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● Death toll in southwestern China landslide rises to 39, with 5 people still missing



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● French President Macron arrives in Jaipur




Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana

Free food grains every month to 80 crore citizens

Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat



BJP needs Rahul to win polls: Himanta

Assam Police issues notice to Cong leaders for route violations



War of words between Cong and Assam CM on RaGa yatra

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday claimed that the BJP will win all constituencies covered by Rahul Gandhi during the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in the state.

"The BJP will win wherever he campaigns. The BJP needs him for that reason," Sarma said in an interaction with the media here. The former Congress president will be arrested after the Lok Sabha elections, the chief minister said.

The Assam police has filed a case against Gandhi and several other Congress leaders for allegedly provoking supporters to break barricades to enter Guwahati city, deviating from the approved route during the Yatra.

Karnataka Congress leader Priyank Kharge wondered why Gandhi is not being arrested now if he has broken the law. In the post, Kharge said, 'Why wait for the Lok Sabha elections @himantabiswa ji? (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

BHARAT JODO NYAY YATRA

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 25: The Assam Police on Thursday initiated action against Congress leaders, including Bhupen Kumar Borah, for their alleged involvement in deviating from the permitted route and causing disruptions during Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Jorhat town. In this regard, a notice under section 41 (A) CrPc has been sent (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Tuliram distributes ration cards in West Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

DONGKAMUKAM, Jan 25: The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang distributed National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) ration cards in a programme held here at Waisong Stadium, West Karbi Anglong on Thursday.

Attending the function as the chief guest, CEM Ronghang said that the ruling BJP is committed to the welfare of the downtrodden and building infrastructure roads and bridges.

"Through Ayushman Card, health care will be provided up to ₹ 5 lakh. Assistance is provided to the farmers. The government is building a cancer

hospital in Diphu. In addition to PMAY houses, there is chief minister awaz in which ₹ 1,40,000 will be given to BPL families. Arunodoi 3 will be launch soon," he added.

The CEM also said some ration cards have already been distributed and more will be given, adding, "Overall 1,26,000 NFSA ration cards will be distributed in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong."

Altogether 4159 ration cards were distributed under Rongkhang Member of Autonomous Council constituency.

The function was also attended by MP Horensing Bey; MLAs Rupsing Teron, Bidyasing Englung and Darsing Ronghang and others.

Himanta launches sports center for state's sporting transformation

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Chief Minister on Thursday asserted that high-performance sports training and rehabilitation centre will help Assam to emerge as a shining hub for sports.

He said this while addressing a gathering after the inauguration of the high-performance sports training and rehabilitation centre at Sarusajai Sports Complex here in Guwahati.

Besides this, Himanta also launched Olympic Values Education Programme to help the students imbibe in them the values required for playing at the important sports events.

"Today is an important day in the sporting landscape of the state. The facilities featured in the centre will help the new generation sports persons to have physical endurance and physical fitness to attain a new level of competitiveness in sports. It will also help Assam to emerge as a shining hub of sports," Sarma

said. It may be noted that the Government of Assam signed an MoU with Abhinav Futuristic Private Limited, Oil India Limited and Numaligarh Refinery Limited for establishment of two high performance sports training and rehabilitation centres in Guwahati and Jorhat respectively.

The facilities incorporated in the centre include biomechanical and motion analysis lab, functional lab, gait lab, physiology lab, recovery lab, rehabilitation lab etc.

Sarma also thanked Olympian Abhinav Bindra for partnering with government of Assam for creating this new age facility for sports. The chief minister said Abhinav Bindra is an enduring source of inspiration for the young sportspersons.

"His gold medal at Beijing Olympics not only scripted a new history in the field of sports in India but also opened a new era of sports in the country," he added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

12 Products of Arunachal gets prestigious GI tag

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Arunachal chief minister Pema Khandu announced on Thursday that a total of 12 products from the state have been awarded the prestigious GI Tag.


Expressing his joy over this accomplishment, Khandu stated that this historical achievement is a testament to the diligent efforts of diverse communities in Arunachal Pradesh, who have proudly preserved their unique products and traditions.

The products are Apatani, Monpa, Adi, Galo, Tai Khamti and Nyishi textiles, Monpa handmade paper, Singpho Phalap (Singpho tea), Adi Apong, Dao (machete), Angnyat millet

and Marua Apo (Marua millet beverage).

In a post on the micro-blogging site X, Khandu wrote, "A momentous milestone for Arunachal Pradesh! I am happy to share that 12 products from our state have been granted the prestigious GI Tag. This recognition is a result of the dedicated efforts of diverse communities in Arunachal Pradesh, who have preserved their age-old unique products and traditions with pride."

Khandu went on to highlight that, with the addition of these 12 products, Arunachal Pradesh now boasts the highest number of GI Tags among all Northeastern states. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



Greetings To All Fellow Citizens


On

75th

Republic Day

This is the 'Amrit Kaal' of Bharat's development. Today, Bharat is filled with the reservoir of youth power, brimming with energy. Today, we are at a turning point where every effort of ours will strengthen the foundation of Bharat for the next thousand years.

- Narendra Modi



Live telecast of Republic Day celebrations from Kartavya Path from 9:00 a.m. onwards on Doordarshan network

Rupee settles 1 paisa higher at 83.11 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Jan 25: The rupee rose 1 paisa in a range-bound trade to close at 83.11 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as the support from weak American currency overseas was negated by rising crude oil prices. Forex traders said the rupee is trading in a narrow range as muted domestic equities and sustained foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.13 against the greenback. The unit oscillated between an intraday low of 83.14 and a high of 83.08 and finally settled at 83.11 (provisional) against the dollar, 1 paisa higher from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee had settled at 83.12 against the US dollar.

The rupee traded on a flat note amid weak domestic markets and rising crude oil prices. Foreign fund outflows also weighed on the domestic currency, said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

However, the American currency was trading on a muted note, as traders pared their positions ahead of US Q4-2023 GDP data capped sharp gains. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on weak domestic markets and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. The Red Sea issue, rising crude oil prices, and selling pressure from foreign investors may also dent the rupee."

"Traders may remain cautious ahead of GDP, weekly unemployment claims, durable goods orders and new home sales data from the US. Investors may also watch out for ECB monetary policy decisions. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 82.90 to ₹ 83.50," Choudhary added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent lower at 103.17 on Wednesday. (PTI)

PNB Q3 profit jumps over three-fold to ₹ 2,223 cr

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: State-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) on Thursday posted an over three-fold increase in its profit to ₹ 2,223 crore for the third quarter ended December 2023. The bank had earned a net profit of ₹ 629 crore in the same quarter a year ago. Its total income increased to ₹ 29,962 crore during the quarter under review against ₹ 25,722 crore in the same period last year, PNB said in a regulatory filing.

The bank's interest income rose to ₹ 27,289 crore compared to ₹ 22,384 crore in the third quarter of the previous fiscal. (PTI)

GEMA to host Electrofest from Feb 3

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Guwahati is set to host first-ever electrical expo named Electrofest, the A-Z of Electricals, where all electrical solutions will be available under one roof. This Expo is organised by Guwahati Electric Merchants Association (GEMA) and is a three day event from February 3 to 5 at Ashi Apsara, Paltan Bazar, Guwahati.

GEMA President Nawal Kishor Sarda said for the first time GEMA is organising this mega event to promote electrical trade and products and have received massive response from entire India. Speaking on the occasion chairman of Electrofest Gopal Pasari said more than 700+ leading companies will participate and showcase their products in the three days long expo.

Expo convener Abhishek Kejriwal said that for the first time, this expo is bringing together all electrical companies showing the latest innovations in electricals and is a must visit for builders, architects, contractors, traders, interior designers, and consumers from all over the NE.

Secretary Saket Raj Pugalia said that the who's who of the electrical, lighting & power world is going to be present at this expo starting from manufacturers, OEM's, suppliers & distributors, to agents and will provide plenty of trade opportunities.

Govt close to saturation in implementing social sector schemes: FM

Earlier government had schemes of providing houses, roads etc but the sense of urgency was missing

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the government is close to reaching saturation in implementing social sector schemes designed to provide basic necessities to the poor.

Addressing the students of Hindu College on the occasion of its 125th anniversary, she said the time has come for India to become economically 'aatmanirbhar' (self-reliant) and march forward to become a developed nation by 2047.

Regretting that 60 years since Independence passed without any sense of urgency, Sitharaman said, "we have laid the material foundation for a Viksit Bharat" and empowering people by providing basic necessities to all. Even earlier government had schemes of providing houses, roads etc but the sense of urgency was missing, she said, adding, nearly 50 per cent of the population were devoid of fundamental things 50 or 60 years post independence.

"So that's the underlying principle with which between 2014 and today we have done with a sense of urgency. Push the border forward, you take it further. Make sure every-



body who's actually eligible to get those should get it...the approach (of the government) is to empower people, skill people, give access and ensure that everyone gets good health treatment and so on," she said.

She also said the government has been able

to save ₹ 2.5 lakh crore through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) by weeding out dummy and undesirables beneficiaries.

DBT has not only improved transparency in the government fund transfer but also enhanced efficiency through the use of technol-

ogy, she said.

Stressing that the government doesn't differentiate between people, Sitharaman said that is the reason why the prime minister categorises India in four groups--Youth, Women, Farmers and Poor-- and efforts are made for betterment of these groups irrespective of caste, creed and religion. She also said that India is nearly self-sufficient as far as agriculture is concerned except in oil seeds and pulses.

However, she advocated that one should not waste food as many parts of the world are facing problems.

Terming Ram Lalla Pran Pratishtha ceremony of January 22 as a 'civilisational marker', she said, this was a fortunate moment for the generation who could witness restoration of civilisational values.

She urged the students to focus on skill development as well as on values -- both civilisational and nationalistic.

Reminding students that the country celebrates National Voters' Day on January 25, she said, it is not just the right of citizens to vote but it is their duty also, and the first time voters have greater responsibility. (PTI)

Markets fall dragged by IT stocks, foreign fund outflows

MUMBAI, Jan 25: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty declined on Thursday due to selling in IT stocks and continuous foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 359.64 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,700.67. During the day, it plunged 741.27 points or 1.04 per cent to 70,319.04.

The Nifty fell by 101.35 points or 0.47 per cent to 21,352.60.

Among Sensex shares, Tech Mahindra fell by over 6 per cent after the company reported a 60 per cent decline in net profit to Rs

510.4 crore in the December quarter. Bharti Airtel, ITC, HCL Technologies, Asian Paints, Wipro, HDFC Bank, Nestle, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services and Maruti were among the other major laggards.

NTPC, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the gainers.

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

European markets were trading

mostly lower. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Wednesday.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,934.93 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.02 per cent to USD 80.96 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark jumped 689.76 points, or 0.98 per cent, to settle at 71,060.31 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty ended 215.15 points, or 1.01 per cent, higher at 21,453.95. (PTI)

LG expands its youth skill programme under CSR

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: As the nation celebrates National Youth Day, LG Hope Technical Skill Academy, a noteworthy Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project of LG Electronics, stands tall as a beacon of hope for the youth of our country. Since its inception in November 2022, this initiative has been making significant strides in empowering the next generation through comprehensive technical education.

LG first Hope Technical Skill Academy was inaugurated at the NSIC campus, Okhla Delhi, marking a significant step towards addressing the critical need for skilled professionals in the electronics sector. NSIC (National Small Industries Corporation) is the location partner for LG Hope Technical Skill academy. The project's foundation was laid with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the honourable Minister of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Mr. Narayan Rane, underlining LG's commitment to skill development and social responsibility.

Expanding its footprint beyond the national capital, this year LG initiated skill academies in Hyderabad and Chennai, reinforcing the commitment to youth empowerment across diverse regions. The academy focuses on courses related to consumer durable repair and service, aligning with the evolving demands of the industry.

In terms of key statistics, the Delhi Academy, spanning 5300 sqft, commenced operations in November 2022 with a three-year goal to train 1800 students. Presently, 440 students have successfully graduated, and 120 are undergoing training, with 249 securing placements. The Hyderabad Academy, covering 8500 sqft will train 1800 students over three years. The Chennai Academy, operating on an 8000 sqft area aims to train 1365 students over three years.

Commenting on the same, Hong Ju Jeon-MD, LG India said, "At LG Hope Technical Skill Academy, we're all about creating opportunities and inspiring dreams. As we move forward, we celebrate the journeys—past, present, and future—of countless individuals whose lives we touch and transform. LG brand philosophy is Life's Good which represents our unwavering commitment to making people's lives better through products, service and innovation. Through our recent brand reinvention, we want to inspire and encourage people, especially youth, to approach life with an optimistic attitude. Through these academies, we aim to equip youth with skills to contribute towards industry growth and also, transforming their lives for good and have a dignified living."

European shares slip after Chinese markets led gains in Asia

TOKYO, Jan 25: Global shares were mixed on Thursday as European markets retreated following gains in Asia, where Chinese stocks rallied after Beijing announced a raft of policies to support sagging markets.

France's CAC 40 lost 0.2% to 7,440.66 and Germany's DAX slipped 0.3% to 16,849.26. Britain's FTSE 100 edged 0.1% lower, to 7,521.19. The future for the S&P 500 was little changed while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.2%.

The European Central Bank was expected to keep interest rates unchanged Thursday and its meeting could see ECB boss Christine Lagarde send a message to financial markets to cool it with expectations for rapid rate cuts.

The ECB leader is faced with financial markets that are anticipating cuts as early as April, and stock prices that have risen and fallen depending on hopes for the boost from lower rates. In Asian trading, the Hang Seng in Hong Kong jumped 2.0% to 16,211.96, while the Shanghai Composite index was up 3.0%, at 2,906.11.

Late Wednesday, the Chinese central bank announced a set of rules to govern lending to property developers. Earlier, it said it would cut bank reserve requirements to put about 1 trillion yuan (\$141 billion) into the economy.

The Chinese economy has slowed, with growth forecast below 5% this year, its lowest level since 1990 excluding the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. A debt crisis in the real estate industry has com-



pounded other longer-term problems. Shares in Chinese property developers jumped Thursday, with China Evergrande up 6.4% and Country Garden gaining 5.9%.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 was little changed, finishing about 10 points higher at 36,236.47.

Speculation has been growing about the Bank of Japan ending its negative rate policy later this year, and investors are bracing for what that might mean for the nation's inflation, as well as its currency.

South Korea's Kospi edged up less than 1 point to 2,470.34 after the nation's central bank reported the economy grew at a better-than-expected quarterly rate of 0.6% in the last quarter of 2023.

Sydney's S&P/ASX 200 advanced 0.5% to 7,555.40.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 added 0.1% to 4,868.55, setting a record for a fourth straight day. Gains for tech stocks pushed the Nasdaq composite up 0.4% and the Dow industrials lost 0.3%.

Stocks have broadly rocketed to

records recently on hopes that cooling inflation will convince the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates several times this year.

Later Thursday, the government is expected to report that the U.S. economy grew at an annual rate of around 2% in October-December, slowing from a vigorous 4.9% annual growth rate in the previous quarter.

Economic reports coming later in the week could further sway expectations for rate cuts this year. On Thursday, the government will give its first estimate for how quickly the economy grew during the end of 2023. A day later, it will give the latest monthly update on the measure of inflation that the Federal Reserve prefers to use. In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude added \$1.23 to \$76.32 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, rose \$1.13 to \$80.77 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar edged up to 147.60 Japanese yen from 147.51 yen. The euro cost \$1.0900, up from \$1.0884. (AP)

FRANKFURT, Jan 25: European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde will likely push back Thursday against expectations for quick interest rate cuts even as Europe's economy sputters and financial markets froth in hopes of cheaper credit that would boost business activity and stock prices.

She will likely underline that the bank needs to see more proof that painful inflation — which has made everything from groceries to energy more expensive — has been beaten down, analysts say.

Lagarde has indicated that the ECB's next move would likely be a cut to borrowing costs this summer but said its benchmark rate will need to stay at a record high for "as long as necessary" to unequivocally squelch inflation.

The ECB leader is faced with financial markets that are anticipating cuts as early as April, and stock prices that have risen and fallen depending on hopes for the boost from lower rates.

Lagarde has cautioned that the bank will make decisions based on the latest figures about the economy's health rather than making longer-term promises. The ECB is expected to leave rates unchanged during Thursday's meeting at its Frankfurt headquarters.

Stock investors saw their holdings, such as those in U.S. retirement accounts, soar in the last weeks of 2023 as the U.S. Federal Reserve and ECB indicated that a rapid series of rate hikes was ending.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said officials discussed prospects for rate cuts at the bank's December meet-

ing, and the U.S. central bank has indicated it would cut its key interest rate three times this year.

The S&P 500, a broad measure of U.S. large company shares, has hit record highs this week, and European indexes also have risen. The global stock rally faces questions about whether gains can continue.

Rate cuts make riskier investments like stocks more attractive than safer bets like money market accounts and certificates of deposit. They also stimulate business activity and thus prospects for share prices to go higher.

Expectations for rate cuts have been fueled by the rapid drop of inflation in Europe to 2.9% in December from the peak of 10.6% in October 2022. In a little over a year, the ECB raised its key rate from negative levels — which made it cheap to borrow money to buy a house or invest in a business — to a record-high 4%.

While rate hikes are a central bank's chief weapon to snuff out inflation, they also can slow the economy — which has been seen in Europe and countries around the world, feeding expectations for cuts now that inflation has dropped closer to preferred levels. The economy of the 20 European Union member countries that share the euro currency, where the ECB sets interest rates, shrank slightly in the July-to-September quarter of last year. Expectations are no better for the following months.

The economic squeeze follows a surge of inflation fueled by a supply chain crunch during the COVID-19 pandemic and then higher food and

energy prices tied to Russia's war in Ukraine. The worst of the energy costs and supply problems have eased, but inflation has spread through the economy as workers push for higher wages to keep up with the boost in prices they're paying. Analysts say there are good reasons for the ECB to move cautiously. For one, having to reverse course and raise rates if inflation doesn't keep falling — or spikes again — would only prolong the pain from tighter credit.

Another is the speed of pay raises for Europe's workers. ECB officials have indicated that they want to see figures for wage increases for the first months of this year before deciding where they think inflation is headed.

Lagarde will likely keep the door wide open for a first cut in June without fully committing to it," according to analysts at Berenberg bank. "By emphasizing the need for more data on inflation dynamics in early 2024, she may push back gently against market expectations for a first rate cut in April."

Additionally, attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on ships in the Red Sea have forced many vessels bringing consumer goods and energy supplies to Europe to avoid the Suez Canal and take a longer journey around the tip of Africa.

The disruption has so far not led to higher oil prices but has added to shipping costs for companies and underlined uncertainty about energy supplies and whether businesses could pass along higher expenses to consumers that would fuel a new round of inflation. (AP)

US growth likely slowed last quarter but still pointed to a resilient economy

Widespread fear was the Federal Reserve's numerous interest hikes

WASHINGTON, Jan 25: The nation's economy was supposed to have sunk into recession by now, dragged down by the highest interest rates in two decades and a resulting slump in borrowing and spending.

Instead, the US economy has kept chugging along. Even more encouraging, inflation, which touched a four-decade high in 2022, has edged steadily lower without the painful layoffs that most economists had thought would be necessary to slow the acceleration of prices.

On Thursday, the Commerce department is expected to report that the nation's gross domestic product — the economy's total output of goods and services — rose at an annual rate of around 2 per cent from October through December.

That would mark a deceleration from a vigorous 4.9 per cent growth rate in the July-September quarter. But it would still showcase the surprising durability of the world's largest economy, marking the sixth straight quarter in which GDP has expanded at a solid annual pace of 2 per cent or more. Helping fuel that growth has been steady spending by consumers, whose purchases drive more than two-thirds of the economy.

The economy's outlook had looked far bleaker a year ago. As recently as April 2023, an economic model published by the Conference Board, a business group, had

pegged the likelihood of a US recession under the next 12 months at close to 99 per cent.

The widespread fear was that the Federal Reserve's numerous interest hikes, in seeking to tame inflation, would slow borrowing and spending so much as to trigger a deep downturn. That is what typically has occurred when the nation's central bank has aggressively jacked up rates to fight inflation.

Now, there's growing optimism that the Fed is on track to deliver a rare "soft landing" — raising borrowing rates enough to cool growth and hiring and ease price increases yet not so much as to send the economy into a tailspin. A moderation in GDP growth last quarter would be consistent with that outlook.

Even as inflation has slowed significantly, overall prices remain nearly 17 per cent above where they were before the pandemic erupted three years ago, which has frustrated many Americans. That fact will likely raise a pivotal question for the nation's voters, many of whom are still feeling the lingering financial and psychological effects of the worst bout of inflation in four decades.

Which will carry more weight in the presidential election: The sharp drop in inflation or the fact that most prices are much higher than they were three years ago?



The Fed began raising its benchmark rate in March 2022 in response to the resurgence in inflation that accompanied the economy's recovery from the pandemic recession. By the time its hikes ended in July last year, the central bank had raised its influential rate from near zero to roughly 5.4 per cent, the highest level since 2001.

As the Fed's rate hikes worked their way through the economy, year-over-year inflation slowed from 9.1 per cent in June 2022, the fastest rate in four decades, to 3.4 per cent as of last month. That marked a striking improvement but still leaves inflation above the Fed's 2 per cent target.

The progress so far has come at surpris-

ingly little economic cost. Employers have added a healthy 225,000 jobs a month over the past year. And unemployment has remained below 4 per cent for 23 straight months, the longest such streak since the 1960s.

The once red-hot job market has cooled somewhat, easing pressure on companies to raise pay to keep or attract employees and then pass on their higher labour costs to their customers through price hikes. It's happened in perhaps the least painful way: Employers are generally posting fewer job openings rather than laying off workers. That is partly because many companies are reluctant to risk losing workers after having been caught flat-footed when the econ-

omy roared back from the brief but brutal 2020 pandemic recession.

Another reason for the economy's sturdiness is that consumers emerged from the pandemic in surprisingly good financial shape, partly because tens of millions of households had received government stimulus checks. As a result, many consumers have managed to keep spending even in the face of rising prices and high interest rates.

Some economists have suggested that the economy will slow in the coming months as pandemic savings are exhausted, credit card use nears its limits and higher borrowing rates curtail spending. Still, the government reported last week that consumers stepped up their spending at retailers in December, an upbeat end to the holiday shopping season.

Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at the tax and consulting firm RSM, said he thinks consumer spending is even stronger than the retail sales report indicated. Brusuelas suggested that the government data "did not adequately capture" increased holiday splurging on travel and other services.

For that reason, he expects Thursday's GDP report to surpass consensus estimates and come in at a 2.4 per cent annual rate — "above the pre-pandemic average, showing a healthy and resilient economy ending the year on a positive note that most did not predict 12 months ago". (AP)

BRIDGE WORKS

E-Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/19 of 2024 Dated: 23-01-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of Item:** Rehabilitation of cracked/damaged abutment and piers of Br.No.216, 265 by Jacketting, including protection works of Br.No.216, 265 & 260 and other ancillary works under ADEN/Dimapur. **Tender Value:** ₹1,99,16,472.39. **Earnest Money:** ₹2,49,600/- **Date & Time of Closing Tender:** 15:00 hrs. on 15-02-2024 & opening at 15:00 hrs. of 16-02-2024. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 15-02-2024 at the website www.ireps.gov.in. **DRM (W), Lumding**
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

CEM Pramod Boro launches e-office management system at BTC Secretariat

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 25: In a noteworthy development for the Bodoland Territorial Region government, chief executive member (CEM) Pramod Boro ceremonially launched the e-office management system at a program held at BTC Secretariat, Bodofa Nwgrw in Kokrajhar. The government of BTR becomes the first Sixth Schedule Council to adopt this system, following the Government of Assam.

CEM Boro highlighted that the e-office framework will not only expedite development processes but also ensure efficiency among officers. He mentioned that e-office implementation marks a new era of smart governance for the benefit of the nearly thirty-five lakh citizens residing in the five districts of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). He outlined the importance of embracing new governance measures to address the aspirations of the people of Bodoland.



All officers of the Bodoland Territorial Council have been provided with dedicated personal login identities and digital signatures, and over 65,000 files from 55 departments, branches, and cells of the BTC Secretariat have been digitised. Personal Information Management System (PIMS) data for all, including the chief ex-

ecutive member, executive members, and BTC Legislative Assembly Speaker, has been prepared to streamline the e-office operations. Bhaskariyoti Rajbongshi, joint secretary of BTC government, mentioned that the IT infrastructure is being upgraded to meet the new demands of e-governance. The lay out of the Local Area Net-

work (LAN) in the BTC Secretariat was carried out through NICS, a subsidiary company of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India.

Hands-on training was conducted in the e-Lab set up at the BTC Secretariat by the roll out team and master trainers. A state-of-the-art record room has also been constructed to store files scientifically. A team of 8 master trainers was selected from BTC Secretariat staff and trained by the e-office team of Assam Secretariat (Civil) in Dispur to monitor the process in the initial phase of implementation.

E-Office is a Mission Mode Project (MMP) under the National e-Governance Programme of the government. The product is developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) and aims to bring about more efficient, effective, and transparent inter-government and intra-government transactions and processes.

Pijush inaugurates distribution of new ration cards in Tezpur

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Jan 25: Pijush Hazarika, the minister of Water Resources, Parliamentary Affairs, Information, Public Relations, Printing, and Social Justice, inaugurated the distribution of new ration cards to 6,740 beneficiaries of Tezpur Legislative Assembly Constituency. The event took place in a meeting organised at Tezpur Swahid Bakori on Thursday.

Minister Hazarika expressed that the new ration card would be a transformative card for the beneficiaries. He highlighted that those receiving this ration card would also be eligible for the Ayushman card and LPG gas under the Ujjwala scheme. Through the Ayushman card, each family member would have access to medical care up to ₹ 5 lakh annually. Around 29,668 individuals in the Tezpur LAC would benefit from these new cards. Minister Hazarika emphasised the government's commitment to ensuring a nurturing environment for every economically disadvantaged individual under the leadership of



chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. He mentioned that the distribution of ration cards is a cornerstone of the government's ongoing efforts to provide a dignified life for economically disadvantaged individuals.

During his address, minister Hazarika also shared that the state government would soon provide government jobs to 1 lakh 35 thousand youth in the state. Additionally, the government is increasing the amount provided under the Arundol scheme. He mentioned that every member of self-help groups in

the state will receive assistance of ₹ 10,000, which will be increased to ₹ 25,000 if the members perform well in their respective fields.

Several dignitaries, including MP Tezpur Pallab Lochan Das, MLA Prithviraj Rava, Sonitpur Zilla Parishad chairperson Dolly Surin, Tezpur Municipality chairman Pragnan Bhattacharya, Tezpur Development Authority chairman Biraj Nath, district commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra, and district BJP president Dipamoni Saikia, attended the event held at Swahid Bakori in Mazgaon.

AJYCP and ACYPA felicitate APSC CCE qualifier

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, Jan 25: A delegation comprising members of Asom Jatiyatbadi Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) and Anti Corruption Youth Power of Assam (ACYPA), Karbi Anglong, visited the residence of John Teron at Rongagora Daikrum Men Teron village to felicitate him for his success in the Assam Public Service Commission CCE.

During the felicitation, AJYCP central committee member Jitu Phukon presented Teron with a phulam gamosa, Karbi turban, and a citation, acknowledging his achievement.

The delegation included ACYPA, Karbi Anglong, president Citra Baruah, and other members who congratulated and honoured John Teron for his accomplishment in the APSC examination.

Free medical camp at Patgaon

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Composite Hospital, Patgaon, at Frontier Headquarters Border Security Force (BSF) Guwahati, organised a free medical camp on Thursday, for the families of bordermen of Frontier Headquarters BSF Guwahati, 1st Battalion National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), and Composite Hospital, Patgaon, Guwahati. The free general health checkup camp was inaugurated by Bhawna Yadav, president of BWWA (Border Security Force Wives Welfare Association), Frontier Headquarters BSF Guwahati, in the presence of a team of doctors and families of bordermen.

Gaurang Harimuari Pwrbw concludes in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 25: The Gaurang Harimuari Pwrbw-Festival of North East, concluded after two days of rich cultural integration at the Bodofa Cultural Complex, Chandamari in Kokrajhar, Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The event was organised by the North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Dimapur, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, in collaboration with the Bodoland Territorial Region government and supported by Dularai Bodo Harimu Afad.

Folk artists from 13 states of the country, including Kashmir, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and



Haryana, along with eight North Eastern states, participated in the event. They showcased various folk dances, presenting their traditions and contributing to the rich cul-

tural heritage of the country. The highlight of the festival was 'Colours of India', a choreographic presentation of folk dances from across India, depicting the unity in diversity,

RNSS submits memorandum to President of India

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 25: The Rachnatmak Nonia Sangyukta Sangh (RNSS) recently submitted a memorandum to the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, outlining their key demands. The memorandum, presented on January 17 in Shillong Raj Bhawan during the President's visit, was handed over by the national joint secretary, Rachanatkam Nonia; in-charge of North East, Dharmendra Chauhan; president Assam State Committee, Arjun Mahato; secretary West Karbi Anglong, Chandan Chauhan and others.

The RNSS, as outlined in the memorandum, has put forth several key demands. Firstly, they advocate for the inclusion of the

Bhojpuri language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Additionally, they stress the importance of cultural development within the Nonia community. Another significant demand is the establishment of a Nonia Development Satellite Council to promote community welfare. The RNSS seeks rehabilitation measures for individuals displaced by the bank erosion of the Brahmaputra river, especially in Morigaon district and other affected areas. Furthermore, they call for the protection of land rights for settlers on VGR/PGR land in West Karbi Anglong district. Lastly, the RNSS urges a special provision in Mission Basundhara to address mutation and land transfer rights in Assam.

Morigaon celebrates National Girl Child Week

20 successful women and teenagers honoured

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, Jan 25: In conjunction with National Girl Child Week, the Morigaon district Women and Child Development Department organised a reception at the meeting room of the District Commissioner's Office. The event aimed to honour and recognise 20 successful and entrepreneurial women and teenagers who have excelled in various fields.

District commissioner Devashish Sharma, addressing the gathering, said that the need to recognise the sacrifices of mothers and sisters in every aspect of life. He stressed the importance of empowering girls from a young age, encouraging them to move forward with self-reliance. Expressing

concern over the prevalence of breast and uterine cancer in the north-east, he urged a change in societal perceptions and emphasised the importance of early detection.

District Development Commissioner Devayani Chowdhury highlighted the significance of mutual respect between men and women in fostering a positive and emotional atmosphere. Superintendent of police Hemant Kumar Das raised awareness about crimes against women, urging people to use the toll-free number 112 to report any such incidents promptly.

The event honoured women who achieved self-sufficiency in various fields, including animal husbandry, entrepreneurship, journalism,

weaving, fisheries, orchid production, and sports. The awardees included Tarali Patar, Pragati Self Help Group, Kathni Gyanjyoti Self Help Group, Tina Basfor, Mithali Devi, Ilam Ni Bora, Rumi Sharma, Rasmai Boro, Pinki Devi, Mithali Devi, Kalpana Das, Jonmoni Roy, Chayarani Melang, Saraswati Patar, Swarnalata Fangchang, Manorama Devi, Nirmala Nath, Jyoti Konwar, and Charuprabha Bardoli.

The event was attended by heads of various departments, officers, and employees. The additional district commissioner, Dyotibha Bora, moderated the function, while the district social welfare officer, Monika Barthakur, explained the objectives of the event.

Assam Rifles organises lecture on women empowerment

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 25: In observance of National Girl Child Day, Assam Rifles conducted a lecture on 'Women Empowerment' at Balipara Higher Secondary School on Wednesday. The initiative, which took place as part of the National Girl Child Week, aimed to inspire and educate students about the significance of empowering women in society.

The lecture addressed the importance of gender equality and highlighted the crucial role women play in contributing to the progress of the community. By engaging directly with students, Assam Rifles sought to promote awareness and understanding of these vital issues.

A total of 219 girl students and 8 teachers actively participated in the event, displaying enthusiasm and interest in learning about women's empowerment. Initiatives like these contribute to fostering a sense of empowerment, encouraging the younger generation to actively participate in building a more inclusive and equitable future.

Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College organises cleanliness drive

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Jan 25: As part of the celebration of 75th Republic Day of India, Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College NCC, LOKD College Students Union, and College NSS jointly organised a cleanliness drive. The event saw the participation of student union members, NCC cadets, NSS volunteers, teachers, and office staff.

The program was formally inaugurated by Dr Sukdev Adhikari, the principal of the college, in the presence of Governing Body president Dr Jogendra Saikia. ANO Capt Dr Jyotshna Baruah, NSS program officer Prasanta Bodo, and Phanidhar Basumaty, along with student union members, were also present.

choreographed by Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee Dr Prashanna Gogoi, who is also the director of North East Zone Cultural Centre, Dimapur.

The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, state cabinet minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma, and MLA Lawrence Islay were prominent attendees on the concluding day of the event. The festival featured art, crafts, ethnic cuisine, indigenous games, and a folk music and dance extravaganza, creating a cultural integrational environment for the audience. CEM Boro appreciated the event for fostering cultural integration and healthy communication through its activities.

30 Bn CRPF organises civic action programme

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Jan 25: The 30 Battalion CRPF organised a Civic Action Program at Neville Higher Secondary School in Chariduar. As part of its civic action initiative for the year 2023-24, the 30 Battalion CRPF renovated the school library and officially handed over the refurbished library building to the school authorities. The Battalion also contributed essential items such as a cupboard, rack, table, chair, fan, water dispenser, and various equipment needed for the students.

The program was inaugurated by Arun Kumar Meena, commandant of the 30 Battalion CRPF. Attendees included Daniel L Hamar, deputy commissioner of 30 Bn, inspector/GD Rajendra Singh, school principal Rajesh Dutta, Zilla Parishad member Mrinal Saikia, chairman SMDC Uptal Das, member SMDC Arun Bhuyan, social worker Shailesh Singh, and students of Neville Higher Secondary School, Chariduar, along with people from rural and local villages in the Chariduar area.

The 30 Battalion CRPF, headquartered at Chariduar, has the responsibility for operations and law and order in Sonitpur, Biswanath, Dhemaji, and Lakhimpur districts. Additionally, it engages in social welfare and public facilities work in rural areas, supporting needy local schools, sports clubs, or institutions through its Civic Action Program. This initiative will continue in the future.

The students and teachers of Neville Higher Secondary School expressed gratitude and thanked the 30 Battalion CRPF for selecting their school for such a program under its Civic Action Program.

Guv administers oath to new APSC members

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria administered the oath of office to Major General (Retd) Bhaskar Kalita and Deboraj Upadhyay, IPS (Retd) as new members of the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) at a function held in the conference Hall of Raj Bhavan.

Chief secretary to the Government of Assam Paban Kumar Borthakur sought the permission of the Governor to start the proceedings of the ceremony. The ceremony was attended by chairman of APSC Bharat Bhushan Dev Choudhury, members, and other functionaries of APSC, along with senior officers of the state government and family members of the newly inducted functionaries.

14th National Voters' Day celebrated in Haflong

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 25: The 14th National Voters' Day (NVD) was observed at the District Library Auditorium in Haflong by the District Election Office of Dima Hasao. District commissioner Simanta Kumar Das graced the occasion as the chief guest.

Addressing the gathering, DC Simanta Kumar Das said that voting is a symbol of patriotism, and everyone should actively participate in the electoral process. He highlighted the significant contribution each voter makes to nation-building through the exercise of their vote.

As part of the celebration, awards were presented to school students who won an essay compe-

petition held on the previous day. Election officer Dhiman Hazarika, in his speech, stressed the importance of National Voters' Day, celebrated annually on January 25, marking the foundation day of the Election Commission of India.

The primary objective of NVD is to promote electoral awareness among citizens and encourage their active participation in the electoral process. The event also included the felicitation of newly enrolled voters, who were handed their Elector Photo Identity Cards (EPIC). National Voters' Day is celebrated at various levels, including national, state, district, constituency, and polling booth levels, making it one of the largest celebrations in the country.

NABARD conducts training on pearl culture & agarbatti making

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Jan 25: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Assam Regional Office in Guwahati organised the second batch of the Livelihoods and Enterprise Development Programme (LEDP) training on pearl culture and agarbatti making in Tripura Basti, Radhanagar GP of Jughjan Development Block, Hojai.

The training program was inaugurated by Rajendra Perna, DDM at NABARD, in the presence of representatives from various banks, the Fisheries Department, District Industries and Commerce Centre (DICC), implementing agency Hojai Unnayan Mancha (HUM), and the master trainer, Rajendra Perna explained that LEDPs focus on promoting livelihoods in clusters, involving initial intensive skill training, refresher training as needed, backward-forward linkages, and handholding support. LEDPs cover the entire value chain, providing end-to-end solutions.

The training on pearl culture and agarbatti making is designed for 60 members of matured Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in two batches of 30 participants each. The sessions cover topics such as record-keeping, book-keeping, enterprise management, business dynamics, and practical aspects of pearl culture and agarbatti making.

For pearl culture, participants learn about the life cycle of mussels, pearl production, varieties of pearls, pH level maintenance, mussel surgery, feeding, and harvesting. The agarbatti making training covers ingredient mixing, bamboo stick making, use of fragrances, packaging, marketing, and more.

No.KWRD/NTI/2023-24/183

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Date-19/01/2024

Sealed tender in prescribed form (to be eventually drawn up in A.P.W.D.H/F-2 Form) tender affixing non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs.8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only are hereby invited from the registered contractors/firms under the Water Resources Department for the year 2023-24 for the following works. An earnest money of 2% on the value of work for each package of work (1% in case of SC/ST/OBC/MOBC etc.) in the form of Fixed Deposit/Demand Draft from any Indian Nationalized Bank including State Bank of India and its associated Banks duly pledged to the Executive Engineer, Kokrajhar W.R. Division, Kokrajhar is necessary along with the tender. The tender will be received in the office of the undersigned up to 2.00 P.M. of 08.02.2024 & will be opened on the same date, hours & place. In case of opening of the tender happened to be a holiday/bandh for any unforeseen reason, the next working day will be considered as the last date of receipt/ opening of the tender.

Detailed notice inviting tender, item of works, specification of package etc. for the schemes may be seen in the office of the undersigned during office hours on any working day up to 08.02.2024. Tender paper is to be obtained from the office of the undersigned on payment of Rs.500.00 (Rupees Five hundred) only per copy (Non-refundable) in the form of Bankers Cheque/Demand Draft duly pledged to the Executive Engineer, Kokrajhar W.R. Division, Kokrajhar during office hours on all working days from the date of issue of tender notice. Payment will be made on availability of fund on appropriate Head of Account only and no claim of interest will be entertained for delay of payment.

Sl. No.	Name of Schemes	Approx. Value (Rs. In L)	Item of Work
1	A/E measures to protect village Rupnathpur area from the erosion of river Polo.	Rs.13,00,000.00	Jungle Cutting, E/W in B/T, Supply, filling and laying of Geo-bag type-A, supply of W.N. Sheets etc.
2	Protection of Peripur village near Mahamaya Mandir from the erosion of river Malbhog.	Rs.15,07,000.00	Jungle Cutting, E/W in B/T, Supply, carriage and launching of P.S.C porcupine of size 3.00m etc.
3	Protection of village Kurshamari from the erosion of river Ganphella on R/B.	Rs.14,00,000.00	Jungle Cutting, Supply, carriage and launching of P.S.C porcupine of size 3.00m etc.
4	Protection of Nabinagar Boro village from the erosion of river Tia.	Rs.13,00,000.00	Jungle Cutting, E/W in B/T, Supply, filling and laying of Geo-bag type-A, supply of W.N. Sheets etc.

Terms & Conditions:-

- The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest tendered rate and reserves the right to reject the tender without reason thereof.
- In case of flat rate quoted by the Contractors/Farms, the decision for allotment of works will be finalized by the competent authorities.
- Payment will be made on availability of fund. No claim including interest on principal amount of bill what so ever will be entertained for delayed payment due to non-receipt of fund in time from Govt./funding agency & the department will in no case will be held responsible for the same.
- The undersigned reserve the right not to receipt the lowest quoted rate and may reject any/all tender without assigning any reason thereof.
- All other terms & conditions will remain same as per rule and procedure followed in W.R. Department, Assam.
- Rate, Registration No., GST No., PAN No., detailed address including Phone No., etc. to be quoted on the body of tender form clearly.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Kokrajhar W.R. Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1215

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Every day brings new choices.
- Martha BeckEmployment scenario:
Future tense

The current state of unemployment in post-independence India demands urgent attention. Despite a significant increase in GDP following the pandemic-induced downturn, employment rates have stagnated, particularly affecting small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs). This stagnation is exacerbated by the neoliberal policies that prioritise capital over labour, resulting in a decline in job growth rates compared to earlier economic regimes. The neoliberal shift has led to heightened competition in the Indian market, driving faster technological advancements and consequently, increased labor productivity. However, this productivity growth has not translated into equivalent job creation, as evidenced by the persistent unemployment crisis. The withdrawal of government support from agriculture has further compounded the issue by displacing rural workers, adding to the pool of urban job-seekers. Under unfettered capitalism, technological advancements often lead to job losses rather than increased employment opportunities. This trend perpetuates income inequality, reduces consumption, and dampens aggregate demand, ultimately contributing to a cycle of overproduction and further unemployment. Unlike the optimistic predictions of past economists like David Ricardo, higher profits from technological advancements do not necessarily translate into increased investment or long-term employment growth under neoliberal capitalism.

It is essential to recognise that unemployment is a systemic failure rather than an individual's fault. As such, there is a pressing need for a democratic demand for employment solutions that go beyond the limitations of both capitalism and socialism. While some advocate for a basic minimum income as a form of relief, such measures are insufficient and lack the dignity of meaningful employment. A universal employment guarantee, constitutionally guaranteed and justiciable, emerges as a viable solution to address the unemployment crisis. By providing employment as a fundamental right to all citizens, the government can ensure dignity and economic security for its people. Contrary to misconceptions, funding such a scheme would require only a modest percentage of GDP, estimated to be around three percent. A simple calculation reveals that providing a monthly wage to unemployed workers at a rate of Rs 20,000 per month would require approximately 3.2 percent of GDP. However, the actual financial burden would likely be lower due to the multiplier effect of increased demand for goods and services, stimulating further job creation. With careful consideration, this burden could be significantly offset by additional tax revenue generated from the resulting economic activity. Implementing such a scheme is not only financially feasible but also morally imperative. Neglecting to provide meaningful employment opportunities to citizens amounts to a failure of governance and a betrayal of democratic principles. Therefore, policymakers to address the pressing issue of unemployment in India must prioritise the establishment of a Universal Employment Guarantee Scheme.

In conclusion, the introduction of a Universal Employment Guarantee Scheme is not only the need of the hour but also a crucial step towards building a more equitable and inclusive society. By recognising employment as a fundamental right, India can take a significant stride towards ensuring the well-being and dignity of all its citizens. It is time for decisive action to tackle the unemployment crisis and uphold the principles of social justice and economic empowerment. The implementation of a Universal Employment Guarantee Scheme in India is imperative to address the worsening unemployment crisis. By constitutionally guaranteeing employment as a fundamental right, the government can provide dignity and economic security to citizens, while also stimulating economic growth and mitigating income inequality.

Pride unveiled: Ek Bharat
Shreshtha Bharat's call to
a resilient India

By: Thejangulie Metha

India, the majestic tapestry woven with the vibrant threads of diverse cultures, languages, religions, cuisines, festivals, and traditions, proudly stands as a bastion of unity in the face of diversity. This kaleidoscope of richness isn't merely a spectacle; it's the lifeblood coursing through the veins of our glorious nation – a testimony to the indomitable strength and brilliance that defines us as proud Indians.

In a visionary move that echoes the unwavering spirit of our great nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sparked the flames of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) on the hallowed day of 31 October, 2015 – the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Iron Man of India and the mastermind behind our unyielding unity.

EBSB is not a mere program; it's a symphony, a grand orchestration of states and union territories converging in a triumphant celebration of unity, a spectacle that soars beyond boundaries and prejudices, binding us together with the unbreakable thread of patriotism.

The resounding vision of EBSB extends far beyond a mere initiative; it's a clarion call to forge an unwavering and dynamic India. It beckons the sons and daughters of different states and union territories to engage, learn, and proudly share their triumphs and experiences. This isn't just a program; it's a rallying cry to construct a resilient and formidable India, where mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation are the bedrock of our shared destiny.

EBSB, with its innovative concept of state/UT pairing, orchestrates a year-long symphony of shared activities and events,

weaving a grand tapestry that proudly displays the kaleidoscope of our nation's diversity. It transcends the mere celebration of differences; it fosters a profound sense of responsibility and ownership for the entire nation.

Picture the magnificence of language learning activities, where the melodious tones of one state's language resonate in the heart of another.

Envision the enchantment of cultural exchange programs, where the rhythmic beats of folk dances, the harmonious melodies of music festivals, and the exquisite craftsmanship of handicraft exhibitions create a tapestry of our shared heritage. Feel the electric sizzle of cuisine festivals, where the rich flavors and enticing aromas from one state grace the palates of another, creating an unparalleled fusion of tastes that symbolizes our unity.

As we march toward the jubilant celebration of our Republic Day on 26 January, 2024, the heartbeat of EBSB echoes resoundingly in the soul of our great nation. This initiative, more than a program, is a movement, a mission, and a mantra that has brought us closer, creating a harmonious society that not only reveres but treasures its diversity. EBSB is not just a journey; it's a transformative odyssey propelling us towards a new and resplendent India.

In the grandeur of EBSB, as we stand united, we embody the very spirit of our nation's resounding motto – Satyameva Jayate (Truth Alone Triumphs). Let this anthem reverberate as we march forward, hand in hand, towards a future where our diversity isn't just celebrated, but cherished as the true essence of our magnificent India. Jai Hind!

(The author can be reached at thejaicritcal@gmail.com)

Reflections on Dynamic Trajectories and Uncertain Futures

Reflecting on 75 years of the Indian Republic, one ponders its current position and the significant milestones achieved since 1947. The journey of Independent India has been marked by notable events, shaping the nation's course. From this vantage point, the future unfolds with uncertainties, inviting contemplation on what lies ahead for the diverse and dynamic nation.

At the dawn of Independence, India grappled with inherent contradictions that cast a shadow on the Republic's trajectory. Economically, the nation lagged significantly, showcasing dismal statistics. The average life expectancy was a mere 32 years, with a literacy rate standing at approximately 14%.

Particularly disheartening was the meager 9% literacy rate for women. Famine, a grim reality, claimed three million lives in Bengal during the Second World War, attributed to both disease and starvation stemming from a shortage of food. Despite its vast size, India, the world's second-largest country after China, struggled as a relatively small economy, its resources drained and potential for growth hampered by two centuries of colonial rule.

Yet, India possessed distinct advantages relative to other colonies during Independence. It boasted an autonomous capitalist class, free from entanglements with British imperialism. Additionally, the nation enjoyed a well-established infrastructure, encompassing banks, financial institutions, as well as extensive road and rail networks crucial for fostering economic development.

Foremost among India's strengths was its rich intellectual and philosophical heritage. The people of India orchestrated a disciplined and enlightened mass resistance against the formidable British imperialism. The profound depth of India's intellectual capital found its apex in the Constitution, adopted in 1949 by an elected Constituent Assembly and inaugurated on January 26, 1950 – designated as Republic Day. This constitutional document stood as both representative and emancipatory, capturing the aspirations of the Indian people. It not only outlined the blueprint for India's modern transformation but

also skillfully retained the positive elements of its deep-rooted traditions. Carrying this baggage of contradictions, the nature of India's journey into the future unfolded with intriguing complexity.

Examining the Indian Republic reveals a tapestry woven with multiple trajectories – oscillations, continuities, and mutations. In essence, it narrates a tale not of stagnancy but of an exceedingly dynamic social order where motion consistently outweighs inertia.

However, the dynamism, albeit prominent, hasn't invariably steered in the desired direction. Broadly speaking, the political course of the Republic has been characterized by disruptions, while the economic path has demonstrated sustained patterns. Simultaneously, the evolution of the 'nation' has encountered transformative shifts, akin to genetic mutations in its developmental journey.

In its political infancy, Independent India embarked on a transformative journey under the aegis of a representative state for its people. This era was characterized by a pervasive consensus, marked by a broad agreement on overarching goals. Nehru emerged as the undisputed leader, steering this consensus. The political landscape witnessed a phase of centralization, wherein Nehru's leadership faced minimal opposition, even prompting arguments that he held a dual role as both Prime Minister and the foremost leader of the Opposition.

While centralization harbored authoritarian tendencies, India's political trajectory diverged from that path. Factors such as the lingering spirit of the national movement, Nehru's enlightened guidance, the diverse nature of the Congress party, an overarching consensual atmosphere, and a resolute commitment to diversity collectively deterred the nation from veering into authoritarianism.

The late Sixties marked the onset of fractures in this model. Consensus, the initial linchpin, gradually faded away. Despite the absence of consensus, centralization persisted, paving the way for potential authoritarianism. Discontent materialized prominently through the JP movement, and its aftermath saw the declaration of the Emer-

gency as a reactionary measure.

The period of centralization bereft of consensus proved unsustainable, harboring inherent contradictions. This led to a pronounced swing in the Indian political landscape. The pendulum shifted decisively towards the opposite end, witnessing an era of excessive federalization, notably in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st. Concurrently, the decline of the Congress, coupled with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) not fully realizing its nationwide potential, marked a clear weakening of all-India parties. Governments, whether of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), found themselves reliant on small regional parties, often resorting to tactics bordering on blackmail to navigate the intricate political landscape.

Disillusionment with the existing model grew, leading to a second pendulum swing towards centralization in the early years of the 21st century. This shift differed significantly from the centralization witnessed in the 1950s. The decline of the Congress party persisted and seemed irreversible, while the Left lost its prominence in pan-Indian politics. A societal preference for centralized governance coincided with a desire for a strong leader. The global economic crisis provided an opening for a right-wing ascendance, and cultural energies increasingly leaned towards majoritarianism.

These dynamics culminated in the ascendancy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power. However, viewing the BJP solely as a beneficiary of new realities would be an oversimplification. The relationship between the BJP and these realities was dialectical, with the party not only benefiting from the changes but also actively contributing to their creation. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement of the 1980s and '90s ostensibly focused on the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, also aimed at forging a pan-Indian political constituency of Hindus, thereby centralizing majoritarianism in Indian politics.

The planned economic model, the import substitution strategy, and later, the Green Revolution, all aligned in a cohesive direction. By the 1980s, any looming threat of re-colonization or dominance by global superpowers in the Indian economy had been effectively thwarted. Having established a secure foundation, India took a significant leap toward active participation in the global economy, following the successful examples of South Korea in the 1960s and China in the 1970s. Recognizing the need for internal economic reforms to compete globally, the government initiated a gradual withdrawal, promoting private initiatives. This period witnessed the dismantling of major monopolies, such as Indian Airlines in civil aviation, Doordarshan in television channels, and VSNL/BSNL in telecommunications, with enduring

consequences. The emphasis on economic growth also facilitated the government's welfare initiatives. Notable schemes like MN-REGA, Right to Education, and the distribution of free ration to millions of Indians during and after Covid became feasible due to the rapid economic growth that generated resources for welfare. In essence, India's economic trajectory has been one of consistent organic growth, where the economic reforms initiated in 1991-92 should be viewed not as a reversal but as a logical extension of preceding policies.

Significant transformations have occurred in the fundamental identity of the Indian nation. The notion of an Indian people and their nation began evolving in the latter half of the 19th century. The predominant vision of the Indian nation, as articulated and practiced by freedom struggle leaders, portrayed it as a civic rather than ethnic entity, grounded in territorial rather than religious affiliations. Pluralism, federalism, and a non-coercive approach characterized this mainstream imagination, which emphasized unity in the struggle against British rule. The foundational principles of Indian nationalism rested on fostering a sense of unity among all Indian people, transcending religious, cultural, and linguistic differences.

Minority communities were actively encouraged to join the nationalist cause, with assurances that they would be equal participants in the national life. In essence, this outlined the emerging Indian nation. The zenith of Indian nationalism was reached with the expulsion of British imperialists in 1947. Nevertheless, this pinnacle of success was paradoxically marred by a momentous failure – the partition of India into two distinct nation-states, India and Pakistan.

Post-1947, the significance of anti-imperialism, a pivotal pillar of Indian nationalism, diminished. Nehru, in his role as the leader of the Indian people, grappled with the question of the new elements that would shape the nation's ideational fabric. He anchored these elements in developmentalism, social harmony, and securing a dignified position for India among major nation-states globally.

To address these con-

cerns, Nehru established the National Integration Council, comprising politicians, bureaucrats, and academics. The council's mandate was to propose measures aligning with the principles inherited from the days of the national movement, aimed at fortifying the Indian nation.

In the 1980s, the predominant vision of Indian nationalism underwent considerable turmoil as it faced divergent influences. Its legitimacy was scrutinized by separatist movements in Punjab, Kashmir, and parts of the North-East. Simultaneously, efforts were made to shift its orientation towards a Hindu majoritarian perspective through the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. The Dalit assertion in politics accentuated internal faultlines, often magnified for effect.

The ideational fabric of Indian nationalism faced a rigorous examination, subjected to challenges from various quarters with varying levels of assertiveness. The 1980s emerged as a decade that inflicted substantial damage on the original mainstream Indian nationalism since 1947, leaving it scarred and bruised. The unfolding scenarios included possibilities of fragmentation, mutation, and appropriation, each with the potential to reshape the fundamental character of Indian nationalism.

The Indian Republic has traversed three significant trajectories. Politically, it has witnessed fluctuations akin to the rhythmic swings of a clock's pendulum. Economically, there has been a consistent and organic growth trajectory, devoid of significant breaks or ruptures. However, the fundamental character and orientation of Indian nationalism present the most enigmatic aspect. The original concept seems more fragile and weakened from within than ever before, casting a substantial question mark on its core identity. What lies ahead in the future – will it unfold as a mere extension of the present, laden with its certainties and uncertainties, or are we poised to witness an expansion of the spectrum of potential trajectories? The certainty is, we do not know. The answers to questions about the future remain within the realm of the future itself. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

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To address these con-

75 Years of the Indian Republic

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Dipak Kurmi

By the people, for the people

The 75th Republic Day celebrations remind us about our loyalty to our statute

By: Amar Krishna Paul

India is the most populous country and the largest democracy of the world. Of late, Elon Musk, the world's richest person and Tesla CEO, backed India to be a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In a post on 'X', Elon Musk, penned, "India not having a permanent seat on the Security Council, despite being the most populous country on Earth, is absurd." Notwithstanding, UNSC, which consists of five permanent members, has not been expanded since 1965 and India's bid to secure a place at the global high table has faced opposition from Beijing and Pakistan.

We, the conscious citizens of India, are celebrating our 75th Republic Day on January 26, 2024, with grand regimental parades in Delhi. French President Emmanuel Macron is the Chief Guest of the day-long celebrations.

The Republic Day honours the adoption of the Constitution of India. The Constituent Assembly had drafted the Indian Constitution. The Constituent Assembly held its first sitting on December 9, 1946. It reassembled on August 14, 1947, as the sovereign Constituent Assembly for the Dominion of India. The Constituent Assembly passed it on November 26, 1949. It came into effect on January 26, 1950.

Every country has its own Constitution with special features because the historical background, social life, economic background

and political conditions influence the making of the Constitution. All these factors have contributed to the making of the Constitution of India.

On 29 August 1947, the Constituent Assembly set up a Drafting Committee. This Drafting Committee was headed by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. The drafting committee had seven members: Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, N. Gopalaswami, B.R. Ambedkar (Chairman of the drafting committee), K.M. Munshi, Mohamad Saadulla (from Assam), B.L. Mitter and D.P. Khaitan.

The preamble of the Indian Constitution: A Preamble means an introduction to the statute. The objectives before the Constituent Assembly were to comprise and compose India into a "sovereign democratic republic" for securing to all its citizens "justice liberty, equality and fraternity". The Preamble is the key to the Constitution.

A preamble is an introductory statement in a document that explains the document's philosophy and objectives. In a Constitution, it presents the intention of its framers, the history behind its creation, and the core values and principles of the nation.

Now, we proceed to mention three examples as the outgrowth of our world's largest democracy.

(i) **Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar:** Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was one of the builders of Modern India. His contribution to India's political thought has been unparalleled. Dr. Ambedkar (1891-1956) was born on April 14, 1891 in Mhow

Cantonment, Madhya Pradesh. He completed his primary schooling in Satara, Maharashtra and completed his secondary education from Elphinstone High School in Bombay. His education was achieved in the face of significant discrimination, for he belonged to the Scheduled Caste (then considered as 'untouchables').

In his autobiographical note 'Waiting for a Visa', he recalled how he was not allowed to drink water from the common water tap at his school, writing, "no peon, no water". For his excellent performance at college, in 1913, he was awarded a scholarship by Sayajirao Gaikwad, then Maharaja (King) of Baroda state to pursue his M.A. and Ph.D. at Columbia University in New York, USA. His Master's thesis in 1916 was titled "The Administration and Finance of the East India Company". He submitted his Ph.D. thesis on "The Evolution of Provincial Finance in India: A Study in the Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance". After the first General Election in 1952, he became a member of the Rajya Sabha. He was also awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Columbia University in the same year. In 1953, he was also awarded another honorary doctorate from Osmania University, Hyderabad. Dr. Ambedkar's health worsened in 1955 due to prolonged illness. He passed away in his sleep on 6 December 1956 in Delhi.

(ii) **Newspaper seller Dr Kalam becomes India's President:** We get an insightful and in-

spiring life lesson from the biography of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, the People's President of India. For the extreme poverty Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam became not only a vegetarian, but also a newspaper boy who used to distribute newspapers in his home town Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu. His firm determination, hard work, dedication to studies under the guidance of his teachers, etc. finally made him the Missile Man and the 11th President of India.

With the passage of time the great people of India made him a noted nuke scientist and the first citizen of the subcontinent. In 2002, he became the President of India. It wasn't just his scientific achievements but also his simplicity and warm smile that often made the media refer to him as the People's President. So, once he said in Silchar (Assam) to the students community, "Small aim in life is a crime." Sad to say, he expired in Shillong on July 27, 2015.

Notably, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Centre for Policy Research and Analysis was set up in the Pine City - Shillong. It is the outcome of a tripartite agreement between Indian Institute of Management, Shillong (IIMS), Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) and North Eastern Council (NEC) signed on October 15, 2016. It acts in undertaking and initiating cross-functional research and generating data with a motivation of assisting proper understanding of ground realities and providing critical appraisals to the policy makers of the Northeastern re-

gion.

(iii) **When a tea seller becomes the PM of India:** The people of India made a tea-selling boy (during childhood days) the Prime Minister of the country. This is, indeed, a great event for India's political history. In fact, Modi used to serve the military personnel and sell out tea at the railway station of Vadodra, Gujarat. History was scripted in the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhawan on the evening of May 26, 2014 as Narendra Damodardas Modi took oath as the Prime Minister of India after a historic mandate from the people of India. In 2019, he became the PM for the second consecutive time.

Summing up
The Constitution of India is considered as the Superior Law of the land. It places down the structure describing the governmental principles, constructs the structures, policy powers and responsibilities and obligations of executive, administrative and governmental establishments and organization, sets the basic rights and duties of every citizen.

That is, the 75th R-Day celebrations remind us about our loyalty to this statute. With the active support of the USA, the UK, Australia, etc. India should be inducted as a permanent member in UNSC soon. The reason is not far to seek. The entire world is currently expecting a pivotal role of the new 'Bharat' in the international arena. (The author is a Gawahati-based writer and analyst on Current Affairs. He can be reached at amarkrishnaghy@gmail.com)

75th Republic Day of India: New Hopes, New Directions

By: Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee

We are entering the era of Artificial Intelligence. India is getting digitalized. Today we should think of India in a new light as our aspirations are new ones. The essence of the Constitution is however Equality for All in every sphere. The British followed the Divide and Rule policy. The Indian Constitution replaced the British colonial Government of India Act (1935) as the country's governing text. The first President of India Dr Rajendra Prasad unfurled the national flag on January 26, 1950, marking the birth of the Indian Republic. The day was declared a national holiday after being recognised as the Republic Day of India.

In 1950, the inaugural Republic Day procession took place. Major Dhyan Chand Stadium, formerly known as the Irwin Amphitheatre, served as the venue. Over 100 aircraft and 3,000 Indian military men took part in the display. Indonesian President Sukarno was the first chief guest of India's first Republic Day parade. Rajpath had its inaugural parade in 1955. Interestingly, Pakistan's Governor General Malik Ghulam Muhammad was the chief guest at the occasion. The Beating Retreat ceremony has its roots in a 1600s custom and is held annually on January 29 at Vijay

Chowk in New Delhi. The custom of announcing the troops' homecoming dates back to King James II, who gave the command for his soldiers to beat drums, lower flags, and stage a parade to mark the conclusion of a battle day.

The 2024 Republic Day theme is "India - Mother of Democracy" and "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India). In Article 16i it is clearly stated, "There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state. The article also forbids discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, and place of birth or any of them in matters of public employment." In fact this is the essence of Indian Constitution - the equality for all.

While Babasaheb Ambedkar and others gave us a map and a moral framework, the task of walking that path remains our responsibility. Over the years India tried to remain true to their expectations, and yet we realise that much remains to be done to realise Gandhiji's ideal of 'Sarvodaya', the upliftment of all. Yet, the progress we have made on all fronts is encouraging. Our society is inclusive and fundamentalist principles are not allowed to flourish even if any government tries to patronize such ideals. Gandhiji's Ramrajya is for all communities, castes

and creeds. The rule of the majority cannot get the right of oppressing or depriving the minority. This inclusive principle made India great all over the world. The democratic principles have been encouraged in every sphere of life.

George Orwell once satirically wrote in his Animal Farm, "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." Today when India is going to celebrate the 75th Republic India, the focus is on the essence of equality in Indian diversity. Still the minority is not given equal status. The term minority can be used in the racial, religious or economic sense. Even women can be regarded as minority in the male dominated society. India is called the mother of democracy. Our country is, of course, home to one of the oldest living civilizations.

As a modern Republic, however, we are young. In the early years of Independence, we faced countless challenges and adversities. Very high levels of poverty and illiteracy were just two of the many ill-effects of the long foreign rule. Yet, the spirit of India was undeterred. Last year the President of India in his Republic Day Speech focused on the essence of India and expressed this hope and confidence that we began an experiment unique in the history of humankind.

Such a vast and diverse mul-



titude of people coming together as one nation remains unprecedented. We did so with a belief that we are, after all, one; that we are all Indians. We have succeeded as a democratic republic because so many creeds and so many languages have not divided us, they have only united us.

Last year, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was the chief guest. The theme of the Republic Day 2024 is "India - Mother of Democracy" and "Viksit Bharat".

The national movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi, was as much about winning Independence as about rediscovering our own ideals. Those decades of struggle and sacrifice helped us win freedom not only from colonial rule but also from the imposed values and narrow world-views. Revolutionaries and reformers joined hands with

visionaries and idealists to help us learn about our age-old values of peace, brotherhood and equality. The vision enshrined in the Constitution, has been continuously guiding our Republic. During this period,

India has been transformed from a largely poor and illiterate nation into a confident nation marching on the world stage. This would not have been possible but for the collective wisdom of the Constitution-makers guiding our path. We cannot forget what B.R Ambedkar told in his final speech in the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, about the potential and pitfalls of life after January 26, 1950: "On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle

of one man one vote and one vote one value.

In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value." The questions he raised were quite significant and they focused on the essence of our democratic base. Ambedkar asked "How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life?" These were the basic

questions to which the Drafting Committee of The Constitution always gave priority. Those who shaped the modern Indian mind also welcomed progressive ideas from abroad Our founding document is inspired by the humanistic philosophy of the oldest living civilisation in the world as well as new ideas that emerged in more recent history.

The Constitution that started governing the life of the Republic was the outcome of the Freedom Struggle. The nation will always remain grateful to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who headed the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, and thus had a critical part in giving it the final shape. His ultimate goal is to create an environment in which all citizens can, individually and collectively, realise their true potential and prosper. As education builds the right foundation for this purpose, the National

Education Policy has introduced ambitious changes. It rightly addresses the two-fold aims of education: as an instrument of economic and social empowerment and as a means to explore truth.

The policy makes our civilisation lessons relevant for contemporary life, while also preparing the learner for the 21st century challenges. The National Education Policy appreciates the role of technology in expanding and deepening the learning process.

Today on the 75th Republic Day it is high time to reiterate this warning for fulfilling the promises of the Constitution and its Preamble. The promises of Equality should not be belied. It is true that we denied equality to the citizens in many spheres of our life. But if we continue to deny it for long, Ambedkar rightly warned us not to deny this equality. "If we try to ignore it, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up." *(The author is currently an Affiliate Faculty of English Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond and a multilingual writer. He can be reached at bhat-tacharj@vcu.edu)*

Me, My Nation and My Emotions - Long Live India

By: Reuben Mughato Kihlo

In every Indian's heart, there's a strong rhythm - a rhythm that feels like the beating heart of our incredible nation. India covered in threads of strength, togetherness, and deep love for our land, bravely faces tough times. Our country isn't just a piece of land; it's proof of the unbeatable spirit that runs through every Indian.

As we approach another Republic Day, I want to talk to those who wish harm to our beloved India. To you, the ones against our great nation, I'm sending a sincere request straight from my heart. Please, look past the boundaries of hatred and embrace the good values that define us - peace, understanding, and harmony.

India has faced many challenges in its history, but we always came out stronger. Our diversity is not a weakness; it's a strong bond that connects us, going beyond religion, caste, and background. It's an unspoken promise among all of us - a promise to stay united, echoing through time.

When faced with tough

times, let's build bridges, not walls. Let's use dialogue, not violence, and work towards a peaceful melody, not a discord of conflicts. Real progress for our nation comes from collaboration, not conflict. We're a nation where different cultures live together peacefully - a sign of our incredible tolerance and acceptance.

To those who want to disrupt our diverse harmony, I urge you to think again. Realize that India's strength lies in its unity. Our combined spirit is unbreakable, a force that will always win against any divisive agenda. It's this spirit that drives us towards a future where every Indian can not just survive but thrive, fulfilling their dreams.

Our commitment to peace is not a sign of weakness; it's proof of the wisdom in our culture. In a recent speech, the Prime Minister spoke about the values of peace, friendship, and courage embedded in India's culture since forever. He reminded us that our nation always responds strongly to those who try to disturb our peaceful atmosphere.

This commitment to peace is not weakness; it's

our determination to stand strong in tough times. The bravery and skill of Indian soldiers, seen in global military campaigns, including the two world wars, are a strong testament to the courage in every Indian's heart.

As we offer peace to those against us, it's not surrender; it's a sign of unyielding hope and determination. Imagine a world where understanding and compassion triumph over hostility, where the pursuit of peace becomes a shared goal. Let's work together for a better future, not just for us but for the generations to come.

Let India's heartbeat echo the call for unity, peace, and a shared destiny. This Republic Day, let the intense spirit of patriotism and nationalism lead us to a destiny that resonates with the dreams of every Indian soul - a destiny that reflects the very heartbeat of our nation.

Let our enemies remember well that - "Hindustan Zindabaad Tha, Hindustan Zindabaad hai aur Jab Tak Yeh Sooraj Aur Chand Raheta tab tak mera Hindustan Zindabad rahega". *(The author can be reached at reubenkiho55@gmail.com)*

Eves power to prevail at R Day parade in national capital



By: Raju Vernekar

With 75th Republic Day being held with the themes of "Viksit Bharat" and "Bharat - Loktantra ki Matruka" and the women marching contingents and flying squadrons being led by women officers, the celebration will have the best representation of women at R Day celebration in New Delhi.

For the first time, the parade will be heralded by 100 women artists playing Indian musical instruments, who will play the music of "Sankh", "Naadswaram", "Nagada", etc. It will witness an all-women Tri-Service contingent marching down Kartavya Path for the first time. The Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) contingents will comprise women personnel from the BSF, CRPF, and SSB.

A total of 48 Agnivayu women will be part of the IAF contingent. The contingents of Armed Forces Medical Services and Delhi Police will also be part of the parade. The combined daredevil bikers team on Royal Enfield Bullets, a first in pa-

rade history, will precede Indian Air Force assets.

Displaying the women's prowess, the IAF's Tableau based on the theme "Bharatiya Vayusena, Saksham, Sashakt and Atmnrbar" (IAF Potent, Powerful and Self-reliant) will be led by Flt Lt Ananya Sharma and Flying Officer Asma Shaikh. Similarly, the IAF's marching contingent will be led by Squadron Leader Rashmi Thakur with Squadron Leaders Sumita Yadav and Pratiti Ahluwalia and Flt Lt Kirti Rohil.

While the Army and Navy contingents/floats will also show their might, the IAF is entering the fray with 51 aircraft, including 8 transport aircraft (with C-295 transport aircraft making debut), 13 helicopters, and one heritage aircraft. They would participate in the dazzling flypast and would include 15 women pilots. One Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) aircraft and two Rafale aircraft of the French Air Force will also participate in the Fly-past. A 95-member marching contingent and a 33-member band will be part of the contin-

gent.

Additionally, the floats from 16 States/UTs and 09 Ministries/Organisations tableaux will display the country's rich cultural diversity, unity, and progress.

Chief Guest

The French President Emmanuel Macron will be the Chief Guest. This is for the 6th time; a representative of France will be India's guest. Prime Minister Jacques Chirac (1976) and the Presidents Valery Giscard d'Estaing (1980), Jacques Chirac (1998), Nicolas Sarkozy (2008), and Francois Hollande (2016) were the earlier guests. Besides France, the representatives of the United Kingdom were the guests at the R Day function on five occasions.

Economy

While India is aspiring to be a \$5 trillion economy by next year, the outstanding internal and external debt at ₹ 169,46,666.65 crore at the end of 2023-2024 is a cause of concern. It was ₹ 152,61,122.12 crore at the end of 2022-2023. The United Nations has projected India's growth rate (GDP) at 6.2% this year, while the RBI governor Shaktikanta Das has predicted,

That the Indian economy is expected to grow 7 per cent in fiscal 2024-25. In the meanwhile the Indian rupee stands at ₹ 83.12 per US Dollar.

Health

The country's population is 140.76 crore with a 74.37% literacy rate. The infant mortality rate is 25,799 deaths per 1000 live births. The doctor-population ratio is 1:834 and the nurse-population ratio is 1:476. The existing hospital bed-to-

population ratio is 1.3/1000 (private plus public hospitals), and there is a deficit of 1.7/1000 population. As such there is an additional requirement of 2.4 million beds. Going by the strength of 13,08,009 allopathic doctors, 5,65,000 AYUSH doctors, and 361,400 nursing personnel, the health infrastructure needs drastic improvement.

Unemployment

As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the unemployment rate scaled down to 3.2 % in 2022-2023 as against 4.1 % in 2021-22 and 4.2 % in 2020-2021. However, according to a Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) report, the national unemployment rate stood at 7.95 % as of July 2023. The unemployment rate in urban and rural India was 7.93% and 7.44% respectively. Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir, and Delhi are having the highest unemployment rates. In 2023 the unemployment rate was the highest at 37.4 % in Haryana and the lowest at 09 % in Odisha.

Defence/Space

With a thrust on self-reliance and a robust budget of ₹ 5,93,537.64 crore, the country's defence export is expected to cross Rs 24,000 crore in the financial year 2024. Similarly with rapid progress in space research, now ISRO plans to launch the Mangalayan II this year. It will study aspects of Mars, including interplanetary dust, and the Martian atmosphere and environment. With these advancements let's hope that India becomes superpower soon!

Patriot's resolve: A resounding Ode to India's Republic Day glory

By: Insuilenia Jamir

Republic Day, a sacred moment that pulsates with the soul of our nation, stands as an unyielding testament to the audacious journey we undertook in the pursuit of democratic governance and sovereignty. As I navigate the corridors of my memories, I am engulfed by the tales of valor, the echoes of sacrifices resonating from our freedom fighters who waged an unyielding battle for the very essence of our independence. Their impassioned words and resolute actions have become the bedrock of my existence, and thus, Republic Day is not merely a customary celebration for me but an earnest homage to the principles etched in our constitution and the indomitable efforts that birthed the Republic of India.

Each passing 26th of January heralds the celebration of Republic Day, a jubilant commemoration of the seminal moment in 1950 when our constitution was woven, transforming our nation into a sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic republic. The culmination of relentless endeavors by visionaries like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who toiled

Republic Day unfolds as a vibrant tapestry, weaving together the diverse threads of India's cultural heritage. A day when individuals from myriad origins converge, embracing their common identity as Indians. The grandeur of the parade in New Delhi, a resplendent spectacle, stands as a testament to our unity amidst regional and linguistic diversity. It exalts the diverse states, their rich traditions, and the unyielding spirit of the Indian people

ceaselessly for justice, equality, and liberty, is encapsulated in this day. It is a fervent tribute to the architects of our constitution, whose foresight erected the pillars of a democratic India.

Republic Day unfolds as a vibrant tapestry, weaving together the diverse threads of India's cultural heritage. A day when individuals from myriad origins converge, embracing their common identity as Indians.

The grandeur of the parade in New Delhi, a resplendent spectacle, stands as a testament to our unity amidst regional and linguistic diversity. It exalts the diverse states, their rich traditions, and the unyielding

spirit of the Indian people. Celebrating this day becomes a ritual of embracing and revering the multiethnic fabric that binds us, fostering togetherness and serenity among the residents of this great nation.

Beyond the respite from daily routines, Republic Day resonates within me as a moment of profound reflection on the lofty ideals guarded by our Constitution. It stirs a deep-seated pride in being a part of this diverse and flourishing nation. A time to acknowledge the sacrifices of brave souls who guard our freedom, and a moment to remember the luminaries who etched the Constitution, ensuring justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity

for every citizen. This event renews our commitment to these ideals, paying homage to leaders who fought relentlessly to carve a system that upholds the rights and dignity of every individual.

In its essence, celebrating Republic Day is my unwavering resolve to honour the democratic values that define the essence of our nation. It is a fervent tribute to our triumphant past, a jubilation of our unbreakable unity in the face of diversity, and an unwavering commitment to a future guided by the hallowed principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Republic Day instills in me an unshakable sense of patriotism, fosters civic engagement, and kindles a collective dedication to upholding the principles enshrined in the Constitution. More than a celebration, it is a reaffirmation of my identity, values, and an unceasing journey towards a more perfect union, steering our beloved nation towards becoming a vibrant and thriving democracy. Nothing can stop me from celebrating the victory of my India and the triumph of my fellow Indians on Republic Day. *(The author can be reached at shaienjr@gmail.com)*

India unleashed: Igniting the flame of patriotism on Republic Day

By: Shisanglemla Lemtur

As the majestic tricolor unfurls against the vibrant Indian sky, igniting a sense of pride within our hearts, our nation stands united in the celebration of Republic Day. Let this moment resonate with the unwavering spirit of patriotism, echoing the immortal words of John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country." It is time for every Indian to heed this call, to passionately contribute to the glory and prosperity of our motherland.

Embracing the essence of responsible citizenship is not just a choice; it is our duty as fervent patriots. Casting our votes is but a small step; let us be the architects of our democracy by upholding laws and regulations, laying the very bedrock of our nation's strength. Investing in education and skill development is not merely personal growth; it is a commitment to transforming ourselves into an intellectual force, elevating the collective wisdom of our great nation and propelling India towards unparalleled progress.

Active involvement in community service and volunteer initiatives is not just a gesture; it is the lifeline that strengthens the social

fabric of our country. Whether championing local development projects, supporting underprivileged communities, or preserving our environment, each act fortifies the bonds that make India unyielding. Responsible citizenship, education, and community engagement intertwine to construct a tapestry of a thriving, harmonious, and unstoppable India.

Contemplating entrepreneurship as a vessel for economic growth is not an option; it is our duty to drive innovation and propel job creation, laying the foundation for India's economic triumph. Let us become stewards of our environment, adopting eco-friendly practices to nurture a greener and healthier nation. As bridge-builders in society, fostering inclusivity, understanding, and respect becomes not just a choice but a testament to our commitment to a united and resilient India.

Supporting charitable causes and engaging in philanthropy is not a luxury; it is a beacon of responsible citizenship. Through financial contributions and active involvement, let us extend a helping hand to those in need, shaping a compassionate society that stands as a testament to our national ethos. Prioritizing health and wellness is not a preference; it is a pivotal step towards a healthier and more pro-

ductive India, embodying the spirit of a self-reliant and robust nation.

Active participation in the democratic process is not just a right; it is a sacred obligation, especially on Republic Day. It serves as a reminder of the power vested in the people. Staying informed, participating in discussions, and holding elected representatives accountable are not mere actions; they are the cornerstones of a better and progressive nation. In championing philanthropy, health advocacy, and democratic engagement, we become architects of holistic development and prosperity for India.

As we revel in the festivities of Republic Day, let it be a resounding call to action. The true strength of India resides in the collective efforts of its passionate citizens. By focusing on what we can do for our country - through responsible citizenship, community engagement, entrepreneurship, and environmental stewardship - we craft a future that embodies the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity enshrined in our Constitution. This Republic Day let us renew our commitment to forging a stronger, more prosperous, and inclusive India for generations to come. Jai Hind! *(The author can be reached at shisanglemlalemtor@gmail.com)*

State news agency says Pulhwasal-3-31 cruise missile is still in its development phase

North Korea says it tested a cruise missile, flaunting new nuclear-capable weapon

SEOUL, Jan 25: North Korea said on Thursday it conducted its first flight test of a new cruise missile, as it expands its military capabilities in the face of deepening tensions with the United States and neighbours.

The report in state media came a day after South Korea's military said it detected the North firing several cruise missiles into waters off its western coast. It didn't immediately provide more details about the numbers of missiles fired or their flight characteristics.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said the Pulhwasal-3-31 missile is still in its development phase and that the launch did not pose a threat to neighbors. It described the missile as "strategic," implying an intent to arm them with nuclear weapons.

Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the missiles flew a shorter distance than previous North Korean cruise missile launches, which he said suggested that the North was trying to improve the performance of existing systems. The cruise missile launches were North Korea's second known launch event of the year, following a Jan. 14 test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate-range ballistic missile, which reflected its efforts to advance its lineup of weapons targeting U.S. military bases in Japan and Guam.

Yang Uk, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said North Korea is trying to highlight its diversifying arsenal of nuclear-capable weapons to increase pressure

on rivals. But the recent displays of new weapons systems came amid a slowdown in tests of short-range ballistic missiles, which could indicate inventory shortages as North Korea continues its alleged arms transfers to Russia, Yang said.

U.S. and South Korean officials have accused North Korea of providing artillery shells, missiles and other supplies to Russia for its war in Ukraine, possibly in exchange for economic assistance and military technology. Kim, who traveled to a Russian space launch center in September for a summit with Putin, has been taking aggressive steps to strengthen ties with Moscow as he tries to break out of isolation and join a united front against Washington.

Both Pyongyang and Moscow have denied that North Korea was sending weapons to Russia. North Korea's cruise missiles are among its growing arsenal of weapons aimed at overwhelming missile defenses in South Korea and Japan. They supplement the country's huge lineup of ballistic missiles, including intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to reach the U.S. mainland.

While North Korean cruise missile activities aren't directly banned under U.N. sanctions, experts say those weapons potentially pose a serious threat to South Korea and Japan. They are designed to be harder to detect by radar, and North Korea claims they are nuclear-capable and their range is up to 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles), a distance



that would include U.S. military bases in Japan.

Since 2021, North Korea has conducted at least 10 rounds of tests of what it described as long-range cruise missiles fired from both land and sea. Tensions in the region have increased in recent months as Kim continues to accelerate his weapons development and make provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the United States and its Asian allies. In response, the United States, South Korea and Japan have been expanding their combined military exercises, which Kim condemns as invasion rehearsals and has used as a pretext to further ramp up his military demonstrations. There are concerns that Kim could dial up pressure in an election year in the United States and South Korea. South Korean experts and officials say Kim's weapons drive has put further strain on a broken economy, crippled by decades of mismanagement and U.S.-led sanctions over his nuclear ambitions. In a separate report, KCNA said Kim

during a two-day ruling party meeting held through Wednesday criticized officials for failing to provide enough of "basic living necessities including condiments, foodstuff and consumption goods" to people living in the countryside and less developed cities and towns. Kim called the meeting to discuss a 10-year project he announced last week to promote more balanced regional development, which includes a goal of building modern factories in every county nationwide.

Satellite images analyzed by The Associated Press this week suggest North Korea has torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with South Korea, a week after Kim dismissed decades of hopes for peaceful reunification with the war-divided peninsula's south.

Kim last week described the Pyongyang monument as an "eyesore" and called for its removal while declaring that the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North's constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary. He accused South Korea of acting as "top-class stooges" of the Americans and repeated a threat that he would use his nukes to annihilate the South if provoked. Analysts say North Korea could be aiming to diminish South Korea's voice in the regional nuclear standoff and eventually force direct dealings with Washington as it looks to cement its nuclear status. (AP)

Flight recorders from Russian plane crash that killed all 74 aboard are reportedly found

MOSCOW, Jan 25: Investigators searching the site where a Russian military transport plane crashed in a border region near Ukraine reportedly have found the plane's flight recorders, a day after Moscow accused Kyiv of shooting down the aircraft and Ukraine's president demanded an international investigation.

The Il-76 fell from the sky and crashed in a huge ball of flame in a rural area of Russia on Wednesday, killing all 74 people on board, Russian authorities said, as the war nears its two-year mark.

Russian officials accused Kyiv of shooting down the plane with two missiles, claiming that 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war were on board as they headed for a prisoner swap. They offered no evidence for their claim. Ukrainian authorities confirmed a prisoner exchange was due to happen Wednesday, and that it was called off, but said they had no information about who was on the plane.

Kyiv officials gave no direct response to the Russian claim that Ukraine struck with plane with a missile, though they noted that Russian aircraft were legitimate targets and that Moscow had requested no safe passage in the context of the prisoner swap. They cautioned against spread-

ing unverified reports. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Thursday repeated the allegation that Ukraine had downed the plane, describing it as "a totally monstrous act".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy didn't directly address Moscow's allegation but said Ukraine would push for an international investigation.

"It is necessary to establish all the facts, as much as possible, considering that the plane crash occurred on Russian territory — beyond our control," he said in his nightly video address late Wednesday.

"It's obvious Russians are playing with lives of Ukrainian POWs, with the feelings of their relatives and the emotions of our society," Zelenskyy said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, which was expected to take place on Thursday afternoon in New York.

The discovery of the plane's flight recorders was reported by the state-owned RIA Novosti news agency, citing emergency services.

However, there was little hope that the true circumstances of the crash and the Russian allegations would be clarified by the investigation. (AP)

Death toll in southwestern China landslide rises to 39, with 5 people still missing

BEIJING, Jan 25: The death toll from a landslide in a remote, mountainous part of southwestern China rose to 39 on Thursday, while five people remained missing, Chinese state media reported.

The disaster struck early Monday in the village of Liangshui in the northeastern part of Yunnan province. Search and rescue operations continued amid freezing temperatures and falling snow.

More than 1,000 rescuers were working at the site with the help of excavators, drones and rescue dogs, the Ministry of Emergency Management said Tuesday. Two survivors were found Monday and were recovering at a local hospital.

State news agency Xinhua, citing a preliminary investigation by local experts, said the

landslide was triggered by the collapse of a steep cliff top area, with the collapsed mass measuring around 100 meters (330 feet) wide, 60 meters (200 feet) in height and an average of 6 meters (20 feet) in thickness. It did not elaborate on what caused the initial collapse.

Aerial photos posted by Xinhua showed the side of a heavily terraced mountain had spilled over several village homes. More than 900 villagers were relocated.

Zhenyong county lies about 2,250 kilometers (1,400 miles) southwest of Beijing, with altitudes ranging as high as 2,400

meters (7,900 feet). Rescuers struggled with snow, icy roads and freezing temperatures that were forecast to persist for the next days.

Heavy snow has been falling in many parts of China, causing transportation chaos and endangering lives. Last week, rescuers evacuated

tourists from a remote skiing area in northwestern China where dozens of avalanches triggered by heavy snow had trapped more than 1,000 people for a week. The avalanches blocked roads, stranding both

tourists and residents in a village in Altay prefecture in the Xinjiang region, close to China's border with Mongolia, Russia and Kazakhstan. On Tuesday, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake in a remote part of Xinjiang killed at least three people and caused extensive damage in freezing weather. Officials suggested the area's sparse population contributed to the "very strong" quake's low death toll.

In all, natural disasters in China left 691 people dead and missing last year, causing direct economic losses of about 345 billion yuan (\$48 billion), according to the National Commission for Disaster Reduction and the Ministry of Emergency Management. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Natural Resources implemented emergency response measures for geological disasters and sent a team of experts to the site.

South Korean police say a lawmaker has been injured in an attack with a rock-like object

SEOUL, Jan 25: South Korean police say a governing party lawmaker is being treated at a Seoul hospital after being attacked by an unidentified man who struck her head with a rock-like object. A police official in Seoul's Apgujeong district said a suspect was arrested at the scene after the attack on Thursday on lawmaker Bae Hyunjin in southern Seoul. The severity of Bae's injury was not immediately clear. The police official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media, said Bae was conscious as she was being taken to the hospital.

South Korean media reported that her condition wasn't life threatening, citing her aides. Calls to Bae's office weren't immediately answered. The attack comes weeks after a man stabbed South Korean opposition lawmaker Lee Jae-myung in the neck in the southern city of Busan. The man told investigators after his arrest that he wanted to kill Lee to prevent him from becoming a future president. Lee was released from the hospital after eight days of treatment. (AP)

A US Congressional delegation affirms bipartisan support for Taiwan in first visit since election

Lai thanked the visiting co-chairs of the US Congressional Taiwan Caucus for their visit, saying that "today's Taiwan is a Taiwan of the world".

"Moving forward, I will work with Vice President-elect Hsiao Bi-khim to build upon the foundation laid by President Tsai to unite the people of Taiwan, strengthen social resilience and continue to defend the cross-strait status quo of peace and stability."

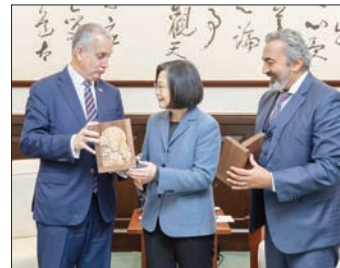
The president-elect also touched on continued military assistance from the US and a proposed agreement to avoid mutual taxation of companies.

Beijing objects to any form of official contact between the US and Taiwan. In 2022, it responded to a visit by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with some of its largest military maneuvers in years, including missile launches and a simulated blockade of the island. It views visits by foreign government officials as them recognizing the island's sovereignty.

President Joe Biden, seeking to calm that complaint, insists there's no change in America's longstanding "One-China" policy, which recognizes Beijing as representing China but allows informal relations and defense ties with Taipei.

Washington cut formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1979 in order to recognize China, but US law requires it to ensure the island has the ability to defend itself. That has translated into a heavy reliance on US military hardware and a law saying that Washington must treat threats against the island as a matter of "grave concern".

China regularly sends warplanes and navy ships to intimidate and harass Taiwan, with 18 planes and six ships operating near the island in the 24 hours before 6 am Thursday. Another three Chinese balloons were recorded as crossing the island, although it remains unclear if they have a military or intelligence gathering purpose. (AP)



TAIPEI, Jan 25: A bipartisan delegation from the United States Congress reaffirmed support for Taiwan during a visit on Thursday, following the election of its new president.

The delegation's visit is the first from US lawmakers to the island since the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party won a third-straight term in the Jan 13 presidential election. China, America's chief competitor for global influence, claims Taiwan as its own territory and threatens to use force to bring the self-ruling island under its control. Beijing strongly condemned Lai Ching-te's election and appears set to continue its policy of refusing to engage with the island's government — a practice that's been in place since Tsai Ing-wen's election in 2016.

"The support of the United States for Taiwan is firm. It's real, and it is 100% bipartisan," US Representative Mario Diaz Balart said.

Balart, a Florida Republican, was joined by California Democrat Ami Bera. "In the 21st century, there's no place for aggressive action. We have to learn to live together, to trade together, to work together, to solve problems together," Bera said.

"Just know that we are proud of the people of Taiwan. We are proud of the relationship and as strong as that relationship has always been. That is assured. It will even be stronger," Balart said.

"So, we look forward to working together to continue to protect the peace, prosperity (and) the future of Taiwan. It's up to people of Taiwan," said Bera. President-elect

Argentina's president faces 1-day general strike as foes seek to derail his austerity agenda

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 25: Argentina's President Javier Milei faced a one-day general strike on Wednesday protesting his decree targeting unions as well as his proposals for economic and labor law changes, showing that his opponents are wasting no time in trying to derail his austerity agenda.

The biggest union, known by its acronym CGT, organized the strike and was joined by other unions. Strikers took to the streets in the capital, Buenos Aires, and other cities across the country, joined by social groups and political opponents, including the Peronist party that dominated national politics for decades.

Until his presidential run, Milei, a libertarian economist, was known mostly for his televised screeds



against the political caste, and he secured victory last year by a wide margin before taking office just over a month ago. A self-declared "anarcho-capitalist," he pledged a drastic reduction in state spending aimed at shoring up a government budget deficit that he says is fueling red-hot inflation, which finished 2023 at 211%.

On Dec. 20, Milei issued a decree

that would revoke or modify hundreds of existing laws so as to limit the power of unions and deregulate an economy featuring notoriously heavy state intervention. A court ruling has put the labor changes on hold. He also sent an omnibus bill to Congress that would enact sweeping reforms in the political, social, fiscal, legal, administrative and security fields.

It remained unclear if the strike, scheduled to end at midnight, would amount to a speedbump to his agenda or no obstacle at all.

While people have legitimate grievances — triple-digit inflation and a steep devaluation of Argentina's peso — behind the scenes the main impetus for the strike was the president's drive to weaken union

power, Buenos Aires-based political analyst Sergio Berenshtein said.

"For union leaders what is at stake is really a lot. If they don't complain, their bargaining capacity is going to drop dramatically and their influence in politics is going to dwindle," Berenshtein told The Associated Press in a phone interview. "Milei feels quite comfortable confronting these leaders. He's still very popular; union leaders are unpopular."

The walkout was Argentina's first general strike in more than four years, and it was also the quickest ever to be organized in a president's term since the return of democracy in 1983, according to a review by local media outlet Infobae. Milei's predecessor, center-left Alberto Fernández, did not face any general strikes. (AP)

Austrian man who raped his captive daughter over 24 years can be moved to a regular prison

KREMS, Jan 25: An Austrian man who had kept his daughter captive for 24 years and raped her thousands of times, fathering seven children with her, can be moved from psychiatric detention to a regular prison, a court ruled on Thursday. The decision, however, stipulates that Josef Fritzl, 88, will have to attend regular psychotherapy and undergo psychiatric evaluations during a 10-year probation period at the prison, Austria Press Agency reported.

A request to release him from detention was rejected but the decision is still a win for Fritzl's legal team as conditions in a regular prison are considered an improvement, compared to strict controls in a psychiatric institution.

His atrocious crime was revealed in 2008 and he was sentenced in 2009 to life imprisonment for committing incest, rape, coercion, false imprisonment, enslavement and negligent homicide of one of his infant sons.

Fritzl became known as the "monster of Amstetten" after the northern Austrian town where he in 1984 locked up his then 18-year-old daughter in a sound-proofed basement of his house.

Over the next 24 years, he repeatedly raped her and fathered seven children with her, one of whom died. Fritzl's wife, who lived on the second floor of the home with the rest of the family, was allegedly unaware of what was going on in the basement, according to Austrian authorities.

Fritzl's daughter disappeared in 1984 at age 18, re-emerging in 2008 from the dungeon-like basement chamber in Amstetten. When the case came to light, it made headlines around the world.

A three-judge regional court in the town of Krems ruled on Thursday that Fritzl, who now reportedly has dementia, could be moved to a regular prison based on a psychiatric assessment that he no longer poses a danger. The ruling overturned an earlier decision from 2022 when Fritzl's request to be moved to a regular prison was rejected. (AP)

Japan became the fifth country in history to reach the moon when the SLIM, touched down on the Moon

Japan's precision moon lander has hit its target, but it appears to be upside-down

TOKYO, Jan 25: Japan's space agency said on Thursday that its first lunar mission hit the tiny patch of the moon's surface it was aiming for, in a successful demonstration of its pinpoint landing system — although the probe appears to be lying upside-down.

Japan became the fifth country in history to reach the moon when the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, touched down on the Moon early on Saturday. But trouble with the probe's solar batteries made it hard at first to figure whether the probe landed in the target zone.

While most previous probes have used landing zones about 10 km (six miles) wide, SLIM was aiming at a target of just 100 metres (330 feet). Improved accuracy would give scientists access to more of the moon, since probes could be placed nearer to obstacles.

One of the lander's main engines lost thrust about 50 metres (54 yards)

above the moon surface, causing a harder landing than planned.

A pair of autonomous probes released by SLIM before touchdown sent back images of the box-shaped vehicle on the surface, although it appeared to be upside down.

After a few days of data analysis, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, determined that the spacecraft landed about 55 metres (60 yards) away from its target, in between two craters near the Shioli crater, a region covered in volcanic rock.

But after the landing mishap, the craft's solar panels wound up facing the wrong direction, and it cannot generate power. Officials said there is still hope the probe will be able to recharge when the Moon enters its daytime in the coming days.

JAXA project manager Shinichiro Sakai said the images sent back were just like those he'd imagined and seen in computer renderings.

"Something we designed travelled



all the way to the moon and took that snapshot. I almost fell down when I saw it," he said. For the pinpoint landing, Sakai said, he would give SLIM a "perfect score."

"We demonstrated that we can land where we want," Sakai said. "We opened a door to a new era."

LEV-1, a hopping robot equipped with an antenna and a camera, was tasked with recording SLIM's landing and transmitting images back to earth. LEV-2 is a baseball-sized rover equipped with two cameras, developed by JAXA together with Sony, toymaker Tomy Co, and Doshisha

reach the moon surface.

The project was the fruit of two decades of work on precision technology by JAXA.

JAXA has a track record with difficult landings. Its Hayabusa2 spacecraft, launched in 2014, touched down twice on the 900-metre-long (3,000-foot-long) asteroid Ryugu, collecting samples that were returned to Earth.

SLIM, nicknamed "the Moon Sniper," was intended to seek clues about the origin of the moon, including analyzing minerals with a special camera.

SLIM was launched on a Mitsubishi Heavy H2A rocket in September. It initially orbited Earth and entered lunar orbit on Dec 25.

Japan hopes to regain confidence for its space technology after a number of failures. A spacecraft designed by a Japanese company crashed during a lunar landing attempt in April, and a new flagship rocket failed its debut launch in March. (AP)

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BRO to fence major portion of India-Myanmar border

Union home ministry identifies 1,700 km stretch of Indo-Myanmar international border that needs to be fenced

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) will fence a major portion of the strategic India-Myanmar international border, and a 10-km stretch in Manipur has already been covered, a senior official said.

The Union ministry of home affairs has identified around 1,700 km of fencing that needs to be done, BRO's additional director general (East) PKH Singh said.

The organisation has already finished fencing 10 km along the border in Manipur's Moreh, which was handed over to the Assam Rifles, Singh told PTI in an interview.

Union home minister Amit Shah recently said the Centre has decided that the India-Myanmar international border will be protected by barbed fencing like the India-Bangladesh border, and the government was rethinking the free movement agreement with Myanmar.

The four Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram share a 1,643-km border with Myanmar.

Singh said the next 80-km stretch in Manipur has also been identified and the detailed project report (DPR) submitted to the ministry.

Fencing the remaining 250 km, along with its approach roads, is in the planning stage with the DPR under preparation.

"The fencing of the India-Myanmar border is an important project for the BRO,



which is now coming up in Moreh. The area around this border has been unfenced since long, and there was a need to check the activities around it," the ADG said.

Singh said the BRO has a long-term rollout plan of nearly Rs 30,000 crore in the Northeast over the next five years, and out of this almost two-thirds is focused in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

The organisation was earlier involved in fencing the India-Bangladesh border along with the Border Security Force, he said.

"We are currently executing projects cov-

ering a wide canvas of disparate infrastructure development, ranging from connecting far-flung remote areas to building strategic roads for the armed forces, encompassing bridges, tunnels, protection works for landslide zones, airfields, helipads and jetties," he said.

Besides the northeastern states, the BRO East is also involved in developing infrastructural facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

"In the archipelago, we are at present focusing on the Campbell Bay area where a

40-km stretch at Indira Point was washed away during a tsunami. We are in an advanced planning stage for a runway extension and construction of jetties along with accommodation facilities in the area," Singh said.

The BRO has received a lot of requests from CAPFs, the navy and coast guard in the area for various works stretching around 1,600 km, he said.

The organisation's primary focus, however, is the strategic infrastructure development of the India-China Border Roads (ICBR) in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, coordinated by the Union home ministry and the defence ministry, the senior official said.

"Out of the 29 projects of 1,400 km in the first phase, 24 road projects of more than 1,287 km have been completed, while the remaining five are nearing completion," Singh said. In the second phase, 17 road projects of 548 km have been taken up with 132 km already completed, while in the third phase, seven projects of 411 km are under the planning stage, he said.

Besides, the BRO has also been entrusted with 531 km out of the 1,748-km of the Frontier Highway, comprising the India-China-Myanmar border, the ADG said. The BRO's ambit will be in nine stretches, with work in three portions of 130 km having already commenced. The remaining six stretches are in the DPR stage, Singh added. (PTI)

M'laya govt does not consider HNLC as 'enemy': Paul Lyngdoh



SHILLONG, Jan 25: Cabinet minister and Meghalaya government spokesperson, Paul Lyngdoh has said that the government does not see the Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC) as an "enemy".

He was responding to a question on the security arrangement made ahead of the Republic Day celebrations across the state especially in view of the recent decision of the HNLC to pull out of the peace talks with the government.

Speaking to the media on Wednesday after a cabinet meeting, which approved the Republic Day speech, Lyngdoh said that elaborate security arrangements will be made as per standard norms.

He however said that the law and order situation in the state is satisfactory and peaceful and that there is no need for any extra additional measures.

Lyngdoh also said that chief minister Conrad K Sangma and deputy chief minister in-charge of home, Prestone Tynsong had indicated that the doors are still open for negotiations with the HNLC, adding, "that will be reiterated formally in the Republic Day address." The minister said, "The law and order situation is very peaceful and we do not see HNLC as our enemy or enemy of the people. This is why we said our doors of negotiations are still open and that will in fact be emphasized in the Republic Day address." (NNN)

Nagaland Guv calls for addressing shortcomings in state



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 25: Nagaland Governor La Ganesan called for addressing all the shortcomings, including connectivity infrastructure and other infrastructures required for rapid economic progress of the state.

"We have to unlock and translate our economic potential and improve the standard of living of our people," Ganesan said in his message on the eve of 75th Republic Day on Thursday.

He said Nagaland, along with the country, has made significant progress since its formation as a state of the Indian Union.

Saying that the state has overcome numerous challenges and made remarkable progress in various fields, including education, economy and infrastructure, Ganesan said Nagaland has also made great strides in preserving and promoting its rich cultural heritage.

The annual Hornbill Festival has become a very popular event that showcases the cultural richness and diversity of Nagaland to the

world, he added.

However, he appealed not to rest on the laurels as the state has the potential to achieve even greater heights in the years to come.

Giving a clarion call to all the citizens to work towards achieving our goal of a Viksit Bharat 2047, Ganesan said Nagaland cannot afford to miss the bus of development this time. "Let us march together with integrity, determination and unity to ensure a happy and prosperous future for all our citizens," he appealed.

Ganesan said from establishing a robust democratic system to making remarkable strides in various fields, India's journey as a republic has been marked by notable achievements in the last 75 years. "On the auspicious occasion of the 75th Republic Day celebration, it is befitting of a grateful nation to pay tribute to the founding fathers of our great nation, and the countless other fellow countrymen and women who sacrificed so much for us and their sacrifices should never be forgotten," he said.

Breakthrough in Tunnel 4 of Dimapur - Kohima BG line project achieved

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: In a major step towards completion of Dimapur - Kohima new broad gauge line connectivity project, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) achieved a major milestone in the second phase of the project. Breakthrough of tunnel 4 between Molvom - Pherima station that measures 1319 meters in length including 151 meters cut and cover was done on Wednesday.

This is the second longest tunnel in phase-II of the project. This achievement is considered a major step for connecting Kohima with the rest of the nation through Indian Railways network.

The construction of the tunnel was started from portal - 1 side on October 3, 2021. Work from Portal - 2 began on January 23 last year. The rock strata encountered is mainly shale and extremely weathered in nature with seepage of water present at few locations, inside the tunnel. To construct the tunnel railways had to face a lot of problems as continuous rains since April, 2022 and extremely poor quality of soil in tunnel 4 has led to squeezing and sliding at portal - 2 affecting the progress. Guidance from the Geological Survey of India and independent consultant were sought to solve the problems.

The average rate of underground excavation is 41.25 meters per month. The underground excavation work was executed by using New Austrian Tunneling

Method (NATM) and by deploying 210 workers, who worked round the clock since the excavation work started. With the final breakthrough of the tunnel, underground excavation of 1168 meters has been completed. Final lining of the tunnel is targeted for completion by May this year.

Indian Railways is significantly contributing towards transformation of the northeastern states by executing several new railway line projects. Constructing new railway lines to connect all the state capitals of north-eastern region is being implemented under capital connectivity projects. Construction of a new broad gauge railway line from Dimapur to Kohima in Nagaland is one such project.

The total length of project is 82.5 km (2.75 Km in Assam and 79.75 Km in Nagaland) having eight new stations namely, Dhanisiri, Dhanisripur, Shokhuvi, Molvom, Pherima, Piphema, Menguzuma and Zubza. The project includes 24 major bridges, 156 minor bridges, 06 road over bridges, 15 road under bridges and 21 tunnels of 31 km length. The project is being implemented at an estimated cost of Rs. 6,663 crores. The new rail connectivity project when completed will also help in transportation of food grains, automobiles and other infrastructural and construction items to the hilly state from other parts of the country at a much cheaper cost, thereby benefitting local people. Economy of the state will receive a major boost.

Security tightened in Manipur ahead of Republic Day

IMPHAL, Jan 25: Security has been beefed up across Manipur, particularly in Imphal on the eve of the Republic Day, in the backdrop of boycotts and shutdowns called by various rebel groups, civil organisations and students' bodies.

Besides intensified random frisking and checking, patrolling has been increased at important government installations, offices, shopping places and other public places.

Police and central security forces deployed across Imphal in the backdrop of ongoing violence have been put on alert to keep an eye on any suspicious activity, an official source said.

Security apparatus has been tightened in all the places in Imphal and round the clock security has been provided to all the venues for the Republic Day celebrations across the state, the source said.

Almost all rebel groups operating in Manipur announced boycotts of the celebrations of the Republic Day in the state. They



called for total shutdown on the day. In the backdrop of the ongoing crisis, many organisations and students' bodies have also called for boycotting the celebration.

While calling to boycott the celebration, the organisations accused the central government of turning a blind eye to the violent conflict unfolding in the state since May 3 last year that claimed hundreds of

lives and rendered thousands homeless.

Six students' bodies have also appealed to the student community and the public to boycott the Republic Day celebration in the state.

In a joint statement, the students' bodies (MSF, DESAM, KSA, SUK, AIMS and AMSU) further urged the people to put up black flags at every household to observe

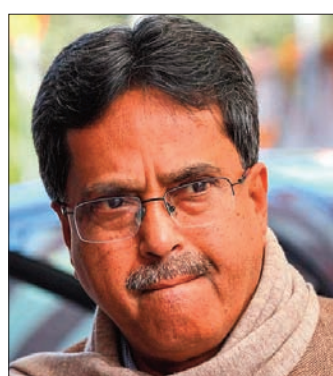
the day as a day of mourning.

Meanwhile, the Manipur Governor, the chief minister and others have greeted the people of the state on the eve of the Republic Day.

While greeting the people of the state, Manipur Governor Anusuiya Ukiy said, "On this auspicious occasion, let us rededicate ourselves to uphold and promote the secular, socialist and democratic values enshrined in our Constitution and work collectively to make our country great."

Chief minister N Biren Singh also greeted the people on the occasion. He said, "Republic Day 2024 provides each one of us an occasion to reflect on where we, as a people, stand today and where we would like ourselves to reach in the next 10 years, 25 years and so on." "As we reflect, we are compelled to think of what many possibilities we could have achieved, were it not for the hiatus on account of this law and order scenario in our state," he added. (NNN)

Tripura police strengthened bond between tribals: CM



AGARTALA, Jan 25: Holding peaceful assembly elections in February last year and strengthening the bond between tribals and non-tribals were the greatest achievements of Tripura Police in its 150-year-old journey, chief minister Manik Saha said here on Thursday.

Tripura Police was established by Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya Bahadur in 1873 to maintain law and order in the erstwhile princely state.

"Holding incident-free assembly elections in February last year was the greatest achievement of Tripura Police. It also facilitated people to cast their votes without any disturbance," he said, after inaugurating the main programme of the force at Prajna Bhavan in Agartala.

Saha said the state police force has also achieved success by strengthening the bond between tribals and non-tribals by adopting a people-friendly policy.

"I had a meeting with senior police officers in the backdrop of the programme. We vowed to fight against the drug menace in the state," he said.

Heaping praise on the role of police, the CM said peace is the precondition of development, growth and prosperity.

"If law and order is not conducive, investments for development will not serve any purpose. Therefore, law enforcement agencies must act against those who violate the law of the land. Police should also adopt a pro-people policy to win the hearts of people," he said.

Director general of police (DGP) Amitabh Rajan and additional DGP Anurag Dhanak also attended the function. (PTI)

458 school teachers receive appointment letters in Tura

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma on Thursday handed over appointment letters to 458 newly appointed government school teachers at Tura in the West Garo Hills district.

The chief minister handed over the appointment letters to the teachers of government lower primary schools during the Teacher Initiative Conclave held in Tura on Thursday. He also released National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) books on the occasion.

The NCERT books will be introduced in schools under the Meghalaya Board of School Education from the current academic session.

Speaking on the occasion, Conrad Sangma said that the appointment of new teachers will go a long way in enhancing the academic performance of students in the state. He also said that his government is committed to improving the educational facilities in rural areas of the state.

"A happy day in Tura as we distributed appointment letters to over 458 newly-appointed Government L.P School Teachers. This comes after a long gap in the recruitment process and after implementation of the roster system," said Conrad Sangma on 'X'.

"As a Government we are committed to improve education in rural areas and the appointment of qualified teachers will greatly enhance the performance of students from a young age thereby improving the overall quality of education across the state," he further said on 'X'.

While releasing the NCERT books, the chief minister said that these books will greatly improve the learning outcomes of students and bring the state's educational curriculum at par with national standards.

"Released the NCERT books that will be utilised in schools under the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) from this academic session at the Teacher Initiative Conclave in Tura," the CM said on 'X'.

Rare golden tiger sighted at KNP

Golden phenotype is rare recessive trait, currently being investigated through non-invasive scat sampling, DNA mapping

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: A rare Royal Bengal tiger of golden morph was sighted at the Kaziranga National Park (KNP) in Assam, officials said on Thursday.

The adult male tiger was spotted by a photographer who was visiting the park along with a local guide, KNP director Sonali Ghosh said.

The golden phenotype, as demonstrated by the Kaziranga tiger, is a rare recessive trait and is currently being investigated through non-invasive scat sampling and DNA mapping at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, she said. Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma shared a photograph of the tiger on X, and said,



"Majestic Beauty! A rare golden tiger was recently spotted in Kaziranga National Park."

Ghosh said diverse forms of pigmentation phenotypes are known in many species of birds, butterflies, wild ungulates, domesticated animals and also in humans.

Phenotypic variations are driven by evolutionary forces such as selection and random genetic drift, she pointed out. Tigers have a unique striping pattern that is known to exist in several coat colour variants, Ghosh said.

The most famous being the pseudo-melanistic morph that is found in Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha, while the white tiger is a recessive trait and is now only confined to zoos, she added. (PTI)

Tripura's connectivity with rest of country improved in last 6 years: CM

AGARTALA, Jan 25: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Thursday said the state's connectivity with the rest of the country has improved over the past five to six years. Inaugurating the Tripura Industries and Trade Fair 2024, Saha said connectivity is a precondition of industrialisation.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given us the HIRA (highway/way/railway and airway) model to make our state a model state. Be it national highway or railway or airway, the state has witnessed a major boost which are preconditions of industrialisation or investment", he said. The CM said around 30 medium and big industrial units have been set up in the state during the past six years.

He said the northeastern state has already started producing rubber thread which has great demand in Bangladesh. "Many industrial units are working on bamboo, rubber and incense sticks. The state has also started exporting agar oil to foreign countries", he said. "Recently, we had industrial summits in Mumbai and Hyderabad and discussion with investors in Gujarat. They want to invest in Tripura. An industry-friendly atmosphere has been created in the state. We have set a target of 50 per cent contribution to the GSDP from the industrial sector", he said. The CM also highlighted the state's good law and order situation which is a key factor for industrialisation. "The overall law and order situation has improved", he said. Saha said the state government has already announced industrial policy which provides subsidies in various sectors. (PTI)

National Voters' Day celebrated in East Garo Hills

HT Correspondent

WILLIAMNAGAR, Jan 25: Along with rest of the country the East Garo Hills district also celebrated the National Voters' Day at the multipurpose hall of the deputy commissioner's office in Williamnagar on Thursday. On the occasion, East Garo Hills deputy commissioner, Vibhor Aggarwal, administered the National Voters' Day pledge and felicitated the best booth level officers of the district. The deputy commissioner also distributed electoral's photo identity cards (EPIC) to the first-time voters of the district.

'Youth is against corruption and parivarwaad' PM: My govt took country out of darkness staring at youngsters

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Thursday that his government took the country out of the darkness staring at youngsters 10-12 years back, as he told young voters that their votes will decide India's future direction and approach.

In a virtual address to young voters organised by the youth wing of the ruling BJP, he said they have the responsibility of making the country developed in the next 25 years in the same way the young generation during the 25 years before Independence had for its freedom.

Taking a swipe at opposition parties, Modi said the youth is against corruption and "parivarwaad" (nepotism), adding that family-run parties never allow other youngsters to move ahead.

"The mindset of leaders of these



parties is anti-youth. You have to defeat these family parties with the strength of your votes," he said.

The circumstances prevailing in the country 10-12 years back had made the future of youngsters dark, he said, asserting that things have changed now.

The country is now talking of possibilities which the generation before 2014, the year the BJP came to power at the Centre, has given up hope on, he said.

Corruption and scams made headlines then while credibility and success stories are being now

talked about, the prime minister said, adding that achievements in different sectors make news these days.

Talking about boost in infrastructure and a host of development measures like digital India and push to start-ups, he said there are limitless opportunities for youngsters.

"It is Modi's guarantee that your dreams are my resolve," he said, asserting that the youth has always been his priority. The presence of a stable and strong majority government at the Centre in the last 10 years had led to big decisions and the resolution of issues pending for decades, he said, citing removal of Article 370, GST roll-out, reservation for women in Lok Sabha and assemblies and ending the practice of instant triple talaq among Muslims. (PTI)

French President Macron arrives in Jaipur To participate in roadshow, hold talks with Modi

JAIPUR, Jan 25: French president Emmanuel Macron arrived Thursday in this decked-up city, where he will spend several hours savouring the sites — and perhaps some roadside chai — before engaging in talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on strengthening India-France ties.

Macron, who is the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations in Delhi on January 26, was visiting Jaipur's iconic sites, including the hilltop Amber Palace, and was scheduled to participate in a roadshow with Modi later in the day.

The two leaders will hold official talks at Rambagh Palace hotel in the evening.

The French delegation was received by Governor Kalraj Mishra and Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma at the airport. Modi, who was on a visit to Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr, was to reach Jaipur later.

Macron then headed for Amber Fort. He was to visit Jantar Mantar and Hawa Mahal next.

It will also be Modi's first visit to Rajasthan after the recent assembly polls, in which his Bharatiya Janata Party ousted the Congress government in the state. The Macron-Modi roadshow will begin from Jantar Mantar and end at Hawa Mahal. According to details made available by officials earlier, the French leader is also expected to do some shopping in that touristy area.

There is no official word on it, but a trader who runs the 'Sahu' tea shop said the leaders will stop for a cup of his masala tea. He told PTI Videos that he would be paid digitally through UPI.



At Amber Fort, a red carpet was laid out and caparisoned elephants lined up for the French president. Macron interacted there with a group of children holding banners proclaiming India-France friendship.

The delegation also browsed through artifacts on display at the temporary stalls set up near the entrance of the fort.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari were at the fort.

Cutouts and hoardings were earlier put up at several locations in Jaipur around the sites Modi and Macron were set to visit. Security was tightened in the city and some traffic diversions put in place. (PTI)

Don't not need to sound poll bugle, people do it for me: Modi

BULANDSHAHAR/REWARI, Jan 25: Launching a slew of projects in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that he only sounds the bugle of development and it is the people who sound the poll bugle for him.

Addressing a gathering in Bulandshahr after inaugurating and laying the foundation stone of development projects worth over ₹ 19,100 crore, he said when the government reaches all beneficiaries of its schemes, there is no scope left for discrimination and corruption. "This is true secularism, this is true social justice," Modi added.

"Modi is serving you honestly and that is the reason that under our government, 25 crore people have come out of poverty and those left also have hope that they will come out of it. You are my family, your dream is my resolve and that is why when common families like you will be strengthened, that will be my capital," he said.

Talking about 'Modi ki guarantee' which is aimed at achieving saturation of welfare schemes, the prime minister said, "What our government says, it does. Our efforts are directed at ensuring that the benefits of government schemes reach all beneficiaries. Modi is giving a guarantee of saturation, guarantee of a cent per cent (saturation of schemes)."

"When the government reaches all beneficiaries, then there is no scope for discrimination... there is no scope for corruption," he asserted.

The prime minister added that he wanted to reach all the needy people quickly without any discrimination.

"For a long time after Independence, someone gave a slogan of 'Garibi Hatao', someone kept lying about social justice but the poor people of the country saw that only a few families got rich and their politics flourished," he said in an apparent attack at the Congress.

Modi also said that he saw a few channels that claimed he would sound the poll bugle with

this programme.

"I saw in the media that Modi will sound the election bugle in Bulandshahr. Modi sounds the bugle of development, Modi sounds the bugle for the welfare of the last person in the queue. Modi neither needed to sound the poll bugle earlier nor does he need it now and will not need it in the future. People keep doing it for him," he said.

"When people sound the bugle for him, Modi does not need to spend time in it, he spends time in serving the people," the prime minister added.

He further said that for decades after Independence, development was kept confined to a few regions and a big part of the country was deprived.

Modi added that Uttar Pradesh was ignored for decades after the Independence as those who ran the governments behaved like rulers and kept the people deprived.

"Such people saw the path of dividing society as an easy route to attain power," Modi said, asserting that it was the BJP's double-engine government that gave pace to development in Uttar Pradesh. Building a developed India is not possible without the fast-paced development of Uttar Pradesh, he added.

The prime minister also said that farmers' interests were his government's top priority and it was creating a 'suraksha kavach' (protective shield) around their families.

"This region gave us Kalyan Singh, who dedicated his life to 'Ram Kaaj' and 'Rashtra Kaaj'," Modi said in Bulandshahr.

"In Ayodhya, I said 'pran pratishtha' has been completed, now it is time to take 'rashtra pratishtha' to new heights," he added.

Earlier in the day, the prime minister inaugurated a 173-km-long double-line electrified section between New Khurja and New Rewari on the dedicated freight corridor (DFC) by flagging off goods trains from the two stations through video conference. (PTI)

FIR against senior CRPF officers, a govt's mistake: J'khand Guv

RANCHI, Jan 25: Jharkhand Governor C P Radhakrishnan on Thursday said that registering an FIR against senior CRPF officers, a day after Enforcement Directorate's questioning of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, is a government's "mistake".

The local administration on January 21 lodged an FIR against senior CRPF officers for "violating" prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPc during the questioning of Soren by the ED in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam.

Speaking to the reporters, on the sideline of the celebration of National Voters' Day here, Radhakrishnan said, "Unnecessarily, large gathering in front of the CM's house had been organised. That is why CRPF had to come. This was the government's mistake. This type of attitude should be stopped".

The Ranchi district administration had imposed prohibitory orders near Soren's official residence, where he faced the ED questioning on January 20 from 7 am to 11 pm, disallowing any demonstration and public meetings. (PTI)

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Kerala govt criticises centre's fiscal approach Highlights low alcohol tax contribution



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Jan 25: The Kerala Government on Thursday criticised the BJP-led Centre's fiscal approach towards the state, noting that the state had to seek a solution to the financial impasse in the Supreme Court. The state government also clarified that only 3.7 per cent of Kerala's own tax revenue comes from alcohol, which is one of the lowest percentages among all states, contrasting with those where it can be as high as 22 per cent. These were part of the customary policy address which was presented before the State Assembly by Governor Arif Mohammed Khan. Khan swiftly concluded the address by reading out only its final paragraph.

"My Government places the considered opinion before the Union Government that Kerala should be ensured it's well deserved share in the distribution of taxes. My Government views with concern the holding back of eligible grants and share of assistance in Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

"My Government is put to added liquidity stress because of the retrospective cut in borrowing limits, which is not in accordance with the accepted recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission. This stand of the Union Government needs an early reconsideration," reads the document, copies of which were distributed to the media after the Governor's brief address. In the document, the Governor said his government's stupendous achievements have come about despite many formidable challenges confronting it.

"Paramount among these is the liquidity stress stemming from the vertical imbalance between the Union and the States in fiscal matters," it said.

The document said the fact that the Union possesses a significantly greater capacity to mobilise resources compared to the states, while the states are mandated to undertake developmental expenditures that far surpass their revenue generating capabilities points to a great asymmetry within India's federal system.

"Over time, this has further intensified, constraining the fiscal position of the states," it said.

Noting that the consistent decline in the awards of the successive Finance Commissions serves as a compelling case in point, the document said Kerala witnessed a decline in its share of taxes devolved by the Union Government from 3.88 per cent during the 10th Finance Commission period (1995-2000) to a mere 1.92 per cent during the 15th Finance Commission period (2021-2026). "In 2023-24, the discontinuation of GST compensation, a reduction in revenue deficit grant, and restrictions imposed on off-budget borrowings of the State by the Union exacerbated the fiscal condition of the State. "The State has been constrained to approach the Hon'ble Supreme Court for a solution to the financial impasse thrust on the State", it said.

The document, however, said despite grappling with these formidable challenges, the state government remained steadfastly committed to infrastructure development and growth focused on a knowledge economy, along with sustained social security spending, the hallmark of the Kerala Model of Development. Talking about the measures taken by the government on achieving fiscal consolidation on one hand and enhancing domestic revenue mobilisation on the other, it said in 2022-23, the state government successfully raised own tax revenues amounting to ₹ 71,968 crore, marking an increase of nearly ₹ 13,600 crore, or 23.4 per cent from the previous year. (PTI)

Delhi's governance inspired by Ram Rajya: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said the Delhi government, with inspiration from 'Ram rajya', provides good education and health, pension for senior citizens and round-the-clock power supply and free water supply.

Lord Ram never discriminated on the lines of caste and religion, but society today has been 'divided on those lines', Kejriwal said. The chief minister was speaking at a Republic Day celebration organised by the Delhi government at Chhatrasal Stadium.

"Inspired by 'Ram rajya', our government gives good education and health for all. Lord Ram never discriminated on the lines of caste and religion, but society has been divided on the same lines," Kejriwal said days after the consecration ceremony at Ram temple in Ayodhya.

"Running an administration with inspiration from 'Ram rajya' also includes providing 24/7 power supply. It also means respecting the elderly and we have been doing that by increasing their pension and arranging free pilgrimages for them.

"It includes providing free water supply to poor and middle class people that we have been doing since we came to power," he said. Kejriwal said that the Delhi government also focuses on safety of women in the national capital, adding that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) makes efforts on the issue even though the Delhi Police does not come under their control.

On the consecration of Lord Ram in Ayodhya, Kejriwal said

that it is matter of pride for the country and world. He added that people "must adopt Lord Ram's life principles" into their own lives.

Making a veiled attack at the Centre, Kejriwal said that the aim of having a USD 5 trillion economy is good only when the financial benefit reaches all poor people in the country. "But the country will remain poor if 4 trillion out of that remain with one or two people," he said.

"In the last 75 years, the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. Bringing down inflation is part of the concept of 'Ram rajya' followed by us. Delhi has minimum price rise as per central government reports. If people are suffering from price rise we cannot say it's Ram Rajya," he said. (PTI)

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INDIA bloc will unitedly fight against injustice across country: Rahul Gandhi

'Nyay has been attached to the yatra because injustice is prevailing across the country'

COOCH BEHAR (WEST BENGAL), Jan 25: Congress leader

Rahul Gandhi on Thursday expressed confidence in the unity of the opposition INDIA bloc in combating injustice nationwide, a day after TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's decision to go solo in the Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal.

The 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra,' led by Gandhi, entered West Bengal from Assam through Bakshirhat in Cooch Behar district.

State Congress president Adhir Chowdhury extended a warm welcome to Gandhi upon his arrival.

Addressing reporters in Cooch Behar, Gandhi accused the BJP and RSS of spreading hatred and

violence across the country.

He said, "The word 'Nyay' (justice) has been attached to the yatra because injustice is prevailing across the country. The INDIA bloc will fight against injustice across the country."

Gandhi's remark exuding confidence in the INDIA bloc came a day after Mamata Banerjee's decision to go solo in the Parliamentary elections in West Bengal caused ripples in the opposition bloc.

Banerjee's sudden comments forced the Congress to adopt a conciliatory approach with party spokesperson Jairam Ramesh asserting that the opposition bloc INDIA "cannot be imagined without



out Mamata Banerjee."

The CPI(M) and Left parties, al-

lies of the Congress within the state and the INDIA bloc at the na-

Alliance not working out in Bengal due to Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury: TMC



NEW DELHI, Jan 25: Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien Thursday held West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury responsible for an alliance not working out between the two parties in West Bengal.

The remark came a day after West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee announced that her party will fight the Lok Sabha polls "alone" in the state.

"Three reasons for the alliance not working in Bengal — Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury," O'Brien told reporters here.

He also claimed that the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) had many detractors but only two — the BJP and Chowdhury — have repeatedly spoken out against the bloc.

The TMC leader further alleged that Chowdhury was working at the behest of the BJP.

"The voice is his, but the words are being dictated to him by the duo in Delhi. In the past two years, Adhir Chowdhury has spoken the language of the BJP. Not once has he raised the issue of Bengal being deprived of central funds," O'Brien said.

"He even endorses ED actions in Bengal when they are against Trinamool. He holds special press conferences to belittle Mamata Banerjee and barely speaks against BJP leaders," he added.

Asked whether the TMC remains part of the INDIA grouping, O'Brien said, "After the general elections, if the Congress does its job and defeats the BJP on a substantial number of seats, the Tri-

namool Congress will very much be a part of the front that believes and fights for the Constitution and plurality."

Banerjee's sudden comments on Wednesday forced the Congress to adopt a conciliatory approach with party general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh asserting that the opposition bloc INDIA "cannot be imagined without Mamata Banerjee".

O'Brien, however, stressed that the TMC has "turned the page".

The Trinamool Congress had been upset with Chowdhury's repeated attacks on Banerjee. The Congress leader recently called the West Bengal chief minister an "opportunist" and said that his party would fight the polls alone.

The party has also been upset over seat-sharing talks with the Congress. The ruling party in West Bengal had offered two Lok Sabha seats to the Congress for the elections. Later, sources said the party could have accommodated another seat.

After Banerjee's announcement that her party has decided to go solo in the state, party sources said there had been no communication with the Congress for at least the past two weeks on seat-sharing.

During the December 19 meeting of the INDIA bloc in Delhi, the TMC had given a December 31 deadline for finalising seat-sharing arrangements. The party later agreed to wait a bit longer as the Congress' National Alliance Committee was holding meetings at the beginning of January.

However, the TMC's offer of two seats did not go down well with the Congress, which said it was too little. (PTI)

'We are not monsters,' says SC; permits withdrawal of PIL challenging fundamental rights

Only an advocate on record is entitled to act and plead for a party in the Supreme Court

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: "We are not monsters," the Supreme Court said on Thursday as it allowed a petitioner to withdraw a controversial PIL which sought the court's ruling to declare the fundamental rights provided to citizens under Articles 20 and 22 as 'ultra vires', or beyond the powers, of Part III of the Constitution.

The PIL was filed by Tamil Nadu resident PK Subramanian through lawyer Naresh Kumar, and the apex court had voiced displeasure over Advocates on Record (AoRs) unthinkingly appending their signature to such petitions.

While Article 20 deals with protection in respect of conviction for offences, Article 22 pertains to protection against arrest and detention in certain cases. Both are included in Part III of the Constitution that deals with fundamental rights.

Only an advocate on record is entitled to act and plead for a party



in the Supreme Court.

Advocates-on-Record cannot be reduced to mere signing authorities, the Supreme Court had observed on October 31, 2023 while slamming the practice of them signing petitions without examining their content.

A bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, since retired, had also appointed an amicus curiae to

assist the court and sought suggestions to improve the AoR system.

A galaxy of bar leaders including Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Adish Aggarwala and its former chief Vikas Singh had appeared in the case.

"We are not monsters. We will permit you to withdraw the case," a bench comprising Chief Justice

D Y Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Satish Chandra Sharma said.

The CJI, however, said the AoRs must realise the responsibility which they have to shoulder.

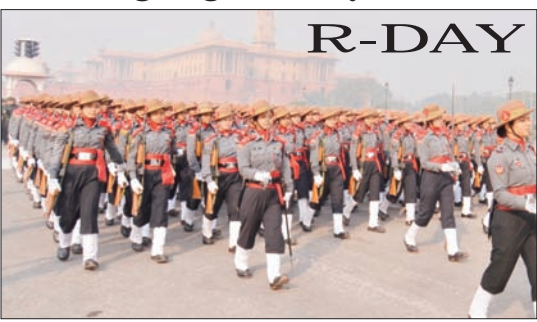
"You (AoRs) have a very important responsibility. It is not that you file whatever comes to you (yeh nahi kuch haath mein aaya file kar do)," the bench said while closing the case.

The bench had earlier said an AoR cannot merely be a "signing authority" and will have to take the responsibility for what they file in the apex court.

On October 31, the apex court had noted in its order, "We are in a way troubled by the fact that a recognised advocate-on-record of this court could have signed such a petition."

The bench had said it wanted the amicus and the AoR association to sit together and address the concerns flagged by the court. (PTI)

15 SSB personnel who killed 'most wanted' Naxalites in Bihar get gallantry medals



NEW DELHI, Jan 25: Fifteen SSB personnel who neutralised six 'most wanted' Naxalites in two operations in Bihar have been awarded the police medal for gallantry on the eve of the 75th Republic Day.

The police medal has come to the paramilitary force that guards unfenced Indian frontiers with Nepal and Bhutan for the operations undertaken in February 2022 in Lakhisarai district and another in July 2020 inside the Valsuki Tiger Reserve. Some personnel who were involved in both the operations were given the bravery medal for each encounter.

The first operation, under the supervision of commanders Deepak Singh and M K Pandey, led to the killing of two 'dreaded' Naxals at 'Ghoghi Kodasi' in Lathiya Kol forest area of Lakhisarai, the official citation said.

Lakhisarai provides a corridor for movement of armed Naxal cadres towards Jharkhand.

The SSB teams, drawn from the 32nd and 35th battalions, along with a unit of the local police, were fired upon by the Maoists first when they were trekking through a narrow jungle pass between two hills.

The gunfight lasted almost three hours and Commandant Singh prepared a well-coordinated plan, perfect execution, and exemplary cohesion at the time of crisis leading to the killing of two CPI (Maoists) cadres on the spot while a third, Arjun Koda, suffered bullet injuries and he surrendered before the security forces a few months after this operation, the citation said.

These Maoists carried rewards and were among the 'most wanted' in the state, a senior officer told PTI.

The other personnel awarded the gallantry medal in this operation include head constable Pradeep Kumar, constables Asim Toppo and Ganesh Singh Rana among others.

The second operation where the SSB personnel were awarded the gallantry medal pertains to the killing of four top Naxal 'commanders' and seizure of a dump of arms and ammunition from the tiger reserve. (PTI)

66 per cent decline in terrorist incidents in J-K after removal of Article 370: Shah

JAMMU, Jan 25: Asserting that a new era of peace has begun in Jammu and Kashmir, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the union territory has witnessed a 66 per cent decline in terrorist incidents and an 81 per cent drop in civilian killings since the scrapping of Article 370.

Addressing a function via videoconferencing, Shah credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for transforming Jammu and Kashmir, which was "known for terrorism", into a tourism hub.

Shah virtually flagged off 100 e-buses in Jammu and handed over appointment letters to Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service (JKAS) officers and compassionate appointees.

"I want to tell you that there has been a fall of 66 per cent in terrorism-related incidents. There has been a decline of 81 per cent in civilian killings and 48 per cent in killings of security forces after the scrapping of Article 370," he told the gathering.

This shows that a new era of happiness, peace and normalcy has begun in Jammu and Kashmir, he said.

The Centre revoked Article 370, which accorded a special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, on August 5, 2019. The government also divided Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

Shah said 2,654 organised stone-pelting incidents took place in Jammu and Kashmir in 2000 but no such incident took place in 2023.

"As many as 132 organised shutdowns took place in 2010 but there was none in 2023. As many as 112 civilians lost their lives in stone pelting in 2010 but no civilian life was lost in stone pelting in 2023. As many as 6,235 civilians were injured during the period (2010)," he added.

The minister said terror financing has also been curbed in Jammu and Kashmir.

"Properties are being sealed and attached. A lot of terror organisations have been banned to curb their activities," he said.

Praising Modi, Shah said the prime min-



ister has transformed Jammu and Kashmir, which was "known for terrorism", into a tourism hub.

When Article 370 was scrapped, several leaders who had been taking advantage of it and had made democracy a joke said it would not have any effect on Jammu and Kashmir. But there has been a huge change, the home minister said.

"The era of bomb blasts, firings, stone-pelting and shutdowns has been replaced by education, schools, colleges, medical colleges, management institutions, industries and infrastructure. This is a big change that Jammu and Kashmir is going through," he said.

Jammu and Kashmir received investments worth ₹ 297 crore in 2019-20 and this increased to ₹ 2,153 crore in 2022-23, he said.

"Nearly 6,000 crore of investments are in the pipeline. This shows progress," he said, adding that Jammu and Kashmir's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has increased from ₹ 1 lakh crore in 2014-15 to ₹ 2,27,927 crore in 2022-23.

Shah further appealed to the youth of Jammu and Kashmir to enrol themselves as voters and become part of the democratic setup of the country.

"The youth of Jammu and Kashmir who carry computers in their hands instead of stones are connected and contributing to the progress of Jammu and Kashmir. Over 7 lakh youths have taken part in sports and this is a big thing," he said. (PTI)

Justice PB Varale sworn-in as SC judge, apex court gets full strength

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: Karnataka High Court Chief Justice P B Varale was on Thursday administered the oath of office as a Supreme Court judge by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud here. The swearing in function was held in the Supreme Court premises, a day after the Centre cleared his name for judgeship. With the swearing in, the top court has attained its full strength of 34 judges, including the Chief Justice of India, and would for the first time have three sitting judges from the Dalit community. The other two sitting judges from the Scheduled Caste community are Justices B R Gavai and C T Ravikumar.

While recommending Justice Varale's name earlier this month, a five-judge SC Collegium headed by CJI Chandrachud said it took into consideration the fact that he is among the senior-most high court judges and is the only high court chief justice from the Scheduled

Caste. A vacancy arose in the apex court following the retirement of Justice S K Kaul on December 25 last year. Justice Varale's appointment came within a week of the SC Collegium recommending his name.

"In exercise of powers conferred by clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution of India, the President is pleased to appoint Shri Justice Prasanna Bhalachandra Varale, Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court, to be a Judge of the Supreme Court of India, with effect from the date he assumes charge of his office," a law ministry notification read. While recommending Justice Varale's name, the collegium had observed that the Supreme Court had operated almost throughout last year with full strength of 34 judges and, therefore, could achieve the distinction of recording an unprecedented rate of disposal by disposing of 52,191 cases in the calendar year 2023. (PTI)

Key roads to temple town closed amid huge rush Ayodhya Ram temple: Darshan timing extended

AYODHYA (UP), Jan 25: The extended timing to offer prayers at the new Ram temple in Ayodhya came into effect on Thursday with 'darshan' being allowed from 6 am as key roads leading to the temple town remained closed to regulate vehicular movement.

Authorities have implemented strict security measures in Ayodhya amid a huge rush of people following the January 22 consecration ceremony. Rapid Action Force and Central Reserve Police Force personnel have been deployed outside the temple and roads from Basti, Gonda, Ambedkarnagar,

Barabanki, Sultanpur and Amethi blocked 15 kilometres ahead of their borders with Ayodhya.

On Wednesday, the temple management decided to let people offer prayers from 6 am to 10 pm, and allotted 15 minutes for 'aarti' and 'bhog' from 12 noon. Earlier, it was 7 am to 6 pm with a two-hour break in between.

On Thursday, devotees started arriving in the temple town on the occasion of 'Paush Purnima' and thousands were seen taking a holy dip in the Sarayu river.

Ayodhya Commissioner Gaurav Dayal earlier said, "We are

trying to ease the situation. We are allowing emergency vehicles and vehicles carrying perishable items to move into Faizabad but the entry into Ayodhya town is still closed." Vehicles from nearby districts have been prohibited from entering Ayodhya district, he added.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday held a meeting with officials in Lucknow to review the steps taken for crowd management and advised VIPs planning to visit the temple to inform authorities in advance. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

BJP needs Rahul to win

If @RahulGandhi has broken the law, why don't you go ahead and do the needful?

"You won't do that, because you are fully aware that he speaks the truth, you did not stand up for your neighbours in Manipur and are looting the people of Assam. He is merely echoing people's sentiments which scares you". In reply, Sharma said, "We need Rahul Gandhi during the election, Brother."

Following Sharma's reply, the Karnataka MLA said, "Bhaisaab! Even after ten years, you need your star campaigners Godhi media, CBI, IT, ED. Take them out of the equation and you will see your castles crumbling. 'Your leader cannot sit through a press conference or address without a teleprompter, forget about doing a Padyatra with the people,' he said.

Sharma alleged that the holding of the Yatra in Assam during the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony was a political conspiracy to create communal tension. "On the day of the Pran Pratistha ceremony in Ayodhya, he (Gandhi) had chosen to travel through minority-dominated districts of Nagaon and Morigaon to provoke a communal clash," he alleged.

"We got a glimpse of his intention to create disturbances in Guwahati, but we foiled such attempts. The state government has to keep the law and order situation under control," Sharma said.

Asked if he had a personal grudge against the Congress leader, the chief minister said, "Yes, I don't like Rahul Gandhi. It is personal, but this will be reflected politically when the party gets less votes than it did in 2019 and the Congress is defeated in most constituencies by huge margins of votes."

The chief minister also said that a media organisation has claimed that Gandhi was using a 'body double' during his bus journey which means that the person sitting in the bus and waving at the people from the window was 'probably not Rahul Gandhi at all'.

Asked whether Gandhi had really used a 'body double', Sharma said it was for the media to check and find out the truth.

Regarding Gandhi not being allowed to visit the birthplace of Assamese icon Srimanta Sankardeva at Batadrava, the chief minister said that nobody stopped him from visiting the sattr (Vaishnavite monastery)

"He was merely asked to go after 3 pm and not during the Pran Pratistha of the Ram Temple as the entire atmosphere was emotionally charged with the momentous occasion. Gandhi's arrogance, however, could not accept this suggestion and he created a situation to attract media attention," he said.

Sharma claimed that the Congress leader was not interested in going there as he was not dressed for the occasion. "He was wearing a T-shirt when men were allowed to enter the sattr wearing the traditional dhoti and kurta," the chief minister said.

He said that if Gandhi had regard for Assam's icons, he would have visited Ahom commander Lachit Barphukan's resting place, Bhupen Hazarika's memorial and Hajo's Poa Mecca and Hayagriva Temple which symbolises communal amity.

"In fact, a recce was also done by security forces at Kamakhya Temple but Gandhi chose not to visit the holy shrine," Sharma said.

He claimed that the Congress has lost its values as was evident from this Yatra.

The party has now shifted from the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi to that of urban Naxals.

The chief minister also showed photographs of the container accompanying Gandhi during the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Assam.

"It is a five-star Yatra which we cannot even imagine. There is a full-fledged dining room and he (Gandhi) did not even eat the meals prepared by the Congress workers at different places," Sharma claimed. The Congress Yatra, which began on January 18 in the state, concluded on Thursday, and the march entered West Bengal. (PTI)

Assam Police issues notice

to Bhupen Kumar Borah, directing him to appear before the Jorhat Police on January 31, 2024, at 11 AM.

"The investigation of Jorhat PS Case No. 20/2024 U/S-120(13)/115(11)/143/147/188/283/323/353 IPC R/W Sec. 3 of PDP Act...revealed reasonable grounds to question you. Hence, you are directed to appear before the Investigating Officer on 31/01/2024 at Jorhat PS at 11 AM," reads the notice to Bhupen Borah.

The police have also issued sections 120(B), 115(II), 143, 147, 188, 283, 323, 353, and Section 3 of the PDP Act in this regard.

Notices have also been issued to Jorhat District Congress president Putul Borgohain and general secretary Abhijit Phukan to appear before the investigating officer (I/O) Hirok Jyoti Chngmai on January 21.

However, Phukan, citing being out of station, plans to appear on January 29 and expressed concerns about the alleged harassment by the government. On the other hand, Borgohain has sought time.

APCC working president Rana Goswami has also received a notice to appear before the police on January 31. It is worth mentioning that on January 18, the yatra deviated from the approved path, resulting in chaos, confrontations with law enforcement, and alleged property damage.

Himanta launches sports

He further thanked Oil India Limited and Numaligarh Refinery Limited for joining hands with the state government for this initiative.

Sharma also said that both the high performance sports training and rehabilitation centre and Olympic Values Education Programme would be very helpful in building high capacity sports persons who are capable of resonating Olympic Values required for excelling in major sports events.

"It will also help in fostering Olympic ethos and values besides providing a fillip for the holistic sports development in the state," he stated.

The chief minister also urged upon the sports fraternity across the state to come forward and make use of the state-of-the-art high performance sports training and rehabilitation centres in Guwahati and Jorhat.

Reiterating the top-most importance that the state government is to sports, the chief minister said that his government is hosting Khelo India University Games besides taking steps for organising the National Games in the state after the Uttarakhand edition.

Giving a snapshot of the sports infrastructure that the government is creating, Sharma informed that a multi-purpose stadium has come up at Amingaon and the same will be built at Chandrapur with adequate facilities for players' hostels among others.

"A hostel with 500 accommodation facilities will be constructed at Sarusajai sports complex. Moreover, a slew of measures will be announced in the forthcoming budget of the state for the promotion of sports in the state," he added.

With regard to the Olympic Values Education Programme, the chief minister said that the programme is being implemented in association with the Olympic Foundation for Culture and Heritage and the Abhinav Bindra Foundation Trust.

The programme will be rolled out in schools to address the challenges of sedentary lifestyle, and other associated issues of the youth and athletes. Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Nandit Gorlosa, MP Pabitra Margherita, MLA Atul Bora, Olympian Abhinav Bindra and host of others were present at the function which was organised by the Sports and Youth Welfare Department.

12 Products of Arunachal

"We now have a total of 20 products with the coveted GI Tag -- the highest among all Northeastern states. This accomplishment, achieved in a short span since the initiative's inception in 2021, sets us apart from others, including Assam and many states. Congratulations to all involved in this incredible journey of preserving and promoting our cultural treasures," he added.

Cheetahs' 2nd home in India almost ready: Officials

S African experts to review preparations in February

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: A South African delegation, including wildlife experts, will arrive in February to assess the conditions at Madhya Pradesh's Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary which is slated to become the second home of cheetahs in India, officials said on Thursday.

They also said the two female Namibian cheetahs who recently gave birth to a total of seven cubs will be released in the wild only when the weather conditions improve.

An official said that a South African delegation will visit India in February for an assessment of the preparations at the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary.

"Thereafter, a call on bringing the next batch of cheetahs will be taken," the official said.

SP Yadav, additional director general of Forests at the Environment Ministry, had earlier told PTI that the next batch of cheetahs will be imported from South Africa and introduced into the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Another official told the news agency that 90 per cent of the work to prepare the wildlife sanctuary for cheetahs has been completed.

Gandhi Sagar is about a six-hour drive from Kuno. It is spread across 368 square kilometres and has an additional 2,500 sq km area surrounding it.

The official quoted above also said the mother cheetahs and their cubs will not be released into the wild until weather conditions in the Kuno National Park improve.

Officials reported on Tuesday that Namibian cheetah Jwala gave birth to four cubs on January 20. In early January, another Namibian cheetah, Asha, gave birth to three cubs.

This is Jwala's second litter and comes after a gap of 10 months.

The officials said that compared to other female cheetahs, Jwala is a wilder animal. She



avoids humans and remains alert even when resting, a typical cheetah behaviour of remaining careful of bigger and stronger predators all the time. Jwala (Namibian name Siyaya) had given birth to four cubs last March. Three of the cubs succumbed to extreme heat while the sole survivor is being raised under human care for future wilding.

The official said the mother cheetahs and their cubs are being kept in larger enclosures to avoid extreme weather and for better monitoring, which is difficult in the wild.

"We will release them in the wild as soon as weather conditions improve," the official said.

The recent births have taken the number of cubs at the Kuno National Park to eight at present, with seven being born this month.

The total number of cheetahs at the Kuno National Park currently stands at 21 (six males, seven females and eight cubs).

While January recorded the birth of seven cubs, it also witnessed the death of Shaurya -- an adult Namibian cheetah -- on January 16.

Officials said they do not know the reason for Shaurya's death as they have not yet received his

post-mortem report.

Since last March, seven adult cheetahs, including Shaurya, have died due to various reasons.

The seven adult cheetahs -- three females and four males -- that died include Sasha, Uday, Daksha, Tejas, Suraj, Dhatri and Shaurya. The first six fatalities occurred in a six-month period between March and August 2023.

Jwala and Asha are among the cheetahs translocated to India from Namibia under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Project Cheetah, aimed at re-introducing the only large carnivore species that went extinct in independent India.

The first batch of eight cheetahs was introduced in India in September 2022. The second batch of 12 cheetahs was flown in from South Africa last February. The much-vaunted cheetah conservation project, however, has drawn sharp criticism over the animals' deaths.

According to officials, one of the biggest challenges faced in the first year of managing the cheetahs in India was the unexpected development of winter coats by some of the animals during the Indian summer and monsoon, in anticipation of the African winter (June to September).

The winter coat, combined with high humidity and temperatures, caused itching, prompting the animals to scratch their necks on tree trunks or the ground. This led to bruising and exposing the skin, where flies laid eggs, resulting in maggot infestations and, ultimately, bacterial infections and septicemia, leading to the deaths of three cheetahs, an official explained.

India plans to import cheetahs that do not develop thicker winter coats, Yadav said earlier.

For the cheetahs already in Kuno, he said the plan is to administer prophylactic medicine before the arrival of monsoon to prevent infection. (PTI)



Hrithik Roshan on playing Indian Air Force officer in 'Fighter': The uniform has some magic

MUMBAI, Jan 25: Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan says he felt a certain "responsibility and strength" when he donned the uniform to play the role of an Indian Air Force officer in his upcoming film "Fighter", directed by frequent collaborator Siddharth Anand. Also starring Deepika Padukone and Anil Kapoor, the movie is billed as a tribute to the sacrifice and patriotism of the Indian armed forces. It is set to release in theatres across the country on Thursday. In "Fighter", Hrithik plays Squadron Leader Shamsheer Pathania, whose aviator call sign is "Patty". Director Sid-

dhart Anand, releasing "Fighter" on the first anniversary of his last project "Pathaan," emphasized the film's high-action sequences and patriotic fervor. While some have drawn comparisons to the "Top Gun" franchise due to aerial shots, Roshan disagreed, asserting that the two films differ significantly in character dynamics.

Commending Anand's pursuit of perfection, Roshan spoke of their fruitful partnership, having previously collaborated on films like "Bang Bang!" and "War." Anand, known for his dedication to getting every detail right, has seen growth throughout their collabora-

tions. Deepika Padukone, fresh from the success of "Pathaan" and "Jawan," anticipates a hat-trick with "Fighter," where she plays Squadron Leader Minal "Minni" Rathore. The actor stressed that the budget is not a deciding factor for her in choosing projects, citing examples of her mid-budget films like "Finding Fanny" and "Gehraiyaan."

Anil Kapoor, essaying the role of Group Captain Rakesh Jai "Rocky" Singh in "Fighter," praised co-star Hrithik Roshan as a sincere and honest actor, ranking him with the best in the world. Kapoor emphasized the need to

emulate Roshan for a prolonged career in the film industry.

Director Siddharth Anand, reflecting on the unexpected success of "Pathaan," acknowledged that such massive success can't be planned and attributed it to luck, love, and team effort. He hopes for a similar impact with "Fighter," focusing on audience love rather than just box office numbers.

As "Fighter" gears up for release, the team remains hopeful for a special connection with the audience, aiming for love and appreciation over mere commercial success. (PTI)



Tom Hollander says he once received seven-figure bonus for 'Avengers' in place of Tom Holland

LOS ANGELES, Jan 25: Actor Tom Hollander says he once mistakenly received Tom Holland's seven-figure bonus pay-check for Marvel Studios' superhero film "Avengers" Hollander, known for starring roles in "Pride and Prejudice" and "The White Lotus", revealed the pay error on "Late Night with Seth Meyers" on Wednesday, adding that people often confuse the two actors due to their similar sounding names.

One day, Hollander said,

he found a message in his mailbox containing a pay slip, intended for "Spider-Man" star Holland, labelled as the first tranche of a box office bonus for one of "The Avengers" films.

"It was an astonishing amount of money. It was not his salary. It was his first box office bonus. Not the whole box office bonus, the first one. And it was more money than I'd ever (seen). It was a seven-figure sum," the actor told Meyers.

Hollander also said he

had received the email right after he hosted a BBC show for which he earned a sum of USD 30,000 to do.

"My feeling of smugness disappeared very quickly," he added.

The actor also said he was sometimes introduced to "excited, then confused, then disappointed children" who probably thought they were meeting Spider-Man.

Hollander currently stars in FX's anthology "Feud: Capote Vs The Swans", in which he plays writer Truman Capote. (PTI)

PARINEETI CHOPRA EMBARKING ON MUSICAL JOURNEY

'Lucky to start whole new chapter in my life'

MUMBAI, Jan 25: Actor Parineeti Chopra on Thursday announced that she is officially making a foray into music as a singer. Chopra, who has a background in classical music, has signed up with Entertainment Consultant LLP, a renowned name in the entertainment world affiliated with TM Ventures Pvt Ltd and TM Talent Management. "Music, to me, has always been my happy place.. I've watched countless musicians all over the world performing on the stage and now it's finally my time to be a part of that world."

"I feel so lucky, blessed and stressed about starting off a whole new chapter in my life and I honestly can't describe how excited I am to embark on this musical journey. A journey that gives me the opportunity to have two careers at once! How fun (and chaotic). So here's to embracing the unknown and facing all my fears and kicking off my singing debut," Chopra wrote in a post on Instagram.

The 35-year-old actor is not completely new to the music world as she had sung the track "Maana Ke Hum Yaar Nahin" for her 2017 movie "Meri Pyaari Bindu". Chopra said she is excited to collaborate with Entertainment Consultant for her singing ventures. "We've got some amazing things in store for you all this year. I hope you're as excited for this as I am," she wrote. On the movie front, the actor was last seen in "Mission Raniganj", co-starring Akshay Kumar. She will next appear in filmmaker Imtiaz Ali's "Amar Singh Chamkila", based on the life of the iconic music star of Punjab from the 1980s. (PTI)



NETFLIX SETS JANUARY 26 RELEASE FOR 'ANIMAL'

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: Ranbir Kapoor-starrer "Animal" will start streaming on Netflix from January 26, the platform announced on Thursday.

Directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, the film also stars Anil Kapoor, Bobby Deol, Rashmika Mandanna and Triptii Dimri.

"Animal", which hit the screens on December 1, went on to become one of the highest earning Hindi films of 2023 despite being criticised for its poor portrayal of women, misogyny and graphic violence.

Ranbir Kapoor said he is looking forward to the digital premiere of his film on Netflix. "We are absolutely overjoyed by the response 'Animal' received in theatres and now I am glad that audiences worldwide will get a chance to watch it in the comfort of their homes. The opportunity to showcase our work globally is truly special," the actor said in a statement.

In addition to Hindi, "Animal" will also be available in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, on Netflix. In a press release, the streamer described the film as an action drama exploring "the intricacies of modern-day relationships, focusing on the dynamics between a father and son", played by Anil Kapoor and Ranbir Kapoor. "Animal" is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Murad Khetani, and Pranay Reddy Vanga. (PTI)



Composing a little bit closer to my heart than singing: 'Naatu Naatu' singer Kaala Bhairava

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: He may have got his first break as a singer, but Kaala Bhairava of "Naatu Naatu" fame says his childhood dream was to become a composer.

Bhairava was launched into the Telugu film industry as a singer with 2011's "Rajanna", whose music was composed by his father MM Keeravaani. He has also sung for Tamil and Kannada films.

His debut as a music director came eight years later with "Mathu Vadalaru", starring his younger brother Sri Simha. Since then, he has composed music for Telugu films, including "Karthikeya 2", "Colour Photo", "Mukha-chitram", and "Happy Birthday".

"Composing is a little bit closer to my heart than singing. That was where I was more invested in since I was a kid, but as I grew up,

playback singing is where I got my first break. I became an established composer years later. It's funny how things turned out but I grew up wanting to be a composer," the 30-year-old told PTI in an interview. His latest project is the third season of the animated series "The Legend of Hanuman". Bhairava said he has been associated with the Disney+ Hotstar show since its first season as the background score composer. This time, he was approached to sing the 'Hanuman Chalisa Ansh'. As a "devout follower" of Lord Hanuman since childhood, the National Award winner said he instantly boarded the series.

"I feel this is one of the best things that happened to me in terms of working on this creatively... This is something I was very excited about," he added.

Staying true to the lyrics of the 'Hanuman Chalisa Ansh' without altering its essence was "one of the challenging aspects" in the composition process, said Bhairava.

"The very thing I did when I had to start composing was that I tried listening to all the existing versions of the 'Hanuman Chalisa' by artists across the country and it actually helped a lot. I wanted to make my version of the 'Hanuman Chalisa Ansh' stand out and sound different from the already existing ones. I realised that the beauty of the Chalisa was that you can't restrict the narrative to a particular mood or tempo. This is musically so rich that we can have that liberty to present it differently," he said.

Bhairava along with Rahul Sipligunj sang the Oscar-winning Telugu track "Naatu

Naatu", but life hasn't changed at all for the singer post awards and accolades. Keeravaani composed the song from "RRR", directed by SS Rajamouli.

"The way I approach my composing process or I go about my work has remained the same before and after (awards). Getting recognition on platforms like that obviously gives you that confidence boost, validates your work. But the process and everything else... Nothing has changed."

Along with name and fame, has the singer-composer also received an opportunity to sing for heroes in the Hindi belt?

Bhairava, who has dubbed his Telugu songs from "RRR" and the "Baahubali" films in Hindi, said he is "manifesting" a chance to sing in the language. (PTI)



Humble Icons: Federer amazed by how much Neeraj has achieved



ZURICH, Jan 25: With their fame, success and weighty legacy sitting lightly on their shoulders, it came as no surprise when Roger Federer and Neeraj Chopra gushed about each other during a recent rendezvous, which was marked by mutual respect, admiration, and stories of triumph and dedication.

Switzerland Tourism set the ball rolling by uniting the 20-time Grand slam winner and the Olympic and world champion from India at Zurich's La Reserve

Eden au Lac for a casual and free-flowing conversation.

It is not often that one gets to see two dedicated, charming, and passionate sportspersons who have done their respective countries proud with their achievements, occupying the same space.

"I am amazed by how much Neeraj has achieved personally and for his country through his grit and determination.

"It's been great to meet him here in Zurich," said Federer, the global ambassador for Switzer-

land Tourism.

Federer, known for his longevity and prowess on and off the tennis court, warmly welcomed Chopra who is also Switzerland Tourism's Friendship Ambassador, to his home country, which was "a dream-come-true-moment" for the 26-year-old Indian. "It's a dream come true for me to meet Roger Federer here in Zurich. I have always admired his skill, his spirit of true sportsmanship and his ability to inspire millions around the world.

"Today, however, what inspired me the most was his humility and his easy-going charm that made me feel so comfortable in his presence.

"We had a wonderful time exchanging notes about our respective passions and life's experiences on and off the field," said Chopra.

While Federer presented Neeraj with an autographed tennis racquet, Chopra handed the former World No 1 a signed India jersey from the Asian Games.

Chopra — who became India's second individual Olympic gold medalist at the pandemic-affected Tokyo Olympics in 2021 — is hoping to repeat the feat at the Paris Olympics later this year.

Since winning the gold medal at the Tokyo Games, Chopra has scripted more history by claiming a silver and an unprecedented gold medal at the World Athletics Championships.

He also retained his Jakarta Asian Games gold medal at Hangzhou last year. (PTI)

INDIA'S LAST VICTORY DATES BACK TO THE CHAMPIONS TROPHY IN 2013

Our time will come: Rohit optimistic despite long ICC Trophy drought

HYDERABAD, Jan 25: India skipper Rohit Sharma firmly believes that their "time will come" to win an elusive ICC trophy, a milestone they have been chasing for the past decade.

The recent World Cup 2023 final loss to Australia saw India's quest for an ICC title stretch to 10 years with their last victory dating back to the Champions Trophy in 2013 under the leadership of MS Dhoni.

"The last three years have been great. Except winning the finals of ICC trophies, we have won everything," Rohit said while talking to JioCinema on the sidelines of their opening Test against England here.

"That's one thing we've not been able to accomplish, but I think time will come. All we need to do is stay in a good mindset, not worry too much about the past, because you can't change the past.

"What you can change is what is going to come next, so all of us are quite focussed on that. We are playing our hearts out."

After being runners-up in the T20I World Cup in 2014, the team faced semi-final exits

in the 2015 ODI World Cup, the 2016 T20 World Cup, and the 2019 ODI World Cup.

The agony continued with defeats in the finals of the 2017 Champions Trophy along with a semi-final loss in the 2022 T20 World Cup.

They also lost the finals of the first two World Test Championship cycles.

Sharma, known for his aggressive style of stroke-making, further spoke about his approach to captaincy.

"I wanted to bring about certain change, players going out there and playing with a lot of freedom. I wanted to take the statistical side of cricket out of this team.

"Numbers are overrated. In India, we do talk a lot about numbers and all of that. I got five hundreds in the 2019 World Cup, but we still lost. The hundreds don't matter.

"I may think about them may be 20 years later after I retire, but what did we get? I wanted the trophy.

"If you don't win trophies, I don't think those 5-6 hundreds make too much sense. Team sport is all about winning trophies, not about individual accomplishments," he added. (PTI)



Bopanna one match away from first Major trophy, reaches Australian Open final with Ebden

MELBOURNE, Jan 25: Rohan Bopanna earned himself one more opportunity to win a Grand Slam title by reaching the Australian Open men's doubles final with Australian partner Matthew Ebden after prevailing in a tense semifinal against Tomas Machac and Zhang Zhizhen here Thursday.

The second seeded Indo-Australian pair faced some stiff resistance from their rivals in the third set but eventually the experience of playing Super Tie Breakers helped them nail the finish with a 6-3 3-6 7-6 (10-7) scoreline after two hours and two minutes.

Zhang (WR 54) and Machac (WR75) are quality singles players, featuring in the top-100 list and their powerful hitting from the baseline did make it a tough contest for the experienced Bopanna and Ebden.

A day after he was assured of becoming the world number one player, Bopanna as usual served well on big points and also managed to pull out the strokes and tricks when they needed the most. Bopanna has reached the US Open final twice (2013, 2023) but a Major trophy has eluded him in his career.

Now at the fag end of his career at the age of 43, he will have the

chance to tick that box on Saturday.

Bopanna and Ebden will face Italian pair of Simone Bolelli and Andrea Pavanetti, who beat German team of Yannick Hanfmann and Dominik Koepfer 6-3 3-6 7-6 (5) in the other semifinal.

"On the circuit, we have played lot of Super Tie Breaks, that gets us sharp. They (Machac and Zhang) return extremely well, we had to make sure we serve well and on spots. This partnership (with Ebden) has been good," Bopanna said after the match.

Asked about his success despite the age, Bopanna said, "A lot of stuff goes behind the scenes. A big team is part of me. I just made sure I stay focussed on what I need to do to get to ready, that is mobility and recovery. I do not look to lift heavy, just do yoga. I feel mental strength helps me."

Ebden said winning in front of the home fans is special.

"I could not be happier, winning before the home fans is special. These guys are super dangerous players. The doubles specialist against singles specialist is great (contest). It's good for the fans. We have been working hard together for years. One more match to go," he said. (PTI)

India face Switzerland in Men's Hockey World Cup opener

BENGALURU, Jan 25: The Indian men's hockey team will open its campaign against Switzerland in Pool B of the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup in Muscat on Sunday. The Simranjeet Singh-led side will take on Egypt in the evening on the same day.

The Indian team's final group game will be against Jamaica on Monday.

The other teams in the fray include the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan and Poland in Pool A.

Pool C features Australia, Kenya, New Zealand, and Trinidad & Tobago, while Pool D includes Fiji, Malaysia, Oman and the United States.

Top-two teams from each will make the quarterfinals slated on Tuesday.

The semi-finals will take place on the same day, while

and the final is set to take place Wednesday.

India had pipped arch-rivals Pakistan 4-4 (0-2 SO) in the final of the 2023 Men's Asian Hockey5s World Cup Qualifier to qualify for the tournament.

Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist Simranjeet will have defender Mandeep Mor as his deputy, while Suraj Karkera and Prashant Kumar Chauhan are the two designated goalkeepers.

Mandeep will have the support of Manjeet in the defence.

The midfield will be manned by Mohammed Raheel Mousen and Maninder Singh.

The forwardline features Pawan Rajbhar, Gurjot Singh, and Uttam Singh, complementing the leadership of Simranjeet. (PTI)

Randhawa becomes first Indian to win Senior Euro Q-School

ANTALYA, Jan 25: Veteran golfer Jyoti Randhawa became the first Indian to finish on top in the Senior European Tour's Qualifying School and claim full playing rights in the Legends Tour this season.

Randhawa finished with a 12-under 276 total and four shots ahead of his nearest rivals. Randhawa, who turned 50 in 2022 and played his first few events on the Senior Tour in Europe in 2023, shot rounds of 71-67-68-70 for 276 at the Gloria Golf Club in Antalya.

Three players France's Lionel Alexandre (72), Simon Griffiths (72) of England and Spaniard Carlos Balmaseda (72) were tied for second at 280, while Andrew Marshall of England with 75 claimed the fifth and final card on offer. The final stage of Legends School is often considered tougher than the main event as

only five cards are available from the field. The field had 55 players this year and many were past European Tour champions.

"It feels really good," said Randhawa, a three-time (2000, 2006, 2007) Hero Indian Open winner. "I got a few starts last year but I thought if I come to Q School and get in the top five, I'll get to play the whole year, and here I am. I'm happy that I won and now I can plan my season," he added. Randhawa, a former DP World Tour player, eight-time Asian Tour winner and one-time winner in Japan, was two shots ahead after three rounds and made it four by the end of the fourth round.

Randhawa played and missed the cut at the Senior Open last year, when he had Jeev Milkha Singh, who finished in Top-15, and Arjun Atwal for company.

Jeev played 10 events in 2023 and had Top-10s in four of them and finished 13th on the Merit list to keep his card.

"I'm pretty young for starting out (on the Legends Tour). If I can go in there and win a tournament then that makes everything a lot easier. My aim is to win one and take it from there," Randhawa said.

Randhawa's final round included birdies on the final two holes for a total of 12-under 276. He had started the final day with a two-shot lead and remained in control of the tournament in blustery conditions on the New Course. When Randhawa made another gain on the 10th, it looked like he would coast to victory. However, a double bogey on the 13th and a bogey on the 15th opened the door for France's Lionel Alexandre, Simon Griffiths of England and Spaniard Carlos Balmaseda. (PTI)

Neeraj Chopra says India must host global athletics competitions within two-three years

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: He has single-handedly raised the profile of Indian athletics internationally and Olympic champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra now wants the country to go a notch higher in the pecking order by hosting global events in the next two-three years.

India is set to bid for the 2029 World Athletics Championships but Chopra said the country can host other global competitions of smaller scale before that.

"It will be good if we host 2029 World Championships but 2029 is a long way to go. I think India can host some big global competitions like Continental Tour event (of World Athletics) before that," Chopra told PTI in an interview facilitated by Switzerland Tourism.

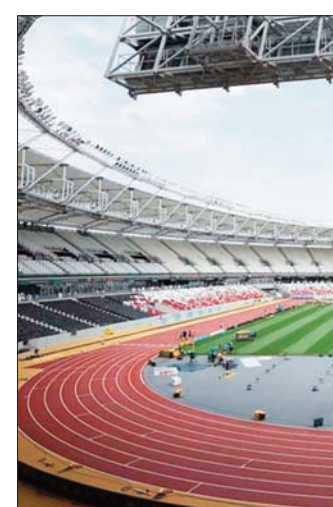
"This kind of global event (like Continental Tour event) will keep Indian fans interested in athletics. If international

track and field stars come to India and compete against Indian athletes, it will be good for the country's athletes as well as for the fans," he opined.

Continental Tour is an annual series of track and field competitions held under the aegis of World Athletics. It forms the second tier of international one-day meetings after the Diamond League.

The reigning world champion said holding global events in India will also create awareness among fans. He also said that live telecast or streaming of global events like Diamond League Meetings, especially where Indian athletes are competing, should be easily available for Indian fans.

Chopra, who is targeting a successful defence of his Olympic gold in Paris Games this year, said he will start competing in May. That means, his



pre-Olympic competition schedule will be of two months or a little over that. The Paris Games begin on July 26.

"I am yet to chalk out a final plan. Probably, we will do that in March. But most probably I

will start competition in May," he said.

The Doha leg of the Diamond League is scheduled for May 10 and he had started his season last year from the Qatar capital in the same prestigious competition.

The 26-year-old Chopra is currently in Switzerland for a "pre-planned" short vacation. During the course of his stay, he met tennis legend Roger Federer, who is the global ambassador of Switzerland Tourism, in Zurich. He will be returning to South Africa for training soon.

"It's a dream come true for me to meet Roger Federer in Zurich. I have always admired his skill, his spirit of true sportsmanship and his ability to inspire millions around the world," Chopra said about his meeting with Federer.

"What inspired me the most was his humility and his easy-

going charm that made me feel so comfortable in his presence.

We had a wonderful time exchanging notes about our respective passions and life's experiences on and off the field," said Chopra, who is Switzerland Tourism's Friendship Ambassador to India.

Asked which aspects of his game he would work on before the Olympics, Chopra said, "I will work a bit on technique and then on strength.

"Also, I want to remain injury-free. In the past few years, there were small injuries which caused interruptions in my schedule. So, I have to also work on small exercises to save myself from injuries.

"There should not be any distractions because of those kind of small injuries. I want to be fully fit and give my best in Paris. That is my focus," he signed off. (PTI)

Open Rabid Chess Tournament in Guwahati today

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Guwahati Chess Academy is set to organise an Open Rapid Chess Tournament on January 26th at the Academy, commemorating Republic Day. The top five players will receive cash prizes along with a trophy. Additionally, the top three players in the Under-7, Under-9, Under-11, Under-13, and Under-15 categories will be awarded trophies. Trophies will also be presented to the top three female players. The tournament will be conducted

in a Swiss league system, consisting of 6 rounds in rapid time control format.

The first round is scheduled to commence at 10 am on January 26, with the prize distribution ceremony taking place at 4 pm on the same day. Participation is limited to a maximum of 40 players, and entries will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Pranab Kumar Nath, a FIDE Arbiter, will serve as the Chief Arbiter for the tournament. This was stated in a press release.

Bazball gets Indian makeover

Jaiswal, spinners put hosts in strong position on day one

HYDERABAD, Jan 25: After spinners put England batters through a harsh scrutiny, Yashasvi Jaiswal rolled out his own version of 'Bazball' en route to a crushing fifty as India posted 119 for one to take the upper hand on day one of the opening Test here on Thursday.

At close, Jaiswal (76 batting, 70 balls, 9x4, 3x6) and Shubman Gill (14 batting) were at the crease and the hosts are 127 runs in arrears of England's anaemic first innings total of 246, which was built around skipper Ben Stokes' headheaded 88-ball 70. Around Stokes, England batsmen crumbled as the spin trio of Ravichandran Ashwin (3/68), Ravindra Jadeja (3/88) and Axar Patel (2/33) rudely nudged them back to reality of batting on an Indian pitch that offers barrowful of turn and grip even from day one. But when the Indian openers came out bat the RGI Stadium, pitch appeared to have lost its bite and the England tweekers looked like a defanged lot.



Jaiswal wrapped himself with the leader's cape despite the presence of his captain Rohit Sharma (24, 27 balls) at the other end, tearing into England bowlers with gusto.

The gap between runs and balls could give the left-hander's innings a hue of carelessness but it was anything but that. Jaiswal started his and the team's innings with a clipped boundary to square leg off pacer Mark Wood, but that was just the appetizer as the left-hander offered a harsh welcome to Tom Hartley to international cricket.

The 22-year-old smashed

the England left-arm spinner for two sixes in his first over, one over long-on and the other in front of the square. His twinkling feet and fast hands made it tough for the England spinners to settle into a rhythm against him.

Jaiswal and Rohit added 80 runs in just 12.1 overs to give their side a wonderful launching pad. It came to an end when Rohit gave a catch to Stokes off left-arm spinner Jack Leach while trying to clear him over the long-on.

But for the rest of the innings, it was a futile toil for the England bowlers as this could be

the beginning of a long and tiring tour for them. To make it even more exasperating for them, they have already exhausted all the three reviews for this innings as well.

However, the whole atmosphere was different when the Indian spinners were operating – the ball bounced, turned and gripped to leave the English batters an edgy group except a few small passages.

One of them came in the post-lunch session when Joe Root (29, 60 balls) and Jonny Bairstow (37, 58 balls) added 61 runs for the fourth-wicket as England attempted to stay above the fast-rising water.

Root and Bairstow, generally, relied on sweep and the reverse avatar of that shot occasionally to gather runs. However, Root was culpable of being too premeditative and it eventually led to his downfall. Jadeja hit a fuller length which resulted in a top-edge off Root's bat that flew to short fine leg where Jasprit Bumrah did not have to strain himself much to complete the catch. (PTI)

Mary Kom dispels retirement rumours, reaffirms commitment to Boxing

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 25: Indian boxing legend Mary Kom set the record straight on Thursday, refuting recent reports about her retirement. The six-time world champion addressed the media to clarify her statement made at a public event on Wednesday, emphasising that she has not officially announced retirement.

Contrary to widespread speculation, Mary Kom revealed that she remains committed to the sport and has not made any formal declaration regarding her retirement.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the Olympic medallist expressed her disappointment over being misquoted and assured that she would personally address

the media when the time comes for such an announcement.

"Dear Friends from the media, I haven't announced retirement yet and I have been misquoted. I will personally come in front of the media whenever I want to announce it," Mary Kom stated.

The confusion stemmed from an event in Dibrugarh on January 24, 2024, where Mary Kom was inspiring students. She clarified that her statement at the school event was focused on the challenges posed by the age limit for Olympic participation. "I was attending a school event in Dibrugarh on 24 January 2024 wherein I was motivating children, and I said, 'I still have a hunger to achieve in sports, but the age limit in the Olympics doesn't allow

me to participate though I can carry on with my sport,'" explained Mary Kom.

The veteran boxer affirmed her dedication to maintaining fitness and continuing her involvement in the sport. She reassured her fans and the public that when she decides to retire, she will make a formal announcement.

"I am still focusing on my fitness, and whenever I announce retirement, I will inform everyone. Please do correct this," Mary Kom urged, seeking clarification and correction of the misinformation surrounding her supposed retirement.

Mary Kom's statement brings clarity to the situation and reaffirms her passion for boxing, leaving her future in the sport open for now.



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Government of Assam



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National Health Mission, Assam

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- Day biting mosquitoes
- Intense biting in the morning and afternoon
- Bites indoors as well as outdoors
- Container breeders so make sure you empty them every time you see one
- Source reduction is the most effective strategy to control Aedes mosquitoes
- It transmits Dengue and Chikungunya




Anopheles Mosquito

- It bites around midnight
- Breeds in slow moving, partly shady streams with grassy margins, breeds in small transient and shady ground pools with leaf litter in forest areas (e.g. Elephant foot prints)
- It transmits Malaria



Culex Mosquito

- Bites in the morning and evening, particularly dusk and dawn
- Breeds commonly in irrigation channels, and in dirty polluted water like pond ditches, swamps, rice fields, mud pools etc.
- It transmits Japanese Encephalitis and Filariasis



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Government of Assam



Republic Day 2024






Best wishes to the people of Assam on the occasion of 75th Republic Day.


Let us all resolve to work together for the progress of the country and the state on this auspicious occasion.

26 January 2024

Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

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