed extensive numbers of pilot rosters, along with pilot fatigue reports submitted by airline operators, it said.

Based on the study and analysis, some of the key areas inducing fatigue, such as maximum flight duty period, night duty, weekly rest period, flight duty period extension, among others, were identified, it said.

The revised FDTL regulations have been formulated after extensive data analysis and feedback from various stakeholders, including airline operators, pilot associations and individuals, as per the statement.

It also said the best practices in the world -- FAA in the US, and EASA in the European Union -have also been taken into consideration in amending the regulations, while keeping in mind the specific operating environment in India.

The revised regulations mandate increased weekly rest periods from 36 hours to 48 hours for flight crew, thus ensuring sufficient time for recovery from cumulative fatigue, it said. (PTI)

On Friday, the domestic currency settled with a gain of 9 paise at 83.15 against the dollar.

flat against US dollar

MUMBAI, Jan 8: The rupee pared all its initial gains to settle just 1

paisa higher at 83.14 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as

the downward movement in crude oil prices in international markets sup-

However, a strong American currency overseas and negative domestic

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong

The domestic currency finally settled at 83.14 (provisional), up 1 paisa

at 83.09 and oscillated between the peak of 83.04 and the lowest level of

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 102.18 on Monday.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 1.14 per cent to USD 77.86 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex plunged 670.93 points, or 0.93 per cent, to settle at 71,355.22 points. The Nifty advanced 197.80 points, or 0.91 per cent, to 21,513.00 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Friday as they bought shares worth Rs 1,696.86 crore, according to exchange data

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

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from 56.9 in November to 59 in December, highlighting a sharp increase in output.

The country's forex reserves jumped by USD 2.759 billion to USD 623.2 billion in the week ended December 29, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. (PTI)

months Germany's DAX gained 0.1% to 16,620.57, with data showing exports rose 3.7% in November while

a feeble increase in factory orders showed the economy was still far from a solid recovery.

The CAC 40 in Paris slipped 0.1% to 7,413.53. Britain's FTSE 100 lost 0.3% to 7,670.10. In Asian trading, Hong Kong's

Hang Seng sank 1.9% to 16,179.00, led by losses for property and technology shares, which dropped 3.3%. The Shanghai Composite index slipped 1.4% to 2,887.54.

Property shares were heavily sold following news that major Chinese shadow bank Zhongzhi Enter-

prise Group, a major lender to real estate developers, filed for bank-

markets to their lowest level in 27 ruptcy in Beijing. Meanwhile, troubled developer China Evergrande's electric vehicle company said its vice chairman had been detained on suspicion of unspecified "crimes." China announced sanctions Sunday against five American defenserelated companies in response to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and U.S sanctions on Chinese companies and individuals. The announcement came ahead of a presidential election in Taiwan that is centered around the self-ruled island's relationship with China, which claims it as its own territory.

In South Korea, the Kospi shed 0.4%, to 2,567.82, and Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.5% to 7,451.50. Taiwan's Taiex gained

0.3%, while the SET in Bangkok was 0.6% lower. Markets in Japan were closed for

the U.S. services industries slowed by more than economists expected Investors are waiting for inflation last month. reports later this week from Japan,

the U.S. and China. Friday on Wall Street, the S&P 500 rose 0.2%, capping its first losing week in the last 10. It roared into 2024 on hopes that inflation and the overall economy are cooling enough for the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates sharply through the year.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.1% and the Nasdaq composite also added 0.1%.

Treasury yields swung sharply in the bond market after the latest monthly jobs report showed U.S. employers unexpectedly acceler-

Altogether, the data could bolster Wall Street's building hopes for a perfect landing for the economy, one where it slows just enough through high interest rates to stamp out high inflation but not so much that it causes a recession. In other dealings, the yield on the

10-year Treasury was at 4.05% early Monday, up from 4.04% late Friday

U.S. benchmark crude oil slipped 66 cents to \$73.15 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, the international standard, lost 68 cents to \$78.08 per barrel. (AP)

## Congressional leaders announce an agreement on spending levels The agreement speeds up the roughly \$20 billion in cuts already agreed to for the Internal Revenue Service

WASHINGTON, Jan 8: Congressional leaders have reached an agreement on overall spending levels for the current fiscal year that could help avoid a partial government shutdown later this month.

The agreement largely hews to spending caps for defense and domestic programs that Congress set as part of a bill to suspend the debt limit until 2025. But it does provide some concessions to House Republicans who viewed the spending restrictions in that agreement as insufficient.

In a letter to colleagues, House Speaker Mike Johnson said Sunday the agreement would secure \$16 billion in additional spending cuts from the previous agreement brokered by then-Speaker Kevin Mc-Carthy and President Joe Biden and is about \$30 billion less than what the Senate was considering.

"This represents the most favorable budget agreement Republicans have achieved in over a decade," Johnson writes.

Biden said the agreement "moves us one step closer to preventing a needless government shutdown and protecting important national priorities.'

"It reflects the funding levels that I negotiated with both parties and signed into law last spring," Biden said in a statement. "It rejects deep cuts to programs hard-



working families count on, and provides a path to passing full-year funding bills that deliver for the American people and are free of any extreme policies.

The agreement speeds up the roughly \$20 billion in cuts already agreed to for the Internal Revenue Service and rescinds about \$6 billion in COVID relief money that had been approved but not yet spent, according to Johnson's letter.

"It's a good deal for Democrats and the country," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told colleagues in a briefing call. Essentially, Democrats see the tradeoffs they made as mild. In a description provided to reporters, they said the COVID savings would have "no significant impact on any current projects or activities in motion." And they said that moving all of the \$20.2 billion in IRS cuts to this year instead of over two years would still leave the agency able to maintain "critical investments" that Congress provided in 2022. At the time, Congress

provided the IRS with an additional \$80 billion that could be spent over 10 years.

Overall, the agreement calls for \$886 billion in defense funding. It would provide \$772 billion in domestic, non-defense spending, when including \$69 billion called for in a side deal to the debt ceiling bill that McCarthy had reached with the White House, Democrats said,

The most conservative House Republicans opposed the earlier debt ceiling agreement and even brought House proceedings to a halt for a few days to show their displeasure. Many were surely wanting additional concessions, but Democrats have been insistent on abiding by the debt ceiling agreement's spending caps, leaving Johnson in a difficult spot.

"It's even worse than we thought," the House Freedom Caucus said of the agreement in a tweet posted on X. "This is total failure.'

Lawmakers needed an agreement on overall spending levels so that appropriators could write the bills that set line-byline funding for agencies. Money is set to lapse Jan. 19 for some agencies and Feb. 2 for others.

The agreement is separate from the negotiations that are taking place to secure additional funding for Israel and Ukraine while also curbing restrictions on asylum claims at the U.S. border.

In a joint statement, Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries voiced their support for the agreement.

"It will also allow us to keep the investments for hardworking American families secured by the legislative achievements of President Biden and Congressional Democrats," Schumer and Jeffries said.

But they also warned House Republicans about trying to add conservative policy riders to the bills in the coming days, saying Democrats would not support "poison pill policy changes in any of the twelve appropriations bills put before the Congress.

Rep. Patrick McHenry, who helped lead the debt ceiling negotiations when Mc-Carthy was speaker, noted that two-thirds of both parties in the House supported that agreement.

"This deal, which adheres to that framework, deserves equally as robust support," McHenry said.

Senate Republican leader Mitch Mc-Connell, R-Ky., tweeted that he was encouraged that leaders identified a "path toward completing" the spending bills. It was a cautious recognition that some obstacles could lie ahead.

"America faces serious national security challenges, and Congress must act quickly to deliver the full-year resources this moment requires," McConnell said. (AP)

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a holiday

#### **TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024**

## PRI members can help prevent wildlife crime: WCCB-Aaranyak

<u>HT Bureau</u> GUWAHATI, Jan 8: The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, in collaboration with Aaranyak, conducted a workshop to enlighten Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) members, forest staff, and villagers on their crucial role in preventing wildlife crime and illegal trade. The workshop, titled 'Prevention of Wildlife Crime and Role of PRI Members', took place on December 28 at the Centre of Excellence (Citrus crops) in Chaygaon, Bamunigaon. Jawaharlal Baro, assistant director of the WCCB, highlighted the significance of wildlife conservation and engaged participants on how they could contribute to curbing wildlife crime and illegal trade. Baro utilised a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate species identification and the various techniques employed by illegal wildlife traders.

The divisional forest office, West Kamrup Division, Government of Assam, provided support for organizing the workshop. The oneday sensitisation program brought together forest staff from the West Kamrup Division and villagers, primarily PRI members.

Dimpi Bora (IFS), divisional forest officer of Kamrup West Division, graced the workshop as a special guest, while Shamim Akhtar, forest ranger of the Loharghat Range, also participated.

Ajoy Kumar Das, a practicing advocate at the Gauhati High Court and senior law consultant of Aaranyak, delved into the three-tier system of Panchayati Raj in India, emphasising its constitutionalisation through the 73rd constitutional amendment in 1992. Das highlighted that the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1986, replaced the 1972 Act and came into effect in September 1990. He underscored the advanced state of the PRI system in Assam as a well-established form of local self-governance.

Advocate Das encouraged PRI members to play a significant role in wildlife crime prevention by acting as informants in investigations or witnesses in court cases. He emphasised their potential to raise awareness at the grassroots level about the importance of wildlife. Discussing Section 125 of the Indian Evidence Act 1872, Das assured PRI members their names would remain undisclosed in investigation diaries, fostering a sense of security in their cooperation with the Forest Department. The workshop aimed to garner community support for wildlife conservation, recognising the pivotal role that local institutions and individuals can play in curbing wildlife crime and fostering a harmonious coexistence with the environment.

## **Booth Karmi Sanmilan** organised in Nalbari

#### HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 8: In Nalbari, the Booth Karmi Sanmilan for

Barpeta LS constituency witnessed a vibrant participation from AGP Karmakartas.

The event not only paid heartfelt tributes to the martyrs of the historic Assam Movement but also extended honours to the families of these courageous martyrs.

Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Atul Bora, highlighted the pivotal role of booths as political hubs for dedicated workers, highlighting that the party's strength is rooted in the strength of its booths.

He urged AGP functionaries and karmakartas to fortify the party's organisational foundation by cultivating robust public relations at the grassroots level.

Expressing gratitude, minister Atul Bora thanked AGP working president and minister of Health & Family Welfare, Information Technology, Science and Technology, Keshab Mahanta, senior leader Phani Bhusan Choudhury, Central Committee vice presidents, general secretaries, secretaries, and other office bearers.

## Journalists rally against assault on reporter, call for Nagaon DC's removal

HT Correspondent JORHAT, Jan 8: A protest gathering convened by the Jorhat Press Club, in collaboration with the Jorhat District Journalists' Association, took place on Monday at the Jorhat Press Club.

The demonstration aimed to address the reported assault on a journalist within the premises of the Nagaon District Commissioner's Ofthe fice by Nagaon DC three days ago. গ্ৰতিবাদী কাৰ্যসূচী Journalists. যোৰহাই প্ৰেছ ক্লাৰৰ উদেৱগত along with representatives from various student

and civic organisations, participated in the meeting, where they vehemently condemned the alleged assault.

The gathering collectively called for a thorough and highlevel investigation into the incident, expressing concerns over the safety and security of journalists in the state.

Additionally, the protesters demanded the immediate removal of the Nagaon district commissioner. They expressed disappointment over the chief minister's silence on the matter and emphasised the need for swift action to ensure the wellbeing of journalists and uphold secretary Paramananda Deka.

their right to work without fear of violence. **Our Jagiroad correspondent** adds: In response to the re-

ported assault on a journalist in Nagaon, the Jagiroad Press Club held an emergency meeting on Monday.

Chaired

incident.

nalists Security Act.

In addition to Parag, the opening ceremony saw the presence of Dighade SR, deputy commandant, and

Francis Chermako, principal of Don Bosco Vocational Training Center, Amguri, Haltugaon, Kokrajhar.

REGION

by president Manoranjan Mishra, the meeting strongly de nounced the Nagaon district commissioner for physically attacking journalist Deepankar Medhi (NB News) while on

duty. The club called for a fair trial and appropriate punishment for the individuals involved. Additionally, they urged the government to take necessary measures to ensure the safety of journalists.

Protesters, including journalists Deepak Kalita, Ajay Pal, Sanu Gogoi, Jugal Bora, Vijay Pal, and Bimal Hazarika, voiced their strong condemnation of the They also demanded the prompt enactment of the Jour-

The discussions The meeting's objectives were delved into the extensi outlined by Jagiroad Press Club range of developmen

### Focus on welfare of needy and less privileged: Governor to officers HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 8: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria conducted a **GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM** comprehensive review of

the ongoing development initiatives and the law and order situation in the Kamrup Metropolitan district. The meeting, held at the conference hall of the

District Commissioner's office, saw the active participation of heads of various departments. District commissioner

Sattawan pre-Sumit sented а detailed overview of the development projects underway in the district through a comprehensive Power-Point presentation.

He briefed the Governor on the functioning of different departments and provided a progress report on various central and state welfare schemes.

During the meeting, the Governor specifically ment assessed the progress of key initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi and the Prime Minister's Fasal Bima Yojana.

tivities and projects

cluding grant schemes highlighting their pivotal from both the central and role in ensuring the physical and mental wellstate governments.

The Governor scrutibeing of children. nised the advancements Expressing his comin Education, Health, mitment to the state's de-Water Resources, Irrigavelopment, Governor tion, Fisheries, PWD, Kataria stated, "This is and the activities of the my second review meet-Social Welfare departing with the district. I have taken keen interest Addressing elemenin stimulating the develtary education, Governor opment of the state and

Kataria urged the district therefore intended to elementary officer to acmeet all the officers to tively work towards get first-hand informaboosting enrollment in tion. He encouraged offigovernment schools. Ad-

ing the importance of creating awareness about various government schemes for public accessibility.

The Governor also engaged in an in-depth disthe cussion with commissioner of Police, Diganta Barah, regarding the policing situation in the district.

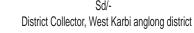
The commissioner provided a comprehensive briefing on the prevailing law and order conditions, contributing to the overall assessment of the district's development and security landscape.

nsive nt ac- s, in-	tention	ly, he directed at- to the Anganwadi in the district,	cers to focus on the wel- fare of the needy and less privileged while stress-		
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E-B1D NOTICE

'OFF' licences in the specified locations of West Karbi Anglong district.

https://assamtenders.gov.in onwards. Please visit the e-tendering portal: from 10/01/2024 (date) 10.00 A.M., (time)



## Mass outreach campaign gears up ahead of Ram Mandir inauguration

nity for the first fifteen days of January.

hoods.

#### HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 8: In preparation for the inauguration of the Ram Mandir on January 22, 2024, an extensive mass outreach campaign is underway in Hojai district. As part of this initiative, volunteers from various social organisations, includ-

Abhijit Ghoshal, secretary of VHP, Hojai district, shared with our correspondent that volunteers are distributing Akshata (sacred rice), invitations, a description, and a photograph of the tem-

ple to Sanatan families.

Lanka, and Lumding) within the district. He assured that the holy items have already been distributed to all temples in the district.

Sanatan families who have not received the items are encouraged to collect them from their nearest temples and seek blessings from Ram Lalla





THE HILLS TIMES

ISTRICT COMMISIONER'S OFF

KAMRUP (METROPOLITAN)

CONFERENCE HALL

ing the Rashtriva Swayamsevak Sangh Bharatiya Janata Party, Vishva Hindu Parishad, Sanskar Bharti, among others, are visiting approximately one lakh families in the district.

The campaign, conducted nationwide under the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, is actively engaging the commu-

The mass outreach program commenced on January 1, 2024, and so far, more than 45,000 Hindu families in the district have received these sacred items. Ghoshal mentioned that 300 groups (tolis) with two thousand volunteers are

involved in distributing these items across the eight blocks and three towns (Hojai,

His efforts resulted in se-

This paved the way for his

entry into the Indian Rail-

ways, where he has been

contributing to various sec-

tors, including operations,

marketing, and business de-

India.

velopment in north-east

For the past two years,

curing the 14th Rank in

APSC and the 256th rank in

UPSC Civil Service Exam.

As a noteworthy reminder, the Sanatan families have been requested to decorate their homes, create rangoli, light lamps in the evening, and witness the Ayodhya Ram Mandir Pran Pratishtha ceremony live at the temple near their residence on January 22.

## **IRTS officer shines with 99.83** percentile in CAT 2023



HT Correspondent NAGAON, Jan 8: Indian Railways Traffic Service (IRTS) officer Kapinjal Kishore Sharma, hailing from Assam, has brought pride to the state by securing an impressive 99.83 percentile in the CAT 2023 exam.

The results of the Common Admission Test (CAT) were recently announced, and Sharma's exceptional performance has earned him a place among the top scorers.

Sharma's journey towards academic excellence traces back to his early years, marked by notable achievements. He secured a rank in the 10th class board exams in 2005 and cleared the IIT JEE mission (UPSC) Civil Serv-

in 2007 Subsequently, he enrolled in the prestigious IIT Guwahati, pursuing a BTech in Civil Engineering and completing the degree in 2011. His commitment to academic excellence continued as he achieved an All India Rank of 132 in the GATE exam, leading to the completion of his MTech in Structural Engineering from IIT Guwahati in 2013. Not content with his academic milestones,

Sharma has served as the Sharma further demonstrated senior divisional commercial manager of Lumding divihis capabilities in civil service exams. sion. In this role, he oversees In 2015, he appeared for all railway commercial activboth the Assam Public Servities in states like Tripura, ice Commission (APSC) Manipur, Mizoram, Naga-Civil Service Exam and the land, and parts of Assam, in-Union Public Service Comcluding specific districts. His tenure has been marked by a

focus on increasing revenue earnings for the Railways and improving the customer experience at railway stations.

Under Sharma's leadership, Lumding division has witnessed a remarkable growth in revenue, surpassing ₹ 1000 crores for the first time-an achievement that reflects his dedication and effective management.

Beyond financial success, Sharma has implemented innovative measures to enhance the passenger experience at railway stations.

Initiatives include the introduction of a world-class executive lounge at Guwahati Railway Station, providing top-notch facilities to passengers and elevating the image of the developing Railways.

Additionally, various amenities such as food and beverage stalls, retiring rooms, and cloakrooms have been introduced at different railway stations in Assam to offer optimal facilities to passengers.

NHM/D/

Looking ahead, Sharma has expressed his desire to pursue a PhD. from IIM Shillong. His research aspirations focus on exploring state-of-the-art methods and strategies to further enhance the passenger experience at railway stations in North East India, ultimately aiming to provide greater comfort and satisfaction to passengers.

## **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.
- ④ Financial Year 2023-24 sets a more ambitious target: 2,03,100 cataract surgeries for Assam, set by the Government of India.
- g 💿 The ongoing intensified Cataract Surgery Campaign aims to achieve this target. -24/1
  - O 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 Call 108** for health related for Ambulance service

For more details contact District NPCB & VI Cell

### 4

### THE HILLS TIMES VOL. XXV, ISSUE 1, DIPHU, TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Beware of little expenses. A small leak will sink a great ship. - Benjamin Franklin

## **India's Debt** Challenges

Tn a recent annual consultation report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has highlighted concerns over India's general government debt, warning that it may surpass 100% of the country's GDP by 2028. While immediate panic may not be warranted, the IMF emphasizes the need for "ambitious" fiscal consolidation to mitigate long-term risks. K.V. Subramanian, India's executive director at the IMF, points out that despite global economic shocks, India's public debt-to-GDP ratio has remained relatively stable, hovering around 81-84% over the past two decades. The IMF's cautionary stance is grounded in the potential impact of a global growth slowdown on India through trade and financial channels. The report also highlights domestic challenges, including weather shocks leading to inflationary pressures and recurrent commodity price volatility. However, the IMF acknowledges the upside of India's robust consumer demand, fostering higher production, supplies, and investment. The global debt landscape is also under scrutiny, with overall public debt reaching \$97 trillion in 2023, marking a 40% increase since 2019. The United States alone holds a significant 33% share of the world's public debt, with a debt-to-GDP ratio of 123.3%. Japan follows closely with a staggering ratio of 255.2%, constituting 11% of the global debt.

Despite India's relatively stable national debt scenario, concerns arise at the state level. Several states grapple with limited revenue generation capabilities, leading to escalating debts and servicing challenges. The debt-to-state GDP ratio projections for 2023-24 reveal worrisome figures for states like Punjab, Bihar, and West Bengal. Some smaller states, including Arunachal Pradesh, face exceptionally high debt-to-state GDP ratios, reaching up to 53%. The root cause of escalating government debts, both at the central and state levels, appears to be linked more to populist measures than strategic development initiatives. Governments, driven by electoral considerations, are providing substantial subsidies and doles to lowincome groups. For instance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's extension of the free food grains scheme for five more years, benefitting 81 crore people, comes at a cost exceeding Rs. 11 lakh crore. Notably, this generosity is extended despite the government's own estimate putting the number of poor in the country at around 20 crore.

While a higher debt-to-GDP ratio can be acceptable if directed towards development expenditure on social and industrial infrastructure, the worrying trend in India is the mounting debt burden resulting from political giveaways. The focus on inducing voter support rather than fostering sustainable growth and employment raises concerns about responsible debt management. Political pressures, combined with poor governance quality in several states, contribute to a situation where debt accumulates to address diverse population demands rather than promoting overall development. In essence, the rising state government debts in India should not be overlooked. It is imperative for policymakers to shift their focus from short-term populist measures to long-term, sustainable development initiatives. Prudent fiscal management, coupled with responsible governance, will be crucial to ensuring that the debt trajectory aligns with the nation's growth objectives. As India navigates the complexities of a changing global economic landscape, a strategic and disciplined approach to managing government debt becomes paramount for securing a robust and resilient economic future. India faces mounting concerns over rising state government debts, prompting the International Monetary Fund to stress the need for ambitious fiscal consolidation. Political pressures and populist spending raise apprehensions about responsible debt management.

**Unveiling the Bharatiya** Nyay Sanhita hit-and-run law: A balancing act between

## History repeats itself with the killing of senior Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri

istory repeats itself. Palestinian airplane hijackings and attacks on Israeli civilians in Israel as well as on Israeli and Jewish targets abroad pockmarked the 1970s and 1980s. The violence put the Palestinian issue on the world agenda. The violence erupted, and at times, was driven by fierce debate among Palestinian guerilla leaders on whether to drop maximalist demands for replacing the State of Israel with a (Palestinian-dominated) "secular democratic state" and strive for a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

It took the PLO 16 years to unambiguously accept Israel's existence and end armed resistance against Israel in 1988. The violence ebbed and flowed. It involved targeted assassinations of Israeli and Palestinian representatives and leaders in third countries.

The 1982 shooting in London of the Israeli ambassador to Britain, Shlomo Argov, sparked the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and forced Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation to decamp from Lebanon to Tunisia.

For much of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, Israel refused to engage with the PLO, employing the same language it uses today about Hamas. To be sure, Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel upped the ante in scale and brutality. It has, again fitting a historic pattern, empowered the most extreme ultra-nationalist, ultra-religious elements on Israel's political spectrum, and sparked a war, involving indiscriminate bombing and punishment of a civilian population that Israel and Hamas will find difficult to live down.

While the jury is out, the war has not halted a torturous process within Hamas, much like the equally torturous evolution within the PLO. Hamas' internal debate became evident with the adoption of its 2017 amended charter and has continued despite the war. There is no guarantee that Hamas will follow in the footsteps of the PLO.

This week's presumably Israeli killing in

Beirut of senior Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri, a 57-year-old co-founder of the group's military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and deputy head of its political bureau, raises the spectre of renewed tit-for-tat Palestinian and Israeli killings in third countries with one difference.

Al-Arouri, was widely viewed as a hardliner within Hamas, responsible for the group's military infrastructure in Lebanon and operations on the West Bank, where its popularity is on the rise because of the Gaza war and its contribution to a potentially burgeoning armed insurgency. Protests erupted on the West Bank, in response to calls by Hamas for "acts of resistance," to protest the killing of Al-Arouri, a West Bank native, and several other Hamas operatives in the Beirut drone strike. A general strike

closed down businesses. DEGREE OF THOUGHT In August, Al-Arouri telegraphed Hamas's in-By: James M Dorsey tentions long before the October 7 attack.

"A total war has become inevitable. We all consider it necessary... The resistance axis, the Palestinian people, and our nation, we want this total war. It is not (just) something we say in the media. We talk about it behind closed doors.... We are discussing together the different scenarios and possibilities," Al-Arouri told Al Maydeen TV. Last century's tit-for-tat killings of

Palestinians targeted primarily PLO moderates, not hardliners, and were perpetrated not only by Israel but also by Palestinian hardliners, like Abu Nidal, a renegade PLO operative.

Israel has repeatedly warned that it will hunt down Hamas operatives wherever they are. In 2015, the US State Department offered up to \$5 million for "information leading to the identification or location" of Al-Arouri. Even so, Israel failed to notify the Biden administration of its plans to take out Al-Arouri, a sign it feared the US would oppose the operation because it risked expanding the war beyond carefully calibrated hostilities on the Lebanese-Israeli border and in the Red Sea as well as Israeli-Palestinian clashes in the West Bank. Complicating the fallout of Al-Arouri's death is the fact that Israel and Hamas are not the only players.

Hezbollah has vowed to retaliate for the killing in Lebanon of any representative of the Iranian-backed Axis of Resistance that includes Hamas, the Yemeni Houthis, and Iraqi militias alongside the Lebanese Shiite militia and the Islamic Republic.

Hezbollah has been waging a war against Israel since October 7 to tie Israeli forces down on the Jewish state's northern border so that they cannot be deployed in Gaza without provoking an all-out conflict that could prove disastrous for Hezbollah and Lebanon.

> Arouri's killing puts Hezbollah between a rock and a hard place. It needs to find a way to be seen as living up to its vow while ensuring the hostilities do

not spin out of control. Many in Lebanon fear Hamas could drag the bankrupt country into a war they do not want.

Last month, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu threatened on a visit to troops on the Lebanese border that Israel would "single-handedly turn Beirut and South Lebanon, not far from here, into Gaza and Khan Yunis" if Hezbollah started an all-out war. In a 90-minute speech to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the US assassination of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Oassem Soleimani scheduled before Al-Arouri's killing, Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah referred only summarily to the Hamas leader's death.

Much of his speech was an ode to Soleimani and Iran's role in supporting militias in Gaza, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen by funding, training, and arming them, enabling them to manufacture weaponry, and creating the Axis of Resistance. Even so, Nasrallah insisted that Axis

members independently took their own decisions and did not take orders from Iran.

Clad in a black cloak and turban, Nasrallah praised Hamas' October 7 attack with no mention of the group's targeting of civilians. He described the carnage rained on Gaza by Israel in response as "worth the sacrifice.

The Hezbollah leader produced a laundry list of why Hamas was winning the war, including its success in putting the Palestinian plight back on the international agenda.

The war succeeded in "reviving the Palestinian cause, forcing nations across the world to look for solutions," Nasrallah said, noting that Arab countries had been willing to establish formal relations with Israel without a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Yet, the Hezbollah leader seemed to buy time, by saying he would address the issue of Lebanon and Al-Arouri's killing in greater detail in another speech on Friday during a ceremony for a Hezbollah operative who died recently.

At the same time, Nasrallah appeared to suggest that Hezbollah would retaliate for Al-Arouri's killing on the group's timeline, considering widespread Lebanese opposition to a war with Israel. Nasrallah warned, referring to Al-Arouri's killing in the Hezbollah stronghold in southern Beirut, that "yesterday's crime is blatant, it is serious. This crime will not go unanswered. The battlefield is there, the nights are there.

Yet, he also noted that "we are taking the situation in Lebanon into account.<sup>3</sup> Tellingly, Nasrallah seemed to back hardliners in Hamas' internal debate.

Arguing that Jewish attachment to the land was fabricated and that Israelis were fleeing the country because Israel was proven incapable of providing security, Nasrallah addressed Israelis directly, saying, "Here you don't have a future. The land of Palestine is for the Palestinians. (IPA Service)

## BJP's rise and the everyday resonance of Ram Mandir in India

#### **By: Dipak Kurmi**

indutva discourse has permeated the diverse tapestry of Indian daily life, weaving its way through tea shops, coffee houses, trains, and Dhabas. Engaging discussions span Hindu dharma, the Ram Mandir, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), and facets of Hindu culture and identity. The vocal proponents of Hindutva manifest in varied shades - some adopting a gentler approach, others assertively passionate, and a few embracing an aggressive stance, even distancing themselves from alternative Hindutva perspectives. The yearning for height-

incrementally, surfacing at a juncture when the political atmosphere became favorable. The ascension of the BJP as a potent political entity provided a platform for this assertive expression of the Hindutva public, allowing them to articulate their convictions with vigor.

Traditionally, the Hindutva community found its voice in the discourses of sadhus and saints, sect gatherings, conferences, and publications, creating its distinct public sphere. However, recent decades have witnessed a proliferation of Hindu organizations, NGOs, and diverse entities that serve as arenas for discussions and assertions related to Hindutva. These groups orchestrate a tives within this vibrant commurange of events, from book fairs and literary festivals to discourse groups, establishing a tangible Hindutva public sphere that extends both into physical realms and across virtual platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram, Actively participating, they express their perspectives, take stands on various Hindu-centric matters, and carve out spaces within main-

stream media, electronic channels, and opinion editorials.

Within the Hindutva public, diversity reigns as it intertwines with other identities like caste and region, evolving dynamically. Despite the multifaceted nature of this community, the overarching identity of Hindutva manages to weave together these differences and contradictions. Internally, distinctions arise, revealing diverse stances and occasional critiques, particularly concerning the intensity of the pursuit of Hinduism. These varying positions find expression across a spectrum of YouTube channels featuring Hindutva activists, showcasing the nuanced tapestry of perspec-

ing in the metamorphosis of nu- as a political icon for its memmerous secular individuals into advocates of Hindutva, marking a swift and significant transfor-

mation in their perspectives. While a significant portion of the Hindutva community aligns itself with the BJP. regional dvnamics come into play, particularly in states like Maharashtra, where alternatives such as the Shiv Sena (Uddhav) present viable choices. The political landscape can witness divergence in positions. The imminent inauguration of the Ram Janam Bhoomi temple on January 22 in Ayodhya is poised to mark a historic milestone, potentially shaping the political allegiance of the Hindutva bers.

As we anticipate the 2024 parliamentary elections, issues concerning the sanctity of Hindutva, coupled with diverse developmental and social assistance initiatives like the Gareeb Kalyan Yojana, are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the electoral landscape for the BJP. The party's proactive endeavors to uplift Hindu temples and sacred sites are perceived by the Hindu community as a commendable elevation of the dignity of their religion. This sentiment, coupled with a favorable political climate receptive to their aspirations and viewpoints, has the potential to realign a significant segment of the Hindutva public towards the BJP in the upcoming elections. To comprehensively grasp the electoral mobilization of Hindutva communities, it is essential to scrutinize not only the electoral issues and agenda of the opposition but also assess their potential influences and repercussions. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

### safety and industry concerns

'n a paradigm-shifting move, nificant disruptions in transportathe Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) has ushered in a new era of legal reforms in India, specifically targeting the grave issue of hit-and-run cases that have plagued the nation's roads. While the intentions behind the stringent penalties under the BNS are laudable - aiming to enhance road safety and hold offenders accountable - its introduction has triggered a complex debate, especially within the trucking industry.

The BNS imposes severe penalties on drivers involved in hit-and-run cases, marking a significant departure from the previous legal landscape. Offenders now face the possibility of 10 years in prison or a hefty fine of Rs.7 Lakh, an earnest attempt by lawmakers to discourage negli-

gent driving. The need for such legislative measures becomes glaring when considering the alarming

statistics of 57,415 hit-and-run accidents in 2021, resulting in 25,938 deaths and 45,355 injuries, accounting for a staggering 13.9% of all accidents and 16.8% of all road accident-related deaths.

The severity of the issue prompted the introduction of the BNS, with the primary goal of fostering accountability and safeguarding lives. However, this laudable initiative has faced vehement opposition from truck drivers across the nation, who argue that the harsh penalties could pose financial hardships and jeopardize their livelihoods. The All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) has gone as far as calling for the withdrawal of the law, citing concerns about potential harassment.

The crux of the truckers' objection lies in the perceived harshness of the law and the fear of disproportionate consequences for accidents beyond their control. The protests have led to sigtion and supply chains, with approximately 70% of trucks and containers off the roads during a three-day strike in Mumbai alone, impacting the distribution of vital commodities, including fuel and essentials.

Amidst the protests and disruptions, the potential impacts of the BNS on India's road safety and accident statistics cannot be overlooked. Proponents of the law argue that the severe penalties could serve as a robust deterrent, leading to a potential decrease in hit-and-run incidents. The expectation is that drivers, now conof the severe scious consequences, will be more inclined to stay at the scene, improving response times and aid to victims.

Moreover, the legal overhaul

bring

could potentially about a cultural shift in driving behaviour, encouraging more

responsible and cautious practices. Over time, this could translate into a slow but significant reduction in accidents, injuries, and deaths on Indian roads.

In response to the protests, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla has taken a conciliatory approach, promising consultations with AIMTC before imposing new penal provisions related to hit-and-run cases. While urging truck drivers to return to work, Bhalla acknowledges the concerns raised by the industry and seeks a balanced resolution.

The unfolding scenario reflects a delicate balance between prioritizing public safety and addressing the legitimate concerns of an industry integral to the nation's economy. As consultations continue, the BNS hit-and-run law remains a work in progress, with its long-term impact on road safety and the trucking industry's future yet to be fully realized. (The author can be reached at shashankadas0007@gmail.com)

ened Hindutva politics and mobilization resonates among many, shaping the evolving narrative of the nation.

Though Hinduism has inherently formed an inseparable aspect of every individual adherent's identity, the Hindutva community showcases a heightened, structured awareness of their Hindu identity. This organized consciousness has developed

nity. In his latest work, "Republic of Hindutva," Badri Narayan delves into the unfolding landscape of Hindutva common sense within the Hindu populace. This shared sensibility triggers their Hindutva awareness whenever pertinent issues come to the fore in the public domain. The surge in Hindutva consciousness among Hindus is palpable, result-

public, especially in the upcoming 2024 parliamentary elections. The BJP earns accolades not only for effectively resolving the Ayodhya issue but also for wholesupporting the heartedly construction of the Ram Janam Bhoomi temple. Leading the BJP, Prime Minis-

ter Narendra Modi commands extensive support from the Hindutva community, emerging

## Global warming linked to a spate of rare disease outbreaks in 2023

#### **By: Zoya Teirstein**

16-month-old boy was playing in a splash pad at a country club in Little Rock, Arkansas, this summer when water containing a very rare and deadly brain-eating amoeba went up his nose. He died a few days later in the hospital. The toddler wasn't the first person in the United States to contract the freshwater amoeba, Naegleriafowleri, this year. In February, a man in Florida died after rinsing his sinuses with unboiled water - the first Naegleriafowlerilinked death to occur in winter in the U.S.

2023 was also an active year for Vibrio vulnificus, a type of flesh-eating bacteria. There were 11 deaths connected to the bacteria in Florida, three deaths in North Carolina, and another three deaths in New York and Connecticut. Then there was the first-ever locally transmitted case of mosquito-borne dengue fever in Southern California in October, followed by another case a couple of weeks later. Scientists have warned that climate change would alter the prevalence and spread of diseases in the U.S., particularly those caused by pathogens that are sensitive to temperature. This year's

spate of rare illnesses may have come as a surprise to the uninitiated, but researchers who have been following the way climate change influences disease say 2023 represents the continuation of a trend they expect will become more pronounced over time: The geographic distribution of pathogens and the timing of their emergence are undergoing a shift.

"These are broadly the patterns that we would expect," said Rachel Baker, assistant professor of epidemiology, environ-

ment, and society at Brown University. "Things start moving northward, expand outside the tropics." The number of outbreaks Americans see each year, said Colin Carlson, a global change biologist studying the relationship between global climate change, biodiversity loss, and emerging infectious diseases at Georgetown University, "is going to continue to increase.

That's because climate change can have a profound effect on the factors that drive disease, such as temperature, extreme weather, and even human behaviour. A 2021 study found water temperature was among the top environmental factors affecting the distribution and abundance of Naegleriafowleri, which thrives in water temperatures above 100 degrees Fahrenheit but can also survive frigid winters by forming cysts in lake or pond sediment. The amoeba infects people when it enters the nasal canal and, from there, the brain. "As surface water temperatures increase with climate change, it is likely that this amoeba will pose a greater threat to human health," the study said.

Vibrio bacteria, which has been called the "microbial barometer of climate change," is affected in a similar way. The ocean has absorbed the vast majority of human-caused warming over the past century and a half, and sea surface temperatures, especially along the nation's coasts, are beginning to rise precipitously as a result. Studies that have mapped Vibrio vulnificus growth show the bacteria stretching northward along the eastern coastline of the U.S. in lockstep with rising temperatures. Hotter summers also lead to more people seeking bodies of

water to cool off in, which may influence took place in 2023 individually to deterthe number of human exposures to the bacteria, a study said. People get infected by consuming contaminated shellfish or exposing an open wound - no matter how small - to Vibrio-contaminated water.

Mosquitoes breed in warm, moist conditions and can spread diseases like dengue when they bite people. Studies show the species of mosquito that carries dengue, which is endemic in many parts of the Global South, is moving north into new territory as temperatures climb and flooding becomes more frequent and extreme. A study from 2019 warned that much of the southeastern U.S. is likely to become hospitable to dengue by 2050.

Other warmth-loving pathogens and carriers of pathogens are on the move, too - some of them affecting thousands of people a year. Valley fever, a fungal disease that can progress into a disfiguring and deadly illness, is spreading through a West that is drier and hotter than it used to be.

The lone star tick, an aggressive hunter that often leaves the humans it bites with a life-long allergy to red meat, is expanding northward as winter temperatures grow milder and longer breeding seasons allow for a larger and more distributed tick population.

The effect that rising temperatures have on these diseases doesn't necessarily signal that every death linked to a brain-eating amoeba or Vibrio that occurred this year wouldn't have happened in the absence of climate change - rare pathogens were claiming lives long before anthropogenic warming began altering the planet's dynamics. Future analyses may look at the outbreaks that

mine whether rising temperatures or some other climate change-related factor played a role. What is clear is that climate change is creating more opportunities for rare infectious diseases to crop up. Daniel R. Brooks, a professor of evolutionary biology at the University of Toronto and author of a book on climate change and emerging diseases, calls this "pathogen pollution," or "the accumulation of a lot of little emergences."

State and local health departments have few tools at their disposal for predicting anomalous disease outbreaks, and doctors often aren't familiar with diseases that aren't endemic to their region. But health institutions can take steps to limit the spread of rare climate-driven pathogens. Medical schools could incorporate climate-sensitive diseases into their curricula so their students know how to recognize these burgeoning threats no matter where in the U.S. they eventually land.

A rapid test for Naegleriafowleri in water samples already exists and could be used by health departments to test pools and other summer-time hot spots for the amoeba. States could conduct real-time monitoring of beaches for Vibrio bacteria via satellite. Cities can monitor the larvae of the mosquito species that spreads dengue and other diseases and spray pesticides to reduce the number of adult mosquitoes.

"If we were looking proactively for pathogens before they caused disease, we could better anticipate local outbreaks," Brooks said. In other words, he said, we should be "finding them before they find us." (IPA Service)



**TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024** 

### MISCELLANEOUS

# An escapist outlet: The rise of hyper-masculinity in Indian cinema



**By: Eshan Sharma** 

Madness is the most disgraceful thing that can overtake a wild creature." ~ Rudyard

Kipling, The Jungle Book It is often said that cinema acts as a mirror to the society we live in. At times, it depicts issues faced by society, and sometimes, it chooses to escape from reality, taking the viewer to an imagined territory. It is difficult to identify when society is influenced by cinema or vice versa.

Films depict a complex society with numerous cultures, identities, and issues in various ways. Sometimes, these representations raise important questions. In recent times, films like Kabir Singh (2019) or Animal (2023) attracted the public as well as scholarly scrutiny regarding the depiction and politics of gender in Indian cinema.

lence.

In a recent interview, actor Naseeruddin Shah said, "Mardon ki insecurity badh rahi hai, isiliye ab aur zyada zor diya jaa raha hai hyper masculinity ko..." (the insecurities of men are increasing and that is why there is a push for hyper-masculinity.)

Indian society is patriarchal, and the Hindi film industry, in particular, is a male-dominated industry, where the majority of the technical crew, including filmmakers and producers, are male. The 'male gaze' dictates how the interplay and politics of gender are represented in our cinema.

As a student of history, my work allows me to go back in time to see how the conception and representation of masculinity has evolved over the years. When I think of films like Animal or Kabir

essentially anti-establishment sciously reshaped notions of and stood for the welfare of masculinity, stardom, and pothe poor. Similar to Amitabh litical discourse on the screen, Bachchan, Naseeruddin Shah leaving an indelible impact on subsequent developments in is depicted in art house films such as Albert Pinto Ko Gussa cinema. Kyon Aata Hai (1980) by What Bachchan's Vijay Saeed Akhtar Mirza as a Khanna was to commercial

young man frustrated with the cinema, Naseeruddin Shah system but non-violent. and Om Puri were to art house Prakash Mehra's Zanjeer cinema. Both of them were (1973) created the image of considered to be the best of the angry young man played their time. They immortalized characters like Albert Pinto by Amitabh Bachchan. The 1970s were more turbulent from Saeed Akhtar Mirza's and testing than any other in Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon India's history, characterised Aata Hai? or Bhiku Lahanya by increasing unemployment, from Govind Nihalani's

Aakrosh during the 1980s. poverty, and political vio-The 80s were arguably a It was the time when, on lost decade, with Indira one side, the Indian armed Gandhi pursuing her gambits forces had just emerged victoof nationalising banks and rious in the Bangladesh Liberloan melas when she should have been ushering in ecoation War against Pakistan,

and on the other side, the nomic reforms and dereguladaughter of independent tion India's first Prime Minister In the movie Albert Pinto Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai?, the Gandhi, was voted in. The central themes of the narrative evocative slogan of the revolve around Pinto's strugdecade was, 'Indira Lao, gle to determine his life's purbeyond repairing

Garibi Hatao' (Elect Indira, pose Eradicate Poverty). expensive cars for affluent The terrible drought in East clients at the garage. Pinto's India in the mid-1960s imlack of awareness regarding peded India's development the social and political dimenand aggravated poverty, resions affecting his family sulting in the country's inleads to the imprisonment of creased reliance on western his unemployed younger brother, exploited by local powers for aid.

The 1970s witnessed the criminal elements. hollowness of the govern-Initially, Pinto's anger ment's 'Garibi Hatao (Eradiseems rooted in selfishness, slogan, but it transforms, symbolising juxtaposed against the harsh a broader discontent. This disrealities of daily life, marked content is reflective of the imby inflation, escalating unemminent expression by real ployment, and pervasive polit-Mumbai textile workers, emical and financial corruption. bodied in the politically active Indifference towards the buryet defiant figure of his father. geoning student movements As the film unfolds, witnationwide further fueled a nessing his brother's incarcersense of helplessness. ation, his father's loss of dignity, and the company's

The common man was disillusioned and angry with the malicious attempts to discredit the workers' union and time, and at that

ema screen, Pinto faces opposition from a disgruntled audience, and Mirza subverts the concept of political acquiescence by implicating the broader society and empowering Pinto.

Characters like Albert Pinto and Vijay Khanna emerged as compelling figures, raising thought-provoking questions through their expressions of anger, which symbolically represented a more profound discontent. Their narratives served as a lens through which the audience could analyse and comment on the intricate social and political landscapes prevalent during the tumultuous decades of the 1970s and 80s

#### The present cinematic landscape

Fast-forward to the present cinematic landscape, and a disconcerting pattern reemerges - women are once again relegated to peripheral roles, their significance measured solely by their contributions to the male character's storyline.

Film critic Anna M.M. Vetticad delves into this issue, particularly in the context of Pushpa, elucidating how, in a contemporary India marked by religious bigotry, language chauvinism, and caste divisions, potential unifying factors encompass misogyny, patriarchy, crass female objectification, and a pervasive desire to control or own women.

A historical examination of commercial cinema reveals a recurrent portrayal of women as objects of desire - depicted as helpless, conservative, and confined to stereotypical 'domestic' roles. Their primary function has often been to bolster the male protagonist's narrative and personify an idealised femininity.

In some instances, the female body becomes a tool for attracting male audiences, exploited through item songs and dances adorned with elaborate costumes.

Examining recent films such as RRR, Pushpa, Kabir Singh, or Animal, a common thematic thread emerges - the portrayal of an exaggerated form of masculinity that markedly deviates from reality. The violence and anger depicted in these films seem to function as an escapist outlet, prompting contemplation on the underlying reasons for al of such g appe

violently toxic masculine rep-

resentations in contemporary

## From rhymes to rap culture in India



#### **By: Shona Gui**

ndia, a land of diverse cultures and traditions, has always been a melting pot of artistic expressions. LIn recent years, one genre that has made a remarkable impact on the Indian music scene is rap. With its rhythmic beats and thought-provoking lyrics, rap has transcended boundaries and captured the hearts of the youth in India.

In this article, we will delve into the journey of rap culture in India, exploring its historical context, emergence, cultural impact, mainstream success, regional variations, role of social media, challenges, and controversies, and finally, discuss the future outlook of rap in India.

#### **Historical Context**

Rap, an art form that originated in African-American communities in the United States during the 1970s, has had a global reach over the years. It found its way to India through the exposure to Western music and culture. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, rap music began to trickle into India, attracting a small but passionate following. Artists such as Apache Indian and Baba Sehgal played pivotal roles in introducing rap to Indian audiences, blending English and Hindi lyrics with infectious beats.

#### **Emergence in India**

In the early stages, rap in India faced resistance and skepticism from the mainstream music industry. However, the underground rap scene started gaining prominence as independent artists began to showcase their talent through various platforms.

Notable pioneers like Divine, Naezy, and Emiway Bantai broke barriers with their hard-hitting verses and relatable storytelling. Their raw and authentic style resonated with the masses, especially the urban youth who found solace in the rebellious and unfiltered nature of rap music.

#### **Cultural Impact**

Rap culture in India has had a profound impact on society, particularly among the younger generation. Through their lyrics, Indian rappers have addressed a wide range of social and political issues, such as inequality, corruption, and the struggles of everyday life. These artists have become the voice of the unheard, speaking out on behalf of marginalized communities and challenging societal norms. Rap music has provided an outlet to express dissent, inspiring a generation to speak up and fight for change. Mainstream Success

In recent years, rap music in India has achieved unprecedented success in the mainstream music industry. Artists like Badshah, Raftaar, and Honey Singh have collaborated with Bollywood musicians, creating chart-topping hits that blend rap with traditional Indian melodies. This infusion of rap into Bollywood has opened doors for aspiring artists, giving them a platform to showcase their talent and reach a wider audience. The success of rap in the mainstream has challenged the notion that Indian music is confined to a single genre, paving the way for more experimentation and artistic expression.

V from Chennai, and MC Heam from Mumbai have become torchbearers of their respective regions, infusing their music with regional nuances and creating a sense of pride among their local fanbase. This regional diversity adds depth and richness to the overall Indian rap culture, cementing its place as a truly homegrown phenomenon.

#### Social Media and Digital Platforms

The role of social media and digital platforms cannot be undermined when discussing the rise of rap culture in India. Platforms like YouTube and Sound-Cloud have provided a democratic space for emerging artists to showcase their talent without relying on traditional gatekeepers. These platforms have allowed artists to connect directly with their audience, fostering a sense of community and enabling rapid growth of the rap scene. The accessibility of technology has nurtured a thriving ecosystem, with aspiring rappers honing their skills, collaborating with other artists, and gaining recognition through viral videos and online competitions.

#### **Challenges and Controversies**

With its bold and often provocative lyrics, rap culture in India has faced its fair share of challenges and controversies. Critics argue that rap promotes violence, misogyny, and glorifies materialistic lifestyles. However, artists have responded to this criticism by emphasizing the artistic and cathartic nature of rap, pointing out that it acts as a mirror to society, reflecting its flaws and celebrating its triumphs.

Additionally, rap artists have started addressing these concerns by shifting the focus towards positive messages, uplifting storytelling, and empowering narratives, thereby reclaiming the art form and using it as a tool for social change.

Honey Singh has acknowledged that some of his earlier lyrics were inappropriate and apologized for any offense caused. He has expressed a commitment to creating more responsible and meaningful content. He strives to bring a unique blend of Punjabi and hiphop styles to his songs.

#### **Future Outlook**

As rap culture continues to thrive in India, the future looks promising. The genre has steadily gained acceptance and recognition among a wider demographic, with fans from all walks of life appreciating the genre's authenticity and artistic expression. The increasing number of rap battles, music festivals, and dedicated platforms for rap enthusiasts signal a growing community that is hungry for fresh, innovative voices.

With the advent of streaming platforms and the blurring of boundaries between regional and mainstream rap, the future holds immense potential for Indian rap to reach new heights and make an indelible mark on the global hip-hop landscape.

In conclusion, the journey of rap culture in India, from its humble beginnings to its current widespread popularity, is a testament to the power of creative expression and the ability of art to transcend barrie Rap music has become a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, a source of inspiration for the disenfranchised, and a catalyst for social change

are them with the image of the 'angry young man' that emerged in the 1970s.

#### **Expressions of anger**

The angry young man was violent but, like Robin Hood, a friend of the poor and an enemy of the rich. The figure of the angry young man was

emerged the figure of Inspector Vijay Khanna (played by Bachchan). This film paved the way for a new kind of hero - a brooding, angry, despondent Bachchan, as opposed to the romantic, charming Rajesh Khanna or Dev Anand.

The 'angry man' persona con-

Poverty)'

cate

system,

their right to strike, Pinto redirects his anger toward a more fitting target – the political and economic elite. This pivotal moment is captured in a cinema setting, with Pinto challenging the political

Indian cinema. This phenomenon invites a broader conversation about societal norms, expectations, and the evolving dynamics of gender portrayal on the big screen. (Courtesy: address of the company man-The Wire) agement. Shouting at the cin-

#### **Regional Variations**

India, with its rich cultural diversity, has witnessed the emergence of regional rap scenes that showcase unique styles and subcultures. Each state and city has its own distinct flavor of rap, reflecting the local language, dialects, and cultural influences.

Artists like Prabh Deep from New Delhi, Brotha

As Indian rap finds its footing in the mainstream, it continues to evolve and redefine itself, paving the way for a bright and promising future. So, turn up the volume, let the rhythmic beats flow, and witness the incredible journey from rhymes to rap culture in India. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

## Is your partner toxic or are you judgmental?

#### By Divya Nair

s it toxic if your husband asks you to wipe off your Lipstick? Or if he raises his voice or does not to listen to you when you disagree with him?

Or if your partner refuses to hold your hand and get photographed in public?

More importantly, are men more toxic in relationships as compared to women?

The answer to all the above is a big NO.

"If we are talking about a particular celebrity couple or a couple's specific behaviour or an incident in the public space, we must remember that everything we see or hear about them may not necessarily be the whole truth," says Gurugram-based Dr Ashish Sehgal, a transformative coach and neuro linguistic programming expert who has over 20 years of experience in counselling people.

It could also be a marketing gimmick or a publicity stunt created to encourage a certain conversation around a new movie, a certain trend, a brand or a new project, he adds.

However, if one were to ignore the celebrity angle, how can one identify toxic behaviour?

According to Dr Sehgal, toxic behaviour is any action or response that is harmful or intended to cause harm.

"When we are looking at relationships, if we go by the benchmark set by society, most behaviours can be seen as toxic," he observes. "Especially when any relationship is judged by outsiders and not by the couple themselves.

Anu Krishna, a Bengalurubased mind coach and NLP trainer, prefers to use the word "unfavourable" instead of "toxic" because she believes that "toxic behaviour can also be misunderstood".

There are two sides to people and their relationships with each other, she explains.

"If you ask two people in a relationship whether there are signs of toxic behaviour, s/he will respond with the words 'always, sometimes or most of the times'. The choice of these words, when used by a couple, should help distinguish between problematic behaviour -- one that is temporary and the other, which is dangerous and needs to be addressed or fixed, she adds. According to Krishna, any person or individual cannot be

labelled 100 per cent toxic. "But s/he can bring certain toxic characteristics into a relationship," she says, adding, "even schizophrenics have their moments.'

Whether we are talking about a particular celebrity couple or a regular couple, Dr Sehgal offers another perspective that is often ignored by society.

"Between a couple, we must remember that nothing can happen without mutual consent or agreement.

'There is a certain comfort or convenience involved which a third person or outsider may not be able to understand.

"It would be unfair to bring up one characteristic behaviour or trait or an isolated incident



about a couple and label the person or the relationship toxic.' Is it normal for couples or adults to display certain toxic traits in a relationship?

How does one identify what problematic behaviour is and what it is not? Experts feel that

there could be several factors that could trigger one of the partners into behaving in a certain way or reacting in a certain situation in a manner that is not favourable

To understand toxic behaviour, it is important to understand the different signs, and frequency, of harmful behaviour.

Some of the most common and varying signs of toxic behaviour include displaying some, or a combination of, the

following traits: Excessive control over a person/situation/relationship There is a thin line of control

in every healthy relationship. While it is okay to feel protective about one's partner, when one person tries to control the other either by ordering, setting too many rules and restrictions or conditioning the person or the relationship, it can be a problem. Gaslighting

According to Krishna, when one partner constantly tries to dull or dim the other person's perception for her/his own advantage over a period of time, the other partner will tend to have self-doubt and may lose conviction about her/his own beliefs and abilities. Gaslighting is often done so subtly that you tend to forget your identity and get carried away with the reality your partner wants you to believe in.

Krishna explains how this could be a problem in a relationship. Here's an example: A lady and her fiance make a plan to go to Goa. One day before the planned event, he calls from the airport and informs her that he is going on an all-boys trip.

The lady is upset because it is not the first time her fiance has cancelled on her. When she confronts him, he defends himself and says she is overreacting, oversensitive and old-fashioned. Krishna says this is a huge red

"Dismissing someone flag. else's emotions repeatedly shouldn't be ignored.'

#### **Physical abuse**

Screaming and shouting are common ways in which couples express their disagreement. However, any display of vio-

lence or physical abuse by either partner in a relationship, accordng to Krishna, is a warning.

"If a person has intentionally or unintentionally caused you physical harm on more than one occasion, please know that it can happen any time again. It is a good enough warning for you to walk away from the person or the relationship," says Krishna. Fear

Many women feel compelled to share information or update

their partners about what they are doing to the extent that it can feel annoying and seem like interference. At the same time, if vour partner is calling or texting you repeatedly to ensure your safety, it cannot be termed as toxic, says Kanchan Rai, founder of Let Us Talk.

"It only shows that your partner is healthily concerned about you," explains the Delhi-based relationship coach.

'What is not healthy in a relationship is your spouse or partner is stalking you without your knowledge.

"If you have to constantly hide or if you are afraid to disclose the right information out of fear of being judged or being caught by your partner, it's a red flag," warns Rai.

#### Cheating, lying and spying due to a lack of trust

A healthy relationship is always based on trust and transparency. If one partner constantly displays signs of cheating or compulsive lying, it is a red flag that needs to be addressed

According to Dr Sehgal, couples who want to control their partners often resort to cheating, lying or spying.

Spying would mean following your partner, checking on them or their belongings, spying on their phone calls, text messages or social media activity and looking for opportunities to establish a reason for doubt.

When you don't respect your partner's space and privacy, the trust in the relationship is compromised and there is, clearly, there is something wrong in the relationship.

While it's important to identify and confront certain kinds of extreme behaviour in men and women, Krishna insists that toxicity can be a grey area when it comes to relationships.

"Anything that happens once cannot and should not be labelled as toxic," she says.

"Before calling it toxic, ask yourself: Is it consistently happening all the time? Does it happen always, sometimes or most of the time?"

Dr Sehgal, meanwhile, says that whatever the circumstances are, a third person, a stranger, a friend or relative has no right to judge or determine the nature of toxicity in the relationship.

"Ideally, a third person or an outsider should not have the right to comment on any relationship," he says, while explaining how isolated incidents or a rare display of bad behaviour may not necessarily qualify or help determine if the relationship or the couple are toxic for each other.

Based on years of therapy and experiences involving couples, young and old, these experts believe that most of these behaviours - if identified and addressed - can be corrected.

One of the first steps to deal with toxic relationships is to identify what is triggering one person in a relationship to behave or react in a way that is not so favourable towards the other individual. It is equally important to self-analyse and understand who the more toxic partner in the relationship is. (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

### World

### 6 THE HILLS TIMES

## North Korea's Kim turns 40; but there are no public celebrations of his birthday

SEOUL, Jan 8: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un turned 40 on Monday with no announced public celebrations at home, after he entered the new year with artillery barrages into the sea and vows to expand his nuclear arsenal.

Since taking power in late 2011, Kim, the third generation of his family to rule North Korea, is believed to have established an absolute leadership similar to his predecessors. But his birthday has yet to be officially celebrated, unlike his late father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung. Their birthdays are two of the North's biggest holidays and are marked with great fanfare, loyalty campaigns and sometimes massive military parades

On Monday, North Korea's state news agency published a lengthy article extolling Kim's guidance of major construction projects in the past decade. It also reported Kim visited a chicken farm with his daughter the previous day. But it made no mention of his birthday. Some observers speculate Kim may think he's still relatively too young or needs bigger achievements to hold such lavish birthday festivities. Others say the lack of a public birthday bash may be related to his concerns about attention to

his late Japan-born mother. Rival Koreas conduct provocative drills along their tense sea

boundary, escalating animosities Kim's headlong pursuit of a bigger nuclear arsenal has invited punishing U.S.-led sanctions, which together with border closures during the pandemic were believed to have badly hurt the North's fragile economy. Kim has subsequently admitted policy failures as his vow that North Korea would "never have to tighten their belts again" remained unfulfilled. "For Kim, it's still probably po-

litically burdensome to idolize himself as he's still young and hasments," said Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

Kim Yeol Soo, an expert at South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs, said it will likely take some time for his birthday to become an official holiday because elderly members of the North's ruling elite would still think he's too young. Birthdays are central to the mythology of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong II, who had ruled North Korea with a god-like status since the country's founding in 1948. Their birthdays — April 15 for Kim Il Sung, and Feb. 16 for Kim

n't accumulated much achieve- Jong II - are typically celebrated with tributes to their giant statues, dance parties, fireworks and art performances. On some milestone birthdays, North Korea's military holds huge parades with goosestepping soldiers and powerful weapons capable of targeting the U.S. and South Korea.

Kim Il Sung's birthday was designated as an official holiday in 1968 when he turned 56, according to a website run by South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles relations with North Korea. Kim Jong II's birthday reportedly became an official holiday in 1982, when he turned 40.

North Korea has never formally commented on Kim Jong Un's birthday. The only time Kim has been honored in public on his birthday was in 2014, when former NBA star Dennis Rodman sang "Happy birthday" before an exhibition basketball game in Py-The Unification ongyang. Ministry-run website states that Kim Jong Un was born on Jan. 8. There are also views that Kim may be worried about bringing unwanted attentions to his mother, Ko Yong Hui, a Japan-born dancer

Korean Peninsula in the past, and the fact that she wasn't Kim Jong Il's first wife, are considered as disadvantageous for Kim's dynastic rule.

"The fact his mother came from Japan is his biggest weak point that undermines his legitimacy of the Paektu bloodline," Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans University, said, referring to the Kim family's lineage named after the country's most sacred mountain

"When Kim Jong Un's birthday becomes an official holiday, he won't still publicize details about his birth," he said. (AP)

## Hasina's party won 223 seats in the 300-seat Parliament **Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina secures fourth** straight term in polls amid boycott by Opposition

DHAKA. Jan 8: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has secured a record fourth straight term as her Awami League party won an overwhelming majority in the general elections marred by sporadic violence and a boycott by the main opposition BNP and its allies.

Hasina's party won 223 seats in the 300-seat Parliament. Election was held for 299 seats. The election to one seat will be held later due to the death of a candidate, according to media reports.

The main opposition in Parliament, the Jatiya Party, got 11 seats, Bangladesh Kallyan party won in one constituency while independent candidates came out victorious in 62 seats. Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and the Workers Party of Bangladesh won one seat each.

Hasina, 76 also the president of Awami League, won

the Gopalganj-3 constituency in a landslide victory, her eighth term as a Member of Parliament.

Hasina, who has been ruling the strategically located South Asian nation since 2009, secured a record fourth consecutive term and fifth overall term in the one-sided election, which witnessed the second-lowest turnout since the restoration of democracy

in Bangladesh's history.

cent jump in an hour.

in 1991.

ence. The turnout in the controversial February 1996 polls was 26.5 per cent, the lowest

ist Party (BNP), which boycotted the election and The turnout in Sunday's observed a strike on election election was 27.15 per cent at day, said the party plans to in-3:00 pm, but after voting tensify its anti-government closed at 4:00 pm, the Elecmovement through a peaceful tion Commission estimated public engagement prothe final tally could stand at gramme from Tuesday as it around 40 per cent, a 13 per dubbed the polls as "fake." The BNP boycotted the

With this win, Hasina is 2014 election but joined the poised to become the longestone in 2018. This time, they serving prime minister in boycotted the polls. Fifteen

Remarks against PM Modi do not represent views of Maldives: Male tells Indian envoy

MALE, Jan 8: The Maldivian government on Monday informed India's High Commissioner Munu Muhawar that the derogatory remarks made by three now-suspended deputy ministers against Prime Minister Narendra Modi do not represent its views.

The Indian High Commissioner had a pre-arranged meeting Dr Ali Naseer Mohamed, the Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry.

"High Commissioner Munu Ma-

moned Maldivian envoy Ibrahim Shaheeb on Monday to the external affairs ministry and conveyed strong concern over remarks posted on social media against the Prime Minister by a number of ministers of the Maldives.

Malsha Shareef, Mariyam Shiuna and Abdulla Mahzoom Majid - three deputy ministers at the Youth Ministry had made derogatory remarks against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media plat-



boycotted the election.

The party leaders claimed Former premier Khaleda Zia-led Bangladesh Nationalthat the low turnout was evidence that their boycott movement had been successful. They said that peaceful democratic protest programmes will be accelerated. and the people's right to vote will be established through this programme. Voters showed little interest

in the outcome of Sunday's polls -- a race between Awami League candidates and Awami

Following BNP's boycott threat in the lead-up to the election, the Hasina administration undertook a series of strategies that allegedly included creating pressure. Ahead of the elections,

Hasina's government arrested tens of thousands of rival politicians and supporters, a move which rights groups have condemned as an attempt to paralyse the Opposition. Hasina went for a

lies and invited all her party leaders and activists to join

tition within the ruling party

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader claimed that the people have rejected the BNP and Jamaat-

e-Islami's boycott of the election by casting their ballots. "I sincerely thank those who braved the fear of vandalism, arson, and terrorism to participate in the 12th na-

tional parliamentary elections," Quader said. Despite the largely peaceful voting, officials and the mainstream media reported at least 18 arson attacks across the

country since late Friday, with 10 of them targeting polling places As Bangladesh steps into

and political balance, bdnews newspaper said. (PTI)

who was known as his father's third or fourth wife. Ko's links to Japan, which had colonized the A heavy wave of Russian missile attacks pounds areas across Ukraine, killing at least 4 civilians

> KYIV, Jan 8: Russia launched its latest barrage of hypersonic and cruise missiles against Ukrainian targetson early Monday, striking near the front lines of fighting in the east as well as in central and western parts of the country, officials said. At least four civilians were reported killed and at least 30 injured.

> Western officials and analysts had previously warned that Russia was stockpiling its cruise missiles in preparation for a strategy of winter bombardment, as bad weather keeps the 1,500-kilometre (930-mile) front line largely static after 22 months of war.

> Unlike last winter, when the Kremlin's forces targeted Jkraine's power grid, Russia is now aiming at Kyiv's defence industry, they say. But the barrages have repeatedly hit civilian areas. Monday's attacks struck a string of urban areas, including housing and a shopping mall, across Ukraine.

> In the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region, a woman died in a missile attack outside the city of Kryvyi Rih and 24 people were injured in a strike on the town of Novomoskovsk.

> In Kryvyi Rih itself, which is Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's home town, more than 20 houses and a shopping mall were damaged in the attack, said regional governor Serhii Lysak. At least four missiles hit Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, injuring one person, said mayor Ihor Terekhov. A woman rescued from the rubble of a building later died, regional Gov.

> Oleh Syniehubov said. More people may be trapped, he said. Authorities in the Khmelnytskyi region said two people died as at least six explosions were heard during the morning missile attack. Meanwhile, Russian troops conducted 131 artillery attacks on the Kherson region, killing two people and injuring five, according to governor Oleksandr Prokudin.

> Kherson and the surrounding region have been consistently targeted since Russian forces withdrew from the city to the eastern side of the Dnipro in the autumn of 2022.

> In Zaporizhzhia, a major southern city along the Dnipro River, two people were injured in a missile strike on a residential district, said regional governor Yurii Malashko. (AP)

## TTP militants kill six Pakistani policemen going to escort polio vaccination team

PESHAWAR, Jan 8: A bomb cal condition at a government explosion targeting policemen hospital and that the death toll going to provide security for was expected to rise further. polio vaccination workers Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakkilled at least six of them and injured 22 others in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

istan(TTP), which has been fighting to impose the rule of Sharia across the Islamic country, has taken responsibil-

latest terror attack claimed by ity for the attack. An official said the medical

League "indepen-Palestinians flee from central Gaza's main hospital

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), Jan 8: Medics, patients and displaced people are fleeing from the main hospital in central Gaza as the fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants draws closer, witnesses said on Monday.

Losing the facility would be another major blow to a health system shattered by three months of war. Doctors Without Borders and other aid groups withdrew from Al-



as fighting draws closer and aid groups withdraw in Israeli strikes. Only 13 of Gaza's

36 hospitals are even partially functioning, according to the UN humanitarian office.

Omar al-Darawi, an employee at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, said the facility has been struck multiple times in recent days. He said thousands of people left after the aid groups pulled out, and that patients have been concentrated on one floor so the remaining doctors can tend to swaths of the Gaza Strip, displaced them more easily.

#### Awami League's governance, the reshaping of the Opposition poses critical questions about the future of the country's parliamentary dynamics

tight-fisted seat-sharing with the Jatiya Party and other al-

the race as independent candidates to make the election look participatory and competitive. But unexpected victories of these independent candidates have significantly altered the political landscape, hinting at a new era of internal compe-

# this new term under the

hawar had a pre-arranged meeting with H.E. Dr Ali Naseer Mohamed, Ambassador at Large, at MoFA, Maldives, today to discuss bilateral issues," the Indian High Commission posted on X.

A top Maldivian government official said that during the meeting, Naseer made it clear that the remarks do not reflect the views of the Maldivian government, and reaffirmed Maldives' continued support for its neighbour, the Sun Online reported.

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

The meeting came after India sum-

form X in response to a video promoting tourism in Lakshadweep.

The three ministers were suspended on Sunday after the remarks sparked an uproar on Indian social media.

In New Delhi, official sources said the Indian high commission in Male strongly raised the matter with the Maldivian foreign ministry on Sunday. The disparaging remarks by the ministers have drawn flak in India, with many celebrities urging people

on X to explore domestic tourist destinations instead of going to the Maldives. There were also posts on social

media claiming that some Indians are cancelling their scheduled trip to the Maldives following the diplomatic row. (PTI)

Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah in recent days, saying it is too dangerous. That spread panic among people sheltering there, causing many to join the hundreds of thousands who have fled to the south of

vast

the besieged territory. Israel says it has largely wrapped up major operations in northern Gaza and is now focusing on the central region and the southern city of Khan Younis. Israeli officials have said the fighting will continue for many more months as the army seeks to dismantle Hamas and return scores of hostages taken during the militant group's October 7 attack

that triggered the war. The offensive has already killed over 22,000 Palestinians, devastated

nearly 85 per cent of its population of 2.3 million and left a quarter of its residents facing starvation.

It has also threatened to ignite a wider war with Lebanon's Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militant groups allied with Hamas.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is back in the region this week. The US, which has provided crucial military and diplomatic support for the offensive, has called on Israel to take greater measures to spare civilians but has also joined it in rejecting international calls for a

cease-fire. Tens of thousands of people have sought shelter in Gaza's hospitals, which are also struggling to treat dozens of people wounded each day

the dreaded Pakistani Taliban We have large numbers of wounded who can't move" he said. "They need special care, which is unavailable.

More dead and wounded arrive each day as Israeli forces advance in central Gaza following heavy to join security duty with polio airstrikes. The Health Ministry said vaccination teams. early Monday that 73 bodies and 99 wounded were brought to the hospishifted to a nearby hospital, where an emergency was detal in just the last 24 hours.

World Health Organisation staff who visited on Sunday saw "sickening scenes of people of all ages being treated on blood-streaked floors and in chaotic corridors", Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the UN agency, said in a statement. "The bloodbath in Gaza must end." (AP)

The incident occurred in the campaign has been halted in Mamund tehsil of Bajaur disthe area where the attack octrict in the province bordering curred and that all the polio workers are safe. Afghanistan just when the police personnel boarded a van

Caretaker Chief Minister KPK Arshad Hussain condemned the attack and said the war against terrorism would go on till the elimination of the last terrorist.

Polio teams are often targeted by militants in Pakistan due to opposition to the vaccine.

The Pakistan Taliban have killed scores of polio vaccination workers and policemen guarding them in the past. (PTI)

The last time the US launched a moon-landing mission was in December 1972 First US lunar lander in more than 50 years rockets toward moon with commercial deliveries

two main engines.

CAPE CANAVERAL (US), mined. Thornton noted

Jan 8: The first US lunar lander in more than 50 years rocketed toward the moon on Monday, launching private companies on a space race to make deliveries for NASA and other customers.

Astrobotic Technology's lander caught a ride on a brand new rocket, United Launch Alliance's Vulcan. The Vulcan streaked through the Florida predawn sky, putting the spacecraft on a roundabout route to the moon that should culminate with an attempted landing on February 23. "So, so, so excited. We are on our way to the moon!" Astrobotic chief executive John Thornton said

The Pittsburgh company aims to be the first private business to successfully land on the moon, something only four countries have accomplished. But a Houston company also has a lander ready to fly, and could beat it to the lunar surface, taking a more direct path.

"First to launch. First to of the year. Highlighting land is TBD," to be deter-Monday's moonshot was the

NASA gave the two companies millions to build and fly their own lunar landers. The space agency wants the privately owned landers to scope out the place before astronauts arrive while delivering NASA tech and science experiments as well as odds and ends for other customers. Astrobotic's contract for the Peregrine lander: USD 108

million. The last time the US launched a moon-landing mission was in December 1972. Apollo 17's Gene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt became the 11th and 12th men to walk on the moon, closing out an era that has remained NASA's pinnacle.

The space agency's new

Artemis program — named

after the twin sister of Apollo

in Greek mythology — looks

to return astronauts to the

moon's surface within the next

few years. First will be a lunar

fly-around with four astro-

nauts, possibly before the end



long-delayed initial test flight 1960s and 70s, before putting of the Vulcan rocket from touchdowns on pause. China joined the elite club in 2013 Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. The 202-foot (61and India in 2023. But last metre) rocket is essentially an year also saw landers from upgraded version of ULA's Russia and a private Japanese hugely successful workhorse company slam into the moon. Atlas V, which is being An Israeli nonprofit crashed phased out along with the in 2019. company's Delta IV. Jeff Next month, SpaceX will

Bezos' rocket company, Blue provide the lift for a lander Origin, provided the Vulcan's from Intuitive Machines. The Nova-C lander's more direct ULA declared success once one-week route could see both the lander was free of the spacecraft attempting to land rocket's upper stage, nearly an within days or even hours of hour into the flight. "Yeeone another. The hourlong dehaw!" shouted chief executive Tory Bruno. "I am so thrilled, by far the biggest challenge I can't tell you how much." will be "exciting, nail-bit-The Soviet Union and the ing, terrifying all at once",

US racked up a string of suc-Thornton said cessful moon landings in the Besides flying experiments

NASA, Astrobotic drummed up its own freight business, packing the 6-foottall (1.9-metre-tall) Peregrine lander with everything from a chip of rock from Mount Everest and toy-size cars from Mexico that will catapult to the lunar surface and cruise around, to the ashes and DNA of deceased space enthusiasts, including "Star Trek" creator

Gene Roddenberry and science fiction writer Arthur C. The Navajo Nation recently sought to have the launch delayed because of the human future.

remains. saying it would be a 'profound desecration" of a

morial companies that bought room on the lander. Celestis. said in a statement that no single culture or religion owns the moon and should not be able to veto a mission. (AP)

## Blinken brings US push on post-war Gaza planning and stopping conflict to UAE and Saudi Arabia

province on Monday, in the

The injured have been

Six policemen were killed

and 22 others injured in the

explosion, a police spokesman

said. The police spokesperson

said all the casualties were po-

He said some of the injured

police personnel were in criti-

clared

lice personnel.

ABU DHABI, Jan 8: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has opened his third day of meetings on an urgent Mideast diplomatic mission to prevent Israel's war against Hamas in

Gaza from exploding into a broader regional conflict. Blinken was meeting Monday with United Arab Emirates leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed before travelling to Saudi Arabia for talks with Saudi Crown Prince

Mohammed bin Salman aimed at enlisting the key Arab leaders in a push to not only keep the war contained but also prepare for post-conflict Gaza's

With Sheikh Mohammed in Abu Dhabi Blinken "emphasised the importance of preventing further spread of the conflict and stressed continued US commitment to securing lasting regional peace that ensures Israel's security and advances the establishment of an independent Palestinian state", the State Department said.

Blinken arrived in Abu Dhabi from similar meetings in Oatar, Jordan, Turkiye and Greece, where he claimed at cease-fire and an end to civilleast modest success in his ian deaths before discussing



mission with pledges from those countries to consider contributing to the effort to plan for Gaza's reconstruction and governance once the fighting has ended.

Gaza has been decimated by

three months of Israeli bombardments that have sparked anger around the world for the massive damage and huge number of civilian casualties. Financial and in-kind support from the UAE and Saudi Arabia will be essential to the success of any such plan and US officials said Blinken on his fourth trip to the region since the war began in October hoped to overcome initial Arab resistance to considering 'day after" scenarios for Gaza. Arab countries have been pressing for an immediate

volvement."This is a conflict that could easily metastasize, causing even more insecurity and even more suffering," Blinken told reporters during a joint news conference in Doha with Oatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. "So from day one, among other priorities, we have been intensely focused on working to prevent the conflict from spreading," he said. "We share a commitment to ensure that the conflict does not expand.' He said his talks had also included "not necessarily easy

discussions" of what each country can do once the conflict is over "to provide the assurances and the incentives required to build a more secure and more stable, more peaceful future for the region" (AP)

Clarke

celestial body revered by Native Americans. Thornton said the December objections

came too late but promised to try to find "a good path forward" with the Navajo for future missions. One of the spaceflight me-

#### FUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024

### Northeast

CPI(M) legislator Jitendra

Choudhury expressed concern over the deadlock and claimed that

during the Left regime, Kokborok-

speaking students were allowed to

write answers in both Bengali and

Dismissing Choudhury's claim,

the in-charge education minister

said the CBSE has already rejected

the introduction of Kokborok lan-

guage in both Bengali and Roman

scripts, as it allows only one. In

their election manifesto, the Tipra

script," he said.

Roman scripts.

Meghachandra said that on Jan-

sage will be delivered from it".

The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra by

"He (Joshi) said the matter is

to do all the preparations as the

party leaders will be coming from

Manipur is in the grip of contin-

ued ethnic violence since May and

over 180 people have been killed

in it so far. Several hundreds have

across the country for the Yatra,'

Chodankar said.

been injured. (PTI)

## Tripura govt yet to take any 'policy decision' on Roman script for Kokborok language answer papers 'There are around 5,000 Kokborok-speaking students who will appear in the CBSE examination'

AGARTALA, Jan 8: The Tripura government is yet to take any 'policy decision' on allowing students to write Kokborok language answer papers in Roman script, incharge education minister Ratan Lal Nath told the assembly here on Monday.

Shortly after the question hour, opposition leader Animesh Debbarma asked whether the government had taken any 'policy decision' on the issue and recalled chief minister Manik Saha's assurance in the last session that a committee would be formed to look into it.

"There are around 5,000 Kokborok-speaking students who are scheduled to appear in the CBSE

#### NLFT militant surrenders before BSF in Tripura's Dhalai



AGARTALA, Jan 8: An NLFT militant surrendered before the BSF in Tripura's Dhalai district, officials said on Monday.

The 37-year-old man, identified as Uday Manik Jamatia, surrendered before the BSF in the district's Chawmanu area on Sunday, they said

"He is a resident of Tulsiram village in Gomati district. He decided to leave the path of violence, and surrendered to live a normal life," a BSF official said.

He joined the banned NLFT (BM) outfit in September last year, the official said.

Due to efforts of the central agencies and state authorities, several National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) cadres have left the path of violence, he added.

The surrendered militant will be handed over to the police for interrogation and other legal process, the official said.

The outfit's top leaders, Sachin Debbarma and Utpal Debbarma, to restore peace and normalcy in the state, adding, "If the governwere arrested from West Tripura's ments do not act, people of all Simna area on December 14, in a



examination starting on February answer papers in Roman script,

lence in Manipur.

peace and normalcy.

ceasefire?

many deaths of Manipuri people

our Prime Minister will visit Ma-

nipur. It is almost the same ques-

tion people are asking: after how

many thousand deaths of Palestin-

ian people will Israel declare a

here: how many people, after being

killed here, will our Prime Minister

give a chance to visit Manipur?"

he added. Sengupta further said

that it is a shameful act that the

whole world is watching what is

issue of Manipur, and we are of the

opinion that our first priority is the

restoration of peace and normalcy

in the state, to stop the killings and

He said that both the state and

the central governments should act

burning of houses," he said.

"Our party (CPI) discussed the

happening in Manipur.

"The same question is raised

15. If these students are not al- they will face difficulties as they lowed to write Kokborok language cannot write papers in Bengali in the northeastern state. (*PTI*)

Work with political will to end Manipur violence: CPI



the victims of the violent conflict." "India's security agencies are very strong. Our army is ready to fight even China and Pakistan at the same time. But, if there is no political will, these security agencies could not stop the violence,'

he added The CPI also emphasised that there can be elections, but before the elections, there should be a conducive political atmosphere so that the people can cast their votes and elect their representatives in a

free and fair manner, he also said. But that might not be the case in Manipur, the CPI leader added. Sengupta then said that the CPI had repeatedly requested the chief minister to do the needful for the restoration of peace and normalcy,

and the party will once again request him on the same matter. The party leaders in New Delhi will also try to meet the Prime

Minister Narendra Modi and re-

convince the communities in conflict, he said

He then said that the Prime Minister should at least take some steps so that normalcy can be restored in Manipur.

Sengupta, who came to Imphal to attend an extended executive meeting of the CPI Manipur State Council, said that the extended meeting held on Saturday has thoroughly deliberated the prevailing situation in the state.

The meeting resolved to urge the state government to convene the session of the Manipur legislative so that it can discuss the prevailing conflict situation and adopt a resolution to end the violence.

The meeting further decided to launch a mass hunger strike to press the state government to convene the Assembly session and also to press the Centre and the state government to take up necessary steps to end the violence with will he said (NNN)

## **Congress awaiting ground** permission for Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra



IMPHAL, Jan 8: Congress Monday said that it is awaiting the "ground permission" from the Manipur government for launching its Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, for which it had applied about a week ago.

Motha had promised to introduce The AICC in-charge of Manipur, the Roman script for Kokborok Girish Chodankar told reporters here that the party leaders met the language, which is the mother state chief secretary Vineet Joshi tongue of most of the ethnic tribes during the day and was assured that they will be informed about the granting of the permission on Monday evening itself.

"We applied to the Manipur government on January 2 itself for the ground permission for the launching of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra at Hapta Kangjeibung in Im-

Arunachal gears up for hustle free holy dip at Parshuram Kund

ITANAGAR, Jan 8: The administration in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh is gearing up for the Parshuram Kund Festival during which people from across the country gather there to take a holy dip in the waterbody on the occasion of the Makar Sankranti.

The festival will be held between January 12 and 16 and all arrangements have been put in place for the visiting pilgrims, Lohit deputy commissioner Shashvat Saurabh told a press meet at Tezu, the district headquarters, on Monday.

The district administration has developed a website, parshuramkund.arunachal.gov.in, for online registration and Inner Line Permit (ILP) for the pilgrims.

Saurav said that devotees can avail ILPs in advance online to avoid the last-minute rush for the Parshuram Kund Festival at Wakro.

Parshuram is considered one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu

meeting with Nagaland deputy The legend has it that Parshuchief minister Y Patton at his resiram killed his mother at the initidence in Aizawl on Monday. ation of his father and the axe he used got stuck in his hand due to visit, Nagaland deputy CM Y Patthe sin. On the advice of some ton conveyed his congratulations sages he wandered all over the

phal East district on January 14, but it has not yet been approved so far. The AICC team met the chief secretary today to seek the ground permission for this rally at the earliest. We have apprised him that the rally will be peaceful," Manipur Pradesh Congress Commit-

Meghachandra said. 'We met the chief secretary with no intention to politicise the issue. Even if the permission is not granted, we would like a word on it," he said.

Chodankar claimed, "We are

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will be launched from Imphal on January 14 and culminate on March 20 in Mumbai. It is being held with the coming general election in mind tee (MPCC) president Keisham with the chief minister .... We have

actually trying to help the government to showcase to the world that Manipur is returning to nor-

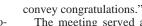
Mizora CM Lalduhoma and Nagaland deputy CM foster bilateral ties in Aizawl meeting



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 8: In a diplo-

The meeting served as a platform for both leaders to engage in discussions regarding vital initiatives for the development of Northeast India.

Lalduhoma and Patton explored potential collaborations between Mizoram and Nagaland, focusing on regional needs. The one-to-one eraction emphasized fostering



#### nities in M ur will be

## HNLC insists on amnesty for peace process resumption

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 8: The proscribed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) maintains its unwavering stance, underlining that the peace process can only recommence if both central and state governments withdraw all cases and extend general amnesty to the top leaders and cadres of the organisation.

Following the formal submission of the HNLC's withdrawal letter from the peace process to the state government's interlocutor. PS Dkhar, Sadon K Blah, the outfit's representative and president of the Hynniewtrep National Youth Front (HNYF), emphasized the pivotal conditions.

'The prospect of the peace process continuing is high if the government withdraws the cases and grants general amnesty, as originally offered by the HNLC. However, if the government insists on the unrealistic demise of legal proceedings, this peace process will come to an end," Blah stated.

Highlighting the disparity in perspectives,

Blah pointed out the government's inclination towards a legal approach while the HNLC advocates a political one.

"Therefore, the ball is with the government now," he remarked.

Elaborating on the two approaches, Blah explained, "The key question at hand is whether the government should resolve this issue through legal means or opt for a political resolution. If the stance is to let the law run its course with regards to the HNLC, it represents a legal approach to the conflicting faction, which, in my view, is an incorrect methodology. Historical evidence suggests that wars worldwide have been resolved not through legal channels but through political discussions.

Blah emphasised the need for the government to showcase the political will to apply the same yardstick to the HNLC as was done for NGOs during the 2013 ILP agitations.

He cited his own experience during the ILP agitations and urged the government to drop

and withdraw cases based on political will. Addressing the nature of the cases against HNLC leaders and cadres, Blah mentioned, 'I remember AK Mishra (MHA Advisor (NE) during a discussion on the request to drop cases, had said that none of the crimes of the HNLC are heinous in nature. So if crimes are not heinous in nature, then the government should consider dropping and withdrawing all charges put against the leaders and cadres.

Blah denied any division within the HNLC and asserted their unanimity in decisions, stressing that the outfit's demands remain unchanged.

Condemning the MDA government for failing to conclude the peace process, Blah stated, "We also feel that the government has everything in its hand to withdraw the cases, to grant amnesty to all cadres of the HNLC, including those who are in jails because if peace is to happen, the government must apply a political solution, not a legal solution to this issue."

Himalayas to atone for it. The axe fell from his hand after he washed his hands in the water of the Lohit

to Mizoram CM Laldu visit, and said, "Today, the deputy Patton, visited my residence to the Northeastern region.

Lalduhoma, acknowledging the stronger ties and cooperation between the two states, aiming for chief minister of Nagaland, Pu Y mutual growth and development in

## 915 held in Tripura in connection with NDPS cases in 1st ten months of 2023

matic exchange, Mizoram chief

minister Lalduhoma hosted a

Expressing the purpose of the

AGARTALA, Jan 8: Altogether 915 people were arrested in connection with 551 narcotic drug seizure cases registered in different police stations of Tripura in the first 10 months of 2023, the Assembly was informed on Monday. While replying to a written question, social welfare minister Tinku Roy said the administration has adopted a zero-tolerance policy against drug trafficking since the first BJP government was formed in the state in 2018.

"Altogether, 915 people were arrested in connection with 551 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act in the first ten months of 2023.

"Besides, over 40,000 kg ganja, cough syrup of 2.98 lakh bottles, 3.85 lakh tablets, 18.26 kg of heroin were seized during the period," he said. From 2013 to 2017, only 425 people were arrested in 404 NDPS cases, the minister said. Roy has been made in charge of the state home department as chief minister Manik Saha is now outside Tripura. During the rule of the first BJP government in the state between 2018 and 2022, 2,918 people were arrested in connection with 1,939 NDPS cases, he said. The minister also said 121 rapes, 133 molestation cases and 18 murders were recorded during the ten months of the last year (2023).

"Altogether, 825 rapes, 845 molestations and 126 murders were reported from 2018 to 2022, and the crime against women was very high during the 2013-2017 period with 1,077 rapes, 1,737 molestations and 142 murders reported to the police," he said.

Asserting that the overall law and order situation in the northeastern state is "quite satisfactory", Roy said there has been no steep increase in murder cases, abduction and unnatural deaths in the past three years. (PTI)

Dtd.04/01/2024

## ALLAFUM calls for ban on destructive practices to safeguard Loktak Lake's ecosystem

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 8: In a bid to protect Loktak Lake's delicate ecosystem, the All Loktak Lake Area Fishers Union, Manipur (ALLA-FUM) intensified its commitment to community-led conservation.

The union strongly urged a ban on activities within the lake that jeopardize their conservation efforts, particularly addressing the use of LED lights by local fishers for illegal fishing.

ALLAFUM secretary Oinam Rajen Singh emphasized the detrimental impact of these practices on the lake's biodiversity. The union also pointed out factors such as the Ithai Barrage obstructing migratory fish passage and overharvesting by local fishers, leading to a drastic decline in fish population and affecting the livelihoods of Loktak fishers.

Speaking at a media briefing, Rajen expressed concern over the recent trend of night fishing using LED lights, causing both over harvesting of fish and disturbing the feeding grounds of wintering migratory water birds

The union stressed the need for immediate action to halt this negative practice to



protect both biodiversity and the livelihoods of the fishing community

Highlighting the use of LED devices by local fishers, Rajen stated that the practice has drawn attention from authorities as it conflicts with traditional fishing methods.

"The union calls for a total ban on night fishing with LED lights and advocates for a closed season during January-February to preserve fingerlings during their spawning period," he added.

Rajen urged local fishermen to adopt sustainable fishing methods, discouraging

the use of tightly-knit fishing nets and battery-operated dynamo-apparatus.

It is worth mentioning that Champu Khangpok Floating Island village, situated in the heart of Loktak Lake, plays a pivotal role in preventing abuse and ensuring longterm conservation.

Rajen called upon the Loktak Development Authority to take a proactive role in collaboration with Loktak fishers to develop effective strategies for lake management and conservation, emphasising the importance of preventing biodiversity loss.

#### No.KOK/BLDG/Tech-40/Pt-IV/2018-19/4591 SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Separate Sealed tenders affixing Non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs.8.25 (Rupees eight & paisa twenty five)

only with a validity period of 180(One hundred eighty) days which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 Form are invited from the intending Registered contractors of class-I (ABC) and II category of the Assam PWD(Bldg.) for submitting tender for the work stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up-to 1-30 Pm of 12-01-2024 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2-00 Pm.

SL No		(Approx.) Estimated value of work)	Earnest money 2% for GNL & 1% for ST/SC/ OBC/MOBC	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
	Construction of Temporary Godown at the backside of Block-B of BTC Secretariat for Storage on unused Office Materials with outsourced Labours	Rs.3,29,707.00	Rs.6600/= & Rs.3300/=	Rs.200/=	2(two) month
2.	Construction of Cremation Ground at Batabari Village, Simborgaon under Kokrajhar Dev. Block, BTC, Assam	Rs.4,69,897.00	Rs.9400/= & Rs.4700/=	Rs.200/=	3(three) month

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up-to 1.30 pm in all working days from 11-01-2024 to 12-01-2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker cheque/Bank draft/Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the Executive Engineer, PWD, Kokrajhar District & Chirang District Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar. The contractor should submit up-to- date copy of Registration Certificate, latest clearance certificate of Income Tax and GST along with the tender paper. In case the office is remain closed/bandh for any circumstances on tender receiving/opening date, then the same will be received/opened in the next working days. Further it is mentioned here that the selected contractor must be erected a signboard in permanent structure with relevant information at the work site and submit completion Certificate along with Photographs in 3 stages viz. before, during and after execution of the scheme.

> Sd/= Executive Engineer, PWD, Kokrajhar Distric & Chirang District Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1094

### NATION

# Gujarat govt complicit and acted in tandem with one of the convicts: SC in Bilkis Bano case

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The Gujarat government was "complicit and acted in tandem with one of the convicts" who had approached the top court with his plea for premature release in the Bilkis Bano case, the Supreme Court on Monday said and slammed the state government for "usurpation of power" while granting remission to the convicts.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan said it fails to understand why the State of Gujarat did not file a review petition against the judgment dated May 13, 2022, which directed the Gujarat government to consider the plea of a convict for premature release as per the State policy of July 9, 1992.

The Gujarat government in 1992 came out with a fresh remission policy under which pleas of those convicts who were sentenced to life imprisonment and had served a minimum of 14 vears of sentence could be considered after a favourable opinion from the Jail Advisory Board.

"Taking advantage of the May 13, 2022 order of this court, other convicts also filed remission applications and the Gujarat government passed remission orders. Guiarat was complicit and acted in tandem with respondent No. 3 (convict Radheshyam Shah) in this case. This court was misled by suppressing facts. Use of power by Gujarat was only an usurpation of power by the State," the bench said.

The top court also nullified its May 13, 2022, order of another bench asking the Gujarat government to consider a remission plea of one of the convicts as the order was obtained by "playing fraud on the court" and by suppressing material facts.

"If the convicts can circumvent the consequences of their conviction, peace and tranquillity in the society will be reduced to a chimaera. It is the duty of this Court to correct arbitrary orders at the earliest and to retain the foundation of trust of the public," the court said.

The bench said the Gujarat government



usurped the powers of the Maharashtra government by acting in furtherance of the judgment dated May 13, 2022, which in "our opinion is a nullity"

It was the State of Maharashtra that was the appropriate government to consider the remission and it was this very apprehension that led this court to transfer the trial out of the State, it said.

"The exercise of power by the State of Gujarat is an instance of usurpation of power and abuse of power. This is a classic case where the order of this court was used to violate the rule of law by granting remission," the bench said. The top court said a breach of the rule of law

amounts to the negation of the right to equality. "Rule of law means no one, how high soever, is above the law. There can be no rule of law if there is no equality. The court has to step in to enforce the rule of law. This Court must be a beacon in upholding the rule of law. In a democracy, the rule of law has to be preserved. "Compassion and sympathy have no role to

play. It is through the power of judicial review conferred on independent institutions, like High Courts and the Supreme Court, that the rule of law is preserved. Rule of law must be preserved unmindful of the ripples of the consequences." the bench said.

It said justice cannot be done without adherence to the rule of law and justice encompasses not just the rights of the convicts but also the rights of the victims.

"Allowing convicts to remain out of prison will amount to giving an imprimatur to invalid orders. The convicts were in prison for little over 14 years and enjoyed liberal parole and furlough. We hold that the deprivation of liberty to the respondents (convicts) is justified. They have lost their right to liberty once they were convicted and imprisoned. Also, if they want to seek remission again, it is important that they have to be in jail," the bench said.

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

All 11 convicts were granted remission by the Gujarat government and released on August 15, 2022. (PTI)

## When poor, farmers, women, youth are empowered, country will become powerful: PM

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Asserting that the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra has not only become the journey of a government but of the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said when the poor, farmers, women and youth are empowered, the nation will become powerful. Addressing the Yatra in various parts of the country via video conferencing, the prime minister said that under earlier governments, the scope of discussions on agricultural policy was only limited to production and sale, neglecting the various issues faced by farmers daily. "Our government has made all-out efforts to ease every difficulty of the farmers," Modi said.

In his remarks, Prime Minister Modi also talked about the transfer of at least ₹ 30,000 to every farmer through PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, promotion of cooperation in agriculture with organisations like PACS (Primary Agricultural Credit Society) and Farmers Producer Organisation (FPO), increase in storage facilities and the "boost" to food processing industry.

The prime minister said that Toor or Arhar dal farmers can now sell their produce directly to the government online, ensuring purchase at MSP and better prices in the market. The scope of this scheme will be extended to other pulses also, he

added. "Our effort is that the money we

send abroad to buy pulses should be available to the farmers of the country," he said. He reiterated that the main goal of the Yatra is to ensure that no deserving beneficiary of the government schemes is left out. Referring to the buzz about the 'Modi ki guarantee', the prime minister dwelled on the rationale of covering beneficiaries in a mission mode and also underlined the link between the resolution of 'Viksit Bharat' (developed Bharat) and the saturation of schemes coverage. Earlier, Modi also interacted with

beneficiaries of Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra via video conferencing as they hailed the government initiatives. Thousands of Viksit Bharat

Sankalp Yatra beneficiaries from across the country along with Union ministers, MPs, MLAs and locallevel representatives joined the event. Addressing the gathering, Prime Minister Modi noted that the Yatra completed 50 days recently and has connected with about 11 crore people

'Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra has become not only the journey of the government but also the journey of the country," he said.

"Modi ki guarantee wali gaadi" is reaching every nook and corner of the country. The poor people who spent their lives waiting to get the benefits of government schemes are seeing a meaningful change today. "The government is reaching the doorsteps of the beneficiaries and proactively providing the benefits,'

the prime minister said. Along with the vehicle of 'Modi ki guarantee', government officers and people's representatives are

reaching the people, he added. PM Modi highlighted the struggle of the poor, youth, women and farmers over many generations. "Our government wants the present and future generations to not

have to live the life that the earlier (*PTI*)

generation lived. We want to get a large population of the country out of the struggle for small daily needs," Modi said.

"Therefore, we are focusing on the future of the poor, farmers, women and youth. For us, these are the four biggest castes of the country. When the poor, farmers, women and youth are empowered, the country will become powerful," he said.

Since the Yatra began, 12 lakh new applications for Ujjwala connections were received along with lakhs of applications for Suraksha Bima Yojana, Jeevan Jyoti Yojana, PM SVANidhi, Modi said.

Underlining the impact of the Yatra, the prime minister said health checkups for more than two crore people have been carried out so far including one crore TB checkups and 22 lakh sickle cell checkups.

The doctors are reaching the doorsteps of the poor, Dalits, deprived and the tribals which was considered a challenge by the previous governments. Modi said.

He also highlighted Ayushman Yojna which provides health insurance worth ₹ 5 lakhs, free dialysis for the poor and low-cost medicines at Jan Aushadhi Kendras.

"Ayushman Aarogya Mandirs built across the country have become huge health centres for villages and the poor," he added.

Modi also highlighted the government's impact on women empowerment in the country and mentioned the availability of loans through the Mudra Yojna, women playing the roles of Bank Mitras, Pashu Sakhis and Asha workers.

J-K admin imposes night curfew ED raids premises Cong, AAP hold talks on seat sharing along international border in Samba of K'taka Cong MLA in Delhi, Punjab; decide to meet again

JAMMU, Jan 8: Night curfew has been imposed along the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district to ensure better area domination by BSF troops and to foil any nefarious activities close to the borderline, according to an official order.

The step was taken to prevent crossborder infiltration and smuggling of weapons through drones in the extreme foggy weather conditions prevailing along the Indo-Pak border line, said the order issued by District Magistrate Abhishek Sharma on Sunday.

According to the order, the movement of civilians has been stopped from from 9 pm to 6 am in one kilometre-long strip from the IB in Samba district.

"No person or group of persons shall move in the area up to one kilometre along the International Border in district Samba from 2100 hours to 0600 hour during the night," the DM said in the order and invoked Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to impose a night curfew along the IB.

rity are subverted," the DM said in the order. In case movement is necessary, the person or persons are required to produce their respective ID cards to BSF and police authorities, Sharma said. aforementioned order shall be dealt with

possible to serve the order individually, it is being issued ex-parte," the order read. "This order shall come into force with immediate effect and shall remain in

committee where authorities of the Bor-

der Security Force (BSF) suggested the

imposition of a daily night curfew on a

one kilometre-long strip from the IB, en-

abling them to perform their duties more

"It is felt by the district administration

that it is expedient that the movement of

people in border areas is regulated so

that there is better area domination by

BSF in border areas and nefarious de-

signs of forces inimical to Indian secu-

effectively, the order said.

"Any person found violating the in accordance with law. Since it is not

force for a period of two months from the date of its issuance, if not withdrawn or rescinded earlier," it added. (PTI)

Nanjegowda



BENGALURU, Jan 8: The premises of Karnataka Congress MLA K Y Nanjegowda and some of his linked entities were raided on Monday morning by the Enforcement Directorate as part of a money laundering

The 61-year-old legislator represents the The searches are covering his premises

The ED case is understood to have been tional Alliance Committee (NAC) filed on the basis of some local police FIRs. formed by the Congress president held Nanjegowda is also the president of the discussions with AAP leaders and a convener of Congress' NAC, said Kolar-Chikkaballapur Milk Union Ltd. (PTI) final decision will be taken later," Was-

#### NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The Congress and the AAP on Monday held a meeting to discuss seat sharing in Punjab and Delhi for the Lok Sabha polls and decided to meet again to give a final shape to the arrangement between the two parties of the INDIA bloc.

Top Congress leaders and members of the seat-sharing committee of the party Mukul Wasnik and Ashok Gehlot were present at the meeting here while those from the AAP included Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak and Delhi cabinet ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj.

The leaders of the two parties discussed possibilities of seat sharing but did not divulge any details.

"We had a very good meeting. Senior AAP leaders were sent to today's meeting for holding discussions with us on behalf of Arvind Kejriwal. The Na-



nik told reporters after the meeting.

"In this meeting, we have had indepth discussions with senior leaders regarding seat sharing and various topics. After a few days, we will meet again and the final discussion on seat sharing will take place. We will give a final shape to the seat-sharing plans later. Together we will contest the elections with vigorous preparation and defeat the BJP," Wasnik, who is the

spired during the discussions. One has to wait for sometime. We have already decided to contest elections together. Congress and AAP are an important part of the INDIA alliance," the Congress leader said.

Apart from Wasnik and Gehlot, Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, and senior party leaders Salman Khurshid and Mohan Prakash were also present at the meeting.

The AAP is in power in Delhi and Punjab. The Congress state units in both the states are opposed to any truck with the AAP.

The Congress has already initiated talks with other parties of the INDIA bloc in different states and is in the process of finalising the seat-sharing arrangement with them.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge had earlier said that the party's seatsharing committee were holding discussions with those of other parties to put up a united front against the BJP in this year's Lok Sabha elections. (PTI)

NC prez Farooq

Abdullah welcomes

SC order

investigation, official sources said. Malur seat in the Karnataka assembly.

and some of his linked entities in Malur and Kolar districts as part of a investigation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the sources said.

The instruction was issued following a meeting of the district-level standing

"It is not proper to reveal what tran-

## Voters won't fall for Cong promises, 'Modi Guarantee' ED's West Bengal unit will bag all 28 Karnataka LS seats: BJP

BENGALURU, Jan 8: Karnataka BJP President B Y Vijayendra on Monday said there is a pro-BJP wave in the country and the party will win all 28 seats from the state in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing a BJP Lok Sabha poll planning meeting here, he said intelligent people of the country will not fall for the "gimmicky guarantees "of the Congress party as they know that Modi guarantee is the best.

"Narendra Modi is set to become Prime Minister for the third time and under his leadership the country will rapidly move on the path of development, if the BJP wins the next election," Vijayendra said.

Hitting out at the Congress government in Karnataka, he said the state's financial health has deteriorated "due to the incompetent Congress"

"The government has completely failed to maintain law and order. Chief minister Sid-



daramaiah, who has presented 14 budgets, has completely failed in the matter of resource mobilisation," Vijayendra claimed. Despite severe drought situation in many

parts of the state and the suicide of 500 farmers in recent times, the state government has

not given any compensation to the distressed, according to him.

Vijayendra said voters of the state are all set to teach the Congress government a lesson in the next Lok Sabha elections, adding that his party would win all the 28 seats in the upcoming polls.

In the last Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won 25 seats in Karnataka, while an independent backed by the party also emerged victorious. The Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular) had won in one constituency each. Former chief ministers B S Yediyurappa,

Basavaraj Bommai and D V Sadananda Gowda and National General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Arun Singh, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka and Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Kota Srinivas Pujari were among those present. (PTI)

KOLKATA, Jan 8: The Enforcement Directorate's unit in West Bengal has submitted a report to its headquarters about the attack on its team during a raid in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district last week, officials said on Monday.

Three ED officers were injured and several of their vehicles vandalised as hundreds of supporters of TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh attacked them on Friday. The attack happened when the ED team went to Sheikh's house in Sandeshkhali for a raid in connection with alleged irregularities in the state's ration system. An NIA investigation into the attack is likely to be sought by the ED headquarters on the basis of the report, an officer

of the agency told PTI. "A two-page report on the attack was

sent on Sunday. We have mentioned minute details of the incident and along with that sent videos of the attack. Media reports have also also been sent," he said. 'The role of the Basirhat Police on that day has also been mentioned in the report -- how they fled the scene on unmarked two-wheelers as the attack began," he

added. The ED has already lodged a complaint at the Nazat police station in connection with the attack. The family of the accused TMC leader, and state police have also registered separate complaints against the central agency.

Incidentally, on the same night, the ED faced a similar situation while arresting another TMC leader, Shankar Adhya, in the alleged ration scam. (PTI)

JAMMU, Jan 8: National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah on Monday welcomed the Supreme Court judgment quashing

the Gujarat government's decision to grant remission to 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano case and said the order will be implemented to provide justice to the victim. Accusing the Gujarat govern-

ment of abusing its power, the Supreme Court earlier in the day quashed the remission to the 11 men convicted of raping Bilkis Bano and murdering seven of her family members during the 2002 communal riots in the state and ordered that they be sent back to jail within two weeks.

The Gujarat government's remission order was without application of mind, a top court bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan said and asked whether "heinous crimes against women permit remission" whatever faith she may follow or creed she may belong to.

"The Supreme Court has taken a very good decision and I want to congratulate the apex court for it as the decision (of the Gujarat government) was wrong," Abdullah told reporters on the sidelines of a public meeting at Baran village in Bhalwal block on the outskirts of Jammu.

He also said people know who welcomed the convicts with sweets after their release from prison following the grant of remission.

"How does one feel seeing her rapists released .... The Gujarat government will implement the court order and provide justice to her," the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said, adding, "What had happened was wrong and we have to fight for it." (PTI)

Indians top Maldives' tourist arrival figures, over 2 lakh visited island nation annually post Covid

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Data shows Indians top the Maldives' tourist arrival figures, with more than two lakh of them visiting the island nation every year after the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Maldives tourism ministry statistics, more than 2.09 lakh Indians visited the country in 2023.

The number was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 while over 2.11 lakh Indians flew to the Maldives in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open for international tourists during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited the country in that period.

In 2018, India was the fifthlargest source of tourist arrivals in the Maldives with 90,474 visitors. In 2019, India reached the second spot with nearly double the number (1,66,030) of arrivals compared to the previous year.

However, this travel hotspot for

Indians is now facing a backlash after three ministers from the Maldives cabinet made derogatory comments against Prime Minister Narendra Modi following his visit to Lakshadweep.

There were posts on social media claiming that some Indians are cancelling their scheduled trips to the Maldives in view of the row. Hashtag "Boycott Maldives" was also trending on social media.

EaseMyTrip on Monday said it has suspended all flight bookings to the island nation on its website "in solidarity" with India.

The government of the Maldives suspended three of its deputy ministers on Sunday after they criticised Modi for his post on X following his visit to Lakshadweep, inferring that it was an attempt to project the Union Territory as an alternative tourist destination to the Maldives.

The Maldivian foreign ministry



said the government is aware of "derogatory remarks" made on social media platforms against foreign leaders and that the personal

views do not represent the country's position.

Amid the row, many prominent personalities, such as cine stars Amitabh Bachchan, Salman Khan and Akshay Kumar and cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar, appealed to people on Sunday to explore "Indian islands" and coastal destinations.

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

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

The Maldivian envoy to India was summoned to the external affairs ministry on Monday and conveyed strong concern over the

remarks against the prime minister. Former sports minister of the Maldives, Âhmed Mahloof, has expressed concern over the row. saying "Indians boycotting the Maldives" will hit the country hard.

"I am deeply worried about the escalating situation regarding the comments about our closest neighbour. Indians boycotting the Maldives would have a huge impact on our economy. It would be hard for us to recover from such a campaign. I call on the government to swiftly take serious action to solve the issue as soon as possible," he said on Sunday. Meanwhile, the worldwide search interest for Lakshadweep reached its peak in the last 20 years, according to Google

trends. Modi was in Lakshadweep on January 2 and 3 to inaugurate several projects. (PTI)

sends report to HQ on

Sandeshkhali attack

### NATION

#### THE HILLS TIMES

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## ED says WB PDS 'scam' enormous, accuses state police BJP plays with democracy and Constitution: Akhilesh Yadav of pressing lighter charges in Sandeshkhali attack FIR

KOLKATA. Jan 8: The row over the attacks on ED teams in West Bengal escalated on Monday with the federal agency saying that the state police registered an FIR only under bailable sections in the January 5 Sandeshkhali incident, while no details were given to it in the Bongaon assault case.

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The ED also claimed that the magnitude of the PDS "scam" which it was investigating was "enormous" and proceeds of crime transferred by a suspect amount to ₹9,000-10,000 crore, out of which ₹ 2,000 crore are "suspected to be transferred to Dubai either directly or through Bangladesh".

The money laundering investigation of the agency pertains to alleged irregularities in the public distribution system (PDS) including bogus procurement of paddy in West Bengal, where the ED last year arrested minister and Trinamool Congress leader Jyotipriya Mallick and his aide Bakibur Rahaman

Fresh raids were launched on January 5 in this case as part of which an ED team, along with an armed CRPF security escort, reached Sadeshkhali to search the premises of Shajahan Sheikh, convenor of TMC's local unit. The other team raided the loca-

tion of TMC leader Shankar Adhya in the Simultala area of Bongaon

Both locations are in the North

CHARLES AND 24 Parganas district.

The agency said three of its officials were "grievously" injured and their mobile phones, laptop, cash, wallets, etc were looted in the first incident. It said in a statement that a complaint was given by the ED at Nazat police station for registration of FIR in the Sandeshkhali case under as many as 19 sections of the IPC.

These included IPC sections like 307 (attempt to murder), 333 (voluntarily causing hurt on provocation), 326 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or means), 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant), 392 (punishment for robbery) and 395 (punishment for dacoity)

It had also registration of the case for offences under IPC sections 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapon), 186 (voluntarily obstructing any public servant), 189 (threat of injury to public servant) and 149 (every member of unlawful assembly guilty of offence committed in prosecution of

common object). The other sections enumerated by the ED for registration of the FIR were 435 (mischief by fire or explosive substance), 440 (mischief committed after preparation made for causing death or hurt), 341 (punishment for wrongful restraint), 342 (punishment for wrongful confinement) read with section 120B (criminal conspiracy), 109 (punishment of abetment

) and 115 (abetment of offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life if offence not committed).

The police, the ED said, registered this FIR under IPC sections 148, 149, 341, 186 and 353 out of the 19 sections sought by the agency. The other IPC sections included in the FIR were 147 (punishment for rioting), 323 (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt), 427 (mischief causing damage to the amount of fifty rupees), 379 (punishment for theft), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention)

All these sections are "mostly bailable and non-scheduled offences", the agency said.

It said a copy of this FIR "has not been shared with this Directorate (ED)"

The ED said a "similar incident" again happened with its team on the night of January 5 as the crowd attacked investigators of the agency while they were arresting TMC leader Shankar Adhya in Bongaon, despite the local police being informed.

An FIR has been filed in this incident too but a copy is awaited, it said in a statement.

Giving an account of the second incident, the agency said it had informed the police about the searches against Adhya. (PTI)

LUCKNOW, Jan 8: Accusing the BJP of playing politics with democracy and the Constitution, Samawadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Monday said the saffron party adopts tactics, which divert public attention from the main issues.

Yadav while addressing a meeting of all the district and city unit presidents of the Samajwadi Party (SP) at the party's state headquarters fixed their responsibility and accountability and stressed that people are ready to defeat the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections because of its anti-people policies.

"The BJP plays with democracy and the Constitution. It adopts such tactics, which divert public attention from the main issues. In this election, the biggest issues will be from saving democracy to rising inflation, unemployment, neglect of farmers, increasing crimes against women, injustice and corruption,' Yadav said, according to a party release.

"Ever since the BJP government came to power, one lakh farmers have committed suicide in the country as per the NCRB data. The boundaries are not safe. Will the vote be cast on bulldozer or for saving Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar's Constitution? I believe the people will vote to save the Constitution of Ambedkar," he added.

Cautioning his party's workers that BJP can adopt all kinds of tactics in the elections, Yadav said they can also put pressure on the Election Commission. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said the

Samajwadi Party is going to play the "biggest role" in Uttar Pradesh.

minister to both countries to seek

de-escalation but New Delhi de-

clined the offer, says former

In his upcoming book, Bisaria,

who was serving as Indian High

Commissioner to Islamabad in

that period, also writes that India

was willing to send an aircraft of

the Indian Air Force to Pakistan to

bring back Wing Commander Ab-

hinandan Varthaman, but the Pak-

Varthaman (now Group Cap-

tain) downed a Pakistani jet on

February 27, 2019, before his

MiG 21 Bison jet was hit in a dog-

Pakistan had launched the retal-

day before. Varthaman was cap-

tured by the Pakistani Army and

"We were willing to send an In-

dian Air Force aircraft to pick him

up but Pakistan refused permis-

Force plane landing in Islamabad

was released two days later.

government refused

diplomat Ajay Bisaria.

istani

fight

permission.

"Elections have come, not even 100 days are left,

so our workers and all the officials of the organisation will work together with full preparation," said Yadav. "We have full faith in our organisation. We will work to convey the programmes, policies and decisions of the Samajwadi Party to the public," he added. Yadav said the Samajwadi Party is strengthening the organisation till sector and booth level.

"All the district heads will deploy the workers at the booth level and give them responsibilities," he added.

The SP chief also praised his party's workers for doing good work on checking the voters list.

"At the booth level, the leaders and workers, along with officials will gather information about where votes were reduced and where votes increased and will also keep an eye on it," he said.

Alleging the BJP has "betrayed the farmers", Yadav said five kilos of fertilizer was earlier reduced from the bag of fertilizer, adding now once again five kilos of fertilizer has been reduced while the price remains the same. The bag of fertilizer, which was of 50 kg, is now reduced to 40 kg, he said.

Asserting "injustice is being done to the farmers" under the BJP government, Yadav said the ruling dispensation "waived off loans of more than Rs 10 lakh crore of the industrialists, but no loan of the farmers was waived off".

Commenting on the INDIA bloc, the former chief minister said the Samajwadi Party is "trying to strengthen the alliance" that has been formed.

"The Samajwadi Party will support the parties in the alliance with full force," he added. (PTI)

## New Delhi declined China's offer to send deputy minister to India, Pak after 2019 Balakot strikes

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: In the af-In his book, 'Anger Management: The Troubled Diplomatic termath of India's Balakot strikes, several countries offered to send Relationship Between India and special envoys and China too sug-Pakistan', he also says several gested that it could send its deputy countries had offered to send spe-

> cial envoys over to the subcontinent but this was no longer necessary. "Even China, not to be left behind, had suggested that it could send its deputy minister to both countries to seek de-escalation. India had politely declined the

offer." he says. In the book published by Rupa, Bisaria, who had a distinguished diplomatic career spanning 35 years, delves into various aspects of India-Pakistan relations since

Independence. The ties between India and Pakistan came under severe strain after India's warplanes pounded a Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist training camp in Balakot in Pakiation for the Balakot airstrikes a istan on February 26, 2019, in response to the Pulwama terror attack. Bisaria says that the day after India's air strikes at Balakot, the ambassadors of the US, UK, and France were informed during a briefing by the then Pakistan sion; the optics of an Indian Air foreign secretary Tehmina Janjua about a message she received

from the Pakistan Army. after all that had happened over The message said that "nine the previous three days, was, of course not acceptable to Pakmissiles from India had been

launched any time that day".

"The foreign secretary requested the envoys to report this intelligence to their capitals and ask India not to escalate the situation. The diplomats promptly reported these developments, leading to a flurry of diplomatic activity in Islamabad, P5 capitals, and in New Delhi that night," Bisaria writes.

The permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, China and France are known as P5 nations.

"One of them recommended to her that Pakistan should convey its concerns directly to India," says Bisaria.

Bisaria also writes that then Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan wanted to talk to his Indian counterpart.

"At around midnight I got a call in Delhi from Pakistani High Commissioner Sohail Mahmood now in Islamabad, who said that PM Imran Khan was keen to talk to Prime Minister Modi," he says. "I checked upstairs and responded that our prime minister

was not available at this hour but in case Imran Khan had any urgent message to convey he could, of course, convey it to me. I got no call back that night," he re

### Cong, AAP hold talks on seat sharing in Delhi, Punjab; decide to meet again NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The Congress and the AAP

on Monday held a meeting to discuss seat sharing in Punjab and Delhi for the Lok Sabha polls and decided to meet again to give a final shape to the arrangement between the two parties of the INDIA

Top Congress leaders and members of the seatsharing committee of the party Mukul Wasnik and Ashok Gehlot were present at the meeting here while those from the AAP included Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak and Delhi cabinet ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj.

The leaders of the two parties discussed possibilities of seat sharing but did not divulge any details.

"We had a very good meeting. Senior AAP leaders were sent to today's meeting for holding discussions with us on behalf of Arvind Kejriwal. The National Alliance Committee (NAC) formed by the Congress president held discussions with AAP leaders and a final decision will be taken later," Wasnik told reporters after the meeting.

"In this meeting, we have had in-depth discussions with senior leaders regarding seat sharing and various topics. After a few days, we will meet again and the final discussion on seat sharing will take place.

We will give a final shape to the seat-sharing plans later. Together we will contest the elections with vigorous preparation and defeat the BJP," Wasnik, who is the convener of Congress' NAC, said.

"It is not proper to reveal what transpired during the discussions. One has to wait for sometime. We have already decided to contest elections together.

Congress and AAP are an important part of the INDIA alliance," the Congress leader said. Apart from Wasnik and Gehlot, Delhi Congress

chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, and senior party leaders Salman Khurshid and Mohan Prakash were also present at the meeting.

The AAP is in power in Delhi and Punjab. The Congress state units in both the states are opposed to any truck with the AAP.

The Congress has already initiated talks with other parties of the INDIA bloc in different states and is in the process of finalising the seat-sharing arrangement with them.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge had earlier said that the party's seat-sharing committee were holding discussions with those of other parties to put up a united front against the BJP in this year's Lok Sabha elections. (PTI)

PM's Awards scheme restructured, to recognise performance through targeted beneficiaries

Centre not giving due recognition to Gangasagar Mela:



Expressing despair, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said that though Gangasagar Mela was "one of the best" religious congregations in the world, the Centre has not given it the due recognition.

Speaking at an official programme at the Sagar Island in the South 24 Parganas district, she said that it was her government that was working for the annual event despite no help from the Centre.

"Kumbh Mela is a big fair and it gets all help from the Centre. We also must remember that the site of Kumbh Mela is connected by road. Gangasagar Mela, which is held on an island, is one of the best such fairs in the world but I don't know why the Centre is yet to give it the

bloc.



due recognition," she said. She said that her government was working to build a bridge to connect the island to the mainland.

"There is no help from the Centre. It's our government which is doing everything," she added.

Banerjee reviewed the preparedness for the congregation in the afternoon, and also inaugurated a number of developmental projects. The Gangasagar Mela, which is held on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, will continue till January 17. About 40 lakh people from across the country are expected to attend the congregation this year. (PTI)

#### NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The scheme for the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration has

been restructured to recognise the performance of civil servants through "targeted individual beneficiaries and implementation" of the government's priority programmes, an official statement said on Monday.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the entire concept and format of the award has undergone a revolutionary change since 2014, the statement issued by the Union personnel ministry said.

The objective of the scheme is to encourage constructive competition, innovation, replication and institutionalisation of best practices, it added.

"Under this approach, emphasis would be on good governance, qualitative achievement and last mile connectivity, rather than only on achievement of quantitative targets,"

according to the statement

"The award scheme has now, this year, been restructured to recognise the performance of the district collector through targeted individual beneficiaries and implementation with a saturation approach. With this in focus, the applications for awards would be evaluated on three parameters -- good governance, qualitative and quantitative," it said. It is expected that central ministries, states and all districts participate in this scheme of the Prime Minister's Awards for 2023. The awards for excellence in public administration under this new scheme shall be conferred by the prime minister, the statement further said. It added that a web portal for the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2023 was launched on Monday by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances. (PTI)

istan," Bisaria writes.

pointed towards Pakistan, to be counts. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## 13th NCHAC Poll records

The NCHAC in Dima Hasao district, established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. holds a pivotal role in administering the region and ensuring the development of the hill communities Presently led by the BJP, chief executive member Debolal Gorlosa heads the council.

### Do not snap links with

of India (SAI) complex, 5th Miles Nihang Rongkethe, Nihang Rongkethe. Addressing the gathering he said that the Karbis developed in culture and language from Rongkhang and even has the Ramayan in the epic poem Sabin Alun.

He further said, "The Karbis have known the Ramayan in the form of Sabin Alun. In Karbi tradition the number nine holds a significant importance. Before numerology was prevalent, the Karbis belief of holding the number 9 in importance proves that the tribe has the knowledge of numbers."

Sarma said the Karbi society has always maintained a rich socio-cultural tradition and a firm belief in the ancient system of faith. The chief minister further said that the rich cultures of the Karbis originated in the Rongkhang area and that it is from this area that the Karbis established twelve capitals from which they practised Karbi rules and rituals, traditions and culture.

Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang in his speech said for preservation and development of Karbi Aronbarim a land of 5,000 bighas in Karbi Anglong and 2000 bighas in West Karbi Anglong would be allotted by the KAAC.

Offices of various organisations of Karbi Aronbarim would be set up in those two plots of land. Plantation of indigenous species of plants like different species of bamboo, trees, wild banana plants and other plants which are needed during rituals by Karbi Aronbarim will be planted.

The KAAC would allocate an annual budget of ₹ 100 crore for the purpose, he added. The King of the Karbi community Longsing Ronghang, Cabinet minister Jogen Mohan, member of parliament Horen Sing Bey, deputy speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly Numal Momin, members of legislative assembly Rupsing Teron, Dorsing Ronghang, Bidya Sing Engleng were also present.

## Mizoram CM likely to

on the other hand, regarded the map prepared by the Survey of India in 1933, as its Constitutional boundary. Vast areas within the inner line reserved forest now fall under Assam. Similarly, a certain extent of the area, as per the 1933 demarcation, is now on the Mizoram side. There is no ground demarcation of boundaries between the two states, officials said.

Lalduhoma had told reporters last week that he discussed the border issues with Shah during his recent visit to Delhi

"I have discussed the border dispute between Mizoram and Assam with the union home minister in Delhi. We want disputes and violence not to occur any more in the future. We also agreed to resolve the issues at a political level," the chief minister had said on January 6. Earlier, he had said that the Mizoram government would set up a boundary committee involving all stakeholders to deal with any issue related to the border with neighbouring states. (PTI)

## India-Maldives diplomatic

on Sunday said the Indian high commission in Male strongly raised the matter with the Maldivian foreign ministry. Amid the row, Indian high commissioner to Male Munu Muhawar held a "pre-arranged" meeting with a senior Maldivian diplomat on Monday. "High Commissioner Munu Mahawar had a pre-arranged meeting with H.E. Dr Ali Naseer Mohamed, Ambassador at Large, at MoFA, Maldives, today to discuss bilateral issues," the Indian high commission in the Maldives said on 'X'. The remarks by the ministers have drawn flak in India, with many celebrities urging people on X to explore domestic tourist destinations instead of going to the Maldives.

There were also posts on social media claiming that some Indians are cancelling their scheduled trip to the Maldives in view of the row. The Maldivian foreign ministry said the government is aware of "derogatory remarks" on social media platforms against foreign leaders and that the personal views do not represent its position.

"The government of Maldives is aware of derogatory remarks on social media platforms against foreign leaders and high-ranking individuals. These opinions are personal and do not represent the views of the government of Maldives," the Maldivian foreign ministry said in a statement on Sunday. (PTI)

El Nino effect leads to dry winter, worries over ripple effect

SNOWLESS IN NW HIMALAYAS

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: High mountain passes with barely any snow, skiers hoping to slalom down white slopes disappointed and tourists calling off trips to hill destinations... the El Nino effect is playing out across the northwest Himalayas with an unusually dry winter and no immediate relief in the offing.

According to the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), 2023 was the warmest-on-record year and the warming El Nino event is likely to further fuel the heat in 2024.

The El Nino phenomenon occurs when sea surface temperatures (SSTs) are higher than average in the eastern tropical Pacific, and there is a simultaneous weakening of trade winds. The absence of snowfall is not a one-time thing but affects the annual cycle of snow.

"If it continues longer, it can have a huge cascading effect on socio-economic benefits. If you don't get (enough) snow, you don't get replenishment of water, it will impact agriculture, your health and can, in turn, impact your economy,' glaciologist and Himalayan researcher A N Dimri told PTI.

And so it is that the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) which struggles with snow clearance operations in tough weather conditions to keep the strategically located 11,800 feet altitude Zojila Pass open has had it easier this year.

"Zojila Pass connects Kashmir with Ladakh and is important for maintaining the supply chain logistics for the troops posted in forward areas in Ladakh. Generally, it has a minimum of 30-40 feet of snow around this time but there is barely six-seven feet of snow now," said Lt Gen Rajeev Chaudhry, former BRO director general.

"It is possible the pass will remain open for traffic for a week more because of less snow," he

The picture is no different in Kashmir, Hi-

machal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. In Kashmir, popular tourist destinations such as Gulmarg and

Pahalgam have received almost no snow while the hills have below-average snowfall disappointing tourists and locals in equal measure. "Bizarre dry winters so far over hills due to

prolonged dry spell & nothing major expected from upcoming Western Disturbance on 9-10th Jan." amateur meteorologist 'Weatherman Shubham' posted on X on Saturday along with a photo of Kedarnath temple and surroundings sans any

The unusually long dry spell has meant that places that would ideally have a minimum of four-to-six feet thick snow by now hardly have any snow. After the initial winter precipitation in November, and at some places in the first few days of December, there has been no precipitation at all.

Attributing it to the absence of Western Disturbances (WDs), the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said almost no major snowfall is likely till mid-January with even the expected January 9-10 WD not likely to help much.

WDs are a series of cyclonic storms that orig-

inate in India's west (and therefore, western) at faraway Mediterranean region. Though the northwest plains, Punjab, Haryana

and Delhi-NCR, have seen their share of foggy 'cold' and 'severe cold' days, there have been no 'cold wave' conditions yet.

"Since December, there has been no active WD over northwest India... this resulted in less than normal precipitation," explained IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra.

Temperatures, he added, are above normal during the El Nino period. "But more than that, the absence of WDs meant that there was no clouding and that led to increased temperatures (in the higher reaches of the Himalayas).'

According to an April 2015 study "Western Disturbances: A review" published in the Review of Geophysics, WD snowfall in December, January, and February is the dominant precipitation input to establish and sustain regional snowpack, replenishing regional water resources.

Spring melt is the major source of runoff to northern Indian rivers and can be linked to important hydrologic processes from aquifer recharge to flash floods, it said.

Drawing a connect between WDs and El Nino, climate scientist Raghu Murtugudde from the Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay said, "WDs have had a trend for a while, so the low precipitation is consistent with that (trend). During an El Nino, the cold winds come from the northwest and the cold temperature remains over northern and north-central India. This means, dry cold winds and thus less precipitation."

Elaborating on the "trend", he said, "The WDs have been decreasing and bringing less precipitation for a couple of decades. That means, there will be more years with below-normal precipitation than years with above-normal precipitation. El Nino exacerbated this." (PTI)

### ENTERTAINMENT

## **'OPPENHEIMER' DOMINATES GOLDEN GLOBES, 'POOR THINGS' UPSETS 'BARBIE' IN COMEDY**

#### **BEVERLY HILLS, Jan 8:**

Christopher Nolan's blockbuster biopic "Oppenheimer" dominated the 81st Golden Globes, winning five awards including best drama, while Yorgos Lanthimos' Frankenstein riff "Poor Things" pulled off an upset victor over "Barbie" to triumph in the best comedy or musical category.

If awards season has been building toward a second match-up of Barbenheimer, this round went to "Oppenheimer." The film also won best director for Nolan, best drama actor for Cillian Murphy, best supporting actor for Robert Downey Jr. and for Ludwig Goransson's score.

"I don't think it was a no-brainer by any stretch of the imagination to make a three-hour talky movie - Rrated by the way — about one of the darkest developments in our history," said producer Emma Thomas, accepting the night's final award and thanking Universal chief Donna Langley.

Along with best comedy or musical, "Poor Things" also won for Emma Stone's performance as Bella, a Victorian woman experiencing a surreal life and sexual awakening.

"I see this as a rom-com," said Stone. "But in the sense that Bella falls in love with life itself, rather than a person. She accepts the good and the bad in equal measure, and that really made me look at life differently.'

Lily Gladstone won best actress in a dramatic film for Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon." Gladstone, who began her speech speaking the language of her native tribe, Blackfeet Nation, is the first Indigenous winner in the category.

"This is a historic win," said Gladstone. "It doesn't just belong to me." The Globes were in their 81st year but facing a new and uncertain chapter. After a tumultuous few years and heaps of scandals, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association was dissolved, leaving a new Globes, on a new network (CBS), to try to regain its perch as the third biggest award show of the year, after the Oscars and Grammys. Even the menu (sushi from Nobu) was flipped. "Golden Globes

journalists, thank you for changing your game, therefore changing

Ozempic, Meryl Streep's knack for winning awards and the long-running "Oppenheimer." ("I needed another hour.")

After one joke flubbed, Koy, who was named host after some bigger names reportedly passed, also noted how fast he was thrust into the job. "Yo, I got the gig 10 days ago.

You want a perfect monologue?" said Koy. "I wrote some of these and they're the ones you're laughing at." HI, BARBIE

Downey's win, his third Globe, denied one to Kenergy. Ryan Gosling had been seen as his stiffest competition, just one of the many head-tohead contests between "Oppenheimer" and Greta Gerwig's "Barbie." The filmmakers faced

each other in the best director category, where Nolan triumphed. It was two hours before "Barbie,"

the year's biggest hit with more than \$1.4 billion in ticket sales, won an award. Billie Eilish's "What Was I Made For?" took best song, and swiftly after, "Barbie" took the Globes' new honor for "cinematic and box office achievement." Some thought that award might go to Taylor Swift, whose "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" also set box-office records.

Margot Robbie, star and producer of "Barbie," accepted the award in a pink gown modelled after 1977's Superstar Barbie.

"We'd like to dedicate this to every single person on the planet who dressed up and went to the greatest place on Earth: the movie theatres," said Robbie

"Barbie" and "Oppenheimer," two blockbusters brought together by a common release

date, also

faced off

in the

best

play

screen-

category

But in an

upset, Jus-

tine Triet

and

Arthur Harari won for the script to the French courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall." Later, Triet's film picked up best international film, too.

Though the Globes have no direct correlation with the Academy Awards, they can boost campaigns at a crucial juncture. Oscar nomination voting starts on Thursday, and the twin sensations of Barbenheimer remain frontrunners.

Other contenders loom, though, like "Poor Things" and "The Holdovers."

Paul Giamatti and Da'Vine Joy Randolph both won for Alexander Pavne's "The Holdovers," Giamatti, reuniting with Payne two decades after "Sideways," won best actor and Randolph won for her supporting performance as a grieving woman in the 1970s-set boarding school drama.

"Oh, Mary, you have changed my life," Randolph said of her character. "You have made me feel seen in so many ways that I have never imagined.'

Hayao Miyazaki's "The Boy and the Heron" won best animated film, an upset over "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse. SUCCESSION' AND THE

**BEAR' LEAD TV WINNERS** 

The final season of "Succession" cleaned up on the television side. It won best drama series for the third time, a mark that ties a record set by "Mad Men" and "The X-Files." Three stars from the HBO series also won: Matt Macfadyen, Sarah Snook and Kieran Culkin.

> "It is bittersweet, but things like this make it rather

> > sweeter,"

said

"Succession" creator Jesse Armstrong

Hulu's "The Bear" also came away with a trio of awards, including best comedy series. Jeremy Allen White won for the second time, but this time he had company. Ayo Edebiri won her first Globe for her leading performance in the Hulu show's second season. She thanked the assistants of her agents and managers.

"To the people who answer my emails, you're the real ones," said Edebiri.

"Beef" won three awards: best limited series as well as acting awards for Ali Wong and Steven Yeun

The Globes also added a new stand-up special award. That went, surprisingly, to Ricky Gervais, who didn't attend the show he so often hosted. Some expected Chris Rock to win for "Selective Outrage," his stand-up response to the Will Smith

slap. THE GLOBES COMEBACK

A few years ago, the Golden Globes were on the cusp of collapse. After The Los Angeles Times reported that the HFPA had no Black members, Hollywood boycotted the organization. The 2022 Globes were all but cancelled and taken off TV. After reforms, the Globes returned to NBC last year in a one-year deal, but the show was booted to Tuesday evening. With Jerrod Carmichael hosting, the telecast attracted 6.3 million viewers, a new low on NBC and a far cry from the 20 million that once tuned in.

The Golden Globes were acquired by Eldridge Industries and Dick Clark Productions, which Penske Media owns, and turned into a forprofit venture. The HFPA (which typically numbered around 90 voters) was dissolved and a new group of some 300 entertainment journalists from around the world now vote for the awards.

Questions still remain about the Globes' long-term future, but their value to Hollywood studios remains providing a marketing

boost to awards contenders. (The Oscars won't be held until March 10.) This year, because of the actors and writers strikes, the Globes are airing ahead of the Emmys, which

A chaotic **Golden Globes** night had a bit of everything: The silly, the serious, and **Taylor Swift, too** 

LOS ANGELES, Jan 8: They may not have had lukewarm chardonnay on the tables, as nominee Jennifer Lawrence had predicted. But the 81st Golden Globes had a bit of everything else: Some silliness, some seriousness, a bit of history, a few good jokes and many bad ones, loads of stars - and one Taylor Swift, who didn't ascend the podium but still made her presence known as perhaps only Swift can.

One decisive trend emerged: In the great "Barbenheimer" showdown of awards season 2024, round one went to the "heimer" part. Christopher Nolan's sweeping biopic "Oppenheimer" dominated the evening, among its wins the prize for best drama, best director for Nolan, and best actor (Cillian Murphy ) and supporting actor (Robert Downey Jr.).

Greta Gerwig's candy-coloured "Barbie," meanwhile, lost to upset victor "Poor Things" in the comedy/musical category, but won the new cinematic and box office achievement award, as well as best song for Billie Eilish's wistful "What Was I Made For.<sup>3</sup>

It would be unwise to count "Barbie" out, but it was a disappointing night for her fans, and also for another fearsome force: Swifties. The pop superstar, who spent 2023 smashing all records in sight, lost out on her fifth Globe nomination. But she stunned on the carpet in shimmering Gucci green, and later created a meme-worthy moment when she reacted with a seemingly icy glare to a joke about her by host Jo Koy.

Swift was not alone in her displeasure; at one point the jokes were falling flat enough for Koy to stop and explain that he'd had only 10 days to prepare.

The crowd laughed harder at Will Ferrell and Kristen Wiig, who made an amusing bit of pretending — insisting — that the ceremony was "a serious night." The joke was that few actually take the ceremony seriously. Noted presenter Mark Hamill: "It's the only awards show with an open bar."

But it was indeed a serious note that served as an emotional highpoint: Lily Gladstone, of "Killers of the Flower Moon," became the first Indigenous winner of best actress in a drama, speaking in the Blackfeet language and reminding the crowd that there are still significant advances to be celebrated.

Koy got a few laughs with a joke about the lengthy "Oppenheimer," saying, "I needed another hour." But as the monologue went on, it was clear that the comic needed something else: sharper jokes from the writers.

Cameras caught negative reactions from celebs like Harrison Ford and Selena Gomez, and the "Barbie" team did not appear amused when he noted that "Oppenheimer" was based on serious material but their own film was based on "a plastic doll with big boobies."

Koy sought to defend himself. "Yo, I got the gig 10 days ago. You want a perfect monologue?" He added: "I wrote some of these, and they're the ones you're laughing at.'

When Da'Vine Joy Randolph won for her acclaimed supporting actress performance in "The Holdovers," she duly thanked the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. Only problem: The HFPA is now defunct, and many in the audience re-sponded audibly: "They're not called that."

Downey in his acceptance speech. It got off to a rocky start. Host Jo Koy took the stage at the Beverly Hilton International Ballroom in Beverly Hills, California. The Filipino American stand-up hit on some expected topics:



e postp to January 15. With movie ticket sales still 20 per cent off the pre-pandemic pace and the industry facing a potentially perilous 2024 at the box office, Hollywood needed the Golden Globes as much as it ever has. (AP)

After several years of turmoil that followed the revelation that the HFPA had no Black members, the Golden Globes were acquired last year by Eldridge Industries and Dick Clark Productions and turned into a for-profit venture.

Some 300 entertainment journalists now vote for the awards. Later, Randolph spoke about the vibe of the evening. "It's a party in there," she said. "It's a good time. We got through the pandemic. We stuck through our two strikes. There's a sense of buzz in there."

Winning an early award for best supporting actor, Downey Jr. told the crowd he had taken a beta-blocker, so "this is going government official to be a breeze." He then Lewis Strauss. misspoke the name of his character, (PTI)

## You have to block mindless trolling but some criticism is important feedback: Ananya Panday

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: You can't get too carried away by either praise or hate, savs actor Ananya Panday, who is earning rave reviews for her performance in "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan", a film she describes as a relevant story that captures the impact of social media on youth.

Panday, who made her movie debut with 2019's "Student of the Year 2", has often been targeted by online trolls for her comments, fashion choices and sometimes, just for hailing from a film family.

The 25-year-old, who is the daughter of actor Chunky Panday, said she has been vocal about people expressing themselves and learning from their mistakes. She believes whatever she has experienced since she became an actor has contributed to her growth.

"If I hadn't been exposed to those emotions, I would probably not be able to perform a certain way. So I'm grateful for whatever's happened because I have been allowed to express myself through my work. And, some criticism is actually helpful and important feedback. Obviously, you have to block out the mindless trolling," Panday told PTI in an interview. Asked about the praise that has come

her way post "Kho Gaye ... " and 2022's "Gehraiyaan", the actor said she has learned to take all feedback in her stride.

"I feel like people's perceptions change every Friday. You can't get too carried away by praise or by hate. You have to keep working hard, that's the best you can do. You can't change the way people speak, so you can only work on yourself. That's what I have learned," added Panday, who also runs a digital social responsibility initiative against online bullying.

She is happy that people have connected with her character of Ahana, a workaholic marketing executive, who feels stuck in her relationship and career, and takes to social media to seek validation. Panday said the film, also starring Siddhant Chaturvedi and Adarsh Gourav, was one of the "best working experiences" she has had. Netflix's "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan" is directed by Arjun Varain Singh and released on December 26. "I want to be able to play characters that go beyond generation, that people always remember, people feel happy when they think about and they feel like they can relate to," said the actor, recalling growing up on films such as "Jaane Tu Yaa Jaane Naa", "Ye

Jawani Hai Deewani" and "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai"

"Kho Gaye..." captures the pitfalls of hyper-connectivity in the Internet era and the constant need for validation from strangers through the story of three friends, who are unable to move forward in life for different reasons whether it's Panday's Ahana, Chaturvedi's Imaad, a stand-up comic hiding a tragedy, or Gourav's Neil, a fitness instructor trying to make it big.

Through the film, Panday said, they wanted to understand the current generation and depict "what's going on around all of us"

"We all felt it, all the actors, the director... Everyone felt like this was happening in their lives and people weren't talking about it. It is such a relevant issue because it's not just about social media. It's about the way relationships have changed."

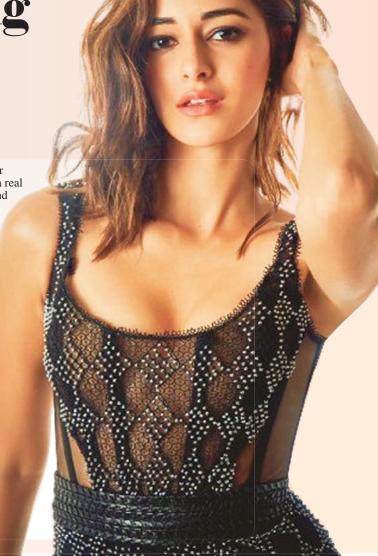
Panday, who is an active Instagram user but is "too scared" of X, said the film helped her relook at her own relationship with social media. "At the end of the day, everyone has to realise that it is just for fun and it can be all taken away with just

a click of a button. You just shut your phone and it's all gone. And, there's a real world out there with actual people and connections to form."

Panday has received acclaim for some of the emotional scenes in the movie, but the actor said those came easy to her as opposed to fun moments in the film.

"Strangely, for me, the toughest part as an actor is to laugh on screen. And, this is one of those films where there were moments where the friends are hanging out and we had to laugh and I just couldn't do it," the actor recalled. What helped her was a workshop with acting coach Atul Mongia.

"He does this exercise where he does 'every degree of an emotion', where you have to go from zero to hundred. I could do anger, sadness, everything, but I just couldn't do happiness and laughter. He made me sit in the middle of a room. First, he made me cry and then, he made me laugh," she said. (PTI)



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#### TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024

### SPORTS

## THE HILLS TIMES 11

## India Women eye maiden T20I series win over Australia in last hurrah of long home season

NAVI MUMBAI, Jan 8: The culmination of a long and mixed home season brings the Indian women's cricket team one last opportunity to register a maiden T20I series triumph over Australia at home when the two sides square off in the series-decider here on Tuesday.

With the three-match affair levelled 1-1, Harmanpreet Kaur's India have a chance to beat the reigning world champions Australia in their own den and kick off the 2024 T20I World Cup year in style.

India have only one series win to show against Australia's four in their five-series bilateral T20I history. Their triumph in an away affair in 2015-16 sits atop in the list of achievements for this side.

However, having registered historic wins in one-off Tests earlier this season against both Australia and England, India would want to make this one last opportunity count.

India were on a roll in the first game and thrashed Australia by a record margin of nine wickets but their batters cut a sorry figure in the second. A tricky pitch here at the DY Patil Stadium on Sunday did not allow batters to



first half of the game assisted India's charge with the bat, the absence of it in the second made

the job of containing the Australian batters difficult. But to their credit, the Indian

bowlers did well to take the

game as deep as possible with some tight lines and sharp fielding. However, the home team's fielding has only been sporadically good. Kaur's own form with the bat will remain a huge concern for the hosts, who were humbled by six wickets in the second game.

The Indian captain has not made a fifty yet in 10 matches so far across formats in these games. She has seven singledigit scores now in 11 innings including the first T20I wherein her services were not required.

"Every player cannot have a good day everyday, but suddenly anyone can have a very good day. It is not the case that we are (right away) aiming for big shots but we are trying to play (as per the) merit of the ball," allrounder Deepti Sharma told the media after the match when asked if Kaur's form was a concern for the team.

Deepti waged a lone battle of sorts with a combative all-round performance in the second game ing Indian innings to give them

some late impetus, and also fought hard with the ball to take the first two wickets of the four Australian wickets to fall.

The pitches for the two T20Is so far have not allowed batters to go berserk especially in the first innings, allowing the bowlers to dominate the proceedings. "It has been a really good contest between bat and ball, there is something in it for both the batters and the bowlers," said Australia's player of the match on Sunday Kim Garth. "Especially, coming from the wicket that we played on the Test match, (it) was a lot more challenging for the batters, so it has been really pleasing that there has been a bit in it for the

bowlers, particularly with the new ball," she added. Deepti also found the pitch for the second game a challenging one to bat on. "...it was not an easy wicket to bat on. The ball was turning as well as getting slow (off the surface). I think we were about 15 runs short...," she scoring a 27-ball 31 in a falter- replied when asked what went wrong for India. (PTI)

Anahat finishes runner-up at 2024 British Junior Open squash



BIRMINGHAM (ENG-LAND), Jan 8: Rising Indian star Anahat Singh signed off with a runner-up finish in the girls' under-17 category at the British Junior Open squash tournament here.

The Indian top-seed Anahat went down 2-3 to Egyptian second seed Nadien Elhammamy in a tense 68-minute cliffhanger at the University of Birmingham on Sunday. The 15-year-old won the

opening game 11-7, before Elhammamy fought back to claim the next two on tiebreak 13-11 & 12-10.

The Delhi girl won the fourth game 11-5 to force a decider, and not much separated the pair in the fifth, which the Egyptian clinched 11-9.

Late last month, Anahat won the Under-19 crown at the Scottish Junior Open to cap a spectacular 2023.

In 2023, Anahat secured the under-19 and senior National championship double, besides winning bronze medals in the mixed doubles and team event at the Asian Games Huangzhou.

She also won another bronze partnering Abhay Singh at the inaugural Asian Mixed Doubles Championships.

Meanwhile, Aryaveer Dewan, the reigning US Junior Open boys' under-15 champion, took third place in the boys' under-15 section.

He lost to Egyptian top seed Philopater Saleh 3-1 in the semifinals, but bounced back to win the play-off for third place. Promising Aadya Budhia was edged out 3-2 by top seeded American Vivienne Sze in the under-13 girls' quarterfinals.

## Malaysia Open: Indian Theegala misses win by one shot, finishes shuttlers hope for 2<sup>nd</sup>; Bhatia 14<sup>th</sup> as Kirk wins Sentry

bright start in highstake Olympic year

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 8: Weng Hong Yang and sixth seed With the Paris Olympic qualification at stake, top Indian shuttlers, including HS Prannoy and Lakshya Sen, will hope to begin the new season on a bright note when they start their campaign at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Tuesday. A lot will be on the line for Indian shuttlers in the next four months as they zoom through a hectic calender, hoping to get inside the world's top-16 by April end to book their berths for the Paris Games.

Frontrunner in the Olympic race, world no. 8 Prannoy, had a sensational season with maiden bronze medals at the World Championships and the Asian Games and a title-run at the Malaysia Masters super 500. He

Jonatan Christie of Indonesia respectively in the opening round here.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have looked in ominous form in the men's doubles arena. They went on a record-breaking spree to emerge as the best-performing Indian shuttlers in 2023.

In a span of 12 months, they won an Asian Games gold, a super 1000 crown in Indonesia, the Korea Open super 500 and the Swiss Open super 300 before grabbing a a career-best ranking of World No.1, albeit for a brief time. The second-seeded pair, which reached the semifinals in 2023, will look to continue the good run and go deep in the draw when they open against the In-

KAPALUA, Jan 8: Indian-American golfer Sahith Theegala missed a 10 foot putt on the 18th hole to finish second in the Sentry, the opening event of the 2024 PGA TOUR season. Theegala fired a sizzling 10-

under 63 to finish at 28-under but Chris Kirk, the overnight leader playing in the final group, carded 8-under 65 to finish at 29-under, that included a superb second shot to set up a birdie on the 17th to go one ahead.

He parred the 18th and won the title. Akshay Bhatia, the other Indian-American in the field, who was second after 54 holes, had a double bogey start after two bogey-free days and finished with 2-under 71 to drop to Tied-14th place. Bhatia, one shot behind at the start, drove his opening tee shot into the native grass and never contended thereafter.

Theegala missed a 10-foot birdie chance at the par-5 closing hole



and shot 63, while Jordon Spieth, whose tee shot on the 16th plugged under the lip of a bunker for a bogey, missed a 15-foot eagle putt on the 18th and shot 65 to finish third at 27-under. Korean Byeong-Hun-An (66)

was fourth at 26-under. Theegala said: "Obviously 18

Indian women's hockey team confident of

#### hurts a little bit but I think Chris (Kirk) hit an incredible shot on 17 there, and then if we were tied or if I was at 29, I think he would probably pull off a birdie there as well (on 18). "Yeah, I really wish I could have had that second shot on 18 back. It's not how it works.' Theegala had a great final day.

After four birdies in a row from second to sixth, he added one on ninth to turn in 5-under. Another birdie followed on 11th and four more came in a row from 13th to the 16th. That birdie on the 16th

birdies, beating Jon Rahm's mark of 32 set last year.

While he was delighted with his record, Im was still somewhat disappointed with his third round of 73 on Saturday which knocked him out of contention in his search for a third PGA TOUR title. This is the second birdie record on TOUR which Im now proudly holds as in 2021, he snared 498 birdies to set a new record for most birdies during a season, breaking the previous mark of 493 by Steve Flesch in 2000. (PTI)

gave him a one-shot lead. Then he parred 17th and missed a 10-footer for the 11th birdie of the day and finished one behind. Sungjae Im got into the PGA TOUR record books with 34

also registered a final finish at the Australia Open super 500.

The 31-year-old, seeded 8th, will hope to continue his rich vein of form when he opens against Denmark's Anders Antonsen, who made a successful comeback from an injury by winning the Korea Open in 2023.

All eyes will also be on Lakshya and Kidambi Srikanth as they fight to get inside the top 16 after enduring contrasting fates last season.

While world no. 16 Sen claimed the Canada Open super 500 before losing his form in the back end, Srikanth, ranked 24, has looked subdued and had just four quarterfinals finishes to show in 2023.

Things are not going to be easy for Sen and Srikanth as they face tough competitors in China's

mad Shohibul Fikri and Bagas Maulana. Brimming with confidence after making three finals in December, the women's doubles pair of Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto will now look to make the right moves this season to crack the global top 16.

donesian combination of Muham-

The duo is currently placed 21st in the Olympic Games Qualification rankings, ahead of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who are at the 27th spot. Ashwini and Tanisha, who

claimed the Guwahati Masters super 100 title, will face USA's Francesca Corbett and Allison Lee in the opening round.

With two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu recovering from a knee injury, India will have no representation in women's singles. (PTI)

making 3<sup>rd</sup> successive Olympics: Navneet

Fuelled by their historic fourth-

RANCHI, Jan 8: Indian women's team is confident of booking a third successive Olympic berth and Hockey India release. its knowledge of the conditions here will put it in good stead ahead of the eight-team hockey Olympic Qualifiers, said attacking midphy, we know the pitch well." fielder Navneet Kaur on Monday. The Indian team, led by Savita place finish in the Tokyo Olympic Punia, had won the Asian Champions Trophy at the same venue of Marang Gomke Jaypal Singh Mundha AstroTurf Hockey Stadium in November last year. in Kunti district. The hosts defeated Japan 4-0 in

the final to secure their second consecutive title in the competition.

"Arriving in Ranchi early has helped us gain quite a few sessions on the main pitch and it has also in Pool B, India's campaign kicks

Exhibiting fervent spirit of sportsmanship

helped us acclimatise to this off with a clash against the United weather," Navneet said in a States on Saturday, followed by their match against New Zealand "Since we have also played in the next day. After a day's rest, India face Italy on January 16. this venue before, during the Women's Asian Champions Tro-

Pool A comprises World No 5 Germany, former Asian Games Champions Japan, Chile, and Czech Republic.

Games, the Indian side spent about "We are upbeat and eager to get a week understanding the condion with our campaign. After our tions. The Indian members also Tokyo Olympics performance, the visited and trained at some venues expectations are high and we want to live up to the billing. We are well-prepared for the event and are "We also went and trained in Kunti district which is home to confident of a good show," Navneet said. The top two teams some of our teammates and it was incredible to see the excitement on from each Pool will qualify for the semi-finals and the teams that finthe children's faces who had come to cheer us," Navneet said. Placed ish in top-3 will earn a ticket to Paris 2024. (PTI)

## Saurabh Chaudhary, will train hard for Paris Olympics: Varun

Was inspired by

ing shooter Varun Tomar always wanted to be like his cousin. Olympian Saurabh Chaudhary, and on Monday the 20-year-old took a giant step towards achieving his goal by securing a quota for the 2024 Paris Games by winning gold medal at the Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Jakarta.

Tomar, who initially trained with multiple-time World Cup gold medallist and 2018 Asian Games champion Chaudhary at his home range in Baghpat district of UP, said the individual gold medal will motivate him to train harder for the 2024 Paris Games "I took up shooting seven

years back watching my senior cousin Saurabh. He has been my motivation, having struck success early in his career. I always

wanted to be like him and achieve international success," Tomar told PTI from Jakarta. "I started shooting a year after

Saurabh and we both initially had the same coach (Amit Sheoran) in Benoli village of Baghpat," said Tomar, a former junior

world championship gold medallist in team event. Tomar, who hails from Garhi

Kangran village in Baghpat, secured India's 14th Olympic quota place on the opening day of the competition, clinching both the individual and team gold.

The 20-year-old shot 239.6 in the final of the 10m air pistol event to claim the top position in individual category ahead of compatriot Arjun Cheema

(237.3).Earlier, Tomar (586), Cheema (579) and Ujjawal Malik (575) shot a total of 1740 to win the 10m air pistol team gold. "It helped that I had someone

like Saurabh to take guidance

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: Promis- from as I don't have anyone in the family who is a shooter," said Tomar, who comes from a farming family.

After nearly seven years of training, Tomar finally got success last year, winning individual bronze medals at the World Cups in Bhopal and Cairo.

Soon he was selected for training at the National Centre of Excellence (NCOE) at the Karni Singh Ranges here and is now employed with the Indian Army.

"I have always appreciated Varun for his calm nature. He is a copy of Saurabh. He hardly interacts with anyone at the range and just keeps to himself, training hard," said national rifle coach Deepak Dubey here.

"He is still a junior but is learning fast. The success in the two World Cups last year and the individual gold medal today are an indication that he really has a sound technique and temperament," said Dubey.

"I know for a fact that he got inspired by Saurabh. He came into NCOE about 5-6 months back. He made a place in the Indian team last year and won two medals in World Cups. He has shot some really good scores last year.

"His selection by the Army Marksmanship Unit has given his career a big boost. The fact that he has come up on his own without having a personal coach is indeed creditworthy," said Dubey.

"He only shoots 10m air pistol and not 25m rapid fire, which helps him give undivided attention to just one discipline. He is just like Saurabh, doesn't talk much, very disciplined, hard working and very obedient," added Dubey. (PTI)

Khel Maharan in Sonitpur district concludes HT Correspondent TEZPUR, Jan 8: Sonitpur District proudly concluded the highly anticipated District Level Competition of 'Khel Maharan 2023', a prestigious event that ran from January 5th to 7th, 2024, culminating on January 7, 2023. This multi-day extravaganza

witnessed the spirited participation of 1080 talented athletes who showcased their prowess across five distinguished sports disciplines.

The event resonated with fervor as athletes competed in Football (A-19 Men, Under-19 boys & girls), Volleyball (A-19 men & women, Under-19 boys & girls), Kho-kho (Under-19 boys & girls), Kabaddi (A-19 boys & girls, Under-19 boys & girls), and Athletics (Under-19 boys & girls ,A-19 Men & Women), encapsulating the essence of sportsmanship and competitive zeal.

Across various venues, each exuding its unique aura, the

stages were set for exceptional displays of talent. Dhekiajuli Sports Association Playground hosted the captivating Athletics event on January 6, 2024, graced by the esteemed presence of the Hon'ble Minister of Assam Government, Shri Ashok Singhal, as the Chief Guest, alongside the distinguished District Commissioner of Sonitpur. At the Bihaguri Mini Stadium, Tumuki, the ardor of A-19 & U-19 boys' Football was palpable. MP, Tezpur, Pallab Lochan Das inaugurated this spirited sports discipline, witnessing the remarkable matches held from January 5th to 6th, 2024, in the esteemed company of the District Commissioner of Sonitpur.

Simultaneously, the eidgah field, Tezpur, reverberated with the excitement of Kabaddi and Kho-kho competitions on January 6th and 7th, 2024, inaugurated by MLA, Tezpur, Prithiraj Rava

Noteworthy was the Women-



19 Football event at the Polo field, Tezpur, graced by eminent dignitaries, including the Secretary of Sports and Youth Welfare, Assam, Director of Sports and Youth Welfare, District Commissioner, Sonitpur, DIG Northern Range(Tezpur), CEO Zilla Parishad, Sonitpur, President of Tezpur District Sports Association, and District Sports Officer Pranjal Dihingia.

Meanwhile, the Hazarapar Stadium stood witness to the thrilling Volleyball matches held on January 6th & 7th, inaugurated by Pranjal Dehingia, District Sports Officer, Sonitpur.

The grandeur of this sporting extravaganza reached its pinnacle at the Hazarapar Stadium during the closing ceremony on the evening of January 7.

The event was graced by luminaries, including Kausar Jamil Hilaly, IAS, Secretary of Sports and Youth Welfare, Assam, as the chief guest, and Prodip Timung, ACS, Director of Sports and Youth Welfare, Assam, as the esteemed guest of honour.

Notable dignitaries such as the District Commissioner, CEO Zilla Parishad, Sonitpur, Additional District Commissioner Kabita Kakati Konwar, Assistant Commissioner Irish Arman Hussain, TDA Chairman, President of Tezpur District Sports Association, among others, added luster to this prestigious occasion, as conveyed by Pranjal Dihingia, District Sports Officer, Sonitpur.

The District Level Competition of Khel Maharan 2023 in Sonitpur District stands as a testament to the fervent spirit of sportsmanship, the undeniable talent, and unwavering dedication exhibited by the dynamic youth of the region.

#### DEO /E -🐼

matter of public importance.

Date: 02-01-2024

### SPORTS



Water Resources, Parliamentary Affairs, Information, Public Relations, Printing and Stationery and Social Justice & Empowerment Departments

Message

completed its 24th glorious year and starting the 25th year on 9th January 2024. I

crucial role in a modern democratic society. Since the time of 'The Bengal

Gazette', the first known newspaper of our country, media has been playing vital

role in the society. In Assam also we have a glorious history of more than 175

years of existence of newspapers. Since the beginning, newspapers in Assam have

been playing crucial role in shaping the opinion of the common people in every

English Language Journalism of our state for more than two decades. On entering

into the silver jubilee year, I would again like to offer my sincere wishes to

everyone associated with the daily including the respected readers. I offer my best

The English daily 'The Hills Times' has also been contributing to the

offer my best wishes to the news daily for their vivid journey.

wishes to the newspaper for their future journey as well.

I am delighted to know that the English daily, 'The Hills Times' has

Media, being known as the fourth pillar of a democracy, has been playing

Dated Dispur, the 2nd January 2024

## Will selectors' safe approach cost India another WC? Rohit, Kohli get final shot at T20 glory

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The selectors have clearly gone for the status quo rather than addressing the elephant in the room by picking Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for their first T20 series in 14 months. Will it have a bearing on India's chances in another T20 World Cup? Only time can tell.

Having endured a heartbreak in the previous two editions of the T20 World Cup, the two greats of the game can't be faulted for wanting a final shot at glory in the format. But the same can't be said about the selectors, who picked a fresh bunch of players to take the team forward since the crushing semifinal loss to England in November 2022.

Now that Rohit and Kohli have been picked for the home series against Afghanistan beginning on January 11, it is a given that the famed duo will be a part of India's squad for the ICC showpiece in the US and Caribbean in June. It also means that India, who have been guilty of playing conservative cricket at the top of the order, are also back to square one as far as their plan-

ning for the T20 mega event is concerned. The two superstars played a massive role in taking India to the ODI World Cup final but can they step up to the demands of the shortest format where one

needs to go after the bowlers from ball one? Rohit, who did not score tons of runs in the recently held ODI showpiece but

yet managed to make a compelling impact with his high risk game, will most

its 25th year of publication.



likely carry on in the same vein when the Afghanistan series begins in Mohali. On the other hand, Kohli's game is tai-

lor-made for the 50-over format but he has also managed to maintain more than a decent strike rate of 137.96 over 148 T20s. Rohit strikes at almost 140 in T20s but he too will need to bat at a higher clip to keep up with the fast changing demands of the modern game.

In contrast, their teammate and world's best T20 batter, Suryakumar Yadav, bats at a 170 plus strike rate.

The likes of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Ruturaj Gaikwad showed promise in the opportunities they got in the senior players but there is to experience at an ICC even timent that has been unanime

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dical Educ

by former players including Sunil Gavaskar and Sourav Ganguly, who have backed the inclusion of Rohit and Kohli in the T20 squad.

Former India selector Sarandeep

Singh too feels Rohit and Kohli are best suited for the job. "It is the right call. In ICC events, you need players who can handle pressure well. They both were great in the ODI World Cup and are in top form. However, this development means it would be very difficult to accommodate Jaiswal and Ruturaj," he told PTI.

He also justified the celebrated pair

were not rested, you could not have tried the likes of Jaiswal, Ruturaj, Jitesh (Sharma) and others.

"Having said that, these two greats don't need to play the shortest format to make a comeback. Eventually, the performance of all the World Cup probables in the IPL will make the picture clearer for the subsequent World Cup," the former India spinner added.

With Rohit and Kohli's inclusion, it is amply clear that selectors did not want to rock the boat. Former India opener Aakash Chopra feels the selectors had to pick both the greats as they could not have left one and included the other.

"It seemed they won't play another T20 World Cup (after 2022) as they had not been playing since the previous edition. Both are in the same boat. Even if the selectors thought about leaving out one of the two, I don't think they would have been able to do that. It was always about picking both or otherwise, Chopra said on his youtube channel.

Hardik Pandya had led the T20 side in Rohit's absence and was expected to lead the team in the US and Caribbean but another injury setback seems to have cost him that chance.

Rohit is back as captain and will have Kohli by his side to rely on when India take on the sprightly bunch of Afghans in the three-match series. But



MESSAGE

E-Block, Third Floor, Janata Bhawan, Dispur, Guwahati-781006, Assam

I am immensely pleased to learn about the astounding feat achieved by The Hills Times, prestigious English daily in the region. Heartiest congratulations to everyone involved with it for completing 25 glorious years in the service of the nation and its people.

The press, the fourth pillar, has a vital role in democracy. It is to maintain vigil on the executive and act as a deterrent to everything socially unhealthy. Bharat has a glorious history of freedom of the press, and the press of our country has been playing a crucial role in nationbuilding even much prior to independence. Changing times are asking for a more pro-active and constructive role for the media.

I am happy to observe that The Hills Times has set an example of excellence in its commitment to democracy in its glorious journey over the years. I am sure that it will continue to lead and inspire others to do the same in the future. I wish the publication a bright future.

Rjania Neg (Ajanta Neog)

(Pijush Hazarika)

কন মহিলা আৰু শিশু বিকাশ বিভাগ

অসম Finance, Women & Child Development

Assam



Keshab Mahanta

MESSAGE I would like to extend my hearty congratulations to 'The Hills Times' and its entire team on the joyous occasion of entering

The Hills Times, an English daily published from Diphu in Karbi Anglong district, over these long years, has done commendable growth through its endeavour in bringing to its readers information reports and opinions so vital in this age of media.

On this commemorative occasion, I wish The Hills Time team greater success in times to come. I wish that the newspaper always uphold the ethics of journalism and maintain high standards in disseminating news and information to the readers. Keep bringing to us the good stories and keep expanding your readership.

Once again, I extend my best wishes to The Hills Time. family.

ne absence of no substitute ent. It's a sen- nously voiced	vember 2022. al "You have to prepare bench strength q	nost significantly, will they finally be ble to land an elusive ICC title? That uestion will be answered in five nonths' time. ( <i>PTI</i> )			
are Research Sý Climate Change	বণজিৎ কুমাৰ দাস মন্ত্ৰী পজতত আৰু প্ৰমোহয়ন, খাসা, অসমৰিক যোগন আৰু প্ৰহুক পৰিক্ৰমা, আইন আৰু ন্যায়, সুহাৰণ প্ৰশাসন বিভাগ, অসম।	Ranjeet Kumar Dass, M.Sc. Minister Panchayat & Rural Development, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Law & Justice and General Administration Department, Assam.			
he	Message				
ng	I am delighted to know that The Hills Times is celebrating its 25th year of publication on January 9, 2024. I extend my warmest congratulations to The Hills Times on this auspicious occasion.				
in	In a democratic nation, newspapers play a vital role in cultivating an informed citizenry and upholding a robust democracy. They serve as a key information				
ole					
n,	source, holding authorities accountable, fostering public debate, educating voters, and safeguarding fundamental freedoms. The Hills Times has consistently met these challenges with excellence.				
es	The Hills Times has been a steadfast advocate for truth and transparency.				
er	May this silver jubilee celebration amply reflect the dedication, resilience, and				
ds	journalistic integrity that have defined The Hills Times over the past 25 years.				
ng	I convey my best wishes to all involved in this remarkable 25-year journey.				
	I sincerely wish that the newspaper will morals of journalism in its service to the na				
es					



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