

**Govt drops Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund scheme • Archer Jayanta Talukdar to be appointed as Dy SP • MoU with Reliance Bio Energy cleared**

## Cabinet okays 3-pc DA hike for state govt staff

**GUWAHATI, Oct 27:** The Assam Cabinet on Sunday approved a 3-percent dearness allowance (DA) hike for state government employees, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The increase will be effective from July this year, he said. Addressing a press conference after chairing a cabinet meeting here, Sarma said, "With this, the total DA will be 53 per cent, which is at par with central government employees."

He said the increased DA will be payable with retrospective effect from July, and the arrears amount will be paid in four equal installments with the monthly salaries from January to April next year. The employees will draw salary with revised DA from December, the CM said.

The cabinet also decided to do away with the earlier provision in the Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund scheme, which barred a tea garden worker whose monthly wage is more than ₹ 15,000 from getting provident fund (PF) benefits.

"As wages of the workers are now increasing, we do not want anyone to be deprived of PF benefits. Hence, it has been decided to remove the cap of ₹ 15,000

- Israel attacks Iran in series of pre-dawn airstrikes targeting military
- Russian strikes on Kyiv and central Ukraine kill 2 teenager
- Shah slams TMC govt for 'state-sponsored infiltration' in Bengal
- Wayanad LS bypoll: Rehabilitation of landslide survivors takes centre stage



monthly earning," the chief minister said. The council of ministers also approved signing of an MoU with Reliance Bio Energy for exploring the scope of compressed biogas sector in the state, he said.

The appointment of archer Jayanta Talukdar as a deputy superintendent of police in the state force has also been cleared.

An investment of ₹ 205 crore in Numaligarh Refinery Ltd, several road and minor irrigation projects under NABARD, ₹ 175 crore for procurement of medicines in government hospitals, ₹ 150 crore for infrastructure development in state police force and formation of election department in Tamulpur district, found the cabinet's nod, too,

the CM said. It okayed a one-time grant of ₹ 25,000 to about 2,000 committees, which organise 'Raas' celebrations, involving live performances of dance dramas based on the life of Lord Krishna.

He also said 'Bhasa Gaurav Week' will be observed from November 3-9, a month after Assamese was accorded the status of classical language.

Meetings and special programmes will be organised in educational institutions and by social organisations during the week. "We will try to send thousands of letters with the resolution of gratitude to the prime minister during the week," Sarma said. (PTI)

## DB STOCK BROKING SCAM

### Assam Police arrest kingpin of trading scam Dipankar Barman from Goa

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Oct 27:** The accused in a multi crore trading fraud who was on run since last couple of months—Dipankar Barman was arrested by Assam Police in Goa on Sunday, said Director General of Police (DGP) GP Singh.

Barman was at large and he was successful in evading arrest since the reports of a huge online fraud conducted by his company DB stock limited surfaced. He allegedly looted crores of money of general public who invested in his trading company on the pretext of getting much higher returns.

Police launched a manhunt to nab Barman; however, he could not be arrested. On Sunday, Singh took to X handle and wrote, "Finally, Dipankar Barman arrested at Goa. The run ends. Congratulations Team @GuwahatiPol." According to police sources, the where-

abouts of Barman could be traced by the investigation team a few days ago and Assam Police officials travelled to Goa to catch the accused. With the active cooperation of Goa Police, Dipankar was finally arrested.

It has been learned that the Assam Police will appeal for a transit remand for Barman at a Court in Goa on Monday and later he would be brought to Guwahati.

Several cases were lodged against Barman for looting people's money and his family members were questioned by the police officials a few days ago.

A highly placed source said that the latest mobile number used by Dipankar was traced by police and this led to the arrest of the accused.

Meanwhile, CBI was handed over the 41 cases related to online trading fraud in the state. The central probe (CONTD ON PAGE-2)



### Himanta seeks West Bengal's cooperation in tackling illegal immigration from Bangladesh

**GUWAHATI, Oct 27:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said the states bordering Bangladesh must coordinate among themselves and with the BSF to foil infiltration bids in the wake of the political turmoil in the neighbouring country.

Addressing a press conference here, he said the Assam and Tripura governments are working together with the border force already but it will be a "well-orchestrated effort" only if West Bengal also starts identifying the infiltrators as those sent back from these two northeastern states may re-enter through it.

"In the last two months, almost every day we are capturing foreigners in our state. My feeling is that due to the porous boundary, in spite of best efforts of the BSF,

some people are coming into India illegally," he said. Sarma stressed that state governments have to identify illegal migrants proactively, and Assam and Tripura are already doing so. Despite the efforts, some infiltrators have managed to enter and reach other states of India as is evident from the arrest of some illegal migrants who had gone back to Bangladesh to bring in more people from their country, he said.

The CM said 138 infiltrators were identified and sent back from Assam in the last two months by the state police in operations carried out independently and jointly with the BSF. He claimed that those trying to enter India illegally were Rohingyas and not Hindus. "The perception about Hindu-Bengalis trying (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

### Jharkhand tough state but BJP hopeful of good results: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, Oct 27:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday that Jharkhand is a "tough state" in terms of BJP's prospect in the upcoming assembly elections there but the saffron camp is "hopeful" of coming to power.

Sarma, who is the party's co-in charge for the poll-bound Jharkhand, also said he has been busy campaigning there and is not able to focus on the November 13 by-polls in Assam.

"I have not been keeping tabs on the bypolls here. I have been very busy with Jharkhand," the chief minister said, addressing a press conference here. On the BJP's prospects in Jharkhand, Sarma said, "It is a tough state. But we are hopeful of good results there."

The Jharkhand assembly polls will be held in two phases on November 13 and 20, and the counting of votes will take place on November 23. The Assam ministers, MLAs and the BJP's state leadership are campaigning for bypolls to five assembly constituencies in the north-eastern state, he said. "I am not sure whether I (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

### HT BRIEFS

#### UPSSA launched

**SIVASAGAR:** The new workers' union, Udyugik Pratisthan Shramic Santha (UPSSA), recently formed in Sivasagar, held its first public meeting on Sunday at the Sivasagar Press Club. The meeting, presided over by Abidur Rahman, president of the UPSSA Sivasagar unit, featured an address by Sayanika Goswami, assistant labour commissioner (in charge). In her speech, Goswami discussed the four new Codes—Code on Wages, 2019, Code on Social Security, 2020, Industrial Relations Code, 2020, and Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code, 2020.

#### Dibrugarh potters

**DIBRUGARH:** The local pottery industry in Dibrugarh is gearing up and staying busy with the production of diyas (earthen lamps) ahead of the Diwali festival. Ratan Pandit, a 30-year-old third-generation potter, is keeping the age-old tradition of pottery-making alive. After completing his higher secondary education at DHSK College, Ratan Pandit joined his family's business. The family has been living at Kachari Ghat in Dibrugarh for several years. The sale of earthen lamps has increased due to the festive season. Diwali, the festival of lights, drives a spike in demand for these traditional lamps. While artificial Chinese lights continue to flood the market, diyas hold a special significance for the Diwali festival.

### 12 Indian fishermen arrested by SL Navy for alleged illegal fishing

**COLOMBO, Oct 27:** The Sri Lankan Navy on Sunday arrested 12 Indian fishermen and seized their trawler for allegedly poaching in its territorial waters, according to an official statement.

With the latest arrest, the number of Indian nationals apprehended this year by the island nation in such incidents has risen to 462. The fishermen were arrested, and their trawler was seized off the coast of Point Pedro, Jaffna, in the northern province, the Sri Lanka Navy said in a press release. The 12 apprehended fisher-

men were escorted to the Kankesanthurai Harbour and will be handed over to the Mailladi Fisheries Inspector for further action, it said. The Sri Lanka Navy has "held 62 Indian fishing boats and 462 Indian fishermen in island waters thus far in 2024 and handed them over to authorities for legal action," the statement said. The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in sev-

eral alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters.

The Sri Lankan Fisheries Ministry has announced that a 12-member Indian team will arrive here on Tuesday to discuss the recurring problem between the neighbours.

The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries.

Fishermen from both countries are arrested frequently for inadvertently trespassing into each other's waters. (PTI)

### Era of 'doom-gloom' replaced by 'hope-possibility': Dhankhar



**GUWAHATI, Oct 27:** Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday said that an atmosphere of hope and possibility has replaced the earlier era of "doom and gloom" in the country, which has emerged as a power to be reckoned with at the global level.

He claimed that there will be forces, both within and outside the boundaries, which will not like India coming forth as a global power, and the youth of the country have to respond to such forces through their action.

Speaking at the 21st biennial convention of Krishnaguru International Spiritual Youth Society here, Dhankhar said, "Ten years ago, the atmosphere was of doom and gloom. Now what we see is an atmosphere of hope and possibility. It has been the contributions of our great men and saints that under the leadership of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi India is a power at the global level now."

"When Bharat is rising, some people are bound to be hurt. Some are within the country and some outside...the youth will answer these people through the knowledge you have acquired and utilise for the nation," he added.

The vice president asserted that the spiritual power of the country is at the centre of Bharat's rise and exhorted the youth to follow the path of spirituality, infusing with it the sense of nationalism and modernity.

He also highlighted the economic growth of the country and said, "While you strive for spiritual awakening, another awakening is unfolding for us. It is the incremental and continual rise of Bharat."

"Bharat was suppressed for centuries and now it is released... An ecosystem is in place where every youth can (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

### Not all projects came to BJP-ruled states in last 10 years: EAM Jaishankar

**MUMBAI, Oct 27:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday refuted the allegations of investments from Maharashtra shifting to Gujarat, saying investors have their calculations and they will see a performing state government which is capable and efficient.

Not all projects have come to the Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states in the last 10 years, Jaishankar said addressing a press conference at the BJP office in Mumbai ahead of the November 20 Maharashtra assembly polls.

"Competitive federalism is good for the country," the BJP Rajya Sabha member said.

Corridor is the most talked about connectivity corridor in the world and the main interface will be in Maharashtra, he said.

Leaders from the opposition parties, including the Congress and the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), have often claimed that various big investment projects have been moved from Maharashtra to the neighbouring BJP-ruled Gujarat. Asked about the opposition's allegations, Jaishankar said the investors also have their own calculations and assessments.

"They will see a performing state government which is capable and efficient. You can't blame the Centre but also have to check your own

merit. Not all projects have come to BJP-ruled states in the last 10 years," he said.

The Indian government works on the image and branding of the country at the international level, but it is the state governments which will take decisions for employment and investments to come, Jaishankar said. "The success of a country depends on positive, effective, sincere partnership from the state governments," he said.

The minister also said Maharashtra needs a government which is on the same page as the Centre since it is the most industrialised state in the country which will play a key role in achieving (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

## Some other projects will also be launched tomorrow PM Modi to launch health cover for senior citizens above 70 years on October 29

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** The health coverage for all citizens aged 70 years and above irrespective of their income status under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) is likely to be rolled out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 29, an official source said.

The U-WIN portal developed for maintaining an electronic registry of routine immunisations, which is currently operational on a pilot basis, will also be launched by the prime minister on the same day.

Besides the two, some other projects will also be launched on Tuesday, the source said.

The U-Win platform, which is a replication of the COVID-19 vac-

cine management system Co-WIN, has been developed to keep a permanent digital record of vaccination of pregnant women as well as children from birth up to the age of 17 under the Universal Immunization Programme. "The PM is likely to launch the expanded scheme under the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme for those aged 70 years and above. It will benefit an estimated six crore citizens in about 4.5 crore households," the source said.

Be it poor, middle class, upper middle class or rich, every individual who is 70 years and above is eligible for getting Ayushman card and will receive free treatment up to ₹ 5 lakh at any of the AB PMJAY empanelled hospitals once the ex-



panded scheme gets launched. Till September 1, 2024, a total of 29,648 hospitals, including 12,696

private hospitals, have been empanelled under the PMJAY. The scheme is being imple-

### Cong slams govt over India's low ranking in NC index



**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** The Congress on Sunday took a swipe at the Modi government over India reportedly being ranked 176 out of 180 countries on the Nature Conservation Index and asked whether the bona fides of Israel's Ben Gurion University that has co-developed the index should also be questioned.

There was no immediate reaction from the government on the reported ranking.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "Whenever India

gets a very low rank on some global index or the other, the immediate response of the non-biological PM's drumbeaters and cheerleaders is to attack the index itself as a plot to defame India by agenda-driven busybody NGOs."

But what will be the response to the just-released Nature Conservation Index in which India ranks a miserable 176th out of 180 countries, he asked.

"This Index has been co-developed by Israel's Ben Gurion University. Will the bona fides of this university too be questioned?" Ramesh said.

India has scored low in the Global Nature Conservation Index, ranking 176 out of 180 countries. It is placed just above Kiribati which ranked 180, Turkey (179), Iraq (178) and Micronesia (177), according to reports. (PTI)



# FPIs withdraw ₹ 85,790 cr from equities due to Chinese mkt valuation

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Foreign investors have continued selling in the Indian market, pulling out a massive ₹ 85,790 crore (around USD 10.2 billion) from equities this month due to Chinese stimulus measures, attractive stock valuations, and the elevated pricing of domestic equities.

October is turning into the worst-ever month in terms of foreign fund outflows. In March 2020, FPIs withdrew ₹ 61,973 crore from equities.

The latest outflow came after a nine-month high investment of ₹ 57,724 crore in September 2024.

Since June, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have consistently bought equities after withdrawing ₹ 34,252 crore in April-May. Overall, FPIs have been net buyers in 2024, except for January, April, and May, data with the depositories showed.

Looking ahead, the trajectory of global events like geopolitical developments and interest rate movements will play a crucial role in shaping future foreign investment in Indian equities, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

## Mcap of 9 of top-10 most valued firms drops ₹ 2 trn as markets tumble

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Nine of the top-10 most valued firms together lost a whopping ₹ 2,09,952.26 crore from market valuation last week, in line with weak trends in equities, with Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries Limited taking the biggest hit.

Last week, the BSE benchmark tanked 1,822.46 points or 2.24 per cent.

"The dismal Q2 earnings so far have aggravated the investors' woes while persistent FII selling continued to create havoc in the market," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

From the top-10 pack, HDFC Bank emerged as the only winner.

The market valuation of Hindustan Unilever eroded by ₹ 44,195.81 crore to ₹ 5,93,870.94 crore.

Reliance Industries' valuation tumbled ₹ 41,994.54 crore to ₹ 17,96,726.60 crore.

State Bank of India's market valuation plummeted by ₹ 35,117.72 crore to ₹ 6,96,655.84 crore, and that of Bharti Airtel tanked by ₹ 24,108.72 crore to ₹ 9,47,598.89 crore. The market capitalisation (mcap) of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) dropped by ₹ 23,137.67 crore to ₹ 14,68,183.73 crore.

The valuation of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) diminished by ₹ 19,797.24 crore to ₹ 5,71,621.67 crore, and that of Infosys declined by ₹ 10,629.49 crore to ₹ 7,69,496.61 crore.

ITC's mcap fell by ₹ 5,690.96 crore to ₹ 6,02,991.33 crore, and that of ICICI Bank went lower by ₹ 5,280.11 crore to ₹ 8,84,911.27 crore.

However, the mcap of HDFC Bank jumped ₹ 46,891.13 crore to ₹ 13,29,739.43 crore. (PTI)

# ONGC chairman should also lead as subsidiary HPCL's head: Synergy panel

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** The oil and Natural Gas Corporation Chairman and Managing Director should also be the chair of the firm's subsidiary Hindustan Petroleum Corporation in line with the universal practice of a corporate group having only one chairman, a panel appointed to work out synergies between the two firms said in its report.

India's top oil and gas producer Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) had, in January 2018, bought the government's entire 51.11 per cent stake in HPCL for ₹ 36,915 crore. The nation's third-biggest oil refining and fuel marketing company thereafter became a subsidiary of ONGC.

But Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), which initially did not even recognise the new owner, continues to be headed by a chairman and managing director, who does not report to parent firm ONGC or its board. ONGC has got just one board position on HPCL following the acquisition.

On a prod from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, ONGC appointed a three-member panel to work out synergies between ONGC and HPCL. The panel, which comprised former oil secretary GC Chaturvedi, former ONGC chairman Dinesh Kumar Sarraf, and former HPCL head MB Lal, a couple of months back submitted its report to ONGC, which forwarded it to the ministry for further action, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter said. The panel in the report said the ONGC chairman and managing director should be the chair of the board of not just ONGC but also all its subsidiaries - ONGC Videsh Ltd, HPCL, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd, and ONGC Petro additions Limited (OPaL).



On the domestic front, key indicators like inflation trends, corporate earnings, and the impact of festive season demand will also be closely watched by FPIs as they assess opportunities in the Indian market, he added.

According to the data, FPIs made a net withdrawal of ₹ 85,790 crore from equities between October 1 and 25.

The sustained FPI selling impacted market sentiments, pulling the NSE's benchmark index Nifty down by 8 per cent from the peak. The trend of sustained FPI sell-

## FII activities, global trends drivers for mkt movement this week: Analysts

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Equity investors will track the trading activity of foreign investors, global trends and ongoing earnings results for further cues, and benchmark indices may continue to witness consolidation in a holiday-shortened week amid the monthly derivatives expiry, analysts said.

Markets fell sharply last week amid massive foreign capital outflows and dismal Q2 earnings so far. Weakness in the markets might continue in the near term amid cautiousness among investors ahead of the US presidential election early next month, an expert said. Equity markets will remain closed on Friday for Diwali, but a special trading window will be open for one hour in the evening.

Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE will conduct a one-hour special "Muhurat Trading" session on the occasion of Diwali on November 1, marking the start of the new Samvat 2081.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said, "We expect the consolidation to continue in the short term. A reversal in trend will depend on a slowdown in FIIs' selling intensity and the outcome of the US presidential election." "Going forward, FII flows will play a crucial role in determining market direction, while volatility is expected to rise in anticipation of the October F&O expiry. With the Q2 earnings season in progress, upcoming corporate results will be key indicators for market sentiment," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

On the global front, geopolitical developments, particularly the Iran-Israel situation, will be closely monitored for their potential impact on crude oil prices, he

added. "Markets worldwide may adopt a cautious wait-and-watch stance ahead of the US presidential election. Key macroeconomic data releases, such as the US jobs report, GDP data, and China's PMI manufacturing data, will be important indicators, alongside the US core PCE prices index release on October 31, the Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge. The Bank of Japan is also set to announce its interest rate decision on October 31," Meena added.

From the quarterly results calendar, Adani Power, BHEL, Adani Enterprises, Adani Ports and Dabur India will announce their earnings this week. "The trend of sustained FPI selling, which started in early October, continues and is showing no signs of reversal any time soon. The current wave of FPI selling was triggered by the Chinese stimulus measures and cheap valuations of Chinese stocks. The elevated valuations in India made India the top choice of FIIs to sell," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

## Hindustan Zinc to invest up to \$2 bn to double production capacity: CEO

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Vedanta Group firm Hindustan Zinc plans to pump in up to \$2 billion (around ₹ 17,000 crore) to double its production capacity to 2 million tonnes in the next few years, its CEO Arun Misra said.

The company which had already engaged consultants to ramp up its capacity is looking for mining partners for the same, Misra told PTI.

"We have a plan of doubling the production to 2 million tonnes. So, I am sure by the end of this quarter, we should be able to make project announcements, which projects, how much and where it is happening," he explained.

The company is targeting a production capacity of 1.2 million tonnes (MT) in 2025, followed by 1.35 MT in 2026 and 1.8 MT in 2027, Misra said.

"And then finally, sometime, we should be able to get 2 million tonnes," he explained.

When asked about the investment the company plans to make to increase production capacity, he said, "Because most of the mining infrastructure is in place, so, it is anywhere between 2 billion dollars or 1.95 or 2 billion dollars, roughly about, say, ₹ 14,000 crore to ₹ 17,000 crore is the kind of money that will be required."

On the company's restructuring plans, he said that the discussions are on and the stakeholders are talking regularly.

He further said that as the government is also working on the disinvestment of Hindustan Zinc so, there is a dependence on that as well. "So, one of them will happen," he explained.

Hindustan Zinc is the world's second-largest integrated zinc producer and the third-largest silver producer. (PTI)

Mazars in India, said.

Heightened concerns around geopolitical stability and recent developments in China have led foreign investors to adopt a more cautious stance, reallocating capital to safer markets. This trend highlights the impact of global uncertainties on emerging markets, where volatility can significantly shape investment patterns, he added.

"With US elections looming, a sharp recent rise in US bond yields implying diminished expectations for aggressive rate cuts by the US Fed, lower growth and high inflation expected back home, continuing geopolitical issues between Israel-Iran and Russia-Ukraine has led to FPIs pulling out funds from most EMs, including India," Piyush Mehta, smallcase Manager and CIO at Caprize Investment, said.

In addition, FPIs pulled out ₹ 5,008 crore from the debt general limit and invested ₹ 410 crore from the debt Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) during the period under review. So far this year, FPIs invested ₹ 14,820 crore in equities and ₹ 1,05 lakh crore in the debt market. (PTI)

# 'No space crunch in Punjab': Centre dismisses concerns over paddy storage

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** The Centre on Sunday dismissed reports of storage space shortage affecting paddy procurement in Punjab, terming them "misinformation" created with "vested interests".

Union Food Minister Prahlad Joshi on Sunday assured that creating adequate storage space remains the government's responsibility.

"Some rumours are being spread. I want to clearly state that creating space is our responsibility. We will take care of that," Joshi said during a media briefing, accompanied by Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra and FCI Chairman Vanita Rattan Sharma.

The state currently has 14 lakh tonne storage capacity, which will increase to 16 lakh tonne by November 1. An additional 31 lakh tonne capacity is being developed under the Private Entrepreneur Guarantee (PEG) scheme.

The minister highlighted that 3,800 millers have applied for paddy lifting, with 3,250 already allocated stock for rice conversion. The government has cleared payments worth ₹ 9,819.88 crore, of which ₹ 7,641 crore has reached

farmers.

The ministry has formed a high-level committee under the FCI chairmanship to monitor storage capacity and movement plans weekly. Out of the national movement target of 34.75 lakh tonne for October, Punjab has been allocated 40 per cent (13.76 lakh tonne).

The Centre plans to evacuate 13-14 lakh tonne of wheat monthly from Punjab until March 2025. An online portal to address rice millers' grievances will be launched soon.

The minister said the government is distributing rice via PDS and to states like Tamil Nadu on demand basis.

Addressing concerns over lower out-turn ratio (OTR) from paddy to rice, particularly with the PR-126 variety, Joshi said IIT-Kharagpur has been commissioned to conduct a detailed study.

"PR-126 variety has been in use since 2016 without issues. The national OTR standard remains at 67 per cent regardless of variety," he added.

The minister said there are reports of widespread use of hybrid varieties being passed off as PR-

126 in Punjab. These hybrid varieties reportedly have significantly lower OTR compared to genuine PR-126 paddy, affecting millers' ability to meet mandated norms.

Joshi also ruled out any relaxation in OTR norms for Punjab's rice millers.

The Centre has engaged IIT-Kharagpur to review current OTR norms and drainage incidentals for paddy. The study is currently in progress.

On the issue of additional transportation charges faced by millers, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) has delegated powers to regional offices. They can now approve extra transportation charges if designated depots have no vacant space beyond a 15-day waiting period.

"The necessary customisation for enabling the same has been made in the procurement portal and the issue has been resolved," the minister said.

The procurement began early on October 1 following heavy rains, with 49.88 lakh tonne paddy procured so far. Saturday alone saw procurement of 5.34 lakh tonne. (PTI)

# Beer makers urge Karnataka govt to withdraw draft notifications, fear 10-20% price hike

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** The Beer Association of India (BAI) has urged the Karnataka government to withdraw draft notifications, which proposed a hike in duty through alcohol content-based classification in beer, saying that on average this move would lead to a price increase of 10-20 per cent in mainstream and premium segments. The draft notification proposes to double the excise duty on strong beer to ₹ 20 per bulk litre, increase the minimum billing price for beer in the state to Rs 300 per case and Additional Excise Duty (AED) to 195 per cent of the billing price or ₹ 130 per bulk litre whichever is higher.

The industry body, in a letter to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, has also asked to withdraw the proposal asking beer manufacturers to declare the sugar content in the beer on the bottle's label and capping the use of sugar to 25 per cent of the weight of malt of grain.

BAI, which represents leading beer makers United Breweries, ABInBev and Carlsberg, said these draft notifications are not in the interest of any of the stakeholders and may result in high prices for consumers, impact Ease of Doing Business in the state and may lead to lower tax revenues as sales would be impacted.

"The increase proposed in the draft notification would increase the prices by 10-20 per cent in mainstream and premium segments. At the same time, it would also make beer unaffordable to the masses with the proposed 35 per cent increase in taxes in this segment," said BAI, whose members account for 85 per cent of the beer sold in India.

Prices of beer have been increased twice in the last 12 months and a third increase in such a short time would be detrimental to industry volume as well as

the revenues for the State from the Beer category.

"Due to the impact on P, we estimate the tax revenues from the beer category may actually fall to the tune of ₹ 400 crore revenue from this proposal," said BAI. Apart from tax revenue loss, it would put over Rs 5,000 crore investment in 10 breweries in the state at risk due to low commercial viability and make future investment into capacity expansion doubtful.

Moreover, high prices and reduced volumes will hit sales, lower manufacturing activity, and impact trade as well as the hospitality industry, said BAI, adding the proposed changes void the draft notification are not in the interest of any of the stakeholders.

Over the display of the percentage of Malt and Sugar content on the label of beer bottles, BAI said it will mislead and confuse consumers, add undue compliance burden on beer manufacturers, force breweries to reveal confidential information, and reduce the ease of doing business in the state.

"We therefore request you to withdraw the draft notifications or amend them," said BAI in a letter written by its Director-General Vinod Giri.

The draft amendment proposes to reclassify beer into three subclasses and apply differential excise duty for each of them, as against a uniform rate on all beer. The government proposed a rate of duty of ₹ 10, ₹ 16 and ₹ 20 per bulk litre based on alcohol - below 5 per cent, 5 to 6.5 per cent and 6.5 to 8 per cent respectively. "We request to either withdraw it or revise this amendment to increase the minimum declared price levels to ₹ 400 per case for bottled beers, and review and rationalize the minimum AED of 130/BL which otherwise will lead to big jump in the P," it said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1.

## Himanta seeks West Bengal's

to come is wrong. The Rohingyas are trying to enter. The state governments must remain vigilant and work closely with the BSF," he said. "Assam and Tripura are already doing it. If the Bengal government also starts identifying the people, it will be a well-orchestrated effort," he said.

Maintaining that all bordering states must support BSF aggressively, Sarma said otherwise the situation may deteriorate. "We are least bothered about the region of the infiltrators, our focus is if someone comes illegally, they must be pushed back," he said. (PTI)

## Jharkhand tough state

will be campaigning here this time. If I can manage time, perhaps I will campaign at one or two places," Sarma added. (PTI)

## ADRE candidate dies in

to bring the documents and meet him near Thakurthan. As Milan collected the documents from his brother and headed back to the exam hall, the tragic accident occurred.

## Era of 'doom-gloom'

explore his potential and rise," he added. Dhankhar maintained that the North East region is in an advantageous position to reap the benefits of the development taking place in the country, especially through the Centre's focus on "Act East Policy". He said the Central government has spent ₹ 3.37 lakh crore for the region in the last decade and its footprint can be seen in the development of communication, connectivity and other sectors.

"Transformation of North East is a testament to the spirit of inclusion. For decades the region faced challenges relating to development. Much has been done and work is in progress," he added. (PTI)

## Not all projects came

the objective of "Viksit Bharat". Maharashtra's contribution in the field of industry, technology, airports, ports is immense and increasing investments, logistics, exports, best practices is important for foreign policy, Jaishankar said. Along with this, infrastructure development and skilled educational policies are also important, he said.

The Centre's focus is on boosting the economy and employment, the minister added. (PTI)

## PM Modi to launch

have to share with the other members of the family who are below the age of 70 years). All other senior citizens of the age 70 years and above will get a cover up to ₹ 5 lakh per year on a family basis. Senior citizens aged 70 years and above, who are under private health insurance policies or Employees' State Insurance scheme, will be eligible to avail benefits under the scheme, officials had said earlier.

However, those already availing benefits of other public health insurance schemes such as the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS), Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) and Ayushman Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) may either choose their existing scheme or opt for AB PM-JAY.

The scheme has covered 7.37 crore hospital admissions, including 49 per cent women beneficiaries. The public has benefited to the extent of over ₹ 1 lakh crore under the scheme, the health ministry had said earlier.

The AB PM-JAY scheme has witnessed continuous expansion of the beneficiary base, it said, adding that initially, 10.74 crore poor and vulnerable families comprising the bottom 40 per cent of India's population were covered under the scheme. In January 2022, the Centre revised the beneficiary base from 10.74 crore to 12 crore families considering India's decadal population growth of 11.7 per cent over the 2011 population.

The scheme was further expanded to cover 37 lakh ASHAs/AWHs/AWHs working across the country and their families for free healthcare benefits.

## Assam Police arrest kingpin

agency took the custody of custody of controversial actress Sumi Borah, her husband Tarkik Borah and another prime accused in the multi-crore online trading scam—Bishal Phukan. They were produced in the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court in Kamrup (Metro) district in Guwahati on Saturday.

The trio was brought to the city from Dibrugarh central jail on Friday along with five other accused in the trading scam. A team of Assam Police escorted them from Dibrugarh to Guwahati.

A CBI team also conducted a search operation in Dibrugarh at a business premise owned by Sumi Borah's brother. The raid operation continued until late hours on Saturday night.



HPCL listed the President of India with nil shareholding as its promoter in those filings.

This is despite the oil ministry's explicit advice, sources said, adding that HPCL delayed the eventual by seeking "clarifications" from various authorities.

HPCL relented in August 2019 after a rap from capital markets regulator Sebi for refusing to recognise its majority shareholder. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) asked HPCL to re-file shareholding patterns to stock exchanges for all quarters since the ONGC acquisition.

When Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) bought the government's stake in fuel retailer IBP Co Ltd, it was listed as the latter's promoter in every instance after the deal. The same was the case when IOC acquired a majority stake in Chennai Petroleum Corp Ltd (CPCL). Since acquiring a majority stake in HPCL, ONGC has only been able to appoint one director to that firm's board. Sources said the ONGC-HPCL synergy panel was of the view that there cannot be two chairmen within a group, and the holding company chairman should sit on the board of all its subsidiaries. (PTI)

Even after the Union Cabinet approval and ONGC buying out the entire government stake, HPCL for over one and half years refused to recognise ONGC as its promoter. It listed ONGC's shareholding of 51.11 per cent as a 'public shareholder' in as many as six quarterly shareholding filings with stock exchanges post-January 2018.



## Krishnaguru International Spiritual Youth Society holds 21<sup>st</sup> Biennial Conference

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Oct 27: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, in the presence of Vice President of India Jagdeep Dhankhar, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal, attended the 21<sup>st</sup> Biennial Conference of Krishnaguru International Spiritual Youth Society at Khanapara here on Sunday.

Addressing the gathering, Governor Acharya emphasised the enduring legacy of Prabhu Ishwar Krishnaguru, who strengthened the foundation of spirituality in Assam decades ago. "The spiritual light kindled by Prabhu Ishwar Krishnaguru on the sacred soil of Assam now illuminates all of humanity, including the Northeast," the Governor stated.

Acharya highlighted that while a blend of tradition and modernity forms India's body, spirituality remains its soul. He stressed that Krishnaguru Sevashram, established



in 1974, continues to play a vital role in preserving and promoting human values through various socio-educational initiatives. He also hailed the institution's role in enhancing the skills of artisans in the traditional bell metal industry, aligning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Vocal for Local' campaign.

The Governor further stated that under the guidance of Krishnaguru Premanand Prabhu, the Youth Society has emerged as a beacon of public service, engaging thousands of young people in welfare activities. He emphasised the crucial role of youth in nation-building, stating, "Our India is a young country, and only the youth have

the ability to take it forward in its pursuit of becoming Vishwaguru." He also urged the youth to carry forward the message of 'Nation First'.

The Governor also acknowledged Prabhu Ishwar Krishnaguru's extraordinary spiritual insight and his message of world peace and universal brotherhood, which continues to inspire and attract people worldwide.

Acharya added that the conference showcased the organisation's commitment to blending ancient traditions with modern progress, embodying the Upanishadic prayer 'Tamso Ma Jyotirgamaya'—the journey from darkness to light.

The conference was attended by Dr Sudesh Dhankhar, CEM of BTR Pramod Bodo, 'Bhaktimatri' Kuntala Patowari Goswami, president of Krishnaguru International Spiritual Youth Society Kamla Gogoi, along with a host of other dignitaries.

## Kuligaon LAMPS closure puts strain on FP shops in Bokajan



**HT Correspondent**  
BOKAJAN, Oct 27: The Kuligaon Large Area Multipurpose Societies (LAMPS) at Kuligaon, under the Borjan Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) of Bokajan LAC, has been closed for the last one and a half years, creating significant challenges for the Fair Price (FP) shops under its jurisdiction.

According to reports following a recent news story aired by local news portals on alleged misappropriations in the distribution of subsidised rice to FP shops on June 25, 2023, the superintendent of Food & Civil Supplies from the Diphu office shut down the Kuligaon LAMPS office.

Due to the closure, FP shop owners now have to procure rice from the Hidipi LAMPS, covering distances of 30 to 40 kilometers. This has doubled their transportation costs, which cuts into the little profit they make. FP shop owners voiced their concerns, appealing to the KAAC authorities to reopen the Kuligaon LAMPS to facilitate rice distribution as before.

## ADRE concludes peacefully in KA

**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, Oct 27: The third phase of the Assam Direct Recruitment Examination (ADRE) 2024 was successfully conducted on Sunday in Karbi Anglong district, aligning with similar exams across Assam. The examination was held in two sessions: Paper-I for Higher Secondary-level posts in the morning, followed by Paper-II for class VIII pass-level posts in the afternoon.

A total of 28,955 candidates were scheduled to appear in Karbi Anglong across 39 centers. Attendance for the first session reached 66.34 percent, while 64.43 percent of candidates participated in the afternoon session. The district administration has confirmed that the examination concluded peacefully, with no incidents reported.

## National seminar held at BKB College, Puranigudam

**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, Oct 27: Eminent academician Dr Alpana Bargohain spoke at a national-level seminar held at Puranigudam Birinchi Kumar Barua College, emphasising that women's empowerment is a gradual process, not a sudden occurrence. She stressed the importance of preparing oneself for this journey.

The seminar was recently organised by the college's Women's Cell in association with the department of Geography, focusing on the "problems and prospects of working women in the unorganised sector of Assam and the North East".

Dr Bargohain highlighted that women's empowerment is not limited to economic or social aspects but also encompasses political empowerment. She emphasised that a woman's ability to raise a healthy, well-educated child who grows into a responsible citizen contributes significantly to national progress.

Nagaland-based entrepreneur Jasmine Jeliang attended the program as a key resource person and shared her success story, inspiring women to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

Other speakers, including Dr Sujata Bhattacharya, Dr Ratna Bhuyan, and Dr Achyut Akash Barua, discussed legal rights, self-help groups, and entrepreneurship opportunities for women.

The event aimed to encourage women to become self-reliant and contribute to a healthy, empowered society.

The seminar was inaugurated by Professor Daizy Bora Talukder from Dibrugarh University, while Dr Nripen Ch Das, the principal of the college, delivered the welcome address. Over three hundred participants took an active part in the seminar, a press note asserted here.

## NF Railway to mark Vigilance Awareness Week

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Oct 27: NF Railway will observe 'Vigilance Awareness Week' from October 28 to November 3, 2024, across all its divisions, workshops, and construction field units. The theme guiding this 2024 awareness week is 'Culture of Integrity for Nation's Prosperity'. An oath will be administered by Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, general manager, Northeast Frontier Railway, and Arun Kumar Chaudhary, general manager, NF Railway (Construction), at the premises of the GM's Office, Maligaon, and GM (CON)'s office, Maligaon, respectively. All DRMs in their respective divisions, along with employees across the entire NF Railway family, will participate in the week. The aim of this pledge is to foster integrity and transparency in all activities, thus eradicating corruption in every aspect of life, including the workplace.

During the week-long Vigilance Awareness Week, various programs will be conducted throughout NF Railway to create awareness among railway employees and the general public. As part of the observance, various in-



teractive sessions with departmental officers of NF Railway Headquarters and divisions will be organised for systemic improvements. A 'Sangosthi' on the topic 'Culture of Integrity for Nation's Prosperity' will be held with participation from senior officials of NF Railway (Open Line and Construction Organisation). Essay writing, drawing, and painting competitions will be organised at Railway Higher Secondary, Netaji Vidyapeeth Higher Secondary, KV Maligaon Schools, and Zonal Railway Training Institute, Alipurduar, for school students. An inter-college debate on the theme 'Culture of Integrity for Nation's Prosperity' will be held on October 30, 2024 at Pragjyotish College, Guwahati. A street play by railway employees and members of Bharat Scouts and Guides will also be organised to spread awareness and sensitise citizens on the ill effects of corruption. A vigilance bulletin will be released, and a Walkathon will be organised during this observance to promote awareness.

## Historic unification of KSA factions achieved in Karbi Anglong

**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, Oct 27: In a new development within the Karbi Students Association (KSA) in Karbi Anglong, the much-anticipated unification of various KSA factions under the initiative of Karbi Rong Asar Amei (KRAA) has been achieved. Leaders and members of the five KSA factions, after resolving all differences, unanimously agreed to unify in a meeting held at the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) central committee office in Taralango on Saturday. This positive development follows months of intensive meetings led by KRAA members, with support from the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), Karbi Lammet Amei (KLA), and former KSA leaders and members.

In the meeting, leaders and members from the five factions of KSA — KSA Inglongpho, KSA Lumding Road led by president Thomson Rongpi, the KSA faction under president Jemson Timung, the KSA faction led by president Samson Teron, and the KSA faction led by president Sumit Timung — attended. Addressing the media, KRAA president Dhormosing Teron informed that elections for the positions of president and general secretary will be held on November 24 to establish a new KSA body. Two hundred electors, including 50 each from KCS, KLA, and KRAA, and 10 members from each KSA faction, will have



voting rights in the election.

For conducting the election, a presidium comprising the five presidents and five secretaries will act as conveners. The five presidents will be candidates for the position of president, and the five general secretaries will be candidates for secretary, with an election officer also appointed, Teron further informed.

The KRAA commended the continuous support from former KSA leaders and members in facilitating the unification process. It also praised the leaders of various KSA factions for heeding KRAA's advice and agreeing to the unification, which they believe will mark a historic moment for Karbi society.

Meanwhile, on behalf of the ex-KSA body, James Hanse expressed his heartfelt gratitude, appreciating the tireless efforts of village head-

## BTC principal secretary reviews developmental progress in Tamulpur



**HT Correspondent**  
KOKRAJHAR, Oct 27: To assess the status of developmental activities and the implementation of various schemes in Tamulpur district, the principal secretary of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), Akash Deep, conducted a day-long visit to several offices, institutions, and field activities in Tamulpur on Saturday.

**Morigaon Primary Teachers' Association opts out of non-educational activities**

**HT Correspondent**  
MORIGAON, Oct 27: The Morigaon District Primary Teachers' Association has made a significant decision not to participate in any non-educational activities starting on Sunday. This decision was made during the organisation's executive body meeting held on Sunday. The meeting, chaired by president Mihir Hazarika and led by general secretary Manas Pratim Patar, resolved to abstain from participating in non-educational activities organised by the Assam State Primary Teachers' Association.

The meeting was attended by Morigaon District Primary Teachers' Association Advisors Girindra Khataniar, Mojibur Rahman, and Bhadeshwar Deka, along with state member Nazrul Islam, vice-president Harlal Mandal, and assistant secretaries Pradipt Kumar Nath and Rajiv Chaharia.

The association's Digital Cell secretary Anup Kumar Das, Jagi Bhaktagaon Center president Mintu Kumar Barthakur, and other office bearers also spoke on the occasion. The meeting further decided to celebrate Children's Day with a grand program and to publish an e-magazine under the management of the Digital Cell of the Morigaon District Association.

He urged all involved to work collaboratively and efficiently to address the challenges ahead, ensuring that developmental goals are met and benefits reach all sections of society.

During the visit, he inspected the Tamulpur Sub-Divisional Center and held discussions with officers and employees regarding various issues. He was accompa-

nied by the district commissioner of Tamulpur, Pankaj Chakraborty. The principal secretary suggested that the district commissioner form a committee to resolve the issues at the Sub-Divisional Center.

Additionally, the principal secretary visited the integrated farming system under the DWIMU Project in Dumuria village and the Daogangbari Handloom Cluster under the Bodoland Handloom Mission, where he interacted with beneficiaries. He also inspected the facilities and functioning of the Tamulpur Sub-Divisional Civil Hospital at Barnagar.

Later, the BTC principal secretary attended a review meeting chaired by the minister of PHE, Skill Development, Employment and Entrepreneurship, and Tourism, Jayanta Mallabaruah, at the Tamulpur DC Office.

## Minister Mallabaruah pushes for swift action on development projects in Tamulpur



**HT Correspondent**  
KOKRAJHAR, Oct 27: State minister for PHE, Skill Development, Employment and Entrepreneurship, and Tourism, Jayanta Mallabaruah, conducted a comprehensive review of the developmental activities underway in Tamulpur district on Saturday.

The review included an assessment of initiatives from 26 departments aimed at accelerating the district's progress. The minister emphasised, "In our pursuit of progress, we must ensure that the benefits reach those who truly need them—our farmers and the community at large. It is imperative that we act swiftly and decisively to turn our plans into reality."

During the meeting, minister Mallabaruah underscored the importance of completing pending projects on time, especially those identified as priorities. He expressed concern over the need for adequate staffing within departments, highlighting that effective implementation relies on having the

right personnel in place.

A significant focus of the discussion was the agricultural sector, where the Minister urged departmental heads to ensure that genuine farmers benefit from rice procurement processes. He noted that only brokers seem to be gaining from these transactions, stressing the need to shift focus towards actual farmers.

Regarding the numerous applications for schemes like 'PM FME' being rejected by banks, the minister called for an immediate report from department heads. He reiterated the importance of public welfare, stressing that the government must prioritise community needs in all its initiatives. The review meeting was attended by key officials, including local MLA Jalen Daimari, principal secretary of BTC Akash Deep, secretary of Higher Education Narayan Konwor, district commissioner Pankaj Chakraborty, superintendent of police Diganta Kumar Choudhury, and various departmental heads.

## Nowgong College NSS gears up for 'My Bharat' portal anniversary

**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, Oct 27: The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, government of India, has planned a series of activities, including market cleaning, hospital volunteering, and traffic volunteering, to celebrate the first anniversary of the 'My Bharat' portal from October 27 to October 30, 2024, in 500 cities across the country.

The ministry has designated Nagaon as the nodal district and instructed the National Service Scheme (NSS) units in Nagaon to undertake these activities. The NSS Unit of Nowgong College (Autonomous), in association with the NSS Units of Nowgong Girls' College, Khagarjan College, and GNDG Commerce College, held a discussion on October 27, 2024, and prepared a series of activities as suggested by the Ministry.

The meeting, attended by programme officers of the respective colleges and Dr Bhuban Ch Chutia, programme officer of Nowgong College (Autonomous), reviewed the SOP for celebrating Diwali with 'My Bharat'.

Dr Chutia mentioned that the NSS team in Nagaon district identified three primary locations in consultation with competent authorities. On October 28, the team will conduct market cleaning activities at Nagaon Barabazar in association with the Barabazar Market Association and Nagaon Municipal Board. On October 29, 2024, NSS volunteers will undertake hospital volunteering activities at Nagaon BP Civil Hospital. On October 30, 2024, the team will engage in traffic volunteering at the Clock Tower traffic point. Additionally, volunteers are planning a mass awareness programme, 'Say No to Crackers', in front of the Nowgong College (Autonomous) premises, with principals and programme officers from the respective colleges present, a press note asserted here on Sunday.

## Event at Mariani College highlights urgent conservation efforts for hoolock gibbons

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Oct 27: Aaranyak, with a mission to conduct research, training, and conservation activities in Northeast India, held a day-long awareness program at Mariani College in Jorhat district on International Gibbon Day, October 24.

The event was organised in collaboration with the department of Zoology, IQAC, Mariani College, state Forest Department (particularly Jorhat Forest Division) with support from The Habitats Trust, IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group, and the IUCN Section of Small Apes.

The Western hoolock gibbon (hoolock hoolock) is found only in the seven northern states of India, located on the southern bank of the Dibang-Brahmaputra river system. Unfortunately, hunting, encroachment, and habitat fragmentation pose the greatest threats to gibbons in India.

Additionally, there is a lack of awareness about the hoolock gibbon among various sections of the population, including students. Many educators and students remain unaware of the numerous aspects of Hoolock gibbon conservation strategies. To address this gap and foster a conservation



drive in Assam, Aaranyak is conducting a series of programs focused on hoolock gibbon conservation.

The program was chaired and inaugurated by Dr Horen Gowala, principal of Mariani College. Dr Dilip Chetry, senior primatologist and head of the Primate Research and Conservation Division at Aaranyak, served as the keynote speaker.

Dr Chetry, who also serves as vice-chair of the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group for South Asia, delivered a talk titled 'The State of Western Hoolock Gibbon Conser-

vation in Assam'. In his keynote address, Dr Chetry emphasised the objectives of International Gibbon Day, which began in 2015: to raise awareness about gibbons and how people can help protect them, to highlight conservation efforts by various organisations, individuals, and communities, and to promote local cultures linked to gibbon conservation. He also addressed the role and responsibilities of educators and students in gibbon habitat areas.

Dr Chetry shared details of Aaranyak's conservation initiatives for the hoolock gib-

bon in Assam throughout 2024. These included educational awareness programs that benefited around 5,000 students, training sessions for 120 frontline staff of the state Forest Department, and various research activities.

Speaker Rupam Bhuyan, forest range officer (in-charge), Mariani Forest Range, H Gibbon Sanctuary, highlighted some challenges faced by the sanctuary and called upon the college community to support Hoolock gibbon conservation efforts. Another speaker, Dr Bhaskar Buragohain from the department of Botany, Mariani College, discussed the importance of orchid conservation at Gibbon Sanctuary.

The International Gibbon Day program was coordinated by Dr Heman Saikia and Dr Rajkumar Buragohain, and anchored by Aishwara Chetia and Monideepa Dutta Borah. Approximately 1,000 students and several faculty members, including Dr Arpanjali Borah, Nibedita Sharma, Rajen Dutta, Ratan Singh, Khirod Chandra Deka, and Somorita Kashyap, attended the event. Key issues such as oil exploration and electrification around the H Gibbon Sanctuary were also raised and discussed.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

A promise must never be broken.  
—Alexander Hamilton

## Yogi vs Akhilesh in UP by-polls?

The Congress has left the Uttar Pradesh by-polls, leaving the field open for the Samajwadi Party Supremo Akhilesh Yadav against the state-BJP led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who has sole responsibility of redeeming BJP after Akhilesh Yadav took the saffron party to the cleaners in the Lok Sabha elections with his 'Pichada Dalit Alpsankyak (PDA)' axis of resistance. The Samajwadi Party head has sworn to repeat his 2024 success in the 2027 assembly elections with the by-polls, set to take place on November 13, a stepping stone for the assembly polls. The Samajwadi Party chief is confidence-personified, his dependency on 'PDA' full and final, as he challenges Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to a do-or-die battle in the state which routinely elects prime ministers, from the first one to the latest one now residing at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg. Yadav believes, for good reason, that 'Pichada Dalit Alpsankyak' will fetch him not just the bypolls but also victory in the 2027 assembly elections.

Yogi Adityanath is one of the star campaigners for the BJP outside Uttar Pradesh and he will be talking a lot about 'Batenge toh katenge' wherever the NDA will be contesting. Akhilesh Yadav, on the other hand, will for the main part, only be campaigning in Uttar Pradesh. It has still not got into the BJP top brass that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is living the reality, is practical to a fault, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi is living in denial and is only around because of a bunch of committed Modi-bhaktas who gave him 240 Lok Sabha seats. BJP leaders and social media influencers, who kowtow to the BJP top brass, are scared stiff of relegating Prime Minister Modi to second place in the high-stakes popularity perception battle in the BJP, in which Yogi Adityanath is clearly in the lead. So, when talk meanders to 'Batenge toh katenge', a primeval fear grips these cowards.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains Supreme No. 1 in the BJP, but Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reigns supreme among Hindu voters and he has the support of RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat because Bhagwat has read the signs and seen the writing on the wall. The two had an hour-long one-on-one in Mathura earlier this week and probably Modi too must have come around to accepting that the Yogi is more popular among Hindus than Modi is among Muslims! Hindus vote for the BJP but Muslims have told it to Modi's face that they wouldn't vote for him or for the BJP if he stood on his head! In Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is hard to beat. It wasn't the Yogi's fault that Akhilesh Yadav walked off with the kudos in Lok Sabha polls 2024. The setback laid fully at the central leadership's door. The goal is the assembly elections while the upcoming bypolls will be another opportunity for Akhilesh Yadav to show his political mettle. And with Akhilesh Yadav stampeding the Congress out of Uttar Pradesh, it is a direct one-on-one between the Yogi and the Yadav, both with prime Ministerial aspirations.

# Empowering India's Youth: The promise of the PM Internship Scheme

Internships have long been celebrated as a mutually advantageous arrangement between young job seekers and employers. Education researchers and learning scientists underscore the value of work-based learning, emphasizing how on-the-job experiences can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world skills. Scholars like David Kolb, John Dewey, and Kurt Lewin have championed experiential learning models, proving them to be crucial components in workforce development. International studies further confirm the positive impacts of such experiential approaches, highlighting that internships refine communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.

The recently inaugurated PM Internship Scheme (PMIS) stands out as a promising initiative for India's youth. Tailored to provide targeted, market-oriented learning, this scheme seeks to empower economically disadvantaged young adults while simultaneously addressing the nation's skill gap.

### PM Internship Scheme: A Structured Path to Youth Empowerment

Launched as a collaborative effort between the government and the private sector, the PMIS introduces a 12-month internship program specifically tailored to benefit India's underprivileged youth. The scheme targets individuals aged 21 to 24 from low-income households, whose educational qualifications range from matriculation to a graduate level (excluding specialized qualifications like IIT graduates or Chartered Accountants).

The program aims to provide work exposure in top 500 companies, a rare opportunity for individuals from rural areas or smaller cities, often left out of the mainstream job market due to systemic inequalities.

Each participant under the PMIS will receive a monthly stipend of INR 5,000, with the government contributing INR

4,500 and the hosting company adding INR 500. Additionally, an allowance of INR 6,000 is earmarked for incidental expenses, easing the transition from the educational environment to the corporate world. Companies involved are also encouraged to utilize their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds to cover the associated costs. In its pilot phase, the scheme targets 1.25 lakh youth in 2024, with a five-year goal of reaching one crore young adults, a step poised to transform India's labor market landscape.

### Bridging the Gap: Benefits for Young Aspirants

For young participants, PMIS is not just about acquiring professional experience—it is about entering a transformative phase of life. The exposure to the corporate world differs significantly from the relatively stable and structured academic environment, pushing students out of their comfort zones.

This experience helps youth not only to explore and refine their career paths but also to develop essential skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, teamwork, and time management.

Internships through the PMIS break down multiple barriers for aspirants from smaller towns and villages, who often lack access to resources that their urban counterparts take for granted. Skills such as fluency in English, computer literacy, email etiquette, and even conducting reliable online research can be daunting for many. While internships have become standard in prestigious institutions and professional courses, they are uncommon in state universities and lesser-known colleges, where most of India's youth are educated.

The PMIS aims to rectify this imbalance, leveling the playing field for candidates from non-metro cities and paving the way for future job placements.



Beyond skill acquisition, the PMIS offers newfound financial independence to young aspirants, fostering a sense of empowerment and self-worth. This is particularly significant for young women, whose financial autonomy could lead to a shift in life choices, such as the timing of marriage or negotiating pre-nuptial conditions.

For employers, the scheme is not merely a low-cost way to assess a candidate's suitability for long-term employment but also a strategic investment in bridging the skills gap. Over the 12-month internship, companies can evaluate an intern's intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional quotient (EQ), adhering to the popular corporate philosophy of "hiring for attitude and training for skill."

### Aligning with National Policy: PMIS and the Broader Economic Context

The PMIS aligns closely with the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes employability and skill development as key outcomes of education. By acting as a "finishing school" for graduates, internships minimize the economic loss caused by unproductive talent, a phenomenon often termed as "talent without employability."

With technological advancements—such as AI and automation—reshaping the job market, adaptability to change and proficiency in life skills are becoming indispensable. The PMIS offers a bridge from education to employment that will be critical in this rapidly evolving environment, potentially influencing capital-to-labor ratios in the manufacturing sector over the long term.

The initiative is not without challenges, however. Integrating a large number of interns into companies, particularly from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, remains a logistical hurdle. Additionally, the adequacy of the monthly stipend—INR 5,000—raises concerns, especially if participants need to relocate for the internship. Here, flexible solutions such as remote work, hiring interns in non-metro offices or factories, and additional company-provided stipends could mitigate these obstacles.

### Global Context and Additional Data: The Success of Similar Programs

Globally, countries have experimented with similar work-based learning schemes to address youth unemployment and skill gaps. In Germany, for instance, the Dual Education System integrates vocational training with formal education, yielding a highly skilled workforce. Australia's Appren-

ticeship System and the UK's T-Levels have also shown promise in bridging the skills gap and preparing youth for industry demands. According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), countries that invest in internships and vocational training tend to have lower rates of youth unemployment and higher labor market participation.

Comparatively, India's PMIS aims to create a comprehensive framework tailored to local conditions, which combines the best of global models with Indian realities. By focusing on youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, the scheme promises to democratize access to the workforce, fostering a more inclusive labor market.

### Looking Ahead: The Potential of the PM Internship Scheme

The PMIS represents a significant step towards a more equitable and dynamic Indian labor market. By providing structured and accessible internships, the scheme promises to enhance the employability of millions of young people, offering them a fighting chance in a competitive environment. In an age where AI and automation are altering the landscape of work, the emphasis on adaptability, real-world skills, and continuous learning will prove vital for India's youth.

For the Indian economy, the benefits are manifold: a reduction in skill shortages, an improvement in employability, and a more inclusive job market. The PMIS, with its market-led and government-supported model, could very well set the stage for a new era of workforce development in India—one that prioritizes skills, opportunity, and equity. If successfully implemented and scaled, the PMIS will not only address the immediate needs of India's underserved youth but also lay the foundation for a more skilled and resilient workforce, contributing to the nation's economic and social progress for years to come.

(The writer can be reached at dipakurmigpltd@gmail.com)

## The prospect of an end to the Russia-Ukraine war

By: Satyabrata Borah

The war between Russia and Ukraine, which began in February 2022, continues to be a complex and volatile conflict with significant global ramifications. As of now, the war shows little sign of resolution, raising important questions about when and how this devastating chapter might end. In this article, we explore the major factors at play in determining whether peace is achievable, the obstacles to a settlement, and what the potential outcomes could mean for the world.

To understand the challenges of ending the Russia-Ukraine war, one must first examine the deep historical and geopolitical roots of the conflict. The war is not just a matter of territorial disputes but also a clash of national identities, power dynamics, and long-standing grievances.

For Russia, Ukraine's move toward Western alliances, particularly its aspirations to join NATO and the European Union, has been seen as a threat to its sphere of influence. On the other hand, Ukraine views its sovereignty and territorial integrity as non-negotiable, especially after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the support for separatist movements in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

These historical grievances, compounded by Russia's desire to reassert itself as a global power and Ukraine's ambition to integrate with the West, have created an almost intractable standoff. The stakes for both countries, therefore, go beyond mere territorial control—they involve the preservation of national identities, security, and their respective futures in the international order.

The war has not only ravaged Ukraine but has had far-reaching consequences for the global community. The humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict has displaced millions of people, destroyed infrastructure, and led to thousands of civilian casualties. Additionally, the economic repercussions, such as disruptions to global food supplies (due to Ukraine's role as a major grain exporter) and rising energy prices have exacerbated inflation and economic instability worldwide. The conflict has also redefined global alliances, with NATO countries, the European Union, and other Western nations imposing sanctions on Russia and providing substantial military and financial aid to Ukraine.

The global dimension of the war adds another layer of complexity to the peace process. Major Powers like the United States, European countries, and even China and India have vested interests in the outcome. A resolution must, therefore, take into account not only the demands of Russia and Ukraine but also the broader geopolitical implications. The question is: how can these international actors contribute to a lasting peace rather than prolonging the conflict?

### Achieving a diplomatic solution is made difficult by several factors:

Both Russia and Ukraine have strong reasons to be suspicious of each other's intentions. Russia insists on protecting the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine and seeks to prevent Ukraine from aligning further with Western institutions. Ukraine, on the other hand, demands the restoration of its pre-2014 borders, including Crimea, a condition Russia is highly unlikely to accept.

The war has become a grinding conflict of attrition. Ukraine, bolstered by Western military support, has demonstrated resilience against Russian advances. Russia, in turn, has escalated its military operations in an effort to break Ukrainian defenses. Neither side appears willing to give up ground, further complicating diplomatic negotiations.

The political will of both sides' leadership also plays a critical role. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has shown a steadfast commitment to his country's independence, while Russian President Vladimir Putin has staked much of his political legacy on the success of Russia's military campaign. Both leaders face enormous domestic and international pressure, making concessions appear politically costly.

The role of international actors, particularly NATO and Western countries, adds another layer of complexity. While their support for Ukraine is critical for its survival, it can also fuel further tensions. Russia views NATO's involvement as direct interference and as an existential threat, and this has further entrenched its position. The West, meanwhile, faces the dilemma of supporting Ukraine without escalating the conflict into a broader war with Russia.

### While the current trajectory of the conflict seems bleak, there are several possible scenarios for how the war might end:

Although increasingly remote, negotiated settlement could occur if both sides reach a military stalemate and seek to avoid further losses. A ceasefire might be brokered through the mediation of neutral actors like Turkey or the United Nations, with both Russia and Ukraine making difficult compromises. This could involve territorial concessions, guarantees of neutrality for Ukraine, and a commitment to rebuilding the war-torn regions. However, the likelihood of this is diminished by both sides' maximalist goals and the deep distrust between them.

If neither side is willing to compromise, the war could drag on for years, similar to protracted conflicts like the Syrian civil war. In this scenario, the fighting may not stop completely, but the intensity could decrease, with intermittent ceasefires and negotiations that never lead to a full resolution. This would mean continued instability in the region, ongoing humanitar-

ian suffering, and further economic fallout.

Decisive Military Victory a less likely but possible outcome is that one side could achieve a decisive military victory, forcing the other to capitulate. For Ukraine, this would involve recapturing all occupied territories, including Crimea, and securing its borders. For Russia, a victory might involve capturing Kyiv or forcing Ukraine into accepting a puppet government. However, given the current state of the conflict, neither side seems capable of such a clear-cut victory.

If the situation deteriorates further, there is a possibility of increased international intervention, either diplomatically or militarily. This could involve a peacekeeping force or a broader international coalition aimed at enforcing a ceasefire. However, such an intervention risks escalating tensions between Russia and NATO, making this a risky and controversial option.

Ending the Russia-Ukraine war will require both sides to reconsider their current strategies. Trust-building measures, such as prisoner exchanges or humanitarian corridors, could lay the groundwork for more meaningful negotiations. Additionally, the role of neutral mediators, such as Turkey or the United Nations, will be essential in facilitating dialogue between the warring parties.

Both Russia and Ukraine will need to balance their domestic political imperatives with the international demand for peace. Russia's leadership, in particular, will need to assess whether the continued isolation and economic damage from sanctions are worth the territorial gains in Ukraine. Ukraine, meanwhile, must decide whether the full restoration of its pre-2014 borders is worth the human and economic costs of a prolonged war.

Ultimately, the war will end when both sides recognize that continued conflict is more costly than compromise. Whether this moment comes sooner or later will depend on the evolving dynamics on the battlefield, the economic and political pressures facing both countries, and the involvement of the international community in brokering peace.

The end of the Russia-Ukraine war remains uncertain, but it is clear that a resolution will require complex and difficult negotiations involving not only the two warring nations but also the broader international community. As long as both sides remain entrenched in their positions, the conflict will continue to inflict untold suffering on Ukraine and destabilize global economies and political alliances. A diplomatic solution, while elusive, remains the most viable path to ending the war and beginning the process of rebuilding. The world watches, hoping that peace, however distant it may seem, can eventually be achieved. (The author can be reached at 9854372736 or satyabratorah12@gmail.com)

## How will Lawrence Bishnoi's rising popularity affect the youth?

By: Deborshi Gautam

In the current times, whether it's print media, electronic media, or social media, the most frequently mentioned name is Lawrence Bishnoi. His popularity, especially among the youth, is growing rapidly. But who exactly is Lawrence Bishnoi, and why is he at the center of attention? Lawrence Bishnoi is a young man born on February 12, 1993, into a middle-class family in Punjab. As a student, Lawrence completed his schooling in his hometown. He then enrolled in DAV College in Chandigarh for higher education, followed by enrolling at Punjab University in 2011 to study law.

While studying at the university, Lawrence was drawn to student politics and entered it actively. After facing failures in student politics, Lawrence became increasingly frustrated. He was influenced by the English scholar Henry Lawrence and changed his name to Lawrence Bishnoi. During his university days, Lawrence came into contact with a person named Goldy Brar. It was during his time at the university that Lawrence Bishnoi became deeply involved in the world of crime. While still studying at the university, Lawrence Bishnoi was arrested in cases involving murder and threats. As a result, he had to spend time in jail.

There is a common perception that people reform after being in prison, but in Lawrence Bishnoi's case, jail only led him deeper into the world of crime. Lawrence was determined to establish himself as a gangster. With the help of various arms dealers and other gangsters, Lawrence expanded his influence not only in Punjab but also in other states across the country. Lawrence Bishnoi's journey from being an ordinary middle-class young man to becoming a notorious gangster has raised significant questions about the country's law and order system. His gang is accused of carrying out numerous high-profile murders both in India and abroad. Some of these accusations have been directly claimed by Lawrence Bishnoi himself, while others remain allegations due to a lack of evidence.

If we highlight some significant incidents, we can see that Lawrence Bishnoi was involved in the murder of popular Punjabi singer Sidhu Moose Wala on May 29, 2022, a crime orchestrated along with Goldy Brar. Lawrence's name also surfaced in the September 21, 2023 murder of pro-Khalistani supporter Sukhdeep Singh.

Additionally, Lawrence has been vocally active against Salman Khan for the blackbuck poaching case in Jodhpur. In 2018, Lawrence openly threat-

ened to kill Salman Khan in Jodhpur. As part of this, shots were fired at Salman Khan's Mumbai residence, a crime in which Lawrence Bishnoi is allegedly involved. There are also accusations that Lawrence Bishnoi was behind the shooting at the home of singer and actor Gippy Grewal in Canada due to his closeness with Salman Khan. Moreover, Lawrence's name surfaced again in connection with the October 12, 2024 murder of political leader and businessman Baba Siddiqui in Mumbai, a case that the Mumbai police are currently investigating.

Although Lawrence Bishnoi is currently imprisoned, his name still evokes fear in various parts of the country. Lawrence is presently held in Gujarat's Sabarmati Jail, one of the oldest jails in the country, where Mahatma Gandhi was also imprisoned by the British administration during India's freedom movement. Lawrence was transferred to Sabarmati Jail from Delhi Jail about 14 months ago, and he has not been allowed outside the jail since. Under a special law, Lawrence Bishnoi is to remain incarcerated in Sabarmati Jail until August 2025. This special law permits the state or central government to detain a criminal in a specific jail if releasing them could lead to law and order issues.

Furthermore, this law has two other provisions. As of now, there are about 79 registered cases against Lawrence Bishnoi in various states of the country. If Lawrence is named as an accused in the recent Mumbai murder case, this would be the 80th case against him. Out of the 79 cases, Lawrence has already been acquitted in several due to a lack of evidence.

Lawrence Bishnoi's gang has even been discussed internationally, with allegations from the Canadian government that India has used members of Lawrence's gang to carry out the murders of pro-Khalistani individuals holding Canadian citizenship. Due to Lawrence Bishnoi's involvement in numerous high-profile murders, his name has gained extensive media and social media coverage. On social media, many people have expressed support for Lawrence Bishnoi, providing various justifications. Some argue that Lawrence's actions against Salman Khan are justified because they believe Khan hurt the religious sentiments of the Bishnoi community.

Others question why those who supported figures like Afzal Guru and Yakub Memon, accused of treason, are now opposing Lawrence Bishnoi, who they claim is acting in the country's interest. Such arguments have found trac-

tion, particularly among the youth, who are increasingly drawn to these justifications.

However, taking up arms and defying the law cannot be justified under any circumstances. The Indian Constitution does not endorse any actions taken outside the bounds of the law. The attraction of the youth to Lawrence Bishnoi is a worrying sign for the country. Once someone acquires weapons, they could be tempted to undertake any kind of illegal activity. If the youth begin to see Lawrence Bishnoi's actions as acceptable and follow in his footsteps, it would be a threat to the country.

Moreover, it is widely reported that even though Lawrence Bishnoi is imprisoned, he continues to orchestrate his operations from jail. If this is true, it would mark a dark chapter in the country's legal system. If a criminal can operate their empire from inside a jail, then the distinction between being imprisoned and being free becomes irrelevant. In fact, running criminal operations from jail is seen as safer for criminals since they are constantly under police protection inside the prison.

The youth must not idolize someone like Lawrence Bishnoi. There is a need for awareness about the unlawful nature of his actions. Beyond just murder and extortion, Lawrence is also accused of involvement in illegal arms trafficking and drug distribution. Therefore, it is imperative to stop portraying Lawrence Bishnoi as a hero based on selective incidents. Any person who engages in criminal activities—whether it's Lawrence Bishnoi, Afzal Guru, or Yakub Memon—is a criminal. Attempting to justify one criminal while condemning another only creates division in society. Criminals have no religion, caste or creed.

Thus, comments in support of criminals should not be made with bias, as they only divide society and lead to chaos. This division creates a wave of support and opposition instead of distinguishing between right and wrong, misleading the youth. In the case of Lawrence Bishnoi, this has already happened. Such influence on the youth will undoubtedly lead them towards a dark future. Supporting criminals and encouraging the youth to be drawn towards crime is more harmful to society than the criminals themselves. Those who support and justify criminals should also be investigated to prevent anyone from daring to defend criminals in the future. (The author is an Executive Editor of Assamese E-Magazine Sobdabak & he can be reached at gautamdeborshi@gmail.com)



# Cold drinks, hot problems: Unpacking the health risks

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

In the modern age of convenience, cold drinks have become a staple in the daily routines of millions of people worldwide. Whether it's grabbing a can of soda during lunch, reaching for a sugary energy drink to combat fatigue, or sipping a chilled cola on a hot summer day, these beverages are often considered a refreshing and harmless indulgence. However, beneath the fizz and the sweet taste lies a darker reality—cold drinks, while enjoyable, carry serious health risks that can lead to long-term consequences for individuals and society at large. As the consumption of cold drinks rises globally, it's critical to unpack the health risks they pose and understand the serious problems that may be brewing within each bottle or can.

The most glaring concern with cold drinks is their extraordinarily high sugar content. Most sodas and sugary beverages are loaded with added sugars, typically in the form of high-fructose corn syrup or sucrose, making them calorie-dense without offering any real nutritional value. A typical 12-ounce can of soda contains anywhere between 35 to 40 grams of sugar, equating to about 9 to 10 teaspoons of sugar per serving. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that adults limit their daily intake of added sugars to about 25 grams (or 6 teaspoons) to maintain health, meaning just one can of soda can far exceed the suggested daily limit.

The human body is not designed to handle such large quantities of sugar in liquid form, and consuming cold drinks regularly has been shown to cause serious metabolic disturbances. Sugary drinks cause rapid spikes in blood glucose levels, triggering the release of insulin to manage

the sudden influx of sugar. Over time, repeated consumption of high-sugar beverages can lead to insulin resistance, a condition where the body's cells no longer respond properly to insulin. This is a precursor to type 2 diabetes, a chronic condition that has become a global epidemic, closely tied to the rising consumption of cold drinks. In fact, studies have consistently shown that individuals who drink sugary beverages regularly are at a significantly higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those who do not.

In addition to contributing to diabetes, cold drinks are a major driver of the obesity crisis, which affects millions worldwide. Sugary beverages are a perfect storm of high-calorie content with low satiety. Unlike whole foods, which contain fiber and nutrients that contribute to a feeling of fullness, cold drinks are essentially empty calories. This means that people can easily consume large quantities of these beverages without feeling full, leading to overconsumption of calories and subsequent weight gain. This is particularly concerning in children and adolescents, who are often the primary consumers of sugary drinks and are at a higher risk of developing lifelong unhealthy eating habits.

Obesity is a known risk factor for a host of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, certain types of cancer, and metabolic syndrome—a cluster of conditions that include high blood pressure, elevated blood sugar, excess abdominal fat, and abnormal cholesterol levels. These conditions significantly increase the risk of heart disease and stroke, which remain leading causes of death globally. The role of sugary cold drinks in promoting obesity and its associated health risks cannot be overstated. In recent decades, numerous studies have drawn direct links between the regular consumption



of these beverages and rising rates of obesity across different age groups and populations.

Another serious health concern linked to cold drink consumption is its impact on liver health, particularly in the development of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). NAFLD occurs when fat builds up in the liver, leading to inflammation and potential liver damage. Although traditionally associated with alcohol abuse, NAFLD has become increasingly common in people who consume large amounts of sugary beverages. The liver processes fructose, a sugar commonly found in cold drinks, differently from glucose, and excessive fructose intake can overwhelm the liver's capacity to metabolize it. Over time, this can lead to fat buildup in liver cells, contributing to the progression of NAFLD. Alarmingly, NAFLD often presents no symptoms in its early stages, meaning that by the time it is diagnosed, significant liver damage may have already occurred.

The role of cold drinks in contributing to poor oral health is well documented, and the effects are particularly evident in children and teenagers. The high sugar content in cold drinks creates an ideal environment for

harmful bacteria in the mouth to thrive. These bacteria feed on the sugars and produce acids that attack the enamel—the hard, protective outer layer of teeth. This acid erosion is the leading cause of tooth decay and cavities. Moreover, the acidic nature of many cold drinks, especially those that are carbonated, further accelerates the erosion of tooth enamel, even in the absence of sugar. Once tooth enamel is damaged, it cannot regenerate, leaving teeth vulnerable to decay, sensitivity, and, ultimately, tooth loss.

In young children, who may consume cold drinks as a regular part of their diet, the risk of developing early childhood cavities is high. Poor oral health in childhood often sets the stage for a lifetime of dental problems, and in severe cases, can lead to infections that affect overall health. Furthermore, as more sugary drinks are consumed in place of healthier options like water or milk, children miss out on important nutrients, such as calcium, that are essential for developing strong teeth and bones.

Caffeine is another ingredient commonly found in many cold drinks, especially in colas and energy drinks. While moderate caffeine intake is generally safe

for most people, the excessive consumption of caffeinated beverages can lead to a range of health issues. Caffeine is a stimulant that affects the central nervous system, increasing heart rate and blood pressure. For people who are particularly sensitive to caffeine or consume it in large quantities, this can lead to symptoms such as restlessness, anxiety, insomnia, and heart palpitations.

Moreover, caffeine is mildly addictive, and frequent consumers of caffeinated cold drinks may develop a dependence, experiencing withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, irritability, and fatigue when they reduce their intake. Another less commonly discussed but equally concerning effect of cold drinks is their impact on bone health. Many sodas, particularly colas, contain phosphoric acid, which can interfere with the body's ability to absorb calcium—a mineral crucial for maintaining strong bones.

Over time, regular consumption of phosphoric acid-rich sodas can lead to a reduction in bone mineral density, increasing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures. This is especially concerning for women, particularly postmenopausal women, who are already at a higher risk for osteoporosis. In younger people, especially teenagers and young adults, the habit of consuming soda in place of milk or other calcium-rich beverages can have long-term negative effects on bone health, increasing their risk of fractures later in life. Even diet sodas, which are marketed as a "healthier" alternative to regular sugary drinks, come with their own set of risks.

While these beverages contain artificial sweeteners like aspartame or sucralose instead of sugar, studies have raised concerns about their long-term effects on metabolism and overall

health. Some research suggests that artificial sweeteners may interfere with the body's ability to regulate blood sugar and may even increase cravings for sweet, high-calorie foods, potentially leading to weight gain.

Moreover, artificial sweeteners may disrupt the gut microbiome, the collection of bacteria and other microorganisms in the digestive tract that play a crucial role in digestion, immunity, and overall health. Alterations to the gut microbiome have been linked to a wide range of health problems, including obesity, diabetes, and gastrointestinal disorders.

The issue of dehydration is another hidden problem with cold drinks. Although they are liquids, many cold drinks, particularly those with caffeine, act as diuretics, increasing urine production and promoting fluid loss from the body. People who rely on sodas and energy drinks as their primary beverages may not be adequately hydrating themselves, especially if they are not consuming enough water. Chronic dehydration can lead to a range of health problems, including kidney stones, urinary tract infections, and impaired cognitive function. In extreme cases, dehydration can lead to kidney damage, particularly in individuals who already have preexisting kidney conditions.

Despite these alarming health risks, the consumption of cold drinks continues to rise, driven by aggressive marketing campaigns, easy availability, and cultural habits that promote sugary beverages as part of daily life. As awareness grows around the dangers of excessive cold drink consumption, it is important for both individuals and public health officials to take action. Governments and health organizations have a role to play in regulating the sale and marketing of these beverages, particularly to vulnerable populations like children. In

some countries, taxes on sugary drinks have been implemented as a way to reduce consumption, and public awareness campaigns have been launched to educate people about the health risks.

On an individual level, reducing or eliminating cold drinks from the diet in favor of healthier alternatives is a simple but powerful step toward better health. Drinking water, herbal teas, and natural fruit juices can provide hydration without the added sugars, artificial sweeteners, and other harmful ingredients found in cold drinks. Replacing sugary drinks with water not only benefits physical health but also helps to reduce the environmental impact associated with the production and disposal of plastic bottles and cans.

We can say at the end that, while cold drinks may offer a momentary sense of refreshment, their long-term impact on health is deeply concerning. From metabolic disorders like diabetes and obesity to dental decay, liver disease, and weakened bones, the risks associated with frequent cold drink consumption are serious and far-reaching. Even diet sodas, often seen as a healthier alternative, carry potential health hazards. As the evidence continues to mount, it becomes increasingly clear that the benefits of cutting back on cold drinks far outweigh the fleeting pleasure they provide. As society grapples with the growing burden of chronic diseases linked to lifestyle choices, making healthier beverage choices can have a profound impact on personal and public health. By understanding the risks and making informed decisions, individuals can protect themselves from the silent but significant dangers of cold drink consumption. *(The writer is an Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-Magazine SAMPROTIK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

## Parkinson's, ADHD tied to genes that affect brain volume

By: Hannah Flynn

Brain volume has been linked to Parkinson's disease and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) risk by an international group of researchers.

A number of new genetic variants associated with the volume of nine subcortical brain structures were identified in a genome-wide association study.

Researchers showed they could predict measurements of parts of the brain using polygenic scores they developed using these variants, which worked across cohorts from different ancestries.

Lead author Miguel Renteria, PhD leads the Computational Neurogenetics Lab in the Mental Health & Neuroscience Program at the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Herston, Australia.

He told Medical News Today that he and his colleagues "have been studying the genetics of brain structure since the ENIGMA Consortium was founded in 2009."

"My team works at the intersection of human genetics and neuroscience, with a focus on how genetic variation shapes individual differences in behaviour, cognition, and mental health," he explained.

"Past research, including from twin studies and ENIGMA collaborators, has shown that brain morphology is moderately heritable and linked to brain-related conditions. Our goal was to map the genetic variants that influence brain structure and examine if these same genes also affect the risk of brain-related disorders," noted Renteria.

The results of the team's research appear in *Nature Genetics*.

**What did the genome-wide association study do?**

Subcortical brain volume has been linked to a number of developmental, psychiatric and neurological disorders. To investigate the role of genetics on subcortical brain volume, researchers looked at the genomes of 74,898 participants of European ancestry, alongside analysis of the volumes of the:

- brainstem, the brain's "control center," responsible for vital functions including breathing and sleep
- caudate nucleus, playing key roles in movement
- putamen, linked to learning and language use
- hippocampus, involved in learning and memory processes
- globus pallidus, which regulates proprioception, or the ability to sense where the body is positioned in space
- thalamus, which processes sensory inputs

- nucleus accumbens, which controls wakefulness
- amygdale, involved in emotional regulation, particularly stress and anxiety
- and the ventral diencephalon.

All of these measurements were taken from MRI scans. They discovered 254 independent loci - or regions of the genome - significantly associated with brain volume, and found that these were responsible for about 35% of variance seen between participants, suggesting the rest of the difference seen was due to environmental factors.

Using the genetic variants discovered on these loci they developed a polygenic score, which they could use to predict the volume of different parts of the subcortical brain structures.

They tested this polygenic score using a UK Biobank cohort, and found that it was predictive of volume of subcortical brain structures with and without adjusting for overall intracranial volume, including across people of different ancestries.

They also found that polygenic scores they calculated could predict the volume of subcortical brain structures in people under the age of 18.

**How do genes affect brain volume, conditions like Parkinson's, ADHD?**

Next, they looked at the interplay between the influence of genes on volume of different subcortical brain structures and neurological and psychiatric conditions.

Parkinson's disease was correlated with genes linked to intracranial and subcortical brain volumes. ADHD, insomnia, and neuroticism were negatively correlated with genes controlling intracranial volume.

Conversely, the opposite was found for birth weight, birth head circumference, and height, which was positively correlated with intracranial volume, confirming that height is associated with larger intracranial volume.

**Renteria told MNT:** "We observed a positive genetic correlation between Parkinson's disease and eight regional brain volumes, and a negative correlation between ADHD and three brain volumes. It's important to note that these correlations were independent, and our study participants came from both general population and clinically enriched for ADHD or Parkinson's."

"My theory is that the underlying mechanisms involve genes crucial to brain development, growth, and aging processes," he suggested.

"We plan to further investigate

to identify the exact biological pathways involved. Understanding these mechanisms could illuminate how brain structure impacts susceptibility to both neurodegenerative and psychiatric conditions, potentially guiding future therapeutic strategies," Renteria added.

**What can polygenic scores tell us about brain health?**

Polygenic scores are calculated using data obtained from the cohort used to predict a phenotype associated with a certain genotype.

A criticism of them has been that they may not be predictive when used in cohorts of different ancestries to the original cohort used to develop the score. In this study, the polygenic score developed was found to be effective across people of different ancestries.

Brittany Ferri, PhD, an occupational therapist at the National Council on Aging, who was not involved in this research, told MNT that polygenic scores "can be appropriate when based on solid ethical and scientific foundations."

"This kind of measurement leverages genetic information to explore brain structure variations, potentially helping us know more about neurological and psychiatric disorders," she explained.

"However, how accurate and relevant it is should be carefully looked at to make sure the advantages are worth the risks and ethical concerns," Ferri cautioned.

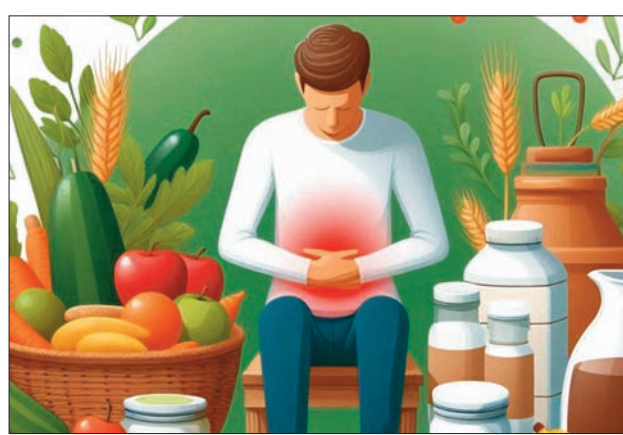
"One major limitation is the incomplete capture of genetic factors by polygenic scores. They might miss out on rare genetic variants or the interactions between different genes. These scores do not factor in environmental factors that are important for brain development," she added.

Clifford Segil, DO, a neurologist at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, CA, also not involved in the current research, told MNT that the results were novel, and needed to be repeated using MRIs on more people.

"Genetic studies note increased risk but no guaranteed bad outcomes. The limitation as a clinical neurologist is if a patient has a 'risk factor genetic profile' what I am supposed to do with this information. I do not have any treatment to increase the size of a subcortical brain structure," Segil noted.

He went on to emphasize that: "Parkinson's is clearly a disease of subcortical brain structures, which is well established, and this study's results warrant repeat searching [of] a subcortical brain structure that would cause problems with attention, which is not well established." *(Courtesy: Medical News Today)*

## Why organic food can lead to a risk of gut disease



By: Mittali Tyagi

Organic food has many health benefits. A new review in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* states how consuming food produced without harmful pesticides, artificial fertilisers or genetically engineered organisms is associated with a lower risk for health conditions such as obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.

People who choose organic foods generally make other healthier lifestyle choices as well.

It's no surprise, then, that the organic food market in India is growing.

In 2022, it was worth \$US1.278 billion. It's predicted to be worth \$4.6 billion by 2028.

Consumers are making their preferences clear. They desire food that contains no residues of pesticides, heavy metals or hormones and has superior colour, scent and flavour compared to conventional produce.

Studies indicate that organically grown fruits and vegetables taste better and contain more antioxidants as compared to conventionally grown varieties.

However, it remains unclear how much of this organic food is safe for human consumption.

The global uptake of organic food has given rise to a parallel problem: the rise in gut bacteria residing in organic produce, which can lead to gastrointestinal illness such as salmonellosis, cholera and dysentery.

How these pathogens are entering the organic food chain is an emerging area of study, as it appears they have managed to migrate from animal guts to plants

incided with increased use of antibiotics in recent years.

In agricultural settings, this has led to a situation where enteric pathogens not only evade the gut environment but also colonise plants, posing a significant food safety concern.

**Contamination risks**

Organic produce such as lettuce, tomato, cucumber and carrots is often used in salads and mostly eaten unprocessed or with minimal processing.

Contaminated fresh produce does not show the sign of any disease but once consumed by humans can lead to gastrointestinal illness. There have been several fresh produce-related outbreaks reported nationally and internationally.

Studies show that pathogenic bacteria are using plants as a secondary host to recolonise human faeces.

Animal and human faeces containing antibiotic-resistant bacteria find their way into other environmental reservoirs like irrigation water, soil, untreated manure and slurry in the form of contaminated manure.

This manure is used as a form of fertiliser for organic food agricultural practices thereby mediating the transfer of these pathogenic enteric bacteria back to humans through the contaminated fresh produce.

The pathogens can be transferred not just through manure but also via the air, insects and birds, posing a greater risk to the growing organic food industry.

Pathogens colonise the plant phyllosphere by initially attaching to the leaf surface using specialised structures and then surviving environmental stress by adapting their metabolism or entering dormant states using the various attachment structures these bacteria possess.

This plant-microbe interaction is an intricate and fascinating area of research and critical for food safety.

Scientists face the hurdle of pinpointing a particular produce item as responsible for an outbreak before establishing the contamination pathway.

People who fall ill after consuming fresh organic produce frequently have difficulty recollecting their

consumption of specific produce items leading to difficulties in distinguishing between various types.

Moreover, produce is commonly ingested as a part of a composite food entity (such as a fruit salad or mixed leaf salad) thereby complicating the process of singling out a specific item as the origin of the infection.

While outbreaks have been varied across different nations, there doesn't seem to be a clear pattern in food-borne epidemics linked to fresh produce.

**Food safety practices**  
Washing vegetables with water or other sterilising techniques have been inefficient in the removal of gut bacteria since the pathogens colonise the fruits and vegetables internally after attaching to their surfaces.

It is necessary to formulate rigorous standards for handling fresh food using materials made from natural agents to prevent contamination.

Some steps to mitigate the risks of food-borne pathogens can be implementing good agricultural practices from the perspective of not just food safety but also preventing environmental degradation and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

For instance, organic manure must be sourced from organic inputs and composted using thermal and aerobic methods to kill pathogens and harmful bacteria. Irrigation water should not be sourced from contaminated rivers or other polluted sources and be free from contaminants.

Good handling practices also help reduce contamination risks in fields and during post-harvest handling.

Technologies that enable real-time monitoring of microbial contamination are critical for maintaining produce safety from farm to table.

Safeguarding plants from enteric pathogen contamination is essential to curb gastrointestinal illnesses, particularly as organic food gains popularity for their health benefits. Maintaining pathogen-free produce ensures that consumers can enjoy organic food without compromising safety. *(Courtesy: Down To Earth)*



## ‘Do not correspond to the will of the Georgian people’ Georgia’s pro-Western opposition disputes crucial election result

**TBILISI, Oct 27:** Georgia’s pro-Western opposition disputed the results of the parliamentary election after officials declared Sunday the ruling party led the crucial vote that could decide whether the country remains on the path to joining the European Union or comes under Russian sway.

The Central Election Commission said Georgian Dream won 54.8 per cent of Saturday’s vote with almost 100 per cent of ballots counted. Following a divisive pre-election campaign, initial figures suggested turnout is the highest since the ruling party was first elected in 2012.

Georgian electoral observers, who stationed thousands across the country to monitor the vote, reported multiple violations and said the results “do not correspond to the will of the Georgian people.”

Georgian Dream has become increasingly authoritarian, adopting laws similar to those used by Russia to crack down on freedom of speech. Brussels suspended Georgia’s EU membership process indefinitely because of a “Russian law,” passed in June.

Bidzina Ivanishvili, the billionaire founder of Georgian Dream



who made his fortune in Russia, claimed victory almost immediately after polls closed and said, “It is rare in the world for the same party to achieve such success in such a difficult situation.” He had vowed ahead of the election to ban opposition parties should his party win.

Tina Bokuchava, the chair of the United National Movement opposition party accused the election commission of carrying out Ivanishvili’s “dirty order” and said he “stole the victory from the Georgian people and thereby stole the

European future.”

She indicated the opposition would not recognise the results and “will fight like never before to reclaim our European future.”

The UNM party said its headquarters were attacked on Saturday while Georgian media reported two people were hospitalised after being attacked outside polling stations.

The pre-election campaign in the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million people, which borders Russia, was dominated by foreign policy and marked by a bitter fight

for votes and allegations of a smear campaign.

Some Georgians complained of intimidation and being pressured to vote for the governing party.

Georgian Dream scored its highest share of the vote — polling almost 90 per cent — in the Javakheti region of southern Georgia, 135 kilometres west of the capital Tbilisi where it failed to get more than 44 per cent of the vote in any district.

Before the election, The Associated Press travelled to the region where many people are ethnic Armenians who speak Armenian, Russian and limited Georgian. Some voters suggested they were instructed how to vote by local officials while several questioned why Georgia needed a relationship with Europe and suggested it would be better off allied with Moscow.

Around 80 per cent of Georgians favour joining the EU, according to polls, and the country’s constitution obliges its leaders to pursue membership in that bloc and NATO. Many fear that Georgian Dream is dragging the country toward authoritarianism and killing off hopes of becoming an EU member. (AP)

## King Charles III set to resume full schedule amid cancer treatment

**LONDON, Oct 27:** King Charles III, who had cut back on some of his royal duties after revealing a cancer diagnosis earlier this year, is to resume a full schedule from 2025 as his treatment continues, Buckingham Palace has said this weekend.

A senior palace official told reporters at the conclusion of the 75-year-old monarch’s tour of Australia and Samoa that he is keen to get back into a regular programme and overseas travel after a successful visit.

“We’re now working on a pretty normal-looking full overseas tour programme for next year, which is a high for us to end on, to know that we can be thinking in those terms, subject to sign-off by doctors,” a Buckingham Palace official was quoted as saying in ‘The Sunday Times’.

“I think it’s great testament to the King’s devotion to service and duty that he was prepared to come this far and he was incredibly happy and very, very determined to do so,” the official said. The tour of Australia along with his wife, Queen Camilla, was the King’s first major visit since the palace confirmed in February that he was suffering from an unspecified form of cancer. Initially, the visit was to also cover New Zealand, which was dropped from the schedule on the advice of doctors.

Following Australia, Charles attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in the Pacific Island nation of Samoa as the head of the 56-member organisation. Closing his speech during the opening ceremony, the King alluded to his health: “For my part, I can assure you today that for however many years God grants me, I will join you and the people of the Commonwealth on every step of this journey.

“Let us learn from the lessons of the past. Let us be proud of who we are today.” The entire schedule, which involved the King and Queen undertaking up to 10 engagements a day, had been tailored specifically to accommodate periods of rest and included only one evening event.

The monarch is said to have “genuinely loved” his time in Australia and Samoa and “thrived” on the programme.

The palace official stated: “It’s lifted his spirits, his mood and his recovery. In that sense, the tour — despite its demands — has been the perfect tonic.” In Parliament House in Canberra, the King was confronted by Lidia Thorpe, a senator from Victoria of Aboriginal descent, who heckled the royal and accused him of “genocide” against “our people”. The outburst threatened to overshadow the trip, but sources close to the King said he was “completely unruffled” by the incident despite the subsequent controversy.

“He’s been around for a long time. As always, he kept calm, carried on. He believes free speech is the cornerstone of democracy, and so everyone is entitled to their views,” palace sources said. The monarch is expected to recommence his cancer treatment on his return to the UK, having paused it whilst abroad.

He issued a message to mark the end of the historic tour: “As our visits to Australia and Samoa come to a close, my wife and I would like to thank both nations for the warmest of welcomes and for the countless fond memories we will carry in our hearts for many years to come. (PTI)

## Musk says real threat to democracy is people who accuse Trump of endangering it

**LANCASTER, Oct 27:** Tech mogul Elon Musk, speaking at a town hall Saturday night in Pennsylvania to support Republican Donald Trump, played down the January 6 attack on the US Capitol and exhorted supporters to cast votes early in the presidential swing state while describing mail ballots as a “recipe for fraud.”

The free-wheeling session inside a ballroom at a hotel in downtown Lancaster touched on a dizzying range of topics, from space exploration and the Tesla cybertruck to immigration and the efficacy of psychiatric drugs. The town hall was part of Musk’s efforts through his super PAC to help boost Trump in swing states ahead of the November 5

presidential election against Democrat Kamala Harris. Musk, whom Trump has vowed to give a role in his administration if he wins next month, spent nearly two hours taking questions from town hall participants. While most were laudatory and covered a variety of topics, one was particularly pointed: A man wanted to know what Musk would say to concerns from voters that Trump’s election could lead to democracy backsliding in the US considering his role in the January 6, 2021, insurrection.

While calling it a fair question, Musk also said that the January 6 attack by Trump’s supporters has been called “some sort of violent insurrection,

which is simply not the case” — a response that drew applause from the crowd. More than 100 law enforcement personnel were injured in the attack, some beaten with their own weapons, when a mob of Trump supporters who believed his lies that the 2020 election was stolen from him stormed the Capitol to stop the certification of votes.

Musk also claimed that people “who say Trump is a threat to democracy are themselves a threat to democracy,” a comment that was also cheered by the crowd of several hundred people packed tightly into the ballroom. Many more watched the event on X, the social media platform Musk purchased two years ago. (AP)

## Trump veers away from swing states for his Madison Square Garden moment

**NEW YORK, Oct 27:** Donald Trump is finally getting his Madison Square Garden moment.

With just over a week to go before Election Day, the former president will take the stage at one of the country’s most iconic venues, hosting a hometown rally to deliver his campaign’s closing message against Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris. “Madison Square Garden is the centre of the universe,” said Trump campaign senior adviser Jason Miller, noting the venue’s storied history hosting events including the 1971 “Fight of the Century.”

The rally is one of a series of detours Trump has made from battleground states, including a recent rally in Coachella, California — best known for the famous music festival named after the town — and one over the summer on the Jersey Shore. This summer he campaigned in the South Bronx.

While some Democrats and TV pundits have questioned Trump’s decision to hold what they dismiss as vanity events, the rally guarantees Trump what he most craves: the spotlight, wall-to-wall coverage and a national audience. Along with trying to energise his base, Trump’s campaign has been trying to court the few remaining undecided voters, many of whom don’t get their news from traditional outlets. To reach them, Trump has spent hours appearing on popular podcasts. And his campaign has worked to create viral moments like his visit last weekend to a McDonald’s restaurant, where he made fries and served supporters through the drive-thru window. Video of the stop posted by his campaign has been viewed more than 40 million times

on TikTok alone. “He’s not just going to be speaking to the attendees inside Madison Square Garden. There will be people tuning in from battleground states all across the country,” said former US Rep. Lee Zeldin, a New York Republican and ally of the former president, who said Trump has been talking about holding an event at the venue since the start of his campaign.

Harris has also travelled to non-battleground states for major events intended to drive a national message. She appeared in Houston Friday with music superstar Beyoncé to speak about reproductive rights, and will deliver her own closing argument Tuesday from the Ellipse in Washington, where Trump spoke ahead of the January 6, 2021 Capitol riot. Trump will be joined at the rally by supporters including Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, who has spent tens of millions of dollars to boost his campaign. The world’s ‘most famous arena’ Trump often compares himself to the country’s greatest entertainers. The former reality TV star has long talked about wanting to hold a rally at the venue dubbed “The World’s Most Famous Arena,” raising the idea in interviews and private conversations. “New York is part of his DNA. Madison Square Garden is part of his DNA,” said New York State Republican Chairman Ed Cox.

While Trump continues to insist the rally is part of his effort to win New York — a state President Joe Biden carried four years ago with more than 60 per cent of the vote — he’s made clear it’s also personal. “It’s the New York, but it’s also, you know,

## Israeli strikes on Gaza kill 22, officials say, as truck ramming near Tel Aviv

**TEL AVIV, Oct 27:** Israeli strikes on northern Gaza have killed at least 22 people, mostly women and children, Palestinian officials said Sunday, as the Israeli offensive in the hard-hit and isolated north entered a third week and aid groups described a humanitarian catastrophe. Israel said it targeted militants.

In a separate development, a truck rammed into a bus stop near the Israeli city of Tel Aviv, wounding 35 people, according to first responders. The circumstances were not immediately clear, but Palestinians have carried out dozens of vehicle-ramming attacks over the years. The attack occurred near the headquarters of Israel’s Mossad spy agency.

Iran’s supreme leader, meanwhile, said Israeli strikes on the country over the weekend “should not be exaggerated nor downplayed,” while stopping short of calling for retaliation, suggesting Iran is carefully weighing its response to the attack.

On Saturday, Israeli warplanes attacked military targets in Iran in response to an Iranian ballistic missile attack earlier this month.

The exchange of fire has raised fears of an all-out regional war pitting Israel and the United States against Iran and its militant proxies, which include Hamas and the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, where Israel launched a ground invasion earlier this month after nearly a year of lower-level conflict. The Israeli military said Sunday that four soldiers, including a military rabbi, have been killed in fighting in southern Lebanon, without providing details about the circumstances. It said five other personnel were severely wounded.

Netanyahu said Israel’s Mossad achieved its goal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that the strikes “severely harmed” Iran and achieved all of Israel’s goals.

“The air force struck throughout Iran. We severely harmed Iran’s defence capabilities and its ability to produce missiles that are aimed toward us,” Netanyahu said in his first public comments on the strikes.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s 85-year-old supreme leader, said “it is up to the authorities to determine how to convey the power and will of

the Iranian people to the Israeli regime and to take actions that serve the interests of this nation and country.”

Khamenei would make any final decision on how Iran responds.

Apparent attack near Tel Aviv wounds dozens. The truck slammed into a bus at a stop as Israelis were returning to work after a weeklong holiday, leaving some people stuck under the vehicles. In addition to being near the Mossad headquarters and a military base, the bus stop is also close to a central highway junction.

Asi Aharoni, an Israeli police spokesperson, told reporters that authorities were treating it as a terror attack. He said the attacker had been “neutralised” without saying if the assailant was dead, and that police are working with Israel’s internal security agency to determine the identity of the attacker.

Israel’s Magen David Adom rescue service said six of the wounded were in serious condition.

Palestinians have carried out scores of stabbings, shootings and car-ramming attacks over the years. Tensions have soared since the outbreak of the war in Gaza, as Israel has carried out regular military raids into the occupied West Bank that have left hundreds dead. Most appear to have been militants killed during shootouts with Israeli forces, but Palestinians taking part in violent protests and civilian bystanders have also been killed.

Red Cross describes horrific circumstances in northern Gaza

The Gaza Health Ministry’s emergency service said that 11 women and two children were among the 22 killed in the strikes late Saturday on several homes and buildings in the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiyah. It said a further 15 people were wounded and that the death toll could rise. It listed the names of those killed, who mostly came from three families.

The Israeli military said it carried out a precise strike on militants in a structure in Beit Lahiyah and took steps to avoid harming civilians. It disputed what it said were “numbers published by the media,” without elaborating or providing evidence for its own account.

## Immigration emerges as contentious issue in US presidential race

**ATLANTA, Oct 27:** With just nine days left for Election Day, immigration remained one of the contentious issues in the US presidential campaign with many immigrants, including from India and other South Asian nations, fearing a backlash if former President Donald Trump wins the poll.

In his campaign speeches, the Republican Party presidential candidate promised a radical shift to tighten Washington’s immigration policy and vowed to carry out the “largest” domestic deportation operation in American history of undocumented immigrants and review the existing refugee programmes if he is reelected.

The 78-year-old Republican leader has even resolved to end birthright citizenship for the children of immigrants living in the US illegally, triggering concerns among various diaspora communities, including from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Various pro-immigration advocacy groups have criticised Trump over his rhetoric on immigration, saying the discontinuation of birthright citizenship is legally questionable as it is enshrined in the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution.

On her part, Vice President Kamala Harris, who is the Democratic presidential candidate, has underlined the need for curtailing illegal immigration and has said the US immigration system is broken and requires legislative measures to be fixed. At a campaign rally this week, Trump accused Harris, 60, of bringing in “migrant gangs and illegal alien criminals” into the US, adding, “Her policy of importing migrant gangs is a crime against our country.”

“This is a very sensitive issue and we are worried about the possible fallout of Trump’s victory,” said Mohammad Iqbal, a Bangladesh-origin green card holder living in Atlanta for over a decade.

“Trump’s policy is creating panic among various migrant societies and that is why they are supporting Vice President Kamala Harris,” he noted.

Vasudev Patel, general secretary of the Federation of Indian-Americans in Georgia, said the Republican leader is looking to welcome “educated” and “peaceful” people to come to the US. (PTI)

## ‘BY EVERY MEASURE, SHE HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT SHE’S READY’

### ‘Take our lives seriously,’ Michelle Obama pleads as she rallies for Kamala Harris

**KALAMAZOO (US), Oct 27:** Michelle Obama challenged men to support Kamala Harris’ bid to be America’s first female president, warning that a rally in Michigan on Saturday that women’s lives would be at risk if Donald Trump returned to the White House.

The former first lady described the assault on abortion rights as the harbinger of dangerous limitations on healthcare for women. Some men may be tempted to vote for Trump because of their anger at the slow pace of progress, Obama said, but “your rage does not exist in a vacuum.”

“If we don’t get this election right, your wife, your daughter, your mother, we as women will become collateral damage to your rage,” Obama said. “So are you as men prepared to look into the eyes of the women and children you love and tell them you supported this assault on our safety?”

The rally in Kalamazoo was Obama’s first appearance on the campaign trail since she spoke at the Democratic National Convention over the summer, and her remarks were searing and passionate in their support of Harris.

“By every measure, she has demonstrated that she’s ready,” the former first lady said. “The real question is, as a country, are we ready for this mo-

ment?”

Obama added, “Do not buy into the lies that we do not know who Kamala is or what she stands for. This is somebody who understands you, all of you.”

Although Obama has been a reluctant campaigner over the years, she showed no hesitation on Saturday as her speech stretched from the political to the personal. Obama said she fears for the country and struggles to understand why the presidential race remains close.

“I lay awake at night wondering, ‘What in the world is going on?’” she said.

Her voice vibrating with emotion, Obama talked about the struggle for women to understand and care for their own bodies, whether it’s their menstrual cycles or menopause. And she spoke about the dangers of childbirth, when a split-second decision can mean the difference between life and death for a mother and her baby.

“I am asking y’all from the core of my being to take our lives seriously,” Obama pleaded.

Harris took the stage after Obama and promised the crowd that she would keep their interests in mind — unlike Trump, who she accused of only being interested in himself.

“There is a yearning in our country



for a president who sees the people, not just looking in the mirror all the time, but sees the people, who gets you and who will fight for you,” she said.

After the rally, Harris went to Trak Houz Bar & Grill with Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, where they drank a locally brewed beer.

“I want to have whatever she’s having,” Harris said.

The politicians chatted and took photos with people at the bar. When they approached a table of young women, one of them burst into tears. Before arriving in Kalamazoo, Har-

ris visited a local doctor’s office in Portage to talk with health care providers and medical students about the impact of abortion restrictions.

One of them said they have patients visiting from other parts of the country where there are strict limitations on abortion, and another said she’s worried that people won’t want to practice in important areas of medicine because of fears about government intrusion.

“We are looking at a health care crisis in America that is affecting people of every background and gender,” Harris told reporters before visiting the

doctor’s office.

Harris appeared with Beyoncé on Friday in Houston, and she campaigned with former President Barack Obama and Bruce Springsteen on Thursday in Atlanta.

It’s a level of celebrity clout that surpasses anything that Trump, the Republican nominee, has been able to marshal this year. But there’s no guarantee that will help Harris in the close race for the White House. In 2016, Hillary Clinton lost to Trump despite firing up her crowds with musical performances and Democratic allies.

Trump brushed off Harris’ attempt to harness star power for her campaign.

“Kamala is at a dance party with Beyoncé,” the former president said Friday in Traverse City, Michigan. Trump held a rally in Novi, a suburb of Detroit, on Saturday before a later event in State College, Pennsylvania.

Saturday is the first day that early in-person voting became available across Michigan. More than 1.4 million ballots have already been submitted, representing 20 per cent of registered voters.

When Clinton was running against Trump, Michelle Obama inspired Democrats with the slogan “when they go low, we go high.”

But this year, at the Democratic Na-

Israel has been waging a massive air and ground offensive in northern Gaza since Oct. 6, saying that Hamas militants have regrouped there. Hundreds of people have been killed and tens of thousands of Palestinians have fled to Gaza City in the latest wave of displacement in the yearlong war.

Aid groups have warned of a catastrophic situation in northern Gaza, which was the first target of Israel’s ground offensive and had already suffered the heaviest destruction of the war. Israel has severely limited the entry of basic humanitarian aid in recent weeks, and the three remaining hospitals in the north — one of which was raided over the weekend — say they have been overwhelmed by waves of wounded people.

The International Committee of the Red Cross on Saturday said that ongoing Israeli evacuation orders and restrictions on the entry of essential supplies to the north had left the civilian population in “horrific circumstances.”

“Many civilians are currently unable to move, trapped by fighting, destruction or physical constraint and now lack access to even basic medical care,” it said.

The war began when Hamas-led militants blew holes in Israel’s border wall and stormed into southern Israel in a surprise attack on Oct. 7, 2023. They killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, around a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed more than 42,000 Palestinians, according to the local Health Ministry. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count but says more than half of those killed were women and children. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The offensive has devastated much of the impoverished coastal territory and displaced around 90 per cent of its population of 2.3 million, often multiple times. Hundreds of thousands of people have crowded into squalid tent camps along the coast, and aid groups say hunger is rampant. (AP)



## Nagaland's former minister passes away



### HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Oct 27:** Former minister and eight-time MLA of Nagaland Legislative Assembly, NLA T A Ngullie passed away on Sunday in Dimapur. Except for the sixth House, Late Ngullie represented the 37-Tyui Assembly Constituency from the first to the ninth NLA. Nagaland Assembly Speaker Shringain Longkumer, chief minister Neiphiu Rio, deputy chief minister Y Patton, advisor and BJP MLA Imkong L Imchen, State units of the Congress and Lok Janshakti Party Ramvilas have expressed sadness and condoled his demise.

Late Ngullie served the State in different capacities including minister in-charge of finance, revenue and electricity in 1982 and minister of agriculture, horticulture and irrigation in 1989. He also served as the deputy speaker and Leader of opposition, displaying unwavering dedication to the state's development.

# Work of highway widening in Mizoram to commence soon: CM

Lalduhoma, returned to Aizawl on Saturday after a week-long tour to the national capital

**AIZAWL, Oct 27:** Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma has expressed optimism that widening work of a national highway will commence soon and the compensation for those who would be affected by the project will be settled shortly as the central fund is expected for the same.

He said the Centre had agreed to provide ₹ 1,190 crore to both the state forest department and land owners as compensation for the widening of the national highway, a part of which is known as NH-6 and the other portion as NH-306.

The national highway is the primary lifeline of Mizoram linking the northeastern state with the rest of the country through Assam.

The Centre approved the widening project of NH-306 along with NH-6 into four lanes a few years ago but it could not be implemented due to issues over compensation and ownership of land along the highways.

Lalduhoma, who returned to



Aizawl on Saturday after a week-long tour to the national capital, told reporters that he recently took part in the review meetings for highways chaired by Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari.

The chief minister said he also separately met the union minister

over the challenges, including compensation issues, in the execution of the highway-widening project.

He said the project could not be implemented for a long time due to forest clearance issues and disputes over ownership of land and

compensation between the state forest department and landowners along the NH-6 and NH-306 between Vairengte and Sairang.

"The forest department claims certain areas of land on either side of the highway as roadside reserve forest, which is true. On the other hand, some people claim that they also legally owned the plots as they pay taxes and possess valid documents," Lalduhoma said.

"We urged the union minister to give compensation to both the parties to ensure that the long-pending issues are resolved and the project is commenced," he said.

Lalduhoma said Gadkari agreed to pay ₹ 90 crore to the forest department and another ₹ 1,100 crore to the land owners for the highway project, and asserted that such an arrangement has been made for the first time.

Last month, over 2,000 landowners along NH-6 and NH-306 had staged demonstrations demanding that land ownership issues be resolved. (PTI)

## 'Mann Ki Baat' reflects India's global transformation: Tripura CM



### HT Correspondent

**AGARTALA, Oct 27:** Chief minister Manik Saha on Sunday said that every episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' brings thousands of inspiring stories from every corner of India, while reflecting the changing image of the nation globally.

Saha said this after listening to the 115th episode of PM Modi's Mann Ki Baat at Swami Dayalananda Vidyanketan, Banamalipur.

On Sunday's episode, Saha said, PM Modi highlighted various initiatives aimed at preserving the country's folk culture, promoting cyber security, encouraging vocal for local, emphasizing the importance of fitness, and spreading Indian culture internationally.

"I feel good when Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks about animation. Animation is an industry, a very old one. Through animation, Ramayana and Mahabharat were created, helping people learn history. Animation is also used in many movies," he added.

Saha noted that PM Modi addressed the issue of national cyber security.

"Mobile phones have many advantages and disadvantages. Many people fall victim to mobile hacking, and PM Modi informed us about steps to take in such situations," he said.

He further mentioned that PM Modi encourages everyone to pursue innovative work.

"To listen to PM Modi's Mann Ki Baat, people from not only India but also foreign countries eagerly await each episode. Leaders from various countries are surprised to see how PM Modi conducts such a program. I am not aware of any other country leader doing the same. Through Mann Ki Baat, PM Modi highlights many unknown facts we may not be aware of, connecting with people from various sectors. Every episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' brings thousands of inspiring stories from every corner of India, while reflecting the changing image of India in the world," Dr. Saha said.

## DNSU for transparency in ILP process



### HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, Oct 27:** The Dimapur Naga Students Union (DNSU) called for transparency from the Nagaland government regarding the inner line permit (ILP) process.

In a release, the DNSU said despite a recent notice issued by the government, there were no specific dates or deadlines provided for outsiders to apply, leaving the public unclear on application procedures.

Voicing against reliance on online applications alone, the union stressed the need for stronger enforcement of paper applications.

It expressed serious concern over the lack of a robust enforcement system for the ILP Act in Dimapur, Chümoukedima and Niland districts.

It said while the government has taken commendable steps, including implementing the ILP following the historic cabinet meeting on September 11 and activating intensive checks on suspected illegal immigrants at various interstate entry points/check gates including Dimapur railway station, the DNSU has insisted that more needs to be done.

The union acknowledged the challenges posed by limited man-

power and resources for enforcement in Dimapur but urged the government to involve civil society organisations (CSOs) in the ILP enforcement process. It proposed establishing a district task force that incorporates CSOs from each district to support effective ILP implementation.

The DNSU voiced deep concern about their future and the potential influence of outsiders on their community. It called for direct discussions on issues affecting indigenous people rather than yielding to external pressures.

It also urged the state government to form a dedicated committee or commission to oversee ILP implementation, citing fears that consultations with experts, NGOs, and relevant bodies have been overlooked, risking manipulation against the Naga people.

Pointing out that the ILP is designed to protect the indigenous Naga population, the DNSU flayed the current approach for prioritising the interests of outsiders.

It also pointed out that the past political parties have included ILP implementation in their election manifestos, only to neglect these promises once in power.

## Nagaland Guv honours rehab centre for exemplary service



### HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, Oct 27:** Nagaland Governor La Ganesan felicitated the Shalom Rehabilitation Centre, Chümoukedima for its exemplary service to the people of Nagaland and the northeast.

The governor honoured the centre during the screening of Mann Ki Baat, the monthly radio programme hosted by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Raj Bhavan in Kohima on Sunday.

Shalom Rehabilitation Centre, an initiative by the Diocese of Kohima (Catholic church), was established in 1993 in response to the challenges of substance abuse affecting individuals, families, and society in Nagaland.

Under the motto "Together We Can," the centre has transformed countless lives.

Partnering with the Medical Mission Sisters (MMS) and the Medical Sisters of St. Joseph, Shalom is committed to restoring lives affected by chemical dependency.

Through a structured, a four-

month residential programme combining pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments, Shalom has successfully helped individuals recover and reintegrate into society.

It provides a safe and supportive environment for those seeking recovery.

Led by Rev. Fr. Dr. Joe Mariadhas, the centre's dedicated team offers personalised care and guidance to every individual. Their mission is to foster transformation and hope through compassionate, non-judgmental care, supporting those affected by addiction toward a brighter future.

In each 'Mann Ki Baat' screening, the Nagaland Governor honours individuals and organisations dedicated to serving the community. These felicitations not only highlight exemplary contributions but also encourage citizens to engage actively in social initiatives which showcase the impactful work being done to improve the lives of people in Nagaland and beyond.

## Impeached NSCN leader receives support

**DIMAPUR, OCT 27:** N Kitovi Zhimomi, who was "impeached" in the coup of April 21, 2024, as "ato kilonser" (prime minister) of the GPRN/NSCN received the support of 190 Naga Army as declared by the group on October 25.

A press release issued by Kitovi Zhimomi led by GPRN/NSCN made a declaration and said that this declaration was witnessed by 2 Major Generals, 4 Brigadiers, 6 Colonels, 23 Lieut. Colonels, 43 Majors, 41 Captains, 21 2nd Lieutenants, 19 Sgt. Majors, 13 Sergeants, 14 Corporals, and 4 Lance Corporals. The press release recalled that they were called back to the General Headquarters (GHQ) of Khehoyi Camp from various commands/units and directed to report on or before April 20, 2024 by the Commander in Chief.

The press note then said, "To our surprise the then Commander-in-Chief, General Samson Aye told us that the Naga Army will take over the Government, and we will not allow the Ato Kilonser to be stationed in the Council Headquarter (CHQ), as he will be impeached".

It added, "This made them speechless and the idea and motives are only known to Gen Samson and



Maj Gen Hotoi alone."

"We therefore, do hereby declare and clear our position before Naga People and Naga National Workers, to be noted in the history of the Naga people's movement for self-determination, that it was done by the then Gen Samson and Maj Gen Hotoi alone and are responsible and shall be accountable. As we were not told nor were we aware with what motive the coup was carried out against our Ato Kilonser N. Kitovi Zhimomi," it also said.

The press release then said the Naga Army personnel "respect N Kitovi Zhimomi as a tall leader among the Naga national leaders

who sacrificed all his prime age and continuing his loyalty and serving to protect the future of our younger generation." "Hence, we shall not allow any elements to hijack or misguide our Loyalty toward our leader. N. Kitovi Zhimomi and we are confident that our undisputed leader will never fail us but lead our people to a better future," the press release further said.

It then declared "loyalty and commitment to stand along with him and strengthen the organisation and make committed efforts to enhance and solidify the Agreed Position in working toward an early Naga solution."

## Indian Army commemorates 78th infantry day in Manipur and Nagaland

### HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Oct 27:** The Indian Army commemorated the valour and sacrifices of the brave Infantry soldiers by organising numerous ceremonies held at Leimakhong Military Station, Manipur and at Zakhama Military Station in Nagaland on the occasion of the 78th Infantry Day also celebrated as the Shaurya Diwas to commemorate the successful landing of Indian Army at Srinagar Airfield on 27 October 1947, to denying Kashmir to the invading Pakistani Tribals and forces. The battle of 1947 was the first successful military operation of the Independent India.

To mark the occasion solemn wreath-laying ceremonies were performed at the war memorials in Leimakhong and Zakhama honoring and remembering the courage of fallen heroes of Infantry, the ultimate. A special documentary was screening showcasing the



contributions of the Corps of Infantry in various operations, underscoring their role in safeguarding the nation.

GOC, Red Shield Division, officers, Junior Commissioned Officers, soldiers and veterans paid homage that symbolizes the bond between generations of soldiers and their shared commitment to duty by sharing the stage for celebrations.

## Council of churches launched to promote unity among Christian denominations

**AIZAWL, Oct 27:** The Council of Churches in Mizoram (CCM), a conglomerate of major Christian denominations in Mizoram, was launched on Sunday.

It is the first of such union in 130 years since Christianity was introduced here in 1894, a church leader said.

It was established by eight key churches, including Mizoram Presbyterian Church (MPC), Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) and Evangelical Church of Maraland, to foster unity and harmony among various churches in the state.

Mizoram is a Christian-majority state, and the churches wield significant influence in the society.

The CCM was launched by Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod moderator Rev R Vanlalngaha during a conference held at the Presbyterian church in Aizawl's Mission Veng locality.



Chief Minister Lalduhoma, cabinet ministers, and a number of legislators from the ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) and the opposition parties, including the MNF, Congress and BJP, attended the programme.

During the business session held on Saturday, over 500 delegates from different churches adopted the council's constitution and approved the appointment of seven office bearers.

The delegates also passed the

interim budget of ₹ 32.4 lakh.

The CCM will be headed by Rev Dr R Lalbiakliana, who is the general secretary of BCM, as president, while Rev Dr Lalhman-gaiha from MPC has been appointed as the general secretary.

The council will run its temporary office from the Synod Convention Centre in Aizawl.

Lalbiakliana said that the main objective of the council is to bridge divides by creating common ground among churches, and setting aside differences in doctrines and church traditions.

The primary focus of the council is to promote unity among the diverse churches in Mizoram to reform and improve the society and assist the government in upholding good governance, he said.

Lalbiakliana said that other churches from different denominations have also been invited to join the council. (PTI)

## NSCN(K-YA) cadre shot dead in Arunachal Pradesh



**ITANAGAR, Oct 27:** An NSCN (Khaplang Yung Aung) cadre was shot dead by security forces in Arunachal Pradesh's Longding district, a defence official said.

Acting on specific information about the movement of NSCN (K-YA) cadres in the area, Assam Rifles launched a search operation on Friday, Defense PRO Lt Col Amit Shukla said.

During the search operation, the security forces came into contact with the cadre, who fired upon the Assam Rifles patrol team, he said.

The Assam Rifles troops retaliated and in the exchange of fire, one cadre of the NSCN (K-YA) was killed. One pistol was recovered from the site, Lt Col Shukla added. (PTI)

## Tripura likely to extend 'Rubber Mission' for another 5 years

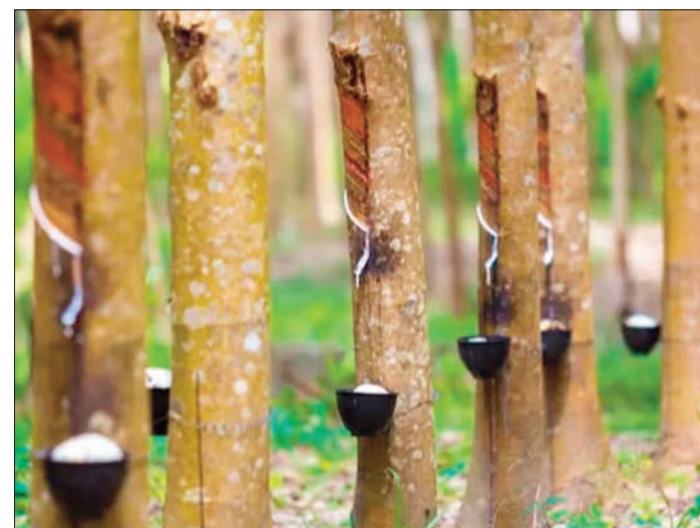
'Mission has become very popular among the tribals living in hilly regions'

**AGARTALA, Oct 27:** Buoyed by the successful implementation of the 'Chief Minister's Rubber Mission' in Tripura, the state government is contemplating extending the programme for another five years, an official said on Sunday.

The livelihood generation initiative, launched in 2021-22, is set to be completed by 2025-26.

A total of 56,400 families have been brought under the programme, while rubber plantation was carried out across 46,086 hectares of land during the first four years of the mission, he said.

The Automated Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA) supplied saplings to the selected beneficiaries free of cost, and the Tripura Welfare Department extended additional assistance such as encompassing fencing and providing fertiliser, the official said. Under the programme, the Rubber



Board ensured quality supply of plants, pre-plantation and post-plantation training in different districts, he said.

"The mission has become very popular among the tribals living in hilly regions," director of Tribal Welfare, Subhashish Das, told PTI.

The department is mulling extending the programme for another five years in view of its financial viability and popularity, he said.

"We are planning to bring another 60,000 hectares of land under rubber plantation for 60,000 families once the first phase of the mission is completed. It has been seen that even militants who have surrendered are keen on rubber plantation because it is a promising livelihood option," Das said.

Steps have been taken for construction of integrated rubber processing centres of varying size for supporting the production of high-grade rubber latex, he said.

Initiatives have also been taken to conduct skill development programmes in rubber tapping for ensuring quality in latex collection, the official added.

Tripura is the second-largest rubber producer in India. (PTI)



# Shah slams TMC govt for 'state-sponsored infiltration' in Bengal, RG Kar incident

*'The next big target for the BJP is winning the West Bengal assembly polls in 2026 with a two-third majority'*

**KOLKATA, Oct 27:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday accused the TMC government in West Bengal of aiding "state-sponsored infiltration" and corruption, claiming that incidents of assault on women in Sandeshkhali and the rape and murder of a doctor at RG Kar Hospital are evidence that women are "not safe" in the state.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a press conference.

Shah also said that the next big target for the BJP is winning the West Bengal assembly polls in 2026 with a two-third majority, asserting that this is the only way to address corruption and infiltration.

He launched the party's membership drive in West Bengal, setting a target of enrolling one crore members from the state.

"In Bengal, where Rabindra Sangeet (Tagore songs) used to be heard in the morning, sound of bombs is heard everywhere now. In Bengal, state-sponsored infiltration is going on. Corruption in hiring process, health sector and rations along with cut money and syndicates, is rampant. To get rid of it and build a Sonar Bangla (Developed Bengal) as envisioned by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the people of Bengal need to elect a BJP government in 2026," he said.

This cut-money culture and corruption must end in West Bengal, he said while setting a target of "winning a two-thirds majority" in

the 2026 assembly polls in Bengal. Shah referred to incidents in Sandeshkhali and RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, where a woman doctor was raped and murdered in August, asserting that these exemplify the lack of security for women in West Bengal.

Ahead of this year's Lok Sabha polls, allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders in Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district had surfaced and became one of the issues dominating the parliamentary poll narratives in Bengal.

"Women are not safe in Bengal. Incidents like Sandeshkhali and RG Kar will stop when BJP comes to power in 2026," he said.

Shah urged party members not to underestimate their influence in the state, stating, "Mamata didi (CM Mamata Banerjee) must not be very

happy that we got fewer seats in the Lok Sabha in Bengal. She should not think we are sitting idle as we got a few seats less (than our target)."

The BJP, which had set a target of winning over 30 of the total 42 Lok Sabha seats from Bengal in 2024, secured only 12, six less than what it bagged in 2019.

"Don't forget, we are a party that has gone from two seats to 370 seats and has taken steps like the abrogation of Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir. Of the state elections held in 2024, we have won more than 50 per cent. We have won in Haryana and we will win in Jharkhand and Maharashtra," he said.

"After that, our next big target in 2026 is winning in Bengal and forming the next government with a two-thirds majority," the BJP

leader added.

This is Shah's first visit to Bengal after the Lok Sabha polls in April-May and also after the rape and murder of an on-duty doctor at state-run RG Kar hospital, triggering nationwide protests.

The Union Home Minister also criticized Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, pointing out that while the Congress party is celebrating its performance in this year's Lok Sabha elections, the BJP-led NDA has secured a third consecutive term.

"Rahul Gandhi claimed in Parliament that they defeated us in the elections, and I don't understand why his allies don't make him understand that those who win take the oath of Prime Minister and those who lose sit in the opposition benches. If you count the number of seats that the Congress has won since 2014, it won't touch 240. If you combine the seats of all the allies of Congress this time, it still will not touch 240. But still, they are claiming they have defeated us," Shah said.

The BJP has secured 240 seats in the Lok Sabha elections.

About TMC government's allegations that the Centre was not releasing funds due to the state, Shah alleged that funds sent by the central government are being siphoned off by ruling party leaders.

"I want to ask Mamata didi: how

much funding did the INDI alliance (Congress-led UPA government) allocate to Bengal? From 2004 to 2014, the UPA government gave 2.9 lakh crore to Bengal, while the NDA government has provided 7.74 lakh crore from 2014 to 2024," he said.

"Today, I visited the border, and some individuals mentioned that they aren't receiving the benefits of the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. I told them to wait until 2026. From 2026, every poor person in Bengal will receive the benefits of the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. Furthermore, the youth won't need to pay bribes for jobs and education," he stated.

The TMC government in Bengal did not implement the Centre's health insurance policy.

Responding to Shah's accusations, TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said, "Infiltration is a problem at the international border, which is being guarded by the BSF under his ministry. Therefore, if infiltration is an issue, it is a failure of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the central agencies responsible for border protection."

Ghosh said Shah is viewed in Bengal as a "political tourist" who has little influence on local politics.

"He often comes before elections and makes tall claims, but poll results speak a different story," the TMC leader said. PTI

# Rehabilitation of landslide survivors takes centre stage

**WAYANAD (KERALA) Oct 27:** The issue of rehabilitation of the survivors of the July 30 landslides has taken centre stage in Kerala's Wayanad ahead of next month's Lok Sabha bypoll, with the Congress-led UDF and CPI(M)-headed LDF raising the matter in response to concerns from the affected families.

According to the government, the deadly disaster has claimed 231 lives while 47 people are still missing.

Bypoll to Wayanad constituency is being held on November 13 and the election was necessitated due to the resignation of local MP and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as he emerged victorious from Uttar Pradesh's Rae Bareilly as well.

### WAYANAD LS BYPOLL

of the Meppadi gram panchayat, where the devastating landslide occurred.

"The situation is extremely serious. The government announced an immediate relief assistance of ₹ 9,000 to ₹ 10,000 for survivors in these three wards, but 132 people are yet to receive it. The government has been providing funds to cover monthly rent for the past three months, with the assistance initially promised for six months."

"However, it is unlikely that rehabilitation will be completed within this period. So who will cover the rent after that," asked Naseer, who currently lives in a rented house in Kalpetta with his family.

Another major demand is the release of the official list of those who died and are still missing in the disaster.

According to official records, 47 people remain unaccounted for, and locals are urging authorities to issue death certificates to their relatives.

There is also a demand for authorities to provide adequate treatment facilities for those still residing in the Chooralmala region, which remains isolated after the catastrophic disaster.

JMJ Manoj, another survivor, pointed out that while the government provides ₹ 6,000 as monthly rent assistance, many families need more as they are living in houses with higher rent. "We are demanding that the monthly rent assistance be increased to ₹ 10,000," said Manoj, who is also the convenor of Janakeeya Samiti.

Currently, around 800 displaced families are residing in rented houses following the disaster. The Kerala government sought ₹ 2,000 crore in central assistance for compensating and rehabilitating the victims of the Wayanad landslide. However, only ₹ 291.2 crore has been received so far, disbursed in two installments of ₹ 145.6 crore each.

As part of its rehabilitation plan, the state government aims to build one or two townships for the survivors, featuring single-storey houses of approximately 1,000 square feet, designed with the option for future expansion to two storeys.

The disaster, which struck on July 30, devastated large parts of three villages—Punchirimattam, Chooralmala, and Mundakkai—along with sections of Attamala in Wayanad. (PTI)

# Jharkhand Polls: Women voters hold key in CM's constituency, 31 other seats

**RANCHI, Oct 27:** Women voters may play a decisive role in 32 assembly constituencies, including the seats of Chief Minister Hemant Soren and former CM Champai Soren, as they outnumber male voters in the electoral roll.

Out of 32 constituencies where women voters are more than men, 26 are reserved for scheduled tribes.

The elections to the 81-seat Jharkhand assembly are scheduled to be held in two phases on November 13 and November 20.

The counting of votes is slated for November 23.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren has filed his nomination papers from the Barhait assembly constituency, where the number of women voters is higher than male voters. The constituency enrolled more than 2.25 lakh voters, including 1.15 lakh women and 1.09 lakh male voters.

Similarly, the Saraikela assembly constituency registered over 3.69 lakh electors, including 1.83 lakh male and 1.85 lakh female voters.

Former chief minister and BJP nominee Champai Soren is contesting from the Saraikela seat.

Soren joined the BJP on August 30 citing "insult" and "humiliation" at the hands of JMM leaders.

Barhait and Saraikela are among the 32 assembly seats where women voters outnumber male voters. Jharkhand has 28 tribal reserved seats, nine scheduled castes

and the rest are general category seats out of the total 81 constituencies. Majhgau assembly constituency in West Singhbhum district registered the highest number of women voters compared to their male counterparts.

The constituency registered 1.21 lakh women voters against 1.12 lakh men voters as per the electoral roll. Jharkhand has around 2.60 crore electors, including 1.31 crore male and 1.29 crore female voters, compared to 2.23 crore in the 2019 assembly elections.

There are 11.84 lakh first-time voters and 1.13 lakh people with disabilities, third-gender individuals, and senior citizens over 85, who are expected to vote.

In a bid to woo women voters in the state, political parties are leaving no stone unturned.

The BJP has pitched Gogo Didi Yojana to counter the JMM-led alliance government's Maiyan Saman Yojana to attract female voters.

Under Maiyan Saman Yojana, ₹ 1,000 per month is credited to the accounts of over 50 lakh women in the state. Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren said that the amount would be increased to ₹ 2,500 monthly from December, if voted to power.

On the other hand, the BJP has promised in its first manifesto to transfer ₹ 2,100 per month to the accounts of women after forming a government in Jharkhand. (PTI)

# Punjab BJP delegation submits memo blaming AAP govt for 'tardy' paddy lifting

**CHANDIGARH, Oct 27:** A delegation of Punjab BJP leaders on Sunday met Governor Gulab Chand Kataria and submitted a memorandum alleging inefficiency on part of the AAP government in the state for "tardy" paddy lifting.

The delegation urged the governor to intervene and ensure the complete lifting of paddy from mandis as a "gift" to the farmers of the state so that they can "celebrate Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas with their families".

The memorandum said, "Due to inefficiency on the part of the Punjab government, even after 26 days of official commencement of paddy procurement, the Punjab government has failed to lift most of the paddy from the mandis across the state."

Paddy procurement for Kharif Marketing Season 2024-25 commenced in Punjab from October 1, according to the BJP delegation that included Avinash Rai Khanna, Preneet Kaur, Harjit Singh Grewal, Rana Gurmeet Singh Sodhi, Vijay Sampla, Vineet Joshi and Fateh Jang Bajwa.

"Before the commencement of the season, in the last week of September, Punjab government got ₹ 44,000 crore for the purchase of paddy on MSP from the central government," the memorandum said.

The BJP's memorandum further alleged that the Punjab government

has miserably failed to make all the necessary arrangements on time to ensure the smooth purchase of paddy: be it the purchase of gunny bags, tarpaulin or notification of custom milling policy or notification of FRK (fortified rice kernels) milling policy or awarding of labour contracts or transportation contracts, etc.

The state government has also failed to ensure proper drinking water, toilet facilities, and compulsory medical facilities at mandis, the memorandum said.

The biggest failure of the government is its inability to enter into an agreement with 5,500 rice millers for the milling of paddy, it said.

"Now, the ongoing paddy procurement crisis in Punjab has spiralled into a serious law and order issue," it said.

"Farmers who have been protesting since the first week of October, have now increased the intensity of their 15-20 day long agitation and are now blocking the national and state highways and local roads. It has led to great inconvenience to the people of Punjab during the festive season," it said.

Notably, farmers under the banner of Kisan Mazdoor Morcha on Saturday held road blockades at a few places in Punjab for an indefinite period to protest the "tardy" paddy procurement and lifting and other issues.

Protests were held at Badarukhan

on Sangrur-Bathinda highway in Sangrur, Dagu on Moga-Ferozepur highway in Moga, Satali Phul on Gurdasour-Tanda highway in Gurdasour and Batala railway station, farmers said.

Seeking the governor's intervention to end the "tardy" paddy procurement, the BJP delegation's memorandum said, "We request your good self to intervene and ensure the complete lifting of paddy from mandis and gift farmers of Punjab happiness to celebrate the Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas with their families. The BJP urged the governor to ask the Punjab government to take all steps to ensure proper supply of DAP and urea for the next sowing season "as this is the next impending disaster Punjab will face".

Notably, paddy lifting from mandis (wholesale markets) in Punjab has been hit after the state rice millers refused to mill the paddy till their demands were met.

Rice millers have expressed concern over the out-turn ratio (post-milling yield) of the PR-126 variety and other hybrid varieties, claiming that it will cause them huge losses.

BJP leader and former Punjab chief minister Amarnath Singh had on Friday lashed out at Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann over the "tardy" paddy procurement in the state, alleging the latter "turned his back on the farmers" facing hardships in the mandis. (PTI)

# Mahayuti used its stint in power in Maharashtra : Congress



three Adani projects that have received approval in ecologically sensitive areas of the Western ghats," he said.

According to experts, environment ministry officials have "selectively interpreted the law" to allow these "red category" projects in sensitive areas, the Congress leader said.

Adani's own environmental evaluations had warned of significant damage to forests during construction but the projects were approved anyway, Ramesh claimed.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Mahayuti's brazen manipulation of the legal process clearly has severe repercussions for local communities and the local environment, he said.

"It is telling that the Mahayuti has used its stint in power to push corporate cronies' interests ahead of the wellbeing of Maharashtra's people and forests," Ramesh alleged.

The ruling Mahayuti alliance comprises Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, the BJP and the Ajit Pawar-led NCP. The opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) comprises the Congress, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP).

The remarks of the Congress leader came ahead of the polling for the 288-member Maharashtra Assembly on November 20.

The votes will be counted on November 23, a day before the current Maharashtra Assembly completes its term. (PTI)

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** The Congress on Sunday accused the Mahayuti government in Maharashtra of using its stint in power to push corporate cronies' interests ahead of the well-being of the state's people and forests.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh alleged that in November 2023, a major advisor to Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL) was appointed to an Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Centre that approves proposals for hydro-electricity projects, like those made by AGEL.

Soon after, in December 2023, the residents of more than 100 villages in Kolhapur rose up in protest against AGEL's Rs 7,000-crore Patgaon Pumped Storage Project, he said.

Since Kolhapur has been struggling with low rainfall and limited availability of water and no public meetings were held before the project was granted permission, locals are concerned about the impact it would have on the worsening water situation, Ramesh said on X.

"Worryingly, this is just one of

# MGNREGS demand-driven scheme, not possible to fix enrolment targets: Govt

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** The rural development ministry on Sunday dismissed reports that enrolment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is going down and said it is not possible to fix targets for total enrolment in the demand-driven scheme as the financial year is still going on.

According to a report of Libtech India on the implementation of the MGNREGS, there has been an 8-per cent drop in the number of active workers under the scheme compared to last year.

The report also said there has been a net deletion of 39 lakh workers, raising concerns about wrongful deletions. While the names of 84.8 lakh workers were deleted, only 45.4 lakh workers were added under the scheme.

"Since MGNREGA is a demand-driven scheme and current FY is still ongoing, hence, it is not possible to fix an exact target of person days generation. However, the states/UTs can send proposals for labour budget revision as per the locally felt needs," the ministry said in a statement.

"It may be noted that the total person days generated between FY 2006-07 to FY 2013-14 were 1,660 crore, whereas the total person days between FY 2014-15 to FY 2024-25 has been 2,923 crore"



it added.

The Libtech report said employment opportunities under the scheme have dropped significantly compared to the previous year, from 184 crore to 154 crore person-days.

It also said 27.4 per cent of all the workers, or 6.7 crore people, are ineligible for receiving wages through the Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS).

wages remain unpaid because of this reason. In case of non-eligible workers, whose ABPS is still pending, states/UTs have been requested to sensitise all banks to ensure timely seeding of Aadhaar numbers of MGNREGS beneficiaries into NPCI mapper," it added.

The ministry said if any transaction returns from the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) or a bank with any valid reason for rejection under the ABPS, then that transaction can be regenerated through the National Automated Clearing House (NACH) payment mode.

"Therefore, there already exists an alternative solution at NREGA-Soft in the form of NACH payment mode (i.e account based) for the regeneration of failed transactions under ABPS. States/UTs have been continuously sensitised regarding this," the ministry said.

On deletion of job cards, it said job card verification is a continuous process under the MGNREGS and the exercise is conducted by the states and Union territories with the help of the Aadhaar number as a tool of de-duplication.

"Job cards can be cancelled/deleted, after due verification, only if it is a fake job card (incorrect job card)/duplicate job card/household not willing to work/family shifted from gram

panchayat permanently/single person in job card and that person has expired," the ministry said.

It said according to NREGA-Soft, during the financial year 2023-24, the total number of job cards deleted by the states was 1.02 crore, whereas in the current FY 2024-25, as on October 26, the number was 32.28 lakh.

The ministry also rejected the argument that MGNREGS work is not undertaken in villages where the mates (frontline supervisors) do not have smartphones that support the NMMS app.

"In case of exceptional circumstances due to which attendance could not be uploaded, the District Programme Coordinator (DPC) has been authorised to approve the manual attendance. In FY 2024-25, attendance for 20.35 lakh worksites (95.66 per cent) has been captured and uploaded on the portal," the ministry said.

It also said the budget estimate for the scheme has been on an increasing trend. During FY 2013-14, the budget allocation was ₹ 33,000 crore at the BE stage, which is ₹ 86,000 crore during FY 2024-25 – the highest since the scheme's inception. Further, it is stated that in FY 2024-25, the minimum average notified wage rate has increased by 7 per cent. (PTI)



# Cyber agency warns against scams using fear tactics; PM urges public vigilance

CERT-In issues alert on 'digital arrest' scam and rising online frauds

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Indian cyber-security agency CERT-In on Sunday shared a list that talks about more than a dozen ways in which online scams are being perpetrated by fraudsters in the country, including "digital arrest" to dupe people by stealing their money and private data.

The public advisory has been accessed by PTI and it came on a day when Prime Minister Narendra Modi too cautioned people against such frauds in his monthly "Mann ki Baat" radio broadcast.

The Computer Emergency Response Team of India (CERT-In) advisory said "digital arrest" is an online scam as "government agencies do not use platforms like WhatsApp or Skype for official communication".

"Verify their identity by directly contacting the relevant agency," it recommended.

The advisory said in a case of "digital arrest", victims receive a phone call, e-mail or message claiming that they are under investigation for illegal activities, such as identity theft or money laundering.

The scammer threatens the victim with arrest or legal consequences unless he takes immediate action. They often create a sense of panic to prevent rational thinking, the advisory said.

Under the guise of "clearing their name", "assisting with the investigation" or "refundable security deposit/escrow account", individuals are coerced into transferring large



sums of money to specified bank accounts or UPI IDs, it added.

The advisory urged people, who get contacted by such cyber criminals, to "not panic as scammers use fear and urgency to manipulate victims".

"Take a moment to assess the situation calmly before responding. Avoid sharing personal information and never disclose sensitive personal or financial details over the phone or video calls, especially to unknown numbers," the CERT-In said.

It stressed that people should not transfer money "under pressure" as legitimate law-enforcement agencies "will never pressure you into sending money immediately".

"If someone demands money over the phone or online, it's most likely a scam," it said.

The advisory said staying "vigilant and informed" is crucial to protect oneself from this "emerging

cyber threat".

Modi spoke about "digital arrest" in his "Mann ki Baat" radio address, noting that it has hit all sections of the society, as he requested people to adopt the mantra of "stop, think and take action" when faced with such a scam.

He said probe agencies are working with the states to deal with the issue but added that awareness is essential in protecting oneself from this crime.

"Beware of digital arrest frauds. No investigative agency will ever contact you over the phone or a video call for such an investigation," the prime minister said. He asked people to call national cyber-security helpline number 1930 or inform police about such crimes on www.cybercrime.gov.in.

The advisory also spoke about other online cons like "phishing scams", in which scammers create e-mails or messages that appear le-

gitimate, often using logos and branding from trusted organisations: "lottery and prize scams" where victims receive notifications claiming that they have won a huge amount of money and to claim the prize, they are asked to pay a processing fee or taxes.

It said scammers exploit "hope and greed" to carry out lottery scams.

"Emotional manipulation scams" are perpetrated on online dating communication apps where scammers build emotional connections and then solicit money for emergencies like medical treatment and request that funds be sent via crypto currency.

"Job scams" are meant to con fresh graduates by posting about fake work listings on legitimate hiring portals or social media.

As part of "tech support scams", cyber criminals take advantage of a user's lack of technical knowledge and stealthily gain access to his computer by warning about a virus and then steal sensitive personal data.

"Investment scams" cash on a person's desire to earn quick money as they promise "unrealistic" returns via Ponzi or pyramid schemes and in "cash-on-delivery scams", criminals set up fake online stores accepting CoD orders. When the product is delivered, it is either counterfeit or completely different from what was advertised.

To con people using "fake charity appeal scams", scammers create convincing websites or social

media profiles asking for donations for fake causes like disaster relief or health initiatives and use such images or stories that provoke sympathy or urgency.

"Mistaken money-transfer scams" are those in which fraudsters contact a victim via e-mail or social media, claiming that money has been mistakenly sent to his account as they use fake transaction receipts to ask the person to return the funds immediately to avoid legal issues.

"Phone scams" are those where victims receive calls or messages under the fake name of a telecom regulatory body, saying there is an "issue" in their service as they urgently seek one-time passwords (OTPs) and banking information for identity verification.

"Parcel scams" are like "digital arrest" where victims are informed over a call or message that they are under probe as their drugs-laden parcel has been seized and they will be arrested or may have to face legal consequences if they do not pay a fine.

As part of the "loan or cards scam", fraudsters offer loans with low interest rates, coupled with quick approval, and "disappear" after the victims transfers an upfront fee for securing the loan.

The advisory suggested a host of best practices and counter-measures to stay vigilant against such crimes and not give into the "pressure tactics" deployed by cyber criminals, who seek quick action by creating "a sense of urgency". (PTI)

## Kashmir on edge: Undetected infiltration for last one year endangers security



**SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** An investigation into the October 20 terrorist attack in Gagangir in Jammu and Kashmir's Gaderbal district has indicated significant gaps in intelligence and undetected infiltration since last one year along the Line of Control (LoC), officials said on Sunday.

The attack, which claimed the lives of seven individuals, including a local doctor and two labourers from Bihar, has raised concerns about the unreported trend of local youths joining militant groups in Kashmir during this period.

The attack on the Z-Morh tunnel construction site involved two terrorists, one identified as a local youth from Kulgam in South Kashmir who joined a terrorist group in 2023, while the other is believed to have come from Pak-

istan. Security officials expressed alarm at the rapid radicalisation of local youths, underscoring the need for improved human intelligence (HUMINT) capabilities to identify them.

In light of recent changes in leadership of the Jammu and Kashmir police and the XV Corps of the Indian Army, there is a renewed focus on enhancing HUMINT to prevent local youths from slipping into terrorism.

The terrorists on October 20 entered the construction site and opened fire for about ten minutes before fleeing into nearby jungles. The local assailant was armed with an AK rifle, while his accomplice carried an American M-4 rifle.

Officials indicated that the local terrorist may have been involved in facilitating the infiltration of the other attacker along with his group, who likely crossed the LoC from the Tulail sector in March this year.

There have been intelligence reports of infiltration attempts from various regions, including Tulail,

Gurez, Machil and Gulmarg in North Kashmir, since December last year, but the army has been denying them due to lack of corroboration.

Similarly, the terrorists involved in the incident at Bota Pathri in the Gulmarg region on Thursday that left two soldiers and two Army porters dead are believed to have been holed up in the higher reaches of Afrawat since early August, the officials said.

Previously, security agencies have struggled against what they refer to as the "hidden threat" posed by terrorists employing "conservation and consolidation" tactics.

This strategy involves infiltrators remaining dormant within the local population until they receive orders from their handlers in Pakistan. Officials believe that the recent month-long assembly elections in the Union Territory may have prompted these groups to remain low-profile due to heightened security measures and increased international scrutiny.

The shift in terrorist operations has highlighted the urgent need for enhanced surveillance to thwart foreign mercenaries from executing their plans.

Security forces have noted that the infiltration and recruitment of local youths have increasingly taken place through online platforms.

Terrorists are now relying on encrypted messaging services such as Telegram and Mastodon, which are already banned in certain districts like Rajouri and Poonch, for covert communication and operational coordination.

As authorities remain on high alert, the challenge of gathering actionable ground-level intelligence persists, underscoring the critical need for a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism in the region, they said. (PTI)

## MedTech industry raises alarm over refurbished device imports

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Oct 27:** The Indian MedTech industry, led by the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) and the Association of Indian Medical Devices (AiMed), has voiced serious concerns over recent government policies allowing the import of refurbished and pre-owned medical devices.

During a press conference on Sunday at PHD House, industry representatives highlighted the risks these policies pose to the country's healthcare safety standards, domestic manufacturing, and the 'Make in India' initiative.

Industry leaders claim that recent Office Memorandums from the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC), alongside directives from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), permit imports that directly undermine the National Medical Devices Policy. By allowing refurbished imports to compete with locally manufactured devices, officials argue, these policies weaken India's self-reliance efforts and threaten domestic businesses, including startups and MSMEs, which have invested heavily in R&D and innovation.

A primary concern raised is the impact of using refurbished devices on patient safety. Experts point out that these pre-owned devices often lack the reliability, warranties, and updated technology

offered by newly manufactured equipment. Rajiv Nath, Forum Co-ordinator of AiMed, stated, "Allowing the import of pre-owned equipment compromises patient safety and turns India into a dumping ground for obsolete medical technology, undermining the progress made by domestic manufacturers."

Industry leaders are calling on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to step in and address the issue, urging a policy shift to prioritize local manufacturing over imports. They emphasized that India's MedTech sector has made significant strides in recent years, developing devices that meet international standards. However, they warn that continued allowance for refurbished imports will compromise the sector's growth, limit innovation, and hinder the quality of patient care across the country.

Speakers at the event reiterated the importance of policy consistency, particularly to support India's vision of self-reliance in the healthcare sector. Industry stakeholders urged the government to reconsider these import policies, enhance regulatory oversight, and enforce post-market surveillance to ensure that medical devices in India meet stringent safety standards. They emphasized the need to protect India's MedTech industry and align policies with the national vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

## State not empowered to frame rules for motor driving schools: HC



**PRAYAGRAJ, Oct 27:** The Allahabad High Court has held that Section 27 of Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989 empowers the central government to make rules for licensing and regulating motor driving training schools. The state government is not competent to frame rules in this regard.

The Uttar Pradesh government had issued an order in 2023 laying down Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for private motor driving training schools and their operation which was challenged before the High Court.

Allowing the writ petition filed by UP Motor Training School Owners Association and seven others, a high court bench comprising Justices Anjali Kumar Mishra and Jayant Banerji struck down the government order. The counsel for the petitioners had submitted that the central government alone has the power to make rules for the purpose of licensing and regulating schools or establishments for imparting in-

structions in driving of motor vehicles and related matters. The bench in its order dated October 25, 2024 observed, "Section 28 of the Act which empowers the state government to frame rules clearly bars it from framing rules regarding which the power vests with the central government."

"Various paras and clauses of the impugned Government Order by which the petitioner is aggrieved, in our considered opinion clearly fall within the domain of rule-making power of Central Government alone," the bench said. "The submission of learned Standing Counsel that the impugned Government Order merely supplements the rules framed by the central government cannot be accepted," the court added. Welcoming the judgment, KM Bajpai, President of UP Motor Training School Owners Association said, "We expect that while taking any further decision, the state would take care of the interest of motor driving school operators." (PTI)

## Delhi HC transfers over 200 judicial officers in subordinate courts

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** The Delhi High Court has transferred several judicial officers in its subordinate courts within the national capital, including the judge hearing the cancellation report filed by the Delhi Police in a minor wrestler's sexual harassment case against former BJP MP and ex-Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

Besides identifying new postings for 233 judicial officers in Delhi Judicial Services, the high court also issued a separate notification for the posting of 23 judicial officers in Delhi Higher Judicial Service.

The registrar general of the high court issued the list of trans-

fers on Friday with immediate effect. Special Judge (POCSO) Chhavi Kapoor of the Patiala House court, who was hearing the matter against Brij Bhushan Singh, has been transferred to the Rouse Avenue court as a special judge.

Additional Sessions Judge Gombi Manocha will now hold the court in place of Kapoor who had reserved the order on the police report.

Additional Session Judge Jitendra Singh has been transferred to Rouse Avenue to fill the court left vacant by the recent retirement of special judge Rakesh Syal.

Syal was holding special court to try cases against lawmakers, including the alleged Delhi excise

policy scam against former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, the alleged Waqf board scam case against AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan, and a 1984 anti-Sikh riots related case against Congress leader Jagdish Tytler.

Besides transfers, these postings also included the induction of around 70 judicial officers in various districts upon completion of their training.

"Hon'ble the Chief Justice and Hon'ble Judges of this Court have been pleased to make postings/transfers in the Delhi Judicial Service with immediate effect," one notification read.

A similar notification was issued for Delhi Higher Judicial Service. (PTI)

## Two workers die, seven hospitalised after inhaling toxic fumes



**AHMEDABAD, Oct 27:** Two workers died and seven were hospitalised after they inhaled toxic fumes at a textile factory in Gujarat's Ahmedabad on Sunday, police said. The incident occurred at Devi Synthetics in the Narol industrial area of the city.

Nine workers inhaled toxic fumes that leaked when spent acid was being transferred into a tank at the factory, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Ravi Mohan Saini said. "Police received information

around 10.30 am that nine persons were affected due to a toxic gas leak in a factory in Narol and were taken to LG Hospital, where two died," he said. Seven workers are hospitalised, of whom four are critical and are being treated in the ICU, he said.

A preliminary investigation revealed that spent acid, used in the printing and dyeing industry, was being transferred into a tank when the workers nearby were affected, he said. The official said a team from the police, Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), industrial safety and Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB) officials reached the site and started probing the exact cause.

Industrial safety and FSL officials are probing to find out if the factory followed due procedures regarding NOC, etc. And police will take action based on their report, he said. (PTI)

## Marathon to affect central Delhi traffic on tomorrow

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Traffic will be affected in central Delhi on Tuesday as a marathon will be flagged off on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, an advisory said.

According to the advisory, around 7,700 people will take part in the 'Run for Unity', which will begin from Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium. Motorists are hereby informed that as a part of the celebration of Rashtriya Ekta Divas, the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a 'Run for Unity' will be flagged off from gate number 1 of Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium on Tuesday at 7:40 am, the advisory stated.

Approximately 7,700 participants will take part in the event. They will reach the venue by bus and car. Therefore, traffic will be restricted towards Indira Gate, C-Hexagon from 6:45 am till the completion of the function, it said. The route will start from gate number 1, Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, C-Hexagon, opposite Shahjahan Road and at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Statue, the advisory said. (PTI)

## CDS, Army chief pay homage to infantrymen on 78<sup>th</sup> Shaurya Diwas

Leaders honor fallen infantrymen, marking 1947's defense of Kashmir

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan and Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi on Sunday paid homage to infantrymen who died on duty at a solemn ceremony held at the National War Memorial here to mark the 78th Shaurya Diwas.

October 27 has a unique significance for the Infantry -- on this day in 1947, infantrymen became the first from the Indian Army to land in Srinagar and help evict invaders from the outskirts of the city, thus saving Jammu and Kashmir from Pakistani invasion, the Army said. At the Shaurya Diwas event, Gen Chauhan and Gen Dwivedi laid wreaths on this occasion to pay tributes to the infantrymen. Infantry is the largest fighting arm of the Indian Army.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also posted on X on the occasion.



"On Infantry Day, we all salute the indomitable spirit and courage of all Ranks and Veterans of the Infantry, who tirelessly protect us. They always stand resolute in the face of any adversity, ensuring the safety and security of our nation. The Infantry embodies the essence of strength, valour and duty, inspir-

ing every Indian," he wrote. Three decorated veterans -- Brig Vijay Kumar Berry, MVC (retd) who had participated in 'Op Cactus Lily' (1971), Sub Maj (Hony Capt) Shatrughan Singh, Vrc (retd) and Hav Jai Ram Singh, Vrc (retd) who had participated in 'Op Vijay' (1999) also laid wreaths on

behalf of Infantry veterans at the war memorial.

The ceremony which was attended by colonels of all the regiments of the Infantry, was conducted with military precision and solemnity.

In his message to all infantrymen on the occasion, the director general of the Infantry exhorted all to rededicate themselves to the core values of bravery, sacrifice, selfless devotion to duty, professional excellence, and to remain indomitable in their resolve to defend the integrity and sovereignty of our country, an Army official said.

In a video post on X, the Army wrote, "General Upendra Dwivedi, #COAS and All Ranks of #Indian Army convey best wishes to All Ranks, #Veterans and Families of the #Infantry on the occasion of 78th #ShauryaDiwas." (PTI)



# We had to be very different: Raj & DK on creating two spies in 'The Family Man' and 'Citadel'

**MUMBAI, Oct 27:** Filmmakers Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK said they wanted "Citadel: Honey Bunny" to have a distinct identity from their earlier series "The Family Man" as they felt the need to explore a new style and approach with the spy project.

While "The Family Man", starring Manoj Bajpayee, followed a middle-class man working for a covert government agency, "Citadel" operates in a fictional universe where spy agencies are not tied to governments and handle larger global missions. "We had to be very different from "The Family Man", we couldn't do the same things. It was easier to do it, but we thought we should pick a different style for this," Raj told PTI in an interview. DK said they knew from the start that "Honey Bunny" needed to stand apart from their previous work.

"Citadel" is a different world. It is not India nor the real world we live in. It is a slightly fictitious universe, where there are spy agencies that are not government agencies, and they are fighting for things larger than protecting the borders.

"So, that's the thread we adhered to, and then we started creating these spies. Even in terms of treatment, they are slightly larger-than-life than

Srikant Tiwari. So, they are an entirely different breed of spies," he said.

"Honey Bunny" serves as the Indian chapter of "Citadel", which started with an American show headlined by Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Richard Madden. The Prime Video series, featuring Samantha Ruth Prabhu opposite Dhawan, is billed as a riveting narrative that fuses elements of a gritty spy action thriller with the heart-warming allure of a love story. "When stuntman Bunny (Dhawan) recruits struggling actress Honey (Prabhu) for a side gig, they are hurled into a high-stakes world of action, espionage, and betrayal. Years later, as their dangerous past catches up, the estranged Honey and Bunny must reunite and fight to protect their young daughter, Nadia," reads the official plotline.

The idea for "Honey Bunny" came from Sita R Menon, a frequent collaborator of Raj & DK. The writer, who has worked with the director duo on projects such as "99", "Shor in the City", "Go Goa Gone", as well as shows "Farzi" and "Guns & Gulaabs", said she aimed to ensure "equal weightage" to both Dhawan and Samantha's characters in the story.

"This is the best way you can bring equality... The effort was to give equal weightage to both protagonists and to every character in the story. I had pitched two ideas to Raj & DK, and one of them was picked up. But the three of us worked in tandem in terms of developing it on blank paper. It took almost five years," Menon said.

Many people on social media found the trailer of "Honey Bunny" to be similar to the Hollywood action-comedy "Mr. & Mrs. Smith", which featured Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie as a spy couple. When asked about the same, Raj said, "It has nothing to do with 'Mr. & Mrs. Smith' at all. If you know us, we won't be derivative in any of that." The filmmaker teased that there are "bigger plans" being enacted in the US for the "Citadel" franchise, which also saw the release of an Italian version titled "Citadel: Diana" earlier this month.

"That's their train; they started it, and we are focused on our bogey. They've got big plans... They are shooting season two, and there are a lot of plans. As things come out, it will evolve more. I know our characters are going to be in their world, but we've to wait and see how it is going to grow," Raj said. (PTI)



## Adele opts for custom Gaurav Gupta gown for her Las Vegas residency opening

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Popular singer-songwriter Adele was spotted wearing a custom-made ensemble crafted by celebrated designer Gaurav Gupta at the opening night of her Las Vegas residency on Saturday. The multiple Grammy winner, known for songs such as "Rollin' in the Deep", "Set Fire to the Rain", and "Someone Like You", was dressed in a black Saturn Orbit gown from Gupta's label at the first show of her "Weekends with Adele" series of concerts at The Colosseum, Caesars Palace. Gupta shared a video of Adele, draped in his creation, as she performed her song "Love In The Dark" from her 2015 album "25".

"@adele in Custom Gaurav Gupta. @gauravguptaofficial for the opening of her Las Vegas Residency last night. I am just floored and flying at the same time. She truly makes us transcend. Thank you @bosehl @maisonbose @sweetbabyjamie for this magical moment. #adele #lasvegas #gauravgupta," he captioned his Instagram post. Adele also shared a series of pictures from the event on her social media pages. In the past, Gupta has also dressed the likes of Beyonce, Kim Kardashian, Mindy Kaling, Nicki Minaj, Kelly Rowland, Rebel Wilson and Allison Janney. (PTI)



## British singer-songwriter Jorja Smith, Amit Trivedi to perform at NH7 Weekender

**MUMBAI, Oct 27:** (PTI) Grammy nominee Jorja Smith and musician Amit Trivedi are set to headline NH7 Weekender 2024 in December, the organizers have announced.

The 15th edition of the multi-genre music-comedy and gaming festival will be held on December 14 and 15 at Teerth Fields, Pune.

Trivedi, known for his work in "Dev.D", "Qala", said he is looking forward to perform at the NH7 Weekender after a decade.

"NH7 Weekender is memorable to me as my first ever live performance in 2014. My journey from then to now with the festival has been nothing short of exhilarating. The festival gives artists a platform to explore their musical freedom. I cannot wait to be back on the NH7 Weekender stage with the electrifying crowd to experience the monumental 15th edition of the festival come to life," the composer-singer

said in a statement.

The artist line-up for the upcoming edition consists of over 30 homegrown and international artists, including Padma Bhushan awardee Usha Uthup, King, Raftaar, Wazir Patar, Pataka Boys, Chaar Diwaari, Craze, Youngr, DJ Jarreau Vandal, Asterism, and Oliver Cronin, among others.

Raftaar said he is excited for his maiden performance at the NH7 Weekender.

"Having been present at the festival over the years as an attendee and also, to support my friends, I am looking forward to finally performing at the happiest music festival. It is a great opportunity to connect with my fans! Waiting to vibe with the Weekender Warriors!," he said.

NH7 Weekender is an IP of NODWIN Gaming and is co-presented by McDowell's House of Soda.

Akshat Rathee, Co-Founder and MD NODWIN Gaming said they are thrilled about the lineup of NH7 Weekender.

"The happiest music festival has always been about truly celebrating music beyond geographies and genres. This year's lineup is a tribute to the rising power of Indian musicians while also embracing global artistry," Rathee said, adding the festival will celebrate the genres capturing the world's attention like pop, electronic, and R&B. (PTI)

## Alicia Vikander to topline drama movie 'The Last Day'

**LOS ANGELES, Oct 27:** Oscar winner Alicia Vikander will headline the cast for the upcoming drama film "The Last Day".

To be directed by Rachel Rose in her feature debut, the movie will also star Victoria Pedretti and Wagner Moura in pivotal roles, reported entertainment news outlet Variety.

The story is about a writer and mother who confronts her lack of creative purpose and embarks on a journey of rediscovering herself after encountering figures from her past.

"The Last Day", which completed production earlier this month, is produced by Lucie Elwes, Rose, Mason Plotts, Pamela Koffler and Christine Vachon of Killer Films.

The film will be executive produced by Maja Hoffmann and Lucas Hoffmann of Luma Projects.

Vikander won an Oscar for best supporting actress for her performance in "The Danish Girl" and is also known for starring in films such as "Ex Machina", "Anna Karenina", "A Royal Affair", "Testament of Youth", "Tomb Raider" and "The Green Knight".

She was most recently seen alongside Cate Blanchett and Charles Dance in the political satire "Rumours" as well as "The Assessment" opposite Elizabeth Olsen.

Vikander's upcoming projects include the Korean thriller "Hope" and Oliver Assayas' "The Wizard of the Kremlin". (PTI)



## Punjabi aa gaye oye: Diljit Dosanjh kicks off 'Dil-Luminati India Tour 2024' with sold-out Delhi show

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** "O, ki haal Dilli walo!!!" echoed through the packed Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium as Diljit Dosanjh made a grand entry and captivated the crowd with an energetic performance that kicked off his eagerly awaited 'Dil-Luminati India Tour 2024'. The concert, the first of two scheduled for Saturday and Sunday in the national capital, saw the singer enthral thousands of fans with his chart-topping tracks like "Lover", "5 Taara", "Do You Know", "Ikk Kudi" from "Udta Punjab", and many more.

"It's an amazing vibe, and people have been waiting for the last half hour, so the craze is full-on. And as he said 'Punjabi aa gaye oye', it really felt like he's come back home. We're enjoying it," one fan told PTI.

Dosanjh, dressed in an all-black outfit, complete with a black turban and sunglasses, waved the national flag at the start of the concert. He then gave a salute in front of the flag, drawing loud cheers from the crowd.

Addressing his fans, Dosanjh, 40, said, "O, ki haal Dilli walo? (How are you people in Delhi?)" The crowd responded with a massive roar. "Delhi, we had a full house, sold out. We got permission only for this much, otherwise, we would have done it for three days in a row with a stage at the centre. Thank you guys, appreciate," he said. Many took to social media to complain about being stuck in long traffic jams while trying to reach the

venue. Several videos showed long queues at the Barapullah Bridge.

Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal was among those caught in the jam and had to leave his car and walk the last stretch to the venue. Sharing a video on his Instagram Stories showing bumper-to-bumper traffic, Goyal wrote, "Walking the last mile to JLN Stadium for Diljit. So much traffic!"

At the venue, large crowds waited for hours to enter, but the excitement was palpable.

"There used to be fights back in the day, and the same is happening today because we weren't getting tickets. We had to ask some of our friends to help us get them," another fan added.

"On a scale from 1 to 100, my excitement level is 110," said one enthusiastic concert-goer.

Others felt lucky to have secured tickets amid the heavy demand.

"It was pure luck that I got the tickets. My favourite Diljit song is with Gurdas Maan, 'Ki Banu Duniya Da', and my current favourite is 'Born to Shine'," said a fan.

Fans also detailed the struggles to book the tickets for their favourite singer's concert.

"I struggled for nine hours on Zomato Live to get some tickets, and finally got one. My girlfriend has another ticket, but she's sitting on the other side. We're in two different rows," said one concert-goer.

While many were fortunate to be

part of one of the biggest shows in recent memory, others found themselves stranded outside, unable to enter as they learned their tickets were invalid.

Despite pleading with the organisers, they were denied entry, leaving some furious and others heartbroken.

"It was a total waste to come here," said one disappointed fan, who was turned away by the security.

Another added, "I came here without a ticket and met someone who sold me a fake one. They charged me a lot of money for it." Delhi will witness a second consecutive date with the singer that he added after the tickets for the first show were sold out within minutes.

The Sunday show is going to be sold out as well with only lounge tickets remaining and they are priced between Rs 32,000 and Rs 60,000.

Organised by Ripple Effect Studios and Saregama India, with Zomato Live handling ticketing, the tour has already broken records, becoming the fastest-selling and highest-grossing concert event in Indian history.

Dosanjh, who has captivated music lovers globally with his Punjabi hits, announced his arrival in Delhi in an Instagram post on Friday.

"Delhi Ka Mausam Kya Keh Raha Hai. DIL-LUMINATI TOUR Year 24," he wrote, sharing photos from the plane and the airport.

In another post on Saturday, the 40-year-old musician shared a video from

the stadium as he inspected the arrangements ahead of the concert. "All set for

tonight," he captioned the video.

The Delhi shows mark the beginning of a 10-city tour for Dosanjh, which will take him across Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Pune, Kolkata, and more, before concluding with a grand finale in Guwahati on December 29.

In recent years, Dosanjh has transcended cultural and language barriers, becoming one of the most prominent South Asian artists on the global stage. A pivotal moment in his journey was his 2022 performance at Coachella, where he became the first Punjabi artist to perform at the iconic festival.

In June, Dosanjh appeared as the musical guest on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon," where he performed his popular tracks "G.O.A.T." and "Born to Shine." (PTI)





## MOVE OVER MESSI-RONALDO

## New generation of soccer stars lining up to win Ballon d'Or

**MANCHESTER (ENGLAND), Oct 27:** No Lionel Messi. No Cristiano Ronaldo. When the Ballon d'Or is presented at a gala ceremony in Paris on Monday, it will feel like the start of a new era in soccer. There is also a sense of void now that one of sport's most engrossing rivalries is likely over.

"It's interesting that as it starts to come to an end, we are sort of saying, what's the next equivalent rivalry going to be," soccer author Jonathan Wilson told The Associated Press. "As if that kind of rivalry was a natural state. But, there's never been a rivalry like that before."

Messi and Ronaldo won soccer's most prestigious individual award a combined 13 times over 16 years of unprecedented dominance. Neither has been nominated this year.

Instead Real Madrid winger Vinicius Junior is the favourite to be crowned the world's best player and become the first winner born this century. He underlined his credentials this week with a stunning Champions League hat-trick against Borussia Dortmund. "Vinicius had an incredible season where he was a key player... he proved he's the best player in the world," Madrid teammate Lucas Vazquez said.

But, rather than Vinicius spearheading a new era of dominance, it seems likely the award will revert to a time before Messi and Ronaldo when multiple winners were relatively rare.

France great Zinedine Zidane, for instance, only won it once. The same goes for Ronaldinho,



Rivaldo, Luis Figo and George Best. Originally limited to European players, it was never won by Pele or Diego Maradona.

Before Messi, the last player to win back-to-back awards was Dutch striker Marco van Basten in 1988 and '89. Messi won a record-extending eighth Ballon d'Or last year after leading Argentina to triumph at the World Cup in 2022.

Wilson, who wrote about the history of Argentinian soccer in his book "Angels With Dirty Faces," sees no obvious successor

to the Barcelona great, now at Inter Miami.

"Messi's been phenomenal for 17, 18 years," he said. "It's not a pure tallying process, but in terms of greatness over a protracted period, Messi is the greatest there has ever been by quite some margin."

"I don't think there's anybody in the world now who has anything remotely close to that talent." Such was the dominance of Messi and Ronaldo, not only would Vinicius Junior become the first winner born this century, but there has never even been a recip-

ient born in the '90s.

Vinicius Junior, whose goals helped Madrid to a record-extending 15th European Cup last season, is part of a new generation of stars that are flourishing as Messi and Ronaldo reach the final stages of their careers.

Kylian Mbappe, Erling Haaland, Jude Bellingham and Lamine Yamal make up a field of contenders who could challenge for years to come.

Manchester City midfielder Rodri is the second favourite to win this year and would become

the first player born in the '90s to take the award.

Mbappe, who has long been seen as the heir to Messi and Ronaldo as the world's best player, was born in 1998, meaning it's likely there will eventually be a winner from that decade even if Rodri misses out.

The only other winners since Ronaldo won his first Ballon d'Or in 2008 were Luka Modric in 2018 and Karim Benzema in 2022. Both were born in the 1980s.

The award was cancelled in 2020 when Robert Lewandowski was widely regarded as the best player that year. He was also born in the '80s. Neymar, born in 1992, came third on two occasions.

The Ballon d'Or was created by France Football magazine and has been awarded since 1956. It is voted for by journalists from the top 100 countries in the FIFA rankings.

Each journalist, one per country, selects 10 players in ranked order, with points attributed to each position. The winner is the player who receives the most points. The dominance of Messi and Ronaldo in the age of social media has heightened the award's profile. Players talk of their dream to win it in a manner they may have spoken about the Champions League and World Cup in the past.

The potential to win the award is used during transfer negotiations, with clauses added to contracts stipulating a buying club will pay extra costs if a player goes on to be crowned the best player in the world. (AP)

## Lewandowski and Yamal spoil Mbappé's first clasico as Barca rout Real Madrid 4-0

**BARCELONA, Oct 27:** Robert Lewandowski scored twice and Lamine Yamal piled on to ruin Kylian Mbappé's first clasico as Barcelona routed Real Madrid 4-0.

The lopsided victory in Spain's capital ended the host's unbeaten run in La Liga at 42 games, one shy of Barcelona's record streak in 2017-18. Carlo Ancelotti's side suffered its first loss since Sept. 23 last year.

And what a loss it was. Lewandowski got the visitors going from a superb pass by Barcelona's latest youth talent Marc Casadó in the 54th minute and rose up to head in a fine header three minutes later to silence Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

Yamal made it a rout in the 77th when the teenage phenom rifled a shot from an angle over goalkeeper Andriy Lunin. That goal made him the youngest scorer in a clasico at 17 years, 105 days, surpassing teammate Ansu Fati, who was about 250 days older in October 2020.

Raphinha then broke free with Madrid completely unhinged and chipped Lunin in the 84th.

The win came three days after Barcelona thumped Bayern Munich 4-1 in the Champions League. It has outscored its last five opponents 21-2.

"We came here to do just this," Yamal said. "We had lots of confidence and when we scored the second goal, we wanted to score a third, and then a fourth, as many goals as possible. To win 4-0 at this ground and beat Bayern 4-1, we showed that we are ready for anything."

It is an understatement that Mbappé had a frustrating first game against Barcelona in a white shirt. The France star was caught eight times offside by Barcelona's synchronized back four and failed to beat second-choice goalkeeper Iñaki Peña one-on-one with his team down two goals.

"We knew that they played with a high line, and we just couldn't

take advantage of it," Ancelotti said. "Sometimes (Mbappé) fell offside, but he had three or four chances to score and needed a better finishing touch."

Hansi Flick, meanwhile, had a night to remember in the first clasico for the German coach.

Barcelona still has financial troubles that cast doubt over its future but its youthful team has made huge steps forward since Flick replaced Barcelona great Xavi Hernández in the summer.

"Today we made a fantastic match and it is all about the team. Everyone gave it 100%," said Flick, who Ancelotti called "a gentleman" for telling his bench to cool it when they effusively celebrated the fourth goal near Madrid's dugout.

After opening a six-point lead over Madrid at the top of La Liga, it is no longer a foregone conclusion that with Mbappé on board Madrid will waltz to a second straight domestic title.

Casadó was one of five home-grown players that Flick put in his starting lineup, the same 11 from the Bayern win. Six players under 22 years old started for Barcelona, led by 17-year-olds Yamal and Pau Cubarsí.

Casadó had flashes of the flawless ball control of a Sergi Busquets as he helped compensate for Madrid's extra man in the midfield before he cued up the game-changing pass to play Lewandowski clear to slot home.

Yamal upstaged Mbappé this summer when Spain beat France en route to winning the European Championship, and he did it again.

To top it off, he scored with his supposedly "not as good" right foot before flashing his new braces decorated with Barcelona's colors for the cameras. Mbappé was ruled offside five times in the first half hour, as Barcelona pressed high. Vinicius Júnior, who featured in a fascinating duel with Cubarsí, missed a golden chance in the 21st when he shot past the post from close. (AP)

## Real Madrid, Spanish league condemn racist insults against Yamal in Spanish league 'Clasico'

**MADRID, Oct 27:** Real Madrid and the Spanish league on Sunday condemned racist insults against Lamine Yamal during Saturday's "Clasico," and Madrid said it was working to identify those who abused the Barcelona forward.

Madrid said it "has opened an investigation in order to locate and identify the perpetrators of these deplorable and despicable insults so that the appropriate disciplinary and judicial measures can be taken."

The league said it was going to formally denounce the "intolerable racist" insults and gestures against Barcelona players at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

The league said it "strongly condemns these events" and "remains firm in its commitment to eradicate any type of racist behaviour and hatred inside and outside stadiums. There is no place for this scourge in sport."

The reaction came after videos on social media showed the alleged insults against Yamal after he scored Barcelona's third goal in its 4-0 rout of Madrid. The 17-

year-old celebrated in a corner in front of Madrid fans and made some gestures apparently provoking the fans.

A few fans could be heard yelling insults at Yamal and the other Barcelona players.

"Real Madrid strongly condemns any kind of behaviour involving racism, xenophobia or violence in football and sport, and deeply regrets the insults that a few fans uttered last night in one of the corners of the stadium," the club said in a statement.

Madrid has been denouncing racist insults against its forward Vinicius Júnior, who is also Black, for several years, including when he played a match at Barcelona's Camp Nou Stadium.

Four Atletico Madrid fans who allegedly led a social media campaign aimed at promoting racist acts against Vinicius were detained earlier this month.

Barcelona's victory left the Catalan club six points ahead of Madrid at the top of the league standings after 11 matches. (AP)

## Batters fail again as Delhi trail Assam by 116 runs

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Delhi's woes with the willow continued as the team struggled to 214 for six after the likes of Yash Dhull and Himmat Singh failed to convert their starts into substantial knocks in their Ranji Trophy match against Assam here on Sunday.

Resuming at their overnight score of 264 for six, Assam's first innings ended at 330 with wicketkeeper Sumit Ghadigaonkar making 162 off 237 balls. Ghadigaonkar was overnight 120, having seen his colleagues blown away by Harshit Rana's excellent bowling. Delhi were 214 for six at stumps on day two, trailing Assam by 116 runs.

Having received his maiden Test call-up, Rana ended with fine figures of 5/80 in 19.3 overs, wrapping up Assam's innings with the wicket of Mrimnoy Dutta.

When their turn to bat came, Delhi lost Gagan Vats for a duck but Sanat Sangwan (47 off 88 balls) and Dhull (47 off 44 balls) added 66 runs for the second wicket to steady the innings.

Dhull's wicket signalled the arrival of skipper Himmat, who added 81 runs for the third wicket with Sangwan before the latter was out leg before.

Even as Sangwan walked back to the pavilion, Himmat looked determined to play a long innings but nine runs later, Assam's veteran off-spinner Swarupam Purkayastha dashed his hopes by bowling out the batter for an 88-

ball 55.

Purkayastha was Assam's best bowler on the day with figures of 3/46 in 17 overs, while left-arm spinner Rahul Singh picked up 2/32 in the Group D match.

When Rahul had wicketkeeper Pranav Rajuvanshi trapped in front of the wicket, Delhi were in all sorts of trouble at 182 for six. But Sumit Mathur (19 batting) and Rana (15 batting) ensured there was no further casualty for the home team until the close of play on the second day.

**Brief scores:**  
At Delhi: Assam 330 (Sibsankar Roy 59, Sumit Ghadigaonkar 162; Harshit Rana 5/80) lead Delhi 214-6 (Himmat Singh 55; Swarupam Purkayastha 3/46) by 116 runs.

At Jamshedpur: Jharkhand 202 (Anukul Roy 61; Jagjit Singh 3/32, Vishu Kashyap 3/64) lead Chandigarh 34-0 (Shivam Bhamri 23 batting) by 168 runs.

At Coimbatore: Chhattisgarh 500 (Aayush Pandey 124, Anuj Tiwary 84, Sanjeet Desai 82, Eknath Kerkar 52, Ajay Mandal 64; Ajith Ram 4/132) lead Tamil Nadu 23-1 (Ajith Ram 10 batting; Jivesh Butte 1/5) by 477 runs.

At Rajkot: Railways 234 & 122-7 (Shivam Chaudhary 35; Dharmendrasinh Jadeja 3/40, Yuvrajsinh Dodiya 3/50) lead Saurashtra 196 (Prerak Mankad 52; Karn Sharma 4/38) by 160 runs.(PTI)

## Dortmund slump to another loss at Augsburg as Leipzig top the Bundesliga

**DORTMUND, Oct 27:** Borussia Dortmund's awful away form continued in a 2-1 loss to Augsburg in the Bundesliga that increases the pressure on coach Nuri Sahin.

Dortmund's fourth loss in a row in away games in all competitions — including 5-2 at Real Madrid on Tuesday — left the team seven points off new Bundesliga leader Leipzig.

The team's poor form has key players and sporting director Sebastian Kehl at a loss. "I'm annoyed by the many goals we're conceding," Kehl said. "We've been addressing this intensively but now we're standing here having to explain things that I can't explain."

Alexis Claude-Maurice made his first start since joining Augsburg in August and rewarded his new team with two goals from distance to turn the game around. Dortmund led with an early Donyell Malen goal.

The game ended with 18-year-old Dortmund defender Almugera Kabar sent off for two yellow cards on his Bundesliga debut. American forward Cole Campbell also debuted.

Sahin, who took over after Edin Terzic left following Dortmund's Champions League final loss last season, already faced scrutiny of his tactics last week after Dortmund gave up a two-goal lead in the loss at Madrid.



Sahin could be without defenders Waldemar Anton and Julian Ryerson and midfielder Marcel Sabitzer for another away game on Tuesday at Wolfsburg in the German Cup. All went off with injuries on Saturday.

In the Champions League, it has lost all three of its games. In the Bundesliga, Marco Rose's team leads the standings — at least until Bayern Munich plays Sunday — and is unbeaten in its eight games.

Leipzig briefly looked like bringing its Champions League form to the Bundesliga before a second-half comeback to beat Freiburg 3-1.

Poor marking allowed Ritsu Doan to head Freiburg in front in the 15th — the first goal Leipzig

conceded in the Bundesliga since Aug. 31. Goals from defenders Willi Orban and Lutsharel Geertruida got Leipzig back into the game before Lois Openda scored from a tight angle to secure the win.

With attacking midfielder Xavi Simons set to be out for weeks with an ankle ligament injury sustained in Leipzig's 1-0 loss to Liverpool on Wednesday, teammates Castello Lukeba and Amadou Haidara raised his shirt in tribute.

Late goals were key to Bayer Leverkusen's title win last season. It went the other way on Saturday as Romano Schmid's 90th-minute goal salvaged a 2-2 draw for Werder Bremen and dropped Leverkusen five points off the lead. (AP)

## Carlos Sainz Jr. puts Ferrari on the pole in Mexico City as Perez's miserable season continues

**MEXICO CITY, Oct 27:** Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. won his first pole of the season at the Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez, and Sergio Perez's miserable Formula 1 season continued when he failed to advance out of the first round of qualifying at the Mexico City Grand Prix.

"Very happy and great couple of laps, a lot of times around Mexico you always have a feeling you cannot put a lap together and it's extremely difficult," Sainz said. "Honestly, my two laps were pretty much identical, almost perfect. Very happy because that's not normally the case around Mexico with how tricky it is."

Three-time defending champion Max Verstappen, who had an engine change Saturday, qualified second for Red Bull. Verstappen is a five-time winner in Mexico City.

Lando Norris of McLaren, who is chasing Verstappen for the driver championship, qualified third and was followed by Charles Leclerc of Ferrari, who won the United States Grand Prix last week.

Mercedes drivers George Russell and Lewis Hamilton qualified fifth and sixth, while Kevin Magnussen of Haas was seventh. Pierre Gasly of Alpine, Alex Albon of Williams and Nico Hulkenberg of Haas rounded out the top 10.

But the focus in Mexico City is on Perez, who is under intense pressure to keep his seat with Red Bull after he signed a contract extension in June.

His poor performance this season — he's winless for the first time since joining the team in 2021, is eighth in the driver standings and has crashed three times — has played a role in McLaren passing Red Bull for the lead in the constructors' championship race.

Perez was visibly annoyed after his poor qualifying effort and said his car is not performing to his liking.

"It's too bad, I have many problems with slowing down the car, many problems," he said.



"Every time I try to break, I don't have the grip, that's the main problem. We see the problem and we know the problem that we have, it doesn't have a quick fix." He will start 18th on Sunday at a track notoriously difficult to pass and where he crashed on the first lap last year. He said his strategy for the race is recovery. "Get some points and minimize the damages, it's the best we can do," he said. "It's a long race where anything can happen, we are going to give everything. This is the weekend when I want to do my best, unfortunately we have not been able to achieve it."

Although team principal Christian Horner insisted multiple times this weekend that Perez

is under contract at Red Bull for 2025 — with an option for 2026 — there are performance clauses that could cost Perez his seat at the end of the season.

"I think he's summed it up perfectly — it's been a bad year for Checo," Horner said Friday. "We know what he's capable of and we're hoping that we can give him a set-up and the confidence in the car to extract the kind of performances that we know he's very capable of."

"Checo's our driver. He's contracted for 2025. He's competitive. He's hungry. He's not happy with where he currently is. So as a team, we're doing our very best to support him," Horner continued. (AP)



## KOHLI'S FORM NOT A CONCERN

# Indian batters were exposed by Santner: Simon Doull

PUNE, Oct. 27: Former New Zealand pacer Simon Doull attributed India's shocking series defeat to their batsmen's inadequacies against spin bowling but he was not ready to write off underwhelming star batter Virat Kohli.

Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner grabbed 13 wickets as the Kiwis walloped India by 113 runs in the second Test here on Saturday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

"There's a misconception that Indian players are better players of spin. I think they've had better spinners and they've been able to expose the opposition batters. But in this Test (at Pune), their batters were exposed a little bit by a very, very good performance from Mitchell Santner," Doull told PTI Videos.

Even though Doull said negating spin is no longer a forte of many teams, he conceded that Indian batters' capitulation against "not a world-class spin bowling attack" of New Zealand offered some worrying signals.

"I think you get used to playing on such good wickets. And when it does turn, techniques get exposed a little bit. For a long time, when India played on turning surfaces, they still had the best spinners in the world in Jadeja and Ashwin."

"So, they've been able to undo other sides. In this Test match, they were undone by a New Zealand side that, with all due respect, is not a world-class spin bowling attack. So, that will be a concern of some sort," he detailed.

Kohli's modest run in the ongoing series was one of the talking



points, as the veteran batter succumbed to spin three times in four innings.

But Doull did not read too much into the former Indian captain's dismal form, and said it would not have an effect in the upcoming five-match Test series against Australia.

"There're issues against spin but he's not the only one. You're not going to find those (spin-friendly) conditions in Australia. He (Kohli) had a great series Down Under."

"He plays quick bowling as well as he has for the last four or five years. So, I don't think it's a concern," he noted.

The 55-year-old also defended Indian skipper Rohit Sharma for his defensive approach and placed

veteran bowlers in the side as culpable for the series defeat.

"I think winning the toss is crucial. For Rohit, the wrong decision at Bangalore was crucial. He's admitted to that as well. New Zealand seamers took advantage of that," he said.

Rohit elected to bat first in the opening Test under overcast conditions and his side got bowled out for a pathetic 46, which eventually transpired into an eight-wicket defeat.

The second Test saw a different scenario as New Zealand skipper Tom Latham won the toss and smartly elected to bat first, realising that batting fourth on Pune pitch would be a tough task.

"Winning the toss in this Test (at

Pune), when you knew, pitch was going to turn...it might not have looked like a big score, 259 in the (NZ) first innings."

"But it was made to look like a really big score because the ball was turning. So, I think Tom Latham's captaincy was outstanding for the most part."

Doull, who took 98 wickets from 32 Tests, said senior bowlers too should have taken more responsibility.

"People say Rohit might have been a touch defensive, but that comes down to the bowlers. There're very, very senior spin bowlers in that side."

"If you can't trust an Ashwin or a Jadeja to set his own field, you can't blame Rohit for that all the

time. I think the bowlers have to have some part to play in that as well," he explained.

Moving over to the upcoming Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Doull said winning the third Test at Mumbai against the Kiwis will do a world of good to their morale ahead of the marquee clash starting next month.

"They have to forget about this series. They could go out and win the third Test in Wankhede and go to Australia with a little bit more confidence. In Australia, quick bowlers will be required. India batters, I think, will be a lot better off on good surfaces. That's what you tend to get in Australia."

Doull said India have good enough players to tackle the Australian challenge.

"It'll come down to how they play the quick bowlers from Australia – the tall, slightly bouncier bowlers. But they've got the batters to do the job, I think, in good conditions."

"And if later on in the Test matches, whether it be in Perth or whether it be in Sydney, it starts to turn and bounce a little bit, then their spinners will come into play."

New Zealand also became the first visiting side to win a Test series in India after 12 years, and Doull termed it remarkable.

"I think it's one of the greatest moments in New Zealand cricket history. Teams don't come here and beat India once, let alone twice. And for a New Zealand team to do it without one of their star batters – Kane Williamson – it's just a phenomenal performance," he signed off. (PTI)

## Lewis century powers West Indies to consolation ODI win against Sri Lanka



**PALLEKELE (SRI LANKA), Oct 27:** Evin Lewis' unbeaten 102 steered West Indies to a consolation victory against series winner Sri Lanka in the third and last one-day cricket international.

Lewis, playing his first ODI since 2021, hit a straight six to bring up the winning runs and his fifth ODI century off 61 balls. The opener played through even after rolling his left ankle on 51.

The West Indies reached 196-2 in reply to Sri Lanka's 156-3 after a five-hour rain delay reduced the match to 23 overs per side at Pallekele International Stadium.

Pathum Nissanka, dropped before he scored and on 17, and Avishka Fernando, also dropped, opened with an 81-run stand in 17 overs for Sri Lanka followed by the rain delay.

When play resumed, Kusal Mendis hit the first four deliveries

to the boundary.

Nissanka reached his 15th ODI half-century off 58 balls and was run out for 56.

Mendis went on to a 19-ball half-century and was dropped twice before finishing 56 not out after nine boundaries and a six over midwicket.

The West Indies lost its first wicket on 36 but Lewis and captain Shai Hope combined for 72 runs.

When Hope was caught for 22, Lewis was joined by Sherfane Rutherford and they saw West Indies home by eight wickets with one over to spare.

Rutherford took just 26 deliveries for his fourth ODI half-century, an unbeaten 50 including three sixes and four boundaries. He also scored 74 and 80 in the series but Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka was named player of the series for scoring 145 runs and taking two wickets. (AP)

## Australia won't underestimate reserve pacers: McDonald

**SYDNEY, Oct 27:** Australia head coach Andrew McDonald feels the absence of Mohammed Shami during the marquee Border Gavaskar Trophy next month is a huge loss for India, but stressed that the hosts won't underestimate the quicks stepping in for the seasoned pacer.

Shami, who had played a significant role in India's successful 2018 tour of Australia, has not played since the ODI World Cup final last November due to an ankle injury. He underwent surgery and was subsequently rehabilitating at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) but developed swelling in his knees which affected his rehabilitation.

"Mohammed Shami is a big loss," McDonald was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo on ABC's Offsiders.

"The way our batters speak about his relentless nature, his line and lengths, the way he goes about his business, a real good complimenting skill set to Bumrah so think that one-two combo they'll lack a little bit, and they'll miss that."

India have handed maiden call ups to Delhi speedster Harshit Rana and Andhra seam bowling all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy while quicks Akash Deep and Prasidh Krishna have also been selected for the marquee series. Jasprit Bumrah will lead the fast bowling department.

"But needless to say we saw what happened last time, they had reserves that came in and did the job as well so they cannot be underestimated at all," he added. Australian teenager Sam Konstas, who announced himself with twin Sheffield Shield centuries for New South Wales earlier this month, is in the reckoning to partner Usman Khawaja at the top in the five-match series.

"I think we're picking the best team for here and now, and if that does encompass a younger player, then we'll head down that direction," he said. McDonald stated that if the selectors believe the 19-year-old is the best option, he will receive a Test debut, regardless of his lack of first-class experience. (PTI)

## Captain Devine guides NZ to 259/9 against India

**AHMEDABAD, Oct 27:** Skipper Sophie Devine led from the front with a calculative half-century and lifted New Zealand to a challenging 259 for nine after India's spirited comeback in the middle overs of the second women's ODI here on Sunday.

Devine struck 79 off 86, striking seven fours and a six while stitching a vital partnership of 82 runs for the fifth wicket with Maddy Green (42 off 41 balls).

Opting to bat first, New Zealand were off to an excellent start with openers Suzie Bates (58 off 70 balls) and Georgia Plimmer (41 off 50) adding 87 runs in just under 16 overs.

India fought back by snaring three wickets in quick succession, and then, Radha Yadav pulled off an incredible catch after running backwards to give leg-spinner Priya Mishra her maiden international wicket.

What a player Yadav has been for India on the day; she was involved in three of the first four New Zealand wickets as the visitors seemed to have lost the plot when Brooke Halliday was walking back to the dressing room after Yadav's pyrotechnics. But then, Devine had other other plans as she found an able ally in Green and the two helped their side regain control of the proceedings. (PTI)

## PCB central contracts: Shaheen Shah Afridi demoted to Category B; Fakhar, Iftikhar, Mir omitted

**LAHORE, Oct 27:** The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday demoted premier pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi to Category B from Category A, and did not offer central contracts to senior players Fakhar Zaman, Iftikhar Ahmed and Osama Mir for the 2024-25 season.

Test skipper Shan Masood remained in Category B despite Pakistan scoring a come-from-behind 2-1 series victory over England recently.

The board awarded the central contracts to a total of 25 players just two short of the 27 who were given contracts last year.

Like last year, the PCB made the contracts announcement after a delay of nearly three months as the players' performances, fitness levels and behaviour were analysed.

In that context, a PCB source informed PTI that Zaman, the only Pakistan player with a double hundred in ODIs, was excluded from the list of contract players because he failed two fitness tests.

"Fakhar has an ongoing knee problem for which he is undergoing rehabilitation at the NCA in Lahore. He failed two fitness tests recently and will now take another test at the end of November," the source said.

He said the selectors had informed Zaman that he needed to meet fitness standards as they might include him in the national squad for the tour to South Africa in December and also for the Champions Trophy next year.

He also said Zaman's omission has nothing to do with his tweet on Babar and the show cause notice sent to him subsequently by the PCB.

"He has responded to the show cause notice and is apologetic in his reply. He has shown remorse over his action.

"No disciplinary action has been taken



against him for his tweet about Babar's selection," the source said.

The official disclosed that another seasoned opener, Imam-ul-Haq, has also been sidelined from the team and contracts because of fitness issues.

As part of the PCB's strategy to incentivise, encourage and reward talented and emerging cricketers, five players have been offered central contracts for the first time.

They are: Khuram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Mohammad Ali, Muhammad Irfan Khan and Usman Khan.

They have been placed in Category D. The board has awarded A category contracts to just two players – former captain Babar Azam and Muhammad Rizwan, who will soon

be announced as Pakistan's white ball formats captain.

**List of centrally contracted players:**  
**Category A (2):** Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan

**Category B (3):** Naseem Shah, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Shan Masood

**Category C (9):** Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Noman Ali, Saim Ayub, Sajid Khan, Salman Ali Agha, Saud Shakeel and Shadab Khan

**Category D (11):** Aamir Jamal, Haseebullah, Kamran Ghulam, Khuram Shahzad, Mir Hamza, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Hurraira,

Muhammad Irfan Khan, Muhammad Wasim Jnr and Usman Khan. (PTI)

## India's proud run of 18 consecutive series wins at home since losing to England in 2012-13 ended

# Onus of series loss down to seniors: Karthik; Manjrekar defends Gambhir

**NEW DELHI, Oct 27:** Former wicket-keeper Dinesh Karthik believes the onus for the Test series loss to New Zealand rests with the senior Indian players, while former batter Sanjay Manjrekar feels it would be unfair to place the blame on coach Gautam Gambhir.

India lost the second Test to New Zealand by 113 runs in Pune on Saturday as the Black Caps took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three match series. With this, India's proud run of 18 consecutive series wins at home since losing to England in 2012-13 ended. Throughout the two matches, the senior players underperformed. Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli struggled with the bat, while the formidable spin duo of R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja also failed to make a significant impact.

"Yeah. Why shouldn't it (the onus of the series loss) be the senior players? They will look at themselves and say, 'What could we have done better?' I don't think they have run away from it," Karthik said on 'Cricbuzz'.

"If you go and ask each one of them personally, what they think of the series I don't think they'll have great things to say about



pen, and the brick bats are thrown at you I think they will have the courage to face it," he added. Karthik said the seniors themselves will take responsibility for the defeat, acknowledging that they did not have their best series.

"If you go and ask each one of them personally, what they think of the series I don't think they'll have great things to say about

how the whole team played, and it is only but fair to ask them questions about what can be done better for future of Test cricket in India and for Indian Test cricket.

"So, knowing them personally, and I do know each one of them personally. They will say that they didn't have the best series. The question then becomes what do they need to do to get better and it is a very

very current question to ask," he detailed.

New head coach Gautam Gambhir has also come in the line of fire after India erred tactically and experienced repeated batting collapses in the two Tests but Manjrekar backed the former opener.

"I will still maintain that the coach has the minimal influence on a team, lesser than your 11th weakest player. He does not set foot on the ground, the captain is in-charge out there."

"But you have to applaud him for Washington Sundar's selection, which was an immediate hit," Manjrekar told 'ESPNcricinfo'.

"But the move to send Washington ahead of Sarfaraz Khan or maybe four spinners here would have made more sense. But to put any kind of responsibility on the door of Gautam Gambhir would be terribly unfair because until now we can't do it because in cricket, a coach has minimal influence on performances," he added.

Manjrekar questioned Rohit's "bizarre" decision to send all-rounder Washington to bat ahead of in-form Sarfaraz.

"The move to have Sarfaraz Khan bat down the order and sending Washington

Sundar above him because he is a left-hander, those kind of things shouldn't happen.

"It's just bizarre. That's one thing that Rohit Sharma needs to be careful of...the T20 thinking of match ups left hand-right hand combinations. I think he should just go by the overall quality and ability of players," Manjrekar said.

When India needed its experienced batters to lead, Rohit could manage a total of 60 runs across four innings (2, 52, 0, 8) while Kohli was a touch better collecting 88 runs (0, 70, 1, 17).

Highlighting Kohli's absence in the domestic circuit, former India captain Anil Kumble felt the talismanic batter could have prepared well for the long Test calendar by making himself available for the domestic matches.

"Perhaps just one or two innings in a match situation could have helped. Being in an actual game is definitely more beneficial than just practice; it gives an upper hand," Kumble said on 'Jio Cinema'.

"If he feels that playing earlier would have benefited him, and the team management agrees, then maybe it would have," he added. (PTI)

## Qinwen Zheng clinches WTA Finals berth

**TOKYO, Oct 27:** Top-seeded Qinwen Zheng of China claimed the Toray Pan Pacific Open title with a 7-6 (5), 6-3 win over American wild card Sofia Kenin on Sunday and clinched her place in the WTA finals next month.

The No. 7-ranked Zheng, who won gold at the Paris Olympics, fired 16 aces and only faced a single break point throughout the 1 hour & 52-minute victory in Tokyo over the 2020 Australian Open champion.

The 22-year-old Zheng earned her third title of the year and first on hardcourt since winning at Guangzhou last year. She has gone 28-4 since Wimbledon, including a 12-2 run in the tour's Asian swing. The 25-year-old Kenin had one of the best performances of the season. The American was ranked as high as No. 4 early in 2020. However, a series of injuries, including ankle and quadricep ailments, made her WTA ranking drop to its current 155.

The WTA Finals begin November 2 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)