

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- N Korea blows up parts of inter-Korean roads in a symbolic display of anger
- Violence-hit Pakistan locks down the capital for an Asian security meeting
- Both NDA, INDIA bloc confident of victory as battlelines drawn
- Four planes get bomb threats via X posts

India-Canada row escalates; New Delhi rejects Ottawa's fresh charges



NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The India-Canada diplomatic row over the killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar escalated further on Tuesday with Ottawa attempting to link the Bishnoi gang with Indian government agents to carry out covert operations in that country and New Delhi stoutly trashing the charges.

As the ties between the two countries hit rock bottom, Canadian foreign minister Melanie Joly did not rule out imposing sanctions against India saying "everything is on the table".

On its part, India strongly rejected attempts by Canadian authorities to link Indian agents with criminal gangs in Canada with official sources even saying that Ottawa's assertion that it shared evi-

dence with New Delhi in the Nijjar case was simply not true. The sources also rejected Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations that India was engaging in activities including carrying out covert operations targeting Canadian nationals in his country. At a press conference, Trudeau, pointing fingers at India on the Nijjar case, said Canada will never tolerate the involvement of a foreign government in threatening and killing Canadian citizens on Canadian soil.

On Monday, India expelled six Canadian diplomats and announced withdrawing its high commissioner from Canada after dismissing Ottawa's allegations linking the envoy to a probe into the killing of Sikh extremist Nijjar.

Joly, replying to a question at Trudeau's media briefing, did not rule out further action against India. "So today was a really important step. When you look at what is available in our toolbox, expelling diplomats is one of the highest and toughest measures a country can take under the Vienna Convention...Everything is on the table," she said.

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau's allegations in September last year of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bypolls in Assam's five Assembly seats on Nov 13

BJP to field candidates in Samaguri, Dholai, and Bihali ● AGP in Bongaigaon ● UPPL in Sidli ● Counting on Nov 23

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Oct 15: Assam's five assembly constituencies will go to bypolls on November 13 and counting of votes will take place on November 23, Election Commission of India announced on Tuesday.

The five seats went vacant after five MLAs including a cabinet minister were elected in the Parliament in this year's Lok Sabha polls.

Two MLAs from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), including a cabinet minister, along with one each from alliance partners Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United Peoples Party Liberal (UPPL), as well as one from the opposition Congress won the Lok

Poll Events	Single Phase (285 ACs)
Date of Issue of Gazette Notification	22.10.2024 (Tuesday)
Last Date of Making Nominations	29.10.2024 (Tuesday)
Date for Scrutiny of nominations	30.10.2024 (Wednesday)
Last Date for Withdrawal of Candidatures	04.11.2024 (Monday)
Date of Poll	20.11.2024 (Wednesday)
Date of Counting	23.11.2024 (Saturday)
Date before which election shall be completed	25.11.2024 (Monday)

Sabha elections earlier this year, paving way for the bye-elections in their seats.

The former cabinet minister Parimal Suklabaidya successfully contested in the Silchar Lok Sabha seat

as his earlier assembly seat in Dholai went vacant. Meanwhile, another senior BJP leader Ranjit Dutta was elected to the lower house of the parliament this time. He was representing the Behali seat in the assembly.

With the election of its senior leader Phani Bhushan Choudhury to the Barpeta Lok Sabha constituency, the AGP has made its parliamentary debut. The party ran in two of the state's parliamentary seats, but Congress candidate Rakibul Hussain defeated it in the Dhubri polls.

Choudhury was a six-time MLA from the Bongaigaon assembly segment. When AGP fielded him in the Barpeta Lok Sabha seat to fight parliamentary (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Smuggler arrested

GUWAHATI: In a significant operation aimed at curbing transborder smuggling, the personnel of the Border Security Force (BSF) successfully apprehended an Indian smuggler attempting to traffic a large quantity of prohibited cough syrup to Bangladesh, the security forces announced on Tuesday. The incident occurred at the Indo-Bangladesh border, where the BSF's 138 Battalion acted swiftly to intercept the illegal activity. As per reports, the smuggler was caught red-handed while attempting to transport the banned substance across the border. Taking to the micro-blogging site X, BSF Guwahati stated, "In drive to combat transborder smuggling, alert #Bordermen of 138 Bn #BSF apprehended an Indian smuggler attempting to traffic prohibited cough syrup to Bangladesh at the Indo-Bangladesh border."

Cleanliness drive

GUWAHATI: Minister of Industries, Commerce, and Public Enterprises, Bimal Borah has launched a special cleanliness drive under the banner "Cleanliness Campaign: Prosperous Tingkhang, Clean Environment" in the Tingkhang constituency, the Minister announced on Tuesday. Aimed at creating a healthier and cleaner environment, the initiative has encouraged active participation from local residents. In a post shared on the micro-blogging site X, Borah emphasized the importance of community involvement in keeping the environment clean and safe.

Thieves arrested

DIPHU: The Manja police in Karbi Anglong has arrested five thieves and seized a pick up truck (AS 09 BC 2229) loaded with stolen PHE water pipes and a motorcycle (AS 0-1 AJ 3954). The police have been investigating the stealing of water pipes of the PHE department from Siloni. The main water supply pipes at Siloni Terang village was cut into pieces, stolen and sold at Manja. Today, Manja police raided a place, 15 kms from here and seized a pick up truck and a motorcycle.

Jaishankar arrives in Islamabad to attend SCO meeting

ISLAMABAD, Oct 15: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday landed in Islamabad to attend a conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), in the first visit to Pakistan by a senior Indian minister in years.

Jaishankar was greeted at the Nur Khan airbase by senior Pakistani officials.

It is the first time in nearly nine years that India's foreign minister travelled to Pakistan even as the ties between the two neighbours remained frosty over the Kashmir issue and cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

The last Indian Foreign Minister to visit Pakistan was Sushma Swaraj. She had travelled to Islamabad in December 2015 to attend a conference on Afghanistan.

Earlier in the day, India said it

remains actively engaged in various mechanisms of the SCO.

Pakistan is hosting the two-day SCO Council of Heads of Government (CHG) summit on October 15 and 16.

"The SCO CHG meeting is held annually and focuses on the trade and economic agenda of the Organisation," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent India at the meeting. India remains actively engaged in the SCO format, including various mechanisms and initiatives within the SCO framework," it said in a brief statement in New Delhi.

In the evening, Jaishankar is likely to attend a banquet reception to be hosted by Pakistan Prime Minister (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Guwahati's Nabagraha temple to get major transformation: Himanta

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Oct 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday announced that the Nabagraha temple in Guwahati will witness a major overhaul in terms of infrastructure with the state government planning to spend more than ₹ 12 crores in upgrading the existing structures of the temple.

Known as Nabagraha Devalaya, one of the most revered temples in the city generally attracts a good number of devotees every day. Sarma asserted that the amenities will be developed so that the devotees will experience better convenience while visiting the holy place. He also mentioned that the true character of the temple will be more properly maintained through the transformation plan.



Taking to X, the chief minister wrote, "The Nabagraha Devalaya in Guwahati is all set for a transformation with a ₹12+cr plan to upgrade existing facilities and develop new ones. Amenities will be developed to ensure convenience for the devotees and to maintain the true character of the holy place." The Assam government has been focusing on the transformation plans of temples. According to CM Sarma, the Rudreswar temple of Lord Shiva in

Guwahati, which dates back to the 18th century, will be transformed into a heritage centre to increase tourism.

He claimed that the devotion of Lord Shiva happens in the Rudreswar Devalaya, which was constructed by Ahom monarch Prammata Singha in honour of his father Rudra Singha.

He stated that the site will become a hub for heritage tourism as part of the extensive restoration plan overseen by the Directorate of Archaeology. A budget of ₹ 2.33 crore has been set by the state government, which includes new signage, gates, and boundary wall reconstruction. Additionally, landscaping, drainage, seating, and public facilities will be created.

Tata Group to create 5 lakh jobs



NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Tata Group will create 5 lakh manufacturing jobs in the next five years across sectors such as semiconductor, electric vehicles, battery and related industries, its Chairman N Chandrasekaran said on Tuesday.

Speaking at a symposium on the Indian Foundation for Quality Management, the Tata Sons Chairman asserted that India cannot achieve the goals of being a developed nation if the country cannot create manufacturing jobs.

"... Between our (Tata Group's) investments in semiconductors, our investment in precision manufacturing, assembly, electric vehicles, batteries and related industries, I think we will create five lakh manufacturing jobs in the next five years," he said.

Citing the group's upcoming semiconductor plant in Assam and other new manufacturing units for electric vehicles and batteries, he said, "we are setting up a number of plants". While he has not got the full details, Chandrasekaran said based on "basic math", these jobs will have multiplier effects.

As the ecosystem has to be set up, he said a minimum of 5 lakh companies -- small, medium-scale companies would also come up in the ecosystem. He acknowledged the government's support in these initiatives and stressed on the need for creating jobs in the manufacturing sector. "We cannot achieve the goals of Viksit Bharat if we cannot create manufacturing jobs, because we all know 1 million people are coming to the workforce every month," he said. Chandrasekaran further said, "We need to create 100 million jobs." He asserted the significance of new-age manufacturing like semiconductors, which creates eight to ten indirect jobs for every single job created. (PTI)

Cong biggest anti-Dalit and anti-OBC party: BJP

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The BJP on Tuesday accused the Congress of being an anti-OBC and anti-Dalit party, and demanded that Rahul Gandhi must tell the country why Capt Ajay Singh Yadav, chairman of the party's OBC front, was "insulted" during the Haryana assembly polls.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla launched an offensive against the Congress citing Yadav's recent comment that the party should introspect for the losses it suffered, especially in southern Haryana, in the just concluded assembly elections in the state.

Tagging Rahul Gandhi in his post on X last week, Yadav also pointed out that the Ahirwal community had no representation in the party's CWC, CEC, AICC general secretaries and the Haryana Pradesh Congress Committee. The Congress leader went on to allege that his position as the AICC OBC department chairman was also an "eyewash and toothless".

"The Congress and its scion keep talking about castes and OBC, but as a matter of fact, they are the biggest anti-Dalit, anti-OBC and anti-backwards. It's in their political DNA. A direct evidence of this is emerging with the



Congress leader Ajay Singh Yadav bringing it to light," Poonawalla told reporters at the BJP headquarters here, latching on to Yadav's post on X. The Congress leader has exposed the anti-OBC mindset of the party with his comments, he said.

"The Congress is wearing the garb of OBC just to create division in the Hindu society. Its sole objective is to divide Hindus and organise vote bank jihad in Muslim society," Poonawalla alleged, adding that the Congress never talks about social inequality prevailing in Muslim society. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Committee approved to study plight of tribals in Assam: Jharkhand CM

RANCHI, Oct 15: Barely two weeks after Chief Minister Hemant Soren wrote to his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma claiming the marginalisation of tea tribes despite their significant contributions to the economy, the Jharkhand government approved the formation of a committee to study their plight.

The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting chaired by Soren on Monday.

"Tribals from Jharkhand were taken to other places such as Assam and Andaman and Nicobar Islands by the British. Their number is about 15 to 20 lakh and they are fighting for their rights. It is known that tribals are working in Assam tea gardens but they have not been given ST status so far and are debarred from the welfare schemes meant for them," the CM said.

"Our government invites all original inhabitants to return to Jharkhand. We will form a committee to study this problem under the Minister for Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste, Minority and Backward Class Welfare Department. All-party representation will be there," he added. "They will go to those places, study their

problems related to housing, jobs, rights etc. Based on the committee's recommendations, the state will introduce welfare measures," Soren told reporters after the meeting. Tea tribes of Jharkhand origin in Assam have the status of Other Backward Class and are debarred from welfare measures meant for tribals, a statement from the state government said.

In his letter to Sarma on September 25, Soren expressed grave concern about the community's situation and advocated for their recognition as STs.

Sarma, the BJP's election co-in charge for Jharkhand, has attacked the JMM government for "corruption, infiltration and declining law and order issues among others."

"I am acutely aware of the significant challenges faced by the tea tribes in Assam, particularly since many are indigenous to Jharkhand, including Santhali, Kuruk, Munda, and Oraon, whose ancestors migrated during colonial times to work in tea plantations," Soren said. He stressed that these groups meet the criteria for ST status due to their distinct cultural identity and vulnerability to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Focused on healthcare, agriculture and sustainable cities

Education min announces 3 AI CoEs

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday announced three Artificial Intelligence Centres of Excellence (CoEs) focused on healthcare, agriculture and sustainable cities.

The CoEs will be led by top educational institutions, in consortium with industry partners and startups.

"The three CoEs in 'AI healthcare, agriculture and sustainable cities', will democratise AI innovations and research to revolutionise healthcare delivery, strengthen food security and address critical urban challenges. These CoEs led by our top academic institutions will strengthen India's AI capabilities and power the growth of India's AI ecosystem," Pradhan said.

"The CoEs in AI will emerge as temples of global public good. The talent and zeal that Bharat is



blessed with, in the times ahead, these CoEs will be a key element of global public policy and also emerge as solution-providers of the world," he added.

Pradhan further mentioned, "I am confident that the CoEs will give further impetus to the startup

ecosystem in our country, help create a new generation of jobs and establish new paradigms of global public good."

The CoE in healthcare will be led by IIT Delhi and AIIMS, while the CoE in agriculture will be led by IIT Ropar. The CoE in sustain-

able cities will be led by IIT Kanpur.

According to officials, the centres will conduct interdisciplinary research, develop cutting-edge applications and create scalable solutions in these three areas.

As part of the vision to "Make AI in India and Make AI work for India", the establishment of these centres was announced under Para 60 of the Budget Announcement for 2023-24.

In alignment with this, the government has approved the creation of the three AI Centres of Excellence, with a total financial outlay of ₹ 990 crore over the period of FY 2023-24 to FY 2027-28.

To oversee the implementation of the initiative, an industry-heavy Apex Committee has been constituted, and co-chaired by Sridhar Vembu, Founder and CEO of Zoho Corporation. (PTI)

SC notice to Centre, EC on fresh plea against freebies

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The Supreme Court has sought a response from the Centre and the Election Commission on a fresh plea against the practice of political parties promising freebies during elections.

A bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra issued notices to the Union of India and the poll panel on a petition filed by Bengaluru resident Shashank J Sreedhara.

The petition filed by advocate Srinivasan has also sought a direction to poll panel to take effective steps to restrain political parties from making promises of freebies during the pre-election period.

"The unregulated promise of freebies imposes a significant and unaccounted financial burden on the public exchequer. Further, there exists no mechanism to ensure the



fulfilment of pre-poll promises on which votes were secured," the plea said.

The top court tagged the matter with other pleas on similar issues.

The apex court had earlier agreed to list for hearing pleas against the practice of political parties promising freebies during elections after senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for lawyer and PIL petitioner Ashwini Upadhyay, sought an urgent hearing of the matter. Upadhyay's plea said there

should be a total ban on populist measures to gain undue political favour from voters as they violate the Constitution, and the EC should take suitable deterrent measures.

It also urged the court to declare that the promise of irrational freebies from public funds before elections unduly influences the voters, disturbs the level playing field and vitiates the purity of the poll process. "Petitioner submits that the recent trend of political parties to influence voters by offering freebies with an eye on elections is not only the greatest threat to the survival of democratic values but also injures the spirit of the Constitution," the plea said.

"This unethical practice is just like giving bribes to the electorate at the cost of the exchequer to stay in power and must be avoided to preserve (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

New Art Players to showcase two plays

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Oct 15: New Art Players (NAP), a leading socio-cultural organisation in the region, is set to present two short and intimate plays on October 19 and 20, 2024. The plays are based on the stories 'Tirtha' by Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia and 'Eta Golpor Dwitiyo Khando' by Minal Kumar Bora, respectively. Both plays are conceptualised and directed by Nayan Prasad, with Dhanjit Boro handling the arrangement of lighting and music.

The cast for 'Tirtha' includes renowned actors Dr Jayanta Das, Dr Chimoy Chakraborty, Bhaskar Barua, and Namrata Sharma. In 'Eta Golpor Dwitiyo Khando', Parag Barua, Satyajit Gogoi, Hrishikesh Bardoloi, and Melody Patgiri will take the stage.

The performances will be held at NAP's under-construction auditorium (back side of Kamrup Academy HS School), with two shows each day at 5:00 pm and 6:45 pm. The total running time for both plays is approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes.

As seating is limited, interested attendees are requested to book their seats in advance via WhatsApp by contacting 91019-97225 or 98640-91941, informed NAP's general secretary, Rathindra N Bhattacharya.

Hojai police seize cattle-laden Bolero van



HT Correspondent
HOJAI, Oct 15: Acting on a tip-off, Hojai police seized a Bolero pickup van loaded with cattle at Nilbagan in Hojai district on Tuesday. The vehicle, bearing registration number AS 12 CC 3029, was carrying 17 cows and was reportedly traveling from Nagaon to Nilbagan. The police took the truck into custody.

Five individuals were arrested in connection with the case: Jahirul Haque, Mijan Ali, Jahirul Islam, Ziyadul Islam, and Mukshidul Islam, all residents of the Rupahihat Police Station area. The investigation is ongoing.

Hojai district police have reiterated that no illicit activities will be tolerated, and the crackdown on such offences will continue.

Artist protests oil exploration

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Oct 15: Marshall Baruah, a young artist, expressed his opposition to the reported permission for oil exploration in the Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary, known for its Hoolock Gibbon primates, by creating a large mural on a concrete wall along the NH 37 bypass near Sivasagar town on Monday. However, the government clarified through the media that the hydrocarbon exploration site is located outside the sanctuary area. Baruah mentioned that a previous mural he created on a wall in Guwahati was removed by the authorities, but he remains determined to continue his efforts to draw attention to the issue.

CEM Pramod Boro chairs meeting on development block reorganisation

The reorganisation aims to strengthen grassroots administration, streamline services, and drive holistic growth across BTR



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Oct 15: A meeting with senior officials of the government of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and public representatives on the issue of reorganising the development blocks of all districts in BTR was held at the

BTC Secretariat conference hall, Bodofa Nwgvr in Kokrajhar on Tuesday. Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Region, chaired the meeting and discussed at length the reorganisation of the development blocks across all

districts in BTR. Notably, the development blocks are currently constituted in an ad-hoc manner, with some blocks under BTR jurisdiction falling in other districts and vice versa. It is hoped that the reorganisation of the development blocks will boost the holistic growth

of BTR by enhancing administration at the grassroots level, streamlining service delivery, and ensuring that the benefits of various developmental initiatives reach the intended beneficiaries across the region.

CEM Boro stated that a meeting was held with senior officials of the BTR government to discuss the reorganisation of development blocks across all districts of the Bodoland region.

He mentioned that the BTR government has been working towards the overall development and welfare of the common masses since coming to power. He also noted that the reports on the development blocks in all districts of BTR would lead to more developmental progress in the days to come.

"The reorganisation of the development blocks will boost the holistic growth of BTR by enhancing administration at the grassroots level, streamlining service delivery, and ensuring that the benefits of our many developmental initiatives reach the intended beneficiaries," Boro said.

Among others, BTR executive members Dhananjay Basumatary and Gautam Das were prominent attendees at the meeting.

Minister Nandita Gorlosa distributes cheques to 36 civil service aspirants



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Oct 15: Minister for Power, Sports, and Youth Welfare, Nandita Gorlosa, distributed cheques to 36 civil service aspirants from Dima Hasao district under the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) 2022-23. The financial support aims to assist these students in pursuing their civil service ambitions without financial burdens. The event, held at the District Commissioner's Office, was attended by Dima Hasao deputy commissioner Simanta Kumar Das, along with other district officials.

Minister Gorlosa's initiative primarily benefits students from BPL or middle-class families, offering them financial relief to ease their economic challenges. Speaking on the occasion, the minister emphasised the importance of education and the development of human resources. She stated that the fi-

nancial assistance is intended to encourage these aspirants to continue their studies with determination and strive to achieve their goals.

To further inspire the students, minister Gorlosa arranged the distribution program at the DC's Office, providing the aspirants a valuable opportunity to engage with working civil servants. During an interactive session, she remarked, "Infrastructural development is important, but we must also focus on cultivating human resources to ensure efficient and effective governance. I hope this financial aid will be used wisely to support your journey toward success."

Minister Gorlosa's commitment to youth empowerment through education and perseverance reflects her vision for a prosperous future built on capable and dedicated human resources.

UPPL welcomes bye-election date announcement

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Oct 15: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday announced the dates for the bye-elections for 48 Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies in six states, including Assam, where five Assembly constituencies will go to the polls on November 13.

The bye-elections in Assam will take place on November 13 in five constituencies: Sidli, Bongaigaon, Samaguri, Behali, and Dholai LAC.

The bye-election in Sidli LAC was necessitated by Joyanta Basumatary's resignation after being elected to the Lok Sabha, in Bongaigaon LAC by Phani Bhushan Choudhury's election to the Lok Sabha, in Samaguri LAC by Rakibul Hussain's election to Parliament, in Behali by Ranjit Dutta's

election to Parliament, and in Dholai LAC by Parimal Suklabhadhyaya's election to the Lok Sabha during the Parliamentary elections held last May.

The gazette notification of the bye-election will be published on October 18, the last date for making nominations is October 25, and the last date for withdrawal is October 30. The date of the poll is November 13, and the counting of votes will take place on November 23.

The ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has welcomed the announcement of dates for the bye-elections in Assam, including Sidli LAC, which will be held on November 13.

UPPL president and CEM of the Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, welcomed the announcement of dates for the bye-

elections in five LACs in Assam by the Election Commission of India on Tuesday, stating that the bye-elections will be conducted in a peaceful and smooth environment as scheduled by the Election Commission.

He stated that the UPPL, under the banner of the NDA alliance, is fully prepared to contest the bye-elections. He expressed confidence that NDA-backed candidates in all five constituencies, including Sidli LAC, will achieve victory in the bye-elections.

He added that the government of Assam and the government of BTR are working jointly and dedicatedly towards the welfare and overall development of the common masses across the state, and people from all communities are coming forward to extend support to the NDA alliance.

State invites discharged home guards to re-enroll for extended service



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Oct 15: In an initiative to strengthen the ranks of the home guards in Assam, discharged home guard volunteers from Cachar, Hailakandi, and Karimganj districts, who are under the age of 55, are now eligible to re-enroll for an additional three-year service term. This opportunity, governed by the Assam Home Guards Act and Rules, 1947, amended in 2015, is open to all interested individuals from October 25, 2024, until November 16, 2024.

Eligible volunteers are invited to submit their Op-

tion Forms at the Home Guard Office in their respective districts during this period. To complete the application, individuals must provide essential documents, including their First Home Guards Basic Training Certificate, school certificate, proof of age (such as a birth certificate), PAN card, Aadhaar card, a character certificate, and two recent passport-size photographs.

The re-enrollment drive provides a vital opportunity for willing former volunteers to continue their service in safeguarding their communities. This move is expected to enhance the operational readiness and community support provided by the Assam Home Guards while giving experienced individuals the chance to extend their contributions in this honourable capacity.

The district commandant, Home Guards, Cachar, announced the re-enrollment opportunity and encouraged all eligible discharged home guard volunteers to seize this chance to continue their dedicated service to the people of Assam.

Training programme of 700 new Goa Police constables begin in Assam



GUWAHATI, Oct 15: Assam DGP G P Singh on Tuesday inaugurated a training programme of 700 newly recruited constables of Goa Police at Dergaon in Golaghat district. As a step towards inter-state police cooperation, 43 weeks of training of the personnel, including 131 women police constables, will be held in the state, Singh said.

"We strive to provide high quality training to our fellow police personnel preparing them towards service to the nation," he said.

The selected recruits will join the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd India Reserve Battalions of Goa Police. The DGP, in his address, emphasised on developing essential qualities such as discipline, loyalty, physical fitness and proficiency in weapons.

"You are not just joining the police force, you are becoming part of a legacy – a force that serves with honour, courage, and commitment to justice," Singh asserted.

He also underscored the immense responsibility of wearing the police uniform, reminding the recruits that they will be the face of law and order, tasked with protecting the lives, rights and property of people.

The DGP said that 1,957 personnel of Manipur Police are already being trained at the Lachit Barphukan Police Academy. (PTI)

BJP, Congress workers clash during campaign for bypolls

GUWAHATI, Oct 15: A clash broke out between Congress and BJP workers in Rupahihat in Assam's Nagaon district when the opposition party took out a bike rally on Tuesday, police said.

The Congress had taken out the rally for the upcoming by-elections to the Samaguri assembly constituency, vacated by the party's Dhubri MP Rakibul Hussain. Congress workers from the neighbouring districts had also participated in it.

Congress leaders alleged that when a group of party workers from Rupahihat were on the way to take part in the rally, BJP workers tried to stop them, and damaged their bikes.

The BJP leaders, on the other hand, alleged that Congress workers had torn their posters and banners.

A clash broke out, and some persons on both sides were injured in the scuffle.

Police said they immediately went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Additional security forces were deployed in the area and patrolling intensified, they said. (PTI)

9th Sivasagar Book Fair inaugurated with calls to promote Assamese language

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Oct 15: The 9th Sivasagar Book Fair, organised by the premier organisation 'Khoj', got underway at Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjya Kheta in Boarding Field on Tuesday. Inaugurating the Book Fair, the vice-chancellor of Dibrugarh University and the newly upgraded Sibsagar University, Dr Jiten Hazarika, said that the recognition of Assamese as a classical language does not ensure the survival of the language. He added that many more efforts are needed to develop the language, such as creating an environment for reading, writing, and discussing themes and styles of books at book fairs.

Dr Hazarika also mentioned that 16,000 book fairs are organised worldwide.

Earlier, the president of the All Assam Students Union, Utpal Sharma, delivered a scholarly speech on the Assamese language, its newly acquired recognition as a classical language, and the accompanying challenges.

He said that the recognition of both Assamese and Bengali as classical languages is a great relief from the unfounded belief that Assamese is an offshoot of the latter.



Quoting Hiren Bhattacharyya, he noted that it does not affect the English language whether we write or speak it correctly, but when we make numerous mistakes in speaking and writing Assamese, it harms our language. Sharma stated that AASU has been striving to secure the status of the Assamese language by advocating for constitutional provisions.

Dr Prakash Kotoky, chairman of the Sivasagar Development Board, inaugurated the main gate, while Dr Sabyasachi Mahanta, president of the organising committee, delivered the welcome speech. Samiran

Phukan, secretary of the organising committee, introduced the guests, and Joyjyoti Gogoi, secretary of Khoj, also addressed the gathering. During the event, Dr Jiten Hazarika released Juna Konwar's short story collection 'Ritu Ahe Ritu Jai'.

The souvenir was released by journalist Sanjeev Kumar Phukan. Khoj felicitated noted journalist Sanjeev Phukan, executive editor of The Dainik Janambhumi, Rajani Dutta, former Padadhikar of Srimanta Sankardev Sangha, and successful cultivator Dinesh Teye with the 'Rangpur Gaurav' titles.



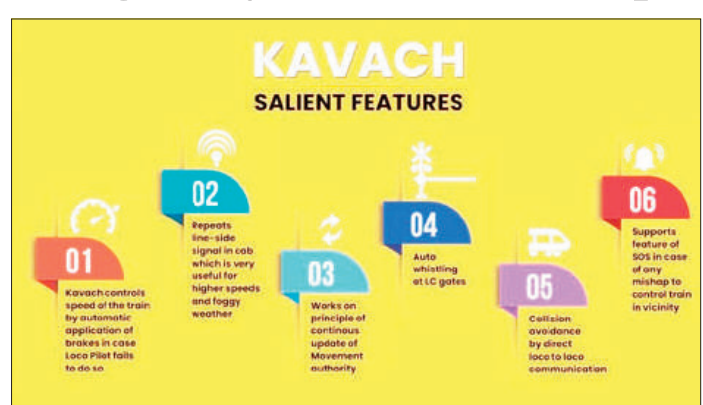
Idols of Goddess Lakshmi on display in the streets of Ganeshguri on Tuesday. HT Photos

Indian Railways to equip 10,000 locomotives with advanced Kavach 4.0

NFR identifies 1,966 route kilometers from Malda Town to Dibrugarh for Kavach implementation

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Oct 15: In a major milestone, Indian Railways is all set to install Kavach 4.0 – an indigenous Automatic Train Protection System – on 10,000 locomotives across its network. Recently, after a successful trial, Kavach 4.0 was implemented on a 108 km stretch between Kota and Sawai Madhopur in the West Central Railway.

Following this achievement, Indian Railways will now install Kavach 4.0 in mission mode across its network in all new projects. Additionally, all locomotives equipped with earlier versions of Kavach will be upgraded to Kavach 4.0. In the NF Railway, approximately 1,966 route kilometers from Malda Town to Dibrugarh have been identified for the implementation of Kavach.



'Kavach' – an indigenous Automatic Train Protection System developed by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) in collaboration with Indian industry – aims to enhance safety in train operations. Kavach

is designed to provide protection by preventing trains from passing signals at danger (red) and avoiding collisions. It automatically activates the train's braking system if the driver fails to control the train according to speed restrictions.

Kavach has been certified for the highest level of Safety Integrity Level – SIL4 – by an Independent Safety Assessor and reduces the probability of train collisions in block sections and on running lines at stations through its non-SIL features. This makes Kavach a potential candidate for adoption by other countries.

Earlier, on April 15, 2024, the Supreme Court of India appreciated the initiatives taken by Indian Railways for the implementation of Kavach in trains. Over the years, Indian Railways has been taking several steps to reduce train accidents. By rolling out Kavach 4.0, Indian Railways is committed to making rail travel even safer for passengers. This step is part of a larger plan to strengthen the railway network and enhance safety measures across the country.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

I know not age, nor weariness nor defeat.
-Rose Kennedy

Bid to end Myanmar's political crisis

Lot of developments are currently on in finding out a way out for the cessation of hostilities in Myanmar. With the opposition National Unity Government of the deposed Prime Minister Su Kyi and the other rebels firmly in possession of a number of states in the strife-torn country defeating the forces of ruling Junta, pressure is mounting on the military bosses for starting negotiations with the rebel groups. For Bangladesh, the restoration of peace in Myanmar is of crucial importance as about one million Rohingya refugees are staying in Coxbazar in Chittagong district since the beginning of the coup in February 2021 and it is becoming too much burden for the Bangladesh economy to continue in this manner despite some assistance from the humanitarian agencies including the UN. Bangladesh is specially concerned at the status of the Rakhine province of Myanmar which is the home place of most of the refugees. Recent reports say that the rebels, mainly the Arakan Army, have taken control of most of Rakhine province. Since the trends in the battle are favouring the rebels, and the NUG, Indian officials have also started preliminary talks with the rebels. Sources say that a more broad-based discussion will be held in the middle of November between the rebels and the officials of the Indian government. Both India and Bangladesh have borders touching Myanmar.

According to Nazbul Khan, an expert on developments in Myanmar, recent events, such as India's outreach to Myanmar's armed groups, reflect a shifting regional strategy. According to a Reuters report, India has begun discussions with these groups near its border, with the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar confirming the dialogue, which is scheduled to take place in mid-November. While the specifics remain confidential, this move demonstrates India's efforts to secure its border and counter China's influence. Additionally, a recent visit by an Indian member of parliament to the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project underscores India's commitment to connecting its northeastern states through Myanmar and reducing dependency on traditional routes. India's proactive engagement highlights the need for Bangladesh to safeguard its own geopolitical interests as the situation in Rakhine evolves, says this expert who is close to the Dr. Yunus government. Sources say that the International Crisis Group has urged Bangladesh to initiate direct dialogue with the AA, especially given its growing control over northern Rakhine.

Cross-border trade, cultural ties, and the functional land ports between Bangladesh and Myanmar are strategic assets that Dhaka must leverage. Bangladesh is well-positioned to be a key supplier of life-saving drugs, food, and essential goods to Rakhine, contributing to both humanitarian relief and infrastructure development. Formalising trade through the Teknaf port would offer multiplied benefits for both regions. Teknaf is crucial for cross-border commerce and has significant potential to drive economic growth. Despite recent security concerns, the port's prospects remain strong, and its effective utilisation can revitalise trade, maximise economic benefits, and enhance regional connectivity. At the recent ASEAN summit, a resolution was moved supporting peace talks in Myanmar. Both India and China supported the idea. Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the summit. China has big interests in Myanmar.

Prioritizing employee welfare for better productivity of organization

By: Dimple Sarma

Anna Sebastian Perayil—a name that has touched many hearts, making us think about our work culture and the struggle to balance work and life. The 26 years old Ernst & Young employee had died due to work pressure. Her sad death shows the mental pressure that employees face every day. Her story is a plea for change, a call to prioritize human well-being over productivity, and to ensure that no one else has to face the same silent struggle. In today's world, workplaces have become a web of high expectations, demands, and constant pressure.

Almost every company pushes employees to their limits, often ignoring their basic needs. We often hear from friends and colleagues about how work is causing stress, anxiety, and even mental health problems and there are less room to think and prioritize personal life. The pressure of work is taking over personal lives, turning people into machines. These stories aren't rare but are signs of a bigger issue affecting many organizations. As every organization focuses on increasing productivity and profits, the cost to employees' health and well-being becomes less noticeable. This raises the question of how can focusing on employee welfare improve productivity.

Work pressure isn't new. For years, employees have faced long hours, tight deadlines, and high expectations. However, today's work culture has become even more demanding, thanks to technology that keeps people connected to their jobs 24/7. The line between work and personal life has faded, causing problems like burnout, mental exhaustion, and growing dissatisfaction. This constant pressure hurts not only employees but also the organization. When people are overworked and stressed, their productivity drops, creativity fades, and they can't perform at their best. And if anyone is not mentally ready to deliver his best due to workload, no one can expect the best result. This leads to obvious problems for companies, such as lower efficiency, less motivation, and more absenteeism and resignations.

To make things worse, many companies are cutting costs by not hiring new employees, which means the remaining staff have to take on even more work. If an employee is sick or absent, there's often no plan to cover their tasks, leaving others to struggle to meet deadlines.

Following the tragic EY Pune incident, another corporate death has gained attention, highlighting the increasing work pressure in the corporate world. This time, Sadaf Fatima, an additional deputy vice-president at HDFC Bank's Vibuti Khand branch in Lucknow, collapsed and died after reportedly falling from her chair while at work, as per various media reports. This heartbreaking incident once again raises concerns about the extreme stress employees face in high-pressure work environments, forcing us to reflect on the toll that relentless work demands can take on an individual's health.

Amid growing work pressure, employee welfare offers a way to improve workplace culture. It should focus on the overall well-being of employees—physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially. By investing in welfare programs, organizations create a supportive environment that boosts productivity. When employees feel valued and cared for, they become more engaged and motivated. It is said a person who is appreciated has the chances of performing better. A key aspect is promoting mental health and reducing stress through support, work-life balance, and open communication.

With this backing, employees can better handle pressure, make good decisions, and contribute effectively to the company's success. Prioritizing employee welfare helps reduce burnout, which is common in high-pressure workplaces. Companies that offer stress relief programs like counselling, workshops, and relaxation opportunities can prevent employees from reaching exhaustion. Welfare programs also boost morale and job satisfaction, fostering loyalty and commitment. This leads to better teamwork, higher enthusiasm, and lower attrition rates resulting saving costs and retaining skilled workers.

Physical health initiatives, such as

Lakshmi Puja is a vibrant festival celebrated across India, particularly revered in regions like Assam, where it embodies the essence of prosperity, abundance, and spiritual well-being. This festival, dedicated to Goddess Lakshmi, is not merely an occasion for worship but a deep-rooted cultural observance that intertwines rituals, community values, and a connection to the land. The significance of Lakshmi Puja extends beyond the material realm; it represents a holistic approach to wealth that encompasses ethical living, gratitude, and the bonds that tie families and communities together.

As autumn descends and the month of Ashwin unfolds, the air is filled with a palpable sense of anticipation. This season marks the culmination of the harvest, a time when agricultural communities in Assam express their gratitude for the earth's bounty. Lakshmi Puja arrives as a celebration of life and sustenance, a moment for families to gather, reflect, and seek blessings for the future. The festival resonates with the agricultural calendar, emphasizing the importance of nature and the cycles that govern it. In Assam, this is not just a festival; it is an acknowledgment of the symbiotic relationship between people and the land that sustains them.

Preparation for Lakshmi Puja begins days in advance, as families engage in a thorough cleaning of their homes. This act is imbued with profound significance. Beyond the physical act of tidying up, it symbolizes the removal of negativity and the creation of a welcoming space for the goddess. In Assamese culture, cleanliness is paramount, and it is believed that Goddess Lakshmi favors homes that are neat and well-maintained. The vibrant tradition of decorating homes with alpina designs—intricate patterns made from rice flour—adds a layer of beauty to the celebrations. These artistic expressions serve not only as decor but also as offerings that invite the goddess into their midst.

When the day of Lakshmi Puja arrives, families awaken early, filled with enthusiasm for the rituals that lie ahead. The focal point of the puja is the idol or image of Goddess Lakshmi, often adorned with fresh flowers, fruits, and other offerings that reflect the richness of the earth. The goddess is usually depicted seated on a lotus, symbolizing purity and grace. Surrounding her are representations of wealth,

such as coins and rice, underscoring her role as the provider of both material and spiritual prosperity.

The presence of the goddess in this form invites devotees to connect with her not only through reverence but through the act of celebration itself.

The rituals commence with heartfelt prayers and the recitation of sacred mantras. This moment establishes a sacred connection between the devotees and the divine. The atmosphere is filled with the fragrance of incense and the sound of bells ringing, creating an ambience steeped in spirituality. Families gather around the puja area, their collective energy amplifying the prayers as they express gratitude for the blessings they have received. The rituals embody the spirit of togetherness, as family members join hands in devotion and reverence.

As a part of the offerings, rice holds particular significance. In Assam, rice is not merely a staple; it symbolizes nourishment and abundance. By offering rice to the goddess, devotees express their appreciation for the sustenance provided by the earth. Additionally, the presentation of fruits like bananas and coconuts, along with traditional sweets made from rice flour and jaggery, reflects local agricultural practices and the bounty of the harvest. These offerings go beyond mere rituals; they represent a deep-seated respect for nature and its cycles, reinforcing the connection between the land and its people.

The lighting of diyas or earthen lamps is one of the most striking aspects of Lakshmi Puja. As dusk approaches, families light these lamps, placing them at entrances and within the puja area. The soft glow of the diyas illuminates homes, transforming them into sanctuaries of light. This act symbolizes the dispelling of darkness and ignorance while inviting wisdom and prosperity into the household. It is believed that the flickering flames guide Goddess Lakshmi into their homes, heralding her blessings. The sight of homes aglow with countless diyas serves as a metaphor for hope, divine grace, and the spirit of the festival itself.

A particularly touching ritual involves drawing the goddess's footprints, usually created from rice flour or coloured powders. These footprints lead from the entrance of the home to the puja area, symbol-

izing the arrival of Goddess Lakshmi. This act emphasizes the belief that inviting Lakshmi into the household ensures her blessings. The footprints serve as a visual reminder of the goddess's grace and the importance of maintaining a sacred space for her presence.

In rural communities, the connection between Lakshmi Puja and agriculture is particularly pronounced. For farmers, this festival is an occasion to seek blessings for a successful harvest. The significance of the harvest season is deeply felt, as it sustains families and communities alike. Many families offer the first yield of their crops to the goddess, expressing gratitude for her protection and blessings. This act of devotion acknowledges the fundamental relationship between people and the land, reinforcing the community's reliance on agriculture for sustenance and livelihood.

Lakshmi Puja is characterized by its community celebrations, bringing people together in shared worship. In many towns and villages, large-scale community pujas are organized, where individuals gather to honour the goddess collectively. These public celebrations often take place in temples or community centers, where idols of Goddess Lakshmi are installed, and elaborate rituals are performed. The communal aspect of these celebrations fosters a sense of unity, emphasizing that prosperity is a shared blessing. The gathering of families, friends, and neighbours during these festivities creates an atmosphere of camaraderie and collective joy, strengthening the social fabric of the community.

The cultural richness of Lakshmi Puja is further enhanced by the inclusion of traditional performances. Folk dances, songs, and artistic expressions are often integral to the festivities, showcasing the vibrant heritage of Assamese culture. These performances serve not only to entertain but also to educate and engage younger generations in their cultural roots.

Through traditional arts, the festival becomes a platform for cultural expression, allowing individuals to connect with their heritage and celebrate their identity. The presence of cultural activities during Lakshmi Puja infuses the celebrations with energy and vibrancy, making it a joyous occasion for all involved. Charity and generosity are paramount during Lak-

shmi Puja, reflecting one of the festival's most important aspects. It is believed that sharing wealth and resources amplifies the blessings of Goddess Lakshmi. Many families take this opportunity to donate food, clothing, and other essentials to those in need. This act of giving, known as daan, is viewed as an essential part of the puja, reinforcing the belief that true prosperity lies not only in individual wealth but also in uplifting others. The spirit of generosity cultivated during Lakshmi Puja promotes social harmony and ensures that the well-being of the community is prioritized alongside personal gains. By engaging in charitable acts, individuals embody the values of compassion and empathy, contributing to a nurturing environment where everyone can thrive.

The ethical and spiritual dimensions of Lakshmi Puja add depth to its significance. In Hindu philosophy, wealth is not viewed solely in material terms; it encompasses knowledge, virtue, and happiness as well. Lakshmi embodies this broader understanding of wealth, emphasizing that material success must be accompanied by spiritual growth and moral integrity. The rituals associated with Lakshmi Puja serve as a reminder of the importance of living a virtuous life, where wealth is used for the betterment of oneself and society. By engaging in charitable acts and ethical living, devotees align themselves with the values embodied by the goddess, ensuring that their own prosperity is enriched by moral integrity.

The relationship between Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu plays a crucial role in the worship practices of Lakshmi Puja. As the protector and preserver of the universe, Vishnu represents dharma, or righteousness. This dual worship reflects the belief that wealth and prosperity are best enjoyed when aligned with ethical principles. The teachings of both deities emphasize the importance of maintaining moral integrity while pursuing wealth. This theological perspective reinforces the idea that true prosperity is achieved when material pursuits are coupled with ethical behaviour and spiritual growth.

The significance of Lakshmi Puja extends beyond individual households and communities; it contributes to the broader cultural landscape of Assam. The festival acts as a unifying force, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and fostering a sense of belonging. Through shared rituals

and collective celebrations, Lakshmi Puja becomes a reflection of the community's values and aspirations. The emphasis on unity and cooperation during the festival reinforces the idea that prosperity is a shared endeavour, encouraging individuals to work together for the common good.

In contemporary society, the teachings of Lakshmi Puja remain relevant, even as the world undergoes rapid changes. The festival encourages individuals to reflect on their values and priorities, particularly in a time when materialism often overshadows spiritual considerations. Lakshmi Puja serves as a reminder to appreciate the blessings one has, fostering a mindset of gratitude and contentment. The rituals provide individuals with an opportunity for introspection, allowing them to assess their relationship with wealth and its role in their lives.

As society continues to evolve, the observance of Lakshmi Puja adapts to modern contexts while retaining its core values. Urban celebrations may take on new forms, yet the fundamental principles of gratitude, community, and ethical living endure. Families in urban settings may choose to celebrate in smaller gatherings or participate in public temple celebrations, but the underlying essence of the festival remains intact.

The festival of Lakshmi Puja also plays a crucial role in promoting mental well-being. Engaging in rituals and acts of devotion provides individuals with a sense of purpose and connection to their cultural heritage. The collective experience of worship fosters a sense of belonging and community, which can be particularly comforting in an increasingly fragmented world. The practice of gratitude cultivated during the festival encourages individuals to focus on the positive aspects of their lives, fostering resilience and a sense of fulfillment.

Ultimately, Lakshmi Puja is a multifaceted festival that encompasses a rich tapestry of rituals, traditions, and values. It celebrates not only material wealth but also the ethical principles that underpin true prosperity. The festival serves as a reminder that wealth is not solely about material possessions but also encompasses the richness of relationships, community, and spiritual fulfillment. *(The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-Magazine SAMPROTIK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

Lakshmi Puja: Celebrating prosperity, devotion, and cultural heritage

By: Dipak Kurmi

Lakshmi Puja, or Lokkhi Pujo as it is known in parts of eastern India, is a deeply significant Hindu festival dedicated to the veneration of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, prosperity, and good fortune. As the Supreme Goddess of Vaishnavism, Lakshmi is revered across the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Her blessings are sought with great fervor, and her arrival is eagerly anticipated by millions of devotees who prepare their homes and hearts for this auspicious occasion.

Celebrated on the amavasya, or the new moon day, in the Hindu calendar months of Ashwayuja or Kartika, Lakshmi Puja often coincides with the third day of Deepavali in most parts of India and Nepal. However, regions like Bengal, Assam, and Odisha have their own unique timing and customs, with the puja occurring five days after Vijaya Dashami, following the conclusion of Durga Puja. This distinct regional variation adds to the cultural richness of the festival, making it a pan-Indian celebration that resonates with different traditions and practices.

At its heart, Lakshmi Puja is a celebration of the divine feminine and the blessings of prosperity and abundance that she bestows. Devotees believe that Lakshmi roams the earth on the night of her puja, seeking out homes that are clean, well-decorated, and filled with devotion. It is said that the goddess prefers to visit the cleanest houses first, and so the preparations for her arrival are meticulous.

Homes are thoroughly cleaned, often days in advance, to ensure that they are spotless and inviting. Finery and lights adorn the household, while aromatic sweets and delicacies are prepared as offerings to welcome the goddess.

As the evening of Lakshmi Puja approaches, the air is filled with a palpable sense of anticipation. The symbolic act of

opening doors and windows to invite the goddess into the home marks the beginning of the celebration.

Diya lamps are placed on windowsills and balcony ledges, their warm glow flickering in the night, signaling an open invitation for Lakshmi to enter. This act of lighting diyas is not only a mark of devotion but also a way of illuminating the darkness, symbolizing the triumph of light over ignorance and the ushering in of prosperity.

Dressed in their finest clothes, devotees gather for the puja, which involves prayers not only to Lakshmi but also to other deities, depending on the region. Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, is often invoked at the beginning of the ceremony, ensuring that the path to prosperity is free of any hindrances. Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and Kubera, the treasurer of the gods, are also worshipped in many households, highlighting the multifaceted nature of wealth and success - beyond material riches to encompass knowledge and fortune.

Lakshmi Puja is not merely a celebration of wealth in its material form; it is a holistic festival that honours the values of family, tradition, and spirituality. Mothers, who work tirelessly throughout the year to nurture and sustain their households, are especially praised on this day.

They are seen as embodiments of Lakshmi herself, the living symbols of prosperity and well-being in the family. This deep reverence for the mother figure elevates the festival beyond the pursuit of material wealth, grounding it in the values of gratitude, respect, and familial love.

In many regions, especially in Assam, Bengal, and Odisha, Lakshmi Puja takes on local flavours that enrich the festival's significance. In Bengal, the Kojagori Lokkhi Puja is celebrated five days after Vijaya Dashami, with the goddess worshipped at night, under the full moon. This

variation is steeped in tradition, with the goddess represented in unique forms, such as banana trees, clay covers for utensils, and small boats carrying five drums. On Deepavali eve, also known as Dipanwita Lokkhi Puja or Alakshmi Viday, the goddess is worshipped once again, this time to bid farewell to her antithesis, Alakshmi, the bringer of misfortune.

In Assam and Odisha, the celebrations are similarly rich in tradition. Five days after Vijaya Dashami, families come together to decorate their homes, especially their entrances, to welcome the goddess. Prasad offerings typically include sweets, moong dal, gram, and fruits, all prepared with great care and devotion.

The cleanliness of the home is paramount, as it is believed that Lakshmi will bless the cleanest homes with her presence. The act of drawing rangoli or alpina on the doorstep further signifies the welcome extended to the goddess, creating a beautiful and intricate path for her to enter.

Lakshmi Puja is also an important part of Tihar, Nepal's second major festival after Dashain. In Nepal, the celebration stretches over five days, each day dedicated to a different deity or animal, including crows, dogs, cows, and oxen. The third day, however, is reserved for Lakshmi Puja, and it is on this day that the Nepalese people buy gold, silver, and new utensils as symbols of wealth and prosperity.

These items are then used in the puja to honour Lakshmi, and homes are cleaned with holy water, cow dung, and red mud, preparing them for the goddess's blessings.

The ritual of Lakshmi Puja varies from region to region, but certain elements remain central to the ceremony. The purification of the space is a key aspect, with devotees lighting benzoin incense to cleanse the atmosphere. The kalasha, a sacred vessel filled with water, betel

nuts, flowers, and coins, is placed at the heart of the altar, symbolising abundance and prosperity.

A Panchmukhi Diya, a special five-faced lamp, is lit, and the goddess is bathed in panchamrita, a mixture of milk, curd, ghee, honey, and sugar. This ritual cleansing is followed by offerings of flowers, sandal paste, saffron, and garlands, all given in reverence to the goddess.

In rural areas, the symbolism of prosperity is deeply rooted in the agricultural traditions of the land. A bamboo pot, known as 'Mana', is filled to the brim with freshly harvested paddy, symbolising the abundance of the earth's bounty. The goddess is worshipped with offerings of fruits, coconut, banana, and doob grass, while the reading of the Lakshmi Purana in Odia adds a spiritual dimension to the ceremony.

The culmination of Lakshmi Puja is marked by the aarti, a devotional hymn sung in praise of the goddess, accompanied by the ringing of a small bell. This final act of devotion is performed in a silent and sublime atmosphere, leaving the devotee with a sense of spiritual fulfillment and the hope for a prosperous year ahead.

Lakshmi Puja is not just a festival of wealth, but a celebration of life, family, and spiritual abundance. It is a time when the divine feminine is honoured, familial bonds are strengthened, and the blessings of prosperity are sought with devotion and humility. The festival weaves together the material and the spiritual, creating a tapestry of rituals and traditions that resonate with the values of generosity, cleanliness, and reverence for the divine.

As the diyas flicker and the mantras are chanted, the presence of Lakshmi is felt not only in the wealth that she bestows but in the joy, peace, and well-being that fill the hearts and homes of her devotees. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)*

Meitei, Kuki, Naga MLAs of Manipur meet in Delhi

Union home minister and Manipur chief minister did not attend the meeting

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Aiming to bring a lasting peace in strife-torn Manipur, MLAs belonging to the Meitei, Kuki and Naga communities met here on Tuesday for the first time since ethnic violence broke out in the state 17 months ago, sources said.

The meeting was called by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in an attempt to iron out differences between the Meitei and Kuki communities, and find an amicable solution to the ongoing conflict.

Those who attended the meeting included State Assembly Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh, Tongbram Robinro, Th. Basantakumar Singh from the Meitei side and Kuki MLAs Letpao Haokip and Nemcha Kipgen (both state ministers).

The Naga community was represented by MLAs Ram Muivah,

Awangbow Newmai and L. Dikho, the sources said.

Home ministry's interlocutor A K Mishra and other senior officials were present at the meeting.

However, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh did not attend the meeting.

The deliberations come nearly a month after Shah said resolving the situation in Manipur requires dialogue between the Kukis and Meiteis, and that the Centre is in discussion with both the groups.

On June 17, a similar statement was given by the home minister when he reviewed the security situation in the northeastern state.

A statement from the ministry had said Shah had underscored the importance of a coordinated approach to resolve the ongoing conflict in



Manipur and added that the "MHA will talk to both the groups, Meiteis and Kukis, so as to bridge the ethnic divide at the earliest".

All the Naga, Kuki and Meitei MLAs and ministers likely to attend the meet were invited by the MHA through letters and telephone calls,

the sources said.

Ten Kuki MLAs, including seven from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have not attended the Assembly sessions held in between.

According to the wishes of the Kukis, the MLAs from the community have even pressed their demand for separate administrations or a Union Territory for the tribals in Manipur.

Ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on May 3 last year after a tribal solidarity march was taken out in the hill districts of the state to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Since then, more than 220 people, including members of both the Kuki and Meitei communities as well as security personnel, have been killed in the violence. (PTI)

14 of 25 districts of Arunachal are now malaria free



ITANAGAR, Oct 15: As many as 14 of the 25 districts of Arunachal Pradesh are now eligible for malaria-free certification, National Center for Vector Borne Disease Control (NCVBDC) state programme officer Dr KT Mulung said on Tuesday.

Mulung was speaking at the inauguration of the three-day state review meeting on vector-borne diseases organised by NCVBDC at Naharlagun near here.

The meeting focused on evaluating the state's efforts towards malaria elimination and reviewing the progress in combating vector-borne diseases.

Additional senior regional director of the regional offices of health and family welfare, Shillong and Guwahati, Dr Juliana Lyngwa praised the remarkable reduction in malaria cases in the state. Lyngwa attributed the achievement to the dedication of health officials and field staff.

She also stressed the importance of proper documentation to ensure smooth progress towards receiving malaria elimination certification.

State family welfare director Dr Amping Perme underlined the department's commitment to achieving a malaria-free Arunachal Pradesh in the near future.

National Health Mission (NHM) mission director Marge Sora assured of proper allocation of funds for vector-borne disease control programmes.

The meeting, which will conclude on October 17, will review the strategies and develop actionable plans to accelerate the progress towards a malaria-free Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

Army establishes culture, heritage museum in West Kameng

ITANAGAR, Oct 15: The Indian Army has established the Kameng Cultural and Heritage Museum at Nyukmadung in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district, an official said.

The museum under the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) will serve as the cultural beacon of peace, security and commitment to nation-building through community integration. Guwahati-based Defence PRO Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said in a press release.

He said Arunachal Pradesh has a deep-rooted connection to Indian civilization tracing mentions in Kalika Purana and the great epic Mahabharat.

It is replete with innumerable historical monuments and archaeological sites that establish its rich cultural and ancient heritage which along with resplendent natural beauty comes together harmoniously at the Kameng Museum, Lt Col Rawat said.

He said the museum, a collaborative effort of the Indian Army and the local community, will bring together cultural and religious linkages of all communities covering all tangible historical, religious, archaeological and ethnographic aspects woven into the fabric of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Kameng Cultural and Heritage Museum has been professionally and aesthetically curated by the National Museum Institute of History of Art, Conservation and Museology along with the voluntary donation of ancestral land and 343 artefacts by the local community.

The museum has a state-of-the-art movie hall showcasing rich cultural and heritage linkages of Arunachal Pradesh with Bharat. A cafeteria and children's park has also been constructed for tourists.

The museum will be inaugurated by Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu in the presence of Union minister of state for rural development Kamlesh Paswan and Gajraj Corps general officer commanding Lt Gen Gambhir Singh on October 23, Lt Col Rawat added. (PTI)

8 Bangladeshi nationals, 6 Rohingya held by BSF in Tripura

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Oct 15: The Border Security Force (BSF) in Tripura has detained 8 Bangladeshi and 6 Rohingya nationals from various parts of the state in last 24 hours.

A press release from BSF said that on October 14 on specific information BSF troops of Border Out Post Mike under Unakoti District apprehended 03 Bangladeshi nationals near ICP Manughat while they were planning to ex-filtrate to Bangladesh territory.

"Apprehended BD nationals are residents of District Kishoreganj and Habiganj Bangladesh. In another operation BSF troops of BOP Rangichera under Dhalai District apprehended four Bangladeshi nationals (female) while they were trying to infiltrate into Indian territory with the assistance of touts by negotiating the border fence. Apprehended Bangladeshi nationals are residents of District Bhola and Manikganj, Bangladesh", the press release said.

The BSF said that on October 15 at a joint operation with sister agencies BSF troops apprehended 01 Bangladeshi national along with 01 Indian tout at Agartala Railway station while they were trying to board Hamsafar Express and in another operation on specific information BSF troops of BOP Baihangbari under North Tripura District apprehended 06 Rohingya illegal migrants while they were trying to enter Indian territory by negotiating the border fence.

Khliehrangnah of Meghalaya, shines as Best Panchayat

Dhalai of Tripura bags Best District Award

5th National Water Awards

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Oct 15: The Union Ministry of Jal Shakti has announced Dhalai District of Tripura as Best District while Best Panchayat named Khliehrangnah, West Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya for the 5th National Water Awards 2023 in the North East Region.

The Department of Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation (DoWR, RD & GR), under the Ministry of Jal Shakti announced the 38 winners, including joint winners, for the 5th National Water Awards, 2023, in 9 categories viz Best State, Best District, Best Village Panchayat, Best Urban Local Body, Best School or College, Best Industry, Best Water User Association, Best Institution (other

than school or college), and Best Civil Society.

Under the North East Zone, Dhalai District of Tripura emerged as winner.

"Major achievements of District in the field of water conservation include creation of 748 community recharge structures, micro irrigation systems in additional 15 hectares of land, excavation of 63 ponds, construction of 176 check dams with storage capacity of 9 lakh cubic metres and construction of 137 water tanks for rainwater harvesting", said a PIB press release.

It informed that in addition, 25,684 water bodies available in the district have been geo-tagged and mapped. 41.32 lakhs of miscellaneous and bamboo tree saplings have



been nurtured and planted across the district's expanse.

"Community engagement with local communities through interactive sessions, awareness campaigns, workshops and training sessions, has been undertaken to explain water usage patterns and to encourage community participation in conservation and management initiatives", the statement said.

While, Khliehrangnah, West Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya named as Best Panchayat award in Third winner (joint). "Khliehrangnah Panchayat has renovated and revived 20 water bodies, including 14 springs and 6 streams. 1 dug out pond with 2,400 cubic meters has also been created by the Panchayat. Other works like contour trenches, land rehabilitation by af-

CFSB accuses NSCN-K (Nikki Sumi) of ceasefire violation

DIMAPUR, Oct 15: Ceasefire Supervisory Board (CFSB) chairman Amarjeet Singh Bedi has accused the Nikki Sumi faction of NSCN-K of abducting two Naga youths in violation of the laid down ceasefire rules.

Two youths were abducted from Dimapur allegedly over illegal taxation demand on October 10.

Bedi on Monday held separate closed-door meetings with representatives of NSCN-K (Nikki Sumi), Dimapur-based civil society organisations and youth bodies at Police Complex in Chumoukiedima.

The CFSB chairman, after meeting with the Naga underground group leaders, said that the Nikki Sumi faction of NSCN-K has been found accountable for the violation of ceasefire ground rules as well as misuse of the ceasefire office.

He said that the group agreed in writing that they were ready to adhere to all the

ground rules.

Bedi said that he asked the NSCN-K Nikki Sumi group to make all efforts to apprehend those involved in the abduction who may have acted in an individual capacity and hand them over to the police so that necessary action can be taken as per the law.

Bedi said that the Centre and the NSCN-K (Nikki Sumi) signed the ceasefire agreement in 2021 and thereafter extended it last month for a period of one year.

The agreement was signed with an aim to bring peace, mutual understanding and also trust among the parties so that Naga political issue is resolved in a peaceful atmosphere, he said.

Bedi said, as the chairman of CFSB, he has to ensure that laid down ceasefire ground rules are adhered to by the Naga political groups who have signed the ceasefire agreements with the Centre.



If any group violates the ground rules, they will be held accountable for unlawful activities, he said.

The Centre has signed ceasefire agreements with five groups. However, the Nikki Sumi faction of NSCN-K has not entered into dialogue to resolve the Naga political issue. (PTI)

Meghalaya seeks ₹ 600 cr for social welfare improvement

SHILLONG, Oct 15: Meghalaya government is seeking ₹ 600 crore financial support from the Centre for strengthening and improving the overall functioning of the social welfare department.

Informing this recently, minister in-charge Social Welfare department, Paul Lyngdoh said that he has reviewed the functioning and funding position of the directorate and the interventions, which is required to be taken by the state.

"Certain matters will also have to be taken to the cabinet, certain matters will also have to be taken to the five ministries dealing with our department here in Meghalaya," he said.

"The additional interventions would include more funding from the ministry. We have projected a deficit of about ₹ 600 crore. There is also a need for us to improve the service conditions of the employees here. A lot of them are working on a contractual basis and it's a lot of hard work. They have to stay over, those who are on the night shift. So things like that. We will try to en-

hance facilities for them so that they would be able to optimise the services that we can offer," Lyngdoh added.

The minister also reviewed the functioning of the women and child helpline at the office of the Directorate of Social Welfare.

Emphasizing that not everything that is happening in Meghalaya is negative, the minister said, "There is a lot of positivity. There are a lot of highly motivated young men and women, working tirelessly to serve the society and it's an incredible story when we hear that women facing domestic violence, for instance, get immediate attention and support, our intervention as a department."

The minister then said, "We will need to further strengthen the department, ensure that where cases take longer than they should take, those will be corrected and once we integrated their information system with the secretariat, I will be in a position to see the data flowing on a daily and we can then take corrective measures in such cases." (NNN)

Funds crunch may hit mid-day meal scheme in Mizoram

AIZAWL, Oct 15: Two associations of school teachers in Mizoram have expressed apprehension that students will cease to receive mid-day meals soon due to the alleged failure of the government to provide sufficient funds.

The Mizoram Primary School Teachers' Association (MPSTA) and the Mizoram Middle School Teachers' Association (MMSTA) recently sent a joint letter to the school education department stating that they will stop providing midday meals from October 18 since it will not be possible for them to pay the cooks and for cooking costs.

They said that cooks had not been paid for their remuneration for four months.



School Education department director Lalsangliana said his office is in touch with the teacher associations to resolve the issue.

The government has been facing difficulties in disbursing the funds as the Centre is yet to release the first instalment of mid-day meals fund under the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) programme for the current academic session, the officer said.

The associations said they had discussed the matter with education minister Dr Vanlalhlana on September 17 and also met the education department director on the issue, but the matter was not resolved.

The government has raised the honorarium of cooks from ₹ 1,500 a month to ₹ 3,000 from the 2024 academic session.

Sources said that the government disbursed their honorarium for the first two months - April and May - in early October, after the teachers' associations threatened to discontinue the programme from October 1.

In the letter, the MPSTA and MMSTA urged the government to address their issue on or before October 18. (PTI)

MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION OF WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/152 of 2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Name of work:** Maintenance and operation of water supply system in all colonies, service buildings and stations etc. in Panikhait, Thakurkuchi, Panbari, Digaru, Tetelia, Kamrup Khetri, Barahu, Jagiroad, Aujari, Chaparmukh Jn, Kamrup, Laopani, Thekeraguri, Dharamtul, Haibargaon, Malbarari, Nagaon, Slighat Town, Jamunamukh, Juglian, Hoi, Dhalpukhuri, Lanka, Habaipur, Lamsakhang, Patharkhola and Bar Longter under the jurisdiction of SSE/W/Chaparmukh Jn, SSE/W/Line/Lumding Jn. & SSE/W/Jagiroad (For Two years). **Tender Value:** ₹ 2,80,36,290.24/-, **Earnest Money:** ₹ 2,90,200/-. **Date & time of closing of tender:** 15.00 hrs. of 04-11-2024 & will be opened at: 15.00 hrs. of 05-11-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 04-11-2024 in website www.ireps.gov.in

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No.KMB-27/Misc/Waste Collection/2024-25/368-69 Dated Kokrajhar the 15/10/2024

NOTICE FOR TENDER

Sealed tender affixing court fee Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and twenty five Paise) only are invited from the up-to-date registered contractor of PWD (Roads) firm or Registered Contractors under Kokrajhar Municipal Board up to 2:00P.M on 25/10/2024 (Friday) with the completion of work as per estimate, and same will be opened by the undersigned on the same date and hours. The tender papers will be issued to the contractor or authorized agent up to 12:00 Noon on 25/10/2024 (Friday). The details of NIT & Terms and Conditions may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. The payment will be made if and when the fund is received from the concerned department.

Name of Project	Amount
Collection and disposal of waste materials from CIT, Kokrajhar	Rs 8,66,821.00

Sd/-
Executive Officer,
Kokrajhar Municipal Board, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/722

Dia Mirza appointed as jury at the All Living Things Environmental Film Festival

MUMBAI, Oct 15: Actor Dia Mirza is part of the jury at the All Living Things Environmental Film Festival (ALT EFF), which is scheduled to take place from November 22 to December 8.

A total of 72 films will be showcased at the festival with 38 making their India premieres. The diverse selection of films at the festival highlight critical environmental issues, ranging from climate change to wildlife conservation.

The screenings will be held not only in metro cities but also in 55 locations in small towns and villages across India over the festival period. This will be in

addition to 45 screenings taking place in 14 tier-1 cities. This effort aims to bring environmental awareness at various grassroots levels.

"I am honoured to be part of ALT EFF, a festival that is not just about films but about building a dialogue around sustainability and the future of our planet. The power of cinema to evoke empathy and inspire change is unparalleled, and I look forward to watching films that reflect the incredible efforts being made globally to protect our environment," Mirza said in a statement.

Festival director Kunal Khanna said it

is crucial to engage communities beyond metro cities on environmental issues and cinema has the power to connect people from different walks of life.

"Bearing in mind the diversity of languages in India, this year we have used AI to translate foreign language films into regional languages, along with curating films made in regional languages. With 38 India premieres and 72 exceptional films, we are excited to create an inclusive platform that brings environmental issues to the forefront, inspiring audiences everywhere," Khanna added. (PTI)



Rashmika named national brand ambassador of Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Actor Rashmika Mandanna was on Tuesday named the national brand ambassador of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), an initiative of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India to deal with cyber crime in the country.

The actor, popular for films such as "Pushpa: The Rise", "Dear Comrade", and "Animal", made headlines after a deepfake video of her was widely circulated on social media earlier this year.

As someone who faced the impact of cybercrime, Mandanna said it's time for "stricter measures to protect our online world".

"Let's unite to build a safer cyberspace for ourselves and future generations. I want to bring awareness and protect as many of you as possible from cybercrimes as I take on the role of brand ambassador for I4C. Let me and the Government of India help you," she wrote in an Instagram post. The actor, who has 44.2 million followers on Instagram and 4.9 million followers on X, urged people to report cybercrimes by calling on the number 1930 or visiting cybercrime.gov.in. website.

Cyber Dost, the cyber-safety and cybersecurity awareness handle maintained by the MHA, welcomed Mandanna as the national brand ambassador of I4C.

"Excited to onboard the pan-India star @iamRashmika as I4C's National Brand Ambassador. We are joining forces to fortify India's digital landscape, we'll tackle cybercrimes head-on," read a post on X. The I4C was set up by the MHA to provide a framework and eco-system for law-enforcement agencies (LEAs) in dealing with cybercrime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

Mandanna will next be seen in "Pushpa: The Rule", set to hit the screens on December 6. (PTI)



Marathi actor Atul Parchure passes away at 57; CM Shinde says he was among his fans

MUMBAI, Oct 15: Well-known Marathi actor Atul Parchure, known for his comic roles, died at a private hospital here on Monday, family sources said.

Parchure (57), who had recently recovered from cancer, was about to make a comeback on stage but suddenly developed health complications and his condition worsened in the last two days, the sources said.

He started his career as a child actor and soon rose to fame with roles in plays such as "Tarun Turk", "Mhatre Ark" and "Nati Goti". Parchure

also acted in a host of Marathi and Hindi TV serials and films. Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, his deputies Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar took to social media platform X to express their condolences.

Shinde condoled Parchure's untimely death on behalf of the state government and called himself one among thousands of the senior actor's fans.

"The news of his death was painful," the CM said, adding the Marathi theatre and cinema has lost a talented actor. (PTI)



Manipur actor Bijou Thaangjam calls out 'Jigra' casting team for 'unprofessional behaviour'

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Actor Bijou Thaangjam, known for his roles in "Mary Kom" and "Shiv-aay", has accused the casting team behind the Alia Bhatt-starrer "Jigra" of unprofessional behaviour.

According to the actor, who has been credited for character roles in many Hindi films, he was asked to be available in December to shoot for the movie but never received a follow-up call.

The actor, in a post on X, said he didn't want to stir up controversy but thought it was time to speak up.

"Back in 2023, I was approached by their casting team to audition for a role. I sent my tapes twice over the span of four months, playing along with their timeline. By the end of November, they told me I'd be shooting in December — fantastic, right? Except they never gave me any firm shoot dates.

"Still, they booked me for the entire month of December, expecting that I'd be ready to shoot for them at any moment. As someone based in Imphal, Manipur, I made it very clear from the start that travel arrangements would need to be made, but that didn't seem to matter," Thaangjam recalled.

The actor said he was kept in the dark throughout the month except for a brief message that they were waiting for a "revert".

"Meanwhile, I'd lost out on other projects because I was sitting around, waiting for them to give me the go-ahead. But, of course, that never came," the actor said.

As an actor from North-east, Thaangjam said the experience felt "particularly dismissive, almost discriminatory".

"My time was wasted and I missed out on other opportunities just because they expected I'd be available at a moment's notice," he wrote.

"Jigra" has faced a number of controversies, including the negativity surrounding Bhatt's casting in the movie and actor Divya Khosla Kumar's comments that the film, a jailbreak drama, resembled the plot line of her last film "Savi". (PTI)

VARUN DHAWAN SAYS ADITYA CHOPRA ONCE REFUSED TO CAST HIM IN A BIG-BUDGET ACTION FILM

MUMBAI, Oct 15: Varun Dhawan on Tuesday revealed that he once asked Aditya Chopra to cast him in an action film but the producer turned him down saying the actor was not "at that place" yet to justify the budget required to make a good movie in the genre.

Dhawan, who is leading the India chapter of a global spy series "Citadel" with "Citadel: Honey Bunny" opposite Samantha Ruth Prabhu, revealed the story during the trailer launch of the Prime Video show.

"During lockdown, I met Aditya Chopra, he was playing badminton, and Maneesh Sharma was there. They were making 'Tiger' (3) at that time. I asked him, 'Why don't you make an action film with a younger talent?'. He was like, 'I want to give you acting roles, and don't want to give you action (roles)'. I kept pursuing it," Dhawan said.

"He (Chopra) was like, 'I can't do that because I can't give you that budget right now. You're not at that place where I can give you such a big budget'. I kept thinking and then I messaged him and asked him, 'What is the budget?' And he gave me a figure, that this is the budget you need to make something big in action."

Dhawan said when "Honey Bunny" came his way, the first question he asked creators Raj Nidimoru

and Krishna DK of "The Family Man" and "Farzi" fame, and Amazon Prime Video was about its budget.

"...Because I got this knowledge from Aditya Chopra that you need this much budget to make something look good in action. I'm grateful to Amazon and Raj & DK for giving us this platform because that is needed to make something look big, to make actors look larger than life."

Dhawan, who is set to star in Atlee-produced "Baby John", said he is grateful to South filmmakers for giving him the opportunity to explore the action genre and hoped that Bollywood also takes note.

"I had a great time (doing action). It is a wake-up call, and hopefully, a lot of people take notice of this. Right now, I feel only South Indians are taking notice of me and giving me great opportunities in action, which is true. I started working with Raj & DK, and Sam, and next, I'm working with Atlee and Keerthy (Suresh, actress). Hopefully, that will lead the way for other people in our industry to give me (action roles)," he said.

"Citadel: Honey Bunny", set in the 90s, is billed as a riveting narrative that fuses a love story with action beats.

The Hindi series, also starring Kay Kay Menon, Saqib Saleem, and Sikander Kher, will premiere on November 7 on Prime Video. (PTI)



FRANCE AND GERMANY BEAT FIERCE RIVALS IN NATIONS LEAGUE

BRUSSELS, Oct 15: France and Germany had stand-in forwards to thank for wins over fierce rivals in the Nations League.

With Kylian Mbappé again absent, Randal Kolo Muani started up front for France and scored in each half in a 2-1 victory away to neighbor Belgium.

The Belgians must be sick of the sight of Kolo Muani, who also netted in a 2-0 win in the reverse fixture in Lyon last month. It was also the Paris Saint-Germain striker's shot that deflected into the net when France beat Belgium 1-0 in the last 16 at the European Championship during the sum-

mer.

On his debut for Germany, Jamie Leweling had a second-minute strike ruled out after a video review but had more luck with a rasping drive in the 64th to seal a 1-0 triumph over the Netherlands in Munich.

Leweling, a forward for Stuttgart, was one of four players making their first starts for Germany on a night fans paid tribute to four players — Toni Kroos, Manuel Neuer, Thomas Müller and İlkay Gündoğan — who recently retired from national-team duty. Neuer, Müller and Gündoğan were at Allianz Arena to receive the acclaim of Germany fans.

There were also victories for

Italy, which beat Israel 4-1, and Hungary, a 2-0 winner in Bosnia, in the top-tier League A.

With two group games remaining in November, France, Italy and Germany all stand on the verge of clinching a top-two finish and spots in the quarterfinals.

France holds on France was forced to hang on to preserve its third win in four group matches after Aurélien Tchouaméni, its captain in the absence of Mbappé, was shown a second yellow card in the 76th for tripping Belgium midfielder Youri Tielemans.

Tielemans had earlier lifted a penalty kick over the bar in

the 23rd, only for Kolo Muani to convert his own spot kick after Wout Faes was penalized for handball after falling to the ground attempting to challenge Bradley Barcola. Loïs Openda headed in the equalizer from Timothy Castagne's cross, with the goal initially ruled out for offside but awarded after VAR check.

Kolo Muani, who has started only two games for PSG this season, grabbed the winner in the 62nd in Brussels by heading in Lucas Digne's left-wing cross.

New era felt like a new era for Germany, with Neuer, Müller and Gündoğan all given a fond farewell before

the game. Together with Kroos, who wasn't there in person due to commitments at his youth academy, the four players won more than 450 caps for Germany.

Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann is bringing through younger players, with Aleksandar Pavlovic, 20, and Angelo Stiller, 23, handed first starts and the 23-year-old Leweling making his debut in place of the injured Deniz Undav. At the other end of the age scale, goalkeeper Oliver Baumann became the third oldest debutant for Germany — at 34 years, 134 days — having been on the bench 26 times. (AP)



I waited for many years for women's HIL, but now will serve in a different role: Rani Rampal

DON'T WANT TO TAKE UNDERCOOKED SHAMI TO AUSTRALIA: ROHIT



BENGALURU, Oct 15: India skipper Rohit Sharma has virtually ruled out Mohammed Shami from the upcoming Test tour of Australia, saying that the pacer's recovery from an ankle surgery has been hampered by swelling in knees and it would not be right to take an "undercooked" version of him for the marquee showdown.

Shami last played for India during the ODI World Cup final last year and has been recuperating from an ankle surgery after that.

"To be honest, right now, it's pretty difficult for us to make a call on him, whether he'll be fit for this series or Australia series. He recently had swelling on his knee, which was quite unusual," Rohit told reporters here on the eve of the first Test against New Zealand.

"He was in the process of getting fit, getting close to 100 per cent, he had swelling in his knee, that put him back a little bit in his recovery. So, he had to start again. Right now, he's at NCA, he's working with the physios and the doctors at NCA," he added.

Rohit said the team management wants Shami to regain full fitness before returning to top-flight cricket.

"We are keeping our fingers crossed, we want him to be 100 per cent fit. We don't want to bring an undercooked Shami to Australia, that is not going to be the right decision for us.

"It is quite tough for a fast bowler, having missed so much of cricket, and then suddenly to come out and be at his best, it is not ideal," he noted. Rohit said the National Cricket Academy staff will continue to assess Shami's fitness and he might play a couple of internal matches in that process.

"We want to give him enough time to recover and be 100 per cent fit. The physios, the trainers, the doctors have set a roadmap for him. He is supposed to play a couple of (practice) games before he plays international cricket," he added.

Shami has played 64 Tests for India, taking 229 wickets at an impressive average of 27.71. India will play five Tests in Australia starting November 22. (PTI)

Latham looking forward to challenge of beating 'well-rounded' India

BENGALURU, Oct 15: New Zealand captain Tom Latham on Tuesday conceded that beating a "well-rounded" India would be an enormous task but said his team is ready to face the challenge over the course of a three-match Test series, beginning here on Wednesday.

The presence of a host of experienced batters and bowlers, Latham said, makes India a formidable opponent.

"You obviously look at the spinners when you come over these conditions. But they've got an equally good seam attack in Bumrah, Siraj, Akash Deep, who's played the last couple of Tests against Bangladesh. So just a well-rounded side," Latham said in the pre-match press meet here on Tuesday.

"From a batting point of view. You have a lot of match winners who can take a game away from you pretty quickly.

"We're looking forward to the challenge. Hopefully, we can lean back on the experiences that we've had here the last couple of times that we've toured," he added.

In that context, Latham said the Kiwis will miss the presence of former captain Kane Williamson, who has been ruled out of the early part of this tour owing to a groin injury.

"It's disappointing not to have Kane here. Fingers crossed he'll be ready as soon as possible. I think Youngie (Will Young) will play. He'll bat at three. He's batted all over the order. I guess it's his opportunity to put his hand up.

"Yeah, obviously, disappointing when you miss a senior guy like Kane, but it gives opportunities for other guys to put their hand up," he said.

However, Ben Sears getting ruled out because of a knee injury has opened up a chance for out of form veteran Tim Southee to get a place in the eleven.

"Absolutely, I think last time they played a Test here, Tim took 7 for 60."

"Obviously, Ben Sears has been ruled out, so I guess if we do end up going with the three seamers, then obviously Tim will come right into the equation."

Latham admitted that the build-up to this series was not ideal after a 0-2 series defeat against Sri Lanka, but hoped to carry over the learning from that contest.

"Obviously, results weren't ideal in Sri Lanka. I think that first Test was a reasonably small margin in terms of the defeat. But we actually did a lot of good stuff in that tour.

"And, yeah, I guess you come here to India, it's slightly different conditions. That wicket at Galle didn't offer a lot from a bowling point of view," he noted.

Latham is no stranger to captaincy but being in the hot seat on a permanent basis from the three-match series against India excites the Canterbury man.

The 32-year-old was handed the skipper's arm band after Southee stepped down from the role after a poor away series against Sri Lanka.

"It's obviously a huge, exciting privilege for me to be in this position. But regardless whether I'm captain or not captain, I'm trying to perform my role as best as I can.

"That's not going to be any different being captain," said Latham. (PTI)

Lakshya, Malvika make first-round exits at Denmark Open

ODENSE, Oct 15: India's Lakshya Sen battled hard against China's Lu Guang Zu but ultimately lost in three games to make an early exit from the Denmark Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Tuesday.

Lakshya, a 2021 World championship bronze medallist, squandered an opening game advantage, losing 21-12 19-21 14-21 to Lu in a men's singles opening round match which lasted 70 minutes.

The 22-year-old from Almore, who finished fourth at the Paris Olympics, had previously lost in the second round of the Arctic Open in Finland last week.

Malvika Bansod, who had reached the quarterfinals at China Open, also couldn't cross



Yang Ching Tun in women's doubles.

Lakshya, competing in his second event since the Olympics, kept pace with his Chinese rival before pulling ahead at 8-8 to take an 11-9 advantage at the break.

The Indian kept his nose ahead after resumption and jumped to 20-11 with a seven-point burst to comfortably pocket the opening game.

After the change of sides, Lakshya surged to 8-2 but Lu rallied to narrow the gap to 11-12. The Indian extended his lead to 16-11 but Lu's persistence paid off as he kept troubling Lakshya and reversed the situation, taking 19-18 lead.

The Indian drew parity but Lu got the required two points to script a comeback. (PTI)

the opening hurdle, going down to Vietnam's Nguyen Thuy Linh 13-21 12-21 in women's singles. Panda sisters — Rutaparna and Swetaparna — also made a first-round exit after losing 18-21 22-24 against Chinese Taipei's Chang Ching Hui and

SAO PAULO, Oct 15: No Neymar, no Vinicius Júnior, no problem for Brazil.

Two players from local giant Botafogo rescued Brazil and coach Dorival Júnior from another embarrassment last Friday in a last-minute 2-1 victory at Chile in South American qualifying for the 2026 World Cup.

Under pressure from fans and even the country's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Júnior is expected to give more playing time to Botafogo strikers Igor Jesus and Luiz Henrique, the scorers in Santiago. Jesus, and not Real Madrid striker Endrick, is once more set to start as a center forward, and Henrique is a likely substitute for Savinho in the second half.

But for their goals, a fourth straight loss in qualifying for

Brazil could have meant the beginning of the end for coach Júnior, who took over only in January. Going by Monday's training, Júnior could be set to use another local player as a replacement for the suspended Lucas Paquetá. Flamengo midfielder Gerson's presence would beef up the team's physicality against Peru in Brasilia on Tuesday night.

Two other new players are also expected to be in Brazil's starting 11: Right back Vanderson replacing Danilo, and midfielder André taking the place of Bruno Guimarães. The rescue act by the two Botafogo players has reignited an old debate in Brazil: should the national team feature only players from the big European leagues for major competitions? President Lula had his say.

"I was watching (Brazil vs. Chile) and I only knew the goalkeeper (Ederson), the PSG defender (Marquinhos), Rodrygo and Raphinha, who I recognized because of his hairstyle," Lula told radio CBN in an interview. "I didn't know these players. They should get those who play here in Brazil to play for the national team." Since he took over Brazil, Júnior has called on 20 local-based players. Tuesday's match could make the case for other local talents in the squad such as Botafogo left back Alex Telles and Cruzeiro midfielder Matheus Pereira. Brazil rose to fourth on the table on 13 points, behind Lionel Messi's Argentina (19), Colombia (16), and Uruguay (15).

Argentina facing boosted Bolivia Argentina tops the standings but is under a little pressure when it welcomes Bolivia in Buenos

Aires on Tuesday. The Argentines have taken just one point from their last two qualifiers: A 2-1 defeat at Colombia and a 1-1 draw with Venezuela.

Defender Cristian Romero will replace Germán Pezzella after serving a suspension. Midfielder Alexis Mac Allister, who did not play against Venezuela, is a likely replacement for Thiago Almada. And striker Lautaro Martínez and Julián Álvarez are in contention for the starting lineup.

Bolivia has a different attitude than the team which succumbed to Argentina 3-0 in La Paz at the start of qualifying a year ago.

Under new coach Oscar Villegas and following the move to Estadio Municipal in El Alto, 4,150 meters above sea level, Bolivia has won three consecutive matches in qualifying against

Venezuela, Chile, and Colombia.

Bolivia has risen to fifth place, inside the top six positions that directly qualify for the World Cup. The Bolivians last qualified for the World Cup in 1994.

Embattled Bielsa Also on Tuesday, Uruguay coach Marcelo Bielsa will be in the spotlight when they host Ecuador.

Players past and present have been criticizing Bielsa's methods, and the 1-0 defeat at Peru last Friday has upped the pressure on the coach. "I know that my authority was somehow affected," Bielsa said after the defeat in Lima.

Ecuador coach Sebastián Beccacece defended Bielsa, a fellow Argentine. Beccacece said in a press conference that he sees Bielsa "as a soccer father" and "a reference not only in my career, but also in my life." (AP)

