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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 not 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 Tingkhong 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 Pramatia 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 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 Committee approved to study plight of tribals in Assam: Jharkhand CM

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)

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

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)

Reliance Jio Chairman Akash Ambani wants Indian data to be stored locally

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Reliance Jio, the nation's largest telecom company, on Tuesday said Indian users' data must remain within the country as Chairman Akash Ambani pitched for "incentives" including that on electricity for Indian companies ready to set up AI and machine learning data centers.

Speaking at IMC and ITUWSTA 2024, Ambani termed AI as a revolutionary tool for the transformation of every area including healthcare, education, agriculture and manufacturing, and emphasised it is "critical" in realising India's vision for a developed nation by 2047.

"AI is absolutely critical for realizing our dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047. Therefore, India under your leadership should urgently embrace AI with a holistic strategy driven by maximum 'atma nirbhar' efforts," he said at the event which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Jio, he said, is making all out efforts to bring the benefits of AI to every Indian, everywhere, just as it did for mobile broadband.

"We are committed to democratising AI, offering powerful AI models and services to everyone in India at affordable prices," Ambani said. He described Artificial Intelligence as the most revolutionary tool of transformation invented by the human mind, and said it will disruptively transform every aspect of lives, every facet of the society, and every sector of the economy.

It will "bring in an era of unimaginable abundance and efficiency," he said, citing the potential for transformation in sectors such as manufacturing, education and agriculture.

"With AI, India has the potential to completely transform the manufacturing sector, including SMEs, so that India becomes the New-Age Factory and New-Age Services Centre for the World... The Agriculture sector, so that our farmers can become prosperous by



growing more with less water," he said on the power and potential of artificial intelligence.

AI in the health sector will make quality healthcare a reality and in the education sector it will ensure that every Indian student can have the best learning opportunities.

Jio is laying the groundwork for a national AI infrastructure, he added. Ambani further observed that the scale and speed of multilingual data generation in India, which will drive the AI revolution, will grow exponentially.

"We request the government to expedite the updating of the 2020 draft of the Data Centre Policy. Indian data should remain in Indian Data Centres," he said.

Accordingly, Indian companies ready to set up AI and machine learning data centers should get all necessary incentives, including incentives for power consumption, he suggested.

"Indian mobile companies, along with the thriving ecosystem, are in a position to offer solutions to the rest of the world, including developed countries," Ambani said. India needs an accelerated talent generation on a scale that is necessary to make India a global AI leader.

"Some of the existing jobs will evolve, and

many more exciting opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship are going to be created in a rapid way just like during the adoption of computers and the internet," Ambani said.

He pledged that India will lead the charge in mobile innovation, and "we will also fully embrace the power of AI to create a connected, intelligent future that is truly transformative for every Indian."

Ambani said the world is in awe of India which is now a digital superpower galloping down the 5G highway, from a nation crawling at 2G speed only eight years ago.

"I would like to assure the Prime Minister that India will have an even better record with 6G. From a nation that ranked a lowly 155th in mobile broadband adoption, we have risen to become the world's largest data market," he said. He also lauded India's progress in fostering an environment for startups to thrive. The nation, he said, has emerged as the third largest unicorn hub of the world.

UPI has become the world's number one digital payment system, he said, adding India is the only large country in the world that has one of the lowest mobile data prices, and yet one of the fastest internet speeds.

"India's per capita data consumption of over 30 GB is one of the highest in the world. But that is only half the picture. The other half tells you that India's story of digital transformation is an example of inclusivity," he said.

India's digital revolution has spread to the remotest corners of the country, he said, adding over 530 million unbanked Indians have been brought into the financial system through Jan Dhan accounts.

Further, he noted that 300 million of these account holders are women.

"I feel both proud and humbled that Jio has played a significant part in this remarkable transformation," Ambani said. (PTI)

Sensex falls by 153 pts, RIL major drag after weak Q2 results

MUMBAI, Oct 15: Benchmark Sensex closed lower by nearly 153 points on Tuesday due to selling in index major Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finance and HDFC Bank as weak quarterly results and spike in inflation dented investor sentiment.

Paring early gains, the BSE Sensex declined 152.93 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 81,820.12. During the day, it fell by 337.48 points or 0.41 per cent to a low of 81,635.57.

The NSE Nifty settled lower by 70.60 points or 0.28 per cent to 25,057.35 with 30 of its components closing down, 18 with gains and two unchanged.

From the 30 Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Maruti were the biggest laggards.

Reliance Industries Ltd, India's most valuable company, on Monday reported a 5 per cent fall in the July-September quarter net profit as weak oil refining and petrochemical business hurt operational performance.

"The domestic market experienced a downturn, influenced by a mixed global trend and partial profit-taking. Although declining crude prices are beneficial for the domestic economy, they signal weakening global demand. Additionally, India's CPI surged driven by food prices, which will delay expected rate cuts," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Asian Paints, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement and HCL Technologies were among the gainers.

IT services major HCL Technologies (HCLTech) reported a 10.51 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to ₹ 4,235 crore in the July-September quarter and also raised the lower band of its growth guidance on the back of better-than-expected performance.

"The sharp cut in Brent crude ... is a macro positive for India, but CPI inflation for September coming worse-than-expected at 5.49 per cent is a concern and the MPC will be forced to take this seriously and postpone the rate cut to 2025," said V K Vijayakumar,



Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

Soaring vegetable prices pushed the retail inflation rate to a nine-month high of 5.49 per cent in September, according to government data released on Monday. The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.05 per cent while BSE midcap index climbed 0.25 per cent.

Among the indices, metal tanked 1.56 per cent, auto declined 0.67 per cent, energy (0.39 per cent), commodities (0.23 per cent), IT (0.22 per cent) and oil & gas (0.03 per cent).

Realty jumped 2.07 per cent, services (0.85 per cent), industrials (0.69 per cent), consumer durables (0.41 per cent) and capital goods (0.41 per cent).

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 4.71 per cent to USD 73.81 a barrel.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets ended higher on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 3,731.59 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. However, domestic institutional investors (DIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 2,278.09 crore. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1.

India-Canada row escalates

New Delhi rejected Trudeau's charges as "absurd". In his comments at the media briefing on Monday, Trudeau, referring to findings by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), claimed that it has "clear and compelling evidence that agents of the government of India have engaged in, and continue to engage in, activities that pose a significant threat to public safety."

"This includes clandestine information gathering techniques, coercive behaviour targeting South Asian Canadians, and involvement in over a dozen threatening and violent acts, including murder. This is unacceptable," he alleged. The Canadian Prime Minister said his government's attempts to work with India did not yield any result. "That is why, this weekend, Canadian officials took an extraordinary step. They met with Indian officials to share RCMP evidence, which concluded six agents of the Government of India are persons of interest in criminal activities," he said.

"And despite repeated requests to the Government of India, they have decided not to co-operate. Given that the Government of India still refuses to cooperate, my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Melanie Joly, had only one choice," Trudeau said.

"Today (Monday), she issued a deportation notice for these six individuals. They must leave Canada. They will no longer be able to act as diplomats in Canada, nor to re-enter Canada, for whatever reason," he said.

An Indian government source said, "Canadian PM Trudeau's press conference yesterday was the same old Trudeau saying the same old things for the same old reasons." Separately, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police alleged that Indian agents are using criminals to "target" the South Asian community, specifically pro-Khalistani elements in Canada. In this context, it also referred to the Bishnoi gang.

The Indian government sources said the assertions by Canadian officials that Canada presented credible evidence to India in the Nijjar case is "simply not true".

"The central assertion from all Canadian officials is that credible evidence has been presented to India. This was also repeated by their Charge d'Affaires Stewart Wheelers to the press. This is simply not true," the source said. "From the very beginning, the Canadian approach has been to make vague accusations and put the burden of denial on India," it added. The sources also rejected attempts by the RCMP to link Indian agents to the Bishnoi gang. At the RCMP press briefing, assertions were made about connections of certain individuals to India. In no case were any specifics provided, the sources said. (PTI)

Bypolls in Assam's five

elections, supporters of Choudhury opposed the party's decision and urged Choudhury to remain the MLA of Bongaigaon. Congress leader Rakeebul Hussain defeated the three-time AIUDF MP and party chief Badruddin Ajmal in the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat with a margin of more than 10 lakh votes reinforcing his status as a five-time legislator from the Samaguri assembly seat.

Meanwhile, UPPL's Joyanta Basumatary, the former MLA from Sidli, also made headlines by securing the Kokrajhar seat. "Our party will contest in three of the five assembly constituencies, while the AGP and another ally, the UPPL, will each contest for one seat," stated state BJP president Bhabhesh Kalita.

He declared that the BJP would put forth candidates for the assembly seats of Samaguri, Dholai, and Bihali.

The UPPL will contest in the Sidli assembly constituency, while the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) is set to field candidates in the Bongaigaon assembly seat. On the other hand, the Congress party is likely to contest in all five assembly seats despite pressure from its allies to leave one or two seats for them.

Notably, the bye-election to 48 assembly constituencies and two parliamentary constituencies will be held in November along with polls in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. The bypolls for the 47 assembly constituencies and Wayanad parliamentary seat in Kerala will be on November 13, while the voting will be held in one assembly constituency in Uttarakhand and the Nanded parliamentary seat in Maharashtra on November 20.

Jaishankar arrives in Islamabad

Shehbaz Sharif to welcome the delegates from the SCO member nations, people familiar with the matter said. Both sides have already ruled out any bilateral talks between Jaishankar and his Pakistan counterpart Ishaq Dar on the sidelines of the SCO heads of the government summit. Jaishankar's visit to Pakistan assumes significance as it is seen as a significant decision on New Delhi's part.

In his recent address at an event, Jaishankar said "like with any neighbour, India would certainly like to have good relations with Pakistan." "But that cannot happen by overlooking cross-border terrorism and indulging in wishful thinking," he added. The decision to send the senior minister is seen as a display of India's commitment to the SCO. (PTI)

Cong biggest anti-Dalit

The BJP spokesperson described Yadav as a "big OBC leader" and alleged that the Congress has not only ignored his comment but also insulted him and the OBC community.

"I demand that the Congress and Rahul Gandhi come out with a response... If you are so committed to the OBC society, then answer why you are insulting an OBC in your own family (party)," he added.

Poonawalla also alleged that a conspiracy was hatched in the Congress to "finish" the party's dalit leader Shelja Kumari during the Haryana assembly polls after Gandhi's remarks on "scrapping reservation" during his US visit. "Consequently, people of this society (Dalits) showed the exit door to the Congress in the state assembly polls," he added. (PTI)

Committee approved to study

exploitation. While most ethnic groups of tea tribes are recognised as STs in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, Assam continues to classify them as OBCs, Soren said.

"Despite their vital contributions to Assam's economy and culture, they continue to be marginalised and denied the benefits and protections accorded to Scheduled Tribes," Soren wrote to Sarma demanding immediate ST status for them. The tea tribes' OBC classification prevents them from accessing critical government benefits and opportunities, including central government schemes tailored for STs like the Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme and the National Tribal Health Mission, he added. Soren emphasised that as non-STs, these tribes miss out on educational scholarships, housing subsidies, and healthcare facilities.

"Living far from their ancestral homeland, these tribes may face challenges in preserving their cultural heritage. This can manifest in various forms, such as denial of land rights, limited access to employment opportunities, and prejudice in interpersonal relationships," the letter mentioned.

Demanding ST status for them, Soren said, "Their long-standing contributions to the region's economy and culture, their socio-economic deprivation, and their unique cultural heritage warrant this recognition. By doing so, we can address historical injustices, promote social justice, and ensure that the tea tribes enjoy the same rights and opportunities as other marginalised communities in Assam." (PTI)

SC notice to Centre, EC

democratic principles and practices," it said. The petition sought a direction to the EC to insert an additional condition in the relevant paragraphs of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order 1968, which deals with conditions for recognition as a state party, that a "political party shall not promise/distribute irrational freebies from the public fund before the election".

The petitioner has urged the apex court to declare that the promise or distribution of private goods or services, which are not for public purposes from public funds, before the elections violate several articles of the Constitution, including Article 14. (PTI)

Bandhan Mutual Fund launches Nifty 500 value 50 and Momentum 50 Index Fund

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 15: Bandhan Mutual Fund has recently announced the launch of the Bandhan Nifty 500 Value 50 Index Fund and Bandhan Nifty 500 Momentum 50 Index Fund.

These are open-ended index schemes tracking the Nifty 500 Value 50 Index and Nifty 500 Momentum 50 Index, respectively.

The Nifty 500 Value 50 Index focuses on 50 undervalued companies within the Nifty 500 universe, while the Nifty 500 Momentum 50 Index focuses on 50 stocks based on their strong recent performance trend.

"The New Fund Offers (NFOs) will open on Monday, 14 October 2024, and close on Thursday, 24 October 2024" on official statement said.

The statement further said that investments in both the Bandhan Nifty 500 Value 50 Index Fund and the Bandhan Nifty 500 Momentum 50 Index Fund can be

made through licensed mutual fund distributors, on-line platforms, or directly via their respective links.

Highlighting the growing demand for factor-based strategies, Vishal Kapoor, CEO, Bandhan AMC, commented, "Factor Investing has gained considerable traction as it targets specific characteristics that have historically driven risk or returns. The Bandhan Nifty 500 Value 50 Index Fund aims to offer exposure to out-of-favour stocks trading below their intrinsic value and capitalise on their potential recovery. Meanwhile, the Bandhan Nifty 500 Momentum 50 Index Fund focuses on stocks with strong recent performance, with the expectation that the upward trend will persist in the short term."

These indices are rebalanced semi-annually to stay aligned with evolving market dynamics. Investors looking to incorporate the value and momentum strategies into their portfolios can consider these funds, the statement concluded.

Ather Energy launches 'Ather Care' service plans for EV owners

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 15: Ather Energy has introduced its new 'Ather Care' service plans, offering comprehensive maintenance packages for its electric scooter customers.

These plans—Ather Care, Ather Care Plus, and Ather Care Max—provide a range of services, includ-

ing free periodic maintenance, discounts on wear-and-tear parts, and value-added services like polishing and ExpressCare.

The plans, covering 1 year or 10,000 kms, are designed to reduce maintenance costs for EV owners as they move beyond the initial 3-year warranty period. Available at

over 210 service centers and 230 experience centers, prices range from ₹1130 to ₹2400, offering up to ₹5900 in benefits. Ather's goal with these service plans is to address customer concerns over the perceived high cost of electric two-wheeler maintenance while providing added convenience.

India set to lead global 6G revolution: Scindia

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: India is resolved to lead the world in 6G, communications minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Tuesday, terming the telecom sector of the country as 'aggressive' and 'ambitious'.

Scindia, speaking at the inauguration of India Mobile Congress and World Telecommunication Standardization (WTS) 2024, said with the Bharat 6G Alliance, India hopes to contribute at least 10 per cent patents to 6G standardisation. "It is our belief and our commitment -- India followed the world in 4G, we marched with the world in 5G, but we shall lead the world in 6G," the minister asserted.

With the fastest 5G rollout in India wherein 98 per cent of districts and 90 per cent of all villages

were covered in a span of just 21 months, Scindia said it is the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's effort of not just embracing, but bracing the country to become the first-mover in 6G technology.

"It is noteworthy that the Indian Mobile Congress and the International 6G Symposium demonstrates both local and global advancements in 6G, and also design principles that will shape the future of telecom," he further said.

The recent changes to the Telecommunications Act 2023 have been designed in such a way so as to modernise India's telecom framework, drawing light upon hitherto unaddressed areas such as the high potential sector of satellite communications, addressing the

challenges of the digital era, the most important being cyber security, Scindia said.

"The telecom sector, much like other growth-critical sectors in India, is aggressive, is ambitious, and its outlook in our journey from Amrit Kaal to Shatadhi Kaal is to lead the world," he said.

India Mobile Congress (IMC) is an annual event organized by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI). IMC 2024 will see participation from over 400 exhibitors, nearly 900 startups, and participation from 120+ countries.

About 3,200 delegates from over 160 countries are part of the WTS assembly. (PTI)

ICRA forecasts 20-25 pc growth for Indian room air-conditioner industry in FY'25

KOLKATA, Oct 15: The Indian room air-conditioner (RAC) industry is poised for unprecedented growth, with year-on-year sales volumes expected to grow by 20-25 per cent to reach record highs of 12-12.5 million units in the financial year 2024-25, according to a study conducted by ICRA.

The sales are expected to grow by 10-12 per cent in the 2025-26 fiscal, it said.

Factors such as rising temperatures, increasing demand for multiple RAC units per household, growing urbanisation, higher disposable incomes and favourable consumer financing options are expected to drive this growth over the next few years, the credit rating agency said in a report.

"The domestic RAC industry surpassed the pre-COVID peak levels in sales volumes in financial year 2023-24, aided by changing climatic conditions and favourable consumer trends," Srikumar Krishnamurthy, senior vice president and co-group head,



Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said.

He said that the number of average heatwave days per year has been steadily increasing over the last three decades.

The recently concluded summer season saw robust year-on-year volume growth of 40-50 per cent for most original equipment manufacturers (OEMs).

ICRA, however, projected mod-

eration to about 10-12 per cent in financial year 2025-26.

"On the supply side, the domestic household RAC capacity is anticipated to increase by over 40 per cent over the next three years. The key OEMs and contract manufacturers have been adding RAC capacities rapidly to support the growing demand in the domestic market," Krishnamurthy said.

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 Mrinal 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 Chimroy 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.

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 Nwgrv 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 Bhusan 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 Option 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



HT Correspondent
GUWAHATI, Oct 15: Assam DGG 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, 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

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Oct 15: The 9th Sivasagar Book Fair, organised by the premier organisation 'Khoj', got underway at Dr Birentra Kumar Bhattacharya Khetra 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 ungrounded belief that Assamese is an offshoot of the latter.

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



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.



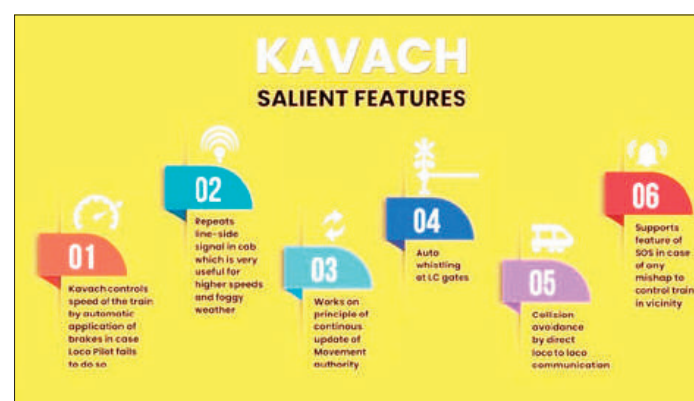
Idols of Goddess Lakshmi on display in the streets of Ganeshguri on Tuesday. HT Photos

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 Sharma

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.

Most 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.

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-Megazine 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.

Diyas 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@rediffmail.com)

The bravery and patriotism of Kanaklata

By: Satvabratt Borah

Kanaklata Barua was a young and fearless freedom fighter whose name has become identical with bravery and patriotism during India's struggle for independence. Born on December 22, 1924, in the remote Borangabari village of Assam, Kanaklata hailed from a humble family. Although she lost both her parents at a young age, she grew up with a strong sense of responsibility and patriotism, qualities that would eventually lead her to become a martyr for the nation.

Despite the adversities in her early life, Kanaklata displayed an indomitable spirit and fierce love for her country. As a child growing up in colonial India, she was deeply influenced by the ongoing freedom struggle. India was reeling under British oppression, and the atmosphere was charged with revolutionary ideas. Like many youths of her time, Kanaklata was inspired by the sacrifices of great freedom fighters such as Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and local Assamese leaders like Kushal Konwar.

Though she was very young, Kanaklata was deeply inspired by the growing call for independence. She realized that the freedom movement was not limited to prominent leaders but was something that every Indian citizen could and should participate in. Her patriotism became evident in the way she engaged with the political movements of her time, despite societal restrictions imposed on women.

In 1942, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement. It's a call for immediate British withdrawal from India. The movement spread like wildfire across the nation. It mobilizes masses of Indians to rise against colonial rule. This was a critical moment in India's freedom struggle. It witnessed the active participation of people from all walks of life, including women and the youth.

Kanaklata joined the movement with



unwavering resolve though she was only 17 years old. She was a part of the 'Mrityu Bahini' which is a group of young revolutionaries in Assam who were ready to sacrifice their lives for the country's independence. "Mrityu Bahini" symbolized the undying spirit of Indian youth, who were willing to face any hardship in their quest for freedom.

Kanaklata's most heroic and tragic act came on September 20, 1942. When she and her fellow revolutionaries in the Mrityu Bahini decided to hoist the Indian national flag at the British-controlled police station in Gohpur, Assam. This act of rebellion was meant to send a clear message to the British authorities that the Indian people would no longer bow to colonial rule.

They were ready to take bold steps to declare their independence. Led by Kanaklata and Mukunda Kakati, the group marched towards the police station by holding the tricolor with pride and determination. The British authorities already sensed the symbolic power of this act and ordered them to stop. But Kanaklata refused to turn back. Despite the warnings she continued to march forward with the national flag in hand.

The British police opened fire when the revolutionaries refused to halt. Kanaklata was one of the first to be shot. She died instantly by holding the tricolor close to her heart. Despite her death, the flag was kept aloft by her fellow revolutionaries. They continued their protest, unwilling to let her

sacrifice be in vain.

Kanaklata Barua's sacrifice expanded far beyond the borders of Assam. It inspired many to join the freedom struggle. Her act of bravery, particularly her willingness to lay down her life for the nation at such a young age, became a symbol of the selfless spirit of India's freedom fighters.

Her patriotism also highlighted the crucial role of women in the freedom movement. At a time when society placed significant restrictions on women's public and political participation, Kanaklata shattered those barriers with her bold actions. Her story became a source of inspiration, particularly for women, showing that they too had a vital role to play in shaping the destiny of the nation.

Kanaklata Barua's name is preserved in the records of Indian history as a fearless patriot. The Government of India and the state of Assam have honored her in numerous ways. Her martyrdom is commemorated annually in Assam. Her story is taught in schools to remind younger generations of the sacrifices made by her for India's freedom.

The Indian Navy named a fast patrol vessel INS Kanaklata Barua in her honor, recognizing her contribution to the independence movement. Her heritage is also celebrated in popular culture, where she is remembered as a symbol of courage.

The story of Kanaklata is one of unparalleled bravery and selflessness. Despite her young age, she exhibited a deep understanding of patriotism and the importance of fighting for one's country. Her ultimate sacrifice during the Quit India Movement is a reminder that the freedom India enjoys today came at the cost of countless lives like hers. In a world where the struggles of youth and women were often overlooked, Kanaklata broke barriers, standing tall as a leader who fearlessly confronted injustice. Her unwavering commitment to India's independence continues to inspire generations, making her a timeless symbol of bravery and patriotism.

'Chawal Ka Atta' for glowing skin

By: Shahnaz Husain

Chawal Ka Atta, or Rice Flour, is an organic, healthy, and effective skincare ingredient that is affordable and suitable for all skin types.

Rice flour has been used for centuries in traditional beauty rituals, to exfoliate and brighten the skin and protect against ultraviolet (UV) rays. It is packed with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that can work wonders for your skin.

This humble ingredient, commonly used in Indian kitchens, reduces excess oil, soothes irritation and gives you clear and glowing skin. It is a superstar beauty product that has the power to cleanse your skin and moisturise it thoroughly. The antioxidants present in rice flour nourish and repair your skin. Incorporating rice flour face packs into your skincare routine will act as anti-inflammatory and antioxidant agents that function to prevent skin ageing, reduce UV damage, promote skin lightening, and improve skin and hair regrowth.

It is a magic ingredient that can make your skin soft, bright and supple, remove stubborn tan, get rid of discoloration or blemishes on the face. Derived from every Asian's staple food rice, rice flour is a skin saviour in every regard. Packing a

punch with a blend of essential nutrients, the results of including rice flour face packs for glowing skin are incredible.

In oily skins, it helps to deep cleanse the pores and keep them free of clogged oil, thus preventing problems like blackheads, pimples, and acne. It contains allantoin and antioxidants, which have many healing and soothing properties. For centuries, rice powder has been used as a natural exfoliating ingredient manufactured from rice seeds. The grains from rice powder have been used to achieve clearer, smoother skin. Due to its spherical shape and size, rice powder gently polishes the skin without causing irritations.

It is ideally suited to oily skin and is effective as a facial scrub. It helps to deep cleanse the skin and unclog the pores, discouraging and dislodging blackheads. It removes dead skin cells, tightens the pores, and brightens the skin.

Mix rice powder with curd and a pinch of turmeric and use it as a facial scrub. Apply on the face and rub gently on the skin with small circular movements. Wash off with water. Rice powder can also be added to "Ubtan" or body scrubs, along with gram flour, curd, rose water, powdered lemon, orange peels, etc.

Mix 3 tablespoons (tbsp)

milk powder with 5 tbsp brown rice flour. Blend in 1 tbsp olive oil (leave out if your skin is very oily). Stir in rose water gradually until you have a thick paste. Apply to the face, then allow to air dry for 10 to 15 minutes. Apply a bit of water to loosen up the mask, then gently rub it to exfoliate the skin. Rinse with fresh water and tone the skin.

Mix one tablespoon of rice flour, one teaspoon of oats, and one teaspoon of honey in a jar and add two teaspoons of milk to make of paste of smooth consistency. Apply this pack on your face and uncovered areas, allow it to dry naturally and wash off with lukewarm water.

Take two tablespoons of aloe vera and one tablespoon of rice flour. Mix to form a thick paste. Apply and let sit for 20 minutes. Rinse off and moisturize. This face pack works actively towards removing the dead skin cells and all the impurities that clog the pores and contribute to damaged and dull skin. Exfoliating with rice powder may be used in many other ways for beauty care. You can mix one teaspoon of rice powder with a half teaspoon of coconut oil and massage it into your skin on the face and neck for an anti-ageing treatment. This would be suitable for normal to dry skin.

Skin type should be kept in mind during exfoliation. Dry

skin may be exfoliated only once a week. If there is any sensitivity, like dry rough, and reddish patches, the skin should not be exfoliated. Exfoliation helps oily skin, as it refines the skin texture and helps to keep the pores free of clogged oil. For oily skin can use scrubs or cleansing grains two or three times a week. For blackheads, rice powder can be mixed with rose water and used. However, if there are pimples, acne or rash, scrubs should not be used on them.

Too much exfoliation, especially on dry skin, can lead to skin sensitivity. In such cases, avoid exfoliation for some time. A soothing cream may be applied. Sometimes cold milk may help to soothe the skin. If there is a rash, a little rose water can be mixed with sandalwood paste and applied. If there is any itching, it should be referred to a dermatologist.

After exfoliation, tone the skin with rose water or a rose-based skin tonic. A cold compress with chilled rose water or skin tonic may be given, using cotton wool. Then a protective cream should be applied. If the skin is dry, a moisturizer should be applied. If one is going out in the sun, apply sunscreen after exfoliation. (The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)

5 Indian women chefs who have changed the landscape of the culinary world!



By: Ambika

Food has been a significant part of our lives. It is often used as a metaphor to express ourselves or be a beacon of change. The fusion of flavours and creation of new delicacies has brought in a fresh perspective of viewing the culinary landscape as a symbol of equality and unity.

Food is often associated with gender. Even though the role of cooking at home is assigned to women, the industry is mainly dominated by men who generally are executive chefs or own big restaurants which creates barriers for women in the culinary world.

The gender gap and regressive gourmet environment has led to women not pursuing a career in the culinary space and hampered their enthusiasm to bring change in the gourmet world.

However, there are 5 female chefs who have not only broken the notions around women's cooking skills being confined to the kitchens but also have changed the landscape of the culinary world. Here's our chance to know them and appreciate their contributions towards culinary space.

The Female Culinary-ans:

Nita Mehta: She is a multi-talented chef, known for her cookbooks, cooking classes and as a judge of several cookery shows. She has authored over 600 cookbooks of which 6 million copies have been sold worldwide. She is a successful entrepreneur, running a culinary Academy known as 'Nita Mehta Culinary Academy' and a restaurant named 'Kelong' in Ludhiana, Chandigarh and Rohtak and owns two publishing companies known as SNAB Publishers Pvt Ltd and Nita Mehta Publications.

She has launched her range of spices under the brand name of 'Kitchen Queen Nita Mehta'. In 1999, she was conferred with the Best Asian Cookbook Award for her book 'Flavours of Indian Cooking at the World Cookbook Fair in Paris.

Through her spices, she

has created a magic in delicacies by giving them a new dimension of flavour. She has become the epitome of passion and proved that nothing is impossible and with determination, anything can be achieved in this world.

Doma Wang:

A prominent chef and restaurateur, she is often known by the name of "Momo Queen of Kolkata". She was born and raised in a Tibetan family in Kalimpong, a small town near Darjeeling. Influenced by her Tibetan heritage and her father's love for cooking, she started her culinary journey by making and delivering momos from her home kitchen in Salt Lake, Kolkata in 1992.

Gradually, her business grew, leading her to open two restaurants: Blue Poppy Thakali and Boma Asian Bakery. Her success has earned several awards including a spot-on Culinary Culture's list of India's top 30 chefs in 2022. Her dedication towards preserving and popularizing Himalayan flavours has made her a beloved figure in Kolkata's food landscape. Additionally, her perseverance has demonstrated that passion, resilience, innovation and leadership skills are the key ingredients towards business success and internal happiness.

Pankaj Bhadouria:

A former teacher turned chef, she is a famous culinarian, television personality and author. She gained fame after winning first season of food reality show "MasterChef India" in 2010. Ever since then, she has showcased her love and passion for cooking by establishing two culinary ventures in Lucknow, writing numerous cookbooks, conducting culinary workshops and hosting cookery shows such as Chef Pankaj Ka Zayka (2011), Rasoi Se - Pankaj Bhadouria ke Saath (2013) and Dream Kitchen (2017). Furthermore, she has established her own culinary academy and is the first MasterChef Winner worldwide to have an official MasterChef Cookbook. Today, she has become the face of several brands such as Knorr, Taaza Tea, Kelloggs and

Tefal etc. Her dedication has earned her several accolades and awards such as OSM Kitchen King/Queen of the Year Award in 2016, featured in the list of: 9 People Who Made It Big After Participating in Reality Shows by Indiatimes and many more.

Her determination towards bringing modern twist in traditional cuisines and emphasis on integrating innovation and passion has displayed that one must be passionate about pursuing the career of their dreams, has the ability to overcome obstacles and stay focused on their goals in order to be successful in life.

Shipra Khanna:

She is a renowned celebrity chef, restaurateur and television personality, also known for winning the season 2 of "MasterChef India" in 2012. She is richest chef in India and most successful amongst MasterChef winners worldwide. After winning the competition, she went on to host several cookery shows such as Good Food, Snack in the Food and Chef Khanna's and many more.

Furthermore, she has got a strong digital presence with over 50 million followers across all social media spectrum. Currently, she owns two restaurants: H.O.T - House of Taste in Ahmedabad and The Darzi Bar & Kitchen in New Delhi.

She has been honoured with several titles and awards such as the cultural ambassador of India in 2022, World Gourmand Award and the WBA Award at Cannes Festival. Additionally, she has authored nine cookbooks and teaches culinary arts at Le Cordon Bleu, Paris.

The creative and adaptability skills demonstrated by her has proven that embracing various cooking styles, creating fusion of dishes and being persistent in fulfilling their ambitions can help elevate the culinary experience and contribute towards success in culinary industry.

Natasha Gandhi:

Once a CA aspirant, now a successful chef, content creator and entrepreneur. She is known to be one of the top 5 contestants in

MasterChef India Season 6 and was the audience's favorite contestant at that time. She has been a beacon of change in narratives around bryanis, millets, curating the future of food through fusion and bringing regional cuisines and less popular cuisines to the world.

Furthermore, she conducts online and offline workshops where she whips guilt-free recipes and is on a mission to enrich our understanding of diverse Indian food.

Also, she has a strong social media presence with around 1.4 million followers on Instagram. Currently, she runs her own venture named "House of Millets" where she showcases her love for millets and fascinating cooking skills.

The emphasis on appreciating cultural roots, the entrepreneurial spirit and innovation skills has contributed towards her culinary success and exhibited that preserving cultural identity and creativity can be the key towards both personal and professional achievements.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the chefs have changed the landscape of the food space and contributed towards changing narratives around food, culture and gender. However, the number of women in culinary space is not sufficient and there is an urgent need of challenging and breaking the gender stereotypes around women's culinary skills. Women should be encouraged to pursue a career in culinary landscape by breaking the social barriers and bring a change in global society.

Additionally, the restaurants and cooking institutes should try to make the cooking environment comfortable for women and motivate them to pursue their culinary dreams.

Lastly, We should all try to explore the less-known female chefs and appreciate their contributions towards the food space and society. After all, encouraging women to pursue their ambitions can lead to prosperity for the country and change the face of the globe. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

What is the best diet for women?

By: Louisa Richards

People need a balanced diet for health and well-being regardless of their gender. Even though no particular diet is best for women, there are specific areas to consider when it comes to supporting women's health.

What is a healthful diet?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015–2020 recommend that people eat healthful, nutritious foods that are not calorie dense, such as vegetables and whole fruits.

Healthful eating patterns tend to include nutrient dense forms of:

- a variety of vegetables in different colours
 - legumes, such as beans and peas
 - fruits (mostly whole fruits)
 - protein foods, such as lean meats and poultry, fish and seafood, soy products, and nuts and seeds
 - grains (at least half of which are whole grains)
 - unsweetened dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese
 - healthful fats, such as olive oil, avocados, and oily fish
- The same guidelines also recommend that people limit or avoid certain foods, as follows:
- Limit calories from added sugars to 10% of total daily calories. Processed foods, sweet treats, and sugary drinks all contain added sugars.

- Limit saturated fats to less than 10% of total daily calories. Foods high in saturated fats include butter, cheese, and meat that is not lean.

- Avoid trans fats. Processed foods such as desserts, frozen pizzas, and coffee creamer can contain trans fats.

- Limit sodium to fewer than 2,300 milligrams (mg) daily (for adults).

- Limit alcohol to no more than one drink daily for women and no more than two drinks daily for men.

Some diets can help people make more healthful food choices. Also, some specific diets can support health conditions or reduce the risk of chronic diseases. The following diets all have a plant-based focus and include fish. The sections below will discuss each diet and what the evidence says about supporting women's health.

The Mediterranean diet
According to some experts, the Mediterranean diet is beneficial for weight loss, heart health, and preventing diabetes. Research also indicates that the diet may help prevent Alzheimer's disease.

Women may have more health problems during perimenopause and postmenopause if they have overweight or obesity, according to one 2015 study.

The study suggests that Spanish women who adhered to the Mediterranean diet were less

overweight and that the diet may improve quality of life during menopause.

A Mediterranean diet emphasizes vegetables and fruits, olive oil, nuts, and legumes.

Oily fish is an important part of the diet, as are unrefined grains. Also, some people drink wine as part of the diet.

Foods that people should limit when following a Mediterranean diet include meat and dairy. People should also avoid processed foods and eat as naturally as possible.

According to some research, eating a diet that restricts sugar, fat, and salt may also help with the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome.

The DASH diet

According to several studies, the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet can lower blood pressure and may help people lose weight. Rates of high blood pressure, or hypertension, can increase in women after menopause.

One 2017 study indicates that women aged 70 years and over maintain better cognitive function when they adhere to a long-term DASH diet.

A 2017 Cochrane review suggests that the DASH diet may also reduce cesarean section incidence in women with gestational diabetes. Women aged 19–50 years who are moderately active need 2,000–2,200 calories per

day. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, based on a 2,000-calorie per day diet, the DASH diet has the following goals for daily and weekly servings of food groups:

- a) 6–8 daily servings of grains
- One serving is one slice of bread or half a cup of cooked rice.
- b) a maximum of 6 daily servings of lean meats or poultry, eggs, and fish
- One serving is 1 ounce (oz) of cooked meat, fish, or poultry or one egg.
- c) 4–5 daily servings of vegetables
- One serving is a cup of leafy vegetables or half a cup of raw or cooked vegetables.
- d) 4–5 daily servings of fruit
- One serving is a medium piece of fruit or half a cup of frozen or canned fruit.
- e) 2–3 daily servings of low fat or fat-free dairy products
- One serving is one cup of milk or 1.5 oz of cheese.
- f) 2–3 daily servings of fats and oils
- One serving is a teaspoon of margarine or vegetable oil.
- g) 4–5 weekly servings of nuts, seeds, beans, and peas
- One serving is a third of a cup of nuts or half a cup of cooked beans or peas.
- h) 2,300 mg of sodium daily (or 1,500 mg to lower blood pressure further)
- five or fewer sweet treats weekly

Women may wish to work out their calorie needs and decide whether or not they want to lose weight. They can then adjust the number of servings accordingly.

The MIND diet

The Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay (MIND) diet combines the Mediterranean and DASH diets.

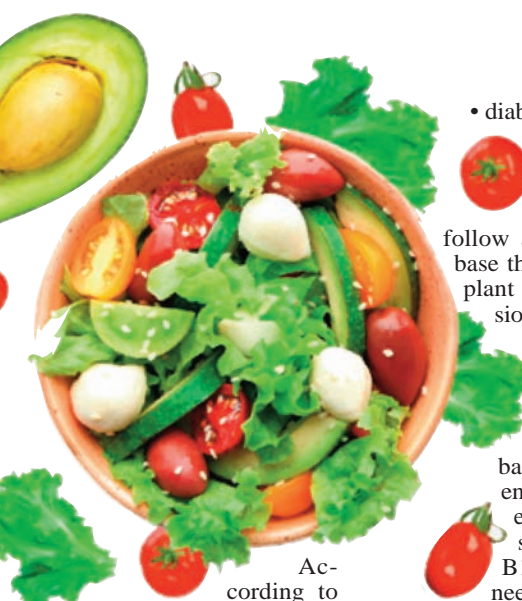
Adopting the MIND diet may help women as they age, as some studies suggest that it is associated with reduced cognitive decline and a lower risk of Alzheimer's disease. The same benefits could also apply to men.

A 2020 study of Iranian women suggests that the participants had a 50% lower risk of breast cancer when they adhered to the MIND diet.

Migraine is more common in men than women, and one 2020 study suggests that participants following the MIND diet had less frequent, less severe, and shorter migraine headaches.

The MIND diet emphasizes natural, plant-based foods, much like the DASH and Mediterranean diets. It specifically encourages people to increase their berry and green leafy vegetable intake.

The diet also limits animal-based and high saturated fat foods, especially butter, which people should limit to a tablespoon per day.



According to an article in the

Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, other guidelines for the MIND diet include:

- eating at least 3 servings of whole grains, a salad, and one other vegetable each day
- drinking a glass of wine each day
- snacking on nuts every other day
- eating beans every other day

The flexitarian diet

A flexitarian diet is a semi-vegetarian diet, in which someone occasionally eats meat or fish. According to one 2016 review, flexitarian diets are more popular with women than men. The review suggests that the diet has benefits for:

- body weight
- blood pressure

- diabetes risk
- inflammatory bowel conditions

People who follow a flexitarian diet base their meals around plant foods but occasionally include animal foods, such as eggs, meat, or fish.

Someone who eats a plant-based diet should ensure that they get essential nutrients, such as vitamin B12. They may need to take a supplement for this purpose.

Summary

There is no particular diet that is best for women. A healthful diet benefits people of all genders and can help prevent chronic conditions. The Mediterranean, DASH, and MIND diets all have a plant-based focus and limit foods such as saturated fats, sugars, and processed foods.

Healthful diets such as these have benefits including a reduced risk of breast cancer, fewer migraine headaches, and fewer problems associated with obesity at menopause. Women can also improve their health by getting regular daily exercise, getting adequate sleep, and determining the best stress relief strategies for them. (Courtesy: MNT)

UN says over 400,000 children in Lebanon have been displaced in 3 weeks by war

BEIRUT, Oct 15: More than 400,000 children in Lebanon have been displaced in the past three weeks, a top official with the U.N. children's agency said Monday, warning of a "lost generation" in the small country grappling with multiple crises and now in the middle of war.

Israel has escalated its campaign against the Lebanon-based Hezbollah militant group, including launching a ground invasion, after a year of exchanges of fire during its war with Hamas in Gaza.

The fighting in Lebanon has driven 1.2 million people from their homes, most of them fleeing to Beirut and elsewhere in the

north over the past three weeks since the escalation.

Ted Chaiban, UNICEF's deputy executive director for humanitarian actions, has visited schools that have been turned into shelters to host displaced families.

"What struck me is that this war is three weeks old and so many children have been affected," Chaiban told The Associated Press in Beirut.

"As we sit here today, 1.2 million children are deprived of education. Their public schools have either been rendered inaccessible, have been damaged by the war or are being used as shelters. The last thing this country needs, in addition to everything else it has gone



through, is the risk of a lost generation."

While some Lebanese private schools are still operating, the public school system has been badly affected by the war, along with the country's most vulnerable people such as Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

What I'm worried about is that we have hundreds of thousands of Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian children that are at risk of losing their learning," Chaiban said.

More than 2,300 people in Lebanon have been killed in Israeli strikes, nearly 75% of them over the last month, according to the Health Ministry. In the last three weeks, more than 100 children were killed and over 800 were wounded, Chaiban said.

He said displaced children are crammed into overcrowded shelters where three or four families can live in a classroom separated by a plastic sheet, and where 1,000 people can share 12 toilets. Not all of them work.

Many displaced families found have set up tents along roads or on public beaches. Most displaced children have experienced so much violence, including the

sounds of shelling or gunshots, that they cover at any loud noise, Chaiban said.

Then there is "evacuation orders upon evacuation orders. We're at the beginning, and already there's been a profound impact," he said. The escalation has also put over 100 primary health care facilities out of service, while 12 hospitals are either no longer working or partially functional.

Water infrastructure has also come under attack. In the last three weeks, 26 water stations providing water to almost 350,000 people have been damaged, Chaiban said. UNICEF is working with local authorities to repair them.

He called for civilian infrastructure to be protected. And he appealed for a cease-fire in Lebanon and in Gaza, saying there needs to be political will and a realization that the conflict cannot be resolved through military means.

"What we must do is make sure that this stops, that this madness stops, that there's a cease-fire before we get to the kind of destruction and pain and suffering and death that we've seen in Gaza," Chaiban said.

With so many needs, he said, the emergency response appeal for \$108 million in Lebanon has only been 8% funded three weeks into the escalation. (AP)

Bishnoi gang linked to Indian 'agents' targeting 'Khalistani elements' Canadian police

OTTAWA, Oct 15: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police alleged that the Bishnoi gang is connected to the "agents" of the Indian government, which is targeting the South Asian community specifically "pro-Khalistani elements" in the country. The remarks were made during a press conference by RCMP Commissioner Mike Duhene and his deputy, Brigitte Gauvin in Ottawa on Monday, hours after India announced the expulsion of six members of the Canadian high commission in Delhi.

On being asked if India is targeting the Sikh community in Canada, Gauvin said, "It is targeting the South Asian community... but they are specifically targeting pro-Khalistani elements in Canada...members of the pro-Khalistani movement." "What we have seen, from an RCMP perspective, is that they use organized crime elements," she added.



"It has been publicly attributed and claimed by one organized crime group in particular which is the Bishnoi group here in Canada. We believe the group is connected to agents of the Government of India." However, investigation agencies in India have linked Lawrence Bishnoi to several crimes in India.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has named him in high-profile cases, including smuggling of arms from Pakistan.

The NIA had claimed that Bishnoi was running an extortion syndicate with Canada-based gangster Goldy Brar, who has close links with pro-Khalistani terror outfit Babbar Khalsa International (BKI).

Bishnoi has been allegedly operating his terror-crime syndicate from jails in India wherever he has been lodged over the years.

The RCMP's comments came on a day India expelled six Canadian diplomats on Monday and announced that it is withdrawing its High Commissioner in Canada, after dismissing Ottawa's allegations linking the envoy to a probe into the killing of Sikh extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Canada, however, said it has expelled six Indian diplomats. India has been strongly rejecting Canada's charge of involvement of

Indian agents in Nijjar's killing last year. The RCMP has been investigating the murder.

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September last year of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in Nijjar's killing. New Delhi rejected Trudeau's charges as "absurd". India has been maintaining that the main issue has been that of Canada giving space to pro-Khalistani elements operating from Canadian soil with impunity.

At the press conference, Duhene and Gauvin said the announcement was not about the Nijjar case specifically, but rather to inform the public and draw attention to the "breadth of criminal activity that is occurring in Canada, which is a grave concern to our public safety." "There's a distinct investigation on the Nijjar case and there's another distinct investigation on the national security side to see the connections with the Government of India," Duhene was quoted as saying by Toronto's CityNews.

The commissioner read a statement that said the RCMP and other Canadian law enforcement agencies have investigated and charged a "significant number of individuals" for their involvement in homicides, extortions and other criminal violence. When asked for a specific number, Gauvin said "Approximately eight people were arrested and charged in relation to homicides and 22 people in relation to extortions, with some of them having connections to the Government of India."

The public is being asked to help in reporting incidents of "foreign interference" by the Government of India. Anyone who feels threatened online or in person is encouraged to report the incident to their local police, the report added.

"Indian diplomats and consular officials are here to protect the interests of their nationals that are based in Canada and their country's national interests as well, and not to be part of criminal activity or intimidation or coercion of these individuals. So we take that very seriously. Gauvin said, according to the news portal. (PTI)

Kim Jong Un has vowed to sever relations with SKorea and abandon the goal of achieving peaceful Korean unification

North Korea blows up parts of inter-Korean roads in a symbolic display of anger

SEOUL, Oct 15: In a symbolic display of anger, North Korea on Tuesday blew up the northern section of unused roads that once linked it with the South, with the rivals exchanging threats days after the North claimed that its rival flew drones over its capital Pyongyang.

The roads' choreographed demolition underlines North Korea's growing anger against South Korea's conservative government. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has vowed to sever relations with South Korea and abandon the goal of achieving peaceful Korean unification.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles affairs with North Korea, separately condemned the North's detonations as a "highly abnormal" and "regressive" measure that violates previous inter-Korean agreements.

Video provided by South Korea's military showed a cloud of white and gray smoke emerging from the explosion at a road near the western border town of Kaesong.

North Korean trucks and excavators could be seen clearing out debris. Another video showed smoke emerging from a coastal road near the eastern border.

North Korea has a history of staging the choreographed destruction of facilities on its own soil as a political message.

In 2020, North Korea blew up an empty, South Korean-built liaison office building just north of the border in retaliation for South Korean civilian leafletting campaigns. In 2018, North Korea demolished tunnels at its nuclear testing site at the start of nuclear diplomacy with the United States.

In 2008, North Korea blew up a cooling tower at its main nuclear complex when earlier disarmament-for-aid negotiations with Washington and others were happening.

Destroying the roads, which



were mainly built with South Korean money, would be in line with leader Kim Jong Un's order in January to abandon the goal of peaceful Korean unification and formally designate South Korea as the country's "invariable principal enemy." That order surprised many outside North Korea watchers because it seemed to break from his predecessors' long-cherished dreams of peacefully unifying the Korean Peninsula on the North's terms.

Experts say Kim likely aims to diminish South Korea's voice in the regional nuclear standoff and seek direct dealings with the United States. Kim may also hope to diminish South Korean cultural influence and bolster his family's dynastic rule at home.

North Korea has accused South Korea of infiltrating drones to drop propaganda leaflets over Py-

ongyang three times this month and threatened to respond with force if it happened again. South Korea has refused to confirm whether it sent drones but warned that North Korea would face the end of its regime if the safety of South Korean citizens is threatened.

Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of Kim Jong Un, said Tuesday that North Korea has secured unspecified clear evidence that South Korean "military gangsters" are behind the alleged drone flights. She warned that South Korea "will have to pay a dear price."

North Korea's state media reported Tuesday that Kim Jong Un laid out unspecified tasks related to "immediate military action" and the operation of his war deterrent during a meeting Monday.

North Korea's military earlier threatened to turn South Korea

into "piles of ashes," saying its frontline army units were ready to open fire.

During a previous era of inter-Korean detente in the 2000s, the two Koreas reconnected two road routes and two rail tracks across their heavily fortified border. But their operations were suspended as the Koreans wrangled over North Korea's nuclear program and other issues.

The South Korean Unification Ministry said the roads and the rail links were built with South Korean materials and equipment worth \$132.9 million provided in the form of loans, and the North is still obligated to pay back the aid.

Last week, North Korea said it would permanently block its border with South Korea and build front-line defense structures. South Korean officials said North Korea had been adding anti-tank barriers and laying mines along the border since earlier this year. They said North Korea has also planted mines and removed lamps along its sections of the inter-Korean roads and taken out ties on the northern side of the railways.

In recent years North Korea has performed a run of provocative missile tests, and South Korea and the United States have expanded military drills and cooperation. (AP)

Violence-hit Pakistan locks down the capital for an Asian security meeting

TOKYO, Oct 15: Official campaigning for Japan's Oct. 27 parliamentary election began on Tuesday with new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba seeking a mandate for his policies and for reforms after the governing party's political funds scandal.

More than 1,300 candidates were expected to enter the races for the 465-seat Lower House before registration closes later on Tuesday.

Ishiba called the snap election after he took office as prime minister on Oct. 1. As customary for Liberal Democratic Party leaders over the past decade, he was to start his campaign in Fukushima to renew his pledge to support the area's recovery from the 2011 nuclear disaster.

With the early election, Ishiba is seeking to secure a majority in the lower house, the more powerful of Japan's two parliamentary chambers, before the congratulatory mood fades. The move has been criticized as prioritizing an election rather than policies and for allowing little debate. A majority for the ruling coalition

could go to hospitals, but were instead asked to take longer routes.

The main event of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will be held on Wednesday, when leaders and officials discuss how to boost their security cooperation and economic ties.

The group was founded in 2001 by China and Russia to counter Western alliances. Other members include Iran, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Militants in recent weeks have killed dozens of people in multiple attacks in restive northwestern and southwestern Pakistan bordering Afghanistan. Security experts say militants have limited capacity to strike in Islamabad.

Pakistan often blames the outlawed Pakistani Taliban, who have sanctuaries in neighboring Afghanistan, for the violence. Afghanistan's Taliban government

Violence-hit Pakistan locks down the capital for an Asian security meeting



ISLAMABAD, Oct 15: Shaken by multiple militant attacks, Pakistani authorities have locked down the capital in a major security move as senior officials from several nations arrive for an Asian security group meeting.

A three-day holiday started on Monday in normally bustling Islamabad and the nearby garrison city of Rawalpindi, and Pakistan has deployed troops and blocked key roads, making it difficult even for ambulances to pass through.

Some doctors asked police to remove barricades so that they

ment says it does not allow anyone to use its soil for attacks against any country.

Two Chinese engineers were killed on Oct. 6 in a suicide bombing outside the airport in Karachi, the capital of southern Sindh province. The attack was claimed by a separatist group.

In the past, ordinary Pakistanis used to line up on both sides of the main roads to welcome any dignitaries visiting the country, but authorities said they had to take harsh security measures because of fears of militant attacks. Only state media will be allowed to cover the meetings.

Among those attending were China's Premier Li Qiang, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref and the prime ministers of Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Mongolia. (AP)

Campaigning begins for Japan's parliamentary election

would be 233 seats between his LDP and its junior coalition partner Komeito. Prior to the dissolution, the coalition held 288 seats, including 256 by LDP. The main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, which briefly ruled Japan from 2009-2012, sees the public anger over the LDP funds scandal as a rare chance to gain ground by appealing to conservative swing voters. The liberal-leaning CDPI is making a conservative shift and now has a centrist leader Yoshihiko Noda, also a former prime minister.

"A leadership change is the biggest political reform," Noda said. Political watchers say Japan's opposition has remained too fractured to push the governing party out of power, which it has held almost without interruption in postwar times. While support ratings in Kyodo News survey for Ishiba's new government already dipped from above 50% to 42% just over a week from taking office, LDP was still by far a voter favorite among all political parties. (AP)

China to build lunar space station explore habitable planets under new plan

BEIJING, Oct 15: China on Tuesday announced plans to launch a manned lunar mission, construct a lunar space station and explore habitable planets and extra-terrestrial life to expand its space programme in the next few decades. China's top space bodies unveiled a national mid- and long-term development programme for space science, which will guide the country's planning of space science missions and space research from 2024 to 2050.

An established space power, China in recent years built its own space station which is currently in operation besides launching several space missions, including a lunar probe that collected samples for the first time from the far side of the Moon and brought them back to Earth for scientific studies.

The programme released by the China Academy of Sciences (CAS), China National Space Administration and the China Manned Space Agency to the media here outlined the goals of China's space science, including 17 priority areas under five key scientific themes, and a three-phase roadmap. The international lunar research station initiated by China will be constructed during the second phase from 2028 to 2035. Ding Chibiao, vice president of the CAS, told the media here. The programme also outlines a roadmap for the development of space science in China through 2050.

In the first phase, leading up to 2027, China

will focus on the space station operation, implementing the manned lunar exploration project, the fourth phase of its lunar exploration programme and the planetary exploration project. Under the new plan, scientists will also explore the habitability of celestial bodies in the solar system and exoplanets and search for extra-terrestrial life, he said.

Key areas of space development in the coming years will be the origin and evolution of the solar system, characterisation of planetary atmospheres, the search for extraterrestrial life, and exoplanet detection, Ding said.

The theme of the extreme universe focuses on exploring the origin and evolution of the universe, revealing the physical laws under extreme cosmic conditions, dark matter and the universe's origin and evolution, as well as the detection of cosmic baryonic matter, according to the programme.

Studies will be conducted on detecting medium to low-frequency gravitational waves and primordial gravitational waves, with the goal of uncovering the nature of gravity and space-time, and the exploration of the Sun and the Earth.

Priority areas include Earth's cycle systems, comprehensive observations of the Earth-Moon, space weather observation, three-dimensional solar exploration, and heliosphere exploration, according to the programme. (PTI)

50 well-preserved Viking Age skeletons unearthed in Denmark

AASUM, Oct 15: In a village in central Denmark, archeologists made a landmark discovery that could hold important clues to the Viking era: a burial ground, containing some 50 "exceptionally well-preserved" skeletons.

"This is such an exciting find because we found these skeletons that are so very, very well preserved," said archeologist Michael Borre Lundø, who led the six-month dig. "Normally, we would be lucky to find a few teeth in the graves, but here we have entire skeletons."

The skeletons were preserved thanks to favorable soil chemistry, particularly chalk and high water levels, experts from Museum Odense said. The site was discovered last year during a routine survey, ahead of power line renovation work on the outskirts of the village of Aasum, 5 kilometers (3 miles), northeast of Odense, Denmark's third-largest city.

Experts hope to conduct DNA analyses and possibly reconstruct detailed life histories, as well as looking into social patterns in Viking Age, such as kinship, migration patterns and more.

"This opens a whole new toolbox for scientific discovery," said Borre Lundø as he stood on the muddy, wind-swept excavation site. "Hopefully we can



make a DNA analysis on all the skeletons and see if they are related to each other and even where they come from."

During the Viking Age, considered to run from 793 to 1066 A.D., Norsemen known as Vikings undertook large-scale raids, colonizing, conquering and trading throughout Europe, even reaching North America.

The Vikings unearthed at Aasum likely weren't warriors. Borre Lundø believes the site was probably a "standard settlement," perhaps a farming community, located 5 kilometers from a ring fortress in what's now central



Odense. The 2,000-square meter (21,500-square foot) burial ground holds the remains of men, women and children. Besides the skeletons, there are a few cremated bodies.

In one grave, a woman is buried in a wagon -- the higher part of a Viking cart was used as a coffin -- suggesting she was from the "upper part of society," Borre Lundø told The Associated Press. Archeologists also unearthed brooches, necklace beads, knives, and even a small shard of glass that may have served as an amulet.

Borre Lundø said the brooch designs

suggest the dead were buried between 850 and 900 A.D.

"There's different levels of burials," he explained. "Some have nothing with them, others have brooches and pearl necklaces." Archeologists say many of the artefacts came from far beyond Denmark's borders, shedding light on extensive Viking trade routes during the 10th century.

"There's a lot of trade and commerce going on," said Borre Lundø. "We also found a brooch that comes from the island of Gotland, on the eastern side of Sweden, but also whetstones for honing your knife ... all sorts of things point to Norway and Sweden."

The burial site was discovered last year, and the dig, which started in April, ended Friday. Boxes of artefacts have shipped to Museum Odense's preservation labs for cleaning and analysis. Conservator Jannie Møsgaard Ebsen hopes the soil may also hold other preserved organic material on the backs of brooches or knife handles.

"We're really hoping to gain the larger picture. Who were the people that were living out there? Who did they interact with?" she said. "It's a little bit like a jigsaw puzzle: all the various puzzle parts will be placed together." (AP)

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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 came 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".

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)

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AA/1	MPS-LMG-SCL-MPS-10-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Silchar railway station.	
AA/2	MPS-LMG-ABSA-MPS-44-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Ambassa railway station.	
AA/3	MPS-LMG-SCL-MPS-7-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Silchar railway station.	
AA/4	MPS-LMG-KWM-MPS-14-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Kamrup railway station.	
AA/5	MPS-LMG-JMK-MPS-15-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Jamunamukh railway station.	
AA/6	MPS-LMG-MBG-MPS-35-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Maibang railway station.	
AA/7	MPS-LMG-SCL-MPS-6-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Silchar railway station.	
AA/8	MPS-LMG-SCL-MPS-8-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Silchar railway station.	
AA/9	MPS-LMG-SCL-MPS-9-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Silchar railway station.	
AA/10	MPS-LMG-KWM-MPS-12-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of kamrup railway station.	
AA/11	MPS-LMG-JGJN-MPS-21-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Jugijan railway station.	
AA/12	MPS-LMG-HKD-MPS-31-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Hailakandi railway station.	
AA/13	MPS-LMG-NGAN-MPS-33-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Nagaon railway station.	
AA/14	MPS-LMG-MANU-MPS-40-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Manu railway station.	
AA/15	MPS-LMG-BPB-MPS-23-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Badarpur railway station.	
AA/16	MPS-LMG-JGJN-MPS-41-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Jugijan railway station.	
AA/17	MPS-LMG-KWM-MPS-11-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Kamrup railway station.	
AA/18	MPS-LMG-KWM-MPS-13-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Kamrup railway station.	
AA/19	MPS-LMG-ABSA-MPS-30-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Ambassa railway station.	
AA/20	MPS-LMG-SBRM-MPS-38-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Sabroom railway station.	
AA/21	MPS-LMG-JMK-MPS-16-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Jamunamukh railway station.	
AA/22	MPS-LMG-JMK-MPS-17-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Jamunamukh railway station.	
AA/23	MPS-LMG-JGJN-MPS-18-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Jugijan railway station.	
AA/24	MPS-LMG-JGJN-MPS-20-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-2 of Jugijan railway station.	
AA/25	MPS-LMG-BPB-MPS-27-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Circulating cum parking area of Badarpur railway station.	
AA/26	MPS-LMG-NGAN-MPS-34-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Circulating area of Nagaon railway station.	
AA/27	MPS-LMG-ABSA-MPS-28-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Ambassa railway station.	
AA/28	MPS-LMG-BPB-MPS-22-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Badarpur railway station.	
AA/29	MPS-LMG-BPB-MPS-26-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Circulating cum parking area of Badarpur railway station.	
AA/30	MPS-LMG-MBG-MPS-36-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Maibang railway station.	
AA/31	MPS-LMG-HKD-MPS-32-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	PF-1 of Hailakandi railway station.	

Auction Start Date & Time: 10.00 hrs. of 28-10-2024 Auction Close Date & Time: 15.30 hrs. of 28-10-2024. Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Lumding

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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 Panikhaiti, Thakurkuchi, Panbari, Digaru, Tetelia, Kamrup Khetri, Barahu, Jagiroad, Aujari, Chaparmukh Jn, Kamrup, Laopani, Thekeraguri, Dharamtul, Haibargaon, Malrabari, Nagaon, Slighat Town, Jamunamukh, Jugijan, Hajo, 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 2:00PM 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

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

DIMPUR, 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 Chumoukidima.

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)

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 have 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.



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 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.

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)

forestation, construction of dug out ponds and rainwater harvesting systems have been implemented by the Panchayat, for enhancing groundwater", the press release reads.

It added that with sufficient water now becoming available, the whole cultivable command area of 135 ha has been brought under cultivation, thereby increasing the crop productivity. In addition, community-based monitoring system has been established to keep track of water quality, encroachments, and any illegal activities impacting water bodies.

Further, trainings at the village level including exposure trips to model villages have been imparted which have brought effectiveness and efficiency of the member in undertaking ground water recharge activities.

Both NDA, INDIA bloc confident of victory as battlelines drawn

Four planes get bomb threats via X posts

RANCHI, Oct 15: With the Election Commission announcing the poll dates for the 81-member Jharkhand assembly, the stage is set for a direct contest between the ruling JMM-led coalition and the NDA. With the current assembly's term concluding in January, the stakes are high for both alliances.

The Assembly polls will be held in two phases on November 13 and 20 and counting will take place on November 23, the Election Commission announced on Tuesday.

The BJP-led NDA has already started campaigning to regain lost ground, deploying Prime Minister Narendra Modi, home minister Amit Shah, agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who have been raising the issues of "Bangladeshi infiltration" and "rampant corruption".

In response, the JMM-led ruling alliance, under chief minister Hemant Soren, is countering with a focus on welfare schemes, such as the Abua Awasi Yojna and Maiyan Samman Yojna, which increases fi-



financial assistance to women aged 18-50 from Rs 12,000 to Rs 30,000 annually.

The opposition INDIA bloc is also intensifying efforts to challenge the NDA's ambitions.

Key factors that are likely to influence the election include the BJP's welfare schemes and the arrest and subsequent bail of Soren by the Enforcement Directorate

(ED). The ruling alliance claims the arrest was politically motivated, as Soren was detained in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud.

In the 2019 assembly elections, the contest was close, with the JMM winning 30 seats and the BJP securing 25, down from 37 in 2014. The JMM-Congress-RJD alliance won a comfortable majority

with 47 seats.

The BJP has announced that its seat-sharing arrangement within the NDA is "almost final," with the first list of candidates expected within the next 48 hours.

According to the proposed arrangement, the Sudesh Mahto-led AJSU Party will contest 9-11 seats, while the Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) will field candidates in two constituencies. Talks regarding seat-sharing with LJP (Ram Vilas) are scheduled for Wednesday or Thursday, pending the return of its chief Chirag Paswan from abroad.

On Monday, Soren confirmed that the JMM-led alliance will contest all 81 seats, although seat-sharing with allies is yet to be finalised. The Congress said it will contest the polls in alliance with the JMM, with a decision on seat-sharing expected soon.

Currently, the strength of the assembly stands at 74, with the JMM-led ruling alliance comprising 44 members — 26 from the JMM, 17 from Congress, and one from RJD.

Two JMM legislators, Nalin Soren and Joba Majhi, are now members of Parliament, while Jama legislator Sita Soren resigned to contest the Lok Sabha elections on a BJP ticket. Additionally, Borio MLA Lobin Hembrom was recently disqualified under the anti-defection law.

Similarly, the BJP's strength has decreased to 23, with two of its MLAs—Dhulu Mahto (Baghmara) and Manish Jaiswal (Hazariabag)—having contested Lok Sabha polls and now serving as MPs. Mandu MLA Jaiprakash Bhai Patel, who joined Congress before the Lok Sabha elections, was also disqualified under the anti-defection law.

Former CM Champai Soren, along with Independent MLA Amit Kumar Yadav from Barkatha, has joined the BJP. Additionally, Kamlesh Singh, the lone NCP legislator in Jharkhand, joined the saffron party on October 4. The AJSU Party currently has three MLAs, while the NCP and CPI(M) have one MLA each, alongside two Independents. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Four planes, including one bound for the United States, received bomb-threat messages through a social media handle on Tuesday, prompting security agencies to undertake specific counter-terrorist drills at various airports, official sources said.

The threats via microblogging platform X came a day after three international flights originating from Mumbai received bomb threats, causing trouble to hundreds of passengers and airline crew. The messages posted on Monday were declared hoax.

The sources said an X handle issued threats on Tuesday to four planes — an Air India Express aircraft from Jaipur to Bengaluru via Ayodhya (IX765), a SpiceJet plane from Darbhanga to Mumbai (SG116), an Akasa Air plane from Siliguri to Bengaluru (QP 1373) and an Air India plane from Delhi to Chicago (AI 127).

The Air India Express aircraft underwent a security check at the Ayodhya airport. The SpiceJet and

Akasa Air planes have landed, according to flight-tracking websites. The AI flight from Delhi to Chicago has been diverted to Canada for security checks.

Precautionary measures are being taken in all the cases, aviation security sources told PTI. The X handle tagged the airline and police handles, claiming that bombs were placed on these planes, the sources said.

Four different X handles had issued a similar threat to three international flights originating from Mumbai on Monday.

All the messages on Monday were declared hoax after security and intelligence agencies as well as airlines and airport operators carried out stipulated anti-terrorist security drills that are activated in case of bomb or hijack threats, the sources said.

Officials said the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has sought the help of Indian cyber-security agencies and police to trace the person or people behind these threats. (PTI)

Mayawati says BSP to contest on its own in Maharashtra, Jharkhand, UP bypolls

LUCKNOW, Oct 15: Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Tuesday said that her party will contest on its own in the upcoming state elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand as well as by-elections in nine assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh.

In a series of posts on X in Hindi, Mayawati welcomed the announcement of the poll schedule and said it is the responsibility of the Election Commission to ensure that the elections are held in the shortest possible time and are free from the curse of money and muscle power.

"The BSP will contest elections alone in both these states..." she said, adding it is to ensure that its people remain united and strive to come to power as part of their mission to protect dignity and self-respect inspired by B R Ambedkar.

"The BSP will field its candidates in the by-elections being held on nine assembly seats in UP and will fight this election on its own strength with full preparation and vigour," the former



chief minister said in another post.

Assembly polls in Maharashtra will be held in a single phase on November 20. In Jharkhand, elections will be held in two phases on November 13 and 20, the Election Commission announced on Tuesday.

Voting in the bypolls will be held on November 13. The counting of votes will be held on November 23.

The Election Commission announced the bypolls for nine of the 10 vacant seats of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly. It did not announce bypolls in the Milkipur seat of Ayodhya district due to pending election petition.

All the seats except Sisamaul fell vacant after their MLAs were elected as MPs in the Lok Sabha polls. In Sisamaul, SP MLA Irfan Solanki was disqualified after being convicted in a criminal case.

In the 2022 assembly polls, Sisamaul, Katehari, Karhal, Milkipur and Kundarki were held by the Samajwadi Party, while the BJP had won Phulpur, Ghaziabad, Majhawan and Khair. The Meerapur seat was held by the RLD.

The Karhal seat fell vacant due to Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav getting elected from Kannauj Lok Sabha constituency. (PTI)

Will take strict view on violence: CEC on Baba Siddique's killing ahead of Maharashtra polls

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Days after NCP leader Baba Siddique was killed in Mumbai, chief election commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday said the Election Commission will take a strict view on preventing violence, especially against political personalities, as the Model Code of Conduct comes into force in Maharashtra.

Asked about concerns following Siddique's killing, especially as the poll panel is already dealing with the issue of urban apathy towards voting, the CEC said they will make it clear to police that violence of any sort should not take place.

"After the MCC declaration, we will make it extremely clear to the police authorities in a particular



state that you are mentioning that violence of any kind and a crime of this nature, which has political overtones, would be absolutely a no-go area for the commission," Kumar said.

"So far, we did not have a role. As the MCC comes into force, we will have a strict view on this. We will direct everyone that any kind

of violence or crime, especially against any political person, should not happen," he added.

"We ensured that it did not happen in Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir... States after states," the CEC said.

Siddique (66), a former Maharashtra minister who joined the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in February after quitting the Congress, was waylaid by three men at Kher Nagar in Mumbai's Bandra area, just outside his MLA son Zeeshan Siddique's office, and shot dead on Saturday night.

The Maharashtra Assembly polls will be held in a single phase on November 20. (PTI)

UP: Tension during religious procession in Barabanki, three arrested



BARABANKI (UP), Oct 15: Three people, including a "DJ operator", have been arrested and around four dozen others booked after a communal flare-up during a religious procession, officials said on Tuesday.

Tension escalated in the Icholi town on Monday during a Durga idol immersion procession in which derogatory music was allegedly played out loud, according to police.

It is alleged that the participants in the procession played loud DJ music in front of a religious site of another community and threw coloured powder, causing a heated dispute, the police said.

Superintendent of Police Dinesh Kumar Singh said, "We have arrested Alok, who threw the powder, along with DJ operator Ravi and another youth named Abhishek. The situation is under control, and we are reviewing the

video footage for further investigation."

"A case has been registered against two named individuals and around four dozen unidentified persons. We are investigating the matter, and PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary) has been deployed to maintain peace," Circle Officer (Ram Sanehi Ghat) Jatashankar Mishra said.

According to the police, the procession was granted permission to pass by the shrine with a specific time limit, but it took longer than permitted.

The police further said the video of the incident went viral, drawing large crowds from both communities. However, authorities managed to disperse the crowds and restore order.

The situation remains peaceful, and police forces are stationed at the scene to prevent any further escalation, they added. (PTI)

Polling for gram panchayats concludes in Punjab; 2 firing incidents reported

CHANDIGARH, Oct 15: Polling to elect gram panchayat members concluded amid tight security arrangements in Punjab on Tuesday, officials said.

Two incidents of firing were reported, they added.

Voting for the posts of "sarpanch" and "panch" through ballots started at 8 am and concluded at 4 pm, the officials said, adding that a voter turnout of more than 45 per cent was recorded.

The polling percentage is likely to go up once the data is compiled, they said.

After the polling, the votes will be counted at the polling stations, the officials said.

A firing incident was reported outside a polling booth in Sohan Sain Bhagat village in Tarn Taran district, leaving a man injured. Mandeep Singh was rushed to a hospital where his condition was stated to be out of danger.

A police official said a scuffle took place between two groups, adding that the matter is being investigated.

Another firing incident was reported from Khudda village in Patiala district, leaving one person injured. A police official said 20-25 unidentified people arrived at a polling booth, allegedly manhandled the polling staff and took away a ballot box. Subsequently, they left the ballot box behind in a nearby field, the official said.

Congress MP Dharamvira Gandhi, who visited the spot, demanded strict

action in the matter.

In Ballagan village in Amritsar, two groups clashed and pelted stones at each other at a polling booth.

At a polling booth in Lohke Khurd village in Ferozepur's Zira, an unidentified person tried to throw ink on a ballot box. An official said the incident has been brought to the notice of senior officials for further action.

Sub-Inspector Lakha Singh (53), who was posted on election duty at Dhillwan village in Barnala district, passed away, a police official said.

After he felt uneasy, he was taken to a hospital where he died, the official added.

Agriculture minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian, along with his son, cast his vote in Khudian village in Muktsar district while education minister Harjot Singh Bains exercised his franchise in Gambhirpur village in Anandpur Sahib.

Talking to reporters, Bains appealed to people to turn out in large numbers to cast their votes in order to elect those who would work for the development of the villages.

The State Election Commission cancelled the polling in Dalla and Pona villages in Ludhiana's Jagraon subdivision due to certain technical reasons. The next date of polling in these villages would be announced later, the officials said.

A total of 19,110 polling booths, including 1,187 marked as hyper-sensitive, were set up for the election. The state has 13,225 gram panchayats.

Polling for the posts of "sarpanch"

was held in 9,398 gram panchayats. A total of 3,798 candidates were already elected unopposed for the posts of "sarpanch".

Elderly people, women and youngsters were seen standing in queues outside several polling booths in the morning.

The polls were held without the symbols of political parties as a consequence of the Punjab Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2024 passed by the Assembly last month.

A total of 1.33 crore people were eligible to vote.

There were 25,588 candidates in the fray for the posts of "sarpanch" and 80,598 nominees contested the polls for the posts of "panch", the officials said.

Around 96,000 personnel were deputed on election duty.

Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann appealed to people on Monday to exercise their franchise.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Monday dismissed a bunch of petitions filed against the panchayat polls. The pleas were filed on several grounds, including challenging the ward demarcation, delimitation, regarding grievances about poll symbols, extension of time for nominations and rejection of nomination papers.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to stay the panchayat polls on grounds of alleged irregularities in the nomination process, saying there will be "chaos" if courts start staying elections on polling day. (PTI)

TMC slams EC for not announcing Basirhat bypolls, calls it 'delaying tactic'



NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Tuesday slammed the Election Commission for not announcing the dates of the bypoll in West Bengal's Basirhat, alleging the poll panel was deploying a "delaying tactic" at the behest of the BJP.

The seat fell vacant after the death of the party MP SK Nurul Islam due to cancer on September 25 at the age of 61.

On Monday, the Election Commission announced dates for assembly polls in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, and by-elections to 47 assembly seats and the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat.

The bypolls to the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat in West Bengal and Milkipur in Uttar Pradesh were not announced as election petitions are pending for the two seats.

A senior TMC leader called it a "delaying tactic" and said the party would have easily won the seat.

"The Election Petition filed for Basirhat is a got up match between BJP and the EC to delay the bypoll. Trinamool would have won easily hence it has not been announced," said a senior TMC leader.

Basirhat witnessed a bitter fight between the TMC and BJP in the recent Lok Sabha polls as the BJP made the alleged sexual assault of women in Sandeshkhali, one of the seven assembly constituencies here, a major poll issue.

BJP's candidate Rekha Patra, however, lost to Islam with a margin of over three lakh votes. Patra later filed an election petition in the Calcutta High Court which remains pending.

Asked about the development, TMC Parliamentary Party leader in Rajya Sabha Derek O'Brien in a brief reply, took a jibe at the poll panel and said, "I heard EC is shifting their office

to BJP HQs!"

CEC Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday said that bypolls for Basirhat and Milkipur are not being announced as election petitions are pending on the two seats.

EC sources later clarified that since the winning candidate in Basirhat has died, the bypoll will be held after the Calcutta High Court closes the case as it has become infructuous. (PTI)MLA P Kaushik Reddy's offer to send saris and bangles to 10 party legislators, who defected to the Congress, has evoked strong response from the women leaders of the ruling party who demanded an immediate apology from him.

Congress leader and Chairperson of the Telangana State Women's Cooperative Development Corporation B Shobha Rani hit out at Reddy over his comments saying he insulted women with his disrespectful comments. At a press conference, Shobha Rani took out her shoe and warned the BRS MLA over his remarks.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, Reddy, the BRS MLA from the Huzurabad constituency said he wants to send gifts—saris and bangles to the 10 BRS MLAs who joined Congress and asked them to wear it.

Kaushik Reddy also said he would send the saris and bangles to the residences of the defected BRS MLAs by courier.

Enraged Congress women leaders asked Reddy to first send the items to BRS president and former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababoo Naidu and the party's Working President K T Rama Rao saying they had started the defections. They also urged the Telangana State Women's Commission to take cognisance of Kaushik Reddy's comments. (PTI)

'India under PM Modi has made its people 'vishwaguru' in hunger'

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge slammed the BJP-led Centre on Tuesday over the rising inflation and said India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made its people "vishwaguru" in hunger.

Kharge's remarks came following a rise in retail inflation and as India occupied the 105th place in the global hunger index.

"The situation of inflation is such that despite the provision of ration to the poor for food security, Modi ji has made the people of the country 'Vishwaguru' in hunger! India has come to the 105th place in the Global Hunger Index," the Congress chief said in a post in Hindi on X. He said retail inflation rose to 5.49 per cent in September, the highest in nine months. It was at 3.65 per cent in August, Kharge noted. He also shared a picture showing high prices of vegetables. (PTI)

NGT directs aerial survey to find trees felled for 'kanwar' route construction

The NGT was hearing a case related to the alleged felling of trees

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the surveyor general of India to conduct an aerial survey to determine the extent of the alleged loss of green cover in the last one year on a route being constructed for the pilgrims' march during the "kanwar yatra" in Uttar Pradesh.

In an order dated October 4, a bench of NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava noted the submissions of the surveyor general, saying, "The Survey of India can conduct an aerial survey using UAV/drone to generate orthorectified images of the area to capture the present ground situation and to identify the extent of trees cut on both sides of the canal within 30 days and a report can be submitted before the tribunal."

Orthorectification is the process of removing image distortions.

The bench also comprised judicial member Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and expert member A Senthil



Vel.

near the Uttarakhand border.

The environmental body had registered a suo motu (on its own motion) a case based on a newspaper report, which revealed that the UP government had given its permission for felling 1.12 lakh trees for the road along the upper Ganga Canal.

Subsequently three persons had

filed intervention applications through advocate Akash Vashishtha

"The surveyor general in the report will give its findings relating to the extent of tree cover, which has been lost within a year in the area concerned and if possible the number of trees that have been cut during this period," the bench said.

On September 20, the tribunal had imposed a token fine of Re 1 on the Survey of India's head for failing to appear before it.

"The surveyor general has filed a regular appeal (RA) seeking review of the order dated September 20. The above plea explaining the conduct has been taken in the said RA therefore it will be considered in that RA," the tribunal said.

It also noted the submissions of the assistant solicitor general for UP that no trees will be felled till the next date of hearing.

The matter has been posted on November 6. (PTI)

SIDDIQUE MURDER

Mumbai cops search in MP for 3rd shooter who flaunted 'gangster' status

MUMBAI, Oct 15: Police have scoured places of worship in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain and Khandwa in their hunt for the third shooter...



Asked about these two districts having 'jyotirlingas' and whether the accused may be a devotee, the official said he would not offer a comment.

They have not been able to find any leads so far, he added. A Mumbai police team reached MP on Sunday, a day after Siddique was shot dead.

Pravin Lonkar - was produced in a Mumbai court which remanded him in police custody till October 21. He is accused of "enlisting" two of the three alleged shooters who opened fire at Siddique.

Actor Jayasurya appears for questioning in sexual abuse case



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Oct 15: Actor Jayasurya appeared before the police here for questioning related to a sexual abuse case registered against him.

The complaint was lodged by a female actor, who alleges that she was insulted during a film shoot at the Secretariat.

Another case was lodged at Karamana police station here under sections 354 and 354 C (voyeurism) of the IPC on a complaint by another female actor who had alleged that Jayasurya molested her at a movie set near Thodupuzha during 2012-13.

Consensual adulterous relationship from its inception does not amount to rape: HC

PRAYAGRAJ, Oct 15: The Allahabad High Court has observed that a long-standing consensual adulterous physical relationship without any element of deception from its inception would not amount to rape within the meaning of section 375 of the IPC...

while making such promise, it would not be treated as a false promise of marriage," the court observed. Allowing a petition filed by one Shrey Gupta, Justice Anish Kumar Gupta quashed the criminal proceedings against the petitioner pending before the court at Moradabad.

under section 482 (inherent powers of high court) under the code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc), seeking to quash the charge sheet and the entire criminal proceedings. The court after going through the facts, observed that the complainant who is a widow and the accused had maintained a consensual physical relationship for nearly 12-13 years even when the complainant's husband was alive.

SIA releases pictures of terrorists killed

JAMMU, Oct 15: The State Investigation Agency (SIA) of Jammu and Kashmir Police has released for identification the pictures of two terrorists killed in a gunbattle in Rajouri district in November 2023, officials said.

Each and every promise of marriage would not be considered as a fact of misconception for the purpose of consensual sexual intercourse unless it is established that such promise of marriage was a false promise of marriage on the part of the accused since the beginning of such relationship. Unless it is alleged that from the very beginning of such relationship there was some element of cheating on the part of the accused

She claimed that Gupta had repeatedly promised to marry her but later broke the promise and got engaged to another woman. She also accused him of extortion, alleging that Gupta demanded Rs 50 lakh to prevent the release of a video showing their intimate encounters.

Southwest monsoon withdraws from entire India. NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The southwest monsoon has completely withdrawn from the country and the northeast monsoon has begun over southeast peninsular India, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Tuesday.

Water supply to be hit in parts of outer-north Delhi

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: There will be no water supply in parts of Delhi's Outer North district for 18 hours from Wednesday 10 am, due to maintenance work, the Delhi Jal Board said.

According to a statement issued, the affected areas include Bawana Village and surrounding colonies, Sultanpur Dabas Village, Pooth Khurd Village, Barwala Village, Majra Dabas Village, Chandpur Village, the area under Ward 35 Kanjhawala and Ward 36 Rani Khera, and their adjoining areas.

Rajnath Singh to lay foundation stone for radar station in Telangana

HYDERABAD, Oct 15: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will be laying the foundation stone on Tuesday for the Indian Navy's proposed Very Low Frequency (VLF) radar station at Damagundam forest area in Telangana, Union Minister G Kishan Reddy said.

'Halloween party' in medical college campus in Indore

INDORE, Oct 15: The medical community on Tuesday "purified" the premises of the Government Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College by sprinkling Ganga water after a "Halloween party" was allegedly organised in the 150-year-old building on its campus.

Doctors 'purify' building with Ganga

Amid uproar, the college management claimed it didn't grant permission to hold the "Halloween" event in the historical building. Office-bearers of the Medical Teachers' Association (MTA) and other doctors sprinkled Ganga in the King Edward Medical School building, constructed in 1878 during the British Raj.

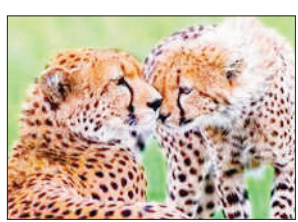
Southwest monsoon withdraws from entire India

2020 -- in the monsoon season this year. Intense low-pressure systems, especially in August and September, resulted in 8 per cent more rainfall than usual in India during the 2024 monsoon season, according to the weather department.

Flight delay after 'bomb threat' at Ayodhya airport

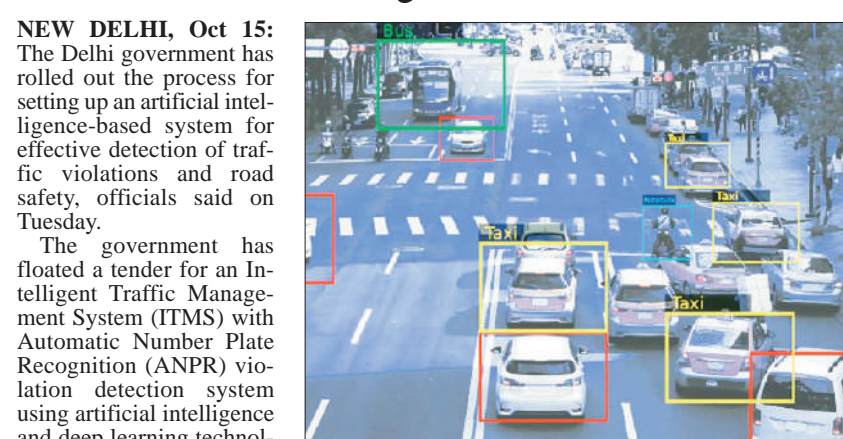
AYODHYA (UP), Oct 15: An Air India Express flight from Ayodhya to Bengaluru was delayed after a bomb threat, officials said on Tuesday.

Gandhisagar Sanctuary to introduce cheetahs as efforts to boost tourism: Mandsaur collector



transformative initiatives in Gandhisagar, including plans to introduce cheetahs into the sanctuary, making it the second such site in the country after Kuno are underway, the collector said.

Delhi govt rolls out AI-enabled violation detection system to enhance road safety



NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The Delhi government has rolled out the process for setting up an artificial intelligence-based system for effective detection of traffic violations and road safety, officials said on Tuesday.

This initiative represents a leap toward a data-driven approach in managing traffic effectively, he said. According to the official, the primary objective of the ITMS is to establish a centralised traffic database that assimilates data from multiple cameras installed throughout the city which will facilitate in-depth analysis of traffic patterns, allowing for better planning and decision-making by city officials.

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 summer.

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 Ilkay Gündogan — who recently retired from national-team duty. Neuer, Müller and Gündogan 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 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 Gündogan 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 captancy 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 armband 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



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

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)

Brazil trusting local players in World Cup qualifying and Argentina faces rising Bolivia

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 reopened 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 Mathheus 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 BoliviaArgentina 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 Villaseca 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)

1st Test: Gill, Jaiswal look to continue good form; Kohli, Rohit eye consistent run against edgy Kiwis

BENGALURU, Oct 15: Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill, the torchbearers of India's transition phase, will have to be the team's driving force in its quest to lord over an unsettled New Zealand when the two sides square off in a three-Test series, beginning here on Wednesday.

The baton has not been completely passed, but Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are certainly running their last lap and these two young superstars will have to show that they can carry forward the legacy of the titans.

Since a productive series against England earlier this year, Gill is now more familiar and comfortable with the rigours of Test cricket.

It is reliably learnt that Gill has a stiff neck, but should be able to play here and the team physio is hard at work to ensure that he is fully fit for the game that also faces the threat of rain.

Gill's last 10 innings are dotted with three hundreds and two fifties, while Jaiswal's last eight outings in Test cricket feature a 214 and five fifties.

Those numbers are not to be scoffed at. But at the same time, it is important for them to build on the foundation through this series, a precursor to the much tougher journey to Australia next month.

Gill seems to have sorted his issues with the in-coming deliveries from pacers, but a trace of the old failing still remains.

In Chennai, Bangladesh pacer Hasan Mahmud troubled him with nip-backers before eventually grabbing his wicket.

Similarly, Jaiswal has a penchant to go for expansive shots against pace bowlers to get dismissed, evidenced by his three dismissals recently against Bangladesh quicks.

In all, the left-hander has fallen to pacers 12 times in 20 innings,



and he would want a better record before facing a clutch of top-class Australian pacers.

While these concerns are not deeply rooted, they serve as cautionary points against a New Zealand attack that has capable hands in pacers Matt Henry, William O'Rourke, if he gets to play here after a sharp decline in his form.

There is another angle to the emergence of Jaiswal and Gill as the pillars of the Indian line-up, as Kohli and Rohit have not precisely set the field ablaze.

Rohit, who has played 15 innings this year, has made two hundreds but managed only one fifty in the remaining 13, totaling 497 runs in eight Tests at just over 35.

Kohli, 53 runs shy of 9000 Test runs, has not made even a fifty in six innings this year, and while Rohit often perishes in his attempt

to grab the momentum, his colleague offers a much more curious case.

The 35-year-old Kohli has not been able to convert the two starts he got this year, ending up with 46 (vs SA) and 47 (vs Bangladesh), stirring the uncomfortable memories of that great slump between 2019 and 2023.

The master batter will also have to keep an eye on New Zealand left-arm spinners - Ajaz Patel and Rachin Ravindra - the tribe which has been a thorn in his flesh in the past. It has been a while since these two stalwarts embossed their mark across a full series, and a nervy New Zealand could be their golden chance to do so.

India has only minor concerns, but New Zealand's troubles across batting and bowling departments are more pronounced.

Their batsmen struggled copiously against Sri Lankan spinners

recently while losing an away series 0-2, and here they will have to negate two modern-day greats in Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja.

They took 20 wickets together against Bangladesh and with the Chinnaswamy Stadium pitch expected to give some assistance to spinners, the veterans might be itching to have a bowl here.

Besides the duo, the Kiwis will have to contend with the genius of Jasprit Bumrah, who rattled Bangladesh by picking up 11 wickets across two Tests.

If they persist with the combination from the last series, Akash Deep will be the third pacer behind Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj.

The management will take into account the fact that New Zealand, who have already lost Kane Williamson to an injury, were put through the wringer by Lankan spinners recently.

In another blow, right-arm pacer Ben Sears has been ruled out of the series due to a knee injury. An uncapped Jacob Duffy, who has played six ODIs and 14 T20Is, has been brought into the squad.

Teams (from):
India: Rohit Sharma (c), Jasprit Bumrah (vc), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, Sarfaraz Khan, Rishabh Pant (wk), Dhruv Jurel (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Siraj, Akash Deep.
New Zealand: Tom Latham (captain), Devon Conway, Kane Williamson, Mark Chapman, Will Young, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Michael Bracewell, Mitchell Santner, Rachin Ravindra, Tom Blundell (wk), Ajaz Patel, Matt Henry, Tim Southee, William O'Rourke, Jacob Duffy.

Match starts at 9.30 AM IST. (PTI)

Pace bowling bench strength needed as we don't want to rely on few individuals: Rohit

BENGALURU, Oct 15: India skipper Rohit Sharma said on Tuesday that the team is blessed with a strong pool of batters and he wants to build a similar stock in pace bowling so that injuries stop having a bearing on the side's balance.

Rohit's comments come in the backdrop of delayed recovery of senior pacer Mohammed Shami and a shoulder injury to left-arm quick Yash Dayal, who was drafted into the India squad for the recent series against Bangladesh.

"When it comes to batting, there are a lot of options. We want to create the same in bowling as well. We want to create bench strength where tomorrow if anything happens to anyone, we are not worried," Rohit said on the eve of the first Test against New Zealand here.

"We don't want to heavily rely on a few individuals. That is not the right thing to do. We want to look at the future and try and make sure we get the right guys in as well," he added.

So, it was not surprising to see India naming pacers Mayank Yadav, Harshit Rana, Nitish Kumar Reddy and Prasidh Krishna as travelling reserves for the series against the Black Caps which comprises three Tests.

However, Prasidh's availability to travel with the squad is subject to him getting fitness clearance from the NCA after suffering an unspecified injury during Karnataka's opening Ranji Trophy match against Madhya Pradesh at Indore.

That apart, Rohit explained why the Indian think-tank wanted those young pacers to be around the senior side.

"So tomorrow, if we feel like they are ready to take that role (replacing an injured pacer), they

should be ready for it. They have obviously played a few games before we made this announcement.

"They have played the Duleep Trophy, Irani Trophy as well. So, we just want to make sure that they are monitored quite well. Their workloads have been taken care of," said Rohit.

"The Mumbaikar said such a step was mandatory because Test cricket is a different beast compared to white ball formats, and the bowlers will take time to adjust to it.

"In the short period of time, they have shown they have ability as well. We want to keep them with the team and see whether they will be ready for international cricket or not.

"Especially Test cricket because Test cricket is a different ball game compared to white ball cricket. We want to see what they can offer us," he noted.

Pitchforking a young bowler to the senior squad, Rohit said, will give the team management an opportunity to understand their cricketing psyche and thoughts about Test cricket.

"Sometimes you have to fast-track someone. That is only in the betterment of Indian cricket. We want to create guys where even if there are injuries, we have someone to quickly step in and take that role. Nitish (Reddy) and Harshit (Rana) both are talented individuals.

"In the future, they are going to provide a lot of stability. So, it's always nice to just have them around and see their mindset," said Rohit.

The four travelling reserves will have more opportunity to play international cricket when they travel to South Africa for a bilateral T20I series, and from there they will re-join the Indian Test squad in Australia. (PTI)

Bangladesh coach Hathurusingha suspended, Simmons to take over

DHAKA, Oct 15: The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has suspended men's team head coach Chandika Hathurusingha due to inappropriate conduct by him during last year's ODI World Cup in India.

Hathurusingha, the former Sri Lanka all-rounder under whom Bangladesh recently endured a forgettable tour of India where they were whitewashed in both the Test and T20I series, will be sacked and replaced by former West Indies player Phil Simmons.

According to ESPNcricinfo, Simmons, who was also an all-rounder and opened the batting for the West Indies in the early and mid 1990s, will be in charge of the Bangladesh team until next year's ICC Champions Trophy.



"Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha has been suspended following allegations he slapped a player at last year's ODI World Cup. His contract will be terminated after 48 hours of suspension, with Phil

Simmons to take over until next year's Champions Trophy," the website said.

The BCB investigated an allegation from a player that the coach had slapped him during the World Cup last year.

The contract of the 56-year-old Hathurusingha, who rejoined the Bangladesh team in February last year for a second stint with the Asian side, was to expire after the 2025 Champions Trophy.

He will therefore not be present with the team for the upcoming two-match Test series at home against South Africa.

He took the team to India on the back of a historic Test series sweep in Pakistan only to suffer an embarrassing 0-2 defeat in the two-Test series against Rohit Sharma's side and a 0-3 loss in the T20I series.

His exit marks an underwhelming end to his brief stint as Bangladesh coach with debacles in the 2023 ODI World Cup and the 2024 T20 World Cup. (PTI)

Man United great Alex Ferguson to step down as club ambassador in latest change under Jim Ratcliffe

MANCHESTER (ENGLAND), Oct 15: Manchester United great Alex Ferguson will step down from his role as club ambassador at the end of the season, a person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the move has not been publicly announced.

Ferguson will be 83 in December and the person said the ending of his ambassadorship was "amicable" and he would "always be welcome at Old Trafford." Ferguson won 13 Premier League titles with United and is widely regarded as one of the finest managers in the history of soccer. He is United's most successful manager, having won 28 major trophies.

He has been a club ambassador since retiring after leading United to its last league title in 2013.

His imminent departure comes at a time when the club is undergoing major change following the partial buyout by British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe in February.

United has undergone an extensive restructuring program following Ratcliffe's investment of \$1.3 billion for a 27.7% stake and implemented cost-saving initiatives that it said included staff redundancies of around 250 roles. United reported losses of 113.2 million pounds (\$148 million) in its latest accounts.

Ferguson was hired by United in 1986 at a time when the club had long-since lost its place as the pre-eminent force in English soccer.

He ended its 26-year wait for the league title in 1993 and went on to dominate the Premier League era right up until his retirement when United was crowned champion with

an 11-point lead over Abu Dhabi-backed Manchester City. He also won two Champions League titles and an unprecedented treble of trophies in 1999 when leading United to victory in the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup.

He has been a regular spectator at United games since his retirement, watching the team home and away during a time when the club has been in obvious decline on the field.

Ratcliffe assumed control of United's soccer operations as part of his minority investment. The sporting side had previously been under the control of the majority owning American Glazer family. A new CEO, Omar Berrada, and sporting director, Dan Ashworth, have been installed, while key figures at Ratcliffe's Ineos Sport, Dave Brailsford and Jean-Claude Blanc, have been appointed to the board. (AP)

New Zealand pacer Ben Sears ruled out of India tour due to knee injury

BENGALURU, Oct 15: New Zealand right-arm pacer Ben Sears has been ruled out of the upcoming three-Test series against India due to a knee injury.

The opening Test begins here on Wednesday. Sears' departure to India was delayed after he experienced pain in his left knee during New Zealand's recent tour of Sri Lanka. Scans back home revealed a tear to his meniscus, prompting medical consultations in hopes he could be cleared to play.

"However, following the medical advice, the decision was made to rule him out of the series. A plan on the best course of treatment and rehabilitation for the injury will be advised in due course," New Zealand Cricket said.

Jacob Duffy has been called in as his replacement and the uncapped 30-year-old right-arm fast bowler will leave for India on Wednesday. Duffy has so far played six ODIs and 14 T20Is for the Kiwis and in 102 First-Class outings he has claimed 299 wickets.

"We're obviously disappointed for Ben who made a strong start to his Test career during the home summer and offers a genuine pace option," New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said in a statement.

"It remains to be seen how long we'll be without him for, but we're hopeful his road to a full recovery will be a short one. It's an exciting opportunity for Jacob who has been around Test the squad before. With three Tests ahead of us he has every chance of making his Test debut."

Stead hoped Duffy's experience in County Championship would be beneficial for the player.

"Jacob's recent experience playing for Nottinghamshire in the County Championship certainly pushed his place. His performances in white-ball cricket for the Blackcaps have always been impressive and we're confident he'll be able to contribute if called upon," he said. (PTI)

Keeping Jasprit Bumrah quiet will go a long way in winning against India: Pat Cummins

MUMBAI, Oct 15: Australia will have to find a way to keep Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah quiet if they are to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, reckoned captain Pat Cummins on Tuesday as he drew comfort from success in last two ICC finals against their fierce rivals. The world's top two Test teams will clash in a five-match affair starting on November 22 in Perth and India will enter the contest having held the trophy for nearly a decade, which includes winning two consecutive series Down Under.

"I'm a big fan of Bumrah. I think he's a fantastic bowler. Hopefully, if we can keep him quiet, that is going to go a long way to winning the series," Cummins said on the Star Sports Press Room.

"Alongside him, he has got some other guys who haven't played a lot over here in Australia (that) we haven't seen a lot of. We'll see how it goes," he added.

Cummins said Australia will lean on happy memories of winning the last two ICC finals -- World Test Championship and ODI World Cup -- against Rohit Sharma's India.

"The last two series were a long time ago. We have got over it," he said. "I've never played alongside



him (Rohit Sharma), so I don't know him super well. But it has looked like they (Indian team) are pretty organised, pretty well-planned.

"Fortunately, over the last few years, we've had some success in the World Test Championship final and (in) a different format for the ODI World Cup. We'll be trying to lean on those memories. As I'm sure they're trying to remember some of the previous series over here as well," he said.

Cummins said playing against Cheteshwar Pujara, whose stoic resistance with the bat laid the foundation of India's away wins in 2018-19 and 2020-21, was "real Test cricket".

"It was always great playing (against) Pujara. He was one of those guys who never really felt like he was getting away from you. But then he would (just) bat, bat, bat and bat," he said.

"I really enjoyed the contest against him. Some days he won,

other days I won. It's going to have a bit of a different feel without him. Pujara is a great player."

"(I) had lots of battles against him over the years. I quite enjoyed them, to be honest. It was real Test cricket. He might score runs, but you always feel like you're in for a chance."

Cummins said playing against India's former No 3 batter was a real battle of outlasting each other.

"It comes down to almost who wants to outlast each other, which

I quite like that aspect of Test cricket. It's going to be a shame that he is not there, but I'm sure they'll pick someone else who's in a similar kind of style," he said.

Cummins said the India-Australia rivalry will now be "mirroring" the Ashes given that there will be five Tests hereon.

"I do think it is," said Cummins when asked if India-Australia rivalry matched that of the Ashes.

"Particularly, after the Indian team won the last couple of series at (our) home. We've had more success against England over the past decade. I think it's right up there," he said.

"You know when you play against India, you've got a few Indian fans that are watching. It's a slightly different rivalry to England-Australia rivalry. But again, now having a five-Test match series, it does mirror the Ashes series very closely," he said.

Cummins said India's reputation has been consolidated by winning away from home.

"Winning (in) Test cricket away from home is as tough as it gets in our sport and India have done that around the world. They are really, really good at home but also, one of the better teams to travel as well -- that's their reputation," he said. (PTI)