

6 WORLD

● Maldivian Prez Muizzu says Indian troops to be sent back by May 10

● Zelenskyy confirms he's thinking about dismissing the country's military chief

8 NATION

United Nations Security Council

● Govt should work on de-politicisation of UNSC sanctions on terrorists: Parl Panel

● Cong govt's protest in Delhi against 'injustice' to State, not against BJP



Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Hamara sankalp Viksit Bharat

Empowering youth through skilling

Training of **1 crore 50 lakh** youth under PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana, employment opportunities created



Noisy Opp forces Guv to cut short speech ● Drugs worth ₹ 1,882 cr seized in Assam since May 2021: Kataria

Stormy start to budget session of Assembly

CM tables Bill to make job tests free of unfair means

GUWAHATI, Feb 5: The state government has proposed to impose punishment of up to 10 years of imprisonment and a fine of up to ₹ 10 crore on anyone found involved in unfair means in recruitment examinations, the state assembly was informed on Monday.

Introducing the Assam Public Examination (Measures for Prevention of Unfair Means in Recruitment) Bill, 2024, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma

said the proposed legislation will give full immunity to any government officer implementing the clauses in "good faith".

Sarma, in the memorandum of the Bill, said it empowers the government to punish any person, including examinees, indulging in any attempt to leak, produce, sell, print or solve question papers directly or indirectly to assist a candidate and hold tests in

undesignated centres.

Such a person will be imprisoned for a minimum of five years, extendable up to 10 years, and shall also be liable to be fined at least ₹ 10 lakh, which can go up to ₹ 10 crore, the Bill mentioned.

"...in case of default of payment of fine, such person shall also be liable to be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term of two years," it added.

Besides, an examinee just indulging in unfair means is liable to be punished with imprisonment of up to three years and also liable to be fined a minimum of ₹ 1 lakh, and another nine months of jail in case of default in payment, the tabled legislation said.

The Bill will also empower the government to debar any examinee from taking any public examination for a period of two years if he or (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Govt proposes 10-yr jail, ₹ 10 cr fine for guilty

Bill proposes to make all offences as cognisable, non-bailable



GUWAHATI, Feb 5: The opposition on Monday forced Governor Gulab Chand Kataria to cut short his speech on the first day of the Budget Session by creating a noisy scene and displaying placards over various issues.

After reading for just three minutes of his 88-page speech, Kataria had to jump to the last paragraph as an unrelenting opposition, comprising Congress, CPI(M) and Independent MLAs, continued to

disrupt his address to the House, where the annual Budget for 2024-25 will be presented on February 12. The moment Kataria started to read his speech, Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia and Congress MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha brought to the Speaker's notice the defective audio system.

The audio system in the new

Assembly building, which is holding its second session since starting operation last year, is inaudible in most of the corners inside the House, including the press gallery.

Speaker Biswajit Daimary, however, did not intervene and asked the opposition members to sit down while the governor was delivering his speech.

The opposition members then rose to their feet and kept shouting

about the audio system.

A section raised various issues and showed placards with different slogans, including protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, reintroducing Old Pension Scheme (OPS) by scrapping National Pension System (NPS), stopping hazardous eviction drives and resignation of home minister for failing to nab the culprits who attacked Congress state chief Bhupen Kumar Borah during 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'.

With the governor continuing his speech, the Congress and Independent MLAs kept shouting with their slogans to draw Kataria's attention. After the Governor left the House, the Speaker informed the members that the speech was considered to be read.

Daimary then invited all the members of the House to the customary tea party after the Governor left, but the opposition boycotted it due to "injustice to the public" by the government.

Earlier, delivering his speech Kataria said the state police has seized ₹ 1,882 crore worth of drugs and different forms of narcotics since Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma assumed charge in 2021.

Kataria said the state government in recent times has made achievements in the areas of anti-insurgency (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Move to bring all tourism activities under one law

GUWAHATI, Feb 5: The state government on Monday proposed a new law with a view to setting up a comprehensive framework to bring all tourism activities under it. Introducing The Assam Tourism (Development and Registration) Bill, 2024, Tourism Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah said it is aimed at revitalising and promoting the industry in the state.

"The tourism sector holds significant economic potential for Assam, contributing to job creation, revenue generation and overall development of the state," he said in the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill.

The legislation will seek to address several critical aspects of tourist management, infrastructure development and promotion, Baruah said. One of the key features of the Bill will be the establishment of the Adventure Safety Audit Committee for conducting risk assessment of all adventure sites and activities in air, land and water. This new law will also enforce registration of all businesses and (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Udalguri station gets facelift worth ₹ 14.31 cr

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 5: In a bid to further enhance rail facilities in Northeast and Assam, ₹ 10,369 crore have been allocated in the interim Budget 2024-25 for Railway infrastructure projects. Under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS), 60 stations in Northeast are being redeveloped with world class amenities/facilities. Among the selected railway stations, Udalguri railway station in Assam will receive a significant facelift under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme at a cost of ₹ 14.31 crore. The revamping of this station will provide modern state-of-the-art amenities to the railway users of the nearby areas.

Udalguri railway station is an important station on the Rangiya - Murkongselek section under Rangiya Division of NFR. The existing station building will be extended with improved facade with facilities like retiring rooms and waiting room with latest amenities for the convenience of the passengers. Divyangjan friendly ramps and toilet facilities with modern amenities like two lifts and a 5-meter-wide Foot Over Bridge will also be provided. New toilet block will be built separately for male and female passengers. Improved parking facilities with beautification of circulating area are also planned. All the platforms will be provided with shelter and resurfaced with marble stone, tiles etc. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Confederation of International Small Tea Holders' headquarters to shift to India

GUWAHATI, Feb 5: The headquarters of the Confederation of International Small Tea Holders (CITS) will shift to India from China, an official statement said.

The decision was taken recently at the 25th session of the FAO Intergovernmental Group on Tea (IGG on Tea) held in Guwahati recently, its India coordinator Joydeep Phukan said in the statement.

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) IGG on Tea, which is under the United Nations, also decided to take up the issue of climate change and assess carbon footprint of tea plantations globally, Phukan said.

The FAO IGG on Tea is the highest global platform for tea wherein all tea-producing and consuming nations deliberate on trends in production, consumption, trade and prices of

tea, including regular appraisal of the global market situation and short-term outlook.

It considers changes in national policies and examines their international effects as they pertain to current and prospective markets.

The meeting was held in Assam for the first time, with 77 delegates attending the session over three days from January 31.

India took over as the chair of the FAO IGG on Tea from the United Kingdom for the next two years and the session was presided over by Saurav Pahari, deputy chairman of Tea Board India.

Among the key decisions taken was to move the headquarters of CITS, which was set up as per a proposal of an earlier IGG meet, from China to India. The central and Assam governments informed

the IGG on Tea the steps it has taken for development of small holders.

Setting up a dedicated research and development centre at Tea Research Association (TRA), Tocklai, in Assam's Jorhat district was among the government initiatives.

Under the auspices of the FAO, adequate funding would be explored for major work on climate change for all tea-growing countries, Phukan said, adding it was also decided to assess the carbon footprint of the tea supply chain up to the consumer level.

The meeting also discussed the strategic framework for the group for the period 2022-31 as per the mandate of the FAO.

Sri Lanka will host the next IGG session after two years, Phukan added. (PTI)

Third term of NDA govt not too far: PM at LS

Modi predicts at least 370 seats for BJP, 400 for NDA

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday expressed confidence that the NDA will get more than 400 seats and the BJP will win at least 370 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. Modi said he was convinced that the opposition parties have lost the courage to contest elections and have resolved to stay on the opposition benches for a long time.

"I can gauge the mood of the nation, it will definitely give NDA more than 400 seats and the BJP at least 370 seats," the prime minister said replying to the debate in Lok Sabha on the motion of thanks on President's address. He said the third term of the government was not too far.

"At most 100-125 days are remaining," he said, referring to the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. "Abki baar," Modi said, and BJP members joined him in unison to say "400 paar". "Even Kharge ji is saying the same thing," Modi said referring to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge's statement in Rajya Sabha.

He said the NDA's third term would be the one that would see big decisions and lay the foundation for the next 1,000 years.

Prime Minister Modi tore into the Congress, attacking it on the issue of dynastic politics and saying it



had a good opportunity to play a good opposition but failed in that role. He said some opposition leaders were keen to change their parliamentary seats, while some others were planning to move to Rajya Sabha.

"I appreciate the resolution the opposition has taken. Every word of their speeches has confirmed my confidence and that of the country that they have resolved to stay there (in the opposition) for a long time," Modi said and blamed (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Karbi students body opposes RNSS demand for land rights

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 5: All India Karbi Students Union (AIKSU) has strongly expressed its resentment on the demand made by Rachnatmak Nonia Sanyukta Sangh (RNSS) for protection of land rights for settlers on VGR/PGR land in West Karbi Anglong, as mentioned in the memorandum submitted by RNSS to President of India, Droupadi Murmu.

In a press conference held here at Autonomous State Committee (ASDC) office here on Monday, the AIKSU president, Easterson Tisso said on January 17 that the RNSS submitted a memorandum to the President of India during her visit in Shillong. The AIKSU president said that in point No 4 of RNSS has demanded for the protection of land rights for settlers on VGR/PGR land in West

Karbi Anglong. Majority of inhabitants on this land are Hindi speaking community, Tisso stated.

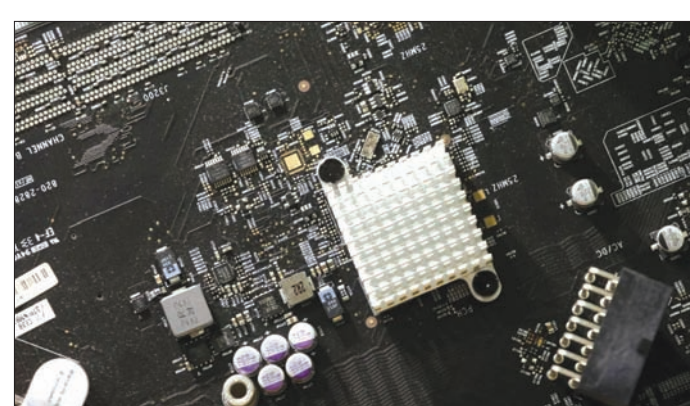
Tisso said, "The State government has launched an online portal Mission Basundhara scheme for settlement of individuals belonging to ST/SC/OBC/MBOC categories who are settled until 2011, under the Minimum Needs Programme. The allottees and their legal heirs, who possess undisputed land and families rendered landless due to erosion and ethnic violence have been rehabilitated. However, in Karbi Anglong, where majority of PGR/VGR land inhabitants are migrants from Bihar and other states. Unlike the above mentioned criteria for settlement, they have not settled due to undisputed possession, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

For use in High-power applications IIT-Guwahati-led research develops cost-effective, semiconductors

GUWAHATI, Feb 5: A cost-effective method to grow a special semiconductor with the potential to significantly enhance the efficiency of power electronics used in high-power applications even at very high temperatures has been developed in a collaborative effort led by researchers of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati, a statement said on Monday.

A team of IIT-Guwahati came together with researchers of IIT-Mandi and Institute of Sensor and Actuator Systems, Technical University Wien, to develop this special semiconductor which can be used in high-power applications like electric vehicles, high-voltage transmission, traction and industry automation.

The research team has developed an innovative and cost-effective



technology to grow ultrawide bandgap semiconducting material named gallium oxide.

This is achieved through a customised low-pressure chemical vapour deposition (LPCVD) system, the statement said.

Emphasising on the need of this research, Ankush Bag, assistant professor, Department of Electronics and Electrical Engineering and Centre for Nanotechnology, IIT-Guwahati, said, "Power semiconductor devices are (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

JMM-led coalition govt of Champai Soren wins trust vote 47-29

RANCHI, Feb 5: Jharkhand's JMM-led coalition government headed by Chief Minister Champai Soren on Monday comfortably won the vote of confidence, days after his predecessor was arrested by the ED in a land fraud case.

While 47 MLAs voted in favour of the confidence motion, 29 legislators opposed it in the 81-member assembly. Independent legislator Saryu Roy abstained. Seventy-seven MLAs were present in the assembly during the voting. After winning the trust vote, the ruling coalition legislators said it was a big slap on the face of the BJP that allegedly hatched a conspiracy to destabilise a democratically elected government by unleashing central forces.

The ruling alliance comprises the JMM, Congress and the RJD while it is supported from outside by the lone CPI(M)(L) legislator. The BJP-

led opposition has 26 legislators of the saffron party and three of the AJSU Party.

JMM legislature party leader Champai Soren took oath as the chief minister of Jharkhand on February 2, after his predecessor Hemant Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on January 31 in a money laundering case.

Champai Soren was given 10 days to prove his government's majority on the floor of the house. He decided that the trust vote will be held on February 5.

Hemant Soren, who is in ED custody now, took part in the trust vote following permission granted by a special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court. After winning the trust vote, Champai Soren said, "We will work with full pace on the schemes started by Hemant Soren." (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Stock markets settle lower on fag-end selling; Reliance, Airtel drag

MUMBAI, Feb 5: Benchmark Sensex fell back by 354 points on Monday due to selling in index major Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel and Maruti amid weak trends from Asian and European markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 354.21 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 71,731.42 on fag-end selling. During the day, it hit a high of 72,385.93 and a low of 71,602.14.

The Nifty fell by 82.10 points or 0.38 per cent to close at 21,771.70. Sensex and Nifty has gained around 0.7 per cent in the previous session. After a flat opening, benchmark indices moved in a narrow range before a sharp fall in the final hour. FMCG, telecom, financials and IT shares were on the back while pharma, auto and energy shares advanced.

"The Indian market witnessed a sharp fall during the final hours of today's trading. The robust US job data for January indicates that the expected rate cuts from the Fed in



the coming year may be less imminent. "This is reflected in the recent sharp climb in US bond yields to above 4% levels, which prompted investors to book profit from the post interim Budget rally amidst elevated valuations," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The current drop in crude prices, provides support and restrains the decline, Nair added.

Among the Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Bharti Airtel, Maruti, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Titan, Hindustan Unilever, JSW Steel, UltraTech Cement, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries were the major laggards.

Tata Motors jumped nearly 6 per cent after the company on Friday reported a two-fold jump in net profit at ₹ 7,100 crore for the December quarter.

Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Mahindra and Mahindra, Tata Steel, NTPC and Tata Consultancy Services were the other gainers.

"Indications are in favour of consolidation to continue and expect Nifty to respect the 21,450-21,600 zone, in case the profit taking extends," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

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

European markets were quoting marginally lower. The US markets ended in positive territory on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.53 per cent to USD 76.92 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 70.69 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 440.33 points or 0.61 per cent to settle at 72,085.63 on Friday. The Nifty went up by 156.35 points or 0.72 per cent to 21,853.80. (PTI)

Airtel posts 54 pc rise in net profit to ₹ 2,442 crore in Q3

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Bharti Airtel on Monday posted a 54 per cent jump in consolidated net profit to ₹ 2,442.2 crore in the December quarter, mainly on account of growth in high value customers.

Airtel prepaid mobile customers are required to pay at least ₹ 155 for about a month-long service as the company had raised rates by 56 per cent in January 2023.

Bharti Airtel Managing Director Gopal Vittal has indicated a need for further increase in mobile services rates. Return on investment made by the company is still low at 9.4 per cent.

The company had registered a profit of ₹ 1,588.2 crore in the year-ago period, a regulatory filing said on Monday.

Despite devaluation of African currencies during the period, the consolidated revenue from operations during the third quarter of the ongoing fiscal grew 5.8 per cent to ₹ 37,899.5 crore from ₹ 35,804.4 crore in the year-ago period.

"Revenue from India business sustained its momentum and grew sequentially by 3 per cent, while consolidated revenue was impacted by the devaluation of the Nigerian Naira and Malawian Kwacha," Bharti Airtel Managing Director Gopal Vittal said in a statement.

The total customer base of Bharti Airtel grew about 8 per cent on a year-on-year basis to 55.1 crore in the December quarter with India customer base growing to 39.7 crore, up 7.5 per cent.

The telecom firm's Africa customer base grew 9.1 per cent to 15.17 crore while its customer base declined marginally to 30 lakh.

India revenue of Airtel grew 11.4 per cent year-on-year to ₹ 27,811 crore during the quarter.

Its Average Revenue Per User (ARPU) -- a key parameter for telecom operators growth -- in the country increased 7.7 per cent to ₹ 208 from ₹ 193 a year ago. "We remain on course with our strategy of premiumisation that helped us add 7.4 million 4G/5G customers and exit the quarter with an industry-leading ARPU of ₹ 208. Even at this ARPU, our return on capital employed, however, continues to be low at 9.4 per cent. To ensure industry health, tariff repair is extremely critical," Vittal said.

Bharti Airtel's capital expenditure during the quarter stood at ₹ 9,274 crore, comprising ₹ 7,756 crore in



India and ₹1,515 crore in Africa.

"We rolled out around 12.3k towers in the quarter to further strengthen our network coverage and provide seamless connectivity. We have rolled out about 45k towers in the last 12 months to ensure coverage and connectivity in rural as well as urban areas," Airtel said. The company said it added 2.82 crore 4G/5G data customers to its network over the last year and its average data usage per data customer stood at 22 GB per month.

In India, Airtel 4G and 5G customer base increased 13 per cent on a year-on-year basis and 3.1 per cent on quarter-on-quarter basis to 24.49 crore account for 73.3 per cent of its total customer base.

Bharti Airtel India mobile data usage increased 8.2 per cent on year-on-year basis and 1.2 per cent quarter-on-quarter to 22 GB per customer per month during the quarter under review.

The home business of Airtel, which comprises fixed broadband line service, grew 23 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

The fixed broadband service customer base of Bharti Airtel in India grew 29.2 per cent to about 73 lakh, however, APRU declined 6.5 per cent to 583.

The net debt of Bharti Airtel declined marginally to ₹ 2.02 lakh crore from ₹ 2.09 lakh crore a year ago.

The company prepaid high-cost debt of ₹ 8,325 cr in January, thereby making the total repayment of ₹ 16,349 cr in current financial year to the Department of Telecom towards part prepayment of deferred liabilities pertaining to spectrum acquired in the 2015 auction.

The total employee base of the company grew 4.12 per cent to 17,924. (PTI)

Paytm shares fall for 3rd day; hit lower circuit limit

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns Paytm brand, fell by another 10 per cent to hit its lower circuit limit, as investors continued to dump the stock following the RBI's crackdown.

The stock tanked 10 per cent to ₹ 438.35 -- its lowest trading permissible limit for the day -- on the BSE. It plummeted 9.99 per cent to hit its lower circuit limit of ₹ 438.50 on the NSE.

In three days, the stock has tumbled over 42 per cent, wiping out ₹ 20,471.25 crore, from its

market valuation.

The regulator last week ordered Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, a restricted bank that can take deposits but cannot lend, to not take any further deposits or conduct credit transactions or carry out top-ups on any customers accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, cards for paying road tolls after February 29. Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) is an associate of One97 Communications Limited (OCL).

One97 Communications holds 49 per cent of

the paid-up share capital (directly and through its subsidiary) of PPBL. Vijay Shekhar Sharma has a 51 per cent stake in the bank.

While users have the option to switch to other wallets, and FASTag services etc being provided by other vendors, Paytm management has said that PPBL is in discussion with RBI to comply with their direction for continuing the business.

Paytm sees an impact of ₹ 300-500 crore on its annual operational profit. (PTI)

Ather's Rizta Set to Redefine Comfort in Family Scooter Segment

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 5: Ather Energy, a prominent player in India's electric scooter market, has been generating anticipation for its forthcoming family-oriented scooter, the Rizta, over the past few weeks. A recent social media post by Ather CEO Tarun Mehta showcased a comparison of Rizta's seat with those of two leading scooters in the same category. The images revealed that the Rizta boasts the largest seat in the family scooter segment, promising enhanced comfort for both riders and passengers.

Tarun Mehta's tweets, which garnered significant attention on social media, emphasized Ather's commitment to meeting consumer demands for a larger scooter. Mehta's post stated, "There are a lot of folks who love @atherenergy but wanted a bigger scooter from us. So when we were designing our family scooter, we made sure we tick that box. I wanted to give you all a sneak peek at what we mean by 'bigger.' This will be the biggest seat in the market! Launching on our Community Day 2024 real soon!" Although the competing brands were not explicitly mentioned, it was evident that the comparison involved seats from the Ola S1 range and the Honda Activa, both renowned for dominating their respective segments.

Despite limited information about the Rizta, recent sightings during testing suggest Ather's intention to target consumers seeking a family-oriented scooter. Observations of the scooter being tested with two riders and additional load underscore its practicality and suitability for real-world scenarios. The sizable floorboard area further reinforces its family-oriented design approach. Ather has announced the launch of the Ather Rizta during Ather's Community Day 2024, indicating an imminent official announcement.

China markets slump to 5-year lows as regulator promises to protect small investors

BANGKOK, Feb 5: Chinese shares gyrated on Monday, sinking to 5-year lows after market regulators sought to reassure jittery investors with a promise to crack down on stock price manipulation and "malicious short selling".

Shares in Shanghai and the smaller market in Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, swung between big losses and small gains throughout the day. The markets have languished on heavy selling of property shares, which are enduring a slump in the real estate market.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission held a meeting Sunday focused on stabilising the markets, state-run Chinese media reported. A notice on its website appeared designed to reassure individual investors who account for more than half of trading volume.

It vowed to crack down with harsh punishment for insider trading and other violations.

"We must sincerely listen to the voices of the broad numbers of investors, respond to their concerns and protect their rights as investors," the CSRC said in a notice.

Those promises followed comments by various top officials on the need to restore market stability.

The head of the economic crimes unit of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the country's top public prosecutor's office, said in an interview in the Securities Times, a publication of the ruling Communist Party's People's daily.

"Protecting the rights of investors is



the top priority," said Zhang Xiaojin. "We will continue to increase the intensity of punishing financial crimes in key areas, and severely crack down on crimes that seriously disrupt the order of the capital market in accordance with the law."

Market observers said there were signs Monday that the authorities had, as is often the case, ordered big institutional investors to step up buying of state-owned banks and other heavyweights. Many of those shares saw strong gains.

The Industrial & Commercial Bank of China gained 2.3%, Bank of China rose 2.8% and the Agricultural Bank of China rose 2%. But overall, shares still mostly lost ground, and technology stocks were among the biggest decliners.

The Shenzhen Component index lost 1.1% after dipping as much as 4.4%. The Shanghai Composite index shed 1% to 2,702.19, having lost 3.5% earlier.

"The situation in the Chinese equity market appears tumultuous, reflecting broader concerns about regulatory uncer-

tainty and government intervention," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a report.

"Despite attempts by state authorities to stabilize the market, investor sentiment remains fragile, reflecting deep-seated concerns about the reliability of government policies and the regulatory framework," Innes said.

Wilder swings were seen in the CSI 1000 index, an exchange-traded fund that fell as much as 8.7% on Monday before regaining some of the losses to close down 6.2%. The CSI 1000 often is used to track so-called "snowball derivatives," investment products that can pay big gains but also can result in exaggerated losses.

Markets were calmer in Hong Kong. The benchmark Hang Seng index, which has also recently seen significant losses, edged 0.2% lower, to 15,510.01.

Chinese companies have lost billions of dollars worth of market value as investors shifted away from the markets in Hong Kong and the mainland in search of better returns. Tokyo's benchmark, the Nikkei 225 index, is trading at near 35-year highs, though that is partly due to changes in investment rules that are drawing money into the market.

Apart from the troubles in China's property market, where developers are struggling to repair their balance sheets after the government cracked down on excessive borrowing several years ago, a slowing of China's economy, the world's second largest, has also taken a toll. (AP)

India's Jan services PMI hits 6-month high amid strongest upturn in new business since mid-2023

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: The services sector growth in India rose to a six-month high in January as new business expanded at a faster pace amid buoyant demand from domestic and external clients, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose to 61.8 in January, up from 59 in December, pointing to the sharpest rate of expansion in six months.

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

The survey is compiled from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 service sector companies.

"India's services PMI rose to a six-month high in January. New business expanded at a faster pace and managers' expectation for future activity was strong. The new export business index accelerated, signalling that India's services exports remained robust," Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC, said.

New export sales rose at the fastest pace in three months. Monitored firms signalled gains from clients across the globe, including Afghanistan, Australia, Brazil, China, Europe, the UAE and the

US. On the prices front, companies noted a further increase in their overall expenses at the start of the 2024 calendar year, with food, labour and freight identified as the key sources of cost pressures.

However, with the vast majority of panellists opting to leave their charges unchanged and only 6 per cent hiking them, output prices rose to the least extent in 11 months.

According to the survey, business confidence has strengthened further. Besides demand strength, firms expect investment and productivity gains to induce output growth in the year ahead.

Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index rose from 58.5 in December to 61.2, indicating the sharpest upturn since mid-2023.

Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data.

"January data highlighted a further acceleration in growth of Indian private sector output, amid quicker increases at both goods producers and service providers," the survey said. (PTI)

We are revolutionising the way financial transactions are optimised: M2P Fintech's Prabhu Rangarajan

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Digital rupee, robo advisors, personalised banking, data analytics regtech (regulatory technology) are among the mega trends reshaping the fintech sector in the post pandemic era, says M2P Fintech Co-Founder Prabhu Rangarajan.

"When it comes to our products, incorporating the latest yet relevant and scalable technology is at the heart of everything we do," Rangarajan told PTI about the acquisitive company which fuels the digital ambitions of banks, lenders, fintechs and other financial services players.

The company, he said, is not just growing but "revolutionising the way financial transactions are understood and optimised". It powers a large percentage of fintech transactions in India with a client base that spans more than 300 banks, 800 fintechs and over 100 NBFCs (non banking financial company). The company has a direct presence in 27 markets globally - a presence it is keen to steadily expand.

The venture backed by marquee investors like Tiger Global Management and Omidyar Network has achieved 'break-even' in 2023, and expects to continue fund-raising to accelerate ambitions across international markets and to widen product suite, Rangarajan said.

The Chennai-based M2P Fintech sees Amazon Web Services (AWS) as more than a service provider, much like a partner in the mission to build sustainable finan-

cial infrastructure.

Excerpts from the interview:
Q: What was the vision of the founders for M2P Fintech?

A: One of the biggest opportunities we saw before kickstarting M2P Fintech was the gap between a bank's tech offering and what was needed in the market by brands to cater to their customers. Recognising this gap, we began our journey to enable banks to become nimbler and help them offer APIs (application programming interface) to set brands on their product journey.

Moving forward, we built exhaustive, in-house tech capabilities, diversified our product offering across segments. We work with banks, NBFCs, financial institutions to digitise their tech layer across banking, lending and payments landscapes and, on the other end, we work with consumer internet and large tech companies across verticals ranging from food tech, regtech, travel and more.

Today, M2P Fintech stands at the threshold of innovation and collaboration. We have got a client base that spans over 300 plus banks, 100 plus NBFCs, and more than 800 fintechs. We power a large percentage of fintech transactions in India and have a direct presence in 27 markets worldwide. It has been an incredible journey, and the best part is we're just getting started.

Q: What are the broad trends defining the fintech industry?



A: The post pandemic era is truly the digital era with transformations across industries at a rapid pace and fintech is no different. Be it the digital rupee, robo advisors, personalised banking, data analytics or regtech, several trends are reshaping our industry.

When it comes to our products, incorporating the latest yet relevant and scalable technology is at the heart of everything we do. It is no one product but a seamless integration wherever possible. With our recent acquisition Goals 101, a data and AI ML (artificial intelligence, machine learning) led organisation, we are looking forward to leveraging their tech capabilities in the most prominent areas like customer service, product and portfolio management, risk, and compliance.

Q: What are M2P Fintech's expansion plans?

A: Today, we have a presence in

27 global markets, and we look at steadily expanding this further.

We are looking at these markets not just as new territories, but as lands of immense possibility where we can bring our innovative digital banking solutions and really make a difference.

There's continuous demand from our banking clients in these international geographies. It is not just about expanding our footprint; it is about deepening our relationships with existing clients and reaching new ones. If you look at Amazon, they began their journey in the US but expanded globally with deep understanding of commerce in each of the markets they're present in. Drawing inspiration from them, we are building new capabilities and adding local flavours in every market catering to their custom needs and regulations. We believe in going hyper local wherever we are present. In

short - we are not just growing; we are revolutionising the way financial transactions are understood and optimised.

Q: What are M2P Fintech's future plans on fund-raising?

A: We have successfully raised more than USD 110 million with marquee investors such as Insight Partners, Tiger Global Management, Beeneet, Omidyar Network, Flourish Ventures, Visa, MUFG, 8i Ventures and Better Capital.

M2P has achieved break-even in 2023, we expect to continue fund-raising to accelerate our ambitions across international markets, expand to newer markets and to widen our product suite which complements the existing products and supports customer acquisition.

Q: What is the outlook for 2024 when it comes to demand for your offerings?

A: A major chunk of the post pandemic era were the significant 'build-years' at M2P where we built and acquired several products and also focused on tweaking them at product and GTM (go to market) levels responding to market feedback. Last year was a watershed one for M2P. We successfully launched products that were of crucial importance to major banks in India, Middle East and North Africa, ASEAN and secured valuable contracts.

Boosting our GTM machine with large banks and the financial stability of breaking even is setting the stage up for steady growth in

2024.

We're one of the only global players with a flexible cloud native stack that makes deployment fast and flexible, the product breadth and the trust of having deployed at large-scale across products. To a digitally ambitious bank or lender, the opportunity to have their entire digital transformation done under one umbrella while being de-risked at the levels of flexibility, timeliness and stability by deploying with M2P is one of the strongest themes we see driving our growth in the near future.

Q: What did cloud technology allow you to do that you couldn't do before? What benefits have you experienced running on AWS?

A: AWS has been a game-changer for several product companies and we're no different. AWS as a cloud service provider has helped us overcome key operational challenges like scalability, flexibility, and security. AWS' advanced computing capabilities have enabled us to automate operations efficiently, process transactions faster, and handle complex data with ease.

When large companies were focused on virtualisation, AWS was the only one that took a product approach to cloud, similarly we're building a financial services cloud drawing inspiration from them. For us at M2P, AWS is more than a service provider - they are a partner in our mission to build sustainable financial infrastructure. (PTI)

BMW Motorrad Launches GS Experience Training Program

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 5: BMW Motorrad India has officially kicked off its highly anticipated training initiative, the GS Experience Level 1, 2024, across India. This program provides riders with a unique opportunity to explore the exceptional capabilities of BMW Motorrad's renowned GS series, ideally suited for the diverse terrains of India. The two-day event, facilitated by BMW Motorrad International Instructor Academy (IIA) certified trainers, promises an exhilarating experience tailored exclusively for owners of BMW's adventure motorcycles.

The GS Experience Level 1, 2024, marks a significant milestone in BMW Motorrad's commitment to adventure biking in India. This bespoke training program offers participants an immersive journey into the world-class performance of the legendary GS range. BMW Motorrad will conduct this intensive training program for GS owners in 13 cities across India, including Pune, Surat, Mumbai, Kolkata, Indore, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Chennai, Lucknow, Kochi, Bengaluru, New Delhi, and Chandigarh.

Vikram Pawah, President of BMW Group India, commented, "The GS is not just a motorcycle; it's a symbol of adventure. BMW Motorrad is revolutionizing the adventure biking landscape in India, with the indomitable Spirit of GS leading the way."

Rampant digital gambling plagues youths in Sootea

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 5: Many youths have depleted lakhs of hard-earned money from their parents due to addiction to online gambling at present. Numerous families in and around the greater Sootea area have to endure mental and physical torture inflicted by digitally addicted youths.

Online gambling is not legal in the state, yet the younger generation easily falls prey to it, losing everything in the process. The allure and excitement of online games attract many, while unscrupulous cyber gaming operators set traps to engage and exploit young individuals. There is little distinction between a drug or cocaine addict and a person addicted to digital activities. Only families ruined by online gaming can truly



understand the pain. Digital addicts exert physical and mental pressure on their parents and elders to release funds for online games or apps, spending hours immersed in gaming, neglecting their future.

An anonymous online gambler informed this correspondent that

some common online game sites include 1Xbet, Sat Sports, Color Prediction, Casino, Tinipatti, Ludoo, etc. He also mentioned that upon visiting these links, a QR code for online payment is provided, requiring a deposit to play games. According to reports, a boy

from Sootea lost Rs 1 lakh in a single day and continued to exhaust more in hopes of recovering the losses. Moreover, youths addicted to digital gambling often engage in anti-social activities like theft, burglary, chain snatching, etc. These digitally addicted individuals often go astray.

The state government has taken no steps to rehabilitate or counsel these individuals, nor to regulate online gaming within the state. On the contrary, prominent hoardings and signboards encourage the younger generation to engage in it. While our neighbouring country Bangladesh has enacted parliamentary acts to prohibit online gambling, our nation and state government seem to wait for more families to suffer and lives to be lost due to the adverse effects of these harmful digital games.

Karbi tribe indulges in Rongker festivities



HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, Feb 5: The Karbi

Litterateur's personal collections donated

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 5: The personal collections, as well as other books penned by the noted Assamese litterateur and poet Lt Budhindra Kr Boruah, along with all his bookshelves, have been handed over to the District Library, Nagaon, by his family members for conservation. The handover took place at a befitting function held at the library on Sunday. During the program, the participants commemorated the contributions as well as his dedication to Assamese literature. Noted poet Paran Kr Boruah urged the family members to provide two photographs of Budhindra Kr Boruah for preservation in the office of Nagaon Sahitya Sabha Bhavan.

Himanta congratulates musical legends for Grammy wins

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 5: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma enthusiastically commended on his social media platform X, the remarkable global recognition of India's musical excellence at the Grammys 2024. He extended heartfelt congratulations to the legendary Shankar Mahadevan and maestro Zakir Hussain for their outstanding achievement in winning the 'Best Global Music Album' category with their masterpiece, 'The Moment' by Shakti. The chief minister also commended the extraordinary collaboration between Zakir Hussain and Rakesh Chaurasia, the renowned flutist, which resulted in their prestigious win in the 'Best Global Music Performance' category for their remarkable contribution to 'Pashto'. CM Himanta Biswa Sarma celebrated these achievements as a testament to India's rich and diverse musical heritage resonating on the global stage, bringing pride to the nation.

Jayanta Mallabaruah announces approval of e-Bills

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 5: Jayanta Mallabaruah, the minister for Public Health Engineering, Skill, Employment & Entrepreneurship, and Tourism Departments, took to his social media X to share a moment of delight. He announced the achievement of a significant milestone, with the approval of 10,000 e-Bills spanning all divisions. Notably, the average Turn Around Time (TAT) for these approvals was an impressive 12 days.

Expressing satisfaction in the seamless and efficient e-Bill approval process, the minister highlighted its role in discontinuing the traditional physical payment process. This transition has not only streamlined the approval procedures but has also significantly contributed to the ambitious goal of achieving 100 percent household coverage under the Jal Jeevan Mission in Assam. Jayanta Mallabaruah emphasised that this achievement aligns with the larger vision of fulfilling the dream of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for 'Har Ghar Jal'.

Diphu gears up to host 32nd Assam State Anesthesia Conference

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 5: Preparations are in full swing to host the 32nd Assam State Anesthesia Conference by the Department of Anesthesia and Critical Care of Diphu Medical College & Hospital (DMC&H) from February 9 to 11 here at DMC&H.

The Department of Anesthesia and Critical Care, in its statement, stated that anesthesia is of immense importance in modern medical science. Anesthesia is essential to perform all surgeries, minor and major cases. Anesthesia is increasingly used in various treatments ranging from ICO to snake bites.

The conference is organised in association with Strace Academy Welfare Society under the banner of the Indian Society of Anesthesiologists (ISA), Assam. The conference will include a day-long workshop on anesthesia, i.e., on February 9. The conference will be attended by hundreds of anesthesiologists from different parts of Assam. Students of anesthesia PG courses, central representatives of the Indian Society of Anesthesiologists, and several senior anesthesiologists from different states of India will also be participating in the conference.

The conference will be held for the first time in the green hilly district of Karbi Anglong, and there is enthusiasm among the anesthesiologists, senior local doctors of other departments, and medical personnel involved in medicine, the organiser said.

During the program, breast and cervical cancer screening were conducted by trained oncology staff Dipti Moni Das, Ranjana, Jubilee, Dimpi, Nilotpal, Tarali under the supervision of an oncologist. Dr Sanjeev K Gupta performed mouth cancer screening, cleared cancer-related doubts, and gave the final consultation to everyone. The chairperson of the program, Amita Gupta, urged the people attending the program to get cancer screened rather than being afraid of this disease.

The president of the Jagriti branch, Sharmila Lohia, Poonam Pandia, Rajiv Jain, Bishnu Daga, and other MYM members shouldered different responsibilities during the program. The event concluded with the screening of a total of 54 persons, witnessing an overwhelming response from the people of the locality in the significant efforts dedicated by the team of experienced healthcare professionals.



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 5: To mark World Cancer Day, Marwari Yuva Manch, Tezpur Jagriti branch organised a cancer screening camp for mouth, breast, and cervical cancers, along with blood pressure and sugar level check-up in collaboration with Tezpur Cancer Care Centre on Saturday at Marwari Dharamshala.

Dr Sanjeev K Gupta, senior consultant and head, department of Radiation Oncology, Tezpur Cancer Centre, attended as the chief guest in the program and delivered a cancer awareness speech on cancer risk factors, the present scenario of cancer in Assam & the North East, the importance of cancer screening, Cervix cancer vaccine, and the facilities available in Tezpur Cancer Centre. In his speech, he urged all to raise awareness to combat cancer and analysed the cancer risk factors, presenting the gloomy scenario of cancer in the North East region of the country.

Devotees participate in five day festivities

66th Lokhimon Karcho celebration

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 5: Lokhimon Dharma celebrated the 66th Lokhimon Karcho, commemorating the birth of the Lokhimon faith. The Lokhimon Karcho was celebrated in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi, as well as in other districts of Assam and in Arunachal Pradesh where there is a concentration of Karbi population.

Lokhimon Karcho is celebrated every year for five days, starting on February 3 to 7. It was on this day, February 5, 1995, that the Lokhimon faith was founded by Lokhimon Engti Hensek at Bapuram Tokbi village, Dolamora, in Karbi Anglong district. In 66 years, Lokhimon faith has spread to various parts of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and in other districts of Assam, such as Tezpur, Sonitpur, and North Lakhimpur, as



well as in Arunachal Pradesh. It has its four ashrams at Bapuram Tokbi village, Dolamora; Japralango, Rongnagar in Bakulia, and at Kokila in Arunachal Pradesh. These ashrams are called Dovan Longri Amei.

In the morning, the religious festival started at home with the cleaning and washing of knives, other tools, and vehicles. After applying red vermilion, children seek blessings from their parents. At Inglongchingri Lokhimon

Keshab Mahanta inaugurates Mukhya Mantri Bigyan Pratibha Sandhan prog

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 5: Keshab Mahanta, the esteemed minister of Health & Family Welfare and Information Technology, took a momentous step by inaugurating the Mukhya Mantri Bigyan Pratibha Sandhan program at IIT Guwahati. This progressive initiative, spanning a duration of five days and commencing on Monday, has been collaboratively organised by ASTEC and IIT Guwahati, embodying a collective commitment towards nurturing a fresh cohort of scientific leaders in the state.

The program stands as a testament to the visionary goals set forth by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who envisions a future where the state boasts a robust community of adept and innovative scientific minds. The Mukhya Mantri Bigyan Pratibha Sandhan program, with its focus on mentoring, seeks to inspire and guide as-



piring individuals, fostering their potential to become influential contributors to the scientific landscape of the region.

In attendance at the inauguration were key figures such as the secretary of ST&CC, deans from IIT Guwahati, the director of ASTEC, and esteemed professors from IIT. Their presence underscored the

collaborative effort invested in this initiative and highlighted the significance placed on the development of scientific prowess within the state. As the program unfolds over the next five days, it is poised to serve as a transformative platform, empowering the participants to emerge as future leaders in the field of science and technology.

Surojit Academy's Cultural Training Center stages play

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 5: The Assam Engineering Institute's Cultural Training Center, Surojit Academy, has been making significant contributions to Assam's cultural sphere. For the past 26 years, the academy has been providing substantial support to drama, folk art, and puppetry in Assam. The academy has been presenting various theatrical productions reflecting the lives of Assamese people. On Sunday, the drama 'Nari' was staged at the Surojit Academy complex. The script and direction of the drama were done by Simanta Sarma, a recipient of the prestigious felicitation from the Cultural Ministry of India and a professor at the SBMS College, Suakuchi.

The drama presented at the academy beautifully portrays the story of women's lives. While some wicked circles constantly lead them astray, and although they sometimes engage in activities for their enjoyment or entertainment, women can also uplift themselves,



overcome various problems, and contribute to society's progress and development. This is precisely what the drama aims to showcase.

Every aspect of the drama, including acting, has been presented beautifully by the artists. There was no sign of any hesitation among the performers. Each scene of the drama was presented with great fi-

nesse. The audience was captivated by the direction of the drama. The music was composed by Kitartha Sarma, stage design and decoration were done by Ganesh Boro and Himangshu Das respectively. At the same time, the lighting and sound were managed by Pranab Jyoti Rabha. The art director and assistant director of the drama is Binita Devi.

Each scene of the drama was skillfully acted out by actors Dhruva Jyoti Kalita, Deepa Mahanta, Hardik Sarma, Pranab Jyoti Rabha, Binita Devi, Karismita Talukdar, Gitima Das, Himangshu Das, Trishna Kalita, Angarag Mahanta, and Polak Kairi.

The success of the playwright and director Simanta Sarma in orchestrating this magnificent creation deserves applause. The staging of this drama at Surojit Academy garnered praise from all cultural enthusiasts, educators, and intellectuals. Simanta Sarma's success in the directorial field is commendable.

Five arrested in connection with on-road robberies

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 5: Following repeated shocking on-road robberies on NH 37 in Nagaon district, Nagaon police arrested five persons from a gang of dacoits. Three were arrested from Nagaon PS areas, while two were arrested on Monday from Borghat under Rupahihat PS and Konuwamai area under Samaguri PS.

Sources claimed that in connection with the ongoing sensational dacoity incidents, Nagaon Police arrested Pappu Bora, Shoriful Islam, and Mahmud Hussain from Nagaon Dakorhat under Nagaon PS last Sunday. Police recovered Rs 1.80 lakh in cash, a luxury car bearing registration number AS 23N 6177, and a vehicle hijacked by them.

Following the arrest of these three culprits, Nagaon Police on Monday arrested two other culprits involved in a sensational on-road robbery near Missa Rowmari area, identified as Baharul Islam of Borghat under Rupahihat PS and Mujamil Hussain of Konuwamai under Samaguri PS. The main kingpin of the gang, identified as Roshidul Haque, is still absconding. CSuperintendent of police, Nagaon, Navaneet Mahanta, affirmed that the police would leave no stone unturned to ensure the exemplary punishment of these notorious dacoits. It's pertinent to mention here that the gang of dacoits intercepted a car near Missa Rowmari on NH 37 on Friday night while a newly married couple along with their family members were returning home from participating in the ceremony of 'Aanth-mongala', a post-wedding ritual organised at a Guwahati-based family of the bride. They injured three occupants of the car and also attempted to snatch the gold ornaments of the bride. Earlier, the dacoits hijacked two vehicles - one supari-laden Bolero pickup van from Kaliabor Tiniali and another vehicle hijacked from Raha areas.

Association appeals for license expansion & training

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Feb 5: Sadou Assom Gramya Aushad Byobasayee Santha (All Assam Restricted Premises Pharmacy Association) Central Committee submitted a memorandum on Monday to Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare, and the Drug Controller General of India through district commissioner Aditya Vikram Yadav appealing to them to grant licenses for keeping and sale of Schedule C1 drugs and also to impart training to the members of the Santha under the government Skill Development

Programme. The Santha appeals to the concerned authority to allow them to stock and sell other drugs prescribed under government certification. The Gramya Aushad Byobasayee Santha have been serving the rural people of the state by providing people some limited medicines besides maintaining their own families with a minimum margin of profits as per Drugs Acts & Rules under license granted in Form 20A and 21A. The memorandum was submitted by Ratul Sharma, president, and Shyamal Mohan, secretary, All Assam Restricted Premises Pharmacy Association.

Assam Chatra Parishad felicitates achievers in APSC CCE

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 5: In a spectacular event held at Tezpur, the Asom Chatra Parishad (ACP), Sonitpur unit, extended a heartfelt salute to the successful achievers in the recent Assam Public Service Commission Combined Competitive Examination. A total of 14 candidates from the Tezpur constituency were felicitated in the event. The felicitation ceremony, attended by MLA of Tezpur Prithiraj Rava and other distinguished dignitaries, was a celebration of academic brilliance and a testament to the relentless pursuit of excellence by the state's brightest minds.

The prestigious event commenced with a speech by MLA Prithiraj Rava, who expressed immense pride in the remarkable achievements of the successful

candidates in the APSC Combined Competitive Examination 2022. He added that the ceremony aimed not only to honour their accomplishments but also to motivate and inspire other students to strive for academic excellence.

Among others, the meeting was attended by the central secretary of Assam Chatra Parishad, Joy Borah, central organising secretary Pabitra Borah, Ratul Nath, president of the Sonitpur AGP, president and secretary of the Sonitpur district Assam Yuva Parishad, Moon Borah and Bhaskar Patangia, and other members of Asom Chatra Parishad (ACP). As the ceremony concluded, the candidates expressed their gratitude for the recognition and shared their insights into the challenges they overcame during their academic journey.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

What we really are matters more than what other people think of us. -Jawaharlal Nehru

Bharat Ratna for Advani ahead of LS polls

Lal Krishna Advani, a stalwart of the BJP and a key figure in the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, has been awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to honour Advani, after sidelining him for a decade, comes at a crucial time with national elections approaching in April-May. The timing of this gesture, right after the inauguration of the Ram Temple, raises questions about its political implications. While some view it as a move to appease discontent within the party and its cadre, others see it as a strategic manoeuvre to consolidate support ahead of the polls. Modi's decision to honour Advani follows the recent conferral of the Bharat Ratna on Karpoori Thakur, a socialist leader, which was seen as an attempt to appeal to marginalised communities and consolidate Hindu votes. However, Advani's neglect during the Ram Temple inauguration event sparked discontent among BJP and RSS cadres, leading to questions about Modi's motives.

The discontent within the party ranks stems from Advani's significant contributions to the BJP's rise to power, particularly his role in the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Despite being sidelined in recent years, Advani's stature within the party remains considerable, and his neglect by the leadership has not gone unnoticed. Critics argue that Modi's decision to honour Advani is driven more by electoral calculations than genuine respect. They point to Advani's past disagreements with Modi, particularly his opposition to Modi's candidacy as the prime ministerial nominee in 2014. However, others argue that projecting Advani as the face of Hindutva could benefit the BJP electorally, given its emphasis on religious issues in its campaign. Advani's complex relationship with the RSS adds another layer to the narrative. While he has faced criticism from the RSS leadership in the past, particularly for his comments on Jinnah and his role in Partition, he remains a symbolic figure within the Hindutva movement. The decision to honor him reflects a balancing act between acknowledging his contributions and addressing internal dissent within the party. Modi's decision to honor Advani ahead of the elections is both a strategic move and a gesture of recognition for his contributions to the BJP. However, the timing of the gesture and the underlying political motivations raise questions about its sincerity.

As the country gears up for elections, the BJP's handling of its internal dynamics and its relationship with its founding members will be closely scrutinized. Overall, the decision underscores the complex interplay between politics, ideology, and personal legacies within the BJP and the broader Hindutva movement. Furthermore, Advani's significance extends beyond his role in the BJP's rise to power. His leadership during the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, culminating in the construction of the Ram Temple, has solidified his legacy as a key figure in the Hindutva narrative. Despite disagreements and tensions within the party, Advani's unwavering commitment to the cause of Hindutva has earned him respect and admiration among many party loyalists. By honouring Advani with the Bharat Ratna, Modi may be attempting to reconcile with a figure whose contributions cannot be ignored, especially in the context of upcoming elections where the BJP's narrative of Hindutva and religious nationalism plays a significant role. This gesture may also signal a broader strategy to rally support and maintain cohesion within the party's ranks during a crucial electoral period.

Female Genital Mutilation: A curse for humanity

By: Er. Prabhat Kishore

The practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has been going on for more than thousands of years. It is the ritual procedure of partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is also called "Khatna" in local dialect. This custom is a violation of the human rights of girls and women. To completely eliminate such inhumane practices by the year 2030, the United Nations has included it in Target 5.3 of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 6th February has been designated as "International Day of Zero tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation" for public awareness as well as accelerating government remedial efforts.

The procedure of FGM varies from region to region and according to ethnicity and the individual practitioner. It involves mixed socio-culture factors within a community and families. There are many myths about FGM. Some communities consider it necessary to control a girl's sexuality, including premature virginity and marital fidelity, in order to prepare her for adulthood and marriage. Some societies term it a social obligation; although no religious script describes this cruel practice.

Victims of FGM face numerous short-term as well long-term complications in their bodies, such as excessive bleeding, irregular menstruation, severe chronic pain, difficulty urinating, infections, bladder problems, development of cysts, inability to get pregnant, complications during childbirth, mental problems, sexual health issues etc. In many cases there is danger of death or permanent deformation in new borne child of FGM victim mothers. The root cause of this custom in various communities is gender inequality and control over female sexuality.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified FGM into four categories-

(1) Clitoridectomy - Partial or total removal of clitoral hood and/or clitoral glans, which is a sensitive part of the female genitals, (2) Excision - Partial or total removal of the clitoris and labia minora, with or without the labia majora, (3) Infibulation-

Narrowing the vaginal orifice with a covering seal (formed by cutting and repositioning labia minora and/or labia majora, in which a small hole is left for passage of urine and menstrual fluid, (4) All other harmful procedure for non-medical purposes, such as pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, etc..

According to a UNICEF report, there are currently more than 20 Crore women and girls in 31 countries around the world, who have undergone some form of this harmful, often deadly, practice. More than 12000 girls every year are facing this cruel age-old ritual. Although the unreported exact data may be much higher than this.

FGM is a universal issue, but is more prevalent in Mali, Egypt, Guinea, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, other African, Middle-East, and also in some Asian countries. In Bharat, this custom is followed by Daudi Bohra community. Despite being declared a human rights violation internationally, it persists for various social reasons. Although after globalisation and with the expansion of education, this practice has slowed down; but still, we have miles to go for its complete eradication from the society. A key challenge is to safeguard not only the girls currently at risk of FGM, but also to protect those to be born in future. There is an urgent need for systematic and coordinated efforts involving the entire stakeholders comprised of parents, religious leaders, civil society representatives, health care personnel, educators, as well as policy-makers to eliminate FGM. The government should tackle this custom by enforcing strict law. In Bharat, this custom should also be outlawed on the tune of Triple Talaaq and Sati Pratha.

The International Day of Zero tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation has a golden opportunity not only to focus efforts and successful interventions to eradicate FGM, but also to recognize the rights of women and girls to live free from all forms of violence, to have decision making powers over what happens to their bodies and have equal access to education, healthcare, employment, and leadership opportunity, which ultimately will strengthen their society and country. (The author is a technocrat and educationist)

India's Myanmar strategy and complex geopolitical challenges

Concerned about the continuous flow of refugees and insurgents across the porous border due to the ongoing crisis, the Indian government has opted to erect a barrier along the Myanmar border. This move aims to put an end to the free movement regime (FMR), similar to the approach taken with the Bangladesh frontier. The fencing is seen as a deterrent and a preventive measure to tackle the persisting challenges posed by the influx.

India should exercise prudence in its approach, particularly in light of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's close ties with China. It is imperative for India to develop a pragmatic strategic plan that aligns with the 'Neighbourhood First' policy.

The focus should be on safeguarding Myanmar from China's influence on the junta through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Additionally, India can play a constructive role by facilitating peace talks between conflicting groups and military leaders in the strife-ridden regions, while also extending support to rebels in border areas.

India adopted a measured approach when the Tatmadaw orchestrated a coup on February 1, 2021. At that time, India chose a diplomatic and indirect stance, offering support to the junta without openly endorsing the democratic forces led by Aung San Suu Kyi. However, this strategic decision has now pre-

sented India with a dilemma. The challenge lies in counteracting China, whose support for certain ethnic groups adds a layer of complexity to the situation. India must navigate these intricacies carefully.

In December 2023, 'Operation 1027' unfolded within the intricate dynamics of the region. Executed by 'The Three Brotherhood Alliance,' comprising the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, AA, and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, this strategic move significantly rattled the junta. The offensive delivered a severe blow, prompting China to extend its support to the junta in response to the unfolding developments.

'The Three Brotherhood Alliance' strategically captured crucial roads and military posts, strategically impacting the already financially strained junta by disrupting revenue streams and impeding troop movements. Reports from the conflict zone indicated that the surprise assaults in the Shan state were swiftly followed by the AA initiating a front against the army at its Rakhine state base on the west coast. This coordinated effort by insurgents aimed to extend influence into Kayah State bordering Thailand to the east, as well as the Sagaing region and Chin State, which shares a border with India.

Notably, this action violated a ceasefire that had been in effect between the



armed groups and the junta for over a year.

This audacious maneuver poses a significant threat to the military's dominance over vital trade routes to China, directly impacting its strategic interests.

Initially supportive of the army-led coup that ousted the elected government under Min Aung Hlaing, China now finds the situation taking an unexpected turn. The pendulum has shifted in the opposite direction, presenting a new and challenging dynamic for the junta.

The Brotherhood poses the most formidable challenge to the junta, achieving notable success by isolating the military from a critical land stretch responsible for approximately 40% of bilateral trade with China. This trade, valued at around \$1 billion, includes significant contributions from the transportation of natural gas into China.

Recent hostilities have erupted in the northern regions of Shan, Kachin, and Chin states, as well as in the western Rakhine state.

Fighters from the Three Brotherhood Alliance assert their control by overtaking numerous military posts, seizing key roads, and compelling the surrender of over 100 Myanmar army soldiers, severely denting the morale of the junta. The armed groups have extended their resistance to the Tatmadaw in Kayah State in the eastern part of the country, adding another layer of significance to their strategic efforts.

It is imperative for India to reassess its approach toward Myanmar, acknowledging that clinging to outdated positions could jeopardize its interests. India believes that the United States should capitalize on the current situation to strengthen collaboration with India in Myanmar. This collaborative effort should focus on addressing the humanitarian crisis, providing support to anti-junta forces, and advocating for the establishment of a federal democracy. India has aimed to maintain a balanced stance between the military leadership and pro-democracy political factions, ensuring that the junta doesn't align too closely with the West. The recent

China. This strategic recalibration is essential for safeguarding India's interests in the region.

Caught off guard by the formidable offensive launched by the alliance, the army generals found themselves in an unexpected and challenging situation. The extensive onslaught initiated a domino effect, effectively cornering the junta.

Reports indicate that armed groups have successfully seized control of fifty towns and villages along with a hundred military posts. In response, Army Chief Hlaing has vowed to launch a counter-attack against what he labels as terrorists in the northern region. This potential move raises concerns about the junta's vulnerability being exposed in the face of this escalating conflict.

The armed rebellion orchestrated by ethnic armed organizations has not only diplomatically exposed the army generals but also has direct repercussions for China. The junta found a fortuitous situation during the Ukraine war as the focus of the US and EU was diverted, providing some respite. However, the recent Hamas attack on Israel has further strained Myanmar's relations with Western powers. The armed groups' successful offensive, in contrast, may reshape the entire geopolitical landscape. The National Unity Government (NUG), formed by opposition lawmakers in Burma, maintains close ties with the West. The recent

achievements of the armed groups have buoyed Western sentiments, potentially altering the dynamics in Myanmar's favor.

China has presented a somewhat contradictory stance, urging Myanmar to restore border stability amidst the escalating conflict between the junta and armed groups. In an intriguing move, China has called on Myanmar to 'cooperate' in maintaining stability along their shared borders.

The official position from China expresses a friendly neighbor's perspective, expressing sincere hopes for Myanmar to swiftly regain stability and development. China claims to support all parties in Myanmar in resolving their differences within the constitutional and legal framework, emphasizing the importance of achieving reconciliation through dialogue. The recent visit of Assistant Foreign Minister Nong Rong gains added importance in the wake of an intensified offensive by armed groups, posing risks to Chinese residents and infrastructure. The adoption of a 'Dual Policy' by China, actively supporting militant groups, has left some former diplomats surprised.

Notably, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Myanmar's northeastern Shan state is reported to receive both weapons and political support from China, adding a layer of complexity to the situation. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Interim Union Budget 2024-25 reveals Modi government's anti-labour stance

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Reduction in the total allocations for Union Ministry of Labour and Employment and also workers' social security in the Interim Union Budget 2024-25 has revealed PM Narendra Modi government's anti-labour stance, an allegation that has been labelled by the joint platform of Central Trade Unions (CTUs) since the passage of four controversial labour laws in the Parliament of India in 2019 and 2020.

In the backdrop of very high level of unemployment in the country, even PM Narendra Modi has been appearing in public events to distribute appointment letters to unemployed youths, only to show his concern, but the Interim Union Budget shows his government has really little concern. The total allocation of the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has been reduced from ₹13,221.73 crore for 2023-24 to ₹12,531.47 crore in 2024-25. Even allocation for the pet scheme of PM Narendra Modi, the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana, has been drastically cut from ₹2,272 crore in 2023-24 to just ₹150 crore in 2024-25. It is shocking that allotment of Labour Welfare Scheme for 2024-25 has been reduced to less than half to ₹50.68 crore from ₹102 crore in 2023-24 (RE). It was even less than ₹75 crore in 2023-24 (BE), and ₹80.78 crore in 2022-23 (actual).

Directorate General of Factory Advice Services has been allocated ₹39.34 crore for 2024-25, against ₹40.03 crore in the 2023-24 (RE), and ₹39.45 crore in 2022-23 (actual). Directorate General of Mines Safety's allocation has been reduced from ₹120.93 in 2023-24 (RE) to ₹119 crore for 2024-25. Directorate General of Employment got a minor increase with allocation of ₹76.86 crore as against ₹74.96 crore in 2023-24 (RE).

Allotment for Directorate General of Labour Welfare Scheme has been reduced to ₹156.36 crore for 2024-25 from ₹157.33 crore in 2023-24 (RE), much less than the budget allocation of ₹175.78 crore for 2023-24. It shows the dismal performance of the Directorate General of Labour Welfare Scheme in the current fiscal, as against the good performance claim of the government for labour welfare in the country. India government does not provide real time labour data which keeps the people in dark about the ground level reality. After much criticism, especially after the COVID-19 crisis outbreak of 2020 that had crippled the entire economy and thereby the labour market, the Centre had increased allotment for Labour and Employment Statis-

tical System from ₹49.12 crore in 2022-23 (actual) to ₹110 crore in 2023-24 (BE), however, it spent only ₹44.80 crore as shown in the 2023-24 (RE). Allocation for the year 2024-25 is only ₹50 crore, which shows that the Modi government is not much interested in improving the Labour and Employment Statistical System in the country.

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan and Pradhan Mantri Karam Yogi Maandhan were other much touted flagship schemes for image building of Modi government. However, allocation of Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan got reduced to ₹177.24 crore for 2024-25 from ₹269.91 crore in 2022-23 (actual), ₹350 crore in 2023-24 (BE), and ₹205.21 crore in 2023-24 (RE). Budget 2023-24 had allocated ₹3 crore for Pradhan Mantri Karam Yogi Maandhan, but government spent only Rs 0.1 crore as 2023-24 (RE) shows. This scheme has been allocated only ₹0.01 crore for the year 2024-25.

After much hue and cry on the disturbing lever of suffering of the unorganised workers in the country, which are over 90 per cent of the total workforce, Modi government, after litigation in the Supreme Court of India, had agreed to have a National Database for Unorganized Workers. Centre had allocated Rs 300 crore in 2023-24 (BE), but the revised estimate for the year shows the government spent only ₹102.96 crore. The Interim Budget 2024-25 has reduced allocation to ₹176.84 crore from ₹300 crore in 2023-24 (BE). National Child Labour Project including grants in aid to voluntary agencies and reimbursement of assistance to bonded labour has been cut drastically to ₹6 crore in 2024-25 from ₹21.05 crore in 2022-23 (actual). ₹20 crore was allotted in 2023-24 (BE) but the Centre spent only ₹12.98 crore as shown in 2023-24 (RE).

While the population is growing, job market crisis has worsened further, and the number of job opportunities are reducing fast, getting jobs for disadvantaged classes such as SC, SC, and OBC in cut-throat competition has become increasingly difficult. They needed special assistance in education and guidance. There is a scheme for Coaching and Guidance for SC, ST and Other Backward Classes. The Interim Budget 2024-25 has reduced its allocation to ₹20.6 crore, while the actual amount spent in 2022-23 was ₹21.97 crore, while revised estimate for 2023-24 shows it was ₹25 crore.

There are other Centrally Sponsored Schemes for jobs and skill development by the states and

Union Territories. Actual expenditure in the two Employment Generation Programmes-Coaching and Guidance for SC, ST and Other Backward Classes - was ₹43.98 crore in 2022-23. There was a negative support to states/UTs of minus (-)0.01 crore rupees under Coaching and Guidance for SC, ST and Other Backward Classes.

Spend on Nation Career Services was ₹43.99 crore. However, allocation in these two Employment Generation Programmes have been reduced to zero in 2023-24, and now in 2024-25. Grant-in-aid for other social services in developmental heads for states and UTs have also been reduced to zero, as against ₹22.98 crore actual in 2022-23. For North Eastern Areas allocation was reduced to ₹191.07 crore for 2024-25 as against ₹1243 crore in 2023-24 (BE), and ₹1204 crore in 2023-24 (RE).

It should be noted that unemployment in the country has been hovering in the range of 7 - 10.1 per cent since October 2023, as per the CMIE data. Workforce participation is has remained around just 40 per cent. Joblessness among those in the age group of 20 to 24 grew during October-December 2023 quarter to 44.49 per cent from 43.65 per cent from the previous quarter. Quality of job has been worsening, both in the rural and urban areas.

Government has no employment guarantee scheme for the urban areas, and the allocation of MGN-REGA scheme has been kept at ₹86,000 crore while at least ₹2.72 lakh crore is needed to provide 100 days work in a year to job card holders. Agriculture growth this year is estimated to decline to 1.8 per cent at a time when it supports 45.8 per cent of workforce. As per PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana, there are 80 crore people who can't afford even foodgrain, while according to World Bank more than 97 crore people can't afford healthy food.

In this backdrop, Modi government's Interim Budget frustrates hope of the working class. Employment generation record is dismal. The Union Minister of Labour and Employment had said in the Parliament about 7 months ago that Modi government generated 1.25 crore jobs in last 9 years, however, 2 crore youths enter every year in the job market in the country. Modi's 2014 assurance to provide work with dignity to all hands, has lost its meaning. On the eve of Lok Sabha election Modi is going on giving all sorts of guarantee again, curiously everything @2047 Vikasit Bharat (Developed India), while his government's interim budget is just anti-labour. (IPA Service)

Raw deal again to Kerala in 2024-25 Union Budget

By: P. Sreekumar

There is no change in the Budget script as far as Kerala is concerned. It has been an unredeeming tale of severe neglect from the Union Government, repeated ad nauseum over the years. For once, both the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government and the Congress-led opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) were united in condemning the raw deal meted out to the State.

In his reaction, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the Budget has ridden roughshod over Kerala's demands and interests. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's sixth budget holds little promise for not only the State but also for the country, youth, farmers and women, Pinarayi added. The interim budget has maintained a deafening silence on one of the State's main demands - that the Union Government refrain from limiting the borrowing limits of state governments. The Budget has also violated the basic principles of cooperative federalism. It reveals a thinly-disguised attempt to centralize fiscal power.

Leader of the Opposition (LoP) V D Satheesan also turned a scathing tongue against the Modi Government for its neglect of the State. The Budget has made no secret of its pro-corporate bias, even as it does little to protect the interests of the poor and downtrodden, Satheesan pointed out. The unkindest cut, he said, is the refusal to curb inflation by reducing fuel prices although crude oil prices have fallen globally. BJP leaders in the State, however struck a different note. They said the interest free loans to spur essential infrastructure development would benefit Kerala in a big way. Both Union Minister of State for External Affairs V Muralidharan and BJP state president K. Surendran said the Budget was visionary.

They are also trumpeting that the Railways' allocation of Rs 2,744 crore to the State was phenomenal. It was a big amount compared to the Rs 372 crore set apart by the UPI Government during 2009-14. But the hollowness of their claim is evident from the fact this was a pittance compared to the Railways' allocation for other States like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. True, two Vande Bharat trains are running in Kerala now. But the detention of other trains to ensure their smooth passage is causing untold hardships to rail passengers in the State. Also, the long-standing demand for a separate zone has not been conceded either. The Railway Minister's announcement on SilverLine is also misleading. He wants to create the impression that Kerala has stopped making a pitch for SilverLine. This is not true. The State Government has been taking all steps to realize the project. But BJP leaders from the State have been taking a blatantly anti-Kerala stand by saying that they would pull out all stops to prevent the project from becoming a reality!

Similarly, the rubber farmers in the State have been administered a rude shock. The Budget has ignored their long-pending demand to increase the import duty of rubber and the MSP of rubber to at least Rs 250 from the current Rs 175. No special attention has been given to the State's farm sector, especially paddy, coconut and spices either. Also, no new establishments like the AIIMS have been announced.

Kerala's Finance Minister K N Balagopal termed the Budget as a big disappointment and said it was nothing but a 'copy-paste job' of past announcements. The Budget, he said, does not contain any constructive measures to address unemployment, increase the income of the people and arrest inflation. Balagopal also blasted the Union Government's double standards on issues like borrowings. The Union Government, which has been objecting to the borrowings made by Kerala, boasted borrowings of Rs 16,85,494 crore, accounting for 36 per cent of its total receipts of Rs 47,65,768 crore.

As if all this was not enough, Kerala's long-standing demand that the shareable portion of Goods and Service Tax (GST) be changed from the current 50:50 ratio to 60:40 in favour of the States has also been ignored. At the end of the day, the BJP has taken all that it takes to further alienate the party from the Kerala voters. On the one hand, the party blames the people of Kerala for not supporting the Union Government. In the same breath, the party and its government at the Centre are doing everything to thwart the State's development. Unless the BJP changes its Kerala-hostile stance, there is no hope of the party opening its Lok Sabha account from the State. (IPA Service)

Politics of patriotism: In the age of Fighter, celebrate a Swades & Newton

By: Tanisha Bagchi

“POK ka matlab hai Pakistan. Occupied Kashmir. Tumne occupy kiya hai, maalik hum hai” - Siddharth Anand's Fighter, starring Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone in lead roles, is set to land in theatres on 25 January. The trailer has come under heavy criticism for dialogues such as the one mentioned above.

For decades, Hindi cinema has been witness to this aggressive devotion to one's country. Wave the tricolour or play the National Anthem, and our heroes will come all guns blazing. Manoj Kumar's Upkar (1965) popularized Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's wartime slogan 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan'. The 50s and 60s also saw films like Naya Daur, Shaheed that spoke about the freedom struggle and farmers concerns. We also had a movie like Chetan Anand's Haqeeqat, that did look at the horrific consequences of a war. The mood shifted in the late 90s and early 2000s with Gadar, Lakshya and Border, which were shriller in their projections of patriotism.

The recent times have been more volatile. Now it's not just celebrating "the sons of the soil," it's also making those sons screaming who the "maalik" and "baap" are.

While there's no getting away from the vicious cycle of violent patriotism, let's look at some films that adapt a different lens:

Chak De! India & Swades - All about making our country proud

These two films, starring Shah Rukh Khan in lead roles, showed us that when it comes to proclaiming one's love for their country, it doesn't need be screamed in every second sentence.

Chak De! India follows the journey of an underdog women's hockey team, led by a resilient coach Kabir Khan (Shah Rukh), and their roaring victory in an international tournament. By coming together, the women (hailing from different states) and Kabir shed their prejudices as well.

If your character's name is Khan, you're probably a terrorist in the film in today's times.

The film shows that it's not just the outside world that is racist and biased, the women in the national hockey team are equally blind. We see the girls fight and bicker amongst themselves, and it takes Kabir to teach them otherwise.

In one of the scenes, Kabir guides the team on how to play a game the right way. When he asks the players to introduce themselves, they do so by mentioning the names of their respective states and regions. To which the coach responds, "Mujhe states ke naam na sunai dete hai na dikhai dete hai, sirf ek mulk ka naam sunai deta hai... INDIA", reminding them to let go of their individualistic pride and ego when they have signed up to play for a national team. Patriotism doesn't just

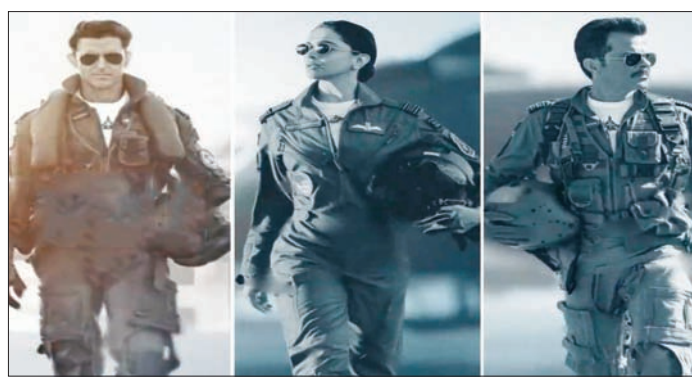
mean going to war, it also means letting go of deep-rooted notions and being kind towards each other.

At the core of the film is also the story of the victory of a man who had been labelled a traitor and ostracised years back, solely on the basis of his religion. It's not enough for a Kabir Khan to form a great team for the World Cup, he is expected to win too. It's ironic that the same expectations aren't placed on coaches who are the "majority". In a country that's currently being split in half by the sword of religion, it's stories like Kabir Khan's that must be narrated again and again.

If your character's name is Khan, you're probably a terrorist in the film in today's times.

In Swades, Shah Rukh Khan harnesses the power of water to create a power generation facility in his village.

On the other hand, Swades narrates the story of an NRI's return to India. Mohan Bhargava's (Shah Rukh) main objective for the brief visit to his country is to find a loved one, Kaveri Amma, and take her back to the US with him, but with time Mohan realises that the village where Kaveri Amma lives needs him and his skills. Swades takes us back to the hinterland and acquaints us with the struggles and little joys of this mundane existence. Given that a majority of India's population resides in smaller towns and villages, we need more stories of people who actually form the backbone of the



country.

Newton - The common man's fight for democracy

If your character's name is Khan, you're probably a terrorist in the film in today's times.

If you are talking about patriotism, there's nothing more poignant than a regular government employee trying his best to preserve democracy. The Amit Masurkar film shadows Newton (Rajkumar Rao), who travels to two villages in the Chhattisgarh jungles to conduct a Lok Sabha election. The villages, which comprise of 76 eligible voters, are stuck between the armed conflict between Naxals and the government. Newton wants to infuse democracy and order in the jungles, but as the layers peel he realises how removed he is from the realities of these people and we also discover that he is no hero.

Unlike other 'patriotic' movies, there's no victory in Newton. Many of us have lost the hope for a fair and just world. There are too many gulfs

that need to be bridged, but there are still people like Newton who are clinging on hard, waiting for the tide to turn.

Rang De Basanti - Re-belling for what's right

If your character's name is Khan, you're probably a terrorist in the film in today's times.

Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's audacious film contended that the system is as corrupt today as it was enslaving in the British era, and freedom will only come if we rise in rebellion. In the fight to do what's right, Mehra does not ask anyone to kneel before Gandhi's altar. In one of the most telling scenes from the film, Mehra takes a stand through Sue, a filmmaker from London who wants to make a documentary on the lives of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Chandrashekhar Azad, Ashfaqullah Khan, Durga Vohra and Bismil. She is asked by her bosses to consider filming something on Mahatma, because "Gandhi sells."

But she rejects the idea because the need of the honour is not

non-violence, it is standing up for what's right. And the youngsters uniting leading the march belong to all religions, unlike a lot of the films we see nowadays, wherein the villain is invariably a kohl-eyed Muslim.

Gunjan Saxena and Raazi - Our war heroes are humans too

Though the Kargil War was undoubtedly one of India's defining moments, we don't often speak about how the lives of the people who took part in it went beyond just fighting at the border. The Janhvi Kapoor-starrer Gunjan Saxena narrates one such story - that of India's only female IAF pilot to fight in the war. At one point in the movie, Gunjan questions whether she is a true patriot because she became an Air Force pilot to live her passion of flying aeroplanes. If your character's name is Khan, you're probably a terrorist in the film in today's times.

Cutting through the noise of the war, the story became about a little girl's ambitions and showed how intricately one's identity is informed by their love for the country.

In Raazi, Sehmat (Alia Bhatt) is sent to Pakistan as an undercover RAW agent. She has to adopt a double life, and while most Bollywood films tend to glorify portrayals of spies Raazi shows the gritty reality. Sehmat realises that every action of hers will have dire consequences. She isn't unaware of the downside of giving up her whole identity to fight for the

country. If your character's name is Khan, you're probably a terrorist in the film in today's times.

The personal struggles and the stories of these two women make the movies all the more real and humane. The films also show that 'true patriotism' doesn't equate with sacrificing one's self for the country, it's also questioning what those sacrifices entail.

Is It Very Important to Demonize Another Nation to Proclaim Love For Our Country?

If your character's name is Khan, you're probably a terrorist in the film in today's times.

Fighter joins the long list of movies that are completely overshadowing the genuine love for the country. There was a time when the youth were growing up to songs like 'Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon,' 'Saare Jahaan Se Achcha,' 'Mere Desh Ki Dharti,' 'Yeh Des Hai Veer Jawaanon Ka.'

Today, it's a grimmer picture. The brand of uber nationalism in films like Gadar 2, Uri., Baby, Holiday, Fighter is not simple love for the country, it is infused with a superiority complex that mostly comes with hating Pakistan and one-upping China. It's violent, and the decibel of jingoism increases with each passing day. We are already living in a polarized world, is it very important to keep demonizing other nations to proclaim our love for the country? (Courtesy: The Quint)

Education must not ignore AI - artists have shown how technology can also expand creativity

By: Lucy Gill-Simmen

Artificial intelligence has the potential to make a major impact on many sectors of society over the coming decades. Some of these effects may be positive, others less so.

When ChatGPT was released, education, a profession that prides itself on integrity and high ethical standards, was rocked by the prospect that AI could allow students to cheat in their studies. The issue is still a live one.

Some educators have pushed for new policies from their institutions, including arguing for the return of face-to-face exams. Others thought AI might be a fad, waiting for it to go away.

Of course, AI isn't going anywhere. As an educator myself, I wanted to explore how my profession could learn valuable lessons about embracing this new technology. The model for this new approach comes from art. Artists have long been exploring the intersection of technology and creativity.

One well-known artist who has embraced AI is the painter David Hockney. In June 2023, Hockney exhibited an AI-generated work on the Pyramid Stage at the 2023 Glastonbury Festival. Titled I lived In Bohemia, Bohemia Is A Tolerant Place, the piece, created by Hockney using AI, was developed into a one-minute video to spread harmony through bohemianism.

Although this was his first AI-generated piece, Hockney is no technophobe. Over many years, he has used a variety of analogue and digital technologies in his work. These included the Xerox photocopier, Quanteil Paintbox, and a computer graphics workstation. These stretched the sensory and creative potential of his eye. His recent immersive art installation in London: David Hockney: Bigger & Closer is a testament to the artist's reputation as an innovator.

Artistic embrace
Hockney is not alone. Many artists have found creative and innovative ways to use AI in their work. Robbie Barrat is a contemporary artist who explores the intersection of AI and art. He is known for his work with generative adversarial networks (Gans). This is where two machine learning systems compete with each other to produce better results. Gans have been used to create realistic artificial faces, becoming so good that people often cannot tell the difference between an AI-generated face and a real one.

In one project, Barrat trained



a Gan on a dataset of classical nude paintings. He incorporated his own sketches and digital drawings into the trained Gan generating unique and surrealistic interpretations of the human form. By scanning or digitising sketches and feeding them into the AI model, he allowed the system to produce novel compositions. The resulting artworks showcased a fusion of his artistic style and learned AI patterns from the classical paintings.

Other artists have integrated AI with augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to create immersive and interactive experiences.

Refik Anadol, for example, uses AI algorithms to process and interpret large amounts of data, transforming them into spectacular works of art. He incorporates these AI-generated visuals into AR and VR experiences to create mesmerising and interactive installations.

AI myth busting

Not every artist is so enthusiastic about the technology, of course. Many perceive image generators like DALL-E and Midjourney as a threat to their livelihoods rather than something to be welcomed. But the realisation that great artists such as Hockney and Anadol have deployed AI to enhance their work should teach us something. Educators should be exploring how to best use AI in their teaching and assessments.

The education sector's reticence to adopt AI is perhaps understandable. Artificial intelligence is surrounded by myths and misconceptions. So it is worth debunking some of these fallacies.

The first is that AI impairs learning experiences. Some educators are concerned that if students rely on AI, their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities may be compromised, along with their capacity for learning independently.

However, the key to successfully integrating AI into education is to understand that intelligent tools are not a replacement for human expertise. They are instead simply tools to augment and enhance it.

The second myth is that AI "isolates" learners. While AI can provide personalised feedback and support, it cannot replace human interaction with an educator and the social and emotional learning that goes along with it.

Some academics fear that over-reliance on AI may result in students feeling disconnected from their peers and educators. In fact, educators can use AI systems to help students learn collaboratively in groups, allowing for collective problem solving.

A third myth is that AI stifles creativity. The importance of creativity in higher education cannot be underestimated, yet many academics have expressed concern that AI will only stifle it. Contrary to some beliefs, introducing AI as a technology can support and enhance creativity in educational settings. For example, generative AI tools can be used to promote divergent thinking, challenge expertise bias, assist in idea evaluation, support idea refinement and facilitate collaboration.

Preparing for the future

The fourth and final myth is that AI encourages learners to cheat at assessment. The continuing narrative around using AI to cheat doesn't tell the whole story. By incorporating use of artificial intelligence effectively into the student's assessment, we can help students become AI-literate, giving them skills they will need in life.

We should design authentic assessments that emphasise tasks requiring learners to apply knowledge, skills and understanding in real-world contexts.

AI can be used as a collaborative tool, a source of inspiration and a helpful guide. AI and education are intertwined, and learners will need to be able to work together with AI to prepare them for the world of work.

Artists have made the formerly unimaginable possible. Now educators can do the same, bringing their learners along for the ride, empowering them to become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers who are ready for a future where AI is commonplace. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

How studying 'peace-building and conflict resolution' can benefit us

By: Madhumita Sharma

Everywhere in today's modern and globalised world we are surrounded by conflicts in some way or the other be it within nations, society, workplace or internationally. As a part of a modern and civilised society, there is a strong necessity for formulation of creative and practical ways of dealing with conflicts. Conflicts have led to extensive human suffering in various forms; there are several factors behind these conflicts which are socio-economic and political in nature.

Usually such conflicts take place in South-Asian nations and in order to resolve such conflicts there is a strong need for peace-building. The study of peace-building focuses upon how to reconstruct society in the post-conflict world, it also lays emphasis on various skills in resolving conflicts such as Negotiation, Arbitration and Mediation and gives an edge to the students who did the program.

One of the country's finest institutions, Lady Shri Ram College for Women offers a one year diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peace Building which is open to final year students and graduates in any discipline. The course is an amalgamation of various social sciences such as Political Science, International Relations, etc and digs deep into the causes of conflicts such as inter-state conflicts, intra-state conflicts and how conflicts are managed and transformed.

The program also helps students to analyse and manage conflicts of different kinds and see its root causes and how they can be dealt with and how useful it can be in today's world. "The cohort was filled with people from diverse backgrounds and it was one of the biggest perks of the program."

The diversity of the cohort helps in conflict resolution from your peers perspective and the theories learnt pays emphasis on long term solutions and the value of the theories and complex strategies can be applied in today's world. It's amazing to read about gender in South Asia and scholars across the region. The ideas and philosophies are backed by the fact about how they can be applied in today's scenario," says Tanya Mittal, an alumnus of the program.

One of the examples of peace building can be traced back to 1978 Camp David Accords where political agreements were signed, which formulated a historical framework for peace in the Middle East and provided a framework for conclusion of a peaceful treaty between Egypt and Israel. Even today peace-building can be put into practice between Russia and Ukraine. "The dissertation in the course helps in several ways and also helped me with academic writing in my masters. There are several conflict modules given in the course which are further helpful in academic settings as well as real life situations and is a stepping stone for people who want to do further research," says Sneha Sen-

gupta, an alumnus who's currently pursuing masters in International Studies.

In this age there is a strong need to resolve conflicts and build peace through various techniques and taking into account the possibilities of moving away from conflicts, at Aung San Suu Kyi Centre for Peace at LSR where the course is taught is taking a strong initiative by inviting young and creative minds with a penchant to make a change in today's world by applying various theories on gender, culture and human rights in conflict transformation. "The students of the program will be a huge asset to big organisations, government agencies, media houses, universities, etc and will enable them to undertake systematic study of conflicts," says Krishna Menon, Former Professor at LSR. Peace building is a dynamic and ongoing process which becomes strategic at every hierarchical level of the society to establish and address the underlying causes and effects of conflicts, thus helping the society to resolve their disputes peacefully and laying the foundation to prevent conflicts in future."

At every step of our lives, one needs to acknowledge and accommodate the sentiments of the other individuals in the society, no matter how different they might be, it can be uncomfortable and intimidating in the beginning. In a society with so many unique and different approaches to fit into a box, everyday when these acts of service to the world are the exact mo-

ments of building towards a world of peace, one brick at a time," says Oonmona Das, an upcoming MPhil student at University of Oxford.

"The skills learnt from the program are very much relevant in today's world and makes one very broadminded and gives a nice exposure to ethics, philosophy, etc which I believe are critical in producing a well informed citizenry," says Upasha Kumari a former student of the program. When we think about peacebuilding we tend to levitate towards peace after warlike situations where there is a total doom, but to approach peacebuilding in the modern world, one needs to act from a point of sensitivity and peace at every step, be it engaging in a conversation with a stranger in a public space or giving someone the space to speak out their concerns.

Apart from LSR other institutions which offer similar courses are Jamia Millia Islamia which provides a full time 2 year program and Ph.D in Peace and Conflict Studies at Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution. JNU also offers a full time 2 year program in Introduction to Peace and Conflict Resolution. IIT Madras also offers a diploma course in Conflict, Reconstruction and Human Security which covers various approaches and case studies of various South Asian countries. Tata Institute of Social Sciences offers a full time MA program in Peace and Conflict Studies. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Do you know about the science of work?

By Pranjal Sharma

In the post-pandemic era, the concept of the workplace continues to evolve rapidly. Even though the practice of hybrid work has become the norm, employees and employers remain dissatisfied. Various experiments continue to be conducted to find the right balance between 'work from home' and on-premise teams.

Employers feel that people who are in a common office tend to perform better and deepen the company's performance.

JLL, the real estate services company, is using neuroscience-based data to better understand the mindsets of professionals. In a conversation during the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Sushel Koul, CEO, JLL Asia Pacific, shared the details of the project.

"We've embarked on the mission of creating a 'Science of Work'. Our aim is to understand and harness the unique creativity inherent in each individual," Koul said.

"By integrating data, research, and new insights, we are designing work environments that foster innovation, collaboration, and wellbeing," Koul added.

"Our ultimate goal is to enable our employees and clients to do their best work, driving resilience, productivity, and success in an ever-changing world," he said. JLL said its workplace neuroscience programme studied the effect of hybrid work habits on cognitive performance in a real-world setting.

"Our primary research's questions focused on matters relating to the realities of hybrid work, aiming to reveal how, and why, different work styles and settings might impact the performance and engagement of employees," said the study.

The study used electroencephalography (EEG) to measure the activity of the brain's cortex on working professionals.

The company said its technology partner, EMO-TIV, trained sophisticated machine-learning algorithms to detect a series of cognitive states based on the raw EEG data from a participant. Results showed a 10 per cent average increase in boredom when an individual's preferred creative work environment was incongruent with the actual condition.

This may lead to negative consequences for creative output and productivity, and could be particularly problematic in industries that rely heavily on creativity and innovation.

Even a small decrease in creative output can have a significant impact on the overall performance of a workplace, said the study.

JLL said that with greater hybrid flexibility,

companies will have to re-purpose space in a workplace. They will have to accommodate more specific workspaces and facilitate 'matching' team needs with available spaces.

Workplaces will have to be as flexible as the people they serve.

"Spatial computing is about to change not just the course of technology innovation, but also the way people work and live."

"Whereas desktop and mobile used screens as portals to the digital world, spatial will finally combine our disparate realities, fusing digital and physical together," said a recent report by Accenture.

"Apps built for this medium will let people immerse themselves in digital worlds with a physical sense of space, or layer content on top of their physical surroundings." Companies will have to customise office spaces on a mass scale for different types of professionals and tasks.

An employee's personality may shape the kind of space they perform best in.

Instead of dull and boring cubicle farms, companies will increasingly have to create office space that wraps itself around the needs of a team.

The type of furniture, the colour of walls, windows and lighting are part of office redesigns shaped by technology.

Internet of things (IoT) in lighting ensures that brightness in an office matches employees' circadian rhythms, the natural changes that happen over the course of a day in the body.

As the day passes, flexible lighting systems change to match the hour of the day. Companies will increasingly deploy technologies using neuroscience, artificial intelligence and IoT to ensure a worker-centric approach to productivity. (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

The withdrawal of Indian troops from the Maldives was one of the main poll promises known for having a tilt towards China

Maldivian President Muizzu says Indian troops to be sent back by May 10

MALE, Feb 5: Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu on Monday said the first group of Indian military personnel will be sent back from the island nation before March 10 and the remaining manning two aviation platforms will be withdrawn before May 10, as he articulated the need to bolster the Indian Ocean archipelagic nation's military capabilities.

In his maiden address to Parliament, Muizzu, widely seen as a pro-China leader, said the support of a large majority of the Maldivian citizens for his administration was for the "pledges to withdraw foreign military troops from the country."

Soon after taking oath as the President of Maldives on November 17, Muizzu formally requested India to withdraw 88 military personnel from his country by

March 15, saying the Maldivian people have given him a "strong mandate" to make this request to New Delhi. In the presidential runoff held in September last year, Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

His government is also reviewing more than 100 bilateral agreements signed with India by the previous government. The main opposition party, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) – which holds a majority in Parliament – on Sunday announced that it would boycott Muizzu's address to Parliament, at this year's inaugural sitting.

He also said that his administration would recover the lost area of the Maldivian territory, and terminate any agreements made by the state that might undermine the country's sov-



ereignty, according to a press release issued by the President's Office.

The President articulated the Maldives' need to augment its modern military capabilities for a comprehensive national defence strategy encompassing terrestrial, aerial, and maritime domains, it said.

Muizzu told Parliament that "diplomatic negotiations were underway for the withdrawal of Indian troops," the release said.

He detailed that, "as

agreed in the latest negotiations, the military personnel on one of the three aviation platforms would be withdrawn before March 10, 2024, and the military personnel on the remaining two platforms would be withdrawn before May 10, 2024."

The President said his government has officially communicated that it will not renew the agreement enabling foreign nations to measure and map the Maldivian oceans and coast-

lines. Muizzu underscored the necessity for the Maldives to fortify its military capabilities across terrestrial, aerial, and maritime domains as part of a comprehensive defence strategy. After the latest round of bilateral talks, India said on February 2 that a "set of mutually workable solutions" was agreed upon with the Maldives for continuing the operations of Indian aviation platforms in the island nation.

Currently, Indian military personnel are in the Maldives primarily to operate two helicopters and an aircraft that have carried out hundreds of medical evacuations and humanitarian missions. The Indian platforms have been providing humanitarian and medical evacuation services to the people of the Maldives for the last few years. (PTT)

At least 6 Kurdish fighters are killed in a drone attack on a Syrian base housing US troops

BEIRUT, Feb 5: A drone attack on a base housing U.S. troops in eastern Syria killed six allied Kurdish fighters late on Sunday, in the first significant attack in Syria or Iraq since the U.S. launched retaliatory strikes over the weekend against Iran-backed militias that have been targeting its forces in the region.

The U.S.-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said Monday the attack hit a training ground at al-Omar base in Syria's eastern province of Deir el-Zour and accused "Syrian regime-backed mercenaries" of carrying out the attack. No casualties were reported among U.S. troops.

An umbrella group of Iran-backed Iraqi militias, dubbed the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, released a video claiming responsibility for the attack and showing them launching a drone from an unspecified location.

In late January, a drone attack by the same group killed three U.S. troops and wounded dozens more at a desert base in Jordan. The U.S. military launched dozens of retaliatory strikes targeting Iran-backed militant groups in western Iraq and eastern Syria and also struck the Houthis in Yemen.



The umbrella group has launched dozens of drone attacks on U.S. military bases and troops in Iraq and Syria, and has called for the withdrawal of American soldiers from both countries.

The attack comes as tensions flare across the Middle East amid the Israel-Hamas war, which was sparked by Hamas' rampage in southern Israel on Oct. 7.

Meanwhile, Britain-based opposition war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least seven SDF fighters were killed in the attack on Sunday and at least 18 others wounded, some in critical condition. It did not say whether any U.S. military personnel were among the casualties.

The attack late Sunday came two days after the U.S. military carried out strikes against militant targets

linked to Iran in Syria and Iraq. The SDF said it has the right to respond to the attack.

The U.S. military said it struck four anti-ship missiles on Sunday that were prepared to be fired at vessels in the Red Sea from Houthi rebel-controlled areas in Yemen.

In a statement early Monday, the U.S. Central Command said the strikes were in self-defense and came after forces determined the missiles "presented an imminent threat to U.S. Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region."

Sunday's strikes came a day after the U.S. and Britain launched a second wave of strikes against the Houthis, meant to degrade the Iranian-backed group's capabilities to attack vessels in the Red Sea. The U.S. and Britain said they hit 36 Houthi targets. (AP)

Zelenskyy confirms he's thinking about dismissing the country's military chief

KYIV, Feb 5: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he was weighing a possible dismissal of the country's top military officer, a prospect that has shocked the nation fighting Russia's invasion and worried Kyiv's Western allies.

Asked whether he was considering the ouster of Gen Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Zelenskyy told Italian RAI TV in an interview released late Sunday that he was thinking about it as part of a broader issue of setting the country's path. He said that "a reset, a new beginning is necessary," and it's "not about a single person but about the direction of the country's leadership."

"I'm thinking about this replacement, but you can't say here we replaced a single person," Zelenskyy

said. "When we talk about this, I mean a replacement of a series of state leaders, not just in a single sector like the military. If we want to win we must all push in the same direction, convinced of victory, we cannot be discouraged, let our arms fall, we must have the right positive energy."

Zelenskyy's comments marked his first confirmation that he was mulling to fire the widely popular general, a possibility that caused an uproar in Ukraine and delighted the Kremlin as the war approaches its second anniversary.

According to Ukrainian and Western media reports, Zelenskyy last week offered Zaluzhnyi to resign, but the general refused. Za-



luzhnyi hasn't commented on the issue.

The tensions between the president and Zaluzhnyi have been rising as the country grapples with dire ammunition and personnel shortages following a failed summer counteroffensive.

The need for a broad mobilisation

to fill the ranks has reportedly been one of the areas of disagreement. Zelenskyy said at the end of last year that he had turned down the military's request to mobilise up to 500,000 people, demanding more details about how it would be organised and paid for.

A rift between Zaluzhnyi and Ze-

lenskyy first broke into the open last fall when the general acknowledged in an interview with The Economist that the fighting with Russia had stalemated. The president strongly denied that was the case.

Ukraine desperately needs more Western military assistance as the Russian forces are pressing in many directions of the 1,500-km (900-mile) frontline, but an aid package has been blocked in the US Congress. Zaluzhnyi's dismissal could fuel uncertainty among Western allies.

Russia has rejoiced at the prospect, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying that the talk about Zaluzhnyi's dismissal exposed rifts in the Ukrainian leadership. (AP)

10 policemen killed, 6 injured as terrorists ambush police station in northwest Pak

PESHAWAR, Feb 5: At least 10 policemen were killed and six others injured as heavily armed terrorists attacked a police station in northwest Pakistan on Monday, ahead of the February 8 general elections in the country.

The incident took place at Chodwan police station in Daraban tehsil in Dera Ismail Khan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, a senior police official in Dera Ismail Khan division said. No outfit has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

"We lost 10 of our jawans, while six others were injured in the ambush carried out by heavily armed terrorists," District Police Officer Nasir Mehmood said. The terrorists attacked the police station from all sides with grenades and heavy gunfire. The police also retaliated, but the terrorists managed to escape, police said.

The forces have cordoned off the area and launched a search operation, while the quick response force has reached with additional force, they said. The attack added to the security concerns surrounding the general elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces which have been hit by poll violence and terror strikes in recent days.

Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker chief minister Arshad Hussain condemned the attack on the police station and expressed condolences to the family members of the victims. The resolve of police against terrorism can not be deterred through such acts of cowardice, he said. (PTT)

El Salvador's Nayib Bukele heads for reelection as president, buoyed by support for gang crackdown

SAN SALVADOR, Feb 5: Voters in El Salvador appeared to give Nayib Bukele a second term as president, putting him well on his way to a landslide victory in an election that for many hinged on the tradeoff of curtailed civil liberties for security in a country once terrorized by gangs.

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal said late on Sunday that with ballots from 31% of polling places tallied, Bukele had 83% of the vote, far ahead of his nearest competitor's 7% for the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. The electoral site updating the count crashed shortly before midnight.

After casting his vote, Bukele made clear that he expects the newly elected Legislative Assembly to continue extending the special powers he has enjoyed since March 2022 to combat the gangs. Later, standing on the balcony of the National Palace, he said that the country had made history.

"Why are there so many eyes on a small (Latin) American country?" he asked thousands of supporters. "They're afraid of the power of example." "Salvadorans have given the example to the entire world that any problem can be solved if there is the will to do it," he said.

The self-described "world's coolest dictator" appeared to sweep to victory after enjoying soaring approval ratings and virtually no competition. That came despite concerns that Bukele's government has slowly chipped away at checks and balances in his first term and accusations that he dodged a constitutional ban on reelection.

After voting, he jostled with reporters, asserting that the election's results would serve as a "referendum" on what his administration has done.

"We are not substituting democracy, because El Salvador never had democracy," he said. "This is the first time in history that El Salvador has democracy. And I'm not saying it, the people say it."

Bukele has been a highly popular leader and only more so since the government began its crackdown on the country's feared gangs.

Under a "state of emergency" approved in March 2022, the government has arrested more than 76,000 people — more than 1% of the Central American nation's population.

The assault on the gangs has spurred accusations of widespread human rights abuses and a lack of due process, but violence has plummeted in a country known just a few years ago as one of the most dangerous in the world.

Sara Leon, 48, was among throngs of people who flocked to El Salvador's previously gang-controlled downtown to celebrate. When she was 23, Leon risked her life to migrate from El Salvador to the United States with her 6-year-old daughter. "If the gangs saw a cute girl, they

abducted her, abused her and killed her," she said. "I didn't want that to happen to my daughter."

She returned to her homeland in October because of the "state of emergency." She said she now plans to buy a home here and hopes her daughter who has since moved to Toronto will be able to return.

"He is a genius," she said of Bukele, tearing up when asked what his administration has meant. "If he's a dictator, may we have a dictator for 100 more years. May he stay in power. That is good if he's this way

and continues governing the country the same way."

Bukele's popularity has also drawn eyes from across the region, and he and party are increasingly looked to as a case study for a wider global rise in authoritarianism.

Throughout his presidency, Bukele has been accused of taking undemocratic steps that concentrated power in his hands, something observers have worried will only grow with Sunday's election.

He showed up in congress with soldiers while attempting to pass his agenda. After his party was victorious in 2021 legislative elections, the newly elected congress purged the constitutional court, replacing judges with loyalists. The new justices later ruled that Bukele could run for a sec-

ond term despite the constitutional ban on reelection. Bukele has also been accused of harassing and even detaining journalists, union organizers and political opponents.

But Bukele arrived on the scene when Salvadorans were craving change, when El Salvador's traditional parties — the conservative Nationalist Republican Alliance and leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front — alternating power for three decades were thoroughly discredited by deep corruption and ineffectiveness.

Earlier Sunday, Bukele waded through a crowd to vote wearing a blue golf shirt and white baseball cap, while supporters chanted, "Five more years! Five more years!"

Smiling, Bukele and his wife dropped their ballots into the box as R.E.M.'s 1987 hit "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)," blared over speakers. Bukele has a habit of trolling his critics.

The charismatic leader has harnessed social media in a way few other leaders in the region have, using it as a tool to pump out propaganda, bolstered by an elaborate communications machine. Not appearing at a single campaign event before the election, he instead plastered videos taped from his couch on social media urging Salvadorans to vote for him so the opposition doesn't "free the gang members and use them to return to power."

He speaks with conviction about the changes he has made to El Salvador, describing the gangs as a "cancer" the nation had to battle in order to grow. (AP)

Most polling stations in Pak's restive Balochistan declared 'sensitive' or 'highly sensitive'

KARACHI, Feb 5: About 80 per cent of the polling stations established for Thursday's general elections in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province have been declared "sensitive" or "highly sensitive" by the authorities.

Of the total 5,028 polling stations in Balochistan, only 961 (approx 19 per cent) are designated as normal, Balochistan's Interior Minister Zubair Jamali said, expressing serious concerns about the potential security challenges in the province during the polls.

While 2,337 polling stations have been declared "sensitive", 1,730 are classified as "highly sensitive", he said.

Jamali said given the recent terror incidents in Balochistan with attempted strikes on security forces, installations, government servants and civilians, security on the polling day would be very tight. Balochistan's caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai on Sunday announced that internet services would be temporarily suspended in areas with polling stations marked as "sensitive" on the day of the election in the province.

In a statement, the minister said social media platforms could be utilised by terrorists for communication purposes on polling day. To mitigate this risk, access to the internet would be restricted in var-

ious areas, including Turbat, Mach, and Chaman.

Jamali said the government, establishment and security forces carried out an extensive survey of all polling stations to categorise them for the elections.

"We have taken into account past incidents of terrorism, the presence of militant groups in different areas and their ability to create violence during polls," he said.

Last week, terrorists belonging to the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) tried to storm the towns of Mach and Kolpur apparently to free inmates in the Mach jail but the attempt was foiled by the security forces.

However, four security personnel, two civilians and at least 24 terrorists were killed during the operation. There have been several incidents of poll violence in Balochistan. In January, four people were killed and six others injured in a bomb blast at a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party rally in Balochistan's Sibi city.

The provincial government has already implemented a ban on political rallies and corner meetings in view of poll-related violence incidents. Jamali said there would be increased deployment of security forces at polling stations, particularly in "sensitive" and "highly sensitive" ones. (PTT)

UK Opposition attacks 'VIP access' for Infosys due to Sunak family link

LONDON, Feb 5: The UK's Opposition Labour Party has claimed Infosys was effectively granted "VIP access" after a media report alleged the software services major was promised help to grow in Britain due to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's familial connection with co-founder Narayana Murthy.

A "Sunday Mirror" report based on a freedom of information (FOI) request said Trade Minister Lord Dominic Johnson discussed the UK operations of Infosys during a meeting at the company's offices in Bengaluru during a visit last April.

A readout of the meeting reportedly said Lord Johnson "made clear that he was keen to see a bigger Infosys presence in the UK and would be happy to do what he could to facilitate that".

"After the Tories handed billions in taxpayers' cash to cronies for duff PPE (personal protective equipment), the public will wonder why an outfit so personally close to Rishi Sunak appears to have been granted this VIP access. There are serious questions to answer," Labour's shadow minister Jonathan Ashworth told the newspaper.

Sunak's wife, Akshata Murthy, has a 0.91 per cent stake valued at around GBP 500 million in the IT business co-founded by her father and received millions in dividends in the past financial year. (PTT)

China gives suspended death sentence to Chinese Australian democracy blogger Yang Hengjun

BEIJING, Feb 5: A Chinese court gave a suspended death sentence to a China-born Australian democracy blogger on Monday. The Australian government, which has repeatedly raised his case over the years, said it was appalled.

Yang Hengjun was found guilty of espionage and sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said. Such sentences are often commuted to life in prison after the two years.

"The Australian Government is appalled," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement. "This is harrowing news for Dr. Yang, his family and all who have supported him." Yang, a former Chinese diplomat and state security agent who became a political commentator and writer of spy novels in Australia, was detained on Jan. 19, 2019, when he arrived in the southern China city of Guangzhou from New York with his wife and teenage stepdaughter.

He was tried behind closed doors in May 2021. The details of his case have not been disclosed. Yang, who became an Australian citizen in 2002, has denied working as a spy for Australia or the United States.

In a letter to his sons in August last year, Yang said he hadn't experienced direct sunlight in more than four years. He told his family he feared he would die in detention after being diagnosed with a kidney cyst, prompting supporters to demand his release for medical treatment. Australia "will be communicating our response in the strongest terms" and will continue to press for his interests and wellbeing, including appropriate medical care, the Australian foreign minister said in her statement. Wang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said the court had protected Yang's procedural rights and arranged for the Australian side to attend on Monday's sentencing, likely referring to a diplomat or diplomats from the Australian Embassy. (AP)

Forest fires rage on in central Chile, killing at least 112 people over 3 days

SANTIAGO, Feb 5: Firefighters wrestled on Sunday with massive forest fires that broke out in central Chile two days earlier, as officials extended curfews in cities most heavily affected by the blazes and said at least 112 people had been killed.

The fires burned with the highest intensity around the city of Viña del Mar, where a famous botanical garden founded in 1931 was destroyed by the flames Sunday. At least 1,600 people were left without homes.

Several neighbourhoods on the eastern edge of Viña del Mar were devoured by flames and smoke, trapping some people in their homes. Officials said 200 people were reported missing in Viña del Mar and the surrounding area. The city of 300,000 people is a popular beach resort and also hosts a well-known music festival during the southern hemisphere's summer.

On Sunday morning, Chilean President Gabriel Boric visited the town of Quilpe, which was also heavily affected by the

fires and reported that 64 people had been killed. Late Sunday, Chile's Forensic Medicine Service updated the confirmed death toll to 112 people. Boric said the death toll could rise as rescue workers search through homes that have collapsed. Some of those arriving in hospitals were also in critical condition.

Rodrigo Mundaca, the governor of the Valparaíso region, where Viña del Mar and other affected cities are located, said Sunday he believed some of the fires could have been intentionally caused, echoing a theory that had also been mentioned Saturday by Boric. "These fires began in four points that lit up simultaneously," Mundaca said. "As authorities we will have to work rigorously to find who is responsible."

The fires around Viña del Mar began in mountainous forested areas that are hard to reach. But they have moved into densely populated neighborhoods on the city's periphery despite efforts by Chilean authori-



ties to slow down the flames. On Saturday, Boric said that unusually high temperatures, low humidity and high wind speeds were making it difficult to control the wildfires in central Chile, which have already burnt through 8,000 hectares (30 square miles) of forest and urban areas.

Boric flew over some of the areas burned by the fires Sunday and visited a school that has been turned into a shelter for the displaced. He said that a presiden-

tial vacation home on the shores of Viña del Mar that is surrounded by large gardens would be temporarily converted into a leisure center for the children of families affected by the fires. The president declared two days of national mourning.

"All of Chile is suffering" Boric said. "But we will stand up once again." Officials asked people in areas affected by the fires to evacuate their homes as quickly as possible, while those farther from the fires were told to stay at home in order to facilitate the transit of fire engines and ambulances.

Curfews were declared in Viña del Mar and the neighboring cities of Quilpe and Villa Alemana as part of an effort to prevent looting. The fires broke out during a week of record high temperatures in central Chile. Over the past two months, the El Niño weather pattern has caused droughts and high temperatures in western South America that have also increased the risk of forest fires. (AP)

PM, Union ministers greet Sikkim CM Tamang on his birthday



GANGTOK, Feb 5: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several Union ministers on Monday greeted Sikkim chief minister Prem Singh Tamang on his birthday.

Tamang turned 56 on Monday. "Birthday greetings to Sikkim CM Shri @PSTamangGolay Ji. May he be blessed with a long life and good health", the prime minister said in a message on X.

Union home minister Amit Shah also wished the Sikkim chief minister on the occasion and prayed for good health and energy to Tamang to keep serving the people of Sikkim. "Wam birthday greetings to Sikkim Chief Minister Shri @PSTamangGolay Ji. May the Almighty continue to bless you with good health and the energy to keep serving the people," he said on X. Several other union ministers, Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu and CMs of other states extended birthday greetings to the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) supremo on his birthday.

The Sikkim chief minister thanked the Prime Minister and all other dignitaries for their kind wishes. (PTI)

Indigenous language Kokborok spoken by nearly 24 % people of Tripura, does not have script

Kokborok script issue: Tipra Motha threatens to change TBSE chief

AGARTALA, Feb 5: The Tipra Motha, the largest opposition party of Tripura, on Monday threatened that heads will roll in the state education board, if students appearing for their upcoming class 10 and 12 exams are not allowed to write their papers on Kokborok language in either Roman or Bengali script.

Kokborok, an indigenous language spoken by nearly 24 per cent people of the northeastern state, does not have a script. Students generally write papers for the language in the Bengali script.

The Tripura Board of Secondary Education (TBSE) president Dhananjay Gonchondhury, however, said the examinees will have to write that paper in Bengali script as it would be difficult for teachers to evaluate answer papers written in Roman script.

"Forcing students to write Kokborok paper in Bengali script cannot be allowed. Gonchondhury should change his stand and provide the option to students to write Kokborok in Bengali and Roman script within two or three



days. Else I will change him," Tipra Motha supremo Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma said.

Debbarma, whose party has 13 MLAs in the 60-member state assembly, was addressing its third foundation day.

Senior Tipra Motha leader Animesh Debbarma last week demanded the removal of

Gonchondhury from his post for allegedly instructing exam supervisors to file FIRs if any student writes answers in Roman script for the Kokborok paper during the upcoming board examinations scheduled to start from the first week of next month.

He said that when Pakistan wanted to impose the Urdu lan-

guage in erstwhile East Pakistan, a language movement broke out there leading to the creation of Bangladesh.

Nine sub-tribes of the Borok community speak this language. According to the 2011 census, 8,80,537 (23.97 per cent of the state's total population) people speak this language.

The indigenous people are not given equal status yet and the Tipra Motha has been speaking for their rights, the state's erstwhile royal family claimed.

"In the Assembly, our 13 MLAs raised the issues related to the Tipra (indigenous) people including Greater Tripaland and the introduction of Roman script for Kokborok," he said.

'Greater Tripaland' state for Tribals is a core demand of the Tipra Motha. It is supposed to include parts of several other northeastern states and Bangladesh, besides Tripura.

No indigenous leader in national political parties is allowed to speak for their community, Debbarma claimed. (PTI)

YMCA, Greater Hyderabad to facilitate investment projects in Nagaland

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 5: The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Greater Hyderabad signed a MoU with the Investment and Development of Authority (IDAN) to help facilitate investment projects in various sectors such as sports, youth development, accommodation and community development. The MoU was signed and exchanged in the presence of Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio, deputy chief minister Y Patton and adviser to the chief minister and IDAN chairman Abu Metha at the capital cultural hall in Kohima.

The YMCA of Greater Hyderabad is affiliated with the Indian YMCA and the World YMCA movement. It is actively engaged in serving the community through its multifarious programmes and activities centered around the holistic development of an individual.

"The Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) signed a MoU with the YMCA of Greater Hyderabad to facilitate investment projects to be undertaken in Nagaland in various sectors such as sports, youth activities and community development. We look forward to a fruitful partnership that will contribute towards the empowerment of our youth," IDAN chairman Abu Metha wrote on X.

Tripura CM meets Shah, Nadda in Delhi, discusses LS poll preparations

AGARTALA, Feb 5: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Monday called on Union home minister Amit Shah and BJP national president J P Nadda in New Delhi and discussed preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the northeastern state.

Taking to social media, Saha wrote, "Happy to meet Hon'ble Union Minister of Home Affairs & Cooperation Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji at New Parliament Building, New Delhi. We discussed the developmental initiatives of #Tripura & also discussed about the upcoming #LokSabhaElection2024 in detail."

In another post, he said, "Glad to meet Hon'ble National President of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Shri J P Nadda Ji at New Parliament Building, New Delhi. We discussed the upcoming



#LokSabhaElections2024 & the organisational issues of the state." Referring to the Lok Sabha elections in the state, Saha said, "Tripura is committed to bloom 2 lotuses again for #ModiAgainIn2024."

The northeastern state has two Lok Sabha constituencies -- West Tripura and East Tripura. (PTI)

AASU opposes English as medium of instruction in vernacular schools



HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Feb 5: Responding to the call given by the central committee of the All Assam Students Union (AASU), the Jorhat district unit of the students' body on Monday staged a demonstration in front of Jorhat district commissioner's office complex seeking revocation of state government's decision to teach science and mathematics subjects in English medium in all vernacular medium government schools from Class VI.

The protesters holding banners and placards shouted slogans against the state government and the education department seeking withdrawal of the decision and to continue with the earlier practice of teaching the said two subjects in mother tongue languages.

They also burnt the effigy of state education minister, Ranaj Pegu. The protesters stated that the decision of the state government was contrary to the announcements made by the Prime Minister and Union home minister, who in recent times were pushing for medium of teaching to be in the mother tongue in engineering and medical institutions.

They also pointed out that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has laid emphasis on use of mother tongue and local languages in the primary level. Terming the government's move as detrimental to the growth of Assamese, Bodo and other local languages, the protesters urged the government not to impose the said decision on the schools and pay heed to the opposition in this regard voiced by the students body and also from several quarters for the greater interest of the state and the students.

The protesters, on the other hand, urged the state government to take necessary steps to improve the infrastructure of government schools in the state. They said that since last year the AASU were holding stir programmes across the state opposing the decision and would continue to do so till government withdraws the decision.

CAA dangerous legislation for a state like Manipur: AMUCO

IMPHAL, Feb 5: Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is a dangerous legislation for a state like Manipur with a small population of indigenous people, said All Manipur United Club Organisation (AMUCO) president Nando Luwang on Sunday.

Talking to reporters on the sideline of a function in Imphal, Nando said that Manipur must be kept outside the purview of the Act. "If not, it is a dangerous Act for the state", he said.

He also said that even before the enactment of the Act, Manipur has started facing the problem of demographic imbalance. The crisis the state is facing currently is also related to illegal immigrants, Nando added.

The AMUCO president said that considering the impact to be given to the state by the CAA, all the indigenous people of the state must raise their voices against the Act unitedly.

"The indigenous people should fight against the Act for the sake of the future of the state", he said.

The issue of CAA resurfaced in the state after a Union minister recently announced that CAA will be implemented across the country soon,



many civil society organisations have reiterated their steadfast stand against the Act.

The Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit System (JCILPS) had already categorically stated that the committee opposed the extension of the Act in the state.

Manipur must be excluded from the purview of the state, it said while reminding that the Centre had already announced that CAA would not be implemented in states/areas where ILP under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 is in force.

It was stated in a letter from the Union ministry of home affairs, foreigners division on September 27, 2020, it added. However, the re-

cent announcement by the Union minister has created confusion among the people, the JCILPS stated.

The people of Manipur opposed CAA and it must not be implemented in the state, the JCILPS added.

Protection and Preservation Committee Manipur (PPCM), another pressure group, had raised their strong objections to CAA while demanding that it should not be implemented in the state under any circumstances.

The PPCM, in a statement on Saturday, reminded the protests by the people across the northeast states against the passing of Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) by the Parliament in 2019. In Manipur too, a conglomerate of civil society organisations known as Manipur People Against Citizenship Amendment Bill (MAN-PAC) was formed after the Parliament approved the legislation and agitated against the legislation.

North East Forum for Indigenous People (NEFIP) which comprises representatives from all northeast states had also opposed CAA, it reminded. (NNN)

Govt should seriously address issues leading to Manipur violence: Pfoze

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: The Naga People's Front (NPF) MP Lorho S Pfoze on Monday demanded that the government seriously address the issues related to ethnic-strife hit Manipur.

Participating in the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address in the Lok Sabha, Pfoze expressed regret that the address had no reference to the violence in Manipur.

More than 180 people have lost their lives and several hundreds have been injured since ethnic clashes broke out in Manipur in early May last year after a Tribal Solidarity March was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Nagas and Kukis constitute little over 40 per cent and reside in the hill districts.

TMC's Pratima Mondal also raised in the Lok Sabha the absence of the Manipur issue from the president's address.

Pfoze said the government must in all seriousness address the issues leading to violence in the state. "Violence must stop. Rule of law must return. Peace must return. Make Manipur vibrant again," he said.

BRS' Nama Nageswara Rao demanded that the amount under the PM KISAN scheme should be raised from ₹ 6,000 per year to ₹ 10,000 per year. Everyone should work together to make India a developed nation by 2047, he said.

N K Premchandran of the RSP said the president gave a political speech which was deeply disappointing. The president made no mention of atrocities against minorities and problems being faced by the working class, he said. (PTI)

Diverse range of electrical products at eLECTROFEST Expo

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 5: A diverse range of electrical products from Kolers were showcased and highly appreciated by customers at the eLECTROFEST Expo organised at Aashii Apsara Banquet Hall, Paltan Bazar under the aegis of GEMA. Kolers India Pvt Ltd Mumbai directors Shashikant Biyani, Suresh Biyani, Mukesh Biyani, Ved Biyani were also present and interacted with valued customers.

North East head Prabhat Chandak mentioned that during these three days of the Expo, All India Technical head Sunit Kapoor, factory technical head Dhiren Rajput, sales head Kamal Soni, senior sales representative (Guwahati) Hemant Biyani, senior sales executive Pankaj Mundhra, Yash Chandak, along with the entire Kolers Team, were present.

He stated that a wide range of Kolers switches and accessories, wires and cable, MCBs, DBS boxes, LED lights, etc., were displayed in this three-day-long eLECTROFEST Expo. Speaking on the occasion, Chandak mentioned that Kolers is a renowned company in Mumbai, manufacturing and producing a wide range of electrical items, including switches, electrical wires, LEDs, DBs, etc. He added that there are more than 300+ Kolers channel partners in the North East, through whom Kolers is enhancing the aesthetics of people's homes and offices. Various products from Kolers were exhibited at the Expo, drawing a large number of dealers, builders, architects, customers, and electricians who visited the stall and appreciated the products.

RRP urges Naga people to elect right candidate in LS polls

DIMAPUR, Feb 5: Rising People's Party (RPP) gave a clarion call to the Naga people to rise above party politics and elect the right leader to represent the Nagas in the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

"This is the right time to fight for our future or else Nagaland will continue to be a failed state," it also said. RPP then said the 2024 Lok Sabha elections will be a battle of ideologies and it is important for Nagas to stay on the right side of history. Given the opportunity, RPP said it will work selflessly for the cherished dreams of "our Naga People, which is, the creation of a new and better Nagaland".

In a statement issued on Monday, RPP said Nagaland continues to reel under the perpetual cycle of corruption and misgovernance and continues to be in news for wrong reasons. "No wonder that it had been termed as a failed state and the corruption capital of India. Amidst this, the resounding cry of the Naga people yearning for change continues to grow unwavering," it added.

The call for dedicated and passionate leaders to lead Nagaland into a new era of peace and development has been the long aspirations of all the Nagas. Since its inception, the Rising People's Party claims it has been expressing this aspiration of the Naga people. In the run up to the previous state legislative assembly election, many conscious Nagas felt that the time was right to bring about the desired change, RPP also said. However, it was not successful due to various inherent factors, RPP said.

According to RPP, the burning desire of the Naga people to see the real change in Nagaland is the driving force and the fuel for the Rising People's Party. (NNN)

Arunachal dist achieves 100 % tapped drinking water connection

117 villages in Aalo district currently have tapped drinking water connections



AALO (ARUNACHAL PRADESH), Feb 5: Arunachal Pradesh's West Siang district has achieved the significant milestone of providing 100 per cent tapped drinking water connection to every household under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), an official said.

All 117 villages in the district now have tapped drinking water connections, he added.

During a function organised by the public health engineering and water supply department in Aalo on Monday, Aalo East MLA Kento

Jini encouraged the village water management committees (VWMCs) to take care of JJM infrastructure.

Jini, who also serves as advisor to the law and justice and parliamentary affairs minister, emphasised the importance of preserving and protecting the catchment areas of the water source.

West Siang deputy commissioner Mamu Hage urged VWMC members to monitor the quality of water and congratulated the department for its achievement. (PTI)

Office of the Headmaster cum Secretary Howraghat Govt.M.E./High School.(Adhoc)

Howraghat, Karbi Anglong
Pin 782481

Ref No IS/KADC/Amal merger, up-gradation/8310-13/ Dt. Diphu the 9/11/2023

In pursuance of Governing Body resolution no 3 dated 17/01/2024, interested candidates are hereby invited for walk-in-interview for documents verification for the following posts for Howraghat Govt M E./ High School (Adhoc) which will be held on 13/02/2024 at 11 am at Howraghat Govt. M.E / High School premises. The posts are purely adhoc basis. Application will be received from 06/02/2024 to 10/02/2024 till 3pm at School premises. Posts are given below

Sl. No.	Name of Post	Minimum Qualification	No of Posts	Fixed Pay/ Month
1.	Assistant Teacher	BA	02	Rs. 12600
2.	Science Graduate Assistant Teacher	B. Sc (Royal)	01	Rs. 12600
3.	Hindi	BA (Hindi as a Subject)	01	Rs. 12600
4.	LDA	BA, PGDCA	01	Rs. 10600
5.	Grade IV	Class X Passed	01	Rs. 8000

Complete Bio-Data scanned copies of Educational Testimonials from HSLC onwards along with original documents and latest passport size photo should be submitted at the time of interview. No TADA will be provided for the purpose.

NB: Special preference will be given to local candidates having Master Degree with B. Ed.

Sd/-
Howraghat Govt. M.E /High School
Howraghat, Karbi Anglong.

Govt should work on de-politicisation of UNSC sanctions on terrorists: Parl Panel

Terrorism in India largely sponsored by Pakistan's spy agency ISI

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: A parliamentary standing committee on Monday called on the government to make persistent efforts to ensure "de-politicisation" of the UN Security Council's sanctions regime on the listing of terrorists and terror entities even as it noted that India remains a recruitment target for global terror groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The report by the panel on external affairs came against the backdrop of China blocking the listing of a number of Pakistan-based terrorists by the United Nations Security Council's sanctions committee.

The committee noted that the problem of terrorism in India is largely sponsored from across the border as terrorist outfits are provided safe havens, material support, finance and other logistics by Pakistan's spy agency ISI to carry out terrorist activities.

The committee was of the firm view that terrorist attacks in the country can only be curbed by dismantling all terrorist networks and safe havens.

It recommended that an action plan or mechanism may be worked out at the earliest for effective shar-



ing of resources, capacity enhancement and pooling of available expertise of the central agencies as well as coordinated global efforts to root out terrorist networks in the "neighbouring countries".

The committee said India should play a prominent role in evolving measures in collaboration with the international community to prevent the spread of radicalisation and extremist ideology.

It said the government should work in close coordination with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and other bodies to bring about qualitative improvement in the regulatory capacity so that terrorist entities do not get new opportunities for financing terrorism.

The committee said effective implementation of the UN Security Council's sanctions regime can be a major tool in countering the ac-

tivities of terrorists and terrorist groups by restricting their travel and suppressing their funding avenues.

On the need for "de-politicisation" of the sanctions regime, the committee said an evidence-based listing and delisting mechanism with greater transparency would be effective in combating terrorism.

In the report on "Countering Global Terrorism at Regional and International Levels", the committee headed by PP Chaudhary urged the government to make persistent efforts at the UNSC to achieve it.

The report mentioned that Pakistan's spy agency ISI has close links with terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) and Indian Mujahideen (IM), and provides them safe havens, material support,

finance and other logistics to carry out terrorist activities in India.

It said India remains a recruitment target for global terror groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS that are operating in South Asia.

"These groups are active in cyberspace and radicalising the vulnerable population to conduct terror attacks," it said.

The committee noted that global terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda are highly dependent on encrypted messaging platforms for instructions to carry out attacks, revival of their sleeper cells and use of virtual currencies like bitcoins for terror financing.

It urged the government to initiate vigorous campaigns for collective action against these terrorist groups to prevent them from building capabilities to carry out terrorist attacks and disturb global peace and security.

The committee said it is of the view that a multifaceted approach involving the active participation of stakeholders including global cyber security and law enforcement organisations at regional and international levels is imperative to counter global cyber terrorism. (PTI)

Bihar deputy CMs meet PM Modi

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Newly appointed deputy chief ministers of Bihar, Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Parliament complex on Monday.

The meeting came days after JD-U supremo and Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar snapped ties with the opposition alliance and joined hands with the BJP again to form the NDA government in the state.

Speaking to PTI after the meeting, Choudhary said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi is our leader. We had come to seek his guidance for the development of Bihar."

"Also, we had to thank the Prime Minister for conferring the Bharat Ratna on Karpoori Thakur (posthumously). People belonging to extremely backward classes, backward classes and Dalits are feeling immense pride due to the conferring of Bharat Ratna on Karpoori Thakur," he told PTI.

Sinha described the meeting with the prime minister as a courtesy call and said, "We had gone to thank the Prime Minister for freeing Bihar from the atmosphere of anarchy and from those who were running goondaraj in the state."

On being questioned about any discussion on the expansion of the Bihar cabinet, Sinha said, "For that, we have a capable leadership and decisions will be taken at an appropriate time."

Both Choudhary and Sinha



slammed the Congress over its allegation that the BJP was trying to poach its MLAs in Bihar.

"Where is the requirement of Congress party's votes to save our government?" Choudhary said, when asked for his comment on the issue.

"Our government has an absolute majority. There is no need to go anywhere," he told PTI.

All, but three MLAs of the Congress in Bihar, the second largest constituent of the opposition alliance which lost power last week, were on Sunday flown to Hyderabad amid fears of poaching by the BJP-led NDA, party sources said.

When contacted, AICC in-charge for Bihar Mohan Prakash

neither confirmed nor denied the development, but asserted that rumours are being spread that Congress MLAs will break away, when the truth is that JD(U) legislators are under pressure due to voters' anger against them, after their party's switch to the NDA.

"They (JD(U)) should worry about keeping their flock together," Prakash said.

Hitting back, Sinha alleged the Congress does not have faith in its own legislators and is treating them as "bonded labourers", which, he said, is "completely inappropriate" in democracy.

"Congress leaders are scared. These are people with dynastic and feudal mentality. They do not have faith in democracy," he said. (PTI)

Govt committed to end Naxal menace in Chhattisgarh, says Governor

RAIPUR, Feb 5: Chhattisgarh Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan on Monday said the state government is committed to crush the left wing extremism and provide essential amenities, education, and healthcare in the affected areas.

The main focus of the governor's address delivered on the opening day of the first budget session of the newly-election Assembly was on strengthening the police force and improving their work-life balance.

He also listed various measures the government is planning for the welfare of various sections including farmers, and providing free rice until December 2028 under the PDS system, apart from promoting spiritual tourism.

"Police force will be provided with modern weapons, communication tools, and other necessary equipment to enhance their quality. In addition, a project with an estimated cost of around ₹ 201 crore will be swiftly completed to develop police infrastructure in Maoist-affected areas," the governor said. The government is also committed to initiating a new era of good governance in Chhattisgarh, inspired by the ideals and principles of the visionary former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the incumbent PM Narendra Modi, he said.

"My Government has decided to equip the police force with new facilities to strengthen them for the effective execution of their duties. Simultaneously, a compassionate approach has been adopted to address their issues from a humane perspective. He said the government stands resolute in establishing the rule of law in the state with a firm commitment to eradicating the Maoist-terrorist menace.

"Our foremost objective is to prioritize the provision of essential amenities, education, and healthcare in Maoist-affected areas," the governor added.

He said recognizing the challenging service, dedication, and commitment of police personnel, the government has decided to provide a one-day weekly off to officers from constable to inspector level in field areas.

In Maoist-affected and difficult regions, district police force personnel will be granted a leave for 8 days once every 3 months in place of the weekly off. Guidelines regarding eligibility and the process for availing leave have been issued, he said.

"The government has fulfilled the commitment to purchase 21 quintals of paddy per acre from farmers, and a transparent and efficient system for paddy procurement has been established, which led to Chhattisgarh achieving the record of highest paddy procurement in the state this year (Kharif marketing season 2023-24)," the governor said. He said the government will provide a minimum support price (MSP) of ₹ 5,500 per standard bag for tendu leaf collection, along with a bonus of up to ₹ 4,500 to collectors.

"Various schemes will be implemented to benefit tendu leaf collectors and their families, promoting their health, education, and comprehensive development. Efforts will also be made to address regional imbalances in development, and empower residents to seize new opportunities, and explore new possibilities," the governor said. (PTI)

If voted to power, INDIA bloc to remove 50 % cap on reservation: Rahul Gandhi



RANCHI, Feb 5: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday promised a nationwide caste census and removal of the 50 per cent cap on reservation if the INDIA bloc forms the government at the Centre after the Lok Sabha polls.

He also alleged that the BJP tried to topple the JMM-Congress-RJD government in Jharkhand as the chief minister was a tribal.

"Want to congratulate all alliance MLAs, (Champt) Soren ji as that they stopped the BJP-RSS conspiracy and protected the government of the poor," Gandhi said at a rally at the Shaheed Maidan here.

Gandhi claimed that dalits, tribals and other backward classes

(OBCs) were made bonded labourers and their participation was lacking in big companies, hospitals, schools, colleges and courts.

"This is the biggest question before India. Our first step would be to get a caste census in the country," the former Congress chief said.

Noting that more than 50 per cent reservation cannot be given under existing provisions, Gandhi promised that an Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance government will "throw out" the 50 per cent cap on reservation.

"There will be no reduction in reservation of Dalits and Adivasis. I am giving you a guarantee that the backward sections of society

will get their rights. This is the biggest issue - social and economic injustice," Gandhi said.

He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi used to say that he is an OBC but when the demand for a caste census was made, he stated that there are only two castes -- the rich and the poor.

"When the time came to give rights to OBCs, Dalits, tribals, Modi ji says there are no castes and when it is time to get votes, he says he is an OBC," Gandhi claimed.

Slamming the BJP soon after the Champai Soren-led government won the trust vote in the Jharkhand assembly, Gandhi alleged that the BJP tried to remove the government as it cannot accept that there is a tribal CM.

"The Congress, the JMM stood against them together and government was saved. They do this in all opposition-ruled states through probe agencies and money power. They (BJP) are attacking democracy, Constitution and want to suppress the voice of the people. The INDIA coalition will not let voice of democracy be suppressed," the Congress leader asserted at the rally held during his Manipur-to-Maharashtra Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. (PTI)

Cong gov't's protest in Delhi against 'injustice' to State, not against BJP

BENGALURU, Feb 5: Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said the protest by the Congress government in New Delhi on February 7 is against the 'injustice' by the Union government in tax devolution and grants-in-aid to the state, and not against BJP.

Listing out "injustice" caused to the state, he urged the opposition BJP to join the agitation in the interest of the state, as the struggle was not against it.

"On February 7, all the ministers and all MLAs of both the houses of the legislature, also MPs, are going to agitate against the Government of India for injustice caused to Karnataka state by the 15th Finance Commission and several other issues concerning the state including grants from the Centre," Siddaramaiah told a press conference here.

He said the agitation would be held at Jantar Mantar in the national capital as he urged BJP MPs from the state to also participate in it.

"The struggle is not between Congress and the BJP or against the BJP, it is against injustice caused to Karnataka state," Siddaramaiah added.

Pointing out that as per the 14th Finance Commission Karnataka got a share of about 4.71 percent of taxes, and 3.64 percent of taxes as per the 15th Finance Commission, the chief minister said, because of this the loss to the state is to the tune of ₹ 62,098 crore in taxes.

Further noting that the state government has submitted a memorandum to the Government of India regarding the severe drought situation in the state, Siddaramaiah said, the crop loss is to the tune of ₹ 35,000 crore, and Karnataka has requested the Centre to release ₹ 17,901 crore from National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), but has not received any relief so far.

"After we submitted the memorandum to the Government of India, the central team had come to Karnataka and visited the affected areas, and submitted a report to the Centre, but so far no meeting has been held by the Government of India to look into the report submitted by the central team. So far we have not received a single paisa from the Centre through NDRF," he said. (PTI)

Several monuments, archaeological sites under encroachment: Govt 3,697 ancient monuments, archaeological sites & remains declared of being of national importance

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: A number of old monuments and archaeological sites in the country are under encroachment, the government informed the Lok Sabha on Monday.

Union minister of culture, G Kishan Reddy said this in a written response to a query in the Lok Sabha.

He was asked about the centrally protected monuments and whether any study has been done to assess their present conditions.

There are 3,697 ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains which have been declared of national importance, Reddy said.

"Inspection of monuments and sites is taken up by the Archaeological Survey of India's officials/of-



ficers from time to time to assess their condition," he said. In his response, he also shared

the state-wise numbers of sites which are under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Kerala Budget: Govt hikes excise duty on liquor, court fees



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 5: A cash-strapped Kerala government on Monday increased court fees and excise duty on liquor and pitched for public-private funding in key areas to raise funds for the implementation of various developmental projects in the state budget for the fiscal 2024-25.

Despite expectations, the government opted not to enhance social welfare pensions and also provided only a nominal increase of ₹ 10 in the minimum support price for rubber -- a major cash crop of the state -- enhancing it to ₹ 180 from ₹ 170 earlier.

Finance Minister K N Balagopal tabled the fourth budget of the second Pinarayi Vijayan government without hiding the financial constraints it is facing, while attacking the Centre for the alleged neglect it shows towards the state.

Seeking to raise additional revenue, the budget proposed a hike of ₹ 10 per litre in excise duty on Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL) and an increase of 15 paise per unit in electricity duty for consumers who generate and consume energy for their own consumption.

The state hopes to generate additional revenue of ₹ 224 crore through these measures, the FM said. However, he later clarified that the levying of gallanage fee on IMFL sale would not be passed on to consumers.

Finding other ways to raise the government's receipts, the FM said suitable amendments would be made to The Kerala Court Fees and Suits Valuation Act, 1959 whereby it would earn an additional ₹ 50 crore.

Elaborating on further plans for raising funds, the finance minister

said the state could bring in ₹ 440 crore annually by revising stamp duty slabs for lease deeds, resuming sand removal in rivers across the state and disposing of unusable assets piled up in various government departments.

Indicating a clear policy diversion from the proclaimed anti-privatisation stand of the Left government, the budget pitched for tapping the possibility of private investments in many key sectors. Opportunities for establishing foreign university campuses will also be examined and steps will be taken to establish private universities as well, the FM said.

Permission would be given to set up 25 new private investment parks in the state in the coming year, he said, adding that private participation in developing local tourism centres would also be encouraged.

Special Development Zones will be created in partnership with the private sector by attracting investment from institutions and individuals including non-resident Keralites, he added.

For the smooth and time-bound execution of major projects such as Vizhinjam Port, Cochin Metro and Kannur Airport, a sum of ₹ 300.73 crore has been earmarked.

Referring to the development of the Vizhinjam port, Balagopal said large-scale investments need to be channelled in to transform it into an entity capable of competing with other prominent ports around the world.

"This can be made possible only through a combination of public funding, public-private partnerships as well as private sector investment," he explained.

While the traditional agricultural sector received an allocation of ₹ 1,698.30 crore in the budget, the cooperative sector, which has been mired in controversies recently, was given a share of ₹ 134.42 crore.

"The tourism sector is growing. Allocating ₹ 351 crore for it in fiscal 2024-25," the minister said, adding that investments worth ₹ 5,000 crore would be attracted to the sector.

Other major allocations include: Life housing scheme (₹ 1,132 crore), IT (₹ 507.14 crore), Science, Technology and Environment (235.55 crore) and so on. (PTI)

Maratha quota leader threatens hunger strike, seeks clarity on draft notification



JALNA, Feb 5: Activist Manoj Jarange, spearheading protests seeking the quota for Marathas under the OBC category, on Monday threatened to launch a hunger strike on February 10 if the government failed to explain the scope of the term "blood relatives" mentioned in the draft notification issued last month.

The government had stated that blood relatives of a Maratha person with records to show he belongs to the Kunbi community would also be recognised as Kunbi, an agrarian community that falls under the OBC grouping.

Jarange has demanded that Kunbi caste certificates be issued to all Marathas in Maharashtra.

Addressing a press conference at Antarwali Sarti village in Jalna district, Jarange claimed that 54 lakh documents related to the Kunbi caste have been discovered, and these prove that Marathas are Kunbis.

The activist said he would undertake a hunger strike if the government fails to provide a clear and satisfactory response by February 10 about the term "sage soyare" (blood relatives) mentioned in the draft notification on Kunbi caste certificates for Marathas.

Jarange claimed that nearly 39 lakh Marathas have benefited from the protest for reservation, and the agitation has united the community, which was historically divided.

Some leaders of Maratha organisations have been posting messages on social media to divide the community instead of focussing on positive discussions about the reservation, he alleged and urged people to concentrate on unity. (PTI)

Bihar Cong MLAs camping in resort outside Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, Feb 5: The Congress MLAs from Bihar, who arrived here amid fears of poaching by the BJP-led NDA, were camping on Monday at a resort at Ibrahimpatnam on the city outskirts.

Telangana Congress sources said the number of visitors from Bihar staying at the resort is over 20, including 17 MLAs who reached the city on Sunday. Ibrahimpatnam is about 30 km from the city.

The opposition legislators are likely to stay in Hyderabad till February 11, they added. Police sources said appropriate security arrangements have been made. Congress, the second largest constituent of the 'Mahagathabandhan' in Bihar, which lost power last week, has 19 MLAs in the state assembly.

The newly formed NDA government in Bihar, headed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, seeks a trust vote on February 12.

Congress sources in Delhi and Patna on Sunday said more than the BJP, it was Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U), a former ally, which they suspect of trying to poach its MLAs. The arrival of the Bihar Congress MLAs in Hyderabad on Sunday evening came barely an hour after the MLAs of ruling JMM-led alliance of Jharkhand left the Telangana capital after staying in a luxury resort for three days ahead of the trust vote of the Champai Soren government. (PTI)

Govt making constant efforts to keep CNG prices under control

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: The government is making constant efforts to bring the prices of compressed natural gas under control and has delinked Indian gas prices from four international hubs based in US, Canada, UK and Russia, and aligned them to the Indian crude basket, Union petroleum and natural gas minister, Hardeep Puri informed the Rajya Sabha.

Responding to supplementaries during the question hour, he said the government is encouraging consumption of compressed natural gas as it is relatively a cleaner fuel.

"The government has ensured that while global prices were witnessing turbulence, massive increases and shortfall. Lockdown prices do not reflect reality prices, as during the lockdown crude prices came down to USD 19.56 per barrel and then shot up to USD 128 and USD 130 per barrel.

"In April 2023, we rationalised the CNG prices and as a result while global prices shot up, domestic gas price was much lower, 83 per cent lower," the minister told the upper house.

"It is our constant effort to provide more gas for domestic cooking purposes and for the transport sector and we are committed to making the green transition," Puri said.

"Our trilemma is to ensure availability, affordability and sustainability and the increased gas which is being provided will raise the gas



available to the transport sector," he noted.

On the matter of encouraging people to switch to CNG vehicles, Puri said there is an autonomous process of transition taking place.

"If you look at the number of CNG vehicles at the time when international CNG prices went up, there was an apprehension that people would stop buying CNG vehicles, but that didn't happen. The very fact that we can make natural gas available to the transportation sector at reasonable prices, not linked to global market prices, that itself acts as an incentive.

"The same is also happening with electric vehicles. But the issue of giving incentives, I think the most important incentive that you can give is to make the energy which these vehicles consume,

available in plenty. We are taking our overall use of gas in our energy matrix from 6 per cent to 15 per cent," he said.

He said in April 2023, the government took some far-reaching reforms by deciding to delink the Indian gas prices from four international hubs based in the US, Canada, the UK and Russia, and we aligned them to the Indian crude basket, in other words, 10 per cent of the Indian crude basket.

"As a result of which, we were able to fix prices every month and the price of gas has now a floor and a ceiling from USD 4 MMBTU to 6.5 MMBTU. This immediately resulted in the price of gas coming down drastically. We have also increased the number of CNG stations from 738 in 2014 to 6,159, a growth of 735 per cent," he said.

The population covered by CGD

has gone up to 98 per cent from 12.81 in 2014, this is a growth of 665 per cent, the minister informed.

Asked whether the disturbances in the Red Sea route have affected crude and gas prices, he said, "so far as the developments in the Red Sea are concerned, we have a certain degree of anxiety as these are non-state actors affecting supply lines...I say with my fingers crossed, we are reasonably confident that given the goodwill around, these factors making for anxiety will be contained and we do not have an all-out escalation."

If an all-out escalation of hostilities takes place and there is disruption, then there will be total supply chain disruption, then there will be concerns, he noted.

If there is no escalation, then this is a "manageable situation", he also said.

In his written reply, the minister said in order to protect the consumers from high volatility of international gas prices, major reforms were undertaken by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas in domestic gas pricing vide revised guidelines issued on 7 April 2023.

"The reforms aimed at rationalising the earlier applicable international gas hub-based pricing. Prior to this, the pricing was based on weighted average of 4 international indices (namely US-Henry Hub, Canadian Alberta Hub, UK NBP and Russian Gas Market). (PTI)

Arrested TMC leader siphoned off money to overseas account, says ED

KOLKATA, Feb 5: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said that TMC leader Shankar Adhya, arrested in connection with an alleged multi-crore ration scam in West Bengal, siphoned off money to a Dubai-based company's account.



Adhya, the former chairman of the Bongaon Municipality, owns a foreign exchange company in the Petrapole area along the India-Bangladesh border, and his relatives also run "around 90 such companies, which were used to siphon off funds outside the country", a senior ED official said.

The Trinamool Congress leader had also opened a company in Dubai, registered under his son's name, with the help of Bakibur Rahaman, another accused in the scam who was arrested in October 2023, the official said.

"Adhya has been involved in siphoning off huge amounts to a Dubai-based company's account," he told PTI.

During the investigation, the ED officers found that on October 16, 2019, USD 79.584 (around Rs 66 lakh) was transferred to that account, he said.

"We are trying to identify the company (where the money was transferred)," the official added.

Adhya was apprehended from his residence at Simultola in Bongaon in January.

He is considered to be close to state minister Jyotipriyo Mallick, who was arrested in connection with the scam last year. (PTI)

555 Asiatic lions dead in 5 years, no rise in mortality rate



NEW DELHI, Feb 5: A total 555 Asiatic lions died in the last five years, but there has been no increase in their mortality rate, the government told the Lok Sabha on Monday. The Gir forest in Gujarat is the only natural habitat of the Asiatic lion. According to government data, the number of these big cats in Gir rose from 523 in 2015 to 674 in 2020.

Replying to a question, Union minister of state for environment, Ashwini Kumar Choubey told the Lower House that 555 lions died in the last five years.

He said 113 lions died in 2019, 124 in 2020, 105 in 2021, 110 in 2022 and 103 in 2023.

Asked if an increasing number of lions were dying in the country, the minister replied in the negative.

Over the years, experts have demanded the translocation of lions in India as the big cats have been geographically isolated in Gir. A second home would protect the lion population from extinction in case of an epidemic, an unexpected decline in prey or natural calamities.

In September 2018, 27 lions died in Gir because of canine distemper virus while 37 had to be quarantined. According to a 2023 report by the Wildlife Institute of India, authorities plan to translocate 40 lions to the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, around 100 kilometres from the Gir National Park.

In 2013, the Supreme Court ordered the translocation of lions from Gir to the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The government, however, released cheetahs into Kuno in 2022-23 as part of its much-awaited project to reintroduce the spotted feline in India. Wildlife expert Ravi Chellam had earlier told PTI that Barda could not be a replacement for Kuno because it is barely 100 kilometres from Gir, as the crow flies.

"Geographic separation is the primary objective of translocation to establish a second free-ranging population of lions to mitigate conservation risks," Chellam, also the coordinator for Biodiversity Collaborative, Bengaluru, had said. (PTI)

HC annuls child's adoption order as parents say they have not bonded with him

MUMBAI, Feb 5: The Bombay High Court has annulled the adoption of a minor boy after his adoptive parents said they have not bonded with the child.

A single bench of Justice R I Chagla passed the order last month while hearing a petition filed by the Bal Asha Trust in December 2023, after the adoptive parents complained to the trust about the "uncontrollable bad behaviour and habits" of the child (age not mentioned in the order).

The HC said it would be in the interest of the child if the adoption

order, passed on August 17, 2023, is annulled.

The high court also directed the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) to re-register the child as 'free for adoption' for identifying suitable prospective adoptive parents at the earliest.

The trust had advised the adoptive parents to undergo counselling sessions in order to understand the child's behavioural issues better and try remedial measures to address those alleged concerns.

The authorities concerned - CARA, State Adoption Resource

Authority, District Child Protection Unit, and Specialised Adoption Agency - were also informed about the adoptive parents' inability to keep and take care of the child.

The adoptive parents attended two counselling sessions as advised by the trust.

The counsellor found the adoptive parents do not have an emotional bonding with the child, though he is fond of the adoptive parents and their seven-year-old biological daughter, who is an elder sibling, the petition said. (PTI)

Four flight trials of 'ABHYAS' conducted successfully by DRDO

Designed by DRDO's Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE), ABHYAS offers realistic threat scenario for practice of weapon systems

BALASORE (ODISHA, Feb 5: Four flight trials of high-speed expendable aerial target 'ABHYAS' were successfully carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) from the Integrated Test Range at Odisha's Chandipur between January 30 and February 2, official sources said.

The trials were conducted with four different mission objectives in a revised robust configuration using a single booster designed by Advanced Systems Laboratory, Hyderabad to provide reduced launch acceleration, they said.

The objectives such as the safe release of the booster, launcher clearance and attaining the required end of launch velocity were achieved. During the flight trials, various parameters such as required endurance, speed, manoeuvrability, altitude and range were successfully validated.

Designed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation's Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE), ABHYAS offers a realistic threat scenario for the practice of weapon systems, the sources said.

It is designed for autonomous flying with the help of an auto pilot indigenously made by the ADE.

It has radar cross-section, visual and in-



frared augmentation system required for weapon practice.

ABHYAS has a laptop-based ground control system with which the aircraft can be integrated and pre-flight checks, data recording during the flight, replay after the flight and post-flight analysis can be carried out.

It requires minimum logistics and is cost-effective compared to imported equivalents, they said.

The systems tested recently were realised through production agencies Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Larsen & Toubro

(L&T) Defence.

With identified production agencies, ABHYAS is ready for production. The system has export potential and can be offered to friendly countries, they added.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has congratulated the DRDO, the armed forces and the defence industry for the successful flight trial of ABHYAS.

DRDO chairman Samir V Kamat appreciated the efforts of the teams associated in the design, development and testing of the system. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

CM tables Bill to

she has been convicted under the provisions of this law. "The court shall make an order of recovery of any wrongful gains made by such person, by way of attachment and sale any of the assets/property movable or immovable, or both, of such person," it said.

The Bill also proposed to make all offences as cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable, and authorise an officer of deputy superintendent of police rank or above to probe the crimes. It also said that "no suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding" shall be applicable against any public servant acting under the direction of the Assam government for anything done or planning to do in "good faith" under this Act.

The government in consultation with the Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court will also institute special courts, headed by not below Additional District and Sessions Judge, to try offences under this Act.

Sarma, in the Statement of Object and Reasons of the Bill, said that it aims to provide an effective measure to prevent and curb the leaking of question papers and the use of unfair means in job tests to any post under the state government, including autonomous bodies, authorities, boards and corporations. (PTI)

Stormy start to budget

operations, crime reduction, child marriage and drugs seizure. "Assam Police continued its intense operation against narcotic drugs and recovered 167 kg of heroin, 30,963.72 kg ganja and other substances," he said. In his speech, which was considered read after it was cut short due to protests by the opposition, Kataria said the Assam Police seized drugs and narcotics worth ₹ 1,882 crore from May 10, 2021 to January 2 this year.

Talking about child marriage, he said the social menace is a severe violation of human rights that causes long-lasting physical, psychological and emotional trauma. "In this regard, special drives have been launched under relevant laws and 5,347 cases were registered against more than 8,800 accused, out of which over 4,407 people have been arrested and sent to judicial custody," the governor said.

"For the first time, an effort has been made to tackle this menace at the grass root level," he said.

Kataria also said 1,249 militants surrendered by laying down 364 arms and 2,946 rounds of ammunition last year. "The number of crimes came down from 1,33,239 in 2021 to 63,713 in 2023, while the conviction rate increased from 6.1 per cent in 2021 to 16.69 per cent in 2023," he informed the assembly. Kataria said that in order to curb graft and corruption by public servants, "91 trap cases were carried out successfully" in 2023. "During this process, 117 people have been arrested, out of which 103 are public servants, including 45 officers. "Similarly, the Bureau of Investigation into Economic Offences has carried out its operations and registered cases related to GST fraud, bank fraud... and arrested 88 people, including 25 public servants," he said. The governor added that a high-security jail is being constructed in Kamrup district under the initiative of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs for 255 inmates at a cost of ₹ 10 crore. (PTI)

Move to bring all tourism

activities related to tourism, while penalties of up to ₹ 30,000 will be levied in case of violation of the provisions of the Bill. (PTI)

Udalguri station gets

for ease of movement for passengers. Entry exit path will be developed, which will offer improved accessibility for passengers. Tenders have been awarded for all the above works. Foundation work for the new station building has already been started. Work for other passenger amenities like Installation of Coach Guidance Board, Train Information Display System, Extension of Platforms, provision of easy access water booths for Divyangjan etc. are also in progress. The upgradation of this station will lead to creation of new avenues which will lead to new employment, business opportunity and ease of travel for passengers of city and nearby areas.

Third term of NDA govt

the Congress for the opposition's present condition. "For several decades you were sitting here (in the treasury benches), but now you have resolved to stay there (opposition benches) for several decades. "The people will bless you and keep you there. You will achieve greater heights and will be soon seen in the public galleries (of the House)," the prime minister said. Modi said that the Budget Session was a good opportunity to make some constructive suggestions, but the opposition members have let go of a good chance.

"You have left the country disillusioned... Leaders have changed but the same tune continues," he said.

The opposition could have given some message to the people in an election year, Modi said, adding that the Congress was responsible for the present state of the opposition. "Congress had a good opportunity to play a good opposition but failed in that role. There are other young people in the opposition, but they were not allowed to speak out of fear that it may overshadow a particular person," Modi said in an apparent reference to Rahul Gandhi. The prime minister said the Congress may soon have to "shut shop" due to its attempt to launch the same product time and again. "It's election time, and you should have worked a bit harder, brought something new and sent a message to the people. However, you failed miserably. Let me teach you this very thing.

"The Congress party is responsible for the current condition of the opposition. The Congress got an opportunity to become a good opposition. However, they failed to fulfil their responsibility in the last ten years...." Modi said in Lok Sabha. (PTI)

Karbi students body

erosion-induced displacement or ethnic violence. It is crucial that Karbi Anglong is a Sixth Scheduled area and only tribal individuals have the right to acquire land as per the Mikir Hills District (Transfer of Land Act) 1959." Tisso also said Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) is the rightful owner of land. As such, the Basundhara portal scheme should not be imposed in West Karbi Anglong. The PGR/VGR land should not be a haven for illegal immigrants and call for early eviction, the AIKSU asserted.

IIT-Guwahati-led

the heart of every power electronic system and function primarily as efficient switches, toggling ON and OFF to condition incoming power from grid to be used by end-user. For emerging high-power applications, there is a demand for compound semiconductor materials with an ultra-wide bandgap.

Power electronic systems play a vital role to manage and control the flow of electricity. They are crucial for converting electrical energy from both renewable including solar and wind, and non-renewable sources including thermal power plants, into a form compatible with end-user applications in terms of voltage, current and frequency.

However, there will always be some losses incurred when the electrical energy passes through a typical power electronic system. Researchers globally have been working on improving the efficiency of power electronic systems using materials like Gallium Nitride (GaN) and Silicon Carbide (SiC) but these have limitations, especially in terms of cost, for high-power applications.

"The main challenge was to make thin and smooth films out of the material. We have successfully developed a superior quality ultra-wide bandgap compound semiconductors and fabricated two terminal devices. The applications of this technology extend to electric vehicles, high voltage transmission, traction systems, and industrial automation," Bag added. He said a key challenge was creating a Gallium oxide thin film on a sapphire substrate, deviating from the common use of Gallium oxide substrates.

This shift enhances cost-effectiveness and thermal performance, addressing issues related to the expense and poor thermal conductivity of Gallium oxide substrates, the assistant professor added.

The findings of the study have been published in multiple research papers in 'Journal of IEEE Transactions on Electron Devices' and 'Thin Solid Films'.

Besides Bag, the co-authors include Satinder K Sharma and Arnab Mondal from the School of Computing and Electrical Engineering, IIT Mandi, and Manoj K Yadav from Institute of Sensor and Actuator Systems, TU Wien, Vienna, Austria. The research has received funding from the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), Department of Science and Technology, the statement added. (PTI)

JMM-led coalition

He said that the cabinet expansion will take place in the next 2-3 days. JMM legislator Mithilesh Kumar Thakur said, "The win in the confidence vote is a tight slap on the face of the BJP."

Earlier, speaking during the special session, the CM alleged that the saffron party was "attempting to destabilise democratically elected governments" in non-BJP-ruled states, including Jharkhand and it used central agencies to frame Hemant Soren in false cases.

"Hemant hai to himmat hai (Where there is Hemant, there is strength)," said Champai Soren. The chief minister also said he is proud that his government is "part 2" of the Hemant Soren administration.

"Misuse of ED and CBI by the Centre a threat to democracy. I urge all to save democracy following the path of the Father of the Constitution," Champai Soren said referring to B R Ambedkar.

The 67-year-old Jharkhand leader alleged that the saffron party was trying to create "anarchy in the country".

"The manner in which obstacles are being presented before our government is not a secret," he said.

The arrested ex-CM Hemant Soren claimed that the ED did not want him to speak inside the assembly. "I challenge BJP to prove corruption charges against me. If someone proves that I possess 8.50 acres of land (illegally), I will resign from politics... January 31 is a black chapter in India's history... Raj Bhavan was instrumental in my arrest," Hemant Soren said.

During his speech, CPI (ML) L legislator Vinod Singh wondered how those with BJP always become corruption-free while those who are not indulged in wrongdoings.

Leader of Congress legislature party Alamgir Alam said the people of Jharkhand will never forget the welfare work done by Hemant Soren.

Leader of opposition in the Assembly Amar Bauri's comment that Congress is anti-national and anti-Jharkhand prompted ruling party MLAs to troop into the well to protest.

AJSU Party chief Sudesh Mahto said there is nothing abnormal in the questioning of Hemant Soren by central agencies as the Prime Minister of the country too had faced investigations earlier.

JMM's Mithilesh Kumar Thakur said the victory of the alliance in the trust vote is a befitting reply to forces conspiring against it. State BJP president Babulal Marandi urged the new chief minister to free Jharkhand from the clutches of a corrupt government system and middlemen.

"If Champai Soren becomes a photocopy of the Hemant Soren government, he may get into trouble," he said. Congress MLA Banna Gupta said, "They (BJP) wanted to scare and threaten our MLAs, but this is a democratic government chosen by the public, it will stand strong. In the coming elections, we will again form the government."

Earlier the ruling coalition MLAs raised slogans like "Hemant Soren Zindabad" for about 5 minutes when the former CM entered the House, clad in a white Kurta-pajama set.

After the trust vote, the House was adjourned till Tuesday.

The ruling alliance had ring-fenced its MLAs by flying them to Congress-ruled Telangana on February 2. The MLAs were brought to Ranchi by a chartered aircraft on Sunday night and brought to the Assembly from Circuit House where they spent the night.

The BJP MLAs described the shifting of JMM-led alliance MLAs to Hyderabad as a political manoeuvre to conceal internal differences within the ruling coalition. The party denied charges that it was attempting to poach ruling alliance legislators. (PTI)

Varun-Atlee's film titled 'Baby John', movie to release in May

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Actor Varun Dhawan's upcoming action entertainer movie with 'Jawan' filmmaker Atlee's production banner is titled 'Baby John', the makers said on Monday.

Also starring Keerthy Suresh and Wamiqa Gabbi, the film is directed by Kalees and will hit the screens on May 31.

'Baby John' is produced by Murad Khetani's Cine1 Studios, Atlee and Priya's A For Apple Studios, and Jyoti Deshpande for Jio Studios.

Varun shared the link of the announcement teaser on his official X page.

'Aaaa #babyjohn. In cinemas worldwide 31st may 2024,' he wrote. 'Baby John' also stars Jackie Shroff and Rajpal Yadav. (PTI)

Ready to work again: Aamir on break from movies



NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Aamir Khan says he is back to movies after a short break that helped him reconnect with his family.

The actor-filmmaker, who has produced former wife Kiran Rao's "Laapataa Ladies", said the time away from movies helped him bond with his family. He revealed that he also started learning Hindustani classical music during this period.

"I had taken a short break because I wanted to spend time with my family. I was busy with my work for so many years... I spent a lot of time with my family and tried to build a strong bond with them," Aamir said during his appearance on News18 India Chaupal.

"I am ready to work again now. I began shooting for my next film from February 1," said Aamir, who took a break from movies after the failure of "Laal Singh Chadha" in 2022.

Asked whether he was open to doing romantic movies, Aamir said he would feature in one if it had an age-appropriate romance. "Romance is a little uncommon in this age but if they are age appropriate, why not? I would like to do all kinds of genres."

But I can't become an 18-year-old, I will not do that," he said. The actor, 58, praised Rao's second directorial project, which is set to release on March 1. Rao made her debut as a filmmaker with "Dhobi Ghat" in 2010.

Rao said Aamir had given a screen test for "Laapataa Ladies" but they mutually decided to cast Ravi Kishan in the role of a cop as the movie has a rural backdrop. (PTI)

'Shakti' display at Grammys

Five Indians bag awards, Zakir Hussain gets three

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: India shone at the 2024 Grammy Awards with five Indian musicians, including tabla maestro Zakir Hussain and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia, picking up the coveted prize at a glittering ceremony in Los Angeles.

While Hussain was India's big winner with three Grammys, Rakesh Chaurasia picked up two. Singer Shankar Mahadevan, violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan and percussionist Selvaganesh Vinayakram, Hussain's collaborators in the fusion group Shakti, won one Grammy each at the event held at the Crypto.com Arena Sunday night.

Shakti won the 2024 Grammy Award for best global music album for "This Moment". The album features the four Indians as well as its founding member, the legendary British guitarist John McLaughlin. "This Moment", which released to critical acclaim in June 2023, is the group's first studio album in more than 45 years. Besides his award for Shakti, Hussain won two other awards -- the best global music performance for "Pashto" and best contemporary instrumental album for "As We Speak".

The best global music performance category had eight nominees, including

"Abundance In Millets", a song by Falu and featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "Shadow Forces" by Arooj Aftab, Vijay Iyer, and Shahzad Ismaily, and "Alone" by Burna Boy.

Rakesh Chaurasia, nephew of legendary flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia, won two Grammys as part of the ensemble of American banjo player Bela Fleck and American bassist Edgar Meyer for "Pashto" and "As We Speak".

"Without love and music we are nothing," Hussain said in his award acceptance speech for "Pashto".

"Thanks to the Academy, thanks to all these great musicians for giving us this beautiful (live) music today. One of our members is missing, Mr Bela Fleck. "So from him, Mr Rakesh Chaurasia, and Mr Edgar Meyer, our deepest thanks... Families are here and without them, we are nothing. With-

out love, music, harmony, we are nothing," the veteran percussionist said. This is not the first win for Hussain at the awards organised by the US-based Recording Academy. He earlier won Grammys, across categories and in solo capacity as well as in collaborations, in 1991, 1996 and 2008. The "As We Speak" team -- Hussain, Meyer, Fleck and Chaurasia -- were also nominated for best instrumental composition for motion picture.

Shankar Mahadevan, who took the stage alongside Rajagopalan and Selva-

ganesh, gave a shout-out to McLaughlin and Hussain. While McLaughlin gave the ceremony a miss, Hussain was backstage as he had won another Grammy.

"We miss you John ji. Zakir Hussain, he just had another Grammy today. Thank you boys, God, family, friends and India. We are proud of you, India," said Mahadevan in the speech, dedicating the win to his wife Sangeeta. Rajagopalan thanked the Recording Academy for the recognition. A R Rahman, who won two Grammys for "Slumdog Millionaire" in 2008, shared a group selfie with Hussain, Mahadevan and Selvaganesh on Instagram.

"It's raining Grammys for India... Congrats Grammy winners #ustadzakirhussain (3grammys), @shankarmahadevan (first Grammy) and @selvaganesh (first Grammy)" the music composer captioned his post.

Three-time Grammy winner Ricky Kej, who also attended the ceremony, called 2024 the year of India at the Grammys. Kej, based out of Bengaluru, won his third Grammy last year for the album 'Divine Tides'.

"Wowwww... this is truly

India's year at the Grammys!!!

Wowwww.. Rakesh Chaurasia, Shankar Mahadevan, Ganesh Rajagopalan, Selvaganesh Vinayakram and Ustad Zakir Hussain.. India is truly shining!! Thrilled!!!! 5 Indians win in a single year :-) #GRAMMYS #GRAMMYS2024," he wrote.

In a separate post, Kej hailed triple wins for Hussain and double feat for Chaurasia.

".. and Ustad Zakir Hussain, the living legend, creates history by winning 3 Grammys in one night!!! Rakesh Chaurasia wins 2!! This is a great year for India at the Grammys.. and I am blessed to witness it. @RecordingAcad #indiawinsatgrammys," he added.

Other nominees in the best global music album were "Epifanías" (Susana Baca), "History" (Bokanté), "I Told Them..." (Burna Boy) and "Timeless" (Davido).

Nominees in the best contemporary instrumental album segment included "On Becoming" by House Of Waters, "Jazz Hands" by Bob James, "The Layers" by Julian Lage, and "All One" by Ben Wendel.

Sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar was the first musician from India to win a Grammy Award (best chamber music performance) in 1968. Since then, several musicians from the country, including Zubin Mehta, Anoushka Shankar, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, L Shankar, and T H Vinayakram, have received Grammys in various categories. (PTI)

'Lahore 1947' a reunion with most talented people: Rajkumar Santoshi

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Filmmaker Rajkumar Santoshi says he is collaborating with A R Rahman and Javed Akhtar on 'Lahore 1947', a film that also marks his reunion with actors Aamir Khan and Sunny Deol. Santoshi directed Aamir in 'Andaz Apna Apna' while he and Deol playing the lead role.



The filmmaker is also known for hits like 'China Gate', 'Pukar', 'Lajja', 'The Legend of Bhagat Singh', 'Khaki' and 'Ajab Prem Ghazab Kahani'. (PTI)

"Lahore 1947" is a very special film. Also, it's a reunion with the most talented people. I worked with Aamir in 'Andaz Apna Apna' and this time, he is collaborating as a producer. With Sunny Deol, we made most loved films like 'Ghayal', 'Damini', and 'Ghatak'. Santoshi said in a statement.

"For a film of this magnitude, I can't think of anyone else than A R Rahman as a music composer, he is one of the top composers in the world right now. Javed Akhtar and I share a very good bond with each other for many years, having him for this project as a lyricist is a delight. This is truly the best dream team and rare to come together. With all the positivity and full of energy, we will commence the shoot for the film very soon," he added.

Trisha joins Chiranjeevi in 'Vishwambhara'



NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Veteran star Chiranjeevi on Monday welcomed actor Trisha on the set of the upcoming Telugu film "Vishwambhara".

Written and directed by Mallidi Vassishtha, "Vishwambhara" will hit screens on January 10, 2025, ahead of Makar Sankranti. The film will have music by "RRR" collaborators -- composer MM Keeravaani and lyricist Chandrabose.

Chiranjeevi shared Trisha's casting announcement on his official X page.

"Welcome on board. The Gorgeous @trishtrashers! #Vishwambhara," he wrote.

Trisha, who worked with Chiranjeevi in the 2006 movie "Stalin", said she is happy to team up with the star once again.

"What an honour it is to reunite with the one and only MEGASTAR after 18 years. Thank you so much for the warmest welcome Chiru sir @KChiruTweets," she replied to his post on X.

"Vishwambhara" is produced by UV Creations. (PTI)

MADHURI DIXIT

Don't know why Suniel Shetty and I never worked together before



MUMBAI, Feb 5: Actress Madhuri Dixit Nene, who has a career spanning over four decades, has opened up on her first collaboration with actor Suniel Shetty, pondering why they never worked together before. She also called the latter "mind-blowing."

Madhuri and Suniel are seen as the judges in the show 'Dance Deewane'.

Talking about the same, Madhuri said: "Suniel is mind-blowing on the show. This is my first collaboration with him, and I don't know why we never worked together before. While we haven't shared the screen in films, this opportunity emerged, and I'm thoroughly enjoying it."

"Initially, I sensed a bit of apprehension from him. As soon as he stepped onto the set and began sharing his comments, I was very impressed with his

ease. The way he talks is amazing. When viewers see him as a judge, they will love him? immensely," shared the 'Saajan' fame actor.

If Madhuri were given the chance to dedicate a song to Suniel and perform with him in the family theme set for this show, which song would it be?

She said: "Well, I love a song from one of his films titled 'Jhanjariya Uski Chank Gayi' and I will definitely perform that song with him."

The song 'Jhanjariya' is from the 1996 action film 'Krishna', starring Suniel and Karisma Kapoor.

Madhuri added that Suniel is a wonderful person, very down to earth, and a beautiful human being.

'Dance Deewane' airs on Colors. (AGENCIES)

Ravindra's 240 puts New Zealand on top after 2 days in 1st cricket test against South Africa

MOUNT MAUNGANUI (NEW ZEALAND), Feb 5: Rachin Ravindra finally caught up with his reputation on Monday, scoring 240 before New Zealand was all out for 511 on the second day of the first cricket test against South Africa.

South Africa was in trouble at 80-4 at stumps, trailing by 431 runs. Kyle Jamieson took two wickets within three balls in the 10th over as South Africa slumped to 30-3 early.

David Bedingham and Zubayr Hamza put on 44 for the fourth wicket but Hamza was out close to stumps, bowled by Mitchell Santner. Bedingham was 29 not out at stumps.

The day belonged to Ravindra, who has been the Next Big Thing in New Zealand cricket since he was a teenager and now, at 24, has come of age.

He was a standout at high school, marked even then as an extraordinary talent. His reputation followed him when he made his first-class debut at 18, moved the New Zealand under-19 team and then into the Black Caps, first in T20 cricket in 2021 and a couple



of months later into the test team.

He realized some of his extraordinary potential at last year's World Cup in India where he was fourth highest-scoring batsmen behind superstars Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Quinton de Kock.

And on Sunday, in only his fourth test and seventh innings three years after his debut, he ar-

rived in test cricket with a maiden century in the company of his idol Kane Williamson.

Williamson couldn't go on Monday, falling at 118 at the end of a 232-run third-wicket partnership. Ravindra went on to 150 and then

to 200 from 340 balls, becoming the second-youngest New Zealander after Matthew Sinclair to score

a double century and the third New Zealander to turn a maiden hundred into 200. Sinclair and Martin Donnelly are the others.

When he was out, bowled by South Africa captain Neil Brand, Ravindra had batted six minutes more than nine hours. His was a majestic innings, full of grit and application.

In another extraordinary milestone Monday, South Africa captain Brand took 6-119 on test debut. Brand is only a part-time left-arm spinner and likely would not have expected to bowl with four seamers in the tourists' lineup.

But without a specialist spinner and with the New Zealand innings taking up 144 overs, he was forced to bowl 26 overs on a drying pitch. Brand bowled Ravindra with a ball which turned back sharply from, cannoned onto the stumps from Ravindra's leg as he tried to pull. He also took the wickets of Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Mitchell Santner, Matt Henry and Tim Southee.

Ravindra didn't score swiftly earlier but showed patience and restraint. His century contained 10

fours and a six, his 200 included 21 fours and still just the one six.

Williamson gave him the inspiration on the first day to dig in and persevere in challenging conditions against tight South African bowling. Ravindra always has chosen Williamson as his model, has watched and tried to match the manner in which Williamson has assembled his 30 test centuries.

He was able in his fourth test to replicate those qualities and even outlast Williamson. It was only when his 200 came up, after a nervous wait of more than 20 minutes on 199, that he let go some of the restraints and began to hit out as New Zealand moved towards a declaration. His complete innings contained 26 fours and three sixes.

"The way I bat is just sort of natural," Ravindra said. "The way I score is just if it's there I'll hit it, if it's not I'll leave or defend it. On that surface I had to be a bit selective over which balls I was going to score off. Kane was providing me with the perfect template of how to do it at the other end. Being able to lean on him throughout the partnership was great." (AP)

Way we put India under pressure was great but couldn't end up on right side of result: Stokes

VISAKHAPATNAM, Feb 5: England skipper Ben Stokes on Monday said he had full belief in his batters' ability to chase a near-impossible 399 against India on a difficult track in the lost second Test here because "scoreboard pressure" usually got the best out of them.

England lost by 106 runs but did not abandon their ultra-aggressive 'Bazball' approach during the chase. However, barring Zak Crawley (73), the visiting batters could not convert their starts into big scores.

"We had full belief in ourselves that we could chase that down. The way we have gone about taking on challenges like that is what we are about," Stokes said at the post-match presentation ceremony.

"In moments like that, when you have scoreboard pressure, that is when we get the best out of ourselves as individuals," he added.

Stokes was very satisfied with the way his team applied itself through the match and he had no advice to give his batters about their approach. "The way we applied ourselves and put India under pressure was great, unfortunately we didn't end up on the right side of the result. There is no suggestion [from me] on how to go out and play."

"We knew there is a task ahead, knew there was 330 (332) to get, everybody in that dressing room is a quality player."

He lauded his inexperienced spin trio of Rehan Ahmed, debutant Shoaib Bashir and Tom Hartley, saying they looked ready for international cricket.

"It wasn't a challenge (to captain them). I absolutely loved (it). To look at Tom, Bash and Rehan with three matches between them and watch them put in the performance yesterday was great."

"They showed a lot of maturity, a lot of skill," he said.

He also applauded his veteran pace spearhead James Anderson, who grabbed five wickets in the match, and Indian star Jasprit Bumrah (9 wickets in match) for managing to make an impact on the sporting track. Bumrah was adjudged man of the match for his performance.

"They showed a lot of maturity, a lot of skill. (Anderson) Jimmy is amazing. You look at Jimmy, and Jasprit Bumrah, two great fast bowlers. Even when you are in the opposition, you put your hand up (for Bumrah). Jimmy is that player for us," he said. (PTI)

Inzaghi takes another step toward his 1st Serie A title

MILAN, Feb 5: Inter Milan's players joyously celebrated as if they had won the league. They might not have — yet — but coach Simone Inzaghi took a potentially decisive step toward his first Serie A title on Sunday.

An own-goal by Bianconeri defender Federico Gatti in chaotic circumstances was enough to hand league leader Inter a 1-0 win in the Derby d'Italia and lift it four points above second-place Juventus.

Both teams were eager to highlight that nothing would be decided at San Siro, with 15 rounds remaining, but Inter also has a game in hand — at home to Atalanta on Feb. 28.

The Nerazzurri players jubilantly danced in front of their fans, who sang raucously and set off flares and waved flags. Hakan Calhanoglu, one of the best players on the field, even took off his shirt in celebration.

"I liked how the team played tonight, the team was really good, we played very well technically and we were always focused," Inzaghi said.

"It's an important step but absolutely not decisive — as I said before the match — but clearly it's a great night, in front of our own fans who really helped us right from the moment we got to the stadium."

Massimiliano Allegri's Juventus will now be nervously looking over its shoulder, with AC Milan only four points behind.

"It was a difficult match, we knew it would be, against a team like Inter that deserves its first place in the league," Allegri said. "It was an important step in our path of growth."

"We can improve but it's been a difficult week, we need to now work calmly to get back to winning ways."

Inter started brighter on Sunday and should have taken the lead in the 25th minute. Calhanoglu played a wonderful, crossfield ball over the top to Federico Dimarco and he crossed for Marcus Thuram, who appeared to be through on goal before a perfectly timed, last-ditch tackle from Bremer.

Juventus went as close at the other end shortly after as Weston McKennie strode downfield before passing to an unmarked Dušan Vlahovic but the in-form forward's first touch was horrible, allowing Benjamin Pavard to get in the block for a corner.

Inter took the lead eight minutes from the break. Nicolò Barella whipped in a cross from the right. Pavard missed the ball with an overhead kick and it went through to Thuram for an attempted diving header but instead it bounced in off Gatti's chest.

Inter started the second half just as it had begun the first and Dimarco drilled narrowly wide of the post before Calhanoglu thumped the right upright.

Juventus also had chances to level in an end-to-end second period and Vlahovic's overhead kick went narrowly over the bar. (AP)

Unbeaten India firm favourites in World Cup semifinal clash against South Africa

BENONI, Feb 5: Red-hot India will be firm favourites to book a place in the summit clash of the ongoing U-19 World Cup when they take on hosts South Africa in the first semifinal here on Tuesday.

Defending champions India have marched on into the semifinals on the back of five consecutive wins in the tournament, with their exciting talent putting up a fine all-round show to ensure their dominance.

Across departments, it will be tough to point out a singular force behind India's juggernaut, particularly in last few games.

If the batters have buried the opponents under a mountain of runs, the bowlers have delivered wins that have exceeded a minimum of 130 runs in terms of margins.

With two centuries and a fifty, the 18-year-old Musheer Khan has lit up the tournament as he sits atop the list of batters with most runs in this edition, amassing 334 runs in five outings at 83.50.

Hot on his heels is India skip-



per Uday Saharan, who has led by example to rake up 304 runs with two fifties and a ton while averaging 61.60.

Sachin Dhas has also given a fine example of himself, hitting a 116 in India's last Super Six game against Nepal after his side was put in a spot of bother at 62 for three.

Each of India's opponents

have hitherto found it difficult to score runs off India vice-captain and left-arm spinner Saumy Kumar Pandey, whose enviable economy rate of 2.17 has helped him snare 16 wickets with three four-fors, placing him third in the list of most successful bowlers in this World Cup.

Pandey's ability to keep a lid on the opposition batters with

suffocating line and lengths in the powerplay have allowed India to dominate the proceedings with the ball in hand.

Pandey's accuracy has also aided the seamers, with Naman Tiwari (9 wickets) and Raj Limbani (4 wickets) thriving from the other end.

Besides India's winning run, their recent success against South Africa also makes them favourites to book a place in the final, which could witness a possible blockbuster India-Pakistan clash.

Pakistan will take on Australia in the second semifinal here at the Willowmoore Park.

Before embarking on the World Cup campaign, India had crushed South Africa in two consecutive ODIs of the Tri Nation Series while chasing, something which will give the Saharan-led side confidence.

However, the knockout games bring a different kind of pressure and the first semifinal could be a battle between India's in-form batters and the on-song South African pacer

Kwena Maphaka.

With three five-wicket hauls in five games, Maphaka has not only topped the charts among bowlers with 18 scalps but he has single-handedly set up South Africa's commanding wins in last two games. The left-arm pacer ran through Sri Lanka with 6/21 in South Africa's last Super Six game.

Teams (from):

India: Uday Saharan (c), Arshin Kulkarni, Adarsh Singh, Rudra Mayur Patel, Sachin Dhas, Priyanshu Moliya, Musheer Khan, Aravelly Avanthi Rao (wk), Saumy Kumar Pandey, Murugan Abhishek, Inesh Mahajan (wk), Dhanush Gowda, Aaradhy Shukla, Raj Limbani and Naman Tiwari.

South Africa: Juan James (c), Esosa Ahebeba, Raeeq Daniels, Kwena Maphaka, Dewan Marais, Ngobani Mokoena, Riley Norton, Romashan Pillay, Siphos Potane, Ntando Zuma (wk), Lhuan-dre Pretorius (wk), Richard Seletswane, Steve Stolk, David Teeger, Oliver Whitehead. (PTI)



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 5: The 2nd All Assam Griffon Challenge Women's Cricket Championship got underway in Sivasagar Boarding Field on Monday.

In the rain interrupted inaugural match Sivasagar B defeated Sivasagar A by 7 wickets. Batting first, Sivasagar A scored 92/2 in 20 overs. Sivasagar B scored 93/3.

Manoj Kumar Borthakur hoisted the tournament flag while the tourney was inaugurated by Mrinala Konwar, chairperson, Sivasagar Municipality Board in presence of Manoj Bhagawati, GS, Sivasagar Sports Association, distinguished guests Monica Saikia, Jayashree Chaliha, Sarat Hazarika, Bharati Saikia, Arabinda Baruah, Pradip Borthakur, Dr Moni Pathak, Bina Goswami, Tutu Phukan and Minnaka Saikia.

I was nervous in second innings: Gill

VISAKHAPATNAM, Feb 5: India batter Shubman Gill on Monday admitted that the pressure of failing to score big in the last few innings made him nervous when he came out to bat in the second innings of the second Test against England here.

Gill, following disappointing performances in the opening Test in Hyderabad and the first innings of the second Test here, finally got the monkey off his back by hitting a century (104) to help India win by 106 runs.

"Honestly, I'll sum it up in just one line: My heartbeat playing the first ball and playing my last ball was the same. My heartbeat was the same throughout my (second) innings. That's how nervous I was feeling," said Gill, speaking to the host broadcaster.

"That's what I was actually talking to Rahul (Dravid) sir this morning when the England team was batting, it (heartbeat) was quite weird... I've never experienced anything like that. It was something different that I experienced yesterday," said Gill, who did not come out to field on Monday due to a thumb injury he suffered while fielding on the second day.

Gill, who scored 23 and 0 in the opening Test which India lost by 28 runs, said it was not the "outside pressure" that was bothering him but the expectation he had from himself that was weighing on his mind.

"Obviously, not being able to score runs in the previ-

ous matches... and it was not only the expectations you know that are outside, but the expectations that I had for myself."

"And, I was also disappointed with the way I got out in the first innings here and in the first Test in Hyderabad. So all the expectations, I was just a bit disappointed with myself, maybe that was the reason (for the nervousness)."

On whether the negative publicity on social media was playing on his mind and making him nervous, Gill said it did not matter to him.

"I don't read the newspapers, I don't really go on social media to try and look for what people are saying there. If you are not doing well, I don't expect someone to tell me I'm not doing well. I know myself I'm not doing well. More than anything else, it was my own personal disappointment," he said.

On his muted celebrations following the century, Gill said had he scored a double-ton, he certainly would have celebrated. The customary bow he takes after reaching a landmark was missing and it was not lost on the spectators.

"I missed out on a big one yesterday. I didn't feel like the job was done, so I didn't like celebrating like that. I thought once I get a double hundred or a 150 I'll celebrate. (PTI)

Ishan Kishan needs to start playing to be considered for selection: Dravid

VISAKHAPATNAM, Feb 5: Ishan Kishan needs to decide when he will start playing "some form of cricket" and then only can he be considered for national selection, head coach Rahul Dravid said on Monday addressing queries on his prolonged break from both international and domestic cricket.

A regular member of the Indian team across formats not so long ago, Kishan has been missing from action since he asked for a break in the middle of the South Africa tour in December citing personal reasons. He last turned up for India in November and has not featured for Jharkhand in ongoing Ranji Trophy.

After the series levelling win over England, Dravid tried to clear the air over Kishan's absence once again.

"There is way back for anyone and everyone. I don't want to go on labelling about the Ishan Kishan point. Have tried to explain this as best as I can, the point was he had requested a break, we were happy to give him the break," said Dravid in the media interac-

tion.

"Whenever he is ready, I didn't say he has to play domestic cricket, I said whenever he is ready, he needs to play some cricket and come back. The choice is his. We are not forcing him to do anything." Dravid didn't seem to amused with the queries and also made it team management's stance clear on the issue.

Considering KS Bharat's ordinary run with the bat in the ongoing series against England, India could do with Kishan's services. Rishabh Pant has not yet full recovered from the injuries he suffered in a horrific car accident in December, 2022. Besides K S Bharat, Dhruv Jurel was also part of the first two Tests.

"We are in touch with him, it is not that we have not been in touch. He has not yet started playing right so at the moment it is not something we can consider. Because you know he maybe he is not ready. He decides when he wants to be ready. We have got options with Rishabh injured and stuff. I am sure the selectors will weight all options," he said. (PTI)

Winning World Cup is within India's reach, says former coach Gary Kirsten

'I wouldn't be surprised if they secure a few victories soon'

CAPE TOWN, Feb 5: Former India coach Gary Kirsten, who was at the helm when the team last won a World Cup back in 2011, believes that the current side has what it takes to bring home another trophy very soon.

The South African and the then India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni became the toast of the nation in 2011 when the side claimed its second ODI World Cup after 1983. But the title, across formats, has eluded India for over a decade now.

The latest heartbeat came in last year's 50-over showpiece in which Rohit Sharma's men were outwitted in the final in Ahmedabad by six-time champions Australia.

"I don't think it is easy to win a World Cup, it is really tough. Probably Australia mastered that better than any other country but India has the potential to compete at the highest level for World Cup success and glory due to depth in its cricket," Kirsten, who was India's coach from 2008 to 2011, told PTI-Bhasha in an interview.

"I wouldn't be surprised if they secure a few victories soon," he added.

When asked if India can break the jinx at the upcoming T20 World Cup this year, Kirsten said it is not improbable if India can figure a way to make things right in the knockout games.

He did not, however, specify what exactly the team would need to do.

"Undoubtedly winning the World Cup is within India's reach and



they have the players who are capable of doing that. But there is still a lot that needs to be right to win a World Cup especially those knock-out games where anything can happen," said the 56-year-old.

Talking about the general state of the game, the veteran of 185 ODIs with 6798 runs said that context is needed to keep ODI cricket alive.

"I love the three and four teams tournaments but I am just worried that sometimes bilateral series become irrelevant. I would love to see a world champion ODI team every year.

"That would be fun, maybe on the (basis of a) point system or the way they can set it up but I think context is everything," he said. "We have just finished a fantastic World Cup in India that captured the imagination of many. I was also there to watch a couple of games and it was very exciting," said the former opener.

On the "club vs country" debate that has gripped cricket ever since the advent of IPL, Kirsten said franchise cricket is giving a platform to those who will not get a chance represent their country and should not be dragged into such debates.

"It is not easy to represent your country. Now new players have an opportunity to represent their franchise so that pulls their aspirations. To give them the opportunity to play professional Cricket, despite not being able to play international cricket, is very important for a lot of young players," said the veteran coach.

Citing the example of ongoing SA 20 league in his country, Kirsten said that franchise-based leagues are very important to keep the game alive at the grassroots level.

"The SA 20 is very important to keep the game alive in this country. Cricket is being played around the world so these leagues play a very important role economically," he pointed out.

"They also pull aspirations into the cricket system. Like when kids go to watch league matches and see their heroes play there, they also get inspired to be like one of them," he said.

The Gujarat Titans mentor declined comment when asked if was open to the idea of coaching the Indian team again.

"I come to India every year and I love it. I am about to go for my eighth IPL season and I enjoy working with the Gujarat Titans. "Ashish Nehra (head coach) is a close mate and we just enjoy working in that Cricket environment together. Vikram Solanki (Director of Cricket) is also there," said Kirsten.

"It would be a great honour to be offered a job at the national level but I am not sure about that. But yes, I always enjoy going back to India (for IPL)."

He is full of praise for the new Gujarat captain Shubman Gill and said he admires his eagerness to grow. Gill struck a hundred in the ongoing second Test against England in Visakhapatnam, ending a prolonged run of poor form in the format.

"Shubman is one of the best players. 900 plus runs in the last IPL season, not many can do that... I just love the way he wants to keep growing and developing his game."

"Looking forward to having him as a captain. He is a smart guy and will enjoy his captaincy," he said.

Kirsten is also kept busy by his Catch Trust foundation, which was started nine years back to address the inequality in access to sporting opportunities for kids in South Africa.

"In 2014, I came out here after coaching in India. I wanted to have a look at cricket in our poorest neighbourhood in Cape town. There was no cricket happening there here. So, I started training young kids to give them opportunities to pursue their dreams," he said. (PTI)

India bounce back against England's 'Bazballers' to level series

VISAKHAPATNAM, Feb 5: Indian bowlers won an engrossing battle against England's firebrand batting for a series-levelling 106-run victory in the second Test here on Monday, blunting 'Bazball' with their resilience in a roller-coaster contest.

England began day four at 67 for one, chasing a record target of 399. They were bowled out for 292 in the extended afternoon session.

The visiting team's no holds barred approach, which has largely been successful, did not work on this occasion as India picked up nine wickets over the course of two sessions to bounce back in the five-match series.

The third Test will be played in Rajkot from February 15.

"You know winning a Test in these conditions is not easy. (I) wanted our bowlers to step up and they did that," said an elated India skipper Rohit Sharma.

Only Zak Crawley's (73 off 132 balls) strategy of mixing caution with aggression worked before the collective efforts of Jasprit Bumrah (3/46), R Ashwin (3/71), Axar Patel (1/75) and Kuldeep Yadav (1/60) yielded the desired results for the hosts who were under pressure

going into day four.

Bumrah picked up the Player of the Match honours for his overall haul of nine wickets in the game, ahead of young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who scored a crucial 209-run knock in India's first innings.

"He (Bumrah) is a champion player for us," reiterated Rohit.

After James Anderson claimed that India were nervous while batting in the second innings and did not know a safe target to counter 'Bazball', England walked the talk on Monday and went ballistic.

"Coming into this last innings, (we) had full belief in ourselves that we'll chase it down," England skipper Ben Stokes said at the end of the game.

His team would have been better served taking a cue from Crawley, who saw out an intense morning spell from Bumrah before going for his strokes.

Night-hawk Rehan Ahmed (23) wanted to smash his first ball of the day out of the park while Hyderabad Test hero Ollie Pope (23) and Joe Root (16) were pushing their luck, frequently attempting sweeps and reverse sweeps on a pitch with variable bounce.

The visitors managed to make 127



runs in the opening session but the loss of five wickets effectively sealed their fate.

When skipper Ben Stokes (11 off 29 balls) got run out via a brilliant direct hit from Shreyas Iyer post lunch, there was no coming back for England.

But Ben Foakes (36) and Tom Hartley (36) frustrated the visitors with a 55-run partnership for the eighth wicket.

umpire's call for the latter was not considered.

At stroke of lunch, Kuldeep Yadav dismissed Crawley while Bumrah trapped Jonny Bairstow (26) in front to deal a massive blow to England, who slipped to 194 for six at the break.

Crawley, by far the best batter on show, was adjudged LBW off Kuldeep with a close DRS call.

On the sixth ball of his first over, Kuldeep got one to turn back in from middle stump.

It seemed the ball was going down leg but DRS showed that it was hitting the leg-stump.

India's standout bowler in the game, Bumrah, bowled his heart out in the two-hour session.

For someone who was operating in four-over spells, Bumrah bowled one extra in his opening burst before returning towards the end of the session to send back Bairstow. He also cleaned up Hartley to end the game.

Root and Pope perished while going for their strokes.

Root, in particular, would be disappointed with his effort as he danced down the track and went for a wild slog without getting to the pitch of the ball to

be caught at short third man, giving Ashwin his 499th wicket.

While Axar Patel found Rehan's pads with a straighter one, Pope offered a sharp catch to Rohit Sharma at first slip off Ashwin and the Indian skipper made no mistake in pouching it.

Crawley's play in the first session stood out. He was patient enough to leave balls in Bumrah's opening spell and when the champion fast bowler did for a full ball, the England opener was quick to put it away with a straight bat.

His cover and straight drive off Bumrah were the standout strokes of his innings.

When Axar was bowling his first spell, India were a tad defensive and had both long off and long on in place for Rehan, who was promoted to bat at number three before stumps on day three.

Pope played a sweep, flick and stepped out to Axar in the same over for three boundaries.

Root, who had missed the last two sessions on Sunday due to an injured right little finger, was in full attack mode with his first two scoring shots being reverse sweep for four. (PTI)

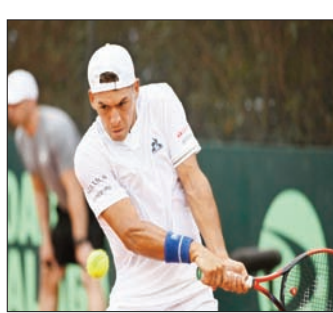
Sebastian Baez lifts Argentina past Kazakhstan in the Davis Cup

ROSARIO (ARGENTINA), Feb 5: Argentina reached the Davis Cup Finals group stage by eliminating Kazakhstan 3-2 in the best-of-five-match qualifying round when Sebastian Baez erased two match points and came back to edge Dmitry Popko 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (6) on Sunday.

Belgium, the Czech Republic and France also wrapped up victories Sunday, while Chile and Peru were in action at night.

Baez is a 23-year-old who is currently ranked a career-high No. 25. He reached the third round of the Australian Open last month before losing to eventual champion Janik Sinner. Popko, 27, is ranked No. 338 and has failed in 16 attempts to qualify for a Grand Slam tournament.

Popko was in position to get Kazakhstan past 2016 Davis Cup champion Argentina, just one point



away from winning while ahead 6-4 in the concluding tiebreaker. But from there, Baez grabbed the match's last four points.

Belgium clinched its spot in the next round with a 3-1 victory over Croatia that was sealed when Zizou Bergs beat Duje Ajdukovic 6-1, 7-5 on Sunday. Bergs also won the opening singles match Saturday against 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic.

The Czech Republic eliminated

Israel 4-0, and France beat Taiwan by the same score.

Seven nations made it through qualifying in series that wrapped up Friday or Saturday: the United States, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Netherlands and Slovakia.

The dozen countries that advanced this week will join reigning champion Italy, 2023 runner-up Australia, and wild-card entries Britain and Spain in the 16-team, four-city Finals group stage in September. Then eight of those teams will make it to the quarterfinals in Malaga, Spain, in November, when a champion will be determined.

One tier below, in the World Group I playoffs, India won 4-0 at Pakistan, while two-time Grand Slam runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas helped Greece get past visiting Romania 4-0. (AP)

PCB, SLC locked in financial dispute over extra expenses during Asia Cup

LAHORE, Feb 5: The cricket boards of Pakistan and Sri Lanka are locked in a financial dispute over who should bear the additional \$3.4 million burden incurred due to the shifting of the Asia Cup to the island nation last year.

With the BCCI unwilling to send its team to Pakistan, the original host, due to geo-political tensions, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) decided on a hybrid model and roped in Sri Lanka to host the majority of the matches.

This resulted in extra expenses being incurred on chartered flights, hotel bookings, venue hiring fees and travel, among others.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) made it clear during the ACC council meeting in Bali last week that it was not willing to take the financial burden as it did not earn extra and was also not the official host of the tournament.

The expenses also reportedly soared because the former PCB chairman, Zaka Ashraf, changed the venue of the first match from Lahore to Multan.

The PCB is also making a case for the ACC to pay for the additional expenses as the continental cricket governing body took the decision



to take away Pakistan's hosting rights and split the event.

A source in the know of things said that during the Bali meeting, ACC chief Jay Shah made it clear that it was the PCB which insisted on hosting four matches after the ACC board had decided to move the entire tournament to Sri Lanka.

"When the financial dispute was discussed by the acting chairman of the PCB, Khawar Shah, and CEO Salman Naseer (in Bali), Jay Shah and the SLC were on the same page," the source

said.

He said that Shah explained to the officials that since Pakistan remained the host of the event and Sri Lanka's venue and facilities were used, SLC's dues should be cleared by PCB.

The source added that SLC president Shami Silva expressed concern to the ACC that PCB had still not cleared the bills for hotel stay and chartered flights.

Shah advised Silva to deal directly with the PCB.

Naseer, however, has assured Silva that some bills pertaining to hotel stay and venue rental were "in the process of verification and would be cleared soon" by the PCB.

However, the issue of expenses incurred on chartered flight remains unresolved, with the PCB insisting that the flights were booked through Classic Travel, a "non-qualified" Sri Lankan company.

Apparently, the PCB has so far paid an upfront amount of \$281,700 and agreed to give SLC \$2,069,885 for the venues. But, now, the PCB is insisting the ACC, being the parent body, share some of the additional costs and pay the hosting fee of 2.5 million dollars. (PTI)

Real Madrid concedes stoppage-time equalizer against Atletico

MADRID, Feb 5: Just a minute away from beating its city rival for the second time in less than a month and taking a four-point lead of the Spanish league, Real Madrid couldn't hang on. Madrid's improvised defense faltered at the end, and Atletico Madrid scored a stoppage-time equalizer in a 1-1 draw on Sunday. Marcos Llorente scored with a header three minutes into added time after Brahim Diaz had put the hosts ahead in the first half at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

The late goal prevented Madrid from exploiting second-place Girona's 0-0 draw with Real Sociedad on Saturday. Madrid leads Girona by two points before the teams meet next week.

"We played a very good match, we were in control," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "We were unlucky to concede that goal in the end, but we lacked height in the defense and we knew it."

Ancelotti had a depleted defense because of injuries and had to improvise right back Dani Carvajal as a central defender alongside Nacho Fernandez. The duo couldn't cope with a cross into the area with a minute to go, and Memphis Depay headed the ball toward the goal and Llorente came in to score the equal-

izer, with the ball hitting the crossbar before going in.

"We worked hard the entire match and in the end we got rewarded," Llorente said. "We gained a point and kept them from getting more points. Considering the way things were going, it's a very valuable point for us." Atletico, which had won four games in a row in all competitions, stayed in fourth place, 10 points off the lead. Diego Simeone's team was two points behind Barcelona, which won 3-1 at Alaves on Saturday.

"The team could've given up but it kept fighting until the end and deserved the draw," Simeone said.

Madrid extended its unbeaten streak to 26 matches across all tournaments, since a 3-1 league defeat at Atletico in September.

It was the third Madrid derby in less than a month, with Madrid winning the Spanish Super Cup semifinal in Saudi Arabia and Atletico winning in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey. Diaz, a late addition to the starting lineup after a minor injury to Vinicius Junior during the pregame warmup, opened the scoring from close range in the 20th minute after Atletico midfielder Koke Resurrección failed to fully clear a ball in front of the goal. (PTI)

Opportunity for young players to familiarise with play style of best teams: Harmanpreet

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 5: Captain Harmanpreet Singh wants the young Indian hockey players to get familiar with the playing styles of the best teams in the world during the FIH Pro League, and hoped the country would seal a direct qualification for the 2026 World Cup with a title-winning run here.

The Indian men's hockey team arrived here on Monday to participate in the Pro League scheduled at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium from February 10 to 16 and Birsamunda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela from February 19 to 25. India narrowly missed out on a podium finish in the previous season, finishing fourth behind the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Belgium.

"We have just come back from a successful tour in South Africa where we played against France, South Africa, and the Netherlands to begin the Pro League in the best shape possible," Harmanpreet said in a Hockey India (HI) release.

"A few young players have been included in the squad this time and this will be a great opportunity for them to familiarise themselves with the play style of some of the best teams in the world."

Five national teams -- Ireland, the Netherlands, India, Spain and Australia -- will participate in the India leg of the Pro League, facing each other once in Bhubaneswar and once in Rourkela.

"We are taking the Pro League very seriously as winning it would not only mean direct qualification for the FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 but these games will also be crucial in the build-up to the Paris 2024 Olympics," Harmanpreet said. (PTI)

Our bowling attack is in transition and I need to guide the youngsters: Bumrah



VISAKHAPATNAM, Feb 5: Mohammed Shami and Ravichandran Ashwin are in the twilight of their Test careers and Jasprit Bumrah on Monday acknowledged that he is now the link between the old order and the new as Indian Test bowling enters a transition phase.

The 30-year-old is one of Indian cricket's greatest ever match-winners and someone

who has made it to India's 'Fab-Five' list of pacers along with the legendary Kapil Dev, the fiery Javagal Srinath and the two artistic exponents of reverse swing in Zaheer Khan and Shami.

Being the second fastest Asian pacer to reach 150 wickets in his 34th game, Bumrah knows that he is the leader of the pack and has to guide the likes of Mukesh

Kumar and Avesh Khan (in dug-out) at this juncture in Indian cricket.

"We're going through a transition so I feel it's my responsibility to help them in any way I can," Bumrah, who got 'Player of the Match' for his nine-wicket haul in the 106-run win over England in the second Test here, said at the post-match presentation ceremony.

He has played very less Test cricket in India but has staggering statistics on pitches not traditionally conducive for fast bowling. In six Tests he has played in India, Bumrah has 29 wickets.

"As I said before, I don't look at numbers. As a youngster, I did that and it made me excited. But now it's an added baggage as you are already playing for India," he said.

The in-swinging yorker that bamboozled an in-form Ollie Pope has been the talk of the town and Bumrah said, "As a

youngster, that is the first delivery I learned (yorker)."

"I used to think that it is the only way to get wickets. I had seen the legends of the game. Waqar, Wasim and even Zaheer Khan."

He shares a nice rapport with his skipper Rohit Sharma, someone who has seen him as a 20-year-old in Mumbai Indians.

"We discuss certain things. I have been playing with him for a long period of time (Rohit)."

Bumrah paid tribute to England veteran James Anderson and insisted that there is no competition as good fast bowling for him is always a nice spectacle.

"No not really. Before a cricketer, I'm a fast bowling fan. If somebody's doing well, kudos to them. I look at the situation, at the wicket and think what are my options. I should not be a one-trick pony." (PTI)

GUNOTSAV 2024
Ensuring Quality Education

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS : 11,933

- GOVERNMENT/PROVINCIALIZED SCHOOLS
- ADARSHA VIDYALAYAS
- TEA GARDEN MODEL SCHOOLS
- KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYAS
- NETAJI SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AVASIYA VIDYALAYAS
- TEA GARDEN MANAGEMENT SCHOOLS

NUMBER OF EXTERNAL EVALUATORS : 4,968

MINISTERS, MPs, MLAs, CEMs, EMs, IAS, IPS, IFS, ACS, APS, AFS, CLASS I & II OFFICIALS OF STATE GOVT. ETC.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS : 10,92,360

CLASSES I TO IX

3RD PHASE OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION

6 - 8 FEBRUARY 2024

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