

URGENT REQUIREMENT

Banking Sector, Leading Credit Card Company
Salary will be 12k to 20k with PF & ESIC.
Qualification: HS to Graduation
Candidates Share Resume in Whatsapp Only.
Whatsapp No. 8777560271
Email: suraj.dixit@teamlease.com



25 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

www.thehillstimes.in

THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXV

Issue No. 52

RNI-ASSEN/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024

PAGES 12

PRICE ₹ 8



Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

India to become world's third largest economy

India improves from 11th to 5th place in 10 years

Scan for more
information

Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

HT BRIEFS**Secretary appointed**

GUWAHATI: Anjanjyoti Das has been appointed as the new secretary-cum-PF commissioner by the Board of Trustees of the Assam Tea Employees Provident Fund Organization (ATEPFO). The Board of Trustees in its meeting held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Sanjoy Kishan, state minister of labour and employment, formally appointed Das as the new secretary-cum-PF commissioner of ATEPFO. Anjanjyoti Das is a postgraduate in statistics from the Gauhati University and has served the ATEPFO as additional PF commissioner for the past 17 years.

Workshop held

KHERONI: A training and workshop was held at the Modal School, Rongkhong in West Karbi Anglong. The Assam Science Technology and Environment Council, Guwahati held the programme that concluded on Thursday. In the two-day programme 65 teachers from 35 schools participated in the workshop that focused on environment awareness and vermin compost production and the application of vermin compost in agricultural production by farmers. Training on recycling of materials was also imparted. Convenor of the nodal agency, Rongkhong block, Biren Deka, Modal School headmaster, Dhan Kumar Pradhan, resource person, Biswabandhu Thapa and others were present on the occasion.

Drug peddler held

GUWAHATI: The special task force of Assam police on Friday apprehended a drug peddler from the Borbari area of the city and recovered 18 vials containing heroin weighing 28.5 grams and a mobile phone from him. The police conducted a raid at VIP Road, Borbari and apprehended the accused. The accused has been identified as Sunil Talukdar (39?), son of Umesh Talukdar. He is a resident of Kaithalkuchi in Nalbari district.

Base for projects worth ₹ 2,000 cr laid in 3 Barak Valley districts

Himanta blows poll bugle with devp pledge

SILCHAR/KARIMGANJ, March 1: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday pledged a 'flood of development' for Barak Valley if BJP-led NDA retains power at the Centre.

He appealed to the people to elect BJP candidates for the sake of development as he inaugurated and laid the foundation for projects worth over ₹ 2,000 crore for the three Barak Valley districts at different functions.

"Today, projects worth over ₹ 2,000 crore have come for Barak Valley. During the Congress regime, they would declare a special package of ₹ 1,000 crore, but no one knew where the money went," Sarma said after the 'bhumi puja' of Karimganj Medical College.

Referring to Congress legislators, particularly Karimganj North MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha who extended 'support to the BJP government,' the CM said it is good for the people of

the district that leaders have come together. "A lot of work is happening here now. But according to us, lot more needs to be done. If we don't indulge in any other politics but only do politics for development and ensure victory of BJP candidates, development will be ensured," Sarma said. More development can be done for Barak Valley if Narendra Modi becomes the Prime Minister for the third straight term, the BJP leader added.

"People have seen floods triggered by the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers. If a BJP MP is elected from here, they will see a lot of development," he said.

The CM also listed various development and welfare schemes being pursued by his government, and added that he was mooting expanding them to grant more benefits to the people. Providing 97,000 government jobs in a transparent manner, expanding Orunodoi (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)



Security beefed up amidst call for anti-CAA protests

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, March 1: Security has been beefed up in the city amidst call for anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests by various organizations ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

The central government will formulate the rules of CCA before the announcement of the polls dates for Lok Sabha. Various parties and organizations have said that there will be a strong movement to protect the

state's history and culture.

On the other hand, the police are leaving no stone unturned to prevent any type of agitation in the state. Since Friday, the entire city of Guwahati has been shrouded in heavy security.

The newly appointed commando force patrolled Dispur this morning. The superintendents of police of each district have been instructed to tighten the security arrangement.

Police will take extreme action to

deal with the CAA protestors, according to reliable sources.

Assam DGP G P Singh wrote on his X handle. Some people have spoken about right to protest, a lot of people have spoken about dangerous movements. I want to refresh the memory of people with what such words led to in December 2019. Vandalism & arson, including at our revered Srimanta Sankardev Kalashetra. Assam Police would not let the same happen in 2024. As Director General of Police & Head of Police Force, it's my duty to make people aware of the situation, he further wrote.

Meanwhile, the Asom Jatiya Parishad claimed that their party workers were called to the police station and were asked to sign the bond that they will not protest against CAA. A day earlier, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sharma said that the parties concerned can go to the (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

Manipur MLAs slam 'biased' resolution, seeks abrogation of SoO pact

CHURACHANDPUR, March 1:

Ten tribal MLAs of Manipur have condemned the "biased" resolution passed by the state assembly urging the Centre to abrogate the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with all the Kuki-Zo underground groups.

The SoO pact was signed by the Centre, the Manipur government and two conglomerates of Kuki militant outfits, Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF). The pact was signed in 2008 and extended periodically thereafter.

In a statement, the 10 legislators belonging to the Kuki Zomi Hmar communities MLAs said, "It is a one-sided resolution emanating from prejudice, bias and hatred for our community that reflects a myopic view on the issue."

Of the MLAs, seven belong to the ruling BJP, two are from the Kuki People's Alliance (KPA) and one is an independent. They were

not present in the assembly when the resolution was passed.

The statement said that as part of the SoO pact, a Joint Monitoring Group (JMG) comprising of representatives of central and state government agencies, the KNO and UPF was formed to oversee adherence to the ground rules. "We would like to question whether the resolution adopted by the august House was based on any report or observations of the JMG, which is the only official mechanism to determine whether any violation of the ground rules has taken place or not," the statement read.

The agreement was lauded as the harbinger of peace in the state when it was signed in 2008 and Manipur, particularly the hill districts, has witnessed a sea change in the security scenario as the level of violence came down drastically in the years that followed, it said. "The recent signing of a peace accord with a (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

CM downplays 'threat' by pro-Khalistani leader

GUWAHATI, March 1: Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday downplayed a purported threat by a pro-Khalistani leader, demanding shifting of radical outfit 'Waris Punjab De' (WPD) members, including its chief Amritpal Singh, from Dibrugarh Central Jail to Amritsar.

Speaking to the media, Sarma said, "Why should you be so afraid of Khalistanis? You seem to have been more frightened whereas the threat was for me."

The purported threat was issued by a person who identified himself as Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, head of an unlawful association called 'Sikhs for Justice', via recorded messages sent to journalists' mobile phones.

In the message, Sarma was asked to order the transfer of Amritpal Singh and his associates to Amritsar jail, warning of 'consequences' if he failed to comply.

It also said 'Sikhs for Justice' is filing a case in the United Nations against India.

Ten members of the pro-Khalistani outfit, including Amritpal and one of his uncles, have been kept in Dibrugarh Central Jail since March last (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

Nagaland assembly adopts resolution against FMR, border fencing

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 1: The Nagaland assembly on Friday adopted a resolution opposing the Centre's decision to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and fence the India-Myanmar border.

The House unanimously resolved to urge the central government to reconsider its decision and abandon the plan of suspending the FMR and fencing the border.

Deputy chief minister Y Patton moved the resolution on the floor of the House on the last day of the fourth session of the 14th Nagaland assembly for consideration and adoption.

The House also resolved to request the Centre to work out regulations for the movement of the people across the border in close consultation with the people inhabiting the border areas, and for suitably bringing in the village council authorities concerned in the entire system of regulations.

As per the resolution, the decision to abrogate the FMR and fence the border will cause immense hardship and inconvenience, and also agony to the Naga people living along the Indo-Myanmar international border areas as (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

UNESCO ambassador visits Charaideo India inks defence deal worth ₹ 39,125 crore

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 1: Ambassador and permanent representative of India to UNESCO, Vishal V. Sharma visited the Moidams - burial mounds of the Ahom Dynasty in Charaideo on Friday.

Ambassador Sharma, who arrived in Charaideo from Paris, thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for promoting the Assamese culture globally.

He appreciated the excellent work of preservation and conservation of the rich cultural heritage of the state being undertaken by the state

government, the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) and the local community.

He said that Modi's words "Vikas bhi aur Virasat bhi" will act as the guiding light for a new India, as they connect our past with our future. He said that India is a cultural superpower and the Ahom Dynasty is a pride of Indian Culture, and the whole world is now getting to know about the rich Assamese culture and history and appreciate them.

Earlier Ambassador Sharma paid a visit to chief secretary Paban Kumar Barhakar, who briefed him on the state's nominations to the World Heritage (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

NEW DELHI, March 1: India on Friday sealed five major defence acquisition contracts worth ₹ 39,125 crore including procurement of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles, radars, weapon systems and aero-engines for MiG-29 jets as part of efforts to boost the combat capabilities of the armed forces.

The mega procurement projects were firming up amid India's lingering border row with China in eastern Ladakh, and they will be implemented under the broad framework of the government's policy to boost domestic defence manu-

facturing. The contracts for the procurement of the platforms and weapons systems were signed in presence of Union defence minister Rajnath Singh and defence secretary Giridhar Aramane, under whose guidance these deals fructified, an official readout said.

"These deals will further strengthen indigenous capabilities, save foreign exchange and reduce dependency on foreign origin equipment manufactures in future," it said. Two separate deals were firming up for procurement of BrahMos missiles.

The first one is for procurement of BrahMos missiles from the BrahMos Aerospace Private Ltd (BAPL) at a cost of ₹ 19,518.65 crore. "These missiles would be utilized to meet combat outfit and training requirements of the Indian Navy," the defence ministry said.

The second contract is for procurement of the ship-borne BrahMos system from the BAPL at a cost of ₹ 988 crore.

These missiles would be the Indian navy's primary weapon for maritime strike operations and the weapons would be fitted onboard (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

Development by BJP visible in Karbi Anglong: CEM Ronghang

**HT Bureau**

DIPHU, March 1: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang on Friday said that the development carried out by the BJP is visible in Karbi Anglong and the state. Ronghang said this while addressing the Vikash Yatra, which

was held at the Government Boys HS School playground in Karbi Anglong on Friday.

Enumerating the construction of educational institutions, the CEM said that the BJP will always carry out development in the district.

Tuliram Ronghang said, "Team Karbi Anglong visited Borpu-

Tarapung along with DC-SP and others to know the grievances of the people. We interacted with the people and promised them that their grievances would be addressed soon. They had requested for construction of a road, which will be constructed at an estimated cost ₹ 197 crores, though the budget of KAAC is only ₹ 400 crores."

"However, after discussion with MLA Numal Momin, member of Autonomous Council, Pabitra Rongpi and chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, we have already invited tenders for the project," he said. The CEM also said that several roads in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts are being constructed as have been promised. The government is spending hundreds of crores in constructing these roads.

Earlier, he virtually laid the foundation stones for various development schemes, including the foundation (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

Inadequate consumption of nutritional food, access to unhealthy food behind undernutrition, obesity

From undernutrition to obesity, Lancet study unveils India's double whammy

NEW DELHI, March 1: India is grappling with a profound nutritional shift, as highlighted by the latest Lancet study, with nutritionists attributing this "double whammy" of undernutrition and obesity to a dual challenge: inadequate consumption of quality foods and easy access to cheap, unhealthy alternatives.

The Lancet study, published on Thursday, found that in India, nearly 44 million women and 26 million men were obese in 2022, respectively.

The analysis by the NCD Risk Factor Collaboration (NCD-RisC) - a global network of scientists - and the World Health Organization (WHO) also found that about 12.5 million children aged between five and 19 were overweight in 2022. "These numbers are up from 2.4



million and 1.1 million in 1990 for women and men, respectively, while for children, the baseline number was about 0.4 million," said study co-author Guha Pradeepa, from Madras Diabetes Research Foundation

(MDRF), Chennai, told PTI.

Reacting to the study findings, nutritionist Sudha Vasudevan, who was not involved in the study, noted that while good quality foods are nutrient-dense like fruits and veg-

etables, unhealthy foods are usually processed, containing high-fat, sugar, salt, and refined carbohydrates. "We had not yet won the war against undernutrition-related health problems, but now we are additionally burdened by those coming from overnutrition or obesity, and resembling the developed nations in that sense," Vasudevan, Senior Scientist and Head of the Department of Foods & Nutrition Research, MDRF, told PTI.

The findings suggest trends of an "epidemiological and nutrition transition" of India, Vasudevan said. "While the developed countries might be economically equipped to deal with obesity and related health-care burden, India is not and therefore, we are struggling," she said. The Lancet (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

Sensex, Nifty hit record high levels on impressive GDP data, foreign fund inflows

MUMBAI, March 1: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rallied more than one-and-a-half per cent to hit their lifetime highs on Friday helped by impressive GDP data and fresh foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,245.05 points or 1.72 per cent to reach 73,745.35 -- its all-time closing peak. During the day, it zoomed 1,318.91 points or 1.81 per cent to hit a record intra-day high of 73,819.21.

The Nifty climbed 355.95 points or 1.62 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 22,338.75. During the day, it soared 370.5 points or 1.68 per cent to reach its intra-day record peak of 22,353.30.

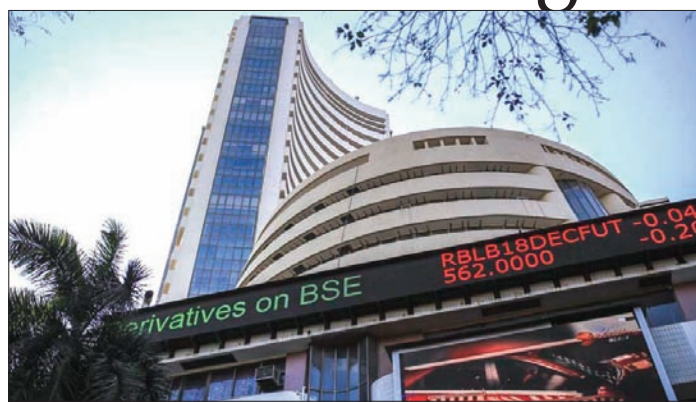
A rally in global markets and auto sales numbers added to the positive momentum in the equity markets, analysts said.

Among the Sensex firms, Tata Steel jumped over 6 per cent while JSW Steel climbed more than 4 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Titan, Maruti, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank and Tata Motors were the other major gainers.

HCL Technologies, Infosys and Tech Mahindra were the laggards.

India's economy grew by better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023 -- the fastest pace in one-and-a-half years.

The growth rate in October-December was higher than 7.6 per cent in the previous three years, and it helped take the estimate for



the current fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) to 7.6 per cent, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday.

India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a five-month high in February amid a sharper uptick in factory production and sales, supported by both domestic and external demand, a monthly survey said on Friday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 in February, pointing to the strongest improvement in the health of the sector since September 2023.

"Better-than-expected Q3 FY24 GDP and ease in US inflation added buoyancy in both domestic and global markets. As the general election draws closer, stellar economic growth data raised confidence among investors for a

pre-election rally. "On the global front, in-line US personal consumption expenditure data and benign Euro zone inflation will influence global central banks to take a dovish view on interest rates," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.89 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.68 per cent.

Among indices, metal zoomed 3.84 per cent, capital goods went up by 2.49 per cent, bankex climbed 2.48 per cent, auto advanced 2.23 per cent, energy (2.14 per cent), oil & gas (2.14 per cent), commodities (2.12 per cent) and industrials (1.91 per cent).

IT and tech were the laggards. A total of 2,387 advanced while 1,451 declined and 109 remained unchanged.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with

gains. European markets were trading in positive territory. The US markets ended in the green on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday as they bought equities worth ₹ 3,568.11 crore, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30 on Thursday. The Nifty gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to 21,982.80.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.82 per cent to USD 82.58 a barrel.

Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE will conduct a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on Saturday to check their preparedness to handle major disruption or failure at the primary site.

The special live trading session will have intra-day switch over from Primary Site (PR) to Disaster Recovery (DR) site.

The exchanges said there will be two sessions -- the first from 9:15 am to 10 am on the PR, and the second from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm on the DR site.

"Trading members are requested to note that the exchange will conduct a special live trading session with intraday switch over from Primary Site (PR) to Disaster Recovery Site (DR) on Saturday, March 2, in equity and equity derivatives segments," BSE and NSE said in separate circulars. (PTI)

Adani to invest ₹ 75,000 crore in MP

UJJAIN, March 1: Adani group will invest about ₹ 75,000 crore in Madhya Pradesh in power plants, building Mahakal Expressway, and setting up cement grinding units in coming years, a top group executive said on Friday.

The apples-to-airport group has already invested almost ₹ 18,000 crore in the state and will continue investing in diverse sectors, said Pranav Adani, Managing Director (Agro, Oil and Gas) and Director of Adani Enterprises at the Regional Industry Conclave here. "Currently, our presence in Madhya Pradesh spans a wide range of sectors - from roads, cement, and natural resources to thermal power, renewable energy and power transmission," he said.

"Our faith in your (chief minister Mohan Yadav's) visionary leadership will see us investing close to ₹ 75,000 crore in Madhya Pradesh," he added.

He, however, did not indicate a time frame for the investment. Of this, the group will invest ₹ 5,000 crore in building the Mahakal Expressway from Ujjain to Bhopal, through Indore.

"We will also invest another ₹ 5,000 crore to set up a 4-million-tonnes-per-annum clinker unit in Chorgadi and two cement grinding units, in Dewas and Bhopal, with a combined capacity of 8-million-tonnes-per-annum," he said. It will invest ₹ 4,600 crore to expand its presence in food processing, logistics, and agri-logistics, and defence manufacturing.

Its investment in fuel distribution, which includes city gas, LNG, EV, and biofuels, will exceed ₹ 2,100 crore, the bulk of which will be used to strengthen CNG and piped cooking gas distribution network in Bhind, Burhanpur, Anuppur, Tikamgarh and Alirajpur in the state. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Himanta blows poll bugle

scheme to 27 lakh women, new roads and 16 lakh new houses under PMAY are among the work done by his government since coming to power in May 2021, Sarma added. Earlier in the day, Sarma inaugurated a cancer care unit at Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH) and claimed that the state's cancer care model is being emulated across the country. "We have inaugurated the cancer care unit here today, which is part of the network of 17 hospitals in the state under a joint initiative of the state government and Tata Trusts," he said. Three categories of cancer care units are being set up in government-run hospitals under the project, of which the one at SMCH is in category 2, which will provide patients with comprehensive care, Sarma said. "The lone category-1 facility, which will be the apex cancer care hospital, is being opened at Guwahati," the chief minister said. The state government's share in the project is ₹ 2,460 crore, while Tata Trusts will provide ₹ 1,180 crore, the government of India ₹ 180 crore and over ₹ 80 crore has been raised through donations. An Assam Cancer Care Foundation has been formed to manage the units, which will be responsible for operating these and if any revenue deficit is there at the end of the year, the state government will fill the gap, the CM said. Ten such cancer care centres are already operational and over 2.15 lakh patients have received treatment in these, he added. "The entire country is trying to emulate Assam. We are thinking of upgrading this project so that Assam becomes a nodal state when it comes to cancer care," Sarma said. He also affirmed the state government's commitment to the development of the Barak Valley.

"A section of people in Barak Valley indulge in propaganda that the state government does not care about this part. But when you look at projects like this, it shows that not only does the government care, but we also actively support Barak Valley," Sarma said. Later in the day, the chief minister attended a function at Lakhipur where he opened and laid the foundation for several projects. Speaking on the occasion, he elaborated the government's various developmental initiatives and assured of sustained progress of Barak Valley. (PTI)

CM downplays 'threat' by

year under the National Security Act (NSA), following their arrest from various parts of Punjab as part of a crackdown on the outfit. Similar threats were made to the chief minister in April last year, leading to the state police launching an investigation into the matter. DGP, GP Singh said a case had been registered under appropriate sections of the IPC and the UAP Act at the Special Task Force (STF) police station.

He also mentioned that the security arrangements for the CM had been heightened in response to the emerging threat. Last month, electronic devices, including a smartphone, were discovered from the cells of NSA detainees at the Dibrugarh Central Jail. Though the DGP did not specify which detainees were involved, it is believed that the items were found in the cells of WPD members. (PTI)

Security beefed up amidst

Supreme Court if they have objections to this law without starting an anti-CAA movement in the state. However, he dismissed the possibility of a strong movement against CAA in the state. Meanwhile, the chief of Asom Jatiya Parishad, Lurinjyoti Gogoi said, We have entered into a state of war to protect our culture and heritage. Police cannot intimidate our party workers by issuing veiled threats.

Manipur MLAs slam 'biased'

UNLF faction was initiated by the state government, and the role played by this outfit during this short period in the current violence is widely known to one and all," the statement said. The UNLF (P) on November 29 last year became the first Meitei armed group in the Imphal Valley to enter into a ceasefire agreement with the government and agreed to renounce violence. However, allegations have been raised that its cadres were involved in violence even after signing of the pact. At least 219 people have been killed in ethnic strife in the state since May last year. The violence erupted on May 3 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, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts. (PTI)

UNESCO ambassador

Convention. He was accompanied by Ranjan Sharma, secretary (ITFC), Deepirekha Kouli of the state archaeology department and Madan Singh Chauhan, joint DG of ASI and other officials. Moidams - burial mounds of the Ahom dynasty are India's nomination for 2023-24 of UNESCO's World Heritage nominations and efforts are on to get them inscribed on the prestigious World Heritage List.

India inks defence deals

various frontline warships. The system is capable of hitting land or sea targets from extended ranges with pinpoint accuracy at supersonic speeds, the ministry said. The deal for procurement of RD-33 Aero Engines for MiG-29 aircraft was signed with state-run aerospace giant Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and the cost of the project would be ₹ 5,249.72 crore. The ministry said the aero engines will be produced by the Koraput Division of the HAL. "These aero engines are expected to fulfill the need of Indian Air Force (IAF) to sustain the operational capability of the MiG-29 fleet for the residual service life," it said. "The aero-engines will be manufactured under transfer of technology license from the Russian original equipment maker. The programme will focus on indigenousisation of several high value critical components, which would help increase the indigenous content of future repair and overhaul tasks of RD-33 aero-engines," it said. The ministry also signed a deal with Larsen and Toubro Ltd for procurement of a batch of close-in weapon system (CIWS). "The contract for procurement of CIWS has been signed with Larsen & Toubro Limited at a cost of ₹ 7,668.82 crore," the ministry said. "The CIWS will provide terminal air defence to select locations of the country. The project will boost and encourage active participation of Indian aerospace, defence and associated industries including MSMEs," it said. The contract for procurement of high-power radar systems has also been signed with Larsen and Toubro Limited at a cost of ₹ 5,700 crore. It will replace existing long-range radars of IAF with modern active aperture phased array based HPR with advanced surveillance features. "It will significantly enhance the terrestrial air defence capabilities of IAF with integration of sophisticated sensors capable of detection of small radar cross section targets," the ministry said.

"It will boost to indigenous radar manufacturing technology as it would be first of its kind radar built by the private sector in India," the ministry said. The signing of the two contracts for procurement of the Brahmos missiles came days after the acquisition was cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). The CCS accorded approval for procurement of over 200 BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles and associated equipment.

It is learnt that it will be a mix of BrahMos missiles having a range of around 290 km and the latest extended range variant of the weapon with a range of around 450 km. BrahMos Aerospace Pvt Ltd, an India-Russian joint venture, produces the supersonic cruise missiles that can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land platforms. BrahMos missile flies at a speed of 2.8 Mach or almost three times the speed of sound. (PTI)

Nagaland assembly adopts

the traditional land holding system straddles the international border in many areas and the people have to cross the international border on a daily basis for their normal cultivation activities. The House also felt that these measures would seriously disrupt the age-old historical, social, tribal, and economic ties of the Naga people living on both sides of the international border.

Development by BJP visible

stone of the Eklavya Model Residential School in Diphu, the construction of a water distribution channel at Jirumukam under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) and several others. He also inaugurated the Weavers Extension Service Unit at Bakalia and the Common Service Centre at Bokajan and several other development projects. On the occasion, two ambulances were also distributed to the Dolamara Tea Garden and Bogijan Tea Garden. The programme was attended by MLAs Rupsing Teron and Darsing Ronghang, deputy speaker of the state legislative assembly, Numal Momin and other government officials.

From undernutrition to obesity

study looked at body mass index (BMI) to understand how obesity and underweight have changed worldwide from 1990 to 2022. It analysed the weights and heights of over 220 million people aged five years or older, from across more than 190 countries. The findings also highlighted a major shift in lifestyle over the past decades, including lack of exercise and healthy food, said Pradeepa.

The study found that the adult obesity rate in India increased from 1.2 per cent in 1990 to 9.8 per cent in 2022 for women, while for men, it rose from 0.5 per cent to 5.4 per cent. Pradeepa attributed the spike in obesity rate to a combination of biological and social factors. "Biological factors involve constant, cyclical hormonal activity with pregnancy-specific weight gain, following which taking care of the child takes precedence.

"On the other hand, social factors compel them to prioritise their children's and family's health over their own. These factors present as barriers to doing exercise for women and taking care of themselves," she explained. The findings revealed the need for innovative interventions in terms of introducing more physical activity and movement in a day, especially for women, said Pradeepa. She referred to Thandav, which is one such intervention, developed by Dr. R. M. Anjana, President of MDRF. Thandav is a ten-minute routine that combines the physical exercise aspect of high-intensity interval training (HIIT) with enjoyable dance movements. The routine thus makes the act of performing physical exercise more entertaining and recreational, and also more socially acceptable as girls and women can perform this easily at their homes, explained Pradeepa. (PTI)

Markets record rally makes investors richer by Rs 4.29 lakh cr

NEW DELHI, March 1: Investors became richer by ₹ 4.29 lakh crore on Friday as markets fired on all cylinders with the BSE Sensex rising sharply by 1,245 points or nearly 2 per cent.

The 30-share BSE benchmark jumped 1,245.05 points or 1.72 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 73,745.35. During the day, the benchmark zoomed 1,318.91 points or 1.81 per cent to reach an all-time high of 73,819.21.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies soared by ₹ 4,29,339.75 crore to ₹ 3,92,25,029.98 crore (USD 4.78 trillion).

"The strong resilience in India's Q3 GDP growth numbers propelled Sensex & Nifty to fresh record highs amid a rally in index heavyweights such as Reliance Industries, Tata Steel and banking stocks," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research) at Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Among the Sensex firms, Tata Steel jumped 6.46 per cent while JSW Steel climbed 4.46 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Titan, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank, Maruti and Tata Motors were the other major gainers.

HCL Technologies, Infosys and Tech Mahindra were the laggards.

India's economy grew by better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023 -- the fastest pace in one-and-a-half years. The growth rate in October-December was higher than 7.6 per cent in the previous three years, and it helped take the estimate for the current fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) to 7.6 per cent, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday. (PTI)

WTOs 5th day meet: Talks on to break impasse over agri, fisheries issues

ABU DHABI, March 1: The meeting of the highest decision-making body of the WTO on Friday entered the fifth day with key members including India, the US, and the EU holding talks to iron out differences on issues such as agriculture, fisheries subsidies, and duty moratorium on e-commerce trade. The 13th Ministerial Conference (MC), which was to end on February 29, extended for a day as developing and developed nations were unable to find common ground on these key issues.

The members are talking to end the impasse and so far things have not moved much, an official said.

"There are nine countries in the green room meeting including Brazil and China. The negotiations have been extended as WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is pushing for outcomes," the official said.

WTO spokesman Ismaila Dieng said that the ministers continue to be engaged in intensive and difficult discussions on a package of agreements for adoption at MC13.

"As a result, in order to give more time for negotiations, the Formal Closing Session of MC13 has now been postponed to 5 pm

UAE time on Friday, 1 March," Dieng said.

India has clearly stated that finding a permanent solution to the public stockholding of grains for food security purposes should be the top priority before taking up any new issues in the agriculture sector. There are major differences among rich nations also on issues related to market access for agri commodities. There are seven agri matters which include export restrictions. An official said talks are going on among the member nations on all the issues and India is clearly stating that it will not compromise the interests of farmers and fishermen.

New Delhi is pressing for a permanent solution to the issue of public stockholding of grains for food security programmes and has asked developed countries engaged in distant water fishing to stop providing any kind of subsidies for 25 years.

India is also pressing for an end to the moratorium on imposing customs duties on e-commerce trade. India and South Africa have blocked a proposal led by China on investment facilitation stating that

the agenda is out of the WTO mandate. India has also asked for the restoration of the appellate body of the WTO's dispute settlement system. The US has been blocking the appointments of judges in the body since 2019, due to which the system is not working smoothly.

New Delhi is pitching for finding a permanent solution to the issue of Public Stockholding (PSH) for its food security programmes.

PSH programme is a policy tool under which the government procures crops like rice and wheat from farmers at a Minimum Support Price (MSP) and stores and distributes foodgrains to the poor.

As part of a permanent solution, India has asked for measures like amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap. Further, the talks on non-trade issues such as trade inclusiveness, women's participation in trade, industrial policy, and environment, in the draft Abu Dhabi package also remained unresolved so far.

However, the ministerial has managed to get at least five outcomes such as new disciplines on domestic regulation for services,

formal joining of Comoros and Timor-Leste as members of the WTO, and least developing countries continuing to get the benefits of LDC even three years after graduation.

Besides, India is also pushing for the adoption of open and interoperable payment systems with a view to cut the cost of money transfers or remittances as the dominance of a few large players in the market contributes to these high costs through complex and opaque fee structures.

According to an expert, the challenge of high remittance costs, averaging 6.18 per cent globally, are well above the United Nations' target of 3 per cent. MC is the highest decision-making body of the 166-member Geneva-based multilateral body. As many as 22 more nations have shown interest to join the organisation. At the meeting of the Heads of Delegation on 28 February, DG Okonjo-Iweala has called on members to go the extra mile to find convergence on various negotiations at the ministerial gathering and to be mindful that time is running out to conclude meaningful agreements. (PTI)



NEW DELHI, March 1: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said Direct Benefit Transfer of ₹ 34 lakh crore has been facilitated by the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) and asked accounts officers to further enhance efficiency and transparency of the system.

In a written message to the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) and the Indian Civil Accounts Organisation (ICAO) on the occasion of the 48th Civil Accounts Day, Sitharaman said PFMS has been the cornerstone of establishing an efficient fund flow system alongside a robust payment and accounting network. PFMS is the management information system used by officers of the Indian Civil Accounts Service to maintain the accounts of the government.

It is also used to transfer funds to beneficiary accounts of various government schemes via Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

"The Direct Benefit Transfer mechanism, facilitated through PFMS, has led to the transfer of Rs 34 lakh crore from the government. This is a testament to the system's effectiveness in eliminating inefficiencies and ensuring that the benefits are delivered directly to the citizens without any leakages," Sitharaman said in her message, read out by Finance Secretary T V Somanathan at the Civil Accounts Day event.

She also highlighted that 1,081 different schemes, including those of state governments, have been

seamlessly integrated into the DBT. PFMS, which is developed and implemented by the Controller General of Accounts under the Department of Expenditure, has played a pivotal role in revolutionising the financial administration of the government. "This has not only facilitated a real-time, reliable, and meaningful management information system but also has paved the way for a more transparent, accountable, and people-centric governance....," Sitharaman said.

The minister further said that initiatives by the Central Pension Accounting Office (CPAO), under the office of CGA such as the Pensioners Facilitation Cell, Web Responsive Pensioners Service, Pension Adalat, and recently developed Dirghayu pensioners' mobile app, have helped more than 12 lakh pensioners with easy access to pension-related information and addressing their grievances promptly. (PTI)

Airtel Introduces Recycled Plastic SIM Cards

Airtel has announced its transition from virgin plastic to recycled PVC SIM cards, marking a significant step towards sustainable business practices. Collaborating with IDEMIA Secure Transactions, a division of the IDEMIA Group renowned for its payment and connectivity solutions, Airtel aims to reduce environmental impact while promoting circularity. By adopting recycled plastic SIM cards, Airtel anticipates a reduction of over 165 tonnes of virgin plastic usage, resulting in a decrease of approximately 690 tonnes of CO2 equivalent emissions annually. This initiative underscores Airtel's steadfast commitment to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and fostering sustainability across its supply chain and stakeholder ecosystem.

Pankaj Miglani, Director of Supply Chain, Bharti Airtel, expressed delight at the company's latest achievement,

emphasizing its dedication to aligning with sustainable measures and contributing to India's net zero ambitions. He highlighted the collaboration with IDEMIA as a testament to shared values in driving towards a greener future. Rahul Tandon, Senior Vice President, Connectivity Services, India, IDEMIA Secure Transactions, commended Airtel for its proactive approach in reducing carbon footprint and providing eco-friendly solutions to subscribers. He credited the innovative efforts of both companies' research and development teams for making such advancements possible.

Airtel has committed to reducing absolute scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions by 50.2% by FY 2030-31, with FY 2020-21 serving as the base year. Additionally, the company aims to

Budget estimates presented, draft rules discussed; council adjourned sine die

North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council concludes Budget Session for 2024-25

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 1: The North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) convened its session in the NCHAC Session Hall for the 1st (246th) Session of the 13th North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council to present both the NCHAC budget and the district budget for the year 2024-25. Additionally, a discussion was scheduled for the 1st (246th) Session regarding the draft rules of procedures and conduct of business in the NCHAC Legislative Assembly, and the draft rule for the formation of the Public Account Committee and its internal working procedure and conduct of business, called by NCHAC chairman Mohet Hojai.

The house requested to convene on Friday, i.e., March 1, 2024, for another discussion of the 1st (246th) Session, which was supposed to take place on March 2, 2024, for the draft rules of procedures and conduct of business in NCHAC Legislative Assembly, draft rules for the formation of Public Account Committee and its internal working procedures and conduct of business. In the session, before the house for another discussion and with the support of all the members present in the session favoring it, the proposal to discuss was accepted by the NCHAC chairman.



Chief executive member in-charge of Dima Hasao Autonomous Council, Donpainon Thaoson, presented detailed budget estimates and expenditures for the financial year 2024-25 at the Council Secretariat, Haflong.

This marks the 1st (246th) Budget Session of the 13th North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), convened by the chairman of the Council, CEM i/c Thaoson informed the house with delight that the state government will henceforth transfer the entitlement grants under a single head of accounts to the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (DHAC), thereby enhancing the discretionary power of the chief executive member of the councils of the sixth schedule areas of the state.

In the Budget Session, CEM i/c

Thaoson informed the house that the state government has allocated a budget provision of ₹ 675.9369 crores for EE and ₹ 467.8635 crores for SOPD/CSS, etc., for the year 2024-25. Out of this, ₹ 640.8419 crores is designated for department salaries, and the remaining ₹ 35.095 crores has been earmarked for pending salary payments and gratuities of Dima Hasao Autonomous Council employees, as well as salary payments for Class-I and Class II employees of NC Hills Autonomous Council and officers on deputation as grant-in-aid general(salary) under EE. The government has also made a provision for ₹ 5.9835 crores and ₹ 166.88 crores under CSS, etc., and for ₹ 75.00 crores as a special grant to Dima Hasao Autonomous Council, and ₹ 220.00 crores for

SOPD-G (Non Salary).

He further informed that the augmentation of its own revenue by exploring all sources of revenue is expected to be ₹ 98.3324 crores from taxation, land revenue, and the Forest Department. Moreover, land premium and royalty from coal, limestone, and other forest products will help in increasing the council's revenue this year.

The proposed budget estimate for the financial year 2024-25, including revenue receipts from the council and government grants, is ₹ 1242.00 crores. The estimated expenditure from the received amount is ₹ 1396.9634 crores, including entrusted departments, leaving a budget closing deficit of ₹ 154.83 crores.

After a healthy discussion, the budget was accepted and passed as declared by chairman Mohet Hojai.

Furthermore, the council discussed the draft rules of procedures and conduct of business in the NCHAC Legislative Assembly, and the draft rule for the formation of the Public Account Committee and its internal working procedure and conduct of business. The chairman informed the house that final discussions and approval would take place in the next session, and he adjourned sine die as the budget session concluded.

Sarba arrives in Dibrugarh amid speculations of contesting Lok Sabha seat

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, March 1: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal arrived in Dibrugarh on Friday after attending the Central Election Committee meeting in Delhi to finalise the list of candidates for the Lok Sabha election.



Speaking to media persons at Mohanbari Airport, Sonowal said that the list finalisation process is still ongoing. He mentioned that the party's national president will announce the names once the list is completed for all the states.

Regarding his candidature in Dibrugarh, he stated, "It's the love and affection of the public that my name is circulating in the media, but the official announcement is yet to be made by the party."

This time, the people of Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency have been expressing their desire for Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal to contest from the prestigious seat.

Sarbananda Sonowal is one of the important leaders of the BJP and is also a member of the BJP parliamentary board.

While BJP has not yet finalised the candidate's

name, a special meeting was held in New Delhi on Thursday night.

"This time, Sarbananda Sonowal is likely to contest from the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat. In 2014, Sarbananda Sonowal contested from the Lakhimpur seat and emerged as the winner. But this time, his name has been making headlines that he will contest from the Dibrugarh seat. Sarbananda Sonowal has a good reputation in upper Assam, and he is one of the promising ministers in the BJP's cabinet," said a party source.

NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati funds dormitory project at JNV



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 1: In a momentous ceremony held at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), Ranchaidham Basugaon, Kokrajhar under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of NTPC Bongaigaon, the foundation stone laying ceremony for a new dormitory was conducted on Thursday, marking a significant step towards empowering girl students of the area. This joint initiative by NTPC, the district administration of Kokrajhar, and the Public Works Department (PWD) Building Division aims to provide on-campus accommodation for 80 students enrolled at the Centers of Excellence (CoE).

The ceremony was graced by esteemed dignitaries including Pramod Boro, chief executive member (CEM) of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), along with Joyanta Basumatary, MLA, Sidi, and Lawrence Islary, MLA, Kokrajhar East. Pradeep Kumar Dwivedi, IAS, district commissioner, Kokrajhar, KC Muralitharan, GM(O&M), representatives from NTPC Bongaigaon, and officials from the PWD were also present. The program was also attended by Khanin Chandra Boro, superintendent, PWD; Rabin Chandra Braham, executive engineer, PWD; Nurul Alam Barbhuiya, principal, JNV, Kokrajhar.

Pramod Boro, in his address, stressed the importance of holistic education in shaping future leaders. He encouraged students to develop diverse skills and talents, emphasizing the need for a well-rounded educational system and acknowledged NTPC Bongaigaon's efforts towards community services.

KC Muralitharan, CGM (O&M), NTPC Bongaigaon, commended the unwavering support from the BTR Government and district administration towards the project and highlighted how this construction aligns with the Government of India's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Abhiyan, a national initiative promoting girls' education and empowerment.

The new dormitory, with a projected cost of Rs 35 lakhs, will address the urgent need for on-campus accommodation for female students enrolled at the CoE. This initiative not only tackles the accommodation issue but also contributes to the broader goals of youth development and empowering young women in the North East. The foundation stone-laying ceremony marks a collective commitment towards enhancing educational access and opportunities for girls in the state and the region. It paves the way for their growth, empowerment, and future leadership in various fields.

Counselling centre inaugurated at KVK Gossaigaon

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, March 1: Under the initiative of Jorhat Agricultural University and under the supervision of Purna Sharma, content expert in community science, a counselling centre was recently inaugurated at KVK Gossaigaon by Dr Ranjit Kumar Saud, associate director, Agricultural University, Gossaigaon.

The main purpose of the counselling centre is to provide free health-related tips to people to remain healthy and fit in their daily lives. Besides, pregnant women, in particular, will be advised to take utmost care of rich vitamin foods during their pregnancy, consume hygienic foods, and learn how to take care of the baby in their womb.

Purna Sharma, while delivering a speech, asserted that health is the main asset of any human life. Any person who is mentally and physically fit is considered healthy, but at times, certain symptoms are seen among them, which as a result make them stressed and uncomfortable. In such cases, those individuals will be counseled at this counselling centre.

She further mentioned that in the future, counselling sessions will be organised on how to sit in a chair to avoid physical discomfort and how to take care of children with disabilities.

The inaugural session of the counselling centre was largely attended by associate dean Dr Ranjit Kumar Sharma, ADEE Dr HC Bhattacharya, chief scientist in-charge of KVK, Dr Sunil Kumar Pal, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary officer Dr Munindra Talukdar, sub-divisional agriculture officer Aseem Saikia, executive engineer, Irrigation Department Mohit Basumatary, KVK scientists Pooja Basumatary, Dr Mujahurul Islam, Narjina Parvin, and project assistant of the Fishery Department Dipankar Saikia, etc.

Retired headmaster passes away

HT Correspondent
MORIGAO, March 1: Bhugram Kakati, 73, a retired headmaster, social worker, and social activist of Kumuraguri near Morigaon town, passed away at his residence around 12:40 am on Thursday night. Kakati was known as a socially conscious person in the greater Kumuraguri area. He began his career as the founding headmaster of Dandua ME School and later transferred to Bhurbandha Girls ME School, retiring in 2012. He was actively involved in every social field in the area.

He served as the former vice-president of the District Rural Library Association, member of the Senior Citizens Association, former vice president of Sonai Regional Education Conscious Forum, former secretary of Kumuraguri Barnamghar Committee, and former president of Kumuraguri Bishwa Bharati Library. Additionally, he was engaged in various small and large organisations in the area.

He is survived by his wife, two daughters, a son, grandchildren, and many relatives.

Rabindranath Tagore University celebrates National Science Day



HT Correspondent
HOJAI, March 1: Rabindranath Tagore University in Hojai, celebrated National Science Day to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' by the renowned Indian physicist and Nobel laureate, Prof CV Raman. Organised by the department of Chemistry and the 'Viksit Bharat @2047' cell, the event aimed to spotlight 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat'. The celebration was marked by enthusiasm and was inaugurated by Prof Subhas Chandra Pan from IIT Guwahati, serving as the chief guest, followed by the felicitation of the guest and the RTU anthem. Dr Satyajit Kumar, the head of the Chemistry department, delivered the welcome speech, highlighting CV Raman's contributions to science. Tilak Chandra Kalita, registrar i/c, also addressed the gathering on the occasion. Prof

Kaushik Chanda, the convener, spoke on the significance of National Science Day and Aatmanirbhar Bharat. Prof Subhas Chandra Pan inspired students to embrace challenges and innovate beyond textbooks, while Dr Jayanta Kr Sarmah, co-convener, addressed the gathering on Vision Viksit Bharat @2047, followed by a video display for spreading awareness on Viksit Bharat @2047 initiatives. The message of the vice-chancellor Prof (Dr) Amalendu Chakrabarty was read by Dr Sarmah. The vice-chancellor, RTU, urged the students and faculty members to harness the power of indigenous technologies to address the pressing challenges facing our nation in various sectors and also extended his best wishes to the student participants, faculty, and staff members of the university on the occasion of National Science Day.

The event featured insightful talks, including Prof Pan's lecture on 'Rings in Drugs and the Significance of Chirality' and online sessions by Prof Mrinmoy De, department of Organic Chemistry, IISc Bangalore, and Prof Balamurali MM, Chemistry division, SAS, VIT, Chennai, on scientific advancements. These sessions fostered lively interactions between the speakers and students. The successful day-long program concluded with the vote of thanks from Dr Sujit Ranjan Acharjee, associate professor in the department of Chemistry. Dr Acharjee particularly appreciated Shilpi Mitra, assistant professor in the department of Chemistry, for inspiring the students to participate in the program in large numbers. Sumayyah Afrin Laskar, the host of the event, and all the UG and PG students of the department of Chemistry were highly appreciated for their role in the smooth conduction of the event. The successful event was a testament to the collaborative spirit of the students, staff, and faculty members of the university, emphasising the role of science in national development. The event concluded with the rendition of the national anthem.

Child predator Bijay Rajput sentenced to 20 years RI

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, March 1: The Court of Special Judge, Jorhat, has sentenced a man to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment after convicting him of sexually abusing a minor girl. The Additional Jorhat District and Sessions Judge (Jorhat), AJ Borah, acting as Special Judge on Thursday, pronounced the judgment in the case, convicting Bijay Rajput, a resident of a tea garden under Titabar Police Station, under Section 6 (1) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012, and sentenced him to 20 years rigorous imprisonment. A fine of ₹ 20,000 was also imposed on Rajput,

and in default of payment, the convict will have to undergo another two years of rigorous imprisonment. Altogether, six witnesses were examined during the trial by the court. The Judge also referred the matter to the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Jorhat, for the grant of compensation to the victim under the Victim Compensation Scheme for her medical treatment, education, and rehabilitation. As per the FIR lodged by the mother of the victim on August 5, 2022, at the Titabar Police Station, Rajput was accused of sexually assaulting the minor several times, which came to light after injury on her private parts was found by the mother.

Portfolios allocated to 11 EMs in 13 NC Hills Autonomous Council

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 1: Following the swearing-in of Debobal Gorlosa for his third term as the chief executive member (CEM) of the 13 NC Hills Autonomous Council on January 24, 2024, a significant development unfolded with the induction of eleven Members of the Autonomous Council (MACs) as executive members (EMs). On Friday, CEM Debobal Gorlosa distributed portfolios to his executive committee (EC), assigning crucial departments to each member.

The distribution of portfolios aims to ensure efficient governance and administration across various sectors within the council. The assigned departments include the general administration department (GAD), personnel, finance, land & revenue, taxes, while other subjects not specifically allocated to other executive members are retained by CEM Debobal Gorlosa himself. The consecutive EMs and their designated departments are as follows: Donpainan Thaoson: EM for Elementary Education, Probata Johari: EM for Handloom &

Textiles; Sericulture & Sports & Youth Affairs, Amendu Hojai: EM for PHE Department, Devojit Bathari: EM for Agriculture, Monjit Naiding: EM for AH & Vety Department; Cultural Centre, Niranjana Hojai: EM for Social Welfare; P&RD, Paudam Nriame: EM for PWD (Mahur Division); Weight & Measures. Furthermore, Zosumthang Hmar is entrusted with EM responsibilities for Council PWD; Water Resources; Industries, while Samsing Engti oversees Co-operative; Food & Civil Supplies; Fisheries.

INTRODUCTION OF DIBRUGARH-DEOGHAR- DIBRUGARH EXPRESS (WEEKLY)					
Ministry of Railways has approved the introduction of train No. 15926/15925 Dibrugarh-Deoghar-Dibrugarh Express (Weekly). Regular service of this train will start as per following details:					
Train No. 15926 Dibrugarh-Deoghar (Weekly) from 05-03-2024 (Tuesday)			Train No. 15925 Deoghar-Dibrugarh (Weekly) from 07-03-2024 (Thursday)		
ARR.	DEP.	STATION	ARR.	DEP.	
---	23:30	Dibrugarh	23:00	---	
01:30	01:32	North Lakhimpur	19:05	19:07	
02:02	02:04	Harmuti	18:00	18:02	
05:30	05:40	Rangapara North	16:00	16:10	
09:50	09:55	Rangiya Jn.	13:50	13:55	
13:15	13:20	New Bongaigaon	11:35	11:40	
15:15	15:20	New Coochbehar	09:12	09:17	
18:05	18:15	New Jalpaiguri	06:40	06:50	
21:20	21:35	Kathihar Jn.	03:20	03:35	
02:35	02:45	Bhagalpur	22:30	22:40	
06:00	---	Deoghar	---	20:05	
Other Stoppages : Dhemaji, Vishwanath Chariali, Udalguri, Nalbari, Barpeta Road, Kokrajhar, New Alipurdur, Jalpaiguri Road, Aluabari Road, Kishanganj, Barsoi Jn., Naugachia, Khagaria Jn., Monghyr, Bariaipur, Sultanganj, Mandar Hill, Hansdiha & Mohanpur.					
Composition : AC 2 tier (Two), AC 3 tier (Six), Sleeper class (Seven), Second class (Four), Brake, luggage cum generator car (One) & LSLRD (One) = 21 Coaches					
General Manager (Operations), Maligaon					
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY					

New Karimganj Railway Station set for modernisation under ABSS



Existing



Proposed

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 1: In a bid to further enhance rail facilities in North East and Assam, ₹ 10,369 crores have been allocated in the interim Budget 2024-25 for railway infrastructure projects. Under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS), 91 stations within NFR's jurisdiction are being redeveloped with world-class modern amenities/facilities. Among the se-

lected railway stations, New Karimganj Railway Station will receive a significant facelift under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme at a cost of ₹ 30.00 crores. The revamping of this station will provide modern state-of-the-art amenities to the railway users of the nearby areas.

New Karimganj Railway Station is an important station located in the southern part of Assam that serves the district of

Karimganj and falls under the Lumding division of NFR. The existing station building will be extended with improved facade along with modern facilities like waiting halls with the latest amenities for the convenience of the passengers. New lighting in the circulating area with other modern amenities like lift/escalator and FOB and cafeteria facilities & modern signages as well as a water fountain will

also be provided. A new toilet block will be built separately for male and female passengers. Improved parking facilities with beautification of the circulating area are also planned. All the platforms will be provided with shelter and resurfaced with marble stone, tiles, etc., for the ease of movement for passengers. Entry exit paths 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 started. Work for other passenger amenities like the installation of coach guidance system, modern train information display system, better road & dividers and provision of easy access water booths for divyangjan, etc., is also in progress.

The upgrading of this station will lead to the creation of new avenues which will lead to new employment, business opportunities, and ease of travel for passengers across the North East. The upgraded station will act as the center of socio-economic activities of the area.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Reality leaves a lot to the imagination.
- John Lennon

Bridging North-South divide

India stands at a pivotal juncture where its economic prowess contrasts sharply with the divisive forces of identity politics. The dichotomy between development and cultural nationalism, exacerbated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, has laid bare a noticeable schism between the northern and southern regions of the country. While India basks in the glow of its burgeoning economy, currently ranked as the world's fifth-largest, and boasts a soaring stock market, the rift between its prosperous south and less affluent north looms large. Prime Minister Modi, a figure of immense influence, has steered India towards economic growth while simultaneously promoting a Hindu-first ideology, often tinged with chauvinism and authoritarianism. The southern region of India emerges as a beacon of modernity, with vibrant startups, esteemed educational institutions, and cutting-edge technological facilities. However, intriguingly, Modi's party finds minimal traction in this thriving hub. Instead, it draws significant support from the economically disadvantaged rural areas of the north, where Hindi reigns supreme. This geographical disparity assumes paramount importance as India braces for the upcoming elections in April and May. Modi's anticipated third term hangs in the balance, contingent upon navigating this delicate divide. Failure to address these fissures could precipitate a constitutional crisis, imperilling India's unified market. Conversely, effective management holds the promise of mitigating the harsh realities of identity politics, fostering a more cohesive future. To comprehend this division, one must delve into the economic dynamics. Historically, the southern states have outperformed their northern counterparts, propelled by effective governance, robust education systems, and secure property rights. This economic chasm has widened since independence, with the south now contributing significantly more to India's GDP.

The southern region not only serves as India's economic powerhouse but also stands as a bastion of political divergence. Unlike the north, where the BJP's agenda finds resonance, the south gravitates towards regional parties championing local languages and advocating moderate Hindu values. However, the BJP's strategy faces resistance in the south. Despite Modi's vision of a technologically advanced and unified nation, he grapples with a lack of mandate from these states. The BJP's recent electoral setbacks in Karnataka underscore the prevailing disconnect. The increasing inter-state trade underscores the imperative of fostering a robust national market. However, achieving this necessitates bridging the geographical tensions and fostering greater integration within the country. Skeptics warn of the potential disruption to the constitutional equilibrium if Modi secures re-election. Allegations of bias against the southern states and apprehensions regarding the imposition of Hindi as the national language fuel anxieties.

Nevertheless, there exists a glimmer of hope. By embracing a more moderate stance on Hindutva, curtailing the emphasis on Hindi promotion, and prioritizing economic development, the BJP could bridge this gaping chasm. Recent indications from within the party suggest a willingness to embrace these shifts. India stands at a crossroads. The south offers a glimpse into the future of the country's economy and politics. Modi and his party must heed the lessons from the south and navigate the path towards a more harmonious and prosperous India.

Legal circles abuzz as Justice Joseph calls for rethink on SC's motto

By: Shashanka Das

Former Supreme Court Judge Kurian Joseph has ignited a contentious discussion within legal and intellectual circles by calling for the Chief Justice of India (CJI) to reconsider the Supreme Court's motto "Yato Dharmastato Jaya" (Where there is Dharma, there is Victory). His remarks, delivered at an event organized by left-leaning intellectuals and the controversial news portal The Wire, have drawn scrutiny and debate.

Joseph's critique, articulated during the event, challenges the alignment of the Supreme Court's motto with the national ethos, implying a divergence from the core principles of the country. He posited, "Truth is the Constitution. Dharma is not always the truth. Dharma is the discharge of your duty in terms of the need of the hour."

This isn't the first time Joseph's statements have stirred controversy. In a seminar back in 2018, he likened the Catholic Church to the preamble of India's Constitution, emphasizing its assimilative nature and unity under the Pope.

However, Joseph's latest argument has raised several concerns among legal scholars and observers. Firstly, it disregards the nuanced role of the judiciary in a democracy. The Supreme Court's motto symbolizes its unique responsibility in interpreting the law and delivering justice, encompassing not only legal correctness but also moral and ethical righteousness.

Moreover, Joseph's assertion overlooks the judiciary's vital function as a check on the powers of the executive and legislature, ensuring alignment with the Constitution. The motto underscores the judiciary's commitment to upholding constitutional principles and ensuring justice prevails.

The contention over the Supreme Court's motto extends beyond semantics; it delves into the values deeply ingrained in Indian culture and legal tradition.

Derived from the Mahabharata, the motto resonates with Hindu concepts of justice and righteousness, transcending religious boundaries to embody universal principles.

Joseph's remarks on the functioning of the Supreme Court, particularly regarding the Master of the Roster system and administrative committees, also merit consideration. While advocating for transparency and fairness, his suggestions could inadvertently restrict the CJI's discretion and impede judicial adaptability to evolving legal challenges.

Furthermore, Joseph's association with controversial figures like Prashant Bhusan, known for his confrontational stance against the judiciary, raises eyebrows. Bhusan's recent objections to case allocations hint at broader discontent with judicial processes, potentially undermining judicial independence and impartiality.

The concern over case allocations underscores a deeper issue within the legal fraternity, where lawyers seek favourable benches to advance their agendas. Such practices risk eroding public trust in the judiciary and compromising the integrity of judicial proceedings.

In conclusion, while Joseph's critique sparks important discussions on the judiciary's role and processes, it also underscores the need for a balanced approach that upholds constitutional principles while fostering judicial transparency and fairness.

As debates continue, it is imperative to safeguard the judiciary's autonomy and integrity, ensuring justice remains paramount in the legal landscape. (The author can be reached at shashankadas0007@gmail.com)



Defection in Congress dividend for BJP

The Congress, the principal opposition of Prime Minister Modi, seems to be paying a crippling price for its past Karmas. It being the largest party to counter the Modi momentum has frequently been pulled by the Prime Minister throughout his preparatory campaigns before the national elections set in. There has been confusion and speculations have been ringing almost sequentially predicting the defection of a battery of leaders who are disgruntled and disengaged with the Congress leadership planning to jump ship before the final calamity of political overturn of the grand old party takes place.

Their convoluted motions seeking asylum in the BJP camp clearly force the punditry to declare it the magnanimity of the ruling party though its double standard fails to hide behind its ideological histrionics. Obviously, there are disgraceful defections happening on a daily basis from the Congress and more disgraceful is the way they are sheltered in the saffron camp.

A question significantly runs riot in the minds of the thinking leaders in the ruling and opposition sides alike. They fail to figure out the urgency with which the ideology driven BJP gives shelters to the defectors in its fold. The BJP's corruption allegations against the opposition leaders get easily evaporated once they take shelter in the saffron camp.

With its accurately framed narratives, the BJP keeps waging war against the opposition leaders and dramatically activates the investigating agencies against them. But the ruling party's political gimmicks turn nasty as it keeps its doors open for the turn-

coats giving them complete protection and political immunity. This political shrewdness of the saffron party should be made to face the ire of the people who voted them to power.

The BJP's ludicrous political bonhomie with the defectors for mere electoral gain has been classically narrated by Anand Ranganathan during a media debate. His satirical accent on the ruling dispensation calls it a Dholi Ghat wherein all corruption charges against the defectors got washed and purified.

Though the BJP and the Prime Minister go at the opposition hammer and tongs, their integrity while dealing with the real menace of corruption seems doubtful. A spectacular display of ostentatious jubilation on the actions of the government against the corrupt and its drum beating do not resonate without people questioning their real intent.

There is always a convulsion of dissatisfaction on its political asylum management giving shelter to all those who chose to jump ships while they had been hunted for corruption charges.

And the government and the BJP are seen conveniently hiding their faces behind welfare schemes and spiritual extravaganzas from temple consecration to spiritual scuba diving. To force people to assume that one side is totally clean and the other side is totally corrupt is an outmaneuvered political game.

Indeed, there are no guilt free parties in Indian politics. The apex court has meaningfully raised its eyebrows on the wealth amassed by one political party

through electoral bonds and squashed it from creating more wealth. So there needs to be justifiable steps taken against corruption and the corrupt. If the Prime Minister and his party are sincere they should not allow the corrupt defectors to find asylum in their camp. Throughout the Modi decade, the opposition failed to establish the corruption charges it brought against his government.

Its welfare projects being monitored and successfully executed, the government under Prime Minister Modi's leadership created an ambience of good governance. A section of the electorate is desperate as Modi's audacious Hindu spiritual campaign is gaining more force. But an overall estimation on his government's performance is graded high with Modi leading the popularity graph.

The Congress is digging its own grave for not being able to comprehend the direction into which the wind is blowing. Its inability to hold its breath of existence is the crisis and Rahul

Gandhi seems exacerbating it further. Its leaders who failed to adjust on the sinking ship had ultimately found it regretless and convenient to ensure their survival with the BJP but unfortunately their defection could not cleanse the blurred political perception of the party.

Having set out for the second yatra, its leader could not grow beyond caste narratives and the dominant family he belongs to has begun to look fragile while awkwardly slipping its steps. Though speculations on party veteran Kamal Nath's plan to

find space under the saffron umbrella faded, the half capsized Congress ship seems gearing for a complete collapse. The party could somehow strike a deal with Arvind Kejriwal in some states and in Uttar Pradesh; it could stitch a poll alliance with Akhilesh Yadav. Here, the party surrendered as an under-deliverer.

Rahul Gandhi's aggressive tone in the speech that he made in Uttar Pradesh shows his party's predicament. He urged people to think hard about caste. "You are being fooled", he cried. The (in) sensitivity with which the Gandhi scion asked a variety of questions to the crowd depicted his depression before the elections.

"Are there any Dalits or other low castes in the judiciary? Are any of you in the media? Do any of you own even one of India's 200 top companies? Of the civil servant class which rules the country, are any of you among them? Why are you all asleep? You are 73% of the population. What kind of society is this where you don't make any decisions?" Rahul Gandhi asked the ordinary people who assembled to capture a glimpse of the man who runs his party in real terms at the top.

The fourth generation leader from the family dynasty was totally unimpressed by the fact that the country was ruled by leaders from his family and party for decades. His questions to the poor illiterate common men assembled there should be answered by his own party.

The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty that has given three prime ministers to the country cannot distance itself from the depleting economic backwardness of a

large chunk of the country's population. His speech could be seen as an attempt to fire up emotions among certain sections of the society. But his audacity for the communal flare-up does not hold intellectual resilience to take questions in return.

A clear indication of provocation, his narratives were for the division of the Hindu community. Being harsh on his insensitive and biased stand on the Hindu community, leaders from the INDIA block began to sense the threat of losing ground. There was doubt and suppressed discontent and disagreement as well. This has been the main reason his party was neglected by Mamata Banerjee and Nitish Kumar.

Bihar was the first state that has carried out a caste census and Nitish Kumar was its proponent demanding the same across the country. Taking asylum in the saffron camp, Nitish Kumar sensed the direction of the wind. This manufactured caste perception is purely intended to make people believe that the privileged castes are holding key posts and managing the country's economy.

The ultimate aim was to drive certain sections in the Hindu community crazy and aggressive against the government. But Modi has played his cards more intelligently well before this cynically achieved its purpose. The momentum he created through the temple extravaganzas in Ayodhya and his eminently consistent consolidation of the spiritual imaginations of the majority has united the Hindu community beyond caste boundaries. (The author is a freelance journalist & can be reached at mrlalu30@gmail.com)

Immediate ceasefire in Gaza is imperative to stop wanton killings by Israel

By: Dr Arun Mitra

The self-immolation of an active-duty member of the U.S Air Force Aaron Bushnell outside the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C on 25th February has sent shock waves around the world. He did this as a protest amidst the barbaric aggression by Israel on Gaza and its latest offensive on Rafah. This extreme step is a reflection of sensitivity towards the helpless innocent children and women and anger that is growing against the war mongering policies of his own country. The death of 30000 Palestinians, 70% of which are women and children has moved saner people around the world. However there is also sharp division in the approach of the global south and many developed countries of the north.

Brazilian President LuizInacio Lula da Silva, while speaking to reporters in Addis Ababa, where he was attending an African Union summit, has accused Israel of committing "genocide" against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and compared its actions to Adolf Hitler's campaign to exterminate Jews. "It's not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It's a war between a highly prepared Army and women and children," he remarked. This is a repeat of what Hitler did to the Jews during the 2nd world war, he said. He had previously condemned Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel as a "terrorist" act. So he is not being partisan in his utterance. His views are confirmed by the latest rhetoric by the Israeli officials who are justifying the killings of children in Gaza.

Similar statement has been given by Republican Representative Andy Ogles of Tennessee in the US, who responded to an activist's question about the deaths of Palestinian children in Gaza by asserting that "we should kill them all". Double standards of the US administration are obvious. Whereas they talk of humanitarian ceasefire and advise Israel to be cautious in bombing, they are supplying billions of US\$ worth arms to them. The US has vetoed Algerian resolution in the Security Council for ceasefire in Gaza. All these are a pointer to serious situation likely to develop in the Middle East which can have global ramifications.

After four months of unprecedented aggression on Gaza the Israel has not been able to find the Hamas or the hostages. Starting from North of Gaza to the center, South, tunnels, the hospitals, schools, every building they have destroyed and evacuated. Now they are saying that the Hamas is hiding in Rafah. Palestinians are being pushed to the sea as they have nowhere to go. These happenings are reminiscent of the barbaric era of colonialism and apartheid.

It is now crystal clear that the sole aim of Israel is to eliminate the Palestinians and establish a Zionist regime in that region with the explicit support of the US administration. Israel's demand for stoppage of aid to the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees and its accusations that some of its employees were involved in the October 7 attack is totally unjustified as there is no evidence in it. There is already spread of disease and hunger among the Palestinians with serious impact on children.

It is most unfortunate and condemnable what happened during the Holocaust. But

what the Zionist regime is doing is a repeat of the Holocaust. Anyone who questions the Israel's actions is dubbed as being antisemitic by Netanyahu government.

The Nazis killed most mercilessly 6 million Jews and a similar number of Non-Jews in the concentration camps. These included Soviet prisoners of war, Non-Jewish (ethnic) Poles, Romani men, women, and children and several other. This however does not give anyone right to kill. It is high time that global community rises to the occasion and stops the genocide otherwise the war is likely to escalate to countries of the Middle East. Other countries of the world could enter in it in the same manner as various nations joined the 2nd world war slowly during 1939 to 1945.

It is in this backdrop that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on Jan 26 ordered Israel to take action to prevent acts of genocide as it wages war against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. The top United Nations court for handling disputes between states was ruling in a case brought by South Africa. The court ordered Israel to refrain from any acts that could fall under the Genocide Convention and to ensure its troops commit no genocidal acts in Gaza. A majority of at least 15 out of 17 judges voted in favour of imposing the so-called provisional measures, including the court's president, Joan Donoghue of the United States. Israel however has not made public the action taken in this regard till date.

The UN Secretary General has expressed anguish over Israel's decision to attack Rafah and condemned collective punishment of Palestinians. But despite his several efforts the UN has failed to contain Israel. The multilateral institutions are not properly equipped to deal with the current challenges, as has been demonstrated by the Security Council's inability to act on the on-going conflicts. Will the G20 group whose chair is now with Brazil be able to take a position?

There have been many peace keeping forces around the world the under the UNO, but this is missing now. India as a big country could have played tangible role in bringing peace in the region. India's non participation in the presentations at the ICJ has raised several questions. Indian government has been the harbinger of peace and disarmament as a leader of the Non aligned Movement (NAM) and always stood with Palestinian cause. The Delhi Declaration of the Seventh NAM summit from 7th to 11th March, 1983, carried the conclusions and recommendations for total unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian and other occupied territories including Jeru lalem; A War crimes tribunal to try Israel for committing crimes against the Palestinian people.

Alas India changed its position on the relationship with Israel and has developed strong defence relations with them and has now supplied Israel with drones made by the Adani group to carry out operations. Modi government has cleared the recruitment of several thousand Indian workers to work in Israeli companies after the Palestinians were expelled by them. India's actions are in contrast to the stand taken by several countries of global south. India should come forward to re-emerge as leader of the peace loving developing countries for a peaceful just global order. (IPA Service)

Myanmar junta crackdowns on non-committal youths

By: Saleem Samad

Scores of youths have been arrested in Mandalay, the second-largest city in Myanmar after Yangon, since the junta activated the conscription law early this month, according to news pouring in from war-torn Myanmar.

More than 80 people have been arrested by government soldiers since the second week of February in Chanmyathazi, Maha Aungmyay, and Aungmyaythazan townships in Mandalay, according to Myanmar's dissident news media, The Irrawaddy.

Combined forces of junta soldiers, police, ward administration officials, and militia members have been taking headcounts and checking households for overnight guests in Mandalay since mid-February.

Migrants working in Mandalay or internally displaced people (IDPs) living in the town were arrested as junta troops searched houses, teashops, and restaurants in the ward on Sunday, allegedly to check for unregistered guests during the day as well as at night.

Streets in Mandalay have become almost deserted after evening hours following the activation of the conscription law and reports that young people are being abducted. Unverified reports on Myanmar social media say abductions by the army have already begun, while potential conscripts speculate that bribery will be the only way to avoid being conscripted.

The national conscription law was implemented on February 10 by Min Aung Hlaing, a Myanmar army general who has ruled Myanmar as the chairman of the State Administration Council since seizing power in the February 2021 coup d'état. He additionally appointed himself Prime Minister in August 2021.

On the other hand, the regime has asked students to join the University Training Corps (UTC), which acts as a reserve for the military's depleted ranks.

Junta newspapers boast that many generals, including regime boss Hlaing, were former UTC members.

Under the Conscription Law, students can defer service, but the regime wants students to join the UTC to recruit them as reserves in the meantime.

The first UTC was formed in 1922 at Rangoon University under colonial rule. It was modelled on the British Army's University Officers Training Corps, which aims to recruit educated officers and expose civilians who will become future employers to aspects of military life.

There are three days of training a week during the academic year with a camp every October. Junta newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar said the UTCs are commanded by the Directorate of Militias and Border Guard Forces, providing students with four years of training.

University staff and UTC students were quoted by junta newspapers saying the organization teaches basic skills and explains what the military does to protect the country. In the wake of the 2021 coup, the regime revived a colonial-era law that allows authorities to conduct warrantless searches of private homes and requires all residents to register overnight houseguests. Previously, such searches were mainly conducted at night. But junta troops are also searching households in Mandalay during the day.

Myanmar's military is aiming to recruit 5,000 able-bodied fighters every month from April under a conscription order, Myanmar watch groups say, revealing its weakness.

Meanwhile, junta soldiers are extorting money from people whom they detain under the pretext of overnight guest registration. The detainees are released after payment is made. However, pro-junta Telegram channels claim that the young men detained are members of the anti-junta People's Defence Force and that they possess weapons.

Fighters from the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) have a message for compatriots who have not yet directly supported their resistance against the junta but are now at risk of being pulled into the violent chaos that has engulfed the country since the 2021 coup.

This comes as a coalition of ethnic armed groups and pro-democracy rebels across the country has inflicted heavy losses on government forces, in a counteroffensive that poses an unprecedented – and possibly existential – threat to the Tatmadaw, as Myanmar's vicious military is known, reports the South China Morning Post. Reports from Yangon (formerly Rangoon) show queues of hundreds at the Thailand embassy as people seek a legal way out, while hundreds of mainly young men have been detained after sneaking over the border into Thailand to escape the draft – a warning of the potential for a larger exodus ahead.

Thailand, a country that does not have an asylum system for the protection of refugees, is under pressure to consider formalising entry ahead of the expected influx, writes SCMP. Earlier in January, China brokered the Myanmar ceasefire, urging the junta and rebel militia to "exercise maximum restraint". The two sides agreed to an immediate ceasefire, the Chinese foreign ministry claimed, while pledging a continued "constructive role" from Beijing.

The junta and rebel Three Brotherhood Alliance held two days of talks in the Chinese city of Kunming, the ministry spokeswoman reveals.

In another story on Al Jazeera, Myanmar's military regime has admitted it is facing "heavy assaults" by anti-coup forces who began a coordinated offensive at the end of last month, claiming to have taken control of several towns in border areas and dozens of military outposts.

Spokesperson Zaw Min Tun told Al Jazeera that troops were under "heavy assaults from a significant number of armed rebel soldiers" in Shan State in the north, Kayah State in the east, and Rakhine State in the west.

Anti-coup fighters are using "hundreds" of drones to drop bombs on military posts, and some sites have had to be evacuated, he added.

Myanmar was plunged into crisis when the generals seized power from the elected government of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a coup in February 2021. (The author is Deputy Editor of The Daily Messenger and an award-winning journalist. He can be reached at saleemsamad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @saleemsamad)

6 jobs that can get a six-figure salary

By: Nikhil Anand

As the IT sector gears up to meet the projected hiring growth of close to 10 to 12 per cent in 2024, certain technology skills will continue to command the higher end of the paycheck.

These emerging technologies, which are not limited to the IT industry, are being harnessed across essentially non-tech sectors to create adaptability, agility and disruption.

As the digital transformation goals for enterprises get increasingly ambitious, they find skill gaps they need to fill.

With reports suggesting that only about 45 per cent of graduate job seekers are deemed employable in the IT industry, candidates with the right skill sets will be highly sought after.

Moreover, the thriving GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council, comprising Arab nations) market will create a demand for niche technology skills. These are the top six technology skills that can

help candidates earn a six-figure salary:

1. Cybersecurity

Besides opportunities, the challenges digital transformation unleashes must be addressed with urgency. To steer clear of cyber threats, businesses are investing big bucks in designing and implementing secure networks.

Cybersecurity engineers are responsible for testing and supervising these security systems, protecting their organisations and clients from cyber attacks, online risks, cyber criminals and more. A combination of the requisite technical degrees and behavioural skills like critical thinking, analytical skills, problem-solving, etc, is indispensable for cybersecurity professionals seeking to earn a weighty paycheck.

2. Artificial Intelligence

Machine learning experts, business intelligence experts, AI engineers, etc, are at the forefront of the AI revolution that is unfolding at a never-seen-before magnitude.

Innovations in automation and GenAI are

compelling businesses to invest in qualified AI professionals.

Professionals with SQL experience and programming knowledge in languages such as C++, Python, Java, etc, will be in high demand to lead the automation goals that have become a mainstay for forward-looking companies.

3. Blockchain Development

From cryptocurrency to NFTs, blockchain is the backbone of some of the most striking innovations of our time.

A decentralised database allows autonomy and accountability within organisations, making this technology a hot cake in the digitalisation landscape. With non-tech brands such as retail, fashion, entertainment and more showing more and more interest in the metaverse, the demand for professionals with blockchain development skills is expected to shoot up.

4. Cloud Computing

A strong knowledge of HTML, big data, data security and project management, along with

fundamental business concepts, can go a long way for professionals seeking a high-paying career as cloud engineers.

Cloud engineers are responsible for a wide variety of service offerings including SaaS, IaaS and PaaS.

Cloud computing allows organisations to easily diversify their portfolio and manage high volumes of data. The dependence on cloud infrastructure is becoming ubiquitous across industries, making it a promising professional choice for technology aspirants.

5. Web Development

Applicable and useful to businesses across the board, web developers contribute immensely to a brand's identity, visibility, credibility, sales, cost optimisation and much more.

Candidates up-to-speed in full stack development, web coding, UI development, front-end development, back-end development and so on will be wooed by businesses from almost every sector.



6. Data Analytics

Data scientists and data analysts play a critical role in aiding business stakeholders exponentially in the decision-making process.

Proficiency in data cleaning, data visualisation, SQL and NoSQL (database storage options), MATLAB, etc, is needed by employers to strengthen their data interpretation and data communication prowess.

As structured and unstructured data become a key point of focus for businesses, data professionals will continue raking in a lucrative salary in the foreseeable future. (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

Textbook Corporation Recruitment 2024 – 2 Vacancy

Last Date: 04/03/2024.

Assam State Textbook Production and Publication Corporation Limited (ASTPPC Ltd.) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 2 Junior Assistant Manager Commercial Vacancy. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Junior Assistant Manager Commercial

No of posts: 2 [SC-1, UR-1]

Educational Qualification:

- Graduate in Commerce stream from a recognized University.
- Minimum 1 year Diploma in Computer Application with operational knowledge of office automation.
- Diploma in Inventory Management.

Experience: Minimum 3 years experience in-

- Store Keeping
- Book Keeping from a reputed ware house/ godown.

Pay Scale: PB- ₹ 14000- ₹ 49000 GP- ₹ 6200

Other Criteria of Textbook Corporation Recruitment

Age Limit: The candidate should be less than 21 years and not above 40 years as on 01-01-2024.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

SC/ ST: 5 years
OBC: 3 years

Important Dates of ASTPPC Ltd Recruitment 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 23rd February 2024
Last date of submission of online application: 04th March 2024

Gauhati High Court Recruitment 2024 – 10 Systems Assistant Posts

Last Date: 07/03/2024.

Gauhati High Court has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 10 Systems Assistant Posts in the Principal Seat of the Gauhati High Court and District Courts of Assam. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Systems Assistant

No of posts: 10 posts

Category-wise vacancy:

UR: 7

STP: 2
STH: 1

Pay: PB-2, ₹ 14000-70000,

Grade Pay- ₹ 7600 (Principal Seat)
Grade Pay- ₹ 6200 (District Courts)

Educational Qualification:

- B.C.A. with 60 % marks in aggregate or equivalent grade from a recognized institution with at least 1 (one) year working experience from a reputed institution/ organization. OR,
- B.Sc. with 60 % marks in aggregate and I year Post Graduate Diploma in Computer Science / Application with 60% marks in aggregate or equivalent grade from a recognized institution with at least 1 (one) year working experience from a reputed institution/ organization. OR,
- Diploma holders from Polytechnic in Computer Science/ Engineering or Electronics & Telecommunications with 60% marks in aggregate or equivalent grade from a recognized institution with at least 2(two) years working experience from a reputed institution/ organization.

Note: Required experience must be gathered only after attaining the qualifying educational qualification as mentioned above.

Other Criteria of Gauhati High Court Recruitment

Age Limit: Candidate's age should not be less than 21 years and not more than 40 years as on 1st January 2024.

Age Relaxation: Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

OBC/MOBC: 3 years
SC: 5 years
STP/STH: 5 years
PwBD: 10 years

Local Language Proficiency: The candidate should have knowledge of the Official Language of the State of Assam (Assamese).

Employment Exchange Certificate: The candidate must have a valid Employment Exchange Registration Number for the State of Assam.

Application Fee of Gauhati High Court Recruitment

Candidates have to pay the application as mentioned below according to their caste:

Category	Application Fee
SC/ ST	₹ 250
PWD	Nil
Others	₹ 500

Important Dates of Gauhati High Court Recruitment 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 21st February 2024
Last date of submission of online application: 7th March 2024, till 4.30 pm
Last date for payment of fees: 13th March 2024, Till bank transaction hours

Jal Jeevan Mission Recruitment 2024 – State Coordinator Legal Post

Walk-in Date: 08/03/2024.

Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Assam has released an employment notification for the recruitment of State Coordinator Legal Post under Jal Jeevan Mission, Assam. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

Name of post: State Coordinator Legal

No of posts: 1 post

Remuneration: ₹ 60,000/- per month

Essential Qualification: Graduation with LLB with minimum 60% marks from a recognized University.

Experience:

- # Minimum 5 years in dealing with Civil and Service court matters.
- # Experience in dealing with Civil and Service court cases/matters is essential.
- # Familiar with MS Office and Internet.

Age Limit: Not more than 40 years as of 01.01.2024 .

Documents Required During Interview:

- # Detailed Curriculum Vitae.
- # Photo Identity & Address Proof (Aadhar/DL etc)
- # Original Educational Qualification Certificates (HSLC interview onwards).
- # Work Experience Certificates if any
- # Self-attested photocopies of all the certificates, mark sheets, experience certificates, etc. to be submitted.

How to Apply for Jal Jeevan Mission Assam Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates who have fulfilled the above-mentioned eligibility criteria may appear in the interview with detailed Curriculum Vitae, photo identity and address proof, original and self-attested copies of all relevant documents as per schedule mentioned below.

Date: 08/03/2024

Time: 10: 00 AM onwards

Venue: Office of the Mission Director, Jal Jeevan Mission, Assam, Hengrabari, Guwahati-36.

Bharat Electronics Limited Recruitment – 517 Trainee Engineer Posts

Last Date: 13/03/2024.

Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 517 Trainee Engineer Posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Trainee Engineer

No of posts: 517 posts

Category-wise vacancy:

UR: 210
OBC: 139
EWS: 52
SC: 77
ST: 39

Vacancy @ North East Zone: 15 posts

Pay: An all-inclusive consolidated remuneration of ₹ 30,000/- per month for the 1st year of engagement, ₹ 35,000/- per month for the 2nd year, ₹ 40, 000/- per month for the 3rd year respectively.

Eligibility Criteria of BEL Engineer Recruitment

Age Limit as on 01.02.2024:

BE/B.Tech: Upper age limit is 28 years
ME/M.Tech: Upper age limit is 30 years

The upper age limit indicated is for candidates belonging to General & EWS Category.

Age Relaxation: The upper age limit will be relaxed by 3 years for OBC (NCL) candidates, 5 years for SC/ST and 10 years for PwBD candidates (having minimum 40% disability, in addition to the relaxation applicable to OBC (NCL)/SC/ST candidates).

Educational Qualification: B.E/B.Tech/M.E/M.Tech in Engineering (Electronics, / Electronics & Communication /Electronics & Telecommunication/ Telecommunication / Communication / Mechanical/ Electrical /Electrical & Electronics / Computer Science /Computer Science & Engineering / Information Science/ Information Technology).

Aggregate of all semesters/years - 55% and above for General, OBC (NCL) & EWS Candidates and Pass Class for SC/ST/PwBD (Person with Benchmark Disabilities)

Experience:

- Trainee engineers with experience of providing IT support (PC maintenance, Network switch and associated software hands on experience, preferably as site IT Engineer, will be preferred.
- The Resident Engineer must be able to Read/Speak/Write in English and Hindi/ Regional Language wherever they are posted.

Application Fee:

Category	Fee
GEN/EWS/OBC (NCL)	₹ 150/- + 18% GST
SC/ST/PwBD	Exempted

Important Dates of BEL Engineer Recruitment 2024

Opening date for Online Submission of Application: 28.02.2024
Last date for Online Submission of Application: 13.03.2024

Prayas Adhyayan Chakra Recruitment – 7 Teacher Posts

Last Date: 15/03/2024.

Prayas Adhyayan Chakra, Bokakhat has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 7 PGT and Graduate Teacher vacancy for Jatiya Bidyalay under Prayas Adhyayan Chakra, Bokakhat. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. PGT

No of posts: 5

Subjects: Botany, Zoology, Economics, Physics and Chemistry

Pay: Negotiable

Educational Qualification: Master Degree (B.Ed Preferable)

2. Graduate Teacher

No of posts: 2

Subjects: Tabla Bissarad and Violin

Pay: Negotiable

Educational Qualification: Bachelor Degree (B.Ed Preferable)

Age Limit: Upto 40 years

Application Fee: Nil.

How to Apply for Prayas Adhyayan Chakra Recruitment?

Interested and eligible candidates may send their Bio-data to pacbkt04@gmail.com within 15th March 2024.

About Prayas Adhyayan Chakra, Bokakhat

Prayas Adhyayan Chakra (Regd No. : Trust 350/60GLT), a organization dedicated to work in the field of empowerment of economically and educationally weaker section of the society.

Under this organization there are four schools namely - Bokakhat Jatiya Bidyalay (Senior Secondary School of Arts, Science and Commerce from class Nursery to class XII under SEBA & AHSEC comprising of both English and Assamese medium), Mohuramukh Jatiya Bidyalay, Brahmputra Jatiya Bidyalay, Disoiporiya Jatiya Bidyalay.

Address: Prayas Adhyayan Chakra
Timou Bil Par, 1 No Ward,
Bokakhat, PIN – 785612, Golaghat, Assam

SAIL Recruitment 2024 – 314 Operator Cum Technician (Trainee) Posts

Last Date: 18/03/2024.

Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 314 Operator cum Technician (Trainee) (OCTT) Posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Operator cum Technician (Trainee) – (OCTT)

No of posts: 314 posts

Discipline-wise vacancy:

OCT (Trainee) (Metallurgy): 57
OCT (Trainee) (Electrical): 64
OCT (Trainee) (Mechanical): 100
OCT (Trainee) (Instrumentation): 17
OCT (Trainee) (Civil): 22
OCT (Trainee) (Chemical): 18
OCT (Trainee) (Ceramic): 6
OCT (Trainee) (Electronics): 08
OCT (Trainee) (Computer/IT): 20
OCT (Trainee) (Draughtsman): 2

Pay scale: ₹ 26600-3%-38920/-(S-3)

Eligibility Criteria of SAIL Recruitment

Age Limit: Age of the candidates must be between 18 to 28 years as on 18/03/2024.

Age Relaxation: Age relaxation is admissible as per rules.

Educational Qualification: Matriculation with 03 years (full time) Diploma in respective branch of Engineering from Govt. recognized university/ institute.

Minimum Qualifying Marks in Eligibility Qualification:

50% for Unreserved posts & post reserved for OBC/ EWS.
40% for posts reserved for SC/ST/PwBD/Departmental Candidates.

Application Fee: At the time of submission of online application, candidates will be required to pay Application & Processing Fee as mentioned below through Net Banking / Credit Card / ATM-cum-Debit Card.

Category	Fee
General/OBC/EWS	₹ 500/-
SC/ST/PwBD/ESM/ Departmental	₹ 200/-

Important Dates of SAIL Vacancy 2024

Starting date of online application submission: 26th February 2024
Last date of online application submission: 18th March 2024

Some 15,000 candidates are vying for a seat in the 290-member parliament

Iran begins voting in first parliament election since 2022 protests as questions over turnout loom

DUBAI, March 1: Iran began voting on Friday in its first parliamentary elections since the mass 2022 protests over its mandatory hijab laws after the death of Mahsa Amini, with questions looming over just how many people will turn out for the poll.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 84, cast one of the first votes in an election that also will see new members elected to the country's Assembly of Experts.

The panel of clerics, who serve an eight-year term, is mandated to select a new supreme leader if Khamenei steps down or dies, giving their role increased importance with Khamenei's age.

Khamenei voted before a crowd of journalists in Tehran, his left hand slightly shaking as he took his ballot from his right, paralysed since a 1981 bombing. State television showed one woman nearby weeping as she filmed Khamenei with



her mobile phone.

He urged people to vote as soon as possible in the election, saying that both Iran's friends and enemies were watching the turnout.

"Pay attention to this, make friends happy and disappoint the evil-wishers," he said in brief remarks by the ballot boxes.

Initial election results are expected as soon as Saturday. Some 15,000 candidates are vying for a seat in the 290-member parliament, formally known as the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Terms run

for four years, and five seats are reserved for Iran's religious minorities.

Under the law, the parliament has oversight over the executive branch, votes on treaties and handles other issues. In practice, absolute power in Iran rests with its supreme leader.

Hard-liners have controlled the parliament for the past two decades — with chants of "Death to America" often heard from the floor.

Under Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, a former Revolutionary

Guard general who supported a violent crackdown on Iranian university students in 1999, the legislature pushed forward a bill in 2020 that greatly curtailed Tehran's co-operation with the United Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

That followed then-President Donald Trump's unilateral withdrawal of America from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018 — an act that sparked years of tensions in the Middle East and saw Iran enrich enough uranium at record-breaking purity to have enough fuel for "several" nuclear weapons if it chose.

More recently, the parliament has focused on issues surrounding Iran's mandatory head covering, or hijab, for women after the 2022 death of 22-year-old Amini in police custody, which sparked nationwide protests.

The protests quickly escalated into calls to overthrow

Iran's clerical rulers. A subsequent security crackdown killed over 500 people, with more than 22,000 detained.

Calls for an election boycott have spread in recent weeks, including from imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi, a women's rights activist, who called them a "sham."

The boycott calls have put the government under renewed pressure — since its 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's theocracy has based its legitimacy in part on turnout in elections.

The state-owned polling centre ISPA hadn't put out election data prior to the vote until Thursday, something highly unusual as their figures typically get released much earlier. Its polling, based on a survey of 5,121 voting-age people, predicted a turnout of 23.5 per cent in the capital, Tehran, and 38.5 per cent nationally. It said the margin of error in the poll was 2 per cent. (AP)

Navalny's family is laying the opposition leader to rest after his death in prison

MOSCOW, March 1: Relatives and supporters of Alexei Navalny are bidding farewell to the opposition leader at a funeral on Friday in south-eastern Moscow, following a battle with authorities over the release of his body after his still-unexplained death in an Arctic penal colony.

His supporters say several churches in Moscow refused to hold the service before Navalny's team got permission from one in the capital's Maryino district, where he once lived before his 2020 poisoning, treatment in Germany and subsequent arrest on his return to Russia.

The Church of the Icon of the Mother of God Soothe My Sorrows, which agreed to hold the service, did not mention it on its social media page. Authorities lined the road from a nearby subway station to the church with crowd-control barriers, and riot police deployed in big numbers early on Friday.

Burial was to follow in the nearby Borisovskoye Cemetery, where police also showed up in force. Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, spent eight days trying to get authorities to release the body following his Feb. 16 death at Penal Colony No. 3 in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 kilometres (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow.

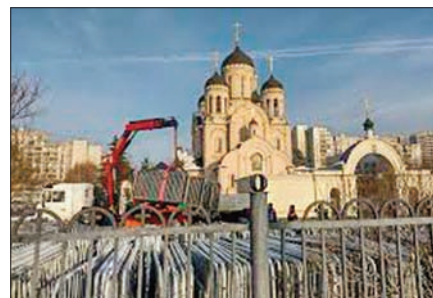
Authorities originally said they couldn't turn over the body because they needed to conduct post-mortem tests. Navalnaya, 69, made a video appeal to President Vladimir Putin to release the body so she could bury her son with dignity.

Once it was released, at least one funeral director said he had been "forbidden" to work with Navalny's supporters, the spokeswoman for Navalny's team, Kira Yarmysh, said on social media. They also were unable to find a hearse for the funeral.

"Unknown people are calling up people and threatening them not to take Alexei's body anywhere," Yarmysh said Thursday.

Russian authorities still haven't announced the cause of death for Navalny, 47, who crusaded against official corruption and organized big protests as Putin's fiercest political foe. Many Western leaders blamed the death on the Russian leader, which the Kremlin angrily rejected.

It was not immediately clear who among Navalny's family or allies would attend the funeral, with many of his associates in exile abroad due to fear of prosecution in Russia. Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption and his regional offices were designated as "extremist organizations" by the Russian government in 2021.



The politician's team said the funeral would be streamed live on Navalny's YouTube channel.

His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, accused Putin and Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin of trying to block a public funeral.

"We don't want any special treatment — just to give people the opportunity to say farewell to Alexei in a normal way," Yulia Navalnaya wrote on X. In a speech to European lawmakers Wednesday in Strasbourg, France, she also expressed fears that police might interfere with the gathering or would "arrest those who have come to say goodbye to my husband."

Moscow authorities refused permission for a separate memorial event for Navalny and slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov on Friday, citing COVID-19 restrictions, politician Yekaterina Duntsova said Thursday. Nemtsov, a 55-year-old former deputy prime minister, was shot to death as he walked on a bridge adjacent to the Kremlin on the night of Feb. 27, 2015.

Yarmysh also urged Navalny's supporters around the world to lay flowers in his honor Friday.

"Everyone who knew Alexei says what a cheerful, courageous and honest person he was," Yarmysh said Thursday. "But the greater truth is that even if you never met Alexei, you knew what he was like, too. You shared his investigations, you went to rallies with him, you read his posts from prison. His example showed many people what to do when even when things were scary and difficult."

Ivan Zhdanov, director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said that his funeral had initially been planned for Thursday — the day of Putin's annual state-of-the-nation address — but no venue agreed to hold it then.

In an interview with the independent Russian news site Meduza, Zhdanov said authorities had pressured Navalny's relatives to "have a quiet family funeral." (AP)

Fire at seven-storey commercial building in Bangladesh's capital kills at least 45 people

DHAKA, March 1: A massive fire that ripped through a seven-storey commercial building here overnight killed at least 45 people and injured 22 others, the health minister said on Friday, in one of the worst infernos that has hit Bangladesh in recent years.

The fire on Thursday night that engulfed the Green Cozy Cottage building in the capital's Baily Road area housed several restaurants and shops.

The fire broke out around 9:50 pm on Thursday at a popular restaurant named "Kacchi Bhai" on the building's first floor and quickly spread to the upper floors that had more restaurants and a garment shop, according to fire service officials.

Health Minister Samanta Lal Sen said around 2 am that 33 bodies were brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and 10 others to the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery. Another victim died at the Police Hospital.

The condition of those injured is "critical", he told reporters at a briefing. Another victim died around 7:00 am while undergoing treatment at the intensive care unit (ICU) of DMCH. Mostafa Abdullah Al Noor, (Nezarat) Deputy

Collector (NDC) in Dhaka, told The Daily Star newspaper.

With this, the death toll from the fire rose to 45, Noor said. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is closely monitoring the fire incident at the commercial building, the Health Minister said.

Fire officials said 75 people, including 42 in unconscious state, were taken out of the seven-storey building. Thirteen fire service units were mobilised, the officials said.

The minister, a burn wound specialist, said 22 people are being treated at both health facilities and their condition is "critical".

"The respiratory system of those who have survived so far has been seriously damaged," Sen told reporters at the DMCH. Doctors said some of the bodies were burned beyond recognition and feared that the death toll could rise.

Witnesses and officials said to escape the fire, people rushed to the upper floors. Many were rescued by firefighters using ladders, they added. IGP Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun in a press briefing said that 44 people died and 75 had been rescued. Some of the rescued individuals received first aid treatment

before returning home safely.

He also said the dead victims included the daughter of a police officer. Fire Service DG Moyn said the 42 unconscious included 21 women and four children.

"It was a dangerous building with gas cylinders on every floor, even on the staircases," he said. He believes the fire originated from a gas leak or stove. The building has only one exit — the staircases, according to him.

Most of the people died as they jumped off the building or from burns or suffocation, said firefighters who brought the fire under control around 12.30 am.

The first death was reported around 1 am when the firefighters took the bodies one by one to a freezing truck waiting outside the building, local media reported. A five-member committee has been formed to investigate the incident.

Fires in apartment buildings and factory complexes are common in Bangladesh due to lax enforcement of safety rules. As many as 102 people were killed and 281 others sustained burn injuries in 27,624 fire incidents across the country in 2023, according to Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) headquarters.

According to the Fire Service statistics, most of the fire incidents originated from electric short circuits, burning cigarettes, ovens and leakage of gas pipelines. (PTI)

Barrister Gohar Khan reelected as Imran Khan's party chairman

ISLAMABAD, March 1: Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party has announced Barrister Gohar Khan's election for the chairman's post for a second time after the withdrawal of all other candidates from the organisational polls.

The 71-year-old former-cricketer-turned-politician Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was scheduled to hold fresh organisational polls on March 3 after the result of its earlier intra-party election was annulled by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Barrister Gohar, 45, was on Thursday elected as the party's chairman unopposed, becoming the only leader to have been elected to the post twice in the party, Geo News reported. The PTI's candidate for the prime minister's slot, Omar Ayub Khan, was also elected unopposed as the party's central general secretary, the party announced late on Thursday.

Dr Yasmin Rashid, Ali Amin Gandapur, and Haleem Adil Sheikh were elected unopposed to the positions of the party's presidents for Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh, respectively, as no candidate contested against them.

Several party leaders had submitted their nomination papers as panels for the intra-party polls, but a majority of them withdrew only two days before the organisational election, the PTI's Federal Election Commissioner Raouf Hasan told the Dawn newspaper. Hasan said that he had no option but to announce the unopposed winners in the absence of opponents on most seats.

The former ruling party will organise an organisational poll in Quetta for the Balochistan president's post.

"The final result of the election will, however, be declared by the Federal Election Commissioner on March 3, 2024, after the election process," read a statement by the party.

The party's top post had been lying vacant after the ECP and the Supreme Court declared its intra-party elections conducted in December last year unlawful.

The PTI held the organisational polls in December on the directions of the ECP. However, its result, which some disgruntled PTI workers challenged, was annulled after a bitter court battle.

Subsequently, the party was deprived of its iconic cricket bat symbol by the top electoral body, and Gohar, who became the chairman after those elections, was no longer the party head.

Earlier, Barrister Ali Zafar was announced as the party's next chairman nominee. However, he refused to accept the chairmanship, and subsequently, the former ruling party nominated Gohar for the top position.

The PTI-backed independents won majority seats at the 266-member National Assembly in the February 8 general election.

However, the PML-N and the PPP have agreed on a power-sharing deal to form a new coalition government, which may effectively end Khan's chances of returning to power. (PTI)

Gunfire paralyzes Haiti as powerful gang leader says he will try to detain police chief, ministers

PORT-AU-PRINCE, March 1: Heavy gunfire paralyzed Haiti's capital on Thursday, and at least four police officers were slain, as a powerful gang leader announced that he would try to capture the country's police chief and government ministers.

The move came during the absence of Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who is in Kenya trying to finalize details for the deployment of a foreign armed force to Haiti to help combat gangs.

Guns were shot at Haiti's main international airport and other targets, including police stations, in a wave of violence that caught many people by surprise. At least four police officers, including two women, were killed in an attack on a station near the community of Canaan, according to a police union. The violence forced the airport, businesses, government agencies and schools to close as parents and young children fled through the streets in panic. At least one airline, Sunrise Airways, suspended all flights. Jimmy Chérizier, known as "Barbecue" and leader of the gang federation G9 Family and Allies, was seen in a recorded video announcing that the aim was to tie up the police chief and government ministers and prevent Henry from returning to Haiti.

"With our guns and with the Haitian people, we will free the country," he said. A spokesman for the prime minister's office could not be immediately reached for comment. The head of Haiti's National Police, Frantz Elbé, and police spokesman Garry Desrosiers did not return messages for comment.

Gunfire still rang out Thursday evening and dozens of Haitians were seen carrying children and heavy bags stuffed with belongings fleeing their neighborhoods. They raised their hands as a peace offering to potential gangs while rushing through intersections.

Armored vehicles patrolled empty streets in downtown Port-au-Prince while others remained stationed near gang-controlled slums.

Residents in some neighborhoods, including Canape Vert and Turgeau, set up roadblocks to prevent gangs from entering as men who were wearing uniforms stood by with machine guns. Pierre Alex Boucher, a math teacher who lives in downtown Port-au-Prince, said he heard heavy gunfire before dawn. Several hours later, as the gunfire continued, he stood on his roof and said he saw police in an armored car trying to fight gang members and then abruptly leave.

The shooting then worsened, and when he saw what he believes were teenagers with machine guns, he fled his home, feeling that his life was in danger. (AP)

Former Canadian PM Brian Mulroney, who forged closer ties with US, has died at 84

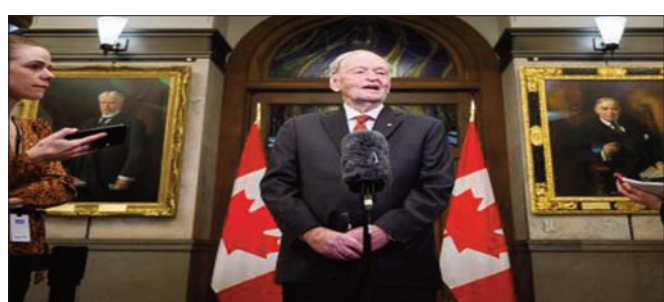
TORONTO, March 1: Former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who forged close ties with two Republican U.S. presidents through a sweeping free trade agreement that was once vilified but now celebrated, died on Thursday. He was 84.

The country's 18th prime minister died peacefully and surrounded by family, daughter Caroline Mulroney said in a post on X. Mulroney's family said last summer he was improving daily after a heart procedure that followed treatment for prostate cancer in early 2023. A family spokesman said Mulroney died at a hospital in Palm Beach, Florida, where he was being treated after a recent fall.

Leader of the Progressive Conservative party from 1983 to 1993, Mulroney served almost a decade as prime minister after he was first elected in 1984 after snagging the largest majority in Canadian history with 211 of 282 seats.

The win would mark Canada's first Conservative majority government in 26 years. His government was re-elected in 1988. Mulroney entered the job with widespread support, but he left with the lowest approval rating in Canadian history. His Progressive Conservative party suffered a devastating defeat just after he left office. But in the years after the loss, prime ministers sought his advice.

"He had the courage to do big



things," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said. "He shaped our past, but he shapes our present and he will impact our future as well. He was an extraordinary statesman and he will be deeply, deeply missed."

The man known for his charm and Irish blarney — a gift for the gab — was an ardent advocate of stronger U.S.-Canadian relations. He pushed a free trade deal forward in no small part due to his chumminess with U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Few Canadians around during his reign have forgotten the widely broadcast Mulroney-Reagan duet of "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" at the Shamrock summit in Quebec City in 1985, named after the pair's Irish heritage and the fact that their meeting fell on St. Patrick's Day. The 24-hour meeting opened the door to future free trade talks between the countries.

Along with a fan base of fellow conservative Margaret Thatcher, Mulroney can also boast of an enduring friendship with former President George

H.W. Bush. Mulroney delivered a eulogy for Bush's state funeral. He also eulogized Reagan in 2004. Mulroney, Reagan and Bush became friends when they shared the world stage as leaders of their countries during the last decade of the Cold War. Mulroney's nine years in power overlapped with Bush's four.

It was Mulroney's amiable relationship with his southern counterparts that helped develop the free-trade treaty, a hotly contested pact at the time. The trade deal led to a permanent realignment of the Canadian economy and huge increases in north-south trade. Canada is one of the most trade-dependent countries in the world. More than 75% of Canada's exports go to the U.S.

"He unleashed free enterprise, crushed inflation, restored fiscal sanity and concluded one of the greatest free trade agreements the world has ever seen," Canadian Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre said in a statement.

"On the world stage, he stood firmly on the side of Western al-

lies against communism and for freedom. He was among the first and most strident to fight against South Africa's apartheid policy and champion the cause of Nelson Mandela."

However, Mulroney's administration was saddled with scandals and his near decade reign as prime minister came crashing down in 1993 when voters delivered a devastating election defeat to his Progressive Conservative Party, leaving it with just two seats in the 295-member House of Commons. He left shortly before the election result.

The defeat came amid widespread unhappiness over Canada's then-depressed economy. Canadians blamed Mulroney for a three-year-old recession that left a record number of people out of work or bankrupt. Under his leadership, a much-criticized 7% sales tax was pushed through, as well as the 1988 U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement, after more than 100 years of tariff protection. The agreement later included Mexico in 1994, evolving into the North American Free Trade Agreement.

SKorea's Yoon calls for unification, on holiday marking 1919 uprising against colonial Japan

SEOUL, March 1: South Korea's president lambasted North Korea on Friday over what he called its repressive rule and vowed to achieve a free, unified Korean Peninsula, weeks after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un rejected the idea of peaceful unification and threatened to occupy the South in the event of war.

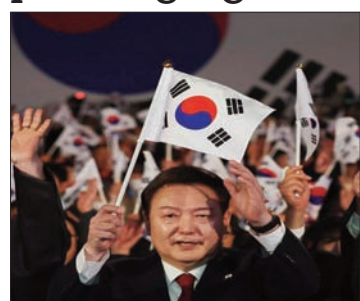
South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol spoke on March 1 Independence Movement Day, a holiday marking a 1919 Korean uprising against Japanese colonial rule.

"Now, we must move toward a free, unified Korean Peninsula," Yoon said in a televised speech. "The North Korean regime relies solely on nuclear weapons and missiles while trapping its 26 million citizens in a quagmire of misery and despair."

"Unification is precisely what is needed to expand the universal values of freedom and human rights," Yoon said. "Our unification efforts must become a source of hope and a beacon of light for the people of North Korea."

Yoon and Kim's conflicting comments on unification came after Korean animosities have run high for more than two years, with North Korea ramping up missile tests and South Korea expanding military drills with the US in a tit-for-tat cycle.

For most of the 70 years since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War, unification was a prized goal of leaders in both Koreas, which are divided by the world's most heavily fortified



border.

But the prospects for unifying the rich, democratic South and the nominally socialist, authoritarian and poor North any time soon are extremely dim, observers say.

Despite extensive US-led sanctions and its own economic mismanagement, North Korea has appeared politically stable. Exchange programmes between the Koreas have been dormant since Kim's high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with then-President Donald Trump collapsed in 2019. In a speech in January, Kim vowed to rewrite the constitution to remove the long-running state goal of a peaceful Korean unification and cement South Korea as an "invariably principal enemy."

He said the new constitution must specify North Korea would annex and subjugate the South if another war breaks out. The sudden abandonment of unification took observers by surprise.

Many experts say Kim likely aimed to take the initiative in dealings with the South while trying to diminish South Korean cultural in-

fluence and bolster his family's rule at home.

During Friday's speech, Yoon called Kim's vow of enmity "truly deplorable." He earlier said Kim's speech showed the "anti-national and anti-historical" nature of the North Korean government.

Yoon's speech didn't touch on the abuses of the Japanese colonial rulers in Korea, which left painful memories and have long been a source of tension between the two countries.

"On a holiday commemorating Korea's resistance against Japanese colonialism a century ago, Yoon touted his administration's improved relations with Tokyo," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul. "He emphasised that the independence movement will only be complete once the northern and southern halves of the Korean Peninsula are finally unified and free."

Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has worked to beef up South Korea's military alliance with the US and resolve historical disputes with Japan, aiming to forge a stronger Seoul-Washington-Tokyo partnership against North Korea's nuclear threats.

"Now, Korea and Japan are working together to overcome the painful past," Yoon said. "Sharing the values of freedom, human rights and the rule of law, our two countries have become partners in the pursuit of common interests for global peace and prosperity." (AP)

Nagaland legislators express concerns over 'Assam Healing Bill'

Minister Along made a plea to his fellow legislators, urging not to rush into condemning the bill

KOIHIMA, March 1: Nagaland lawmakers have expressed concerns over the 'Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024'. The legislators deliberated this matter under Rule 50 during the last day of the fourth session of the 14th Nagaland Legislative Assembly in Kohima on Friday.

Deputy chief minister T R Zeliang emphasised the significance of the discussion on the Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024. Zeliang asserted the "duty to defend faith and beliefs", citing constitutional provisions safeguarding freedom of religion (Article 25-28). He criticised the Assam Bill, alleging it as undermining secularism and targeting Christian practices.

Zeliang argued that Assam's diversity mirrors India's secular fabric, emphasizing coexistence among religions in the Northeast. He criticised the Bill's restriction on healing practices by Christian missionaries, asserting healing as integral to Christian faith, protected under constitutional rights.

He condemned religious intolerance incidents in Assam, including detentions of American citizens for alleged "Christian preaching" and those demands to remove Christian symbols from schools. Zeliang urged Assam to revoke the Bill, calling it a threat to India's secular principle. Highlighting constitutional guarantees of religious autonomy, Zeliang urged Assam to respect minority rights and repeal the contentious Bill. He proposed conveying the Assembly's opposition to Assam's Legislative Assembly.

Minister of Tourism and Higher Ed-



ucation, Temjen Inna Along addressed the Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill 2024. According to the minister, it is within the Nagaland legislature's rights to appeal to the Government of Assam and assert their faith-based practices. He further raised concerns regarding whether this legislation targets a specific minority.

Minister Along urged his fellow lawmakers to critically examine the intentions behind the bill and inquire if it unjustly discriminates against any particular religious group. Emphasizing that the misuse of faith has occurred across religious communities, he reminded the House of the importance of maintaining a fair and inclusive approach.

Furthermore, the minister made a plea to his fellow legislators, urging them not to rush into condemning the bill. Instead, he called for a diplomatic approach, suggesting that they present their concerns and opinions to the Assam Government. Minister Along also took the opportunity to extend his

appeal to "Christian brothers and sisters" residing in Assam, encouraging them to seek guidance from the chief minister. Underscoring the need for peace, the minister emphasised that it is a matter of utmost significance not only for Nagaland but also for the entire nation.

The Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) practices Bill 2024 negates secular ideals enshrined in the preamble of the Indian constitution, said MLA Sukhato Sema.

Secularism, he added, in India, not only implies existing of diverse religious communities but also separation of religion from state power, therefore if the state infringes on religious freedom of citizens through controversial laws then the fate of secularism is at stake.

This controversial legislation not only jeopardizes religious freedoms but also undermines the concept of unity in diversity that India proudly showcases on the global stage.

Secularism in India, Sema said that it goes beyond mere coexistence of

various religious communities; it entails the separation of religion from state power. Consequently, any attempt by the government to impinge on religious liberties through such contentious laws puts the essence of secularism at risk. The call to action now lies with the esteemed legislature to revisit and reconsider the Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill 2024, specifically addressing the concerns raised regarding the Christian communities.

Sema appealed to the house to project a strong united voice in support of revision and reconsideration of this bill, ensuring the preservation of India's secular fabric.

Taking part in the discussion on matters of urgent public importance, Advisor for CAWD and Taxes, Kudecho Khamo called the terms used in the Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill 2024 as incorrect and misleading.

He stated that the bill is a direct violation and infringement of the Constitution of India and is against the fundamental principles of secularism. He said that such a divisive policy in the name of religion, caste etc. is against the visions and ideas of the freedom fighters.

Khamo also said that instead of bringing out such a bill, the Assam government should appreciate the contributions of the Christians. He called upon the members of the house to stand together, promote, and inculcate religious tolerance, social harmony and peaceful coexistence. He appealed to the members to reject the bill and take necessary steps to ensure free and fair practices and belief of all religious groups. (NNN)

NPP to field 30 candidates for Arunachal assembly polls

ITANAGAR, March 1: The National People's Party (NPP) will field 30 candidates for the upcoming assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh, party's state unit president Thangwang Wangham said here on Friday. He said the primary criteria for candidate selection would be their potential for winning.

"The main criteria for issuing tickets will be winnability factor of candidates. We will support the BJP government in the state and our chief ministerial candidate will be Pema Khandu," Wangham told PTI in an exclusive interview. The NPP, led by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, is an ally of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) and extends support to the Khandu government.

Wangham outlined the party's focus on development, youth employment, healthcare, education, and combating the drug menace. He emphasized the goal of creating a drug-free society by raising awareness among addicts about the consequences of narcotics.

"We will work for a drug-free society and will reach the addicts to make them aware of the ill effects of narcotics. Addicts should be given a second



chance to lead a normal life," he said adding, drugs are a major cause for illiteracy, unemployment, social restlessness and growth of insurgency, which are the socio-economic and political burdens for the state.

Wangham, who was a three-time MLA from Longding-Pumao constituency but lost the electoral battle in 2019, said his party would work to make society free from drug abuse.

He added that the party would also work on productivity and industrial development which is lacking in the state.

"Any state or society without productivity is a dumping ground for consumers. There are no central allocations to the industry sector in the state we are entirely dependent on central funds," he said adding,

efforts should be made to set up industrial units to attract central allocations.

On February 25, two NPP legislators out of four in the 60-member assembly, along with two Congress MLAs, joined the BJP.

Mutchu Mithi from Roing constituency and Gokar Basar from Basar constituency, both from NPP along with Congress MLAs Wanglin Lowangdong representing Borduria-Bogapani seat and Ninong Ering from Pasighat West joined the saffron party.

Responding to recent shifts in political alliances, where two NPP legislators joined the BJP, Wangham said such changes might be due to political dynamics in their constituencies and voter preferences. He asserted that the NPP's alliance with the BJP through NEDA remains

intact and unaffected by these developments.

"Their joining BJP will have no impact as NPP has extended support to the BJP government in the state being an ally of the NEDA," Wangham added.

The ruling BJP in the state has 53 MLAs followed by Congress and NPP with two each. There are also three independent members.

In the 2019 elections, the NPP had fielded 30 candidates, with five emerging victorious. However, one of its candidates, Tiring Aboh, was killed by suspected militants before the results were declared.

Forty-five-year-old Aboh was travelling from Assam's Dibrugarh to his constituency, when he along with ten others including his son, was killed at 12th Mile, 20km between Khonsa and Deomali road, by armed militants.

Meanwhile, the party has released its election manifesto with major emphasis on people-centric political and administrative reforms, excellence in education system, better health policy, a robust agriculture and allied sector, new opportunities for unemployed youth among others. (PTI)

Manipur assembly urges Centre to implement NRC

IMPHAL, March 1: The Manipur assembly on Friday passed a resolution urging the central government to implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state.

Speaker Th Satyabrata said, "The House resolves to reaffirm its previous resolution passed on August 5, 2022, and also to urge the Government of India to implement NRC in Manipur in the interest of the state in particular and of the nation in general." In another development, Chief Minister N Biren Singh informed the House that eight FIRs have been filed regarding the February 15 incident in Churachandpur, where a mob vandalised and partially torched the DC and SP office.

Responding to a calling attention raised by Congress MLA K Meghachandra, Singh said, "Eight FIRs have been registered, of which two have been handed over to the CBI."

He further mentioned that six police personnel and 43 civilians sustained injuries during the incident, and 20 people involved in the violence have been identified. Video recordings suggest the presence of armed men, including those carrying AK-47 rifles, among the crowd. The government is taking measures to prevent such incidents from recurring, he added. (PTI)

ECI notifies scheme for IDP voters of Manipur violence for upcoming Lok Sabha elections

IMPHAL, March 1: Election Commission of India (ECI) has notified "Scheme for Internally Displaced Persons of Manipur to vote at the relief camps", said chief electoral officer (CEO) of Manipur on Friday.

The elections to the Lok Sabha are expected to be held between April and May 2024 to elect 543 members of the house.

As per the ECI, the scheme was notified after due consultation with the Central government and state government considering the displacement of large number of people in the ongoing

A large number of electors registered in several parts of the state of Manipur were displaced from their native places during the conflict that started from May 3, 2023.

Presently they are residing in relief camps in various districts of Manipur. The displaced electors are still enrolled at the places where they were ordinary residents before the conflict started.

All such displaced persons who had to leave their native places during the conflict shall continue to be borne on the electoral rolls of the assembly and parliamentary constituencies concerned in the state of Manipur.

As per the past precedent of similar nature, the internally displaced electors shall be provided with the facility to vote at 'Special Polling Stations' to be set up in relief camps as per the scheme.

In order to identify the 'specified voters', the eligible voters staying in the relief camps or otherwise (staying with relatives/friends) are given the option to elicit the choice of 'special polling station' where they would like to cast their vote under the scheme. If the head of the family or any senior member of the family gives intimation in respect of all the family members, it may not be necessary to collect such information from each elector.

Though the right to vote is an individual right, the gathering of such information from the head of the family would not militate against the individual's right to vote at the time of election as the voter concerned will have to exercise the vote individually after satisfying the polling staff of her/his identity.

This information from the head of the family/senior member of the families may be obtained in a non-statutory form to be called 'ID Form', the ECI said while notifying the scheme.

An individual voter, if without any family members staying with her/him at the relief camp, may submit her/his own ID form, it added.

On the basis of intimation given by the specified voters in the 'ID Form', the AROs may call out lists, constituency-wise, (showing therein the details of assembly segment and part number thereof) of electors who opt for voting in person in the above mentioned special polling station.

Then these electors will be assigned to the different special polling stations as per the preference indicated by them. The maximum number of voters at each special polling station will be 1200.

If at any special polling station, the number of voters exceeds 1200, then more than one booth may be provided at the same special polling station location with equitable distribution of electors for convenience, the scheme stated.

'Special Polling Stations' shall be notified for a cluster of relief camps with a specific 'Special polling Station' earmarked for a group of relief camps.

Eligible electors staying in the relief camps shall be given the option to vote at the 'special polling station' notified for the relief camp where she/he is staying at. (NNN)

WALK-IN-INTERVIEW

FOR ENGAGEMENT OF CONTRACTUAL STAFF

Application are invited in a standard form of application for engagement on contractual basis for the following post under Watershed Development Component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana 2.0 (WDC-PMKSY 2.0)-Darrang-1 (Chikanamati)

Sl. No.	Name of post	No. of post	Age Limit	Qualification	Experience	Remuneration Per month (in Rs.)
1	Data Entry Operator	01(One) No.	25-40 Years as on 01-01-2024	Bachelor Degree in any Stream (preferably B.Sc.) Minimum 6(Six) months Diploma / Certificate in Computer Application	Minimum 2 (Two) years experience in relevant field with working knowledge of computer. Candidates working in similar capacity in Govt./Semi Govt. Office/Department/ Organization or PSUs will be given preference.	18,000.00

Venue : Office of the Divisional Officer, Darrang Soil Conservation Division, No. 1 Gerimari, Mangaldai, Assam.
Date : 08-03-2024
Reporting Time : 11.30 AM

Terms & Condition

- Interested candidates may appear before the Selection Committee with all original Documents, all relevant testimonials (Self attested copy of Age Proof Certificate, Pass Certificate, Mark Sheets, Experience Certificate, Two copies of recent Pass port size photographs etc.) including one filled up Standard Form of Application should be submitted on the date of Interview.
- Selected candidate in the interview will be informed through e-mail/ Contact number. Also a copy will be handed in the office Notice Board.
- No TA/DA shall be paid to the candidates for attending the interview.
- At any stage of recruitment, if it is found that the candidate does not fulfill the eligibility criteria and/or that he/she has furnished incorrect/false information / certificate / documents his/her candidature appointment will stand cancelled and necessary legal action will be initiated.
- The decision of the selection committee in any matter related to the recruitment at any stage of the recruitment process will be final and binding upon the candidates.
- The selection committee may prepare waiting list of suitable candidate which would remain valid for 6 months from the date of declaration of result.
- The engagement is purely contractual and coterminous with the end of programme with no provision of regularization.
- Initially the engagement will be made for 11(Eleven) months which may be extended subject to the satisfactory performance.
- The candidates selected for engagement shall have to sign an Agreement with the Project Manager, WDC, WDC-PMKSY 2.0, Darrang & Divisional Officer Darrang Soil Conservation Division, Mangaldai.

Sd/-
Project Manager
WDC-PMKSY 2.0, Darrang-1
cum
Divisional Officer
Darrang Soil Conservation Division
Mangaldai
Janasanyog/D/18638/23/02 March 2024

No.DPRD/BTC/(Gen)UdI-259/2024/10 Dated Kokrajhar, the 29th Feb., 2024

PRESS NOTICE (e-Procurement)

The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for implementation of v/work "Const. off Paver Block at Udalguri Parish Catholic Church" against tender value for an amount not exceeding of Rs.30,00,000.00 (Rupees thirty lakhs) only in respect of Rowta Dev. Block, Rowta under SOPD fund WPT & BC Tribal Affairs (P) for the financial year 2023-24 from the registered contractors of Class-I & Class -II (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads)/(Building), BTC.

Details may be seen at website <http://assamenders.gov.in> and also at the Office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/- Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1498

No.TECH/URBD/BLDG/IFB/2023-24/493 Dated 28/02/2024

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Executive Engineer, PWD (B&NH), Udalguri district and Baksa district Territorial Building Division, Udalguri on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from approved and eligible Contractors registered with Public Works Department (Buildings), Assam/Contractors registered with Bodoland Territorial Council in the category of Class-I (A, B & C), Class-II & Class-III for 1 (one) no. of works for bids amounting to Rs. 1456157.00(approx) (Rupees fourteen lakh fifty six thousand one hundred fifty seven) only.

Details may be seen at in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, PWD (B&NH),
Udalguri district and Baksa district
Territorial Building Division, Udalguri
IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1497

Tripura FM tables ₹ 27,804.67 crore budget in assembly

AGARTALA, March 1: Tripura Finance Minister Pranajit Singha Roy on Friday presented a ₹ 27,804.67-crore budget for the 2024-25 fiscal, and asserted that the government is focused on infrastructure building to generate more job opportunities in the northeastern state.

Roy said ₹ 6,633.80 crore has been earmarked for capital expenditure, while ₹ 1721.94 crore was allocated for the agriculture sector.

"During 2022-23, the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) grew at around 8.89 per cent against 7.20 per cent growth at the national level. The GSDP growth for 2024-25 is estimated to be 8.47 per cent," the minister said.

A total of ₹ 2,000 crore will be spent for road infrastructure in all the 60 assembly constituencies over the next four years, according to the budget.

"The state government will provide Rs 698.68 crore to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC)... Besides, we are setting aside 39.93 per cent of the total development allocation for welfare of indigenous people," he said.

Tripura will set up 85 'pink toilets' at various locations to create hygienic public restrooms for women and children at a cost of Rs 7.51 crore.

Claiming that the state's debt burden is under control, Roy said it increased from ₹ 12,902 crore during 2017-18 to ₹ 21,687 crore till date.

Taking to X, Chief Minister Manik Saha said the state budget is inclusive.

"This budget is aimed at building 'Ek-Tripura, Srestha Tripura, Unnata-Tripura'. It highlights the state government's commitment to the overall development of all sections of society. It will surely put Tripura on a faster growth trajectory," he said. (PTI)

Former speaker of Sikkim assembly assaulted CM condemns attack



GANGTOK, March 1: Former speaker of Sikkim assembly and senior Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) leader KN Rai and party spokesperson SK Timshina were assaulted by unidentified men in Namchi district on Friday afternoon, police said.

Rai and Timshina were assaulted at Mazi Gaon, Melli, around 2.30 pm. Rai sustained facial injuries in the incident, they added. Soon after the incident, his party, the SDF, strongly condemned the attack and labelled it as a heinous crime and demanded the immediate arrest of the perpetrators. The party submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission, urging it to impose President's Rule in the state to ensure free and fair Lok Sabha and assembly elections, which are ex-

pected to be held simultaneously.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang said, "I strongly condemn the unpleasant and anti-social act of assault on former speaker Shri KN Rai in Malli, Namchi district today."

"Rai, a respected politician and senior citizen, should never have been subjected to such mistreatment," the CM said and added that strong actions against the perpetrators will be initiated.

"Our state thrives on peace and harmony, and such despicable acts will not be tolerated. I urge everyone to uphold peace, unity, and tranquillity, rejecting violence and strife," Tamang added.

CM's political secretary Jacob Khaling, while expressing his solidarity with the senior leader, assured that action will be taken against all those who are involved.

"Murderous assault on a senior leader be it in the ruling or opposition party is condemnable. Such politics of violence is not acceptable in any form," he said in a Facebook post. BJP Sikkim president DR Thapa also condemned the attack on Rai and Timshina. "Such incidents have no place in a society aspiring for progress," he said in a press statement. (PTI)

PM Modi attacks Mamata Banerjee govt over Sandeshkhali, claims country seething with anger

ARAMBAG (WB), March 1: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched a scathing attack on the TMC government in West Bengal over atrocities on women in Sandeshkhali, and said the entire country is seething with anger over the issue.

Modi also slammed the opposition bloc INDIA for maintaining a stoic silence on the issue of Sandeshkhali horrors.

Speaking at a public meeting at Arambag in Hooghly district, Modi virtually sounded the bugle for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls by stating that the people of Bengal would respond to the wounds they were inflicted with while casting their votes ("Chot ka jawab vote se dena hai").

"Amid achievements, the entire country is watching the situation of Bengal today. The whole country is sad and angry after seeing what TMC, which beats the drum of Maa, Mati, and Manush, has done to the sisters of Sandeshkhali," Modi said.

"Maa, Mati, and Manush" is the self-designated nomenclature of the Mamata Banerjee government since its ascent to power in 2011.



"What TMC has done to the sisters of Sandeshkhali is a matter of shame," he said at the rally.

Referring to Khanakul, the birthplace of 19th century social reformer Raja Rammohan Roy which was close to the venue of the public meeting, the Prime Minister said that "the spirit of Roy, wherever it is, must be sad and weeping at the state of affairs in Bengal".

"The TMC leaders of

Sandeshkhali exceeded all limits in unleashing violence on the people. The women of Sandeshkhali asked Mamata for help. And what did she do? Instead, she did everything she could to protect those leaders," Modi burst out.

The Prime Minister claimed that it was on account of the BJP's sustained leadership in galvanizing protests that the state administration "was forced to finally bow down before the people of

Sandeshkhali and arrest the prime accused who was absconding for nearly two months".

Modi, evidently, was referring to the arrest of the now-suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh who was arrested on Thursday after managing to evade police net for 55 days.

"Someone must have been protecting him," Modi declared and asked the gathering whether people would forgive and keep supporting such a political party in the state.

Accusing the TMC government of being corrupt in all spheres, Modi also took a dig at the opposition bloc INDIA for acting like the fabled monkey sculptures of "Gandhi who keep their eyes, ears and mouth shut" in the face of the abuse which left Sandeshkhali simmering with discontent.

The PM questioned why the Left and Congress leaders shied away from asking the tough questions to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

"For INDI alliance leaders, supporting the corrupt and appeasement politics is of prime importance rather than standing

by those tortured by the TMC in Sandeshkhali," he said.

Naming the TMC for remaining "neck deep in corruption", Modi mentioned the scams which had recently rocked the state in the domains of primary teachers' recruitment, municipal body recruitment and the public distribution system.

"It is Modi's guarantee to you that those who have looted your money will have to go back to where they came from," he declared.

The Prime Minister also accused the Mamata Banerjee government of stalling several central projects from getting implemented in the state.

"The arrogance of the TMC will break soon. It is confident that it has the support of a particular group, but the Muslim women too will throw them out now," Modi asserted.

The Sandeshkhali region, located on the fringes of the Sunderbans, has been engulfed in turmoil for over a month with allegations against TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh and his cohorts of sexual abuse and land usurpation. (PTI)

Indians being held 'hostage' in Russia as 'mrit kaal' of unemployment : Cong

NEW DELHI, March 1: The Congress on Friday attacked the government over around 20 Indians working as support staff to the Russian army being stuck in that country, alleging they are being held "hostage" there as "mrit Kaal" is prevailing back home with rising unemployment.

India on Thursday said it is trying its best for their "early discharge" from Russia.

"It is our understanding that there are 20-odd people (Indians) who have gone there to work as support staff or as helpers with the Russian army," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing here.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the unemployment situation is so terrible here that India's youths are forced into seeking jobs as soldiers abroad and risk their lives in war-torn Israel and Russia.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here, Congress leader Kanhaiya Kumar alleged that Indians were being held "hostage" in Russia and one person from Gujarat doing civilian work there has been killed.

He questioned the silence of the government on the death.

"If the youth of the country attain martyrdom for their country then it is patriotism. But why are Indian youths having to go to fight for another country? Because the future of the youth is being played within our country. The unemploy-

ment rate in the country has almost doubled in the last 10 years," Kumar said.

Lakhs of posts are vacant in central departments and the condition of government sectors is also very bad, he alleged.

"Indian youth have been held hostage in Russia because there is a 'mrit kaal (disastrous times)' going on for the youth in our country. If Modi government had provided 2 crore jobs every year, the youth would not have had to go abroad," he said.

Russia does not have a permanent army and it runs on contract with a similar model of 'Agniveer' being brought in the country, Kumar said, adding the situation of unemployment in India is such that two youths are committing suicide every hour.

Taking advantage of the helplessness of the country's youth, they were sent to Israel to work as labourers, Kumar said.

In this way the lives of the youth of the country are being played with, he alleged.

MEA spokesperson Jaiswal said the "20-odd people" contacted the Indian embassy in Moscow.

According to media reports, many Indians recruited as security helpers in the Russian military, have been forced to even fight with Russian soldiers in certain areas along Russia's border with Ukraine.

"We are trying our best to get them out. We are trying to get them discharged and support them," Jaiswal had said. (PTI)

SC to hear Gyanvapi committee's plea on maintainability of temple restoration suits



NEW DELHI, March 1: The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear an appeal of the Gyanvapi management committee against an Allahabad High Court order which held that lawsuits for "restoration" of a temple, which was claimed to have stood where the mosque stands in Varanasi, are maintainable.

"We will tag this with the main case," a bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices J B Pardiwalla and Manoj Misra said.

The petition was filed by the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid, the committee which manages the affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque.

On December 19 last year, the Allahabad High Court had dismissed pleas challenging the maintainability of a 1991 suit seeking "restoration" of a temple at the site where the Gyanvapi mosque stands.

The HC had said the "religious character" of a disputed place can only be decided by the court.

It had dismissed five related petitions on maintainability and against a survey of the mosque premises filed over the years by the mosque management committee and the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board.

The HC had held that the suit filed before the district court by Hindus is not barred by the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which forbids "conversion" of the "religious character" of a place from what existed on August 15, 1947.

The suit was filed seeking the right to worship in the Gyanvapi mosque adjoining the Kashi Vishwanath temple. Muslim litigants had challenged its maintainability, citing the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act.

On December 8 last year, the high court had reserved its judgment on all five petitions challenging the maintainability of the suit pending before the Varanasi court.

While upholding the maintainability of lawsuit, the high court had ordered speedy trial in the 32-year-old Gyanvapi dispute case.

It had said the 1991 law on places of worship did not define "religious character" which can only be determined through evidence presented in court by the opposing parties.

"Either the Gyanvapi compound has a Hindu religious character or a Muslim religious character. It can't have dual character at the same time," the HC had said.

"In the national interest, it is required that the suit must proceed expeditiously and be decided with utmost urgency with the cooperation of both the contesting parties without resorting to any dilatory tactics," the high court had said, cautioning against any "unnecessary adjournment" in the lower court.

The Supreme Court earlier gave the go-ahead for a survey of the Gyanvapi mosque premises by the Archaeological Survey of India and the high court allowed a survey of the Shahi Idgah mosque that adjoins the Krishna Janmasthan temple in Mathura.

Hindu litigants say the two mosques were built during the Mughal rule after demolition, or partial demolition, of temples, and the surveys would throw up evidence proving this.

The high court took note of the ASI survey conducted at the Gyanvapi masjid on the directions of the trial court which is hearing the petition of a group of women seeking regular access to Hindu deities depicted on the mosque's rear wall.

If required, the lower court may direct ASI for a further survey, the HC had added.

The high court, on February 26, decided another petition challenging the permission granted to the Hindu side to offer prayers in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque. It said Hindu prayers will continue in the southern cellar of the mosque and dismissed a plea that challenged the district court's order to this effect.

The high court observed that the Uttar Pradesh government's 1993 action of stopping rituals inside "Vyas Tekhkhana" in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque was "illegal". It said the rituals were stopped by "illegal action of state without there being any order in writing". (PTI)

BJP's poll body deliberates on Lok Sabha candidates for about 16 states

NEW DELHI, March 1: The BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) in its meeting for deciding Lok Sabha poll candidates has deliberated on the party's nominees for nearly 16 states amid indications that several heavyweights may figure in the first list.

The CEC members, which included Prime Minister Narendra Modi, party's national president J P Nadda and Union ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, pored over the probables for states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa and Uttarakhand among others to finalise the nominees.

The CEC meeting, which began around 10:30 pm on Thursday and lasted for more than five hours, was held at the party's headquarters here.

Before that, Shah and Nadda had met Modi at his residence to hold consultations, sources said.

They said the first list may have the names of Modi, Shah and Singh from their current seats Varanasi, Gandhinagar and Lucknow respectively besides several Union ministers, including some who will be contesting



Lok Sabha polls after having served in Rajya Sabha.

The list may have over 110 names, they said, adding that the party will continue with its practice of dropping a significant number of incumbent MPs on account of their performance as well as political imperatives.

States like Bihar and Maharashtra where the BJP has key allies, or the states where the party is open to an alliance, as in Andhra Pradesh, have not figured in the discussion so far.

In Uttar Pradesh, the party is likely to leave six seats to allies, including Jayant Singh-led RLD, which has yet not formally joined the BJP-led alliance but has given ample indications it would do.

Though the CEC has gone

through a large number of seats, all of them many not figure in the first list, the sources said.

Union ministers Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Bhupendra Yadav, Mansukh Mandaviya, Dharmendra Pradhan, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Parshotam Rupala are likely to be fielded in the polls. There is a strong buzz that Chandrasekhar will be pitted against Shashi Tharoor, the three-term incumbent Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram.

The sources said three of the four BJP MPs-- Union minister G Kishan Reddy, Bandi Sanjay Kumar and Dharmapuri Arvind--will be contesting from their current constituencies Secunderabad, Karimnagar and Nizamabad respectively.

Mahadev app: ED freezes assets worth ₹ 580 cr of Dubai-based 'hawala-operator'

NEW DELHI, March 1: The Enforcement Directorate on Friday said it has frozen various security holdings valued at more than ₹ 580 crore of a Dubai-based "hawala operator" and seized cash and valuables worth ₹ 3.64 crore after fresh raids in the Mahadev app-linked money laundering case. The latest raids were launched on February 28 at various premises in Kolkata, Gurugram, Delhi, Indore, Mumbai and Raipur.

The ED has alleged in the past that its probe in the Mahadev online book gaming and betting app has shown involvement of various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh, the state where the two main promoters of

the app hail from.

The sources said the agency identified a "hawala operator and major player" in this case Hari Shankar Tibrewal, who hails from Kolkata but currently resides in Dubai, and raided his and his associates premises.

It alleged that Tibrewal partnered with the promoters of the Mahadev app and also "owned and operated" an alleged illegal betting app--skyexchange.

"He (Tibrewal), through his Dubai-based entities, was investing the betting proceeds in the Indian stock market by way of Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) route. He had also employed many of his associates as directors in various

companies which were involved in layering of the betting proceeds by investing them in the stock market," the ED alleged. It said Tibrewal was also involved in "large-scale" hawala movement of the betting funds.

Hence, the ED said, security holdings worth Rs 580.78 crore "beneficially owned" by Tibrewal have been frozen under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Cash worth ₹ 1.86 crore and valuables worth ₹ 1.78 crore were recovered by the agency during these searches, the agency said.

So far, the ED has arrested nine people in this case. (PTI)

BJP saving examination mafia, corrupt people: Priyanka Gandhi on Agra exam paper leak

NEW DELHI, March 1: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday slammed the BJP over yet another exam paper leak incident in Uttar Pradesh, accusing the ruling party of hollowing out the foundation of crores of children and youths to save the examination mafia and corrupt people. The mathematics and biology question papers of the Uttar Pradesh class 12 board exam were allegedly shared on a WhatsApp group an hour after the examinations began on Thursday, prompting authorities to lodge a police complaint. On the complaint of the District Inspector of Schools, Agra, Dinesh Kumar, an FIR has been registered in Fatehpur Sikri. Tagging a media report on it, Priyanka Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X, "Paper

leaked once again! Why so? Under BJP rule, from job exams to board exams, almost every paper is getting leaked!"

Board examinations are the first challenge that children face when they learn to build their future, the Congress general secretary said. If such a "big betrayal" happens to them at this juncture, what will they do next, she asked.

"To save the examination mafia and the corrupt people sitting in the government, the BJP is also hollowing the foundation of crores of children and youth," she said.

Does the BJP not want the children of the state to improve their future by getting a good education, the Congress general secretary asked. (PTI)

IIT-Mandi developing quantum computer that will use photons for faster calculations

NEW DELHI, March 1: The Indian Institute of Technology, Mandi, is developing a first-of-its-kind indigenous room-temperature quantum computer that will use photons for faster calculations, according to officials.

The computer, being developed as part of the National Quantum Mission, will be unique in its ability to analyse data and suggest solutions with 86 per cent accuracy without traditional algorithms, they said.

Quantum computing is a rapidly emerging technology that harnesses the laws of quantum mechanics to solve problems too complex for classical computers.

"We are constructing a room-temperature optical Quantum computer capable of solving feature learning and classification problems instantly."

"With a sophisticated user interface, quantum simulator and quantum processing capabilities in place, our computer will operate as a graphics processor (GPU) instead of CPU,



seamlessly processing inputs such as videos or photographs," said C S Yadav, the chairperson of the Center for Quantum Science and Technologies (COST) at IIT-Mandi.

It will extract a model to explain inherent dynamics hidden in the input data and deliver output as quantum live feed, he said.

"Composing a quantum algorithm is tedious. Yet our computer will mirror the inquisitive mind of a scientist, swiftly suggesting an approximate theoretical model for unknown big data with an 86 per cent accuracy, all without relying on algorithms," Yadav told PTI.

According to Yadav, there is a lot of

buzz about quantum computing and companies like Google and IBM have made their own quantum computers.

"So let's say that those companies are making a quantum computer which is based on a superconducting Josephson junction qubit. To do that quantum computing you will require a very low temperature. So, our objective is to make a photon-based quantum computer at room temperature," he said.

Josephson junction is a device that provides the non-linearity needed to turn a superconducting circuit into a qubit.

Yadav explained that the room-temperature optical quantum computer will use light for doing fast calculations. Using quantum bits (qubits), the computer will exist in multiple states simultaneously, allowing incredibly fast processing. The system will be able to update itself and erase its memory using a special gel.

"We are focusing on scaling up the quantum computing system from han-

dling 16 tasks to 1,024 tasks simultaneously. To achieve this, the team is developing three crucial components: a single photon source, a phase-sensitive single-photon avalanche diode and a multipurpose coincidence counter. These components are vital for building quantum computers and will be developed up to a high level of reliability and effectiveness," he said.

According to IIT-Mandi Director Laxmidhar Behera, CQST is making significant strides in quantum computing technology and is poised to revolutionise various sectors.

"Through the National Quantum Mission, we are advancing the field with groundbreaking innovations aimed at enhancing feature learning and classification capabilities across genetics, astrophysics, finance, and weather forecasting. Strategically selecting the three immediate products, we are poised to develop each component vital for building quantum computers," he said. (PTI)

Nine injured in bomb blast in Bengaluru eatery

'It was not a large-scale blast, it was an improvised explosive blast'

BENGALURU, March 1: A bomb blast at a popular eatery in the city on Friday left nine people injured and police have launched a probe from all angles after it emerged that an earlier suspected gas leak was not the cause of the explosion.

Police suspect that a bag at the eatery with a possible improvised explosive device (IED) could have exploded, even as the NIA and the IB have been apprised of the matter. Officials from the local unit of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) later arrived at the spot.

Chief minister Siddaramaiah said investigation is on to ascertain the cause and nature of the explosion at the popular Rameshwaram Cafe in Whitefield, and added it might have been caused by an "improvised explosive" device.

The incident should not be politicised and everyone should cooperate, Siddaramaiah said, adding strict action would be taken against those involved.

State police chief Alok Mohan described the explosion as a "bomb blast" and said nobody was seriously injured.

"At 1 PM, a bomb blast occurred at the hotel (cafe), nine people are injured, and no one is serious. We are investigating. FSL (forensic) teams have come and are checking. City police Commissioner and other officers are at the spot. We will certainly identify who did it," he said after visiting the spot. Speaking to reporters, he said the injured -- both staff and customers -- are undergoing treatment.

Asked whether an IED was used for the blast, he said, "we are checking."

"Let's not say anything now itself. The FSL team has come and they are checking. Once they collect (samples from the spot),



we will examine."

Divya Raghavendra Rao, co-founder & managing director of Rameshwaram Cafe told a Kannada news channel the blast occurred in the area where customers wash their hands. A stand is also kept there, where the waste is collected.

The explosion was caused from a bag placed by someone from outside, she claimed. A CCTV video of the incident showed an explosion, leading to smoke and panic-stricken customers and others fleeing the place. The opposition BJP sought a detailed probe into the matter.

"Deeply troubled to hear about the blast at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bangalore (sic). Praying for a swift recovery of all the injured in the incident. State govt should order a detailed enquiry & spare no efforts in apprehending the perpetrators," BJP state president Vijayendra Yediyurappa said in a post on 'X'.

"Callousness" of the government in downplaying such crimes "is pushing the state into this chaos & proving to be a safe haven for antisocial elements."

"Failure of police intelligence is also evident in this incident. We strongly urge the

police to conduct a thorough probe & eradicate these elements from the core without yielding to any political pressures," he demanded.

R Ashoka, leader of opposition in the Assembly said, "the bomb blast at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru is yet another glaring example of the deteriorating law and order situation in Karnataka ever since CM @siddaramaiah led @INCKarnataka Govt came to power in the state."

While it was initially suspected that a gas leak could have triggered the blast, the Fire department ruled out the possibility and said a bag was found at the spot. Subsequently, police were looking into all angles related to the incident. A bomb disposal squad and forensic teams were at the spot.

CCTV footage is being scanned to check if there was any suspicious movement in and around the cafe.

"At 1.08 pm today, the Fire department received a call about LPG leakage fire in the cafe. When our officers and teams reached the spot, there was no fire or flame. A bag which was lying behind a woman who was sitting with six other customers at the eatery exploded. It is suspected that the explosion could have been caused due to some object in that bag," TN Shivashankar, Director of Karnataka State Fire and Emergency Services department told PTI.

It is not clear whose bag it was. Ruling out about the possibility of any gas cylinder leakage, the officer said, "I along with my team of officers inspected the spot. But there is no sign of any leakage from the gas cylinder. We have checked it. Another LPG gas cylinder inside the kitchen which was used for making tea and coffee also was checked but there is no leakage from it as

well. There is no sign of gas leakage from any cylinders at the spot as per our initial probe." The cafe which is located at Whitefield's Brookfield area, a vibrant neighborhood, a business centre as well as a tech hub.

It is usually crowded with employees from nearby offices during the lunch hours.

Edison, an eyewitness said, "I was waiting outside the eatery for my turn when suddenly we heard a loud noise... an explosion. We got scared not knowing what it was. There were around 35-40 people at the eatery. They all started rushing out and there was absolute chaos. They started saying that a cylinder exploded. But we don't know exactly what happened."

Amruth, who works at a private firm nearby had just placed his order when he suddenly he heard a huge explosion. In Mysuru, Siddaramaiah said that after 12 PM someone placed a bag and went. All the injured persons are out of danger.

"CCTV and other things are being examined. We have come to know about someone placing a bag. It is said to be an improvised explosive blast. We have to see, the investigations are on."

Asked whether it was a terrorist act, the CM said, it is not known and investigation was on. Police are at the spot and he has asked the home minister also to visit the spot.

"It was not a large-scale blast, it was an improvised explosive blast. Such things have happened earlier too, it should not happen. Let's see what it is. In recent times such blasts had not taken place other than the incident in Mangaluru (Nov'22 pressure cooker blast) during BJP rule. This is the first such incident during our government," he added. (PTI)

Number of candidates contesting Lok Sabha polls jumped four-fold between 1952 and 2019

NEW DELHI, March 1: The number of candidates contesting the Lok Sabha polls has seen a rise of over four times from 1,874 in 1952 to 8,039 in 2019, according to official data.

The average number of candidates per constituency has jumped from 4.67 to 14.8 in the same period, the data showed.

With the Lok Sabha polls nearing, the battleground is set but it is yet to be seen how many candidates are in the fray even as the proportion of candidates contesting has seen a rise since 1952 when the first elections were held.

On an average, there used to be only around three to five contestants per Lok Sabha seat until the sixth Lok Sabha elections in 1977 but in the last elections 14.8 candidates on average contested from per constituency across the country.

According to an analysis by non-profit organisation PRS Legislative Research, there were 8,039 candidates contesting from 542 Parliamentary constituency seats in the 2019 general assembly elections.

A closer look at the last Lok Sabha polls in 2019 show that on an average, among all the states, Telangana had the highest average number of candidates contesting. This is primarily due to 185 contestants from Nizamabad. Excluding Nizamabad, the state's average number of contestants would be 16.1.

After Telangana, Tamil Nadu had the highest average of independent candidates contesting in last elec-

tion. Of the candidates in each constituency in Tamil Nadu, an average of two-thirds contested as independent candidates.

After Nizamabad, the second highest number of candidate representation was seen in Belgaum, Karnataka.

The five constituencies that had the highest candidate representation were from the southern states of Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

The Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress contested 435 and 420 seats respectively. They were in competition with each other in 373 seats. BSP fielded the third highest number of candidates contesting in the 2019 elections.

The seven national parties together fielded 2.69 candidates per constituency. Among the largest five states, West Bengal had the highest representation of candidates from national parties at 4.6 and had candidates from five national parties contesting in the state.

Recognised state parties together fielded 1.53 candidates per constituency. Bihar (6 state parties) and Tamil Nadu (8 state parties) saw a high representation of candidates from state parties at 1.2 and 1.3 respectively.

Five states have more than 30 Parliamentary constituency seats: Uttar Pradesh (80), Maharashtra (48), West Bengal (42), Bihar (40), and Tamil Nadu (39). These states together have 249 seats i.e., 46 per cent of Lok Sabha. (PTI)

CPI(M) condemns killing of Palestinians while collecting aid

NEW DELHI, March 1: The Communist Party of India (Marxist) politburo on Friday condemned the killing of over 100 Palestinians in firing by Israeli troops at a crowd around an aid truck in the Gaza city, and slammed the Indian government for not speaking out on the issue.

CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury accused the government of acting as a "US surrogate", and said India should join the global demand to end "Israeli genocidal cruelty".

"Shocking genocidal attack on the Palestinians. Strongly condemn," Yechury said in a post on X (formerly Twitter).

"Acting as a US surrogate, Modi govt's silence on demanding an immediate ceasefire is aimed at strengthening the US-Israel-India axis. India must join overwhelming global demand to end Israeli genocidal cruelty," he

said.

The CPI(M) Politburo said in a statement that the government should stop following the stance adopted by the United States on the ongoing Israeli-Hamas Gaza, adding that it should "urgently coordinate" its efforts with countries like South Africa, Brazil and the Arab nations.

"The Polit Bureau expresses its shock and condemnation at the killing of 112 Palestinians and many more injured due to firing by Israeli troops in Gaza city. This massacre was perpetrated on starving people who had collected to get food from aid trucks which had entered the area," the CPI(M) said in a statement.

"The genocidal attack on Gaza by Israel has led to more than 30,000 deaths of Palestinians so far. It is highly regrettable that the government

of India has not spoken out when such massacres occur. The Modi government should stop following the stance adopted by the United States on the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza," they said.

"The government should urgently coordinate its efforts with countries of the Global South like South Africa, Brazil and the Arab countries to ensure an immediate and permanent ceasefire," they said.

Israeli troops fired on a large crowd of Palestinians racing to pull food packets off an aid convoy in the Gaza city on Thursday, witnesses said.

More than 100 people were killed, bringing the death toll since the start of the Israel-Hamas war to more than 30,000, according to health officials, with another 70,457 being wounded. (PTI)

Maharashtra's GSDP likely to expand by 10 pc in FY25, govt focus on farmers: Ajit Pawar

MUMBAI, March 1: Maharashtra's gross state domestic product (GSDP) was expected to grow by 10 per cent in FY 2024-25 and the government was committed to ensure that revenue deficit doesn't cross the prescribed limit, Finance Minister Ajit Pawar told the Legislative Assembly on Friday.

The GSDP, which was at ₹38.79 lakh crore in 2023-24, was expected to expand by 10 per cent to reach ₹42.67 lakh crore in 2024-25, Pawar, who is also Deputy Chief Minister, said in his reply to a debate on the interim budget for 2024-25 presented in the Lower House earlier this week.

GSDP indicates total economic output generated within a state's boundaries over a specified period, typically a fiscal year.

Pawar said the fiscal deficit -- gap between government's income and expenditure -- has been restricted at 2.32 per cent of state GDP.

He rejected the opposition's claim that the government was violating provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM Act).

Instead, he noted, the state's revenue deficit (when revenue expenditure exceeds revenue receipts), fiscal deficit and



also public debt all are within parameters set by the FRBM Act as well as the Finance Commission.

The fiscal deficit in 2023-24 was 2.89 per cent, which was below 3 per cent of GSDP as laid down by the Finance Commission, and the gap will be further down to 2.32 per cent in 2024-25, the deputy CM told the House.

The public debt will be ₹7.82 lakh crore in 2024-25, which will be 18.35 per cent of GSDP, below the prescribed limit of 25 per cent (FRBM Act stipulates ceiling for debt to GSDP ratio at 25 per cent), he said.

Maharashtra has fared well in managing its debt considering that some states have crossed the 25 per cent limit, pointed out Pawar.

He said the GST (Goods and Services Tax) recovery has also increased, filling the state coffers substantially. The GST revenue has increased 19.9 per cent, which is the highest for a state in the country.

The deputy CM maintained the interim budget, in which total expenditure for the next fiscal year was pegged at ₹6,00,522 crore with a revenue deficit of ₹9,734 crore, focuses on agriculture, education, public works, health and medical education, social justice, among other segments.

Apart from this, thrust has been given on infrastructure development to facilitate industrial growth, he stated.

Pawar noted his government was pro-farmer and highlighted measures taken for cultivators, including providing benefit of crop insurance to them by paying only ₹1, contributing ₹6,000 (per eligible farmer, per year) in the centrally-sponsored Namo Shetkari Samman scheme as well as providing essential foodgrains at subsidised rates.

He said Mahananda Dairy, a state government entity, will be handed over to any institution which gives the best proposal for managing it, and rejected speculations that the undertaking has been handed over to a Gujarat-based organisation.

Opposition members staged a walkout protesting against Pawar's reply and stating that common citizens had not got any relief in the interim budget. (PTI)

Youth Cong supporters hurl tomatoes, eggs on Odisha police during protest

BHUBANESWAR, March 1: Youth Congress supporters hurled tomatoes and eggs at Odisha police after they were prevented from marching towards Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's residence during a protest rally against 'unemployment' and 'corruption' here on Friday.

Led by their national president BV Srinivas, hundreds of youth Congress supporters participated in the 'Naveen Hatao, Odisha Bachao' protest rally, party sources said.

The protest saw the involvement of key figures such as Odisha Congress campaign committee chairman Bijay Patnaik, former president Jaydev Jena, senior MLA Tara Prasad Bahinipati, state youth Congress president Ranjit Patra, and other senior leaders, they said.

As the rally approached Raj Mahal square en route to Naveen Niwas, police intervened, leading to a confrontation between them and the Congress supporters. In response, some people hurled tomatoes and eggs at the police, they added.

Subsequently, the police detained several Congress supporters and leaders, releasing them later.

Speaking to reporters, Srinivas emphasised the demands for employment opportunities for youths and an end to corruption in the state.

He criticised both the BJD and BJP, likening them to two sides of the same coin, and pledged to continue fighting for the people of Odisha.

Congress leader Jaydev Jena accused the CM of stifling opposition voices, alleging that the government even barred the Congress from protesting.

He highlighted the issue of migration from Odisha due to lack of employment opportunities, stating that over 30 lakh people from the state have migrated to other states for livelihood.

Reacting to the protest, senior BJD leader and MLA Rajendra Sahoo said, "The opposition holds such protests during election time. But the reality is that the people of Odisha have already decided to elect the BJD and make Naveen Patnaik the CM for the sixth term." (PTI)

Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin turns 71

CHENNAI, March 1: DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Friday turned 71, and President Droupadi Murmu and leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended their birthday greetings to him. Stalin cut a birthday cake at the party headquarters 'Anna Arivalayam' here in the presence of party leaders and office-bearers. State ministers and party veterans including TR Bala participated in the event. The chief minister paid floral tributes at the memorials of late DMK stalwarts CN Annadurai and M Karunanidhi at the Marina beach here. He also visited the memorial of reformist leader Periyar EV Ramasamy here and paid tributes. In their greetings, Droupadi Murmu, Narendra Modi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and other leaders wished him a long and healthy life.

Chief ministers of Delhi and Kerala, Arvind Kejriwal and Pinarayi Vijayan respectively, former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav also wished Stalin on his birthday. Leaders of DMK's alliance parties including Tamil Nadu Congress Committee President K Selvaputhur, MDMK chief Vaiko, State committee secretaries of the CPI(M) and CPI, K Balakrishnan and R Mutharasan respectively and Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi chief Thol Thirumavalavan called on Stalin here and extended their birthday wishes. (PTI)

DRI confiscates 36 kg of methamphetamine tablets in TN

MADURAI (TAMIL NADU), March 1: Sleuths from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) seized 30 kg of narcotic drugs, identified as methamphetamine, from a male passenger at the railway station here, and another six kg from the Kodungaiyur dump yard, Chennai, in a meticulously planned operation, the central agency said on Friday.

The value of the confiscated drugs was ₹180 crore and the man and his wife were detained, it said. Methamphetamine, also known as "ice" or "crystal meth" is a highly addictive psychostimulant drug which exhibits powerful euphoric effects similar to those of cocaine, leading to life-threatening consequences, the agency said.

Acting on a tip-off that a passenger of the Madurai bound Pothigai Express Train from Chennai on February 29 would be carrying narcotic substances, the DRI Chennai Zone officials laid a trap for the said passenger and when the train arrived at Madurai railway station on Friday morning the team identified the "passenger" and intercepted him with the help of RPF officials.

A search of his baggage yielded 15 packets weighing 30 kg in total containing white coloured crystal substance, which on testing was found to be methamphetamine. The contraband was immediately seized. Upon being interrogated, he disclosed that some more methamphetamine packets were kept at his home in Chennai, a re-

lease said.

"His home was searched in a swift move and it came to light that his wife threw away the narcotic packets in the dustbin and the garbage was already taken to the Kondungaiyur dump yard," the release stated. A DRI team rushed to the dumpyard and recovered three packets of methamphetamine weighing six kg.

"The international market value of the total seized narcotics substance is around ₹180 crore," the DRI said. Preliminary investigation revealed that the man was carrying it to be transported to Sri Lanka through the coastal route. Both the passenger and his wife have been detained and further investigation is under progress.

This is the first major haul from Madurai coming close to the incident of the Madurai city police seizing over 800 grams of methamphetamine drugs from a house in K K Nagar last week.

Reacting to the seizure, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said it was "very shocking and painful that the ruling DMK has turned Tamil Nadu into a state where all kinds of drugs like ganja, cocaine, heroin and now methamphetamine are easily available." Instead of containing the circulation of narcotic substances, which is pushing the future of Tamil Nadu into the grave, the DMK government encouraged drug lords and provided them access to the party, Palaniswami said in a post on the social media platform 'X'. (PTI)

Human mind an enigma, there can be myriad reasons for suicide: SC

NEW DELHI, March 1: The human mind is an enigma and there can be myriad reasons for a man or a woman to die by suicide, the Supreme Court has said while acquitting a man charged with abetting the suicide of his landlady 24 years ago. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Ujjal Bhuyan said it may not always be the case that someone has to abet commission of suicide and circumstances surrounding the deceased in which he finds himself are relevant.

"Human mind is an enigma. It is well nigh impossible to unravel the mystery of the human mind. There can be myriad reasons for a man or a woman to commit or attempt to commit suicide: it may be a case of failure to achieve academic excellence, oppressive environment in college or hostel, particularly for students belonging to the marginalized sections, joblessness, financial difficulties, disappointment in love or marriage, acute or chronic ailments, depression, so on and so forth," the bench said.

In this case, the man, a former tenant, proposed to his landlady, who was returning after dropping her sister's children off at school.

The man threatened her that if she did not agree to marry him, he would destroy the families of her sisters, outrage their modesty and kill them. After she reached home, the woman informed her sisters about the incident over the phone. Thereafter, she consumed poison in the house. She was rushed to hospital where she died on July 6, 2000. (PTI)

11 structural medical facilities under construction at present in Delhi: Economic Survey

NEW DELHI, March 1: Eleven structural medical facilities, including new hospitals, are under construction at present in the national capital, while several other existing hospitals are also being upgraded with more infrastructure, according to the latest Delhi Economic Survey.

A report on the survey was presented by Delhi Finance Minister Atishi in the Assembly on Friday.

It also said that during the current fiscal year, 7,493 dengue cases were reported in Delhi till November 25 and a total of seven dengue deaths have been reported during the same period.

The survey shared data on birth and death rates as well. The birth rate in Delhi had increased to 14.24 per thousand of population during 2022 as against 13.13 for the year 2021. The death rate per thousand of population had declined to 6.07 during 2022 as against 8.28 in 2021.

As on March 31, 2023, the Delhi government is providing preventive, promotive and curative health care services to the citizens of Delhi through 38 multispecialty and super specialty hospitals, 174 allopathic dispensaries, 60 seed primary urban health centres, 521 Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics, 30 polyclinics, 55 Ayurvedic dispensaries, 25 Unani dispensaries, 117 homeopathic dispensaries and 46 school health clinics, the report said.

"At present, 11 hospitals are under construction," as per the report, which also mentioned various



project details.

These 11 projects also include new blocks coming up at hospitals like GTB Hospital and Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya.

Hospital projects are underway at Vikasuri, Jwalapuri, Shalimar Bagh and Sultanpuri.

The physical progress of the Vikasuri hospital project is 45 per cent and the target date of completion is December 31, 2024, the report says.

At GTB Hospital in east Delhi, a 1912-bed block is coming up. The physical progress on this project is 82 per cent, the report says, adding, "Work in a stand still position since July 2023. Completion depends on sanction of revised estimate, i.e. 6 months time".

Besides, the Delhi government has decided to remodel 15 existing hospitals so as to enhance the number of existing beds as per FAR (floor area ratio) norms. Around 6,000 new beds will be added after completion of remodelling of these hospitals, according to the survey

the same was around 16 per cent of total expenditure, it said.

The total number of medical institutions in Delhi in 2015-16 stood at 3,014 and the figure was 3,423 in 2022-23, as per the report.

There are a number of reasons behind the slow pace of extension of new health outlets and the first and the foremost is "non-availability of land". Multiplicity of agencies and shortage of experienced manpower are the reasons in line for slow extension of health facilities. Moreover all the hospitals, especially major hospitals in Delhi attend to heavy patient workload, it said.

According to the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), the recommended bed population ratio is five beds per a population of 1,000. However, the bed population ratio in Delhi in 2022-23, has remained at 2.70 which is much below the WHO norm, it said.

The survey also mentioned that at the end of the financial year 2022-23, the total sanctioned bed capacity in Delhi decreased to 57,686 beds at 1,153 government and private medical institutions and hospitals, from 58,960 beds available, as on March 31, 2022.

"Sanctioned bed capacity in Delhi decreased particularly in hospitals run by the Government of India and Municipal Corporation of Delhi. In hospitals, run by the government of India this has decreased from 9,544 in 2021-22 to 9,386 in 2022-23," it added. (PTI)

My music about sharing positive ideas with people, says independent artiste Taba Chake

NEW DELHI, March 1: Taba Chake, a multilingual independent artiste from Arunachal Pradesh, says his music is all about giving hope to people. The musician, who is in his early 30s, credited his native state for inspiring his work.

"Most of the inspiration for my music comes from my home state, Arunachal Pradesh. It's also the greenery and mountains. I write about sharing positive ideas, giving hope to people," Chake told PTI in an interview. The singer-songwriter is best known for his 2019 album "Bombay Dreams", a 10-track set with songs in English, Hindi and Nyishi (a language

spoken in Arunachal Pradesh). According to Chake's official YouTube page, the album has stacked up over 25 million streams on music streaming app Spotify alone and over 30 million across other platforms.

Chake, who recently performed at the Vh1 Supersonic music festival in Pune, said the emergence of social media platforms has made it relatively easier for artistes across regions and genres to share their music.

"The world has become so transparent. Yes, social media has given a platform to everyone in the world but if you have something to show to the people and you are not putting it out,



then people won't know about you," he added.

It doesn't matter if one is an independent artiste or a commercial artiste, said the Mumbai-based musician. "You have to put in good work and promote it in a good way. I know independent artists who promote (their music) in a different way... The main purpose is that if you have a good song or project, then it will definitely go places," he said. Chake, also a guitarist, emphasised that one can't come up with great work if they are stuck in a comfort zone.

"You can't be writing great songs living in the comfort of an AC and everything. There has to be some struggle, genuineness or

rawness to write a good song. It (my music) comes from my journey, what all phases I went through in my life. I have been to many places to reach here," he added.

Chake also said he loves listening to all kinds of music. "I grew up listening to Bollywood pop, Bollywood old school, and then, soft rock, metal rock, jazz... I played jazz for two years. I love listening to all genres from all over the world. It doesn't have to be English or Hindi (music). I also listen to music from Indonesia, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore and Japan... That's why I write in different languages," he added. (PTI)

Netflix India announces 2024 slate; 'IC 814: The Kandahar Hijack', 'Heeramandi' part of line-up

MUMBAI, March 1: Streamer Netflix on Thursday unveiled its upcoming slate for India that features over 22 projects, including a series on the 1999 Kandahar hijack, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's debut web show "Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar", Imtiaz Ali's film on the slain Punjabi singer Amar Singh Chamkila, and Oscar-nominated documentary "To Kill A Tiger".

The slate, which was announced here at a star-studded event called 'Next on Netflix', features a mix of movies, web series, unscripted shows and document.

Monika Shergill, Vice President, Content at Netflix India, said the streamer is looking forward to another great year after a successful 2023. "We swept a multitude of awards, including the Oscar, the International Emmy, Busan award for 'Scoop'. On the back of a successful 2023, this year is going to be bigger and bolder. That's how we planned it.

"When you have to programme for that large an audience, it's important to programme to a wide taste... Our ambition is to super serve the audiences and to give them all kinds of entertainment," Shergill told PTI.

The event was attended by AR Rahman, Diljit Dosanjh, Farhan Akhtar, Sonakshi Sinha, Manisha Koirala, Richa Chadha, Taapsee Pannu, Kriti Sanon, Vijay Varma, Anubhav Sinha, Aanand L Rai, Imtiaz Ali, Guneet Monga, Yo Yo Honey Singh, Kapil Sharma, and Sunil Grover, among others. It all started with the introduction of the characters in Bhansali's "Heeramandi", featuring Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Chadha, Sharmin Segal, Aditi Rao Hydari, and Sanjeeda Shaikh. Koirala, who is reuniting with Bhansali after his 1996 feature debut "Khamoshi: The Musical", said the team tried to put its best foot forward as they were working with the master filmmaker.

"To be working with Sanjay 25 years after his first film, 'Khamoshi', it can't get better than 'Heeramandi'. It's been a humongous journey. I've seen him grow as an artist, as a maestro, as a genius, he is India's best," the actor said at the event. The streamer is bringing the true story of the December 24, 1999 hijack of the Indian Airlines flight to screen in the form of a series titled "IC 814: The Kandahar Hijack". The first glimpse of the show, directed and created by Anubhav Sinha, was revealed on Thursday.

Anubhav Sinha, known for films such as "Mulk", "Article 15" and "Bheed", said it was a responsibility to be as authentic as possible while working on the series. "Almost everyone remembers a few things about the hijack, and what all happened during the process, but when I started doing research I realised it is a very complex story and a lot of things happened in those seven days and not many people know about it." (PTI)

EMILY BLUNT REPORTEDLY REUNITING WITH DWAYNE JOHNSON FOR 'THE SMASHING MACHINE'



LOS ANGELES, March 1: Oscar nominee Emily Blunt is in talks to join the cast of Benny Safdie's upcoming feature film "The Smashing Machine", co-starring Dwayne Johnson. If the deal goes through, Blunt will appear alongside her "Jungle Cruise" co-star Johnson in the movie set to start production in sum-

mer. According to The Hollywood Reporter, Blunt is expected to star as Dawn Staples, the wife of MMA and UFC champion Mark Kerr (Johnson). "The Smashing Machine" will follow the story of Mark Kerr, the legendary MMA fighter from the no-holds-barred era of the UFC who climbs the peak of his ca-

reer but struggles with addiction, victory, love and friendship. Blunt and Johnson will also be seen in the "Jungle Cruise" sequel, which is under development.

Blunt is vying for the best actress in a supporting role Oscar at the upcoming 96th Academy Awards, set to be held on March 10. (PTI)

NICK OFFERMAN, BETTY GILPIN JOIN CAST OF 'DEATH BY LIGHTNING'

LOS ANGELES, March 1: "Parks and Recreation" alum Nick Offerman and "GLOW" star Betty Gilpin have boarded the cast of the upcoming historical drama series "Death by Lightning".

The project hails from Netflix and will be directed by Matt Ross, reported entertainment news outlet Variety. Based on Candice Millard's novel "Destiny of the Republic", the show will follow the assassination of James Garfield, the 20th US president, by Charles Guiteau.

Offerman and Gilpin join previously announced leads Michael Shannon ("The Shape of Water"), who will play James Garfield and "Succession" star Matthew Macfadyen, who will portray the role of Guiteau in "Death By Lightning".

Offerman, also known for films such as "The Founder" and "The Kings of Summer", will essay Chester A Arthur, James Garfield's vice president and eventual successor.

On the other side, Gilpin will star as Crete Garfield, the First Lady and James Garfield's wife. The series marks her return to Netflix after "GLOW".

"Game of Thrones" creators David Benioff and DB Weiss serve as executive producers on "Death By Lightning". (PTI)



Kate Winslet says fans recognise her more for 'The Holiday' role, not 'Titanic'



LOS ANGELES, March 1: Oscar winner Actor Kate Winslet says that more people recognise her for her role in the 2006 romantic comedy "The Holiday" than "Titanic", the 1997 disaster epic.

During an appearance at "The Tonight Show", host Jimmy Fallon asked the actor if she knew "The Holiday", a Christmas movie by Nancy Meyers, would be a big hit.

In her reply, Winslet said: "People come up to me in the street more about 'The Holiday' and the episode of 'Extras' (TV show) that I did than 'Titanic'. I promise you. Especially at Christmas."

In James Cameron's multiple award-winning blockbuster "Titanic", she and Leonardo DiCaprio starred as members of different social classes who fall in love during the maiden and doomed voyage of the Titanic ship. "The Holiday", however, was the story of two lovelorn women played by Winslet and Cameron Diaz from opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean who swap their homes to escape heartbreak during the Christmas and holiday season.

Winslet, 48, further said women often tell her they watch the rom-com every

Christmas as a ritual.

"What's so lovely is that mothers and daughters come up to me in the grocery store and they say, 'OK, we just love 'The Holiday'. It's our little ritual at Christmas.' And they have things that they eat every year. They sit down, it's a tradition, and I just love that. That's something I never would have expected, this sort of mother-daughter connection around a film like that. It's so nice," she added.

The actor's latest project is the upcoming miniseries "The Regime", a political satire from HBO. (PTI)

TN bank on 'fingertip knowledge' of coach Kulkarni to knockout Mumbai in Ranji semis

MUMBAI, March 1: Tamil Nadu skipper R Sai Kishore said on Friday that they will lean on the experience and nous of coach Sulakshan Kulkarni, who has 'Mumbai cricket on his fingertips', to deliver the knockout punch on the 41-time champions in their Ranji Trophy semifinal starting here on Saturday.

Tamil Nadu's last Ranji final appearance was in the 2014-15 season when they lost to Karnataka.

"Sulu sir always has his strategies (in place). He is always observant on the ground and that is one of his best qualities. There's never a session where he dozes off. He has

been of great help while captaining," said Sai Kishore.

Kulkarni also hoped to put into use his vast knowledge of Mumbai cricket in favour of Tamil Nadu.

"I've told my team that Mumbai cricket is on my fingertips. I know each and every (player's) positives and negatives. Yes, we respect our opponents because they've a big legacy. But we'll have a good game," Kulkarni said.

Kulkarni, a former Mumbai batter of repute, said it's time Tamil Nadu translated its talent into trophies more consistently at the domestic level.

"We have (produced) so many Test cricketers including

R Ashwin and Murali Vijay and so many (other) cricketers. We have played four (Ranji) finals in the last 15-20 years. It is not a bad performance. But a (Ranji) trophy (win) has eluded us," Kulkarni said.

"This year we are playing quality cricket. The team bonding is great and, hopefully, we will break that jinx this year," he added.

Sai Kishore agreed with his coach.

"We have won championships for Tamil Nadu in white-ball formats. So, we are very excited and want to win a red ball trophy as well. We are all motivated to do that, and that is the talk in the dressing



room," he said. Tamil Nadu got a boost ahead of the last-four match as all-rounder

Washington Sundar and top-order batter Bhardwaj Sai Sudharsan have joined the team.

Sudharsan, who has played just one match this season, has cleared a fitness test at NCA while Sundar, who has also appeared in one match, has been released from the India team so that he could link up with the state side.

Sai Kishore was delighted to welcome back the duo into the TN fold.

"Those two have worked hard in domestic (cricket) and have gone there (to play for India), they realise how important it is to show up here," he said.

"We have played together for so many years. We are happy that they are here in the team. Usually, when the star

India players come back in the team it can be a headache also. But with Washy and Sai, we have actually got a boost," he explained.

Sai Kishore himself was at the forefront of TN's charge, taking 47 wickets with his left-arm spin and he also tops the wicket-taker's table this season.

But he wanted to live in the present rather than dreaming big about an India call-up.

"I take great pride in my team winning tournaments more than my own performance - wickets or runs. I am just trying to live in the moment and enjoying it," Sai Kishore said. (PTI)

Ishan and Iyer were excluded from BCCI's central contracts

Few players will suffer but let it be: Kapil backs BCCI strictness on domestic cricket

NEW DELHI, March 1: "A few players will suffer, but let it be," said legendary former India captain Kapil Dev on Friday as he backed the BCCI's decision to terminate central contracts for lack of commitment to domestic cricket, calling it a much-needed step to protect marquee first-class events like the Ranji Trophy.

Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer were on Wednesday excluded from the BCCI's central contracts after ignoring the board's diktat to play in the Ranji Trophy. The decision evoked mixed reactions with some former players like Kirti Azad and Irfan Pathan backing the out-of-favour duo.

Kapil refrained from taking names but said the BCCI's decision to assert the importance of domestic cricket was long overdue. "Yes, few players will suffer, kuch logon ko taaleef hogi, hone do lekin desh se badhkar koi nahi hai (some people will feel hurt but let it be because nobody is bigger than the country). Well done," he said.

"I congratulate the BCCI for taking the much needed step to protect the status of domestic cricket. I was sad to see domestic cricket being given the skip by players once they had estab-



lished themselves in international cricket," the captain of the 1983 World Cup-winning side observed in his statement.

The BCCI, while announcing the central contracts, urged the players to give due importance to domestic competitions.

The 25-year-old Kishan did not turn up for Jharkhand throughout the team's campaign

in Ranji Trophy despite not being on national duty after leaving the tour of South Africa in December citing personal reasons. He instead focussed on preparing for the IPL next month for his franchise Mumbai Indians. Iyer, on the other hand, did not make himself available for Mumbai's Ranji quarterfinal against Baroda after being ex-

cluded from the Indian team after the second Test against England. He, however, has been picked for Mumbai's Ranji semifinal against Tamil Nadu starting March 2.

"It was high time the message was given and this strong step by the BCCI will go a long way in restoring the prestige of domestic cricket," he added.

Kapil asserted that it was the duty of established stars to play domestic cricket as they owe their success to their respective states. "I have always believed in the process of international players making themselves available to play for their respective states. It helps them extend their support to domestic players. Also it is a nice way to pay back for the services rendered by the state association in grooming a player," he said.

Kapil also expressed his gratitude to the BCCI for enhancing the pension of former cricketers, saying it has come as a major relief to families of several yesteryear players.

In 2022, the board had announced a hike in the monthly pensions of former cricketers -- both men and women.

Former first-class men's cricketers, who earlier got Rs 15,000 per month are now getting Rs 30,000, while former Test players, who got Rs 37,500, are now getting Rs 60,000. Women international players, who received Rs 30,000 prior to the revision are now receiving Rs 52,500, while first-class cricketers who retired before 2003 and were getting Rs 22,500 are now getting Rs 45,000. (PTI)

MUMBAI, March 1: Out-of-favour India batter Shreyas Iyer will be motivated to prove a point and serve a timely reminder of his skillset as he gets back to domestic action when the record 41-time champions Mumbai take on Tamil Nadu in the Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Saturday.

Dropped from the Indian Test side and discarded from BCCI's list of contracted players after he did not make himself available for the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal due to groin and back trouble, Iyer has recovered completely to join Mumbai for the key clash.

Iyer would be key in Mumbai's scheme of things specially against Tamil Nadu's quality spin bowling, which has been one of their key weapons this season.

Skipper R Sai Kishore (47 wickets) and fellow left-arm spinner S Ajith Ram (41) are perched atop the list of highest wicket-takers, against whom Iyer and Co. will have a great opportunity to make a strong statement.

The semifinal promises to be an enthralling battle between Tamil Nadu's persistent and disciplined bowlers and their batters who have piled up big runs this season versus Mumbai's all-round strength.

Mumbai have made it to the semifinals riding on timely performances from different players barring skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who has just one fifty to show from six matches.

None of the Mumbai bowlers has even made it to the top 10 in the list of wicket-takers - Mohit Avasthi (32) is at 13th - yet they find themselves in the final four with their bowlers sharing the workload quite well.

Both Mumbai and Tamil Nadu are coming off impressive wins at the quarterfinal stage.

Young Musheer Khan's unbeaten 203 allowed Mumbai a slender lead which swelled to an insurmountable 605 courtesy a historic show from tailenders

Tanush Kotian and Tushar Deshpande against Baroda. While Tamil Nadu stopped defending champions Saurashtra.

A standout feature in Tamil Nadu's impressive run this year has been the fact that they have bowled out each of their opponents twice in all Ranji matches this season irrespective of the outcome.

Both Mumbai and Tamil Nadu have lost only one match each. While Tamil Nadu only rose to find their best form after an away defeat to Gujarat in their season-opener, Mumbai's narrow loss to Uttar Pradesh only proved to be a minor blip.

It remains to be seen if N Jagadeesan (821 runs) rediscovers his form which helped him register consecutive scores of 245 not out and 321 earlier in the tournament.

The right-hander has not crossed fifty in his last seven innings.

However, Baba Indrajith's (686 runs) enviable consistency has done wonders for Tamil Nadu, with the 29-year-old being on a run-making spree with scores of 80, 187, 98 and 48 in last three matches.

Tamil Nadu have also been strengthened by the inclusion of all-rounder Washington Sundar, who has been released from the Indian Test side.

On what is expected to be a batting-friendly surface, Mumbai's deep batting line-up with Prithvi Shaw and Bhupen Lalwani at the top and all-rounder Shardul Thakur and even Shams Mulani in the lower-order, the hosts will fancy putting up a big score.

For Tamil Nadu, it would be imperative to keep working with their strengths — if Jagadeesan, Indrajith and Pradosh Ranjan Paul form the fulcrum of their batting, seamer Sandeep Warrier has provided adequate support to the spin duo of Sai Kishore and Ajith. (PTI)

Praggnanandhaa blunders again, goes down to Rapport

PRAGUE (CZECH REPUBLIC), March 1: Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa blundered for the second day running and lost to Richard Rapport of Romania in the third round of the Prague Masters Chess tournament underway here.

After briefly going ahead of Viswanathan Anand and attaining the top Indian status in the live rating list, this double blow cost the Indian dearly, and now a lot of hard-work remains in the last six rounds of the 10-player round-robin contest.

It was drama all over, as Praggnanandhaa was not the only one to blow away his chances. Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan turned the tables on local star

David Navara from a nearly hopeless position when the latter failed to keep his nerves under pressure after attaining a winning position. The all-Indian draw between Vidit Gujrathi and D Gukesh ended in a stalemate with neither player able to force matters, while overnight sole leader Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran was held to a draw by top German Vincent Keymer.

In the other game of the day, Nguyen Than Dai Van of Czech Republic defeated Mateusz Bartel of Poland from what was a complicated endgame.

Meanwhile, in another news coming in from Shenzhen in China, Arjun Erigaisi become the new India number one de-

feating Xiangyu Yu of China in the first round of the Shenzhen Masters.

As things stand here, Abdusattorov joined Maghsoodloo in the lead on 2.5 points out of a possible three and the two are now trailed by Gukesh and Rapport with 2 points apiece. Gujrathi stands at fifth spot with 1.5 points, a half point ahead of Praggnanandhaa, Navara, Dai Van and Keymer. Bartel, with just a half point, is at the bottom of the table.

It was simply not Praggnanandhaa's day. The Indian did everything right except going past the finish line in his game against Rapport. The Hungarian-turned-Romanian is known for his uncompromising style and off-beat

openings. The King's Indian was no exception as Rapport chose something uncommon at this level and Praggnanandhaa made rapid progress in the centre before launching a king-side attack. Rapport was looking quite lost at one point in the middle game but hung in there till the Indian faltered. The game changed quickly thereafter as Rapport found some study-like defense and romped home.

Gukesh could not make much headway with his white pieces against Gujrathi out of a Berlin defense game. The middle game saw routine exchanges and the players quickly arrived at a minor pieces endgame that was just level. (PTI)

Defending Asian champions Trophy title crucial to becoming the best, says Hardik Singh

NEW DELHI, March 1: Indian men's hockey team vice-captain Hardik Singh feels that the Asian Champions Trophy triumph last year was the perfect impetus for his side to achieve greater heights and defending the title will be an important step in becoming the best in the world.

Since emerging victorious in the Asian Champions Trophy last year, the Indian hockey team went on to win the Asian Games and directly qualify for the Paris Olympics while also putting up a good show in the home leg of the FIH Pro League.

The next edition of the men's Asian Champions Trophy will take place in Hulunbuir City, China from September 8 to 17.

"Coming back from behind to win the tournament was a special feeling, and looking back, I feel the team used that game as a springboard to reach greater

heights," Hardik was quoted as saying in a Hockey India release.

"There is no doubt that we are looking forward to playing in the Men's Asian Champions Trophy 2024 and defending our title," the midfielder added.

"We aim to be the best team in the world, and an important step in that journey will be to retain the trophy and solidify our position as the best team in Asia."

In the final, India found themselves trailing 3-1 at half-time, but goals from captain Harmanpreet Singh, Gurjant Singh, and Akashdeep Singh in the second half ensured that India were crowned Asian champions in Chennai last year.

Hardik feels the triumph was a testament to the Indian team's progress under then new coach Craig Fulton. "The Asian Champions Trophy Chennai was a spectacular tournament." (PTI)

NEW DELHI, March 1: Star golfer and former champion Anirban Lahiri is set to return at the Hero Indian Open, the country's National Open which will have an enhanced prize money of USD 2.25 million this year.

Part of the Asian Swing, the Indian Open will have 144 players, including 33 Indians, competing for the top prize from March 28 to 31 at the DLF Golf & Country Club in Gurugram.

Out of the USD 2.5 million (₹18.65 crore) prize purse, the winner will receive a handsome USD 382,500 (₹ 3.17 crore approx) with the runner-up picking up USD 247,500 (₹ 2.05 crore approx) and the third-place finisher pocketing USD 140,850 (₹ 1.16 crore approx).

"I am really looking forward to play at the Indian Open this year. It has been five years since I had the opportunity to compete in my



national open. Winning the title in 2015 remains one of my most cherished memories," said Lahiri, a former Asian and European tour champion, via a video message during a press conference

here on Friday.

Lahiri, who had clinched the title in 2015, last played in the 2019 editions before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which meant the event

could only return in 2023 after three years.

The 36-year-old, who now competes on the LIV Golf Tour, skipped the last edition but he has taken approval from the European Tour to participate in the country's flagship golf tournament this year.

The 57th edition of the Indian Open will be the second of five events comprising the Asian Swing as part of the new-look 2024 Race to Dubai.

Apart from Lahiri, Shiv Kapur, three-time DP World Tour winner Nicolas Colseas of Belgium and the new exciting talent Kazumi Kobori of New Zealand will be part of the elite field, the entry of which is still open.

Manu Gandas, who is currently ranked second in the PGTI Order of Merit, and Aman Raj will also be part of the Indian field.

"My best result was last year, I have played thrice in this tournament. My last day was not that great, so I would like to put up an improved show this year," said Gandas, who had played in the 2023 DP Tour.

Indian Golf Union (IGU) President Brijinder Singh said they have taken efforts to make it a memorable experience for the spectators this time.

"The Hero Indian Open has been the summit on the Indian golf calendar as Indian Golf Union strives to promote and run one of the most expansive amateur schedules, which has allowed top amateurs to grow into world-class professional golfers," he said. "We had more time to organise this event this time. So we are scaling up the facilities for the spectators. We will make the whole experience more enjoyable for spectators." (PTI)




Direct Benefit Transfer to another

Individual Household Latrine (IHHL) Beneficiaries under SBM-G Phase II

1st Installment of ₹9,000/- per IHHL



Chief Guest
Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Organised by Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen

1st DBT on
2 October 2023
2nd DBT on
2 March 2024

🕒 12 noon 📍 Guwahati Medical College & Hospital auditorium



Swachh Village- Swachh Assam

Published by Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen

EXCLUSIVE/SBMG/03-2024




Let your baby's future be bright, Paalan 1000 is every baby's right.

80% of the baby's mental development happens in the first 1000 days of life. Adopting Paalan 1000 formulas during this time guarantees a beautiful childhood and a bright future for your child.

6 simple formulas for developing your infant's mind

Formula no. 1



Lots of pamper, love and care, mental development also gets its share.

Formula no. 2



Let your time for breastfeeding, also be a time for loving.

Formula no. 3



Let your baby walk, run, play and dance, well-being and curiosity it will enhance.

Formula no. 4



Counting, songs, shapes and comparisons, awaken the baby's knowledge and understandings.

Formula no. 5



Read a story page by page, ignite your baby's imagination and language.

Formula no. 6



Live your life stress-free, make your baby sharp and full of glee.

During this time








RBSK  **Paalan 1000**
A happier beginning for a brighter future

For more information, contact ASHA or download the app.

NHMD/2023-24/1942





মুখ্যমন্ত্রী মহিলা উদ্যমিতা অভিযান





লাখপতি বাইদেউ



আপুনি প্ৰপত্ৰ পূৰণ কৰিলেনে?

প্ৰপত্ৰ জমা দিয়াৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত জানিবলগীয়া

- প্ৰপত্ৰ জমা লোৱাৰ তাৰিখ** ২, ৩, ৪, ৫ আৰু ৬ মাৰ্চ ২০২৪
- স্থান** আবেদনকাৰীৰ নিকটৱৰ্তী আত্মসহায়ক গোটৰ গ্ৰাম্য সংগঠন কাৰ্যালয়/মণ্ডল পৰ্যায় সংগঠন কাৰ্যালয়/সংশ্লিষ্ট খণ্ড উন্নয়ন বিষয়াৰ কাৰ্যালয়
- প্ৰপত্ৰ** সম্পূৰ্ণৰূপে পূৰণ হোৱাটো বাঞ্ছনীয়
- শুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ দিশ**
 - অমৃত বৃক্ষৰ ফটো
 - স্বাক্ষৰিত সংকেতা-পত্ৰ
 - ব্যৱসায়িক পৰিকল্পনা
 - আবেদনকাৰীৰ ফটো
- নাকচ** অসম্পূৰ্ণ প্ৰপত্ৰ

জমা দিবলগীয়া নথি



সদস্যৰ লগতে অমৃত বৃক্ষ আন্দোলনৰ সময়ত ৰোপণ কৰা গছপুলিটোৰ বৰ্তমান সময়ৰ জিও টেগ ফটো প্ৰপত্ৰত লগাই দিব লাগিব



ব্যৱসায়িক পৰিকল্পনা আৰু বেঙ্ক পাছবুকৰ প্ৰথম পৃষ্ঠাৰ প্ৰতিলিপি প্ৰপত্ৰৰ লগত গাঁঠি দিব লাগিব

সহায়



প্ৰয়োজন সাপেক্ষে প্ৰপত্ৰ পূৰণত জীৱিকা সখী, পশু সখী, কৃষি সখী আদি সখী বাইদেউসকলে সহায় কৰিব

তথ্য আৰু জনসংযোগ সঞ্চালকালয়, অসমৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত

Connect with us     @diprassam  dipr.assam.gov.in

Janasanyog /DI/18648/23/2-Mar-24