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● Rahul, Congress tried since 2002 to target Modi's image: BJP
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India's second-richest man charged with paying \$ 250 mn bribe to Indian officials ● Adani group stocks tank in Mumbai trade

Bribery charge: Gautam Adani indicted in US

NEW YORK/NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Billionaire Gautam Adani has been charged by US prosecutors for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay over USD 250 million (about ₹ 2,100 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange of favourable terms for solar power contracts.

Adani, India's second-richest man, has been charged with bribery and securities fraud in two separate cases brought by US authorities -- a criminal indictment by the US Department of Justice in a New York court that charges him and seven others including his nephew Sagar with paying bribes to unidentified officials of state governments like those in Andhra Pradesh to buy expensive solar power, potentially earn more than USD 2 billion profit over 20 years.

New Delhi-headquartered Azure Power too was part of the alleged bribery scheme, according to the suit.

Separately, the US Securities and Exchange Commission also charged Gautam and Sagar Adani and an Azure Power executive with



"violating the anti-fraud provisions of the federal securities laws".

While the Adani group did not immediately respond to requests for comments, it scrapped a USD 600-million bond issue by renewable energy arm Adani Green Energy Ltd.

The issue was oversubscribed three times hours before the indictment.

"In light of these developments, our subsidiaries have presently decided not to proceed with the proposed USD-denominated bond

offerings," Adani Green Energy said in a stock exchange filing.

Adani group stocks tanked in the Mumbai trade. Ten listed firms of the group lost about USD 30 billion (₹ 2.5 lakh crore) in market value. Gautam Adani was worth USD 85.5 billion and ranked 18th on the world billionaire list prior to the fall in stocks.

The charges in the indictment are allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The US authorities allege that the bribes paid were concealed from the US banks and investors from whom the Adani group raised billions of dollars for the projects that were to supply 12 gigawatts of solar power.

The US law allows pursuing foreign corruption allegations if they involve certain links to American investors or markets.

The US authorities allege that between 2020 and 2024, the Adani firm and its subsidiaries raised more than USD 2 billion in US dollar bank loans from international financial institutions and US-based asset management companies and offered more than USD 1 billion in securities underwritten by international financial institutions and sold to investors in the US.

Adani and his co-defendants sought to "obtain and finance massive state energy supply contracts through corruption and fraud at the expense of US investors", deputy assistant attorney general Lisa Miller said. US attorney Breen Peace said the defendants "orchestrated an (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Karimganj district renamed as Sribhumi

GUWAHATI, Nov 21: The Assam government on Thursday changed the name of Karimganj district in the Barak Valley to Sribhumi, according to an official notification.

The district headquarters in Karimganj town has also been renamed Sribhumi town.

"The Governor of Assam is pleased to rename the Karimganj district as Sribhumi district and Karimganj town as Sribhumi town," general administration department principal secretary Mukesh Chandra Sahu said in the notification.

The changes will be applicable with immediate effect, it said.

The Assam cabinet on Tuesday decided to rename Karimganj district to Sribhumi.

"Over 100 years ago, Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore had described modern-day Karimganj district in Assam as Sribhumi - the land of Maa Lakshmi. Today, the Assam cabinet has fulfilled this long-standing demand of our people," chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said after the cabinet meeting. The decision to rename (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM Modi meets top Caribbean leaders, discusses bilateral ties

GEORGETOWN, Nov 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with the cream of Caribbean leaders on the margins of the India-CARICOM Summit here and discussed strengthening bilateral ties and enhancing cooperation across several key areas towards the empowerment of the Global South.

The Prime Minister arrived in Guyana earlier on Wednesday -- the first visit by an Indian head of the state to the country in more than 50 years.

Through the day, on the sidelines of the second India-Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Summit, Modi met Presidents Chan Santokhi (Suriname) and Dr Mohamed Irfan Ali (Guyana) and six of his counterparts Philip J Pierre (Saint Lucia), Gaston Browne (Antigua & Barbuda), Dickon Mitchell (Grenada), Philip Brave Davis (The Bahamas), Mia Amor Mottley (Barbados) and Dr Keith Rowley (Trinidad & Tobago).

Modi described his meeting with President Ali as "excellent" in a post on X and said the President himself

enjoys "a strong bond with India." The two leaders reviewed the bilateral developmental cooperation, including in sectors like skill development, capacity building, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, education and energy.

"India will always be a trusted partner for Guyana in sectors like infrastructure, shipping, technology and more," he said, calling the Caribbean nation's support for initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) as "noteworthy." During his meeting with President Santokhi, Modi reviewed bilateral relations in sectors such as trade, technology, energy and telemedicine among others.

"Strengthening friendship with Suriname!" he said in another post on X and added: "We also discussed ways to further improve cultural as well as people to people ties." India will keep supporting various development-related initiatives in Suriname, he (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Extend AFSPA to entire Manipur to recover looted arms: Kuki MLAs

IMPHAL/GUWAHATI, Nov 21: Manipur Assembly's 10 Kuki MLAs, including seven of the state's ruling BJP-led alliance, have demanded that AFSPA be extended to the entire state to recover looted arms.

The Centre on November 14 reimposed the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Manipur's six police station areas, including the violence-hit Jiribam, with the Union home ministry asserting that the decision was taken given the "continuous volatile situation" there due to ethnic strife. Now, the entire state, except the areas under the jurisdiction of 13 police stations, is under AFSPA.

In a joint statement, the 10 Kuki MLAs said, "The imposition of AFSPA as per orders dated November 14, 2024, indeed needs immediate review to extend the Act in the remaining 13 police jurisdictions."



They asserted that AFSPA should be imposed in the entire state in order to facilitate the recovery of the "more than 6,000 sophisticated weapons" looted by Meiteis since May 3 last year as it is a long overdue action required to contain the violence.

Ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kukis began on May 3, 2023, after a "Tribal Solidarity March" was organised in the state's hill

districts to protest the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. More than 220 people have been killed in the violence since then.

The central and state governments must take all necessary steps to restore peace and normalcy in Manipur by initiating political dialogue to bring lasting peace to the troubled region, according to the statement of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Delhi HC refuses to stay trial against Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: The Delhi High Court on Thursday refused to stay for now the trial proceedings against former Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal who is an accused in a case of irregularities linked to the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22.

Justice Manoj Kumar Ohri further sought a response from the investigating agency Enforcement Directorate on Kejriwal's plea challenging a trial court's order taking cognisance of a chargesheet in the case. The matter will be heard on December 20.

Kejriwal sought setting aside of the trial court order and argued cognisance of the chargesheet was taken by the special court in the absence of any sanction for his prosecution as he was a public servant when the alleged offence was committed. However, solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED, submitted a sanction was obtained to prosecute Kejriwal and he would be filing an affidavit.

The former CM sought an early date of hearing when the court initially posted the hearing next year and his counsel insisted an order on his plea for a stay be passed during the day on account of urgency.

Mehta sought to file a reply to the stay application, pointing out such an approach was unfair.

On November 12, the high court sought ED's response on another plea filed by Kejriwal who challenged summons issued to him on the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gandhi seeks Adani's immediate arrest, probe against SEBI chief

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Leader of opposition Rahul Gandhi on Thursday demanded the immediate arrest of Gautam Adani after the billionaire industrialist was charged in the US for alleged bribery and fraud.

Addressing a press conference here hours after the US prosecutors charged Adani and associates for allegedly paying USD 250 million bribe to Indian officials, the Congress leader said it is now pretty clear and established in the US that the businessman has broken Indian as well as American laws.

The Adani group denied the charges, saying the allegations by US prosecutors are baseless and the conglomerate is compliant with all laws. It also said that all possible legal recourse will be sought.

Taking a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Ek hain to safe

hain' slogan, Gandhi said as long as the PM and Adani are together, "they are safe" in India.

He said Adani should be arrested immediately and interrogated while his "protector" and SEBI chairperson Madhavi Puri Buch should be removed from her post and a probe should be initiated.

Gandhi further said he will raise the issue during the Winter session of Parliament beginning Monday. The entire opposition is together on the matter and will jointly raise the issue, he said.

He said the opposition's demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the transactions of the Adani Group stands.

"I can guarantee that Adani won't be arrested or investigated in India because the Modi government is protecting him," Gandhi alleged.

When pointed out that nothing was happening in India against Adani despite Gandhi raising the issue several times, the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha said a lot has happened ever since he started raising the Adani issue.

"The PM's credibility has been destroyed. The entire country knows they Adani and PM are one. We will expose everyone and the entire network. Madhavi Buch was the first example," he said.

"India is in the grip of Adani. Adani is controlling India. We will not spare them," Gandhi said. "I'm confident we will work slowly and in the end, we will dismantle this structure."

"This is a political-financial-bureaucracy network as it captures India's political system (on one hand) with money and on the other hand, they (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

LP teachers in KA resume strike over non-payment of salary

DIPHU, Nov 21: A total of 131 Lower Primary (LP) teachers under the Primary Education Department of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) have resumed their agitation by boycotting classes, starting on Thursday, due to the non-payment of 15 months' salary. It is worth noting that the Assam cabinet approved the salaries of teachers engaged by the KAAC on September 24, 2024.

"To ensure the continuation of education of students in Karbi Anglong, the cabinet has accorded approval to payment of salaries to 131 teachers appointed by the KAAC," said an Assam cabinet brochure shared by Sarma.

Whether the financial demands of developing nations will be met remains imprecise

Following this, the aggrieved teachers were initially relieved by the state government's decision and had resumed their duties, withdrawing the class boycott. However, one distressed teacher revealed that the delay in the official process, handled by a person from the Karbi Anglong Primary Teachers Association (KAPTA), has led to this renewed agitation.

"We have started our protest today by boycotting classes, even after the Assam cabinet approved the salary last September. However, we still haven't received our pay. The person from KAPTA, who was responsible for handling the formalities for the release of our salaries, has delayed the process. He has assured us that the official work will be (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC to build new bungalows for EMs and MACs

DIPHU, Nov 21: The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) will soon get new bungalows for its executive members (EMs) and members of the Autonomous Council (MACs), as part of a mega project worth ₹ 300 crore.

This initiative aims to construct new bungalows and quarters at the existing site in the KAAC Colony here.

According to sources, the project is being funded through the Chief Minister's Special Fund. The work will be carried out in two phases: the first phase has an estimated cost of ₹ 171 crore, while the second phase will cost ₹ 130 crore. The project will include 20 bungalows for EMs and five other G+ buildings for MACs.

Additionally, a Club House will be built for recreation and events.

The foundation stone for the project was laid at the KAAC Colony, with MP Amarsing Tisso—who is also the EM of KAAC, responsible



for Agriculture and Land & Revenue—along with MLA Darsing Ronghang and others, participating in the ceremony.

On the occasion, MP Tisso emphasized that the Central Government is prioritizing the Northeast region to ensure it is on par with other states of the country.

"Our Prime Minister has instructed Central ministers to visit the Northeast every month to oversee the implementation of centrally sponsored schemes and ensure they reach the people. Following this directive, three Central Ministers have already visited our district. The most recent (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

COP29 produces streamlined climate finance draft

BAKU, Nov 21: After an all-nighter, a draft text on the new climate finance package for the developing world dropped Thursday morning -- shrunk from 25 pages to 10, but the major sticking points remain.

A quick glance at the text shows developed countries are still dodging a key question: How much climate finance are they ready to give developing countries every year starting in 2025?

This has led to significant frustration among developing countries, who have repeatedly said they need at least USD 1.3 trillion to tackle the escalating challenges. With less than two days left for the UN climate conference to close, negotiators face a gargantuan task to hammer out a deal.

"The revised draft text, while more streamlined, presents a spectrum of options -- some good, some bad, and some outright ugly," said Harjeet Singh, a climate activist and



Global Engagement Director for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative.

He said it acknowledges the need for public funds from developed countries but dodges the key question of how much finance is needed, shifting the burden onto developing countries to raise more domestic funds.

The veteran COP watcher also said the text fails to set clear finan-

cial targets for mitigation, adaptation, and losses and damages from climate impacts -- areas with growing needs and limited resources. "A real, just transition from fossil fuels requires strong public finance, not empty promises," Singh said.

Vaibhav Chaturvedi from Delhi-based think tank Council on Energy, Environment and Water said it is great that the structure is streamlined, but there is no high-level

number from the developed world. David Waskow, the Director of WRI's International Climate Initiative, said the text leaves a lot of work to be done.

"Time is very tight, and to get to bridging texts, even bridging texts with options, is going to take quite a lot of work, and the presidency and the ministerial pair and parties above all, are going to need to really work hard over the next 48 to 72 hours to reach a conclusion," he said.

The draft text presents two views on the goal -- one from developing countries and another from developed countries.

The view of developing countries in the text is that trillions of dollars should be provided by developed countries every year from 2025 to 2035. Of these trillions, developed countries should contribute billions in grants or grant-equivalent terms (public funding), and the private finance (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS Assam artisans

GUWAHATI: The PM Vishwakarma Scheme has emerged as successful for artisans and small-scale entrepreneurs in Assam, with over 6.88 lakh registrations recorded as of November 15, 2024, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Thursday. Talking to the micro-blogging site X, Sarma stated, "In Assam, over 6 lakh registrations have been made and close to 50,000 trainings completed." Launched to empower traditional artisans and micro-entrepreneurs, the scheme has significantly enhanced livelihoods through skill development and financial support. The chief minister lauded the initiative for its transformative impact, highlighting that 48,787 individuals in Assam have successfully completed basic training under the program.

One held

GUWAHATI: In a decisive step against counterfeit currency operations, the Special Task Force (STF) of Assam Police apprehended an individual involved in the circulation of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN), the police officials informed on Thursday. Taking to the micro-blogging site X, the STF Assam stated, "Operation Update: Acting on an intel, a team of STF led by Insp. Kapil Pathak conducted a targeted operation against FICN (Fake Indian Currency Notes) at Downtown under Dispur PS." The operation, led by Inspector Kapil Pathak, was conducted at Downtown under the jurisdiction of Dispur Police Station based on credible intelligence inputs. During the targeted raid, the STF team seized several items connected to the illegal operation. The haul included FICN worth ₹ 5,67,000, a fake currency printing machine, a mobile phone, and a two-wheeler.

Adani group firms' combined mcap plunges by massive ₹ 2.19 lakh cr

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: The combined market valuation of all ten listed Adani group firms fell sharply by ₹ 2.19 lakh crore on Thursday, more than double of what the conglomerate had lost when the US short seller Hindenburg brought out a damning report in January 2023.

Shares of Adani group firms fell sharply as billionaire Gautam Adani was charged by US prosecutors for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay USD 265 million (about ₹ 2,200 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts.

The stock of the group's flagship firm, Adani Enterprises, plunged 22.61 per cent, Adani Energy Solutions tanked 20 per cent, Adani Green Energy plummeted 18.80 per cent, Adani Ports dived 13.53 per cent, Ambuja Cements cracked 11.98 per cent, and Adani Total Gas tumbled 10.40 per cent on the BSE.

Shares of Adani Wilmar de-



clined 9.98 per cent, Adani Power slumped 9.15 per cent, ACC fell 7.29 per cent, and NDTV dipped 0.06 per cent.

Some of the group firms also hit their lowest trading permissible limit for the day during the day.

The combined market capitalisation (mcap) of all ten listed group firms eroded by ₹ 2,19,878.35 crore.

which triggered a massive sell-off in its group stocks," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

Adani, India's second-richest man, and seven others, including his nephew Sagar, have been charged with paying bribes to unidentified officials of state governments in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha to buy expensive solar power, potentially earning more than USD 2 billion profit over 20 years. Adani group on Thursday denied charges of paying bribes to secure favourable terms for solar power contracts, saying the allegations by US prosecutors are baseless and the conglomerate is compliant with all laws.

It said all possible legal recourse will be sought.

"The allegations made by the US Department of Justice and the US Securities and Exchange Commission against directors of Adani Green are baseless and denied," the group spokesperson said in a statement. (PTI)

Sensex, Nifty tumble amid broad-based selloff; Adani group stocks nosedive

MUMBAI, Nov 21: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled on Thursday amid a sharp fall in Adani group stocks after billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani was charged in the US for alleged bribery and fraud.

Besides, relentless foreign fund outflows and weak trends in Asian and European peers also dragged benchmark indices lower.

The BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 422.59 points or 0.54 per cent to settle at 77,155.79. During the day, it lost 775.65 points or 0.99 per cent to 76,802.73.

As many as 2,736 stocks declined, while 1,237 advanced and 92 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty slumped 168.60 points or 0.72 per cent to 23,349.90.

"The domestic market faced renewed pressure due to escalating tensions in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and heightened nuclear concerns. Additionally, the fresh Adani case with the US DOJ added to the market's woes.

"Although there were signs of a slowdown in FII selling, it surged again, adversely affecting market sentiment, particularly in financials sector. We expect an improvement in the trend when global & domestic political issues stabilise," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share Sensex pack, Adani Ports tumbled over 13 per cent after Gautam Adani was charged by US prosecutors over his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 265 million bribes to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts.

All other Adani group stocks, including Adani Enterprises, Adani Energy Solutions, Adani Ports and Adani Green Energy, fell sharply by up to nearly 23 per cent.

State Bank of India, NTPC, ITC, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv were also among the major laggards.

In contrast, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement, HCL Technologies and Axis Bank were among the gainers.

The BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.67 per cent, and the midcap index dipped 0.37 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, services slumped 4.14 per cent, utilities (3.16 per cent), commodities (1.55 per cent), oil & gas (1.45 per cent), power (1.34 per cent) and auto (0.91 per cent).

On the other hand, healthcare, IT, realty and tech were the gainers.

"Several banking stocks came under heavy selling pressure as investor concerns grew over their exposure to Adani Group companies. We expect positive for telecom companies as the Supreme Court ruled in their favour, granting them the right to claim tax credits on duties paid for infrastructure components like



tower parts and green shelters," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

The Indian stock markets were closed on Wednesday due to assembly elections in Maharashtra.

"While the market has been in the midst of a bear hug for the past few weeks, today's fall can also be attributed to the news of the Adani group facing bribery charges, which triggered a massive sell-off in its group stocks. Besides the news, most of the Asian and European markets were in negative territories, which also weighed on the sentiment," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower, while Shanghai ended higher.

European markets were trading in the negative territory. The US markets ended mostly in the positive zone.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 1.13 per cent to USD 73.71 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 3,411.73 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

"Markets are likely to react to the preliminary release of November month manufacturing and services PMI of the US, Europe and India tomorrow. In the near term, we expect the market to remain volatile on account of global geo-political concerns, relentless FII selling and uncertainty around the outcome of state assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand," Khemka said.

Snapping its four days of decline, the BSE benchmark Sensex had climbed 239.37 points or 0.31 per cent to settle at 77,578.38 on Tuesday. The Nifty also bounced back on Tuesday after falling in the past seven trading days. It rose 64.70 points or 0.28 per cent to settle at 23,518.50. (PTI)

OPPO Find X8 Series launched

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 21: OPPO India announced the launch of OPPO Find X8 Series in India on Thursday.

The new Find X8 Series boasts the flagship MediaTek Dimensity 9400 SoC, a path-breaking quad-camera system with two telephoto snappers, a high-density quick-charging Silicon Carbide battery, and ColorOS 15 (based on Android 15) with a host of AI features for photography and productivity – all in an IP68 and IP69-rated durable yet lightweight build.

The series comprises Find X8 Pro, priced at ₹ 99,999 for 16GB RAM + 512GB storage, and the standard Find X8 in two storage variants: 12GB + 256GB at ₹ 69,999 and 16GB + 512GB at ₹ 79,999.

"With the Find X8 Series, OPPO has redefined what smartphones can achieve. The Find X8 and Find X8 Pro blend elegance with cutting-edge engineering to deliver ultra-grade cameras for professional-level photography, ultra-long-lasting battery life for uninterrupted use, and ultra-powerful performance to handle the most demanding tasks with ease," said Pete Lau, SVP and chief product officer, OPPO.

"All these breakthroughs are powered by the advanced ColorOS 15 with OPPO AI that transform everyday tasks into seamless and intuitive experiences. Our partnerships with industry leaders have ensured the Find X8 Series represents the pinnacle of technology and craftsmanship. Together, these innovations establish the Find X8 Series as the new global benchmark for smartphone excellence, setting a higher standard for what users can expect from their devices," a release stated.

All devices will be available from December 3 on the OPPO e-store, Flipkart, and across mainline retail outlets, it further said.

US regulators seek to break up Google, forcing Chrome sale as part of monopoly punishment

WASHINGTON, Nov 21: US regulators want a federal judge to break up Google to prevent the company from continuing to squash competition through its dominant search engine after a court found it had maintained an abusive monopoly over the past decade.

The proposed breakup floated in a 23-page document filed late Wednesday by the US Department of Justice calls for sweeping punishments that would include a sale of Google's industry-leading Chrome web browser and impose restrictions to prevent Android from favouring its own search engine. A sale of Chrome "will permanently stop Google's control of this critical search access point and allow rival search engines the ability to access the browser that for many users is a gateway to the internet," Justice Department lawyers argued in their filing.

Although regulators stopped short of demanding Google sell Android too, they asserted the judge should make it clear the company could still be required to divest its smartphone operating system if its oversight committee continues to see evidence of misconduct.

The broad scope of the recommended penalties underscores how severely regulators operating under President Joe Biden's administration believe Google should



be punished following an August ruling by US District Judge Amit Mehta that branded the company as a monopolist.

The Justice Department decision-makers who will inherit the case after President-elect Donald Trump takes office next year might not be as strident. The Washington, DC court hearings on Google's punishment are scheduled to begin in April and Mehta is aiming to issue his final decision before Labour Day. If Mehta embraces the government's recommendations, Google would be forced to sell its 16-year-old Chrome browser within six months of the final ruling. But the company certainly would appeal any punishment, potentially prolonging a legal tussle that has dragged on for more than four years.

Besides seeking a Chrome spin-off and a coralling of the Android software, the Justice Department wants the judge to ban Google from forging multimillion-dollar deals to lock in its dominant search engine as the default option on Apple's iPhone and other devices. It would also ban Google from favouring its own services, such as YouTube or its recently-launched artificial intelligence platform, Gemini. Regulators also want Google to license the search index data it collects from people's queries to its rivals, giving them a better chance at competing with the tech giant. On the commercial side of its search engine, Google would be required to provide more transparency into how it sets the prices that advertisers pay to be listed near the top of some targeted search results.

"The playing field is not level because of Google's conduct, and Google's quality reflects the ill-gotten gains of an advantage illegally acquired," the Justice Department asserted in its recommendations. "The remedy must close this gap and deprive Google of these advantages." It's still possible that the Justice Department could ease off attempts to break up Google, especially if Trump takes the widely expected step of replacing Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter, who was appointed by Biden to oversee the agency's antitrust division. (AP)

Contd. from Page 1.

Bribery charge: Gautam

elaborate scheme" and sought to "enrich themselves at the expense of the integrity of our financial markets". US prosecutors charged Adani, 62, and seven others, including nephew Sagar, executives at Adani Green Energy and former employees of a Canadian pension fund, for paying over USD 250 million in bribes between 2020 and 2024.

Gautam and Sagar Adani are accused of persuading investors to buy their company's bonds by misrepresenting "not only that Adani Green had a robust anti-bribery compliance programme but also that the company's senior management had not and would not pay or promise to pay bribes".

Adani, chairman of the ports-to-energy Adani Group, his nephew Sagar R Adani, who is an executive director at the conglomerate's renewable energy arm Adani Green Energy Ltd, and its former CEO Vneet Jaan were charged with securities fraud, securities fraud conspiracy and wire fraud conspiracy. The Adanis were also charged in a US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) civil case. The five-count indictment also accuses Sagar and Jaan of breaking federal laws.

The US authorities also charged three former employees of a large Canadian pension fund, CDPQ, in connection with the alleged scheme, saying they obstructed an investigation into the bribes by deleting emails and agreeing to provide false information to the US government. CDPQ, which invests in infrastructure projects, is a shareholder in Adani companies.

The indictment may throw the conglomerate again in turmoil just as it rebounded from US short seller Hindenburg Research's damning fraud allegations. Hindenburg's allegations of "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud" in January 2023 had led to the conglomerate seeing a USD 150 billion wipeout in market value at its lowest point. The group stocks have since recovered most of the losses. Adani Group had denied all allegations made by Hindenburg. (PTI)

Karimganj district renamed

the district would reflect the expectations and aspirations of the people of the district, he had said. "We will continue to change the names that do not have any dictionary reference or any other historical evidence. We have been doing this for a long time and it is a continuous process," Sarma said. Renaming the district will give it a distinct identity, justifying its rich cultural heritage, the CM had added. (PTI)

PM Modi meets top

added. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the two leaders emphasised the importance of "strengthening economic cooperation" and agreed to expand bilateral cooperation in areas including defence and security, trade & commerce, agriculture, digital initiatives including UPI, ICT, healthcare, traditional medicine and pharmaceuticals, capacity building, human resource development, cultural and people-to-people engagements.

The Prime Minister said he had a "very fruitful" meeting with his counterpart from Trinidad & Tobago Keith Rowley and added that the two leaders talked about how to diversify bilateral trade linkages.

"Areas like science, healthcare, education, renewable energy and agriculture offer great potential for cooperation. It is a matter of immense joy that Trinidad & Tobago has adopted UPI. The signing of the MoU relating to agro and food processing is also a welcome step," he added in another post on X.

The MEA said in a separate post that the two leaders also witnessed the exchange of an MoU on setting up Integrated Automatic Fruit and Vegetable Primary Processing Activities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Modi also had a "very good meeting" with Barbados Prime Minister Mottley, during which the talks between the two leaders covered areas such as science and technology, healthcare, education, climate change and agriculture.

The MEA added in a post on X: "This high-level engagement provided an opportunity for both leaders to reaffirm and strengthen the India-Barbados relationship while reviewing ongoing cooperation across several key areas, including health & pharma and collaboration at the United Nations." Mottley, in turn, said, the meeting focused on institutional reforms, economic collaboration, and the empowerment of the Global South.

"Key discussions included political support for reforms, potential collaborations in the pharmaceutical industry, and the idea of establishing a Caribbean bank," she said in a post on X.

Modi had a "fruitful discussion focused on strengthening economic ties, climate change action and green partnerships" with his Bahamas counterpart Philip Brave Davis.

"The leaders also exchanged views on the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign," the MEA said in a separate post on X. (PTI)

Extend AFSPA to entire

the Kuki legislators including five of the BJP and two of JD(U). The 10 tribal legislators also criticised the resolution adopted by the MLAs of the ruling BJP-led NDA in Manipur, calling for a "mass operation" against the Kuki militants responsible for killing three women and three children in Jiribam district within seven days. The Kuki legislators alleged that the resolution was "divisive, one-sided and communal".

They also claimed that the resolution seeking the handing over of cases relating to the death of six civilians to NIA "smacks of a communalised state". "We recommend that all civilian killings from the 3rd of May, 2023, both in the valley and hills be handed over to the NIA," they added. (PTI)

Gandhi seeks Adani's

work for a profit. It is a virtuous cycle which is negative for the country," he said. Gandhi said criminality and corruption are two different issues. "But if Adani is working under due process, we don't have a problem," the senior Congress leader said. "It is up to the government to investigate. Catch Adani and put him behind bars." Gandhi claimed the retail and small investors would suffer losses because of this and stressed that it was his job as the leader of opposition to warn them. He said investigations should cover all states, irrespective of which party was in power. "It is now pretty clear and established in the US that Mr Adani has broken both American and Indian laws. I'm wondering why Adani is running around a free man," he said. The former Congress chief said while chief ministers have been arrested for smaller allegations, Adani has been involved in a ₹ 2,000 crore scam and he is still going scot-free.

Gandhi said the charges made by US prosecutors against Adani and his associates "is a vindication of what we have been saying". Accusing Prime Minister Modi of protecting Adani, the former Congress chief said, "The PM is clearly protecting him. It is my job to raise this issue. We want Adani to be arrested immediately."

"We want to show the country that Adani ji will not be arrested because the PM is protecting him," he said, adding, "Even after a scam of ₹ 2,000 crore, I guarantee he will neither be arrested nor will there be any probe against him." Asked about some states ruled by non-BJP parties being named by the US prosecutors, he said, "Wherever this has happened, be it any government, there should be an investigation. But the one involved in the corruption should be jailed." (PTI)

Delhi HC refuses to

agency's complaint in the money laundering case. The high court refused to stay the trial court proceedings at the moment in the criminal case. While Kejriwal was granted interim bail by the Supreme Court on July 12 in the money laundering case, the apex court released him on bail in the CBI case on September 13.

According to the CBI and the ED, irregularities were committed while modifying the excise policy and undue favours were extended to the licence holders. The Delhi government implemented the policy on November 17, 2021, and scrapped it by the end of September 2022 amid allegations of corruption. The money laundering case stems from a CBI case lodged after Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended a probe into the alleged irregularities in the implementation of the excise policy (PTI)

LP teachers in KA

completed within seven days starting today. If this assurance is not fulfilled within the given time frame, we will be forced to launch another protest," said the teacher, requesting anonymity.

CM unveils Kachari

communities." In line with this commitment, he mentioned that several tribal freedom fighters from the Northeast, including Dimas leader Sambhudhan Phonglo, Rani Gaidinliu of Nagaland, Bir Tikendrajit Singh of Manipur, Ratanmani Reang of Tripura, Helen Lepcha of Sikkim, U Tirot Sing Syiem of Meghalaya, Ropuliani of Mizoram, and Moje Riba of Arunachal Pradesh, have been honoured with statues at the Amrit Udyan in Hengrabari, Guwahati.

Alongside the sculpture, several newly developed facilities, including a command and control centre, cafeteria, digital corridor, and smart pole were unveiled. Additionally, Sarma highlighted the establishment of the Department of Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture, reflecting the present state government's commitment to preserving the traditions and beliefs of the indigenous communities of the region.

KAAC to build new

visit was by Dr. Virendra Kumar, Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, who toured the Same-lango Aspirational Block and inspected PMGAY houses and JIM water supply schemes," MP Tisso said.

MP Tisso further highlighted that Dr Kumar advocated for advancements in agriculture and education in Karbi Anglong. He also mentioned that Karbi Anglong currently has four Ekal Vidyalayas for tribal children, and ten more such schools will be set up in the district.

Regarding the construction of the bungalows and quarters for EMs and MACs, MP Tisso noted that the project is funded through the Chief Minister's Special Fund. KAAC has a total of 26 elected members (MACs) and 4 nominated MACs.

The chairman and deputy chairman are elected from among the 26 MACs, while the Executive Committee (EC) consists of 13 executive members (EMs) headed by the chief executive member (CEM).

COP29 produces streamlined

mobilized to meet the goal should not create debt. They say that developing countries willing to support other developing countries should do so voluntarily. This voluntary support will not be included in the climate finance package. They also suggest setting up burden-sharing arrangements to determine how much each developed country will contribute, based on historical emissions and GDP per capita. The second option, reflecting developed countries' perspective, presents two positions: one is that global climate finance will reach a trillion-dollar figure per year by 2035, though still unspecified, with the funds coming from all sources.

This option doesn't factor in Article 9 of the Paris Agreement, which mandates developed nations to provide financial support. This means asking some wealthier, high-emitting developing nations to contribute to climate finance. Their second view factors in Article 9 and calls for a goal that collectively mobilises an amount greater than USD 100 billion per annum by 2035 for developing countries from a wide range of sources and instruments, including public and private. (PTI)

Celebrations highlight the importance of youth engagement, gender equality & legal support for children

State celebrates World Children's Day

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 21: UNICEF Assam, in association with the Directorate of Sports and Youth Welfare, government of Assam, and the Brahmaputra Volleyball League (BVL), celebrated World Children's Day on Thursday with an exhibition volleyball match symbolising the importance of young people, especially girls, being at the forefront of climate action, driving change as a team for future generations.

The day coincides with the launch of UNICEF's global flagship State of the World's Children 2024 report, 'The Future of Childhood in a Changing World', which delves deep into the global megatrends shaping our lives—climate crisis, demographic transition, and frontier technologies. At the event, speakers highlighted the cause of children's rights and how sports can inspire people to take constructive action to preserve the climate for future generations in Assam.

The event was addressed by Mukesh Chandra Sahu, IAS, principal secretary, Department of Women & Child Development, government of Assam; Kausar Jamil Hilaly, IAS, secretary, Sports & Youth Welfare Department, government of Assam; Abhijit Bhattacharya, founder and former member of the Indian Volleyball team; Nahid Afrin, UNICEF youth advocate; and Dr Madhulika Jonathan, chief of Field Office, UNICEF Assam and Northeast states.

In his keynote address, Mukesh Chandra Sahu stated, "Climate-induced economic challenges create a cycle that worsens structural oppression, including gender inequality and poverty, leading to

issues like child marriage and violations of children's rights. On World Children's Day, we must learn from volleyball, working as a team to defend every child's rights."

Kausar Jamil Hilaly, IAS, secretary of the Sports & Youth Welfare Department, Assam, emphasised young people as champions of change. He said, "Sports ignite joy and inspire us to achieve our beliefs. Climate action is crucial, as it affects our children's future and their rights to a quality life. Like volleyball, tackling climate policy requires a strong serve from both government and people, solid passes, and teamwork."

Dr Madhulika Jonathan, UNICEF Assam chief, emphasised the need for collective youth action on climate. "UNICEF is committed to prioritising children's climate resilience and ensuring access to education and healthcare. Our partnerships with the Departments of Women and Child Development and Sports and Youth Welfare are vital in bridging capacity gaps to minimise climate change's impact on children, especially adolescent girls. Through the Brahmaputra Volleyball League, UNICEF aims to challenge societal norms, advocate for girls' rights, expand their education, and inspire leadership within the league and beyond."

UNICEF youth advocate Nahid Afrin said, "Every child deserves a future that starts with a safe environment. Climate change and social issues like child marriage are interconnected, particularly affecting girls during crises. Policymakers must address this link and create climate action frameworks that prioritise gender equity, ensuring no girl is left behind in



the fight for a sustainable world. I wish this campaign great success."

Our Hojai correspondent adds: The Family Strengthening Program of SOS Children's Village, Hojai, marked the conclusion of Child Safety Week with the celebration of Universal Children's Day on Wednesday. Throughout the week, various activities were organised for children across the FS Clusters, including Dhanuhas Basti, Hira Basti, Milik Basti, and Hawaipur.

The theme for the drawing competition was 'Green and Clean Environment', aimed at raising awareness among children about the significance of climate change and the value of maintaining a clean and green environment. Outstanding performers were recognised with tokens of appreciation on Children's Day by the day's distinguished guests.

Among the guests were Merlin Hazarika, secretary of DLSA Hojai; Chaturthi Biswas, chairman of Hojai Mu-

nicipality; and the headmasters of Tetulitola ME School and Jankalayna LP School. Children from all clusters actively participated in the event. The secretary of DLSA Hojai also conducted an awareness session on the POSCO Act, emphasising its provisions for the safeguarding of children.

The chairman of Hojai Municipality and other guests encouraged the children to remember their responsibilities and to cultivate self-discipline to become exemplary citizens of India, thereby inspiring their community. Chittaranjan, assistant director of SOS CV Hojai, spoke about the significance of the day, focusing on child rights and the role of the Bal Panchayat in the community. Chitralekha Gogoi, village in-charge of SOS CV Hojai, discussed the importance of the FS program and how children can leverage it for personal and community development while fulfilling their responsibilities.

The children showcased a variety of cultural performances, including solo and group dances, solo and group songs, and a drama addressing the detrimental effects of child marriage and honouring the dedication of the armed forces. These performances received widespread acclaim from the audience.

The program was coordinated by animators Sima Nayak, Hematin Sahu, Radharani Das, Shiuli Das, Namita Sahu, Mira Devi, and Sala Kumari Devi, with caregiver Mayarani Das serving as the anchor. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Niranjan Das, sr CWO of SOS CV Hojai.

Our Jorhat correspondent adds: An interaction programme between children from across the district and officials of the district administration, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), and various government departments and agencies was held at the Conference Hall of the Jorhat DC office complex on Wednesday to observe World Children's Day.

The event was organised by the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Jorhat, and 'Bal Raksha Bharat' (Save The Children). After the welcome and introductory speech delivered by the district facilitator of Bal Raksha Bharat, Mriganku Bahak, the child participants (school students up to class 12), who were termed as 'adolescent leaders', spoke on a wide range of topics. They spoke about their experiences regarding their activities and the challenges they face in their localities. The child participants also submitted a charter of demands (memorandum), consisting of a set of suggestions, to the district administration, which was accepted by the chief

executive officer (CEO) of Jorhat Zila Parishad, Bipul Kumar Das, and DLSA secretary-cum-judicial officer of Jorhat, Devojioti Bhuyan, on behalf of the administration.

The charter included suggestions by the children on ways to improve educational and social conditions in the district. Having a community library and a community playground for the overall development of children were two important demands in the charter.

It may be mentioned here that to commemorate the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989, World Children's Day is observed on November 20 every year. DLSA secretary-cum-judicial officer Devojioti Bhuyan, in his address, spoke at length about the legal system and the legal support available to children as per the provisions of the law for the protection and development of children.

Childline coordinator Avisikha Saikia explained the system and process of Childline and the hotline number 1098, while Snigdha Dutta Baruah, child protection officer of the DCPU, explained the sponsorship programme. Sanjukta Bhuyan from the Office of the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO) spoke about the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' and other government schemes. Former Jorhat Press Club president Diganta Buragohain, and a former AASU leader and journalist, now Devajit Baruah, were amongst the speakers.

Swapnali Bhuyan, another child protection officer of the DCPU, offered the vote of thanks.

Youth attacked by alleged timber smugglers

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, Nov 21: Anil Thapa (23), a youth from Hawang in West Karbi Anglong, was injured in an attack by alleged timber smugglers on suspicion of informing the Forest Department on Wednesday night. The victim, who was attacked with a dao, is undergoing treatment at NEIGHMS in Meghalaya, forest officials told reporters. On the same night, forest officials successfully seized a pickup truck (ML 05 S 8710) and another pickup without a registration plate, both loaded with blocks of timber, at Umjakini, West Karbi Anglong.

In this regard, a social worker from the area, Longki Bey, stated that the Forest Protection Force should be deployed in Amri and Chinthong, bordering Meghalaya, in West Karbi Anglong. He alleged that some local ruling BJP party members are brokering for the timber mafia involved in illegal tree felling and smuggling activities to Meghalaya.

Khatkhati police seize 50 kg opium in KA

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Nov 21: Khatkhati police in Karbi Anglong, in an operation under the instructions of Bokajan SDPO Rustam Raj Brahma and under the leadership of Khatkhati Police Station in-charge Nitul Saikia, caught a person red-handed with a huge quantity of opium.

During their daily naka checking on National Highway 39, the police examined a truck (number AS 01 RC 3587) coming from Dimapur and heading towards Guwahati. They found a total of forty-eight packets of opium in a secret chamber built in the upper part of the truck's cabin.

In this regard, the police arrested the driver of the vehicle, identified as Gokul Podal, son of Bishnu Lal Podal of Senapati, Manipur.

The total weight of the seized opium is 50.20 kg, with a market value of ₹ 2.50 crores.

Minor girl missing from Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Nov 21: A 14-year-old minor girl, a resident of No 1 Maulang village under Ledo Police Outpost in the Margherita co-district, has been missing for the past 20 days.

The girl was reportedly taken to Maruwa village in Namsai District, Arunachal Pradesh, by a woman named Purnima Munglung.

The woman had convinced the family to let her take Arati Munda, promising to provide education and care.

On November 1, the family was informed that Arati had gone missing from Namsai on October 30.

The family suspects that the girl may have been trafficked.

Meanwhile, the family has also filed a report at the Ledo Police Outpost under Margherita co-district, but till now, no clues have been found.

Dima Hasao Congress holds candlelight vigil for peace in Manipur



HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Nov 21: The Dima Hasao District Congress Committee (DHDCC) organised a heartfelt prayer session and candle-lighting ceremony to invoke peace and prosperity in the conflict-stricken state of Manipur. The program took place at the Old Boat House, located near the Council Rotary in Haflong, and was marked by an atmosphere of solemnity and unity.

The event saw the participation of senior Congress leaders, party members, and concerned citizens from various walks of life. With the ongoing unrest and challenges faced by the people of Manipur, the program aimed to express solidarity and offer prayers for harmony and well-being in the region.

The ceremony began with a collective prayer led by

prominent leaders of the district Congress. Attendees, holding lit candles, stood in silent tribute to the spirit of peace and the hope for reconciliation. The Old Boat House, with its serene surroundings, provided a fitting backdrop for the occasion, enhancing the solemnity of the moment.

Speaking at the gathering, senior leaders Nirmal Langthasa, Mihir Gorlosa, Kalijoy Sengyung, and H Jeme emphasised the importance of unity and compassion during times of crisis. They urged everyone to remember the values of humanity and peace, which are essential for overcoming turmoil and rebuilding a prosperous future for Manipur.

"This program is our way of showing that we stand with the people of Manipur in their time of need. Through prayer and unity, we hope to send a message of hope and healing," one of the senior Congress leaders remarked.

The attendees also reflected on the urgent need for collective efforts to restore normalcy in Manipur, appealing to all sections of society to work towards peace. The candle-lighting ceremony concluded with a pledge to continue advocating for harmony and development in the region.

The DHDCC's initiative was appreciated by many, as it highlighted the importance of empathy and solidarity in addressing the challenges faced by neighbouring states.

Deomornoi Degree College celebrates World Philosophy Day

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAL, Nov 21: The Philosophy department of Deomornoi Degree College, in collaboration with the college's IQAC Cell, commemorated World Philosophy Day on Thursday. A workshop involving all the college's students and professors was organised as part of the event. Dr Gitali Kalita, the college principal, officially inaugurated the program, following an address by Dr Manoj Kr Sarma, head of the

Philosophy department, who outlined its objectives.

The first lecture, titled 'Philosophy Bridging the Gaps', was delivered by Mohibul Islam, an assistant professor in the English department. In his remarks, Islam encouraged students to focus on value education. Dikshita Kashyap, a fifth-semester student, delivered an insightful talk on the topic.

Following the workshop, students participated in an open quiz

contest conducted by Mainul Haque, an assistant professor in the department of Political Science. More than fifty students took part in the competition, where Chayanika Deka secured the first prize, while Pulakesh Sarma and Janki Kalita won second and third positions, respectively.

Nilima Baruah, an assistant professor in the Philosophy department, concluded the event by delivering a vote of thanks.

Lightning detector installed at MSSV, Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Nov 21: A significant step towards enhancing weather monitoring and atmospheric sciences research in the region was recently taken with the installation of a 'lightning detector' at Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon campus. This state-of-the-art equipment, provided by the North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) under the Department of Space, government of India, will enable real-time monitoring of lightning activity in the area. This significant initiative was led by the vice-chancellor, Dr Mrdul Hazarika, registrar, Dr Sarat Hazarika, joint registrar, Dr Nayan Moni Saikia, and deputy registrar, Dr Bichitra Bikash of the university.

To mark this remarkable occasion, a special invited talk was organised on Thursday by the department of Physics in collaboration with the IQAC of the university on 'Lightning Physics and Observational Techniques' at the conference hall of the university. The invited talk was delivered by Dr Abhay Srivastava, a noted scientist at NESAC. Dr Srivastava's insightful presentation shed light on the complex phenomenon of lightning, its formation, and the advanced techniques used to study it.

OSOP outlets turn NFR stations into hubs of heritage & craft

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 21: The One Station One Product (OSOP) outlets have been thriving across various stations under the jurisdiction of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), transforming railway stations into vibrant hubs for promoting and selling local and indigenous products. These outlets not only provide a platform to showcase the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the region but also bring about a significant positive impact on the livelihoods of local artisans and vendors along with their families. Apart from creating financial security and sustainable livelihoods, the OSOP scheme has become a catalyst for empowering communities and preserving indigenous crafts.

Train passengers can now explore the rich heritage of local handicrafts, handloom products, cotton items, and other handmade artifacts



at the OSOP outlets during their journey stopovers. This initiative empowers local artisans to showcase and market their products while promoting the #Vocal4Local mission.

District-level training on child protection held in Baksa

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Nov 21: A district-level training programme on child protection issues and non-institutional care services for school teachers was held on Thursday at the conference hall of the SDO (Civil), Salbari, in Baksa district.

The event was organised by the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Baksa, with support from the State Child Protection Society (SCPS), Assam. Teachers from Jalah and Gabardhana education blocks in Baksa district participated in the programme.

Nilotpal Pathak, ADC, IC (C), Salbari, inaugurated the programme and delivered the wel-

come address. In his speech, he emphasised the importance of such training for teachers to safeguard children in difficult circumstances. "Teachers are the first line of defense for children facing vulnerabilities. This training will empower them to recognise and address child protection concerns effectively," said Pathak.

Nilankar Das, ACS, assistant commissioner, Salbari, also addressed the gathering, shedding light on child protection challenges in the area and highlighting the critical role of teachers in ensuring children's safety.

Dr Lipika Barman, in-charge district child protection officer, Baksa, provided an overview of key child protection laws, includ-

ing the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.

A session on child psychology and fostering healthy teacher-student relationships was conducted by Dr Purnima Pegu, clinical psychologist. Additionally, Kankan Kumar Bhuyan, protection officer (Non-Institutional Care), DCPU Baksa, discussed the available non-institutional care services for children in need.

More than 50 school teachers from the two education blocks participated in the programme, which aimed to equip educators with the knowledge and skills to identify and address child protection concerns effectively.

Wild elephants rescued

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Nov 21: Four wild elephants, including a calf, which had fallen into a large ditch at Sinatoli Dishingia Gaon near Mariani here, were rescued by the staff of the Mariani Forest Range Office under Jorhat Forest Division in the wee hours on Thursday. A Forest Department source said that the elephants had fallen into a pond-like structure that was filled with water, and the Mariani forest range personnel, with the aid of a JCB, created a sloping road to the water body over which the elephants clambered out. A source said that the water body was created due to digging by a brick kiln owner. The source further said that two adult elephants had earlier managed to get out on their own.

Green Leaf Foundation hosts livestock care awareness prog in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Nov 21: Under the aegis of the Green Leaf Foundation, an awareness meeting-cum-training program on 'Care and Treatment of Domesticated Animals and Birds during Winter' was recently organised at Village No 1 Bhombabil in Kokrajhar district.

The meeting-cum-training program dwelt at length on the challenges faced by domesticated animals and birds in the rural regions of Lower Assam during the winter months. The lack of proper care and sufficient medical treatment often results in significant losses for many farmers and livestock owners, occasionally leading to serious financial difficulties. To address this issue and improve awareness about the care and treatment of livestock during this season, the training program was organised in collaboration with Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Agricultural Science Centre), Telipara. Dr Tarani Kanta Kalita, veterinary development officer of the Gossaigaon sub-division, attended the program as the chief trainer. He delivered an extensive speech on the scientific rearing and care of domesticated animals and birds such as cows, goats, ducks, and chickens. He encouraged the women participants to adopt scientific livestock practices to achieve financial self-reliance.

Dr Muzaharul Islam, a subject matter expert in animal science at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Kokrajhar, also attended as a distinguished guest. He emphasised the importance of training in livestock rearing and urged women participants to acquire training in various fields like livestock farming and agriculture to achieve profitability.

Dr Pankaj Chakraborty, a veterinary doctor from the Gossaigaon State Veterinary Hospital, discussed common diseases affecting domesticated animals and birds such as cows, goats, ducks, and chickens, along with their remedies. At the end of the awareness meeting and training session, medicines for treating common diseases of animals and birds were distributed to around 28 self-help group members from No 1 Bhombabil, No 2 Bhombabil, and No 3 Dawaguri villages under the initiative of the Gossaigaon sub-division Livestock and Veterinary Department.

The event was attended by approximately 150 people, including members from 28 self-help groups, the secretary of the Village Defense Party of No 1 Bhombabil, and several other guests.

Rashtrabhakti Utsav celebrated with patriotic fervour

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 21: Shree Hari Satsang Samiti, Purvottar, organised the 'Rashtrabhakti Utsav' at the Machkhowa ITA Centre in Guwahati. International artist Baba Satyanarayan Mourya and his team mesmerised the gathering with their patriotic performances. Baba Mourya surprised everyone by painting pictures of great personalities like Sri-manta Sankardev, Bharat Mata, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ram, Lord Hanuman, etc. During the program, the entire atmosphere echoed with slogans like 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and 'Vande Mataram'. The program started with the lighting of lamps by the guests. Chairman Ajit Kumar Jana, while welcoming all the mem-

bers present in the auditorium, also highlighted the historic success of the 'Rashtrabhakti Utsav' conducted by Baba Mourya in different districts of Assam recently. Thereafter, program coordinator Vivek Jalan presented an overview of the programs completed so far in the 'Rashtrabhakti Utsav' series, which has been ongoing since November 8, through a PowerPoint presentation. He informed the audience that seven programs have been organised so far in locations such as Limbuguri Tea Estate Field, Diryal Tea Estate Field, TDA of Tinsukia District Auditorium, Amguri in Sivasagar district, Dirai Tea Estate in Dibrugarh district, Doni-Polo Complex in Silapathar, and Bokakhat Natya Mandir in Bokakhat.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams - Eleanor Roosevelt

Change in pricing mechanism needed

Centre and State governments in India are in need of raising both tax and non-tax revenue, dismantling the administered pricing mechanism, reducing subsidies, and reorienting expenditure toward national and state-level priorities. This is essential to ensure India remains on a sustainable fiscal path with higher growth, given the high public debt at the Centre and state level. It is the conclusion of a recent IMF working paper titled "Growth Convergence and Public Finances of India and its States" prepared by the authors Rajan Govil and Khyati Chauhan. Additionally, the paper says that there is a lack of convergence in per capita income across Indian states which requires greater resources for lower-income states for investment and improved public services. The observed wide differences in fiscal parameters across states require a tailored policy for each state. The large stock of debt of several states puts at risk the adequate financing of growth-enhancing expenditures. The paper notes that overall general government revenue has been stagnant over the last three decades at a low of 20% of GDP leading to inadequate availability of resources for development and investment purposes. Expenditure at 30% of GDP has meant a large fiscal deficit of 9.5% of GDP and a public debt of 82% of GDP in FY2023, leaving only some fiscal space.

Indian states combined account for around 60% of total general government (central and states) expenditures amounting to about 18% of GDP in FY2023. The majority of capital expenditure is undertaken at the state level although the gap has narrowed in recent years as some capital expenditure undertaken by state-owned enterprises has been brought on to the central government budget. Fiscal developments at the state level therefore have a substantial bearing on economic developments in each of the states as well as the country as a whole. We find that several of the lower income states have built up a high debt/GDP ratio, leading to their limited ability to increase expenditure on development and investment, the authors said, adding that fiscal consolidation is needed although this may come at the cost of slower economic growth. In addition to the redistribution of revenue through the Finance Commission Awards, the central government has deployed additional schemes, such as the Central Sector Scheme and the Centrally Sponsored Schemes, to support states' development needs, and has recently provided interest-free loans to support states' public investment. Still, we find that states with low per capita income have little fiscal space as they are running large fiscal deficits to meet their capital expenditure requirements and have built up large outstanding liabilities that need to be reduced. Interest expenditure on general government borrowings is high at 5% of GDP or about 25% of total revenues, restricting availability of resources for development and investment purposes. While the fiscal deficit was higher in FY2023 by 3.1% of GDP compared with FY2019 and mainly driven by higher expenditure, the consolidated public debt increased by 12% of GDP during this period to 82% of GDP in FY2023. The states' share in total taxes collected by the central government have however declined from 4% of GDP in FY2019 before the pandemic to 3.5% of GDP in FY2023, while the central government's share has increased during this period from about 7% of GDP to 7.7% of GDP. This decline in the states share mainly reflects an increase in non-shareable cesses and surcharges.

Domestic violence: A silent epidemic in Assam



Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Assam, and it has emerged as a silent epidemic that continues to undermine the social fabric of the state. Despite its prevalence, domestic violence remains a taboo subject, shrouded in silence and stigma, which often prevents victims from seeking help or reporting their experiences. This silence is compounded by societal norms that prioritize family honor over individual well-being, leading to an environment where abuse is tolerated and victims are left to suffer in isolation.

The roots of domestic violence in Assam can be traced to deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and gender inequality. Traditional gender roles dictate that women should be submissive and dependent on their male counterparts, making them vulnerable to abuse. Cultural practices and beliefs often reinforce the idea that a woman's primary responsibility is to maintain the household, which can lead to a sense of helplessness in the face of violence. This systemic oppression is not only a violation of human rights but also has devastating consequences for the victims, their children, and society as a whole.

The statistics surrounding domestic violence in Assam paint a grim picture. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), a significant percentage of women in the state have experienced some form of domestic violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The data reveals a worrying trend: as awareness around domestic violence grows, so does the reporting of such incidents, yet many cases remain unreported due to fear of retribution, shame, and lack of support. Victims often endure the violence in silence, hoping that it will cease or that they will somehow find a way to cope without involving law enforcement or social services.

The legal framework addressing domestic violence in India, including Assam, has seen significant developments in recent years. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, enacted in 2005, was a landmark legislation aimed at providing

protection to women from violence within the home.

However, despite these legal provisions, implementation remains weak.

Many women are unaware of their rights under this law, and even when they seek legal recourse, they often encounter a system that is not adequately equipped to support them. Police attitudes, societal biases, and lack of training contribute to the ineffective handling of domestic violence cases, further discouraging victims from seeking help.

Moreover, the pandemic has exacerbated the situation, with lockdown measures trapping many victims in abusive environments. Reports indicate a surge in domestic violence incidents during the COVID-19 lockdown, highlighting the urgent need for resources and support systems.

Women who were already vulnerable found themselves isolated from their support networks, leading to an increase in violence and a decrease in access to essential services such as healthcare, legal assistance, and counseling.

The pandemic has underscored the urgent need for a multi-faceted response to domestic violence that includes prevention, protection, and rehabilitation.

Addressing domestic violence in Assam requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses legal reform, community awareness, and support services.

First and foremost, there is a critical need for effective implementation of existing laws and policies. This includes training law enforcement officials, legal practitioners, and healthcare providers to sensitively handle cases of domestic violence. Creating a supportive environ-

ment where victims feel safe to report their experiences is essential. Community-based interventions, such as awareness campaigns and educational programs, can help challenge the societal norms that perpetuate violence against women.

Empowerment programs for women are also crucial in combating domestic violence. Providing women with access to education, vocational training, and economic opportunities can help them gain independence and reduce their vulnerability to violence. Financial empowerment allows women to make choices that can lead to a life free from abuse. Community organizations and NGOs play a pivotal role in facilitating such programs, offering support and resources to empower women and encourage them to break the cycle of violence.

Another important aspect of addressing domestic violence is the involvement of men and boys in the conversation. Engaging men as allies in the fight against domestic violence is crucial for changing societal attitudes and norms.

Educational initiatives aimed at young boys can foster respect for women and promote healthy relationships. Encouraging open discussions about masculinity, consent, and empathy can challenge harmful stereotypes and help create a culture that rejects violence.

Support services for victims of domestic violence must be strengthened and expanded. This includes establishing crisis cen-

ters, helplines, and shelters that provide immediate assistance to those in need. Counseling and psychological support services are essential for helping survivors heal and rebuild their lives. Collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations can enhance the effectiveness of these support systems, ensuring that victims receive the comprehensive care they require.

Public awareness campaigns can play a significant role in changing perceptions around domestic violence. By promoting conversations about the issue and encouraging individuals to speak out against abuse, society can begin to dismantle the stigma surrounding domestic violence.

Awareness initiatives can also educate the public about the signs of abuse, the importance of reporting incidents, and available resources for victims. Social media platforms can be leveraged to spread awareness and create a movement that empowers individuals to stand against domestic violence.

The role of the media in addressing domestic violence is crucial. Responsible reporting can bring attention to the issue and highlight the experiences of survivors. Investigative journalism can uncover the systemic failures that allow domestic violence to persist and hold perpetrators accountable.

By amplifying the voices of survivors and providing accurate information about resources and support, the media can contribute to a cultural shift that prioritizes the safety and well-being of victims.

In Assam, traditional cultural practices should be examined critically to identify harmful norms that perpetuate domestic violence. While cultural heritage is essential, it must not come at the cost of human rights and dignity.

Communities should engage in dialogues about cultural practices that can be reformed or abandoned in favor of a more equitable and just society.

These conversations can empower communities to take ownership of the changes needed to eliminate domestic violence.

Addressing domestic violence in Assam is a societal responsibility that extends beyond individual families. It requires the collective effort of government bodies, NGOs, community organizations, and individuals to create a safe and supportive environment for all.

The government must prioritize funding for programs aimed at preventing and addressing domestic violence. Increased resources for training, public awareness campaigns, and support services can facilitate significant change.

The silence surrounding domestic violence must be broken. It is imperative that society acknowledges the gravity of the issue and takes decisive action to address it.

By fostering an environment of open dialogue, support, and accountability, Assam can begin to dismantle the structures that perpetuate domestic violence and ensure a future where all individuals can live free from fear and abuse. The path to healing and empowerment starts with recognition, education, and a commitment to creating a just society that prioritizes the rights and well-being of all its members.

We can conclude in the end that, domestic violence is not merely a personal issue; it is a public health crisis and a violation of human rights that demands urgent attention. The complex interplay of cultural norms, economic factors, and inadequate legal frameworks perpetuates this silent epidemic in Assam.

Through a collaborative effort involving all stakeholders, the cycle of violence can be broken. By promoting education, raising awareness, and providing support, Assam can foster a culture that rejects domestic violence and empowers individuals to seek help and healing.

Only then can the state hope to move towards a future characterized by safety, respect, and dignity for all its residents. *(The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-Magazine SAM-PROTIK)*

Quantum computing: A new era of technology

By: Satyabrata Borah

Quantum computing is a field that is rapidly gaining attention due to its potential to revolutionize the way we process information and solve problems. The concept of quantum computing has existed for decades, but in recent years, it has moved from the realm of theoretical research into practical applications. This is due to significant advancements in technology and our understanding of quantum mechanics. As researchers continue to make strides in the development of quantum computers, it's becoming clear that this new type of computing will change many aspects of life as we know it. The possibilities are vast, and although quantum computing is still in its early stages, its impact on industries, technology, and even society as a whole will likely be profound.

At the heart of quantum computing is the principle of quantum mechanics, which governs the behavior of particles at the smallest scales. Unlike classical computers, which process information in binary form (using bits that can be either 0 or 1), quantum computers use quantum bits, or qubits. A qubit can exist in multiple states at once, thanks to the principle of superposition. This means that quantum computers can perform many calculations simultaneously, which gives them a significant advantage over traditional computers in terms of speed and computational power.

Additionally, quantum computers take advantage of entanglement, another quantum phenomenon, where the state of one qubit can be directly linked to the state of another, no matter the distance between them. This allows for incredibly fast communication and problem-solving capabilities that were previously unimaginable with classical computers.

One of the most exciting aspects of quantum computing is its potential to solve complex problems that are currently beyond the reach of traditional computers. These problems include everything from drug discovery to climate modeling, financial analysis, and even artificial intelligence. In fields like medicine, quantum computers could simulate the behavior of molecules and proteins at a level of detail that classical computers cannot achieve. This could lead to breakthroughs in

drug development and the creation of more effective treatments for diseases.

By simulating complex biochemical processes, quantum computers could help researchers design new drugs that are more targeted and less harmful to the body, speeding up the process of medical discovery.

In the field of climate science, quantum computers could help model the complex systems that govern the Earth's climate. Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges of our time, and understanding the interactions between different environmental factors is essential for making informed decisions about policy and mitigation strategies.

Quantum computers could process vast amounts of data much faster and more accurately than classical computers, allowing scientists to make more precise predictions about climate patterns and potential impacts. With this information, governments and organizations could develop more effective strategies for combating climate change and protecting the environment.

Financial institutions are also likely to see significant benefits from quantum computing. Quantum algorithms could optimize investment strategies, risk assessments, and financial forecasting in ways that are not possible with current technology. For example, quantum computers could analyze large datasets much faster than traditional computers, providing financial analysts with real-time insights into market trends and helping them make more informed decisions. They could also be used to break encryption codes, which has both positive and negative implications. On the one hand, quantum computing could lead to more secure encryption methods, but it could also make current cryptographic systems vulnerable, which raises concerns about data privacy and cybersecurity.

Quantum computing could also have a profound impact on artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. AI systems rely on large amounts of data to train algorithms and make predictions. The more data an AI system has, the more accurate and effective it can be. Quantum computers, with their ability to process massive amounts of data at once, could dramatically speed up the training of AI systems, making them smarter and more efficient.

This could lead to advancements in fields such as autonomous vehicles, robotics, and natural language processing. For example, AI systems powered by quantum computers could be used to optimize traffic flow in cities, improve the accuracy of medical diagnoses, or even develop more sophisticated virtual assistants.

Despite the many exciting possibilities, there are also challenges associated with the development of quantum computing. One of the biggest hurdles is the issue of quantum coherence. Qubits are extremely sensitive to their environment and can easily lose their quantum state due to factors like temperature, noise, and electromagnetic radiation. This phenomenon, known as decoherence, can cause errors in calculations and limit the reliability of quantum computers.

To overcome this challenge, researchers are working on developing methods to stabilize qubits and protect them from environmental interference. Several approaches, such as using superconducting materials or trapping ions, are being explored, but achieving long-lasting quantum coherence remains a significant technical challenge.

Another challenge is the issue of scaling quantum computers. While small-scale quantum computers have been built and demonstrated in labs, building large-scale quantum computers that can handle more qubits and solve more complex problems is a difficult task. Scaling up quantum computers requires overcoming issues related to error correction, qubit connectivity, and hardware limitations. Researchers are actively working on new approaches to solve these problems, but it will likely be several years, if not decades, before quantum computers are widely available and able to tackle real-world problems on a large scale.

The potential societal impact of quantum computing also raises important ethical and security concerns. For example, the ability of quantum computers to break current encryption systems could have far-reaching consequences for data privacy and cybersecurity. Sensitive information, such as financial records, medical data, and personal communications, could become vulnerable to hacking by quantum-powered computers.

This has prompted the development of quantum-resistant encryption methods, which aim to

protect data from quantum attacks. Governments and organizations around the world are investing in the research and development of quantum-safe encryption to ensure that security protocols remain effective in the age of quantum computing.

There are also concerns about the potential for job displacement as quantum computing becomes more widely adopted. While quantum computers have the potential to create new jobs and industries, they could also render certain jobs obsolete.

For example, tasks that currently require extensive computational power, such as data analysis and optimization, could be automated by quantum computers, reducing the need for human involvement. This could lead to job losses in fields like data science, finance, and even cybersecurity. To address these challenges, it will be important to invest in education and training programs that prepare the workforce for the changes brought about by quantum computing.

The rise of quantum computing could also lead to a new wave of technological innovation. As quantum computers become more powerful, they will enable the development of new technologies and applications that we can't yet fully imagine. From advancements in space exploration to new forms of communication and energy generation, quantum computing has the potential to unlock a wealth of possibilities. The key will be to harness this technology responsibly and ensure that it is used to benefit society as a whole.

While quantum computing is still in its early stages, it is clear that it will change the world in profound ways. It has the potential to solve problems that are currently beyond the capabilities of classical computers, revolutionizing fields like medicine, climate science, finance, and artificial intelligence. However, there are still many technical challenges to overcome before quantum computers can reach their full potential.

As researchers continue to make progress, it is important to consider the ethical and societal implications of this technology and work to ensure that it is developed in a way that benefits everyone. The future of quantum computing is both exciting and uncertain, but one thing is clear: it will shape the world in ways we are only beginning to understand.

The complex dynamics of expanding Assam's scheduled tribes list

By: Dipak Kurmi

The longstanding demand to expand the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list in Assam has once again emerged as a contentious issue, threatening to destabilize the delicate social fabric of the state. At the heart of the debate lies the demand for ST status by six communities - Morans, Matakas, Koch-Rajbongshis, Tai-Ahoms, Chutias, and Adivasis/Tea Tribes - against the apprehensions of existing ST groups, who fear that such an expansion might dilute their privileges, benefits, and political influence. The complexity of this issue underscores the challenges of reconciling competing aspirations within a diverse and ethnically sensitive society like Assam.

Efforts to include the six communities in the ST list have been ongoing for decades, but the introduction of The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2019, in the Rajya Sabha reignited hopes and fears in equal measure. For the six communities, the bill symbolized a long-overdue recognition of their historical and cultural identity, as well as access to benefits such as job and educational reservations. Conversely, for the existing ST groups, it signaled potential threats to their political power and access to resources. This dichotomy has entrenched the issue further, making it a litmus test for Assam's socio-political harmony.

The Administrative Framework and Its Challenges: The process of altering the ST list is far from straightforward. According to established modalities, any proposal for inclusion or exclusion must first be recommended by the state government, complete with detailed ethnographic justification. It must then secure the concurrence of the Registrar General of India and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes before it can be legislated.

While the Assam government has held consultations with stakeholders, the conditions put forth by existing ST groups - primarily to safeguard their privileges - have only added layers of complexity to an already fraught process. One of the more potent arguments advanced by proponents of

expansion is the potential to safeguard the political supremacy of Assam's indigenous population. By increasing the number of reserved seats in the state assembly, proponents argue, the dominance of indigenous communities can be solidified, countering fears of political marginalization due to demographic changes fueled by migration and population growth.

Political Aspirations and Fault Lines: However, the issue is far more nuanced than a simple question of reservation benefits. For the existing ST groups, the apprehensions are rooted in the fear of losing their political power, particularly in governance structures like autonomous councils, where seats are reserved for STs rather than specific communities. Granting ST status to new groups would enable these communities to contest and potentially dominate elections in these councils, altering the balance of power.

The political undercurrents are further intensified by electoral dynamics.

The ruling coalition's promises of expanding the ST list, especially in the run-up to elections, have raised expectations among the six communities while simultaneously fueling agitation. The lessons here are profound: making poll promises on sensitive ethnic issues without considering their complexities risks exposing permanent societal fault lines. The recent surge in protests underscores the fragility of the situation and the urgency of finding a sustainable solution.

Inclusive Development as a Pathway: While the expansion of the ST list remains a contentious issue, it also highlights the broader challenge of fostering inclusive growth in Assam. Addressing socio-economic disparities through large-scale development initiatives could provide an alternative pathway to resolving ethnic tensions.

By investing in higher education, healthcare, skill-building, rural development, and women's empowerment, the government could create opportunities that transcend ethnic divides.

Such an approach would not only enhance the quality of life for all communities but also reduce the zero-sum perception of resource allocation. If every com-

munity feels included in the benefits of growth, the apprehensions of one group losing out to another could be mitigated. This could, in turn, pave the way for dialogue on the sharing of political power, shifting the narrative from competition to collaboration.

The Importance of Dialogue and Unity: Ultimately, resolving this issue will require a carefully calibrated approach that balances the aspirations of the six communities with the concerns of existing ST groups. A critical first step would be fostering dialogue between these groups, rather than conducting separate negotiations. A unified discussion table could help build trust and consensus, allowing both sides to explore common ground on political power-sharing and resource distribution.

The role of organizations representing these communities cannot be overstated. By promoting an ethos of cooperation rather than confrontation, these groups can help create a conducive atmosphere for negotiations. Strengthening the combined electoral strength of indigenous communities, for instance, could offset the influence of immigrant populations without exacerbating intra-indigenous tensions.

The expansion of the Scheduled Tribes list in Assam is not merely an administrative decision; it is a question of identity, equity, and survival for multiple communities. Mismanagement of this issue could deepen ethnic fault lines, making peace in the state an elusive goal.

At the same time, addressing the aspirations of the six communities without alienating existing ST groups is a formidable challenge that requires innovative and inclusive solutions.

The Assam government must tread carefully, ensuring that its actions are guided by the principles of justice, inclusivity, and long-term stability. By prioritizing dialogue, fostering inclusive development, and addressing the root causes of ethnic tensions, the state can move closer to resolving this vexed issue. The stakes are high, but so is the opportunity to set a precedent for harmonious coexistence in a diverse and dynamic society. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

Which Hindus do Hindu Supremacists represent in the US? Securely operationalising IMEC and PGII: Peace-progress-prosperity from Space

By: Karthikeyan Shanmugam

In September 2022, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) filed a lawsuit against the California Civil Rights Department (CRD) in a US federal court. Ongoing for over two years, the case is scheduled for its next and possibly final hearing on December 3. Unlike the Cisco case, this lawsuit has received limited media coverage in India and the US. This case not only connects to the Cisco lawsuit but also challenges the CRD's legal authority to pursue caste discrimination cases.

The Cisco case

In June 2020, the CRD filed a lawsuit against Cisco Systems, alleging caste discrimination faced by a Dalit employee and later moved the superior court of California, Santa Clara.

Since this was a first-of-its-kind case in the US, where courts are unfamiliar with caste-based discrimination and lack precedents, the CRD clarified about caste in its filing. "As a strict Hindu social and religious hierarchy, India's caste system defines a person's status based on... the caste into which they are born — and will remain until death. At the bottom of the Indian hierarchy is the Dalit... who were traditionally subject to 'untouchability' practices which segregated them by social custom and legal mandate."

This single reference to Hinduism in the complaint serves as a contextual explanation rather than an exhaustive analysis of caste and its origins. In January 2021, the HAF filed a motion to intervene in the Cisco case on three main grounds.

First, the department's linking of caste with Hinduism could lead employers to avoid hiring Hindus, fearing potential legal issues. Second, employees may object to reporting to or working alongside colleagues of different castes, burdening employers. Third, employers may feel compelled to inquire about South Asian employees' religion, violating employees' religious freedom, protected under the First Amendment, by pressuring them to disclose their beliefs.

The HAF sought to intervene in the case on behalf of all Hindus in the US, arguing on the basis of utopian tenets — truth, non-injury, compassion, equanimity, generosity and equal regard to honour the divine in all — rather than on evidence.

In March 2021, the court put the HAF's intervention on hold since the Cisco case had undergone a stay in hearings, as the defendants appealed for direct arbitration with the victim, thereby removing the CRD from the case. It is important to note that in the Cisco case, the victim did not file the complaint; the CRD filed it on the victim's behalf. In August 2022, the appellate court rejected arbitration in the Cisco case and ruled in favour of the CRD and hearings resumed.

HAF's legal battles with CRD

In September 2022, the HAF filed a new lawsuit against the CRD in a California district court on similar grounds as it filed in the superior court. After nearly a year of hearings, in August 2023, the federal court dismissed HAF's lawsuit on two grounds. First, the HAF cannot represent all Hindus in the US and thus lacks binding authority. Second,

the CRD's efforts to end caste-based discrimination would not prevent or burden Hindu Americans from practicing their religion. However, the court allowed the HAF the opportunity to amend its filing to address the binding authority issue.

After the HAF went down in flames in federal court in the first round, it continued to intervene in the Cisco case at the Santa Clara superior court, resulting in two parallel hearings: one in federal court, where the HAF sued the CRD over its caste discrimination case and another in superior court, where the HAF sought to intervene in the ongoing Cisco litigation.

In September 2023, the HAF filed a First Amended Complaint (FAC) along with HAF-affiliated and a few non-affiliated individuals, including three anonymous ones, rather than directly sue the department. Two former defendants in the Cisco caste discrimination case, who were dismissed in April 2023, had also joined.

In January 2024, the Santa Clara superior court dismissed the HAF's intervention, concluding that "HAF's complaint does not allege any facts showing that CRD coerced anyone into doing something inimical to their religious convictions or otherwise prevented them from being able to practice their religion." The court further clarified, "The point of the lawsuit is to prevent discrimination at Cisco based on caste. It is hard to see how such a case, even though it wrongfully ascribes the caste system to Hinduism, would result in the inability of Hindus to freely practice their religion."

In May 2024, in the federal case, the CRD challenged the plaintiffs' use of pseudonyms, arguing that they were not legally justified. In August 2024, the court ruled in favour of the CRD, denying the plaintiffs' request to continue under pseudonyms. Following this, the HAF filed the Second Amended Complaint (SAC) in August 2024, including the names of two plaintiffs and removing the third from the list of previously anonymous plaintiffs.

The amended complaint reiterates arguments from the original filing, asserting that the CRD's linkage of caste to Hinduism in the Cisco case violates Hindus' religious rights. The complaint also cites personal injuries suffered by the plaintiffs, including reputational harm, anxiety and sleeplessness resulting from the Cisco case. While there were only minor differences between the FAC and the SAC, it would soon become clear how, under the guise of protecting religious freedom, the HAF employs sophistry to obstruct justice for the victim in the Cisco case.

The CRD's response asserts three main points. First, it contends that addressing caste-based discrimination is within its constitutional duty to enforce civil rights protections. Second, the CRD argues that the HAF's claims of denial of opportunity, reputational harm and psychological impacts are speculative, lacking the concrete injury required for standing. Furthermore, it asserts that the HAF's allegations of diverted resources do not constitute significant injury to establish organisational standing. Lastly, the CRD holds that the HAF's claims under the free exercise, establishment, due process and equal protection clauses

are generalised grievances without legal foundation.

HAF's contradictory stance on caste in Hinduism

Fourteen years ago, in December 2010, the HAF released a policy document titled Hinduism: Not Caste in Caste, stating: "Hindus must acknowledge that caste arose in Hindu society, that some Hindu texts and traditions justify a birth-based hierarchy and caste bias, and that it has survived despite considerable Hindu attempts to curtail it." This document drew strong backlash from Hindus, who argued it infringed on their religious freedom and sentiments, questioning the HAF's authority to speak on Hinduism and insisting that all Smritis are integral to the religion. Rather than defend its stance, the HAF removed the document from its website.

Linking the HAF's stance on the Cisco case with legal protections against caste-based discrimination will help us understand how Hindu supremacists have sought to keep oppressed castes under the dominance of upper castes by opposing legal protections. Hindu supremacists always argue that caste redress is "reverse discrimination", as seen in their opposition to SB 403, which seeks to include caste as a protected category. In the Cisco case, the HAF contended that caste discrimination is not barred, yet they label SB 403 as portraying South Asians as "bigots, bullies, rapists, human traffickers, even murderers" to justify an alleged attack on their rights. The original page was later removed.

The message is clear: Hindu supremacists deny that caste discrimination is prohibited under current laws while fiercely opposing any new legislation protecting against it, deploying extensive resources. Their aim is to keep the caste-oppressed dependent on the mercy of dominant castes rather than ensuring civil rights and human rights protections.

The HAF asserts it represents all Hindus in California, yet the CRD challenges this, noting Hinduism's diversity and that a victim of caste discrimination in the Cisco case is also Hindu. The CRD argues, "At least some Hindu Americans residing in California... may have interests that conflict with HAF's purpose in this lawsuit as they may stand to benefit from the Department's efforts to prevent and redress... caste discrimination."

Mihir Meghani, a co-founder of the HAF, claims to experienced stigma and anxiety over caste-related remarks. It is notable, however, that as a physician, he overlooks the documented impact of caste on healthcare access, as highlighted by the National Library of Medicine (NLM), a federal arm of the US health department. In May 2021, the NLM published a paper, Caste Exclusion and Health Discrimination in South Asia: A Systematic Review, which examines caste-based inequalities in healthcare access across South Asia.

The paper explains, "The 3000-year-old caste system is one of the oldest social hierarchies and it forms the foundation of Hindu society. This system includes four divisions: 'Brahmins', priests; 'Kshatriyas', warriors; 'Vaishyas', merchants; and 'Sudras', servants. Underneath these castes lies 'Ati-Sudra', Dalits, also known as untouchables." Such infor-

mation, rather than causing stigma, should foster greater understanding and encourage efforts to address these inequalities.

In April 2023, the CRD dismissed both Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella from the Cisco case and, in December 2023, removed references that linked caste to Hinduism. Despite this, the lawsuit continues because the plaintiffs claim they "suffered deep mental, psychological and spiritual injury" due to the initial association of caste with Hinduism in the case. There is a dedicated matrimonial site in the US specifically for brahmins, the upper-caste Hindus, where many brahmins "prefer" matches within their own caste. Hindu temples openly advertise ceremonies such as the upanayanam, described as the rite where young brahmin boys are invested with the sacred thread and initiated into the Gayatri mantra, for \$251.

Don't such practices cause the plaintiffs or organisations like the HAF "deep mental and psychological injury"? If so, why aren't these sites and ceremonies challenged, let alone subject to similar lawsuits? The HAF's federal case is a veiled attempt to derail the Cisco case through speculative and implausible claims of religious violation. Its argument of religious freedom infringement serves as a smokescreen to obstruct legal remedies and protections for the caste-oppressed, both in the Cisco case and more broadly.

This is not the first time that protections against caste discrimination have been challenged in court; there are established legal precedents on this issue. In October 2022, two California State University (CSU) professors filed a lawsuit against the CSU for including caste in its anti-discrimination policy, arguing it violated religious freedom and due process. In November 2023, a federal court dismissed the claim that the policy stigmatises Hindu practitioners, noting that the plaintiffs' alleged injuries were conjectural or hypothetical.

In February 2023, the Seattle city council in Washington state passed a law adding caste as a protected category, which was then challenged in May 2023 as unconstitutional on similar grounds. However, in March 2024, a court upheld the law, emphasising that its purpose was to strengthen anti-discrimination protections without violating religious freedom.

In each case, the state has defended the rights of those oppressed by caste. Dominant caste individuals and organisations often have the resources to oppose protections for the caste-oppressed, even though caste is a reality in the US, affecting various spheres from work places to community organisations and from dating apps to housing. Only a federal law can truly protect the caste-oppressed from discrimination manifesting as exclusion and denial of opportunity, beyond efforts at the university, city and corporate levels. Against this backdrop, the December 3 hearing and its outcome will be pivotal. It could not only clarify the path forward in the Cisco caste discrimination case, but also influence public opinion in favour of broader federal legislation against caste discrimination. (Courtesy: The Wire)

How armed outsiders and a radical militia shattered the peace in Manipur's Jiribam

By: Rokibuz Zaman

On June 7, Ngurthansang fled his home in Manipur's Jiribam district, as violence caught up with an area that had, for over a year, been relatively buffered from the ethnic clashes in the rest of the state.

With 80-odd Hmar families, Ngurthansang moved to Lakhipur in neighbouring Assam, just across the Jiri river. The 33-year-old, his wife and three children spent four months in a relief camp in Hmarkhawien, a Hmar village in Lakhipur. In October, as peace slowly returned to Jiribam, and the school in which his wife worked reopened, the family made its way back to their home in Zairawn, a Hmar village. "Things were peaceful but all the villagers would stay together at night, and some men from the village would guard us," Ngurthansang told Scroll.

On November 7, however, the village came under attack allegedly by members of the armed Meitei group Arambai Tengol.

Ngurthansang's wife, a 31-year-old teacher, was tortured, allegedly raped and burnt to death. The raid on Zairawn was the start of a new cycle of violence in which women and children have been ruthlessly targeted. Four days later, a group of armed Hmar men attacked a relief camp in the dis-

trict and abducted six women and children — one an eight-month-old infant — of the same Meitei family. Their bodies were recovered from the rivers near Jiribam a few days later.

Ten of the assailants were killed in retaliatory fire as they allegedly attacked a post of the Central Reserve Police Force near the relief camp in Borbekra. Security officials told Scroll that the attack on the Meitei settlement was "revenge" for the death of the Hmar woman in Zairawn.

They also described the first attack on the Hmar village as "unprovoked" and "surprising" — and designed to disrupt a fragile peace of the past few weeks.

"Why did they kill the Hmar woman without any investigation?" said a senior Meitei police official, who was part of the efforts to defuse the animosity between the communities. "Because the Arambai Tengol wanted to send a message. To disrupt the peace, they targeted Zairawn." The Arambai Tengol is a Meitei vigilante group, whose cadres are alleged to have carried out brutal attacks on the Kuki-Zo community during the ethnic conflict in the state, and are believed to have close ties with the Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh.

The long-drawn conflict in Manipur between the majority Meiteis and the minority Kuki-Zomi-Hmar tribes has led to 255 deaths and the displacement

of 60,000 people.

A build-up of armed men

According to the senior police official, the Arambai Tengol has grown in strength in Jiribam since violence broke out in June, with many cadres arriving in the district from Imphal Valley to defend Meiteis.

An Assam Rifles official posted in Jiribam told Scroll that armed outsiders from both communities have been trickling into the district as reinforcements. "Since the June violence, there has been a build-up of armed men from Imphal valley as well as Churachandpur," the official said.

Of the 10 Hmar men killed on November 11 while raiding a Meitei settlement, none was from Jiribam. Seven men had come to the district from Churachandpur, while three had arrived from Pherzawl, the district that adjoins Jiribam.

Security officials and community leaders pointed to a worrying militarisation of both communities in Jiribam. A political leader, who does not belong to either community, said, "The number of youths taking up arms on both sides has shot up significantly — mostly under the influence of outsiders."

A lull that did not last

Jiribam is a tiny district home to many communities, from Muslim and Hindu Bengalis to Meiteis, Pangals, and Kuki-Zomi and Naga tribes.

In May last year, when ethnic

clashes spread from Churachandpur to Imphal, a peace committee comprising people from different communities, security forces and district authorities kept violence at bay here for nearly 13 months. In June, however, the killing of a Meitei man shattered the peace, leading to an exodus of both communities.

Despite the setback, the Jiribam Peace Committee coaxed the representatives of the Meitei and Hmar communities to return to the talks table. They met twice in Cachar and an agreement was signed on August 1 to restore normalcy and "prevent incidents of arson and firing". "We believed that some of the Meiteis also wanted peace," said a Hmar leader, who was part of the peace committee. The senior Meitei police official said the ground had been laid for a third round of consultations between Hmars and Meiteis in Guwahati.

However, not all wanted violence to end. "The Meiteis are a divided house," the senior Meitei police official said. "A section wanted to derail the process for gaining political mileage. And so the attack on the Hmar village. It is unfortunate that Jiribam people were swayed by external influence."

A Meitei leader, who was part of the peace committee, told Scroll that after the June violence, several Jiribam residents joined the Arambai Tengol "as

they are for our protection and defence."

The central security official told Scroll that "the number of arms reaching Arambai Tengol cadres had gone up" in recent months. While most of Jiribam seemed peaceful, Kuki-Zos and Meiteis were often engaged in crossfire in two villages on the periphery of Jiribam town.

'Help' from the hills

As violence simmered, reinforcements began arriving for the Kuki-Zomi-Hmar tribes too — from Churachandpur and Pherzawl. "Jiribam is our area, but we have fewer resources and people there," said a Churachandpur-based Hmar leader. "So, in order to stop the enemy from invading our areas, the armed village volunteers need to go there." The festering ethnic conflict in Manipur has led civilians from the warring communities to take up arms to guard their villages. They are often described as "village volunteers". Twenty-two-year-old Lalthanei Hmar was one such armed civilian. Before he took up arms last year, Lalthanei Hmar worked as a daily-wage painter in Churachandpur town. Two weeks ago, he made his way to Jiribam — a day's journey, involving two vehicles and a river crossing.

"Our villages in Jiribam were attacked. That's why the volunteer committee here selected two-three men from each village and sent them to Jiribam to

guard the villages," R Hmar, his cousin who lives in Churachandpur, said.

Lalthanei Hmar was allegedly among the group of armed men who sprung an attack on the relief camp in Borbekra on November 11. A sparsely populated area, Borbekra is surrounded by Bengali and Hmar villages. Over a hundred Meiteis, displaced in the June violence, had taken shelter at the relief camp. Security officials told Scroll that this was an area where the Meiteis were "vulnerable" and "easy targets". To repulse the attack, CRPF personnel opened fire at the assailants, who, according to several eyewitnesses, were setting shops and houses ablaze and had opened fire at a CRPF post in the area.

Lalthanei Hmar was one of the 10 armed men killed in the firing. However, Kuki-Zo-Hmar groups contest this version and have criticised the CRPF for shooting the men. They also alleged that armed Meiteis and the perpetrators of the violence in Zairawn village were hiding in the camp — a claim denied by the Assam Rifles. A measure of the deep divide between the ethnic communities is that several Hmar people defended the action of the assailants — even the violence against unarmed civilians — arguing that "the presence of Meiteis is a threat to the lives of the Hmars".

"The village volunteers did what they had to do in a civil

Vladivostok Corridor and even the Belt and Road Initiative. According to the global container shipping giant, Hapag-Lloyd, the global smart container market, which aims to connect every container transported in the world through the internet-of-things (IoT), is expected to grow, with 25 percent of all containers in the world being connected to some IoT device by 2026. Additionally, satellite-connected smart containers are also geared to bring down the carbon footprint of the shipping industry, a big plus for the IMEC, making it environmentally sustainable. Connecting ships and containers even in non-trackable seas, as is the present case, will also ensure that traded goods are not subject to tampering, accidents, damages, cargo thefts, and the smuggling of illicit and contraband goods.

Among the IMEC members, India, the EU and the US have their respective PNT systems — Navigation with Indian Constellation (NAVIC), Galileo and the Global Positioning System (GPS). For IMEC to remain operational for a long time, resilient PNT systems and redundancies will be essential. To that end, the three systems could be made interoperable along the corridors. In the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, the US Congress formally acknowledged NAVIC as an "allied system" for the GPS along with Japan's Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS) and EU's Galileo. This recognition only enables strong PNT support for the IMEC corridor. IMEC members devoid of their own PNT, especially UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, can rely on NAVIC's excellent coverage of their geographies. This would positively enable road logistics companies, UAE's Etihad Rail, the Saudi Arabian Railways, and the proposed Gulf Cooperation Council Railway to efficiently, securely, and sustainably carry out land-mode trade along the IMEC corridor.

IMEC, even if the Eastern Corridor is activated before the resolution of the conflict in the Middle East, would have dimensions that go beyond container trade. The corridor envisions connectivity and collaboration through renewable energy grids, free trade zones, hydrogen pipelines, interconnected underwater cables, integrated digital finance infrastructure, and multimodal infrastructure development. Given the growing imperative of cyber security, a secure high-speed data pipeline that could potentially facilitate the export of India's IT services to West Asia and beyond is also proposed. Mumbai, India's financial and commercial capital, is gearing up to become the country's "data capital" with its suburban expanse intending to develop an information technology capacity of 1.5 gigawatts. Mumbai is already the foremost submarine optic fibre cable landing city in India, and these capacities could grow as the Eastern Corridor of IMEC takes shape.

Domestically, India's growing commercial space ecosystem is looking for newer business opportunities and use cases. Without a doubt, IMEC may become a major source of business for the Indian space economy, which aims to grow to 10 percent of the global space economy by 2030. IMEC is a good opportunity for the commercial space companies of its members to forge international partnerships, including revenue-sharing partnerships. These will be mutually beneficial and work towards the aspirations set by the establishment of the PGII. Space technologies and services have the inherent potential to securely operationalise IMEC and positively offer peace, prosperity, and progress to South and West Asia, as well as Eastern Europe and the Atlantic North. It is time to positively and constructively work towards it. (Courtesy: ORF)

Security officials and police officers told Scroll that bringing back peace to the area is now a near-impossible task. One of the reasons is that both communities have decided to arm themselves. "Every person is either a village volunteer or a member of the Arambai Tengol or the UNLF [United National Liberation Front, an armed separatist Meitei group]," said the central security official. "Most of them are armed. Or they are informers."

The official added: "The mindset has got restricted to the cycle of violence and counter-violence. The young men are not able to think beyond that."

'A cycle of violence and counter-violence'

The political leader, who does not belong to either Meitei or Kuki-Zo groups, added: "The young men have stopped studying and taken up arms in the name of protecting their motherland." The senior police Meitei official pointed out that "protracted violence" over 18 months was to blame for Jiribam getting sucked into the spiral of clashes. "If you think it will automatically improve, you are wrong." He said he was not optimistic of peace returning.

"Jiribam was once the hope, but it is the epicentre of violence now." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Ukrainian air defences shot down six Kh-101 cruise missiles during the attack

Russia launched intercontinental missile for first time in war: Ukraine

KYIV, Nov 21: Ukraine says Russia launched an intercontinental ballistic missile overnight targeting Dnipro city in the central-east of the country, which, if confirmed, would be the first time Moscow has used such a missile in the war.

In a statement on Thursday on the Telegram messaging app, Ukraine's air force did not specify the exact type of missile, but said it was launched from Russia's Astrakhan region, which borders the Caspian Sea.

It said an intercontinental ballistic missile was fired at Dnipro city along with eight other missiles, and that the Ukrainian military shot down six of them.

Two people were wounded as a result of the attack, and an industrial facility and a rehabilitation

centre for people with disabilities were damaged, according to local officials.

While the range of an ICBM would seem excessive for use against Ukraine, such missiles are designed to carry nuclear warheads, and the use of one would serve as a chilling reminder of Russia's nuclear capability and a powerful message of potential escalation.

The attack comes two days after Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a revised nuclear doctrine that formally lowers the threshold for the country's use of nuclear weapons. Ukraine on Tuesday fired several American-supplied longer-range missiles and reportedly fired UK-made Storm Shadows on Wednesday into Russia.

The Russian Defence Ministry said in a state-



ment Thursday that its air defence systems shot down two British-made Storm Shadow missiles, six HIMARS rockets, and 67 drones. The announcement came in the ministry's daily roundup regarding the military actions in Ukraine.

The statement didn't say when or where exactly it happened or what the missiles were targeting. This is not Moscow's first public announcement of the

shooting down of Storm Shadow missiles, as Russia earlier reported downing some over the annexed Crimean Peninsula. The developments come as the war has taken on a growing international dimension with the arrival of North Korean troops to help Russia on the battlefield—a development that US officials said prompted U.S. President Joe Biden's policy shift on allowing

Ukraine to fire longer-range US missiles into Russia. The Kremlin responded with threats to escalate further.

Putin has previously warned the US and other NATO allies that allowing Ukraine to use Western-supplied longer-range weapons to hit Russian territory would mean that Russia and NATO are at war. And the new doctrine allows for a potential nuclear response by Moscow even to a conventional attack on Russia by any nation that is supported by a nuclear power.

While the doctrine envisions a possible nuclear response by Russia to a conventional strike, it is formulated broadly to avoid a firm commitment to use nuclear weapons and keep Putin's options open. (AP)

Death toll in Gaza from Israel-Hamas war passes 44,000: Palestinian officials

DEIR AL-BALAH, Nov 21: The death toll in the Gaza Strip from the 13-month-old war between Israel and Hamas has surpassed 44,000, local health officials said on Thursday.

The Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count, but it has said that more than half of the fatalities are women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The Health Ministry said 44,056 people have been killed and 104,268 wounded since the start of the war. It has said the real toll is higher because thousands of bodies are buried under rubble or in areas that medics cannot access.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250.

Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year.

The Israeli offensive has caused heavy destruction across wide areas of the coastal territory, leading many to wonder when or how it will ever be rebuilt.

Around 90% of the population of 2.3 million people have been displaced, often multiple times, and hundreds of thousands are living in squalid tent camps with little food, water or basic services.

Israel says it tries to avoid harming civilians and

blames their deaths on Hamas because the militants operate in residential areas, where they have built tunnels, rocket launchers and other military infrastructure.

Palestinian officials and rights groups accuse Israeli forces of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and the United Nations' top court is considering allegations of genocide brought by South Africa.

The Israeli government adamantly denies the allegations, accusing critics of being biased against it.

In recent weeks, the amount of humanitarian aid entering Gaza has plummeted, prompting the United States to threaten to reduce its military support for Israel before backing down, citing limited progress. Experts have warned that isolated, war-ravaged northern Gaza could already be experiencing famine.

The United States, Egypt and Qatar spent months trying to broker a cease-fire agreement in which Hamas would release the remaining hostages in exchange for an end to the war. Those talks ground to a halt over the summer, with Israel and Hamas each accusing the other of making unacceptable demands.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to end the wars in the Middle East without saying how. His previous administration gave unprecedented support to Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line policies toward the Palestinians. (AP)

Volcano on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula erupts for 7th time in a year

GRINDAVIK (ICELAND), Nov 21: A volcano on the Reykjanes Peninsula in southwestern Iceland has erupted for the seventh time since December.

The eruption started with little warning at 11:14 pm Wednesday and created a fissure around 3 kilometres long. The activity is estimated to be considerably smaller than the previous eruption in August, Iceland's meteorological office that monitors seismic activity said.

"In the big picture, this is a bit smaller than the last eruption, and the eruption that occurred in May," Magnus Tumi Guamundsson, a professor of geophysics who flew over the scene with the Civil Protection agency to monitor the event, told the national RUV broadcaster.

While the eruption poses no threat to air travel, authorities warned of gas emissions across parts of the peninsula, including the nearby town of Grindavik. Around 50 houses were evacuated after the Civil Protection agency issued the alert, along with guests at the famous Blue Lagoon resort, according to RUV. The repeated volcanic eruptions close to Grindavik, which is about 50 kilometres southwest of the capital, Reykjavik, and has a population of 3,800 people, have damaged infrastructure and property and forced many residents to relocate to guarantee their safety.

"Grindavik is not in danger as it looks and it is unlikely that this crack will get any longer, although nothing can be ruled out," Magnus Tumi said.

Iceland, which sits above a volcanic hot spot in the North Atlantic, averages one eruption every four to five years. The most disruptive in recent times was the 2010 eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which spewed clouds of ash into the atmosphere and disrupted trans-Atlantic air travel for months. (AP)

SL Prez backs IMF package despite pre-election rhetoric to renegotiate it

COLOMBO, Nov 21: Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake Thursday backed an International Monetary Fund bailout package despite pre-election rhetoric to renegotiate with the global lender to whet down tough conditions laid down for the recovery.

In his inaugural address to the newly convened parliament after his party's landslide victory last week, President Dissanayake also pledged to fulfil his pre-election promises by ensuring the supremacy of the law and addressing past wrongdoings.

Dissanayake affirmed his administration's commitment to continue the IMF bailout programme initiated by the previous government led by Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"We will enter the staff-level agreement (with IMF) hopefully by November 23," Dissanayake said, expressing optimism about securing the agreement for the next tranche of the nearly USD 3 billion facility. A staff-level agreement is a preliminary pact reached between the IMF staff and the government of a country on a set of economic policies and reforms that the country must implement in exchange for financial assistance from the global lender.

The IMF team on Sunday arrived in Sri Lanka to carry out the third review of the nearly USD 3 billion bailout facility. The third review should lead to the fourth tranche of the 4-year facility. It would be around USD 330 million as was the case in the previous three tranches, according to the Finance Ministry officials.

The debt restructuring agreement reached in the last week of the Wickremesinghe presidency is yet to be officially sealed. Debt restructuring agreement with both bilateral and sovereign bondholders was made compulsory to maintain debt sustainability by the IMF.

Sri Lanka tapped the IMF for a facility at the height of the economic crisis under the presidency of

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the president who was made to flee the country by months-long public protests. Mid April of 2022 Sri Lanka announced its first-ever debt default.

The negotiations with the IMF began thereafter and the Wickremesinghe's government clinched the bailout, a year later in March 2023.

In his policy address, President Dissanayake focused significantly on the country's struggling economy. On debt restructuring, Dissanayake assured that his government would honour agreements made by the previous administration.

"Soon, there will be separate agreements with each country on debt restructuring, and hopefully, all will be finalised by the end of this year," he said. Staying true to his National People's Power (NPP) party's commitment to austerity, Dissanayake made a modest ceremonial entry to parliament, foregoing the usual pomp of motorcycle outriders, motorcades, and military gun salutes.

Clad in a simple white tunic, the 56-year-old President addressed the parliament from the Speaker's chair, marking the first session since his party's landslide victory. The NPP created history in the November 14 election by winning 159 seats in the 225-member assembly. This was the first time that a party won two-thirds control or over 150 seats in a parliamentary election held since 1989.

"It is our duty to make everyone accountable and equal before the law," he said, adding that his government will deliver justice to everyone affected by

past crimes. "Our duty since being elected was to win the confidence of all parties by ensuring continuity," Dissanayake said.

The President emphasised the need for broader public participation in economic development, ensuring that economic benefits reach the larger population. He highlighted the unique unity his government represents, bringing together people from both the south and the north.

"There will be no race, religion, or discrimination-based politics in the government," he stressed.

Announcing welfare measures, Dissanayake vowed to address immediate challenges such as malnutrition, healthcare, and social care, pledging to protect all citizens. "This will be a government that protects all people," he said. At the start of the new session of the 10th parliament since 1978, the NPP's Ashoka Ranwala was elected house speaker while Rizwieh Salih was elected deputy speaker.

Himali Weerasekera, a female member, was elected the deputy chairman of the committee.

The significant feature of the appointment was that all three elected to the high offices were first-time members of parliament, which is an unprecedented occurrence in Sri Lanka's parliamentary history.

Speaker Ranwala, a chemical engineer, represents the NPP's elevation to the highest office through decades of public agitations. He was a trade union leader in the state fuel entity, CPC and an organisation often hit by leftist trade union activism.

After the ceremonial appointments of the three parliamentary appointments, an announcement was made that Sajith Premadasa from the main opposition had been recognised as the opposition leader. (PTI)

Death toll from gun attack in Pakistan on Shiites jumps to at least 28



PESHAWAR, Nov 21: Gunmen opened fire on passenger vehicles carrying Shiite Muslim civilians in restive northwestern Pakistan on Thursday, killing at least 28 people, including six women, and wounding 30 others in one of the deadliest such attacks in recent years in the region, police said.

The attack happened in Kurram, a district in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where sectarian clashes between majority Sunni Muslims and minority Shiites have killed dozens of people in recent months.

No one has claimed responsibility. The latest violence came a week after authorities reopened a key highway in the region after keeping it closed for weeks following deadly clashes.

Local police official Azmat Ali said several vehicles carrying passengers were traveling in a convoy from the city of Parachinar to Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, when gunmen opened fire.

He said the dead included six women, and at least 10 passengers were in a critical condition at a hospital.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari condemned the attack and offered his condolences to the families of the victims. He also ordered authorities to take action against those who orchestrated the attack.

Shiite Muslims make up about 15 percent of the 240 million population of Sunni-majority Pakistan, which has a history of sectarian animosity between the two communities.

Although they live together largely peacefully in the country, tensions have existed for decades in some areas, especially in parts of Kurram, where Shiites dominate.

Nearly 50 people from the two sides were also killed over the same dispute in July when clashes between Sunni and Shiites erupted in Kurram.

Pakistan is also currently carrying out intelligence-based operations in a separate conflict in northwest and southwestern Balochistan province, where militants and separatists often target police, troops and civilians, and the most violence has been blamed on Pakistani Taliban and an outlawed Baloch Liberation Army or BLA group. (AP)

Australian tourist dies after drinking tainted alcohol in Laos, raising toll to 4 including American



VIENTIANE (LAOS), Nov 21: An Australian teenager has died after drinking tainted alcohol in Laos in what Australia's Prime Minister on Thursday called every parent's nightmare. An American and two Danish tourists also died, officials said after reports that multiple people had been sickened in town popular with backpackers.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told Parliament that 19-year-old Bianca Jones had died after being evacuated from Vang Vieng, Laos for treatment in a Thai hospital. Her friend, also 19, remains hospitalised in neighbouring Thailand.

"This is every parent's very worst fear and a nightmare that no one should have to endure," Albanese said. "We also take this moment to say that we're thinking of Bianca's friend Holly Bowles who is fighting for her life."

They are believed to have consumed drinks tainted with methanol, which is sometimes added to mixed-drinks at disreputable bars as a cheaper alternative to ethanol, but can cause severe poisoning or death.

Telephone numbers listed for Laos' Health Ministry did not work and police refused to comment on the incident.

Australia said "several foreign nationals" had also been victims of methanol poisoning. The US State Department confirmed that an American had also died in Vang Vieng, and Denmark's Foreign Ministry said two of its citizens had also died in "the incident in Laos," but neither would comment directly on a link to the methanol poisoning that killed Jones.

Shaun Bowles told reporters outside Bangkok Hospital on Wednesday that his

daughter remained in critical condition and on life support.

"We just like to thank everyone from back home for all of the support and love that we're receiving," he said. "But we'd also like the people to appreciate right now, we just need privacy so we can spend as much time as we can with Holly."

In a statement to the Melbourne Herald Sun newspaper, Jones' family asked for privacy in their grief.

"She was surrounded by love, and we are comforted by the knowledge that her incredible spirit touched so many lives during her time with us," the family wrote.

"We want to express our deepest gratitude for the overwhelming support, love, and prayers we've received from across Australia."

The US State Department said local authorities were investigating the case and were responsible for providing any details, and that the US was providing consular assistance.

"We offer our sincerest condolences to the family on their loss," the State Department said in an emailed statement to The Associated Press.

Landlocked Laos is one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations and a popular tourist destination. Vang Vieng is particularly popular among backpackers seeking partying and adventure sports.

Details on the alcohol poisoning began trickling out about a week after the two Australian women fell ill on Nov 13 following a night out drinking with a group in the remote town.

Thai authorities confirmed that Jones had died by "brain swelling due to high levels of methanol found in her system".

"Drink spiking and methanol poisoning are far too common in many parts of the world," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said after receiving news of Jones' death.

"At this time I would say to parents, to young people, please have a conversation about risks, please inform yourselves, please let's work together to ensure this tragedy doesn't happen again." (AP)

Hong Kong activist Jimmy Lai denies asking newspaper colleague to draft list of sanction targets

HONG KONG, Nov 21: Former publisher Jimmy Lai denied that he asked a colleague to draft a list of potential sanction targets in his second day of testimony on Thursday at his landmark national security trial in Hong Kong.

The 77-year-old founder of the now-shuttered Apple Daily pro-democracy newspaper is being tried on charges of colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security and conspiring with others to issue seditious publications. He was arrested in 2020 in a political crackdown following massive anti-government protests in 2019. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison.

The testimony highlighted a

WhatsApp conversation between Lai and Apple Daily's ex-associate publisher Chan Pui-man. She was one of six former Apple Daily executives who pleaded guilty to conspiring with Lai to call for sanctions or a blockade or to engage in other hostile activities against Hong Kong or China.

Lai's lawyer Steven Kwan showed the messages in court after Chan earlier in the trial said that Lai had suggested the newspaper prepare a sanction list after then-President Donald Trump signed a directive seeking to punish those the US government determines have helped to curtail Hong Kong's civil liberties.

Lai said on Thursday he did

not write that message and had just copied and pasted the text he received from a person he suspected was connected with the White House. He said he did not read the full text thoroughly before forwarding it. He said the text "sounds so foreign to me".

Kwan said Lai sent the same message to several pro-democracy politicians, including Lee Wing-tat. Asked whether he intended to ask Lee to work up such a list, Lai answered "that would be ridiculous".

After the security law was enacted in June 2020, the Trump administration imposed sanctions on Hong Kong officials, accusing them of cooperating with Beijing's effort to

undermine autonomy and crack down on freedom in the city.

Authorities have used the law to prosecute Lai and other leading activists. Under the threat of the law, dozens of civil society groups disbanded and some other activists were forced into self-exile. Apple Daily closed in 2021 following the arrests of some of its senior managers.

Critics say the drastic political changes reflect the freedoms promised to be kept intact in the former British colony when it returned to Chinese rule in 1997 were shrinking. But Beijing and Hong Kong governments said the law restored the city's stability following the 2019 protests. (AP)

Nepal's President confers honorary title to Indian Army Chief Gen Dwivedi

KATHMANDU, Nov 21: Nepal President Ramchandra Paudel on Thursday conferred the Honorary Rank of General of the Nepal Army to Indian Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi, in continuation of an age-old tradition that first started in 1950, reflecting the strong ties between the two militaries.

Gen Dwivedi, who is leading a five-member delegation, arrived here on Wednesday for a five-day official visit at the invitation of his Nepalese counterpart Gen Ashok Sigdel.

President Paudel conferred the honorary rank to Gen Dwivedi at his official residence Shital Niwas.

Earlier in the day, Gen Dwivedi met Gen Sigdel at Nepal Army Headquarters here and discussed matters relating to the collaboration between the two armies, officials said.

He also laid a wreath and paid homage at Bir Smarak (Martyr's Memorial) at the Army Pavilion in Tundikhel, Kathmandu. He also received the Guard of Honour at the Army headquarters.

During his visit, Gen Dwivedi is scheduled to visit Army Staff College in Shivapuri, located on the outskirts of Kathmandu. He also plans to have a mountain flight, officials said. (PTI)

North Korea, Russia agree to expand their economic cooperation

SEOUL, Nov 21: North Korea and Russia reached a new agreement for expanding economic cooperation following high-level talks in Pyongyang this week, the North's state media said on Thursday, as they continue to align in the face of their confrontations with Washington.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency didn't elaborate on the details of the agreement signed Wednesday between its senior trade officials and a Russian delegation led by Alexander Kozlov, the country's minister of natural resources and ecology.

The Russian news agency Tass on Tuesday said officials following an earlier round of talks agreed to increase the number of charter flights between the countries to promote tourism.

Kozlov, who arrived in North Korea on Sunday, met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his top economic official, Premier Kim Tok Hun, before returning home on Wednesday, KCNA said. During Kozlov's visit, Russian President Vladimir Putin's gifted Pyongyang's Central Zoo with more than 70 animals, including lions, bears and several species of birds, according to Tass, in another display of the countries' growing ties.

Kim Jong Un in recent months has prioritized relations with Moscow as he attempts to break out of international isolation and strengthen his footing, actively supporting Putin's war on Ukraine while portraying the North as a player in a united front against Washington.



Kim has yet to directly acknowledge that he has been providing military equipment and troops to Russia to support its fighting against Ukraine. South Korea's National Intelligence Service told lawmakers in a closed-door briefing on Wednesday that an estimated 11,000 North Korean soldiers in late October were moved to Russia's Kursk region, where Ukrainian troops seized parts of its territory this year, following their training in Russia's northeast.

The spy agency believes the North Korean

soldiers were assigned to Russia's marine and airborne forces units and some of them have already begun fighting alongside the Russians on the frontlines, said Lee Seong Kweun, a lawmaker who attended the meeting. US, South Korean and Ukrainian officials have claimed that the North has also been supplying Russia with artillery systems, missiles and other equipment.

North Korea would be possibly getting anywhere between \$320 million to \$1.3 billion annually from Russia for sending its troops to Ukraine, considering the scale of the dispatch and the level of payments Russia has been providing to foreign mercenaries, according to a recent study by Lim Soo-ho, a South Korean analyst at an NIS-run think tank.

While that would be meaningful income for North Korea's crippled and heavily sanctioned economy, it could be lower than the money the North earns from illicit coal exports or supplying military equipment to Russia, Lim said. This suggests that North Korea's troop dispatch is less about money than acquiring key Russian technologies to further advance its nuclear weapons and missile program, which is a major concern in Seoul, Lim said. (AP)

More central forces arrive in violence-hit Manipur

Clashes escalate; curfew imposed in Imphal Valley

IMPHAL, Nov 21: Amid an escalation in violence in Manipur, eight companies of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) have reached the state capital Imphal, and these forces will be deployed in sensitive and fringe areas, an official said.

These forces arrived in Imphal on Wednesday, a day after another batch of 11 companies of CAPF reached the state.

"Four companies each of CRPF and BSF will be deployed in sensitive and fringe areas of the state," the official said.

Of the CRPF companies, one belongs to the Mahila Battalion.

The Centre recently announced that 50 fresh companies of CAPF would be deployed in Manipur.

Violence has escalated in the state as offices of the Congress and the BJP have been ransacked in the hill district



of Jiribam last week. The incidents occurred after mobs set fire to the residences of three BJP legislators, one of whom is a senior minister, and a Congress MLA in various districts of Imphal Valley where

an indefinite curfew has been clamped.

Security forces also foiled the attempt of the agitators to storm the ancestral residence of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday evening.

The violence escalated after three women and three children belonging to the Meitei community had gone missing from a relief camp in Jiribam district after a gunfight between security forces and suspected Kuki-Zo militants that resulted in the deaths of 10 insurgents on November 11.

Bodies of those six were later found over the past few days.

More than 220 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year. (PTI)

Cash, jewellery looted during attack on Manipur MLA's residence: Police



IMPHAL, Nov 21: The mother of JD (U) MLA Kh Joykishan Singh in Manipur has lodged a complaint, alleging that ₹ 18 lakh in cash and jewellery items worth ₹ 1.5 crore were looted by a mob that vandalised the legislator's residence on November 16, police said on Thursday.

Several items kept at the MLA's residence in West Imphal's Thangmeiband area for internally displaced people were also destroyed during the attack, a senior officer said.

"The mother of Thangmeiband constituency legislator Kh Joykishan Singh filed a complaint with the Imphal Police Station that ₹ 18 lakh in cash and several valuable items worth ₹ 1.5 crore were looted and destroyed during a mob attack. An FIR has been registered," the police officer told PTI.

The mob vandalised the residence of the legislator for about two hours on the November 16 evening, he said.

Notably, the MLA was in Delhi due to medical treatment for one of his family members when the mob attacked his residence last week.

An internally displaced person, staying in a

relief camp set up at Tombisana Higher Secondary School in Thangmeiband, a few meters away from the residence of Joykishan, said, "Vegetables like potatoes and onions, and other items such as winter clothes were kept for people like us. All these materials were looted."

"We urged the mob not to vandalise the residence of the MLA as several items meant for distribution among displaced people were kept there," Sanayai, a volunteer who manages the relief camp under the supervision of Joykishan, said.

Lockers, electronics goods and furniture were vandalised, she claimed, adding that the mob attempted to take away three air conditioners but failed.

Seven gas cylinders were also taken away by the mob, she claimed.

Documents of internally displaced people were also destroyed during the attack, Sanayai said. The mob also pushed internally displaced people and one of the volunteers there was injured after being beaten up, she claimed.

Houses of several legislators in Manipur were vandalised as violence escalated last week after three women and three children belonging to the Meitei community had gone missing from a relief camp in Jiribam district following a gunfight between security forces and suspected Kuki-Zo militants that resulted in the deaths of 10 insurgents on November 11.

Bodies of those six were later found over the past few days.

More than 220 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year. (PTI)

Centre sanctions ₹ 104.66 cr for providing health care facilities in Manipur's hill districts

IMPHAL, Nov 21: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Thursday said that the Centre has sanctioned ₹ 104.66 crore for providing health care facilities in the hill districts of the state.

Singh thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union health minister JP Nadda and DoNER minister J M Scindia for their support in developing Manipur.

Taking to X, Singh said, "For the first time, hill districts like Chandel, Ukhrul, Jiribam, Senapati, and Tamenglong will have access to advanced medical facilities like CT Scans, MRI, ICU services, and super-specialty care—bringing healthcare closer to home. Not to mention, the Churachandpur Medical College is already operational, transforming healthcare in the region." This recent sanction of



₹ 104.66 crore under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE) is a step towards equitable healthcare for all, Singh posted on the microblogging site.

The chief minister also posted a copy of the letter sent from the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) to the state chief secretary regarding the sanction. (PTI)

Arunachal Guv seeks US investment opportunities

ITANAGAR, Nov 21: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik on Thursday urged the United States to explore investment and joint venture opportunities in the state.

During a meeting with Kathy Giles-Diaz, the consul general of the US consulate general in Kolkata, who visited him at the Raj Bhavan, Parnaik highlighted the state's vast potential in sectors such as hydropower, horticulture, minerals, and tourism.

He called for strengthening economic ties between Arunachal Pradesh and the US, emphasising the importance of mutual cooperation.

Calling Arunachal Pradesh an organic state with significant horticultural output, Parnaik encouraged the US to explore market connections and utilise its expertise in food processing.

He also proposed initiatives for advanced skills training.

Parnaik noted that the people of Arunachal Pradesh are keen on fostering closer ties between India and the US, particularly because of shared democratic values. (PTI)

Tripura Congress urges chief secretary for immediate relief to flood and violence victims

AGARTALA, Nov 21: Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) President Ashish Kumar Saha has called for urgent intervention by the chief secretary of Tripura, Jitendra Kumar Sinha, to provide relief and support to those affected by recent floods and incidents of communal violence across the state.

In a letter addressed to the chief secretary, Saha highlighted the grave situation caused by the floods, which have claimed nearly 30 lives and displaced countless others.

"Lakhs of people have lost their homes and belongings, but the state government's rehabilitation efforts remain inadequate. The TPCC has demanded that the recent floods be declared a national disaster, but the government has shown reluctance," Saha wrote. He urged the chief secretary to remind the chief minister of his promises to provide relief to the flood victims and fulfill the state's responsibilities towards its people.

Turning his attention to communal tensions, Saha pointed out the deteriorating situation in Gandacherra under the Dhalai District, where tribal and non-tribal communities have been deeply divided.

"Hundreds of people have been ren-

dered homeless due to the breakdown of harmony. The state administration has failed to maintain law and order, and distrust continues to prevail. The Home Department has yet to take effective steps to restore peace and harmony in the affected areas," he added.

Saha also drew attention to incidents of violence between religious groups in Kadamtala (Dharmanagar Sub-Division) and Kaitaraibari (Jirania Sub-Division). These clashes have led to significant destruction of homes and shops, forcing hundreds into relief camps. "The victims have been left without any relief or financial assistance from the government, compounding their suffering," he noted.

The Congress leader demanded adequate compensation for the affected families, as well as employment for the wives of those who lost their lives in the violence. "Given the dire circumstances prevailing across the state, I urge your immediate intervention to alleviate the suffering of innocent people and help them rebuild their lives," Saha stated.

The TPCC president's letter underscores the growing discontent among the affected communities and the urgency for swift governmental action to address their plight.

Nagaland school edu directorate asks employees to undergo verification

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Nov 21: Nagaland's Directorate of School Education (DoSE) gave a final call to the employees under it, including newly recruited employees post October 2023, who have not undergone the employee verification and authentication drive to do the same.

In a notification on Thursday, the directorate asked the employees to report at its office in Kohima from November 25 to November 28 for the verification process, failing which they will be liable to disciplinary action.

The notification said the Nagaland Education Project—The Light-house (NECTAR), under the DoSE, undertook the employee verification and authentication drive for the teachers' attendance monitoring system from May to August 2023 across the state and a follow-up drive for absentees from October 19 to October 26, 2023, to improve the school management system.

However, some employees are yet to undergo the verification and authentication exercise, it said.

Further, the directorate asked all the untrained Hindi teachers/general Hindi teachers who previously submitted their documents via email and were verified to report at its office to capture their master selfie. The employees who missed the verification drive due to sanctioned medical/earned leaves have also been also directed to report for the authentication.

The employee data verification and authentication form, which can be downloaded from www.nagalandeduproject.com or collected from the respective school heads, should be duly filled and verified by the head of school, Educational Block Resource Centre coordinator, district education officer/sub-divisional education officer and countersigned by the area administrative officer and brought for the authentication along with the documents (both original and photocopy) such as Aadhar card, ID card issued by Samagra Shiksha, appointment letter, all transfer/posting order, regularisation order, latest extension order and service book page with bio-data details.

Four Bangladeshis detained with fake Aadhaar cards

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Nov 21: The Government Railway Police (GRP) detained four Bangladeshi nationals in possession of suspected fake Aadhaar cards at Udaipur Railway Station in Gomati District, as they attempted to travel to Bangalore.

Acting on a tip-off, the GRP apprehended the group, which included three women and one man, during a routine check at the station on Wednesday morning.

"We have detained four Bangladeshi nationals, including one male and three females, from Udaipur Railway Station. Aadhaar cards and a mobile phone were seized from their possession. Initial investigations suggest the Aadhaar cards are counterfeit. They reportedly entered India illegally and were en route to Bangalore via Sealdah in West Bengal, facilitated by a tout from Belonia in the South District," a police official said.

The women have been identified from the Aadhaar cards as Mitu Biswas, Rafiza Aktar, and Narsima Aktar.

The GRP handed over the detainees to the local police, who plan to produce them in court and seek their remand for further interrogation. "We are investigating the matter thoroughly to trace their activities and connections," the official added.

Departments unite for a cleaner state Nagaland launches cleanliness drive

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Nov 21: The Nagaland government directed all its departments to conduct mass social work in Kohima and other places across the state in view of the upcoming festive season and to foster a sense of unity and responsibility towards a cleaner and healthier Nagaland.

In a circular on Thursday, chief secretary J Alam asked all employees to contribute to a clean and welcoming environment by ensuring that all the surrounding areas and neighbourhood, including roads, government offices and properties are well-maintained and clean.

A clean and healthy work-space not only benefits em-



ployees but also sets a positive example for the general public, he said.

In order to make the mass social work a big success, the government directed that all heads of departments and officers of various departments to lead by example and actively participate in the social work.

The circular said the officers and staff of the state secretariat would participate in the social work.

The government asked all heads of departments and officers, including heads of

offices, in the districts to personally lead the social work in their assigned areas by mobilising all the staff under their respective offices for active participation.

Apart from the mass social work in the assigned area/locality, it was also directed a part of the departmental staff is used for cleaning and beautification of the directorate and other offices including peripheral surrounding areas.

The government said cleanliness of common areas such as toilets, parking lots, pathways and areas surrounding office complexes should be prioritised and attention paid to the cleanliness of the areas adjacent to roads.

No.SEC.01/2023/Pt/64

Notification

In exercise of powers conferred under Article 243K of the Constitution of India, read with Rule 3 of the Assam Panchayat (Constitution) Rules, 1995, the State Election Commission, Assam, to increase the transparency, efficiency and access of Electoral Roll of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), had adopted Online Electoral Roll Management System (OERMS) developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC) Assam for preparation of online photo electoral roll of PRIs in 2023. In 2023, for the first time the Assam Panchayat Roll was prepared on the Online Electoral Roll Management System (OERMS) and was published on 29.09.2023.

As the State Government amended the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 incorporating a new section 3A in the Act in October, 2023 constituting District Delimitation Commission(s) for Delimitation of Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik Panchayat & Zilla Parishad Constituencies and started the process of Delimitation, the election to PRIs which was due in December, 2023 was delayed.

With a view to make advance preparation to hold election to PRIs as early as possible, the State Election Commission, Assam notified a two stage process for preparation of electoral rolls of PRIs vide notification No.SEC.01/2023/Pt/6 dated 25.08.2024. While in the first phase, the Assam Panchayat Roll which was published on 29.09.2023 was to be updated with the new additional and deleted voters as per Assam Assembly Rolls published on 08.02.2024, the second phase was to involve reorganizing the Panchayat Electoral Roll, 2024 in OERMS as prepared in the first phase in accordance with the fresh delimitation of Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik Panchayat & Zilla Parishad Constituencies by the Govt. of Assam in 2024.

The first phase was completed with the update of Panchayat Electoral Roll, 2023 as per the Assam Assembly Rolls published on 08.02.2024 and notified on 22.10.2024 as Draft Electoral Roll, 2024 with pre-delimitation areas/boundaries of the PRI constituencies.

Now, after completion of Delimitation exercise and issue of notification(s) by the District Delimitation Commission(s), the Commission hereby notifies that respective District Commissioner shall prepare and publish the list of voters for the district as a whole including the erstwhile civil sub-divisions (presently co-district) as per procedure spelt out in Rule 12(2) of the Assam Panchayat (Constitution) Rules, 1995, for holding Panchayat Elections for the posts of Ward Member of the Gaon Panchayat, Member of the Anchalik Panchayat and Member of the Zilla Parishad with date of eligibility of the voters as on 01.01.2025, incorporating the fresh delimitation of PRI constituencies in the OERMS as per schedule given below:

Sl. No	Task	Period
1	Basic preliminary work for preparation of the Electoral Roll including remote training.	21.11.2024 to 24.11.2024
2	Preparation of the Electoral Roll by reorganizing the Master Data and assigning/un-assigning of electors with fresh delimitation of the PRIs.	25.11.2024 to 10.12.2024
3	Publication of Draft Electoral Roll.	11.12.2024
4	Displaying the Draft Electoral Roll at the office of the Gaon Panchayat, Block Development Officer, Zilla Parishad and District Commissioner as well as OERMS website and District Website.	12.12.2024 to 13.12.2024
5	Period of filing Claims & Objections.	14.12.2024 to 21.12.2024
6	Disposal of Claims & Objections.	22.12.2024 to 26.12.2024
7	Publication of Final Electoral Rolls.	28.12.2024

Note: The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the preparation and reorganization of Electoral Rolls for Panchayat Election is being issued separately.

Sd/-
State Election Commissioner, Assam
Janasanyog /D/9057/24/22-Nov-24
Dispur ::: Guwahati-06

No.CHD/HT/BTC(G) 874/2024-25/2 Dated Kokrajhar, the 20th Nov/2024

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Director of BTC, Handloom & Textiles, Kokrajhar invites sealed bids from eligible registered Suppliers/ Dealers/ Firms/ of BTR under the Director of BTC, Handloom & Textiles, Kokrajhar under SOPD for the year 2024-25.

Sl. No.	Name of the Scheme	Amount	Issue of Tender	Submission of Tender	Tender Opening
1	Purchase of furniture for the office of Director of BTC, Handloom & Textiles, Kokrajhar under SOPD for the year 2024-25	Rs. 15,00,000.00	11:00 am to 21-11-2024	Up to 1:00 PM on 28-11-2024	3:00 PM on 28-11-2024

Details of Notice Inviting Tender, particulars & terms and conditions may be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours on payment of INR. 1000/- (Rupees one thousand only) non-refundable, in the form of demand draft/IPO in the favour of the Director of BTC, Handloom & Textiles, Kokrajhar payable at Kokrajhar.

Sd/- i/c. Director of BTC, Handloom & Textiles, Kokrajhar
IPR/BTC/C/2024-25/911

'PM'S CREDIBILITY REMAINS HIGH'

Rahul, Congress tried since 2002 to target Modi's image: BJP

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: The BJP on Thursday dubbed Rahul Gandhi's attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the US prosecutors' indictment of Gautam Adani on alleged bribery and fraud charges as part of his long-running efforts to target its leader, and noted that none of the four states named in American courts had a BJP government.

Addressing a press conference, BJP spokesperson and MP Sambit Patra made it clear that as far as allegations against the Adani group are concerned it is for the company to issue a clarification and defend itself.

"Law will take its own course," he said, while keeping the focus on Gandhi's allegations against the prime minister and the BJP government at the Centre.

Since 2002, Rahul Gandhi, his mother Sonia Gandhi and the Congress have been trying to tarnish Modi's image, but they have not succeeded and the prime minister received the highest civilian award



in a foreign country on a day the opposition party was attacking him, the BJP leader said.

Rahul Gandhi claimed in his press conference that the opposition has been successful in destroying Modi's credibility over his alleged proximity to the business tycoon.

Citing the Adani group's investment in various states ruled by the

development foundation, he added.

If Adani is "corrupt", then why are the Congress governments seeking investment from his company, he asked.

The billionaire industrialist has been charged by US prosecutors for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay over USD 250 million (about ₹ 2,100 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange of favourable terms for solar power contracts.

This was concealed from the US banks and investors from whom the Adani group raised billions of dollars for the project, the prosecutors have alleged. US law allows pursuing foreign corruption allegations if they involve certain links to American investors or markets.

The Adani group, however, has denied the charges.

The Congress, Patra alleged, cannot tolerate the Indian economy gaining in strength with Modi as prime minister, as it is now on track to become the third biggest

global economy.

Rahul Gandhi has been trying to target the Indian economy by making all kinds of allegations, and over 2.5 crore investors even on Thursday lost a lot of money as the stock market tanked, he said.

The Congress leader targeted the government over the alleged corruption in the Rafale aircraft deal and had also gone after it over the issue of Covid vaccines, he added.

Patra also objected to Gandhi's claim that his party has to do the job of the judiciary as well, saying it amounted to contempt of court. Gandhi does not understand legalities and technicalities around an issue and merely repeats what he is briefed by a few advisors, he added.

The Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha will now start a "drama" when Parliament's Winter session begins from November 25 and try to disrupt its proceedings and target the economy, he claimed. (PTI)

Delhi polls: AAP releases 1st list of 11 candidates, fields BJP, Cong turncoats



NEW DELHI, Nov 21: The Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday announced its first list of 11 candidates for the Delhi Assembly polls, dropping three sitting MLAs and fielding six leaders who switched over from the BJP and the Congress recently.

Elections in the national capital are due in February to elect 70 members of the Delhi Legislative Assembly. AAP is the first party to release a list of candidates.

Making the announcement at a press conference here, Delhi AAP convener Gopal Rai reasoned that the early declaration of names of candidates was because eight of the 11 constituencies are not held by the party.

Six of these eight constituencies are currently held by the BJP.

He also rebutted suggestions that outsiders who recently joined AAP were given tickets at the cost of party leaders.

The names of candidates were announced after a meeting of the AAP's political affairs committee, headed by party national convener Arvind Kejriwal. AAP, which has been ruling Delhi since 2015, won 62 seats in the 2020 assembly polls. Talking to reporters, Rai said the tickets were given strictly based on performance, surveys and public opinion as was promised by Kejriwal.

Sitting AAP MLAs who were denied tickets include Rituraj Jha from Kirari, Gulab Singh Yadav from Matiala and Abdul Rahman from Seelampur. Both Jha and

Gulab Singh are two-term MLAs.

The party fielded Brahm Singh Tanwar from Chhatrapur, Anil Jha from Kirari and BB Tyagi from Laxmi Nagar. All three recently quit the BJP and joined AAP.

Former Congress leader Choudhary Zubair Ahmed has been fielded from Seelampur, while ex-MLAs Veer Singh Dhinan and Somesh Shokeen have been given tickets from Seemapuri and Matiala respectively. Ahmed, Dhinan and Shokeen joined the Aam Aadmi Party from the Congress.

AAP MLA from Chhatrapur Kartar Singh Tanwar quit the party and joined the BJP. He was disqualified as MLA by the Speaker.

Rajender Pal Gautam, AAP MLA from Seemapuri, resigned from the membership of the Delhi Assembly and the party to join the Congress.

Former AAP MLA Sarita Singh (Rohtas Nagar), Ram Singh Netaji (Badarpur), Gaurav Sharma (Chonda), Manoj Tyagi (Karawal Nagar) and Deepak Singhal (Vishwanagar) are the other candidates whose names figure in the first list.

The party fielded Sarita Singh and Ram Singh Netaji again from Rohtas Nagar and Badarpur, respectively. They lost to their BJP rivals in the 2020 Assembly polls with narrow margins.

Rai said that the party has paced its election campaign with the release of these 11 names, adding that in the coming days, AAP will start a new campaign. (PTI)

CHARGES AGAINST ADANI IN US

CPI(M) demands CBI probe, says Modi govt can't hide behind smokescreen

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: The Narendra Modi government "cannot hide behind smokescreen anymore", the CPI(M) said on Thursday and demanded a CBI probe into the bribery charges against Gautam Adani made by US prosecutors. The billionaire industrialist has been charged by US prosecutors for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay over USD 250 million (about ₹ 2,100 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange of favourable terms for solar power contracts.

This was concealed from the US banks and investors from whom the Adani group raised billions of dollars for the project, the prosecutors have alleged. US law allows pursuing foreign corruption allegations if they involve certain links to American investors or markets.

The Adani group, however, have denied the charges.

The Left Party said it is shameful that such large-scale bribery of government officials had to be exposed not in India but in the United States. The Narendra Modi government "cannot hide behind smokescreen anymore", the CPI(M) said and demanded that the CBI be directed to immediately file a case based on the material provided by the prosecution in the United States.

"Bribery of public servants comes under the Prevention of Cor-

ruption Act, which is under the remit of the CBI," the Left Party said.

In a statement, the CPI(M) said the indictment filed in a United States court by the Department of Justice against Gautam Adani and six others contained serious charges of the industrialist and his nephew Sagar Adani being involved in paying bribes to Indian government officials at the Centre and states level.

The indictment states that ₹ 2,029 crore was offered or promised to Indian government officials to get state electricity distribution companies to execute power sale agreements for the supply of solar power, the party claimed. It also said that evidence was collected from Sagar Adani, which provides specific details of the bribes offered and promised to government officials.

"It is shameful that such large-scale bribery and suborning of government officials by the Adanis had to be exposed not in India but in the United States through their criminal justice system," CPI(M) said. "Gautam Adani and his business empire have had the full protection of the Modi government to execute his unlawful and criminal activities. Prime Minister Modi himself had shielded Adani from any enquiry or prosecution on the charges emanating from the Hindenburg expose," it said. (PTI)

TMC MP questions 'involvement' of BJP govt over bribery charges against Adani

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: With billionaire Gautam Adani charged in an alleged bribery and fraud case in the US, Trinamooli Congress MP Saket Gokhale on Thursday asked if the Narendra Modi-led government was involved in it.

Gokhale said while markets were reacting to the news of the indictment, the government was "silent" on the issue.

Adani has been charged by US prosecutors over his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 250 million bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts. The BJP, reacting to Congress's attack on the issue, questioned the timing of the development, as it came just before the start of the Parliament session and Donald Trump's impending presidency. All the states

mentioned in the indictment where government officials were paid bribes allegedly by the Adani Group were Opposition-ruled during that time, BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya said. In a post on X, Gokhale shared a market update that showed the stocks of Adani Energy going down. "Bloodbath in Adani Energy stock after the US indictment news," the TMC MP said.

"Markets are reacting but Govt of India is completely silent. Charges are of bribing a govt-owned PSU. How much is Modi & BJP's involvement?" Gokhale said. Adani group stocks faced heavy drubbing during the morning trade on Thursday, with the combined market valuation of all the listed firms getting eroded by ₹ 2.45 lakh crore.

In another post, the Rajya Sabha

MP said the main thing in the indictment is that bribes are alleged to have been paid out to PSUs and govt companies. "This is deeply rotten."

"With Indian agencies being compromised and acting as wings of the BJP, only an independent judicial probe will expose the truth," he said. TMC MP Mahua Moita also took to X and posted that the charges include paying bribes to government officials to "purchase energy at above-market rates benefiting Adani renewables".

Sharing a release by the US Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York, Moitra said, "Adani and seven of his senior executives indicted in connection with scheme to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes and conceal bribery scheme from US investors." (PTI)

Charges against Adani: BJP slams Cong, questions timing of development

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: The BJP on Thursday targeted the Congress over its attack on the central government after US prosecutors charged industrialist Gautam Adani with bribery and fraud, saying all the states mentioned in the indictment were at that time ruled by opposition parties.

BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya also questioned the timing of the development, as it came just before the start of Parliament session and Donald Trump's impending presidency.

This raises several questions, he said. "That the Congress is willing to be a prop in the hands of George Soros and his cabal speaks volumes," Malviya said on X in reply to Congress leader Jairam Ramesh's claim that the indictment vindicates the Congress's demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) in-

vestigation into the various "Modani scams".

Citing from the US federal prosecutors's indictment, Malviya said the states where government officials were paid bribes allegedly by the Adani Group were Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh between July 2021 and February 2022. He told Ramesh, "All the states mentioned here were Opposition-ruled during that time. So, before you pontificate, answer on the bribes the Congress and its allies accepted," he said.

While Odisha and Andhra Pradesh were then ruled by the BJD and the YSR Congress, two regional parties unaffiliated to either the ruling or the opposition alliance at that time, the Congress ally DMK was and remains in power in Tamil Nadu. The Congress was in power in Chhattisgarh. (PTI)

Vindicates demand for JPC probe: Cong on charges against Adani in US

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: With billionaire Gautam Adani charged in the US with alleged bribery and fraud, the Congress on Thursday said it "vindicates" its demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee investigation into the various "scams" involving his conglomerate.

The opposition party also called for "a new and credible" SEBI head to be appointed to complete the securities law investigations into the "Adani Mega Scam".

Adani has been charged by US prosecutors over his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 250 million bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts.

US prosecutors charged Adani, 62, his nephew Sagar and other defendants for paying over USD 250 million in bribes between 2020 and 2024 to Indian government officials to win solar energy contracts on terms that could potentially bring in more than USD 2 billion in profit.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the US Securities and Exchange Commission's actions also cast poor light on the manner in which its Indian counterpart, namely SEBI, has gone about investigating violations of securities and other laws by the Adani Group and its abject failure to hold the Group to account for the source of its investments, shell companies, etc.

"The indictment of Gautam Adani and others by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of the US vindicates the demand that the Indian National Congress has been making since Jan 2023 for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) investigation into the various Modani scams," Ramesh said in a post on X.

"The INC had asked a hundred questions in its Hum Adani ke Hain (HAHK) series bringing out the various dimensions of these scams and of the intimate nexus that has existed between the PM and his favourite busi-

nessman. These questions have remained unanswered," he said.

The Congress reiterates its demand for a JPC into the transactions of the Adani Group, which is leading to growing monopolisation in key sectors of the Indian economy, fuelling inflation, and posing huge foreign policy challenges as well, especially in our neighbourhood, Ramesh said.

In another post, he said the five-count indictment of Gautam Adani, Sagar R Adani and others unsealed by the US Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York has revealed more shocking details about Adani's criminal activities.

"It alleges that they paid over \$250 million (₹ 2,100 crore) in bribes to Indian government officials between 2020 and 2024. It states that the bribes were paid 'to obtain lucrative solar energy supply contracts with the Indian government, which were projected to generate more than \$2 billion (₹ 16,800 crore) in profits after tax'," Ramesh said. It alleges that "on several occasions, Gautam S Adani personally met with an Indian government official to advance the Bribery Scheme" and claims to have electronic and cellular phone evidence of this, the Congress leader said.

"All of this is consistent with a long record of fraud and criminality carried out with impunity with the obvious protection of the Prime Minister," Ramesh charged.

The fact that it has taken a foreign jurisdiction to properly investigate Adani only shows how Indian institutions have been captured by the BJP, and how decades of institutional development have been undone by greedy and power hungry leaders, the Congress leader said.

"The answer is clearly for a new and credible SEBI head to be appointed to complete the securities law investigations into the Adani MegaScam, and for a JPC to be set up immediately to investigate its full extent," he said. (PTI)

Cong, BJD question Adani's land purchase in Odisha, company says it's for afforestation

BHUBANESWAR, Nov 21: With the Adani Group purchasing land near the "sacred" Gandhamardhan hills in Odisha, the opposition Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and Congress on Thursday demanded clarification from the state's BJP government whether the company has any plan to go for mining in that region.

The Adani Group, however, said the purpose for land acquisition is to enrich the local ecology through afforestation and there is no commercial intent.

Gandhamardan Hill Range spanning Bargarh and Balangir districts was declared as a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) in 2023 when the BJD was in power. BHS is an area with unique, ecologically fragile ecosystems with rich biodiversity.

"The government should speak out on the purpose of the Adani Group acquiring land near Gandhamardhan Hills, which reserves an estimated 207 million

tons of bauxite. Since the state government is silent on the matter, suspicion of the people grows," said Bolangir's BJD MLA Kalikesh Singh Deo.

He claimed that the people of two districts protested against the plans of Bharat Aluminium Company Ltd (BALCO) to go for bauxite mining in Gandhamardhan Hills in the 1980s.

"People are getting prepared to launch another round of agitation if required. The state government would be responsible if there is any unpleasant situation," he claimed.

Veteran Congress leader Narasingha Mishra said the party would launch a massive agitation if there is any plan for mining in Gandhamardhan Hills, the treasure house of hundreds of medicinal plants.

"The hill is sacred for the locals who believe that Lord Hanuman had taken a medicinal plant from Gandhamardhan Hills for treatment of Lord Ram's

younger brother Laxman in the Ramayana," Mishra said.

Senior BJP leader and Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan, however, said there was no proposal for mining in Gandhamardhan Hills.

"As the BJD has no issue against the state government, it has been trying to rake up a non-issue," Pradhan said.

Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo, also a relative of BJD legislator, claimed that the Bolangir MLA is trying to create an issue out of nothing just to stay in the limelight.

Odisha's Principal Chief Conservator of Forest Debidatta Biswal said that he has no information about the land purchase by Adani Group.

"There is no transfer of any forest land to any group," Biswal said.

Meanwhile, Adani Group in a statement said: "Mahanadi Mines and Minerals has acquired private land in Bolangir and Bargarh districts from

willing landowners to transfer it to the forest department of the Odisha government for afforestation purposes. The purpose of land acquisition is clearly mentioned in the sale deed with the landowners."

Mahanadi Mines and Minerals is a subsidiary of the Adani Group.

"This land acquisition is not intended for any commercial purposes and will enrich the local ecology on account of compensatory afforestation. The land acquisition process is in line with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's comprehensive guidelines that allow the project proponent to procure land anywhere in permissible geographies in or outside the state," it said.

The company also said that the district forest officer of the Bolangir Division issued a Suitability Certificate in October for this purpose after due diligence by the authorities. (PTI)

We now know contributions of many national heroes, not just one family: Odisha CM

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Odisha government will set up memorials and make a biopic on the life of "Utkal Keshari" Harekrushna Mahtab, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi announced on Thursday, saying the society now knows the contributions of many national heroes, and not "just one family".

Majhi made the veiled reference to the Nehru-Gandhi family while addressing an event at the Vigyan Bhavan here to mark the 125th birth anniversary of Harekrushna Mahtab, the first chief minister of Orissa (now Odisha).

President Droupadi Murmu was the chief guest at the event hosted by the Ministry of Culture where a special commemorative stamp and coin were released along with a few books.

Mahtab was the last prime minister of the province of Orissa. The

province of Bihar and Orissa was carved out of Bengal in 1912 before Orissa became a separate state in 1936. After Independence, it became part of the Union of India.

Stating that this landmark tribute is being paid to Mahtab 37 years after his demise, Majhi said without taking any name, "For a long period, we were only engaged in recognising the contributions of just one family. It happened throughout the country and it also happened in Odisha."

"But Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed all this and we now know the contributions of many more national heroes than just one family," he said.

"In Odisha too, we are now ready to worship all our heroes who made significant contributions to nation building," the chief minister added.

Hailing Mahtab for his contribu-



tions, Majhi said he established the Hirakund Dam and was instrumental in the decision to shift the state capital capital from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar.

"He was a statesman, a visionary, a genius political thinker, and a strategist and mentor to many

young leaders who later became big names in state politics. Besides his contributions to politics, he also inspired a generation of Odia writers and journalists," the chief minister said.

Mahtab led (then) Orissa during a crucial period of the fight for In-

dependence, Majhi said as he underlined the role played by him in the amalgamation of various princely states into the Union of India.

"We know the contributions of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in achieving the integration of the princely states into the Union of India. Likewise, Dr Mahtab was the 'Sardar Patel of Odisha', as he helped merge various princely states into the state of Odisha," Majhi added, calling Mahtab a cynosure of "solidarity and responsive administration".

"He was nominated to the Congress Working Committee by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. He was arrested from Ahmednagar along with the likes of Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad and many other top leaders of the time," Majhi said.

Mahtab was also "arrested in

1975 for opposing the brutalities and slave-like treatment meted out by the then infamous Congress government to the public and public leaders during Emergency", Majhi said, adding that his nearly lifetime association with the Congress ended with the "anti-people politics/polices of the government led by Indira Gandhi".

Announcing several celebrations to honour Mahtab's contributions, Majhi said, "We will hold year-long celebrations to mark the 125th birth anniversary of 'Utkal Keshari' in a befitting manner. The government has taken a decision to set a memorials at different places, including his birthplace Agarpara, reprint books written by him in different languages, and encourage research on his life."

The Odisha government has also taken a decision to make a biopic on Mahtab's life, which will in-

spire the current generations and generations to come, Majhi added.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Minister of Culture and Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekhawat were also present on the dais.

It is a matter of delight that the Odisha government has taken a decision to hold year-long celebrations to mark the 125th anniversary of Mahtab, Pradhan said. Born on November 21, 1899, in Agarpara, Mahtab also wrote extensively in both Odia and English, winning accolades for his work, including the historical account "History of Orissa", besides winning the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for 'Gaan Majhis', the Culture Ministry said.

He served as the Union minister for commerce and industry, before getting elected to the Lok Sabha unopposed in 1962. (PTI)

'Even Ajmal Kasab was given a fair trial': SC remarks in Yasin Malik case

'Malik, the top leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was a threat to national security'

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Even Ajmal Kasab was given a fair trial in our country, the Supreme Court on Thursday remarked and indicated it may set up a courtroom inside Tihar Jail for the trial of J&K separatist leader Yasin Malik in a kidnapping case.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih was hearing a CBI plea against the September 20, 2022 order of a Jammu trial court that directed Malik, serving life term in Tihar jail, to be produced before it physically to cross-examine the prosecution witnesses in the kidnapping case of Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of politician Mufti Mohammad Sayeed.

The bench, however, remarked, "How will cross-examination be done online? There is hardly any connectivity in Jammu... In our country, a fair trial was given even to Ajmal Kasab and legal assistance was given to him in the high court."

Kasab, the lone Pakistani gunman caught alive after the Mumbai terror attack, was hanged till death at the Yerawada Central Prison.

The bench told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the CBI, to take instructions on the total number of witnesses in the case.

Mehta pointed out security concerns and said Malik couldn't be taken to Jammu for the trial.

The law officer accused Malik of "playing tricks" for having asked to appear personally and not engaging a lawyer. Mehta said Malik was not an ordinary criminal and showed a purported photograph of Malik sharing the dais with terrorist Hafiz Saeed.



The top court said it could order trial to take place inside the jail premises and ask the judge to come to the national capital for the proceedings.

The bench, however, noted all the accused persons in the matter had to be heard before it passes an order.

Mehta said Malik appearing in the Supreme Court physically raised security concerns previously.

The bench said Malik could be allowed to appear virtually in the apex court proceedings and posted the matter on November 28.

The CBI in the meantime was directed to amend its petition and implead all accused persons as respondents.

In 2023, Mehta wrote to then Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla flag-

ging a "serious security lapse" after Malik was brought to the Supreme Court to appear in a case.

Malik, serving life sentence in a terror-funding case, was brought to the high-security apex court premises in a prison van escorted by armed security personnel without the court's permission.

Expressing surprise at his presence, Mehta informed the apex court there was a procedure for high-risk convicts to be allowed into the courtroom to argue their case personally.

The CBI said Malik, the top leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was a threat to national security and cannot be allowed to be taken outside the Tihar jail premises.

The apex court on April 24, 2023, issued

notices on the CBI's appeal following which the incarcerated JKLF chief wrote a letter to the registrar of the Supreme Court on May 26, 2023 seeking permission to appear in person to plead his case.

An assistant registrar took up his request on July 18, 2023 and said the apex court would pass necessary orders -- a decision the Tihar Jail authorities reportedly misconstrued to allow Malik to appear and argue his case.

Mehta referred to the CBI's contention in its appeal against the trial court order to bring Malik to Jammu for the in-person examination of the witnesses in the kidnapping case, and said under Section 268 of the CrPC a state government may direct certain people to not be shifted from the confines of a prison.

On September 20, 2022, a special TADA court in Srinagar directed Malik to be physically produced before it on the next hearing for him to cross-examine prosecution witnesses in the kidnapping case.

The CBI challenged the trial court order before the Supreme Court as appeals in TADA cases are only heard by the top court.

Rubaiya was abducted near Lal Ded Hospital in Srinagar on December 8, 1989 and freed five days later after the then BJP-backed V P Singh government at the Centre released five terrorists in exchange.

Mufti, who now lives in Tamil Nadu, is a prosecution witness of the CBI, which took over the case in early 1990s.

Malik is lodged in Tihar jail after he was sentenced by a special NIA court in May, 2023 in a terror-funding case. (PTI)

JDA demolishes Kashmir migrants' shops in Jammu; sparks protests, condemnations



JAMMU, Nov 21: The Jammu Development Authority has demolished a dozen shops belonging to displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu city, allegedly without issuing notices, sparking protests from various sections that demanded action against the officials.

The demolition drive was launched on Wednesday, targeting shops built by displaced Kashmiri Pandits near the Muthi camp three decades ago, officials said.

The old shops were located on land belonging to the Jammu Development Authority (JDA). Relief Commissioner Arvind Karwani visited the area to assess the situation and assured the affected families that new shops would be constructed for them in the area.

"These shops were on JDA land. The relief organisation has floated tenders for constructing a shopping complex in Muthi Camp Phase II. Ten shops will be constructed soon and allotted to these shopkeepers," he said.

Political parties, including the BJP, PDP and Apni Party, and several Kashmiri Pandit organisations condemned the JDA's action and called for the construction of new shops for the displaced community to help them sustain their livelihood.

Pointing to his demolished shop, its owner Kuldeep Kisroo said, "Instead of helping us survive by providing better facilities and financial support, this government has snatched our bread and butter by bulldozing our shops."

Jav Lal Bhat, another shopkeeper who set up his shop in a tin shed in 1991, said, "How can we feed our families when we are solely dependent on the earnings from these shops? We urge the Lieutenant Governor and the Chief Minister to intervene and give us

justice."

Another shopkeeper, Jawahar Lal, described the demolition as "sheer hooliganism". He said, "No notices were served to us for the demolition."

President of the Muthi migrant camp Anil Bhan criticised the timing of the demolition. "It should have waited for another month as the relief department is already constructing shops for them within the camp. This unfortunate incident could have been avoided," he said.

PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti shared a clip of the affected shopkeepers on X and urged Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to address the issue with compassion and urgency. "Heartbreaking scenes emerge as Kashmiri Pandit shopkeepers stand helplessly by the rubble of their demolished shops, reportedly brought down by the JDA without prior notice. This act further deepens their sense of alienation and loss," she said on X.

BJP Spokesperson G L Raina, who visited the site and met the affected families, said, "This visibly seems to be a revenge action soon after the return of the NC-Congress government headed by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah."

"JDA should have provided alternatives to these families. The government must stop targeting this hapless community," he said.

Apni Party General Secretary and former legislator Vijay Bakaya expressed dismay and questioned the intentions of the JDA.

"Many shops being run by Kashmiri Pandit migrants in Muthi for nearly 30 years have been demolished. If these shops had to be removed for any legitimate reason, notice should have been given and alternative locations provided. This high-handed action by the authorities is most condemnable," he said. (PTI)

Formulate proposal to address inter-state trafficking of bonded labourers: SC to Centre

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Centre to hold a meeting with all the states and union territories and formulate a proposal to address the issue of inter-state trafficking of bonded labourers, including minors.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan termed as "alarming" after figures placed before it showed in Uttar Pradesh of the 5,264 bonded labourers released, only 1,101 had received immediate financial assistance.

The apex court observed the problem was in the disbursement of immediate financial assistance to the rescued children as in some cases minors were taken from their home states and forced into bonded labour in adjoining states.

"We find that in order to address the issue of inter-state trafficking of children, the issue needs to be addressed by the union as well as all the states in a unified manner," the bench said. The top court was hearing a plea seeking enforcement of fundamental rights of people trafficked as bonded labourers.

It therefore directed the secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Employment to have a meeting with his counterparts in all the states and union territories and formulate a proposal to address the social evil.

The bench wants the proposal to comprise a simplified procedure to assist the scheme of providing immediate financial assistance to the rescued child labourers.

"Taking into consideration the importance of the matter, we find that it will be appropriate to have the assistance of the Attorney General. We, therefore, request the Attorney General to assist us in the matter," it said. The Centre was further directed by the apex court to take on board the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) while finalising the procedure. The matter will be heard after six weeks.

During the hearing, the counsel appearing for the petitioners

flagged the issue over the immediate disbursement of financial assistance to the rescued bonded labourers.

The bench referred to Uttar Pradesh's figures and said over 4,100 released bonded labourers had not received financial assistance.

The state's counsel said they had compiled the district-wise data along with the number of bonded labourers released and the disbursements made to them and he would place it on record.

When asked how the state prevents bonded labour, the counsel said he would also place on record the procedure being followed in Uttar Pradesh.

The counsel for the petitioners said it was an inter-state issue as there were cases wherein people from Bihar were taken to Uttar Pradesh for bonded labour.

"Why don't you as a union have coordination with all the state governments?" the bench asked the Centre's counsel. It said the secretary of the ministry concerned should hold a meeting with his counterparts in all the states and union territories and come out with a unified formula applicable to all.

The bench further observed in the digital era, there should be a portal akin to the one pertaining to missing children.

"You have to find a unified procedure," the bench remarked.

During a hearing in August, senior advocate H S Phoolka, appearing in the matter, said not even 10 per cent of such labourers were paid financial assistance or compensation.

In July 2022, the apex court agreed to hear the petition and sought responses from the Centre, the NHRC and some states and union territories on the plea.

One of the petitioners claimed he and some other bonded workers were rescued and released on February 28, 2019 from a brick kiln in Shahjahanpur district in Uttar Pradesh before being trafficked by an unregistered contractor from their native in Bihar's Gaya district. (PTI)

Cong workers attack car transporting EVM after polling in Nagpur

NAGPUR, Nov 21: Congress workers ransacked a car transporting an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) to a strong room in Nagpur after polling concluded for the Maharashtra assembly elections, police said.

The police clarified that the EVM in question, which escaped damage in the attack, was not used in polling and it was kept on standby.

The incident took place in the Killa area of Central Nagpur constituency on Wednesday when polling officials were transporting the EVM from booth number 268 to the designated strong room in a

car. Workers of the opposition Congress claimed the EVM was being taken to a photocopy shop to print a document and they started questioning poll party officials over violation of protocols in handling the machines.

According to the police, the vehicle was intercepted by a group of individuals, who raised concerns that EVM protocols were being violated. Tensions escalated when Congress workers began pelting stones at the car.

Reports suggested officials inside the car were physically attacked, but this was not confirmed by the police. Residents of the area

quickly alerted the police, prompting a swift response.

A team from the Kotwali police station rushed to the scene, and secured both the EVM and the officials in the car. The vehicle, along with the EVM, was later escorted to the Kotwali police station for further investigation. Senior police officials said they were looking into the matter, and an offence will be registered based on their findings.

Meanwhile, senior leaders from both the BJP and the Congress rushed to the Kotwali police station, where they engaged in a heated argument over the incident. (PTI)

Jammu petrol pumps declare 'no fuel for vehicles driven by minors', DSE issues circular

JAMMU, Nov 21: In a bid to ensure the safety of underage children, petrol pumps in Jammu have put up posters declaring "no fuel for vehicles driven by minors".

The Jammu and Kashmir Directorate of School Education (DSE) has also issued a circular prohibiting minor students from driving motor vehicles, including two-wheelers and four-wheelers, to school.

The poster, first displayed at petrol pumps in the Gandhi Nagar area on the Jammu-Pathankot highway reads, "No fuel for minors". "The poster, which specifically focuses on minors riding two-wheelers without helmets or four-wheelers, is aimed at ensuring the safety of children," said an employee of the petrol pump.

This step has drawn praise from residents and encouraged the authorities to take proactive measures.

On November 14, two young boys died while another was critically injured after a tragic collision between two vehicles near the Tengpora area in Srinagar. This incident sparked a debate on driving by minors and road safety in the valley.

Following another accident in Srinagar last week, in which two teenage boys died and two others were injured after their car rammied into a stationary truck, the DSE issued an order prohibiting minor students from driving motor vehicles, including two-wheelers and four-wheelers, to school.

"It has come to notice that some underage students are driving vehicles while going to schools or coaching centres. Such an act has

the potential of causing road accidents, endangering public safety, and is also in violation of the provisions of the Motor Vehicle Act," the DSE said in a circular issued on Thursday.

It further said, "In view of the above, it is impressed upon Heads of Institutions of all government and private schools & coaching centres to implement these instructions strictly. They should keep a close vigil to ensure that no underage student is allowed to attend the institution while driving any motor vehicle, including two-wheelers or four-wheelers."

Such students must not be permitted entry and their parents should be informed accordingly, the circular added.

The directive further instructed schools and coaching centres to ensure proper sensitisation of students and parents about the dangers and risks involved in underage driving. Awareness programmes on age restrictions and traffic rules should be organised in collaboration with the traffic police, it said.

"Parents and guardians should be educated through PTMs (parents-teachers meetings) about the consequences of underage driving and their responsibilities," it stated.

Additionally, schools and coaching centres are required to monitor parking areas and entry points to ensure compliance, it said.

"Any instance of a minor driving a vehicle should be immediately reported to the concerned authorities. They should also regularly coordinate with the Traffic Police to enforce strict measures," the circular said. (PTI)

Israel eyes 10,000 Indian tourists in 2024 despite unrest, plans e-visa facility

KOLKATA, Nov 21: Amid ongoing conflict in the Middle East, Israel is hoping that the number of Indian tourists will reach 10,000 in 2024 and is planning to launch an e-visa programme for the Indian market early next year to encourage travel to the West Asian country, an official said on Thursday.

According to the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) India Director of Marketing, Amruta Bangera, around 8,500 Indian tourists visited the West Asian country till October this year.

"In 2018, the country hosted 70,800 Indian visitors, marking a record. Although the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global travel, Indian arrivals began recovering in 2022, reaching 30,900 despite minimal promotional campaigns. The momentum continued in 2023 with 41,800 Indian visitors. In 2024, 8,500 Indians travelled to Israel during the January-October period," she told PTI. "We hope that by the end of this year, the number of Indian tourists travelling to Israel will reach

around 10,000," she said.

Speaking about the impact of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, which has kept West Asia on edge, Bangera claimed, "Israel is safe for tourists, and the conflict is confined to the bordering areas, where tourists are not allowed to venture."

"Yes, the conflict and the news emanating from the region have impacted tourist inflow. But we hope the situation will improve next year, she said. The IMOT is optimistic about the Indian market's potential and is actively engaging with Indian travel agencies to promote Israel as a preferred tourist destination, she said.

We are planning to launch an e-visa programme early next year to attract more tourists from India, she said. Bangera stated that despite ongoing geopolitical challenges in the Middle East, Israel has witnessed a steady recovery in global tourism.

The country recorded a peak of 4.9 million international visitors in 2019. While the pandemic brought travel to a near halt, Israel wel-

comed over 2.6 million tourists in 2022 and 3.1 million in 2023.

"In 2024, the number of international tourists to Israel was 920,000 between January and October," she said.

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East intensified dramatically after the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched a large-scale assault on Israel from Gaza on October 7, 2023, killing approximately 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250.

Hezbollah began attacking Israel from Lebanon on October 8 in solidarity with Hamas, prompting Israel to launch extensive military campaigns in both Gaza and southern Lebanon.

Over 43,800 Palestinians, including many women and children, have reportedly been killed in Gaza, while more than 3,400 people have died in Lebanon due to Israeli bombardments, with 80 per cent of these casualties occurring in the past month.

Israeli fatalities include 76 people, 31 of whom were soldiers. (PTI)

Peaceful environment necessary for growth: VP Dhankhar

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday asserted that India's foreign policy emphasises respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of nations and the primacy of dialogue over conflict and said as wars intensify, the world can learn from the country's age-old principles of harmony and coexistence.

He also stressed the need for nations to focus on strategic security through strong defence capabilities and underlined that a peaceful environment is necessary for growth.

Noting that peace disruption or conflagration in any part of the globe has the potential to upset and unsettle growth, he said a robust national security architecture based on a clear national security strategy is a precondition for achieving our developmental goals.



Delivering a lecture at the National Defence College here on 'India's Core Values, Interests and Objectives', Dhankhar underlined that inclusive development, peace, and universal well-being, while nurturing the environment,

wisdom and modernity aimed at fruitfully people's aspirations.

As the world's largest democracy, the vice president said, India celebrates its diversity with several official languages, multiple religions, and varied ethnicities canvassed under one constitution ensuring freedom and equality.

In his address, Dhankhar said that India's interests are driven by the welfare of its people and global peace while emphasising that the menace of terrorism and fundamentalism need to be combated in tandem and together.

Highlighting the nation's commitment to gender justice he said, "India is committed to gender justice, this being vital to economy and societal values, as also harmony. This has resulted in not only the empowerment of women, it has graduated to the next level of women-led growth." (PTI)

Delhi pollution crisis fuels demand for CNG, BS-6 vehicles during wedding season

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: The enforcement of Stage IV of GRAP, which bans BS-3 and BS-4 diesel vehicles, has disrupted travel and transportation, particularly for those engaged in the wedding business.

The Central Pollution Control Board imposed GRAP-IV measures after Delhi's air quality index (AQI) entered the "severe" category on Sunday. The restrictions, which came into effect at 8 AM Monday, aim to curb pollution caused by older diesel vehicles.

However, the measure has had unintended consequences.

Travel agencies report a sharp rise in demand for BS-6 and CNG vehicles, including cars like Eriga, Innova, and traveller buses, as they scramble to meet commitments made before the ban.

"The wedding season has added to the pressure. Many vehicles were pre-booked months in advance, and

with this sudden ban, we had to scramble to adjust," said Sewak Tuar, a travel agency owner.

"We are struggling to arrange new vehicles, the petrol, CNG, and BS-6 compliant ones, as weddings and transportation needs are being heavily affected," he added.

Aryan Sinha, another travel agency owner, highlighted the growing challenges "We have vehicles available for nearby trips like Amritsar, but families booking vehicles for destinations such as Manali, Mussoorie, and Rishikesh, as well as for weddings, are facing difficulties," he said.

According to Sinha, wedding bookings often require 10 to 15 vehicles for multiple days. Managing this demand is challenging because they now have to ensure vehicles meet the required standards, he said. "For large groups, CNG buses, traveller buses, and BS-6 compliant

vehicles, especially newer models from 2020 onward, are in high demand," he told PTI. The restrictions have also impacted routine tourism as pollution prompts many families to plan trips to hill stations.

Rajesh Kumar, another travel agency owner, said, "This is the peak wedding season, and many families plan destination weddings or large gatherings requiring bulk bookings. Rearranging these commitments has been costly and disruptive, as we now have to rent additional vehicles or upgrade our fleet to comply with the regulations." The shortage has also caused financial strain on agencies, with many reporting losses.

"A large portion of our fleet comprises BS-3 and BS-4 vehicles, which are now off the roads. To accommodate the demand, we've had to rent compliant vehicles, which increases costs," Kumar added. (PTI)

Don't do run-of-the-mill stories: Farhan Akhtar on backing India's first firefighter film 'Agni'



MUMBAI, Nov 21: Actor-filmmaker Farhan Akhtar on Thursday said his aim has always been to make unique movies and his upcoming home production "Agni" will bring out a never-before-seen tale of firefighters. Directed by Rahul Dholakia of "Raees" fame, the film is backed by Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment in association with Prime Video.

"At Excel, in partnership with Amazon, (we) have tried for a long time to keep breaking new moulds, trying and telling different stories that are away from run-of-the-mill stories or something that is formulaic or is the trend of the year or season."

"That's what we keep trying, sometimes we succeed, sometimes we don't but the endeavour goes on. We hope that when this film comes out, all of you watch it. After having seen it, and interacted with Rahul and the entire team, they've put out something that has a beating heart," Akhtar told reporters at the trailer launch of "Agni".

The producer said he instantly jumped at the idea of backing a movie on firefighters since it was a novel idea when Dholakia narrated the story.

"It is not just an action movie but the heart of the film is drama, there's duty, bravery, courage, and sacrifice but that's bravery, courage and sacrifice shown by the family as well. It is an important and fresh story," Akhtar said.

Dholakia said the film will shed light on the contribution of firefighters.

"The concept of the film is how we see films on various forces like police and faujis (army) but we have never seen a film on firefighters, internationally you may have seen but in India, we do not have it."

"When there is a fire, we call them but there are so many other rescue operations that they carry out that we aren't even aware of. In 'Agni', we are talking about the lives of the firefighters, they deserve more respect."

Pratik Gandhi and Divyendu feature in the lead alongside Saiyami Kher, Sai Tamhankar, Jitendra Joshi, Udit Arora, and Kabir Shah.

Gandhi and Divyendu — who appeared last in the comedy flick "Madgaon Express" — pulled each other's leg at the press conference.

"Working with Divyendu is very difficult, it's difficult to concentrate when he is around, no one will watch you when he is around," Gandhi said.

"He is talking about my looks," Divyendu said on a lighter note.

Kher said she learnt a lot about firefighters through "Agni".

"When I heard about the script it was very exciting, the whole process of becoming a firefighter was exciting. When the teaser came out there were so many comments stating, 'There are no female firefighters'."

"Our lack of knowledge is that there are so many female firefighters in the department, I've to say that I was unaware of a lot of things that the fire department does. So, the film has been a great learning," the actor said.

"Agni" will start streaming on Prime Video on December 6. (PTI)

Sooni Taraporevala on 'Waack Girls': It interested me as a storyteller

MUMBAI, Nov 21: Veteran writer-director Sooni Taraporevala says she was introduced to the high-energy dance form of waacking through actor Mekhola Bose and during their discussions, she realised that she could use it as an anchor to tell a story about a group of women.

Her curiosity about Waacking, which involves dancers doing sharp, fast, and expressive arm movements and dramatic poses, resulted in the Prime Video series "Waack Girls".

Taraporevala, known for penning Mira Nair's acclaimed films like "Salaam Bombay!", "Mississippi Masala" and "The Namesake", has created and directed the series.

Bose, granddaughter of cinema legend Soumitra Chatterjee, is a professional waacker and was spotted by Taraporevala when she was casting for her 2020 Netflix movie "Yeh Ballet". "I saw her when I was casting for 'Yeh Ballet. I loved what she was doing but I didn't know what it was called. Later, after the shoot, we had lunch together. She was visiting from Kolkata and we spoke. I asked her about it. That's when I found out about Waacking."

"I asked her a lot of questions about Waacking and her crew, etc. And that's when I first thought of the idea of making something based around Waacking," Taraporevala told PTI in an interview.

When she took a deep dive into the subject, the filmmaker became aware of the history of the dance form.

Waacking originated in the gay clubs of the 1970s in California, US, and became a mode of expression for Black, Latino, and Asian men. The dance form reached its peak during the 70s and then slowly dwindled from the clubs as disco fell from the mainstream and the AIDS epidemic hit the world — taking a lot of originators along with it.

"It interested me as a storyteller. I've written, for Mira, a film called 'My Own Country', which is about the first time AIDS appeared in America. And it's based on a book by Dr. Abraham Verghese who was treating these AIDS patients when nobody knew what AIDS was." "And that tragedy of AIDS and people dying is also part of waacking. And that interested me to explore that level beneath the dance form. And there's nothing wrong with a dance form just being a dance form, but for me as a storyteller, it helped me as a storyteller, it helped me have this other layer under it. And that has worked itself into the story," Taraporevala said.

"Waack Girl" is

set in Kolkata and follows six young women who are unapologetically themselves as they create a dance group in a city and a country that knows little about their chosen dance style, waacking.

The series captures their adventures both on and off the dance floor as they confront personal battles, family expectations, and societal norms.

Bose stars as Ishani, the leader of the titular dance group, alongside Anasua Chowdhury, Chrisann Pereira, Priyam Saha, Ruby Sah and Achintya Bose.

"My co-writers, Iyanah Bativala and Ronny (Sen), and I wanted to have six girls who were very unique in themselves but also as a group... (I'm) tired of seeing women who all look like clones of each other. So all the young women in the show are very distinctive looking and have distinctive personalities," Taraporevala said.

Working with a young cast and crew felt like a good idea and the filmmaker said she fully embraced it.

"My crew was very young. My cast was very young. And that's the way to do it. And they all brought their A-game to it. And I'm so grateful," she said.

As a filmmaker, Taraporevala tries to emulate what Hollywood filmmaker Woody Allen once said about working with his cast.

"Woody Allen, who is now discredited, said that his

process is that 'I get the best person for the job and then I let them do their job'. My guiding principle when I started 'Little Zizou' was that quote of his," she said, referring to the 2009 movie, which marked her directorial debut.

"It was my script. And I had liberty to allow the actors to improvise because I knew what the story was and I knew what I could do with it. And I enjoy collaborating with the crew as well as the cast. That's the process that works the best for me," she added. As a storyteller, Taraporevala said she doesn't aim to stand apart from the rest of the crew.

"I don't like being called madam or ma'am. I hope to be one with the cast and crew. And I think people really appreciate that. They like being appreciated and they bring their best work to a process like that," she added.

Though she is grateful to Prime Video for backing a story like "Waack Girls", the filmmaker said it is still a struggle for storytellers like her to get their stories made.

"Mira, I was just talking to her on the phone yesterday, and she said it never stops. Struggle never ends. When you're in Indie cinema, it's always a struggle," Taraporevala said.

At the core of the struggle is the ecosystem in India that worships film stars and their fans as well as "a certain way of telling a story", she added.

"It's always gonna be a struggle if you step outside of that and want to gain an audience. That's what it is. I mean, 'LAll We Imagine As Light', which has won so many amazing awards, took Payal Kapadia four years to make it," she said.

Also starring Barun Chanda, Lillete Dubey and the late Nitesh Pandey in pivotal roles, "Waack Girls" is produced by

Matter Entertainment, Chalkboard Entertainment, and Jigri Dost Productions.

The series will start streaming on Prime Video from Friday. (PTI)



Nayanthara expresses gratitude to SRK, Chiranjeevi, Ram Charan for providing NOCs for documentary

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: South cinema star Nayanthara has thanked producers Shah Rukh Khan, Chiranjeevi, Ram

Charan and others for providing NOCs to use footage from the films they produced in her Netflix documentary. In a statement, posted on her Instagram page on Wednesday night, the actor listed out all the producers who gave her

No Objection Certificates (NOCs) without any "hesitation or delay" for the documentary "Nayanthara: Beyond the Fairy Tale", currently streaming on Netflix. The post comes days after Nayanthara slammed actor Dhanush for refusing permission to use footage from her 2015 Tamil movie "Naanum Rowdy Dhaan", which he had produced. She also criticised him for sending a legal notice demanding ₹10 crore in damages for the inclusion of a three-second behind-the-scenes clip from the film.

"Every film I have worked on, holds immense significance in my life, as my journey in cinema is filled with countless joyful moments. Among these, many films are especially close to my heart, and I wished to include those memories and scenes in our documentary. "When I approached the following producers to obtain No Objection Certificates (NOCs), they granted them without hesitation or delay. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of them," Nayanthara said in her latest statement.

From Bollywood, she thanked superstar Shah Rukh Khan and his producer-wife Gauri Khan. The actor had played the leading lady in the 2023 blockbuster "Jawan" that was produced by the couple's banner Red Chillies Entertainment. Nayanthara also thanked Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, who owns the banner Red Giant Movies, as well as Subaskaran Allirajah of Lyca Productions and the team at AGS Entertainment - S. Aghoram, S. Ganesh, and S. Suresh. Prominent names from the Tamil Nadu film industry, including K E Gnanavel Raja of Studio Green and filmmaker AR Murugadoss of AR Murugadoss productions, also feature in the list.

Nayanthara expressed her gratitude to Chiranjeevi and his son Ram Charan from the Telugu industry. (PTI)



I GREW UP WATCHING A LOT OF INDIAN MOVIES: 'WICKED' STAR MICHELLE YEOH

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Oscar-winner Michelle Yeoh says she watched many Indian movies while growing up in a multi-racial society in Malaysia and hopes her new film "Wicked" clicks well with the audiences here as it is a musical.

Yeoh, who won the best actress Oscar for her role "Everything Everywhere All At Once" in 2023, reunites with her "Crazy Rich Asians" director Jon M Chu for the big screen adaptation of the hit Broadway musical "Wicked". She stars as Madame Morrible in the movie, which is her first musical. "I grew up in Malaysia and we're a very multi-racial society and I have many Indian friends. In fact, I grew up watching a lot of Indian movies even when as a young child, I used to know how to sing Indian (songs). I'm very familiar with Indian culture and cinema."

"I have many idols in the (Indian) cinema as well. I think 'Wicked' will go down really well with our Indian friends," Yeoh told PTI in an interview.

The actor, 62, said while she was terrified at the prospect of singing in the

movie, she has always loved musicals as a genre because of their ability to transport viewers to a different kind of world.

"It's a fantasy world where people, instead of just talking, suddenly break out into song and dance, and I love that," she added.

One of the big reasons for Yeoh to star in the movie was Chu, whose 2018 film "Crazy Rich Asians" is credited for being the first major Hollywood hit to feature an entirely Asian cast in a modern setting since 1993's "The Joy Luck Club".

Yeoh said she and many others have been fighting for this change for a long time and a lot of the credit goes to storytellers like Chu.

"So many of us have been fighting to create these opportunities. Sometimes we demand to have these changes because I think we should have equal opportunities to be able to showcase our talent in front and behind the camera as well..." "We also have to be good storytellers and tell our kind of stories that echo our faces and our culture and

should be seen more and more often. But then we do need amazing storytellers like Jon M Chu to be able to showcase and highlight all this," she said, pointing at the diverse cast of "Wicked".

Yeoh, a prominent face in world cinema with acclaimed international performances in films such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon", "Tomorrow Never Dies", "Memoirs of a Geisha" and "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings", said she has always believed in the transformative power of cinema and that's why she chooses her roles carefully.

"Which movie or which TV series I want to be part of is a choice. You want to be able to ensure that the choice you've made is a good one because cinema and shows are such powerful mediums of being able to reach out to people to highlight issues."

"There are answers in there that we know too well but are afraid to say it out loud, but then in a movie or in a song, you can say it away," she said. "Wicked", whose first part releases

in theatres on November 22, is inspired by the Broadway show of the same name and serves both as a prequel and a relook at the 1939 movie classic "Wizard of Oz".

Yeoh is happy that the movie is receiving positive reviews and has generated so much buzz even before its release.

"Cinema for me has always been about a shared experience where you go in and you enjoy something together, you laugh together and come out feeling bonded in a very special way." Yeoh said she portrayed Madame Morrible, the headmistress of Crage Hall at Shiz University in the "Wicked" universe, as someone who seems approachable and caring.

"What happens is some people get blinded by their own ambitions... So our approach for Madame Morrible is like, she is a good witch. I don't think any of us start off by being wicked."

She credits the film's two leading ladies -- Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande -- for helping her with singing, which was "very daunting". (PTI)



IT'S GOING TO GET MORE ATTRITIONAL, SAYS CUMMINS ON EVE OF FIVE-MATCH SERIES AGAINST INDIA

PERTH, Nov 21: Australian captain Pat Cummins expects the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against arch-foes India to be more "attritional" as the two heavyweights of world cricket spar over five Test matches instead of the traditional four games.

And given the enormity of the series, Cummins believes players would not have the time to be distracted by the IPL auction that would take place in Jeddah on Sunday, the third day of the match. The blockbuster series will be a survival of the fittest as Australia look to avenge successive losses on home soil when they go head-to-head from Friday. "The Border-Gavaskar Trophy has always been very tight

every series, five Test-match series gets really attritional, it's a big one really," Cummins said at the pre-match press conference here on Thursday.

Australia will be without their assistant coach Daniel Vettori, who was granted permission to leave the Perth Test and be at the two-day auction with his IPL franchise SunRisers Hyderabad.

"Yeah, I think he is there in the auction. I don't think so (it will be a distraction). Dan has flown over there, but he has been here for the whole prep. Done all the meetings, done all the chats, watching it. We came to know that anyway," Cummins said.

"So, for the players, I don't think so. Most of these guys have

been there in the auctions before. They know they can't really do anything.

"You are a sitting duck and seeing whether you get selected or not. It doesn't... doesn't make a difference to how we go about the first two days. It is not a distraction as far as I can see it," he added. The Australia captain admitted there will be pressure on the home team, especially after it lost the last four Test series against India, including the two humiliating reverses on own soil.

"There will always be pressure when you are playing at home. India are a very talented side and it will be a good challenge. But we are not looking too far ahead," Cummins said.



"It would be great to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. India are a great side but we were well prepared."

The leading pacer also said said that newcomer Nathan McSweeney should not try to imitate David Warner, the legendary opener who retired from international cricket earlier this year.

"He should play his natural game. He shouldn't try to imitate David Warner. That's not his game. As long as he makes the bowlers bowl again and again, that's his game," Cummins said of the man who is going to be handed his Test debut at Optus Stadium. Asked about India's talented all-rounder Nitish Reddy, Cummins said they shared the

room for IPL franchise SunRisers Hyderabad and praised the 21-year-old.

"He is an impressive youngster. Didn't bowl much for SRH. He can swing the ball and is a really talented kid."

Interestingly, both Australia and India will be led by fast bowling captains, a rarity in international cricket. While Cummins will lead Australia, Jasprit Bumrah will be in charge of the Indian team as regular skipper Rohit Sharma is currently on a paternity leave. In the past four series between the two teams, India have won on all four occasions, including back-to-back away Test series wins in 2018-19 and 2020-21. (PTI)

We're back: Indian women's hockey team starts LA 2028 journey on bright note

RAJGIR (BIHAR), Nov 21: A new-look and much-fitter Indian women's hockey team started its 2028 Los Angeles Olympics' qualification journey in the most perfect manner, producing a scintillating, unbeaten performance during its title-defending Asian Champions Trophy campaign here.

It marked a resurrection of sorts for the side that had been left deflated after failing to qualify for the Paris Olympics this year. It marks a fresh beginning for the team and its seasoned coach Harendra Singh.

Since taking over in April, Harendra's vision has been crystal clear -- to qualify for the 2028 Games. He always believed and emphasised that a successful ACT campaign will be the right start for the team's journey towards the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Olympics. And Harendra couldn't have asked for more from his wards. "I truly believe this victory will inspire more young girls to take up hockey and further elevate the sport in India. We are thrilled to be able to bring this win to our fans and our nation," said captain Salima Tete after the brilliant campaign. His primary focus since taking charge has been to improve the team's fitness, and fortitude and the Indian players performance in the just-concluded ACT was a tes-



tament to the fact that they have worked tremendously on these core areas and lived up to their coach's expectation.

"While we celebrate this win, our focus remains on long-term goals. We are working hard every day, trusting the process, and staying dedicated to delivering our best in every tournament," Salima said. "Our ultimate aim is to bring more laurels to India and make the

country proud," she added.

The Indians were impressive in most departments of the game and remained unbeaten in seven matches, including the semifinal and final. What has been heartening for India was their ball transition from the backline to the opposition circle using both the flanks. The resolute show by the defensive line was also one of the hallmarks of India's performance

as they conceded just two goals in seven games, while scoring as many as 29 themselves.

Out of these 29 goals, 15 came from field efforts -- a heartening statistic --, 12 from penalty corners and two from penalty strokes.

The ACT produced many stars for India, the prominent among them was 20-year-old young striker Deepika, who was the tournament's highest scorer with 11

goals to her name, including four from field play, six from penalty corners and one penalty stroke.

In fact, five Indians were there in the top-10 scorers' list. Besides Deepika, Sangita Kumari (4 goals), Preeti Dubey (3), Navneet Kaur (3) and Lalrimsiami (3) were also impressive.

Harendra worked extensively on the fitness of the players in the run up to the tournament and it was clearly visible on the turf as the side played fast-paced, one-touch hockey throughout the tournament to trouble opponents, including reigning Olympic silver-medallists China whom they defeated 1-0 in the final to retain the title. If Deepika was a sensation upfront, vice-captain Navneet Kaur, Lalrimsiami and Neha were the fulcrum of India's midfield.

Besides Deepika, young Sangita too was brilliant inside the circle, while Salima and 17-year-old Sunelita Topo simply broke down the opposition defence with their dribbling skills and brilliant runs from the flanks. The defensive line was brilliantly held together by Uditia, Sushila Chanu, Jyoti and Ishika Chaudhary. So good was their performance that Indian goalkeepers Savita Punia and Bichu Devi Khariabam were hardly called into action in the tournament. (PTI)

Sindhu exits in second round of China Masters after hard-fought defeat



SHENZHEN (CHINA), Nov 21: Two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu's campaign at the China Masters Super 750 badminton tournament came to an end in the second round after she lost to Singapore's Yeo Jia Min in a hard-fought three game women's singles contest here on Thursday.

World No.19 Sindhu, who dispatched the higher-ranked Batsunan Ongbammrunphan 21-17 21-19 in the opening round, fought valiantly before going down 16-21 21-17 21-23 to Min in a match that lasted one hour and nine minutes.

It was curtains for other two surviving Indian women's singles players as well with both Anupama Upadhyaya and Malvika Bansod crashing out in the second round.

While Anupama lost 7-21 14-21 against Japan's Natsuki Nidaira, Malvika was thrashed 9-21 9-21 by eight-seeded Supanida Katethong of Thailand.

The women's doubles pair of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand was no match for second seeded Chinese pair of Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning.

The world number 18 India duo, which is currently at eight spot in the BWF World Tour rankings, lost 16-11 11-21 against their Chinese opponents in a second round match lasting just 43 minutes.

Indian singles challenge now rests on the shoulders of Lakshya Sen who will be up against Denmark's Rasmus Gemke in a men's second round match later in the day.

Also in action will be defending champions Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag

Shetty, who returned to action after a break following the Paris Olympics.

The Asian Games gold medalist Indian duo will meet the Danish pair of Rasmus Kjaer and Frederik Sogard in the pre-quarterfinals later on Thursday. Thursday's hard-wrenching defeat was Sindhu's first loss against her Singapore rival in six meetings.

It was a neck-and-neck affair between Sindhu and Min till the first six points but the Singaporean upped her game and capitalised on a few unforced errors from her opponent to take a five-point advantage (11-6) at the first break.

Sindhu, however, didn't give up and clawed her way back with some long rallies and fine court play to pocket four straight points and reduce the margin to 11-10. The close contest between the two shuttlers continued till 16 points before Min upped her game and won five consecutive points to take the first game.

In the second game, Sindhu came out attacking and raced to an early 8-5 lead which Min slowly reduced but the Indian kept her cool and used her experience to pocket four straight points from 17 to level the scores.

The decider was a treat to watch for the spectators as both the shuttlers were in no mood to give an inch to each other. At one point Sindhu had a 13-9 lead but a determined Min didn't give up as she displayed great attacking game and capitalised on a tiring Sindhu's errors to seal the match in her favour. (PTI)

Virat tips for Yashasvi: If you want to play for India for long, imbibe good habits



PERTH, Nov 21: Yashasvi Jaiswal has enjoyed a stellar start to his Test career and the young Indian batter says superstar Virat Kohli's advice to be disciplined in every aspect of life is the guiding principle of his ambition to have a long career in the national team.

The 22-year-old has already scored three centuries and eight half centuries in just 14 Tests with an average of over 56. He is now gearing up for a trial by fire in the five-Test Border-Gavaskar series against Australia, starting here on Friday.

"When I started playing senior cricket, I spoke to Virat Paaji about how he manages himself," Jaiswal told bcci.tv.

"Paaji (Kohli) said to me that if I have to play all that cricket (as long as he has), then I have to be disciplined in my daily routines, follow the process.

"I have seen him (Kohli) doing the stuff consistently day-by-day (day in day out), he motivates me to work on myself and make a difference in my habits," he said.

Jaiswal then elaborated on the template that he follows in his routine.

"I have always believed in

consistency in my work. I have always had a plan when I go for practice. The focus is on recovery, to remain fresh for next practice, taking care of my diet," he said.

"The desire to play for India is the biggest motivation I have, really blessed to have these opportunities and ready for it," Jaiswal added.

The Mumbaikar echoed stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah's confidence in the team's ability to adapt quickly.

"This is a different place. Ball comes at a different height, but that we all know and we are ready mentally. I really want to go in, see it and be there," he said. Jaiswal knows that finding opportunity in adversity is what separates men from boys. He believes he is up for the challenge.

"I always see this as an opportunity for me to go out there and learn," he said.

"People, a lot of times, talk about stuff, that this happens and that happens but I want to go and face that stuff and want to enjoy that smile, that is all I think about. Till you are not there (in person), you don't feel what it is." (PTI)

Reddy is talented and believes in his game, says skipper Bumrah

PERTH, Nov 21: Jasprit Bumrah was not ready to divulge his playing eleven for the opening Test against Australia starting Friday but gave enough indications that the team management is heavily invested in young Nitish Kumar Reddy's all-round abilities, which can lend perfect balance to the Indian eleven.

As a captain what has impressed Bumrah is that the youngsters in the side are neither confused about their roles nor overawed by the sense of occasion of playing their first Test series Down Under.

Reddy, rookie speedster Harshit Rana, Devdutt Padikkal, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Prasidh Krishna and Dhruv Jurel are on their maiden Test tour to Australia.

"Reddy is quite talented and

we are positive about him. You have seen in IPL also, he believes in his game," Bumrah said at the pre-match media conference on Thursday.

Bumrah admired the fact that this generation of players are fearless and clear-headed in their approach.

"The best thing about youngsters in our team is that when you talk to them, no one looks confused, overawed," he said.

"When you have belief in your abilities, you get a lot of confidence as a leader that a youngster wants to perform the tough job.

"He wants responsibility and wants to be thrown at the deep end of the pool as they want to prove themselves. Nothing could be more heartening for a captain."

Virat Kohli's current form might be a matter of debate but Bumrah has no doubt that India's Numero Uno batter looks in fine nick and it could be an ominous sign for the opposition. But he wouldn't like to "jinx it".

"I don't have to say anything about Kohli the batter. I have made my (Test) debut under him. I don't need to give him any kind of special inputs and he is the utmost professional you have in our team and he is one of the leaders," Bumrah was loud and clear.

Bumrah is on his third Test tour to Australia and the stand-in skipper keeps telling the youngsters that once a player performs Down Under, his career graph goes on an upward exponential curve. (PTI)

Embrace the fight in Australia: Mayank Agarawal to Devdutt Padikkal

MUMBAI, Nov 21: Young India batter Devdutt Padikkal will need to embrace the challenges that will come his way if he gets an opportunity in the first Test against Australia starting on Friday, feels his senior Karnataka teammate Mayank Agarawal.

Padikkal, who was initially not a part of India's jumbo 18-member squad for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, was asked to stay back after a team's unofficial Tests Down Under following a blow to Shubman Gill's left hand ahead of the series opener.

If Gill remains sidelined, Padikkal is in line to take field for the second time in the format, having made his debut against England in March.

"They (Indian players) have had time to prepare. The good thing was (that) a lot of the guys went

and played India A games," Agarawal, who was in a similar situation on the 2018-19 tour when he was called up for the second Test at Melbourne, told PTI on Thursday.

"They have had at least three weeks to prepare themselves for the conditions. But it then now boils down to the mindset -- are you willing to get into the fight?"

"Or are you willing to embrace that fight? If he can get into that mindset -- which he has; he has got a lot of skill, a lot of flair (and he) works hard on his game."

In fact, Padikkal looked one step closer to being certain of playing the first Test with BCCI's official handles sharing a video of his experience of being back with the national side one day before the game. "It feels really surreal to be honest. The intensity of the prac-



tice sessions were quite high. You feel that challenge; you will feel that everyone is ready, raring to go for the big series ahead," Padikkal said. "So, it is always pleasure to have training sessions with the Indian team because it feels as big as the match. Hopefully, it will trans-

late to the game as well."

"I am glad that I am getting this opportunity, and hopefully I can make it count," said Padikkal, who scored a fine 88 in the first unofficial Test at Mackay.

Agarawal backed the Indian batters to banish their recent woes in Australia.

"They have prepared in the best way they can or they should, according to them, which we must trust. They are going to face challenges, definitely. It's a place where cricket is played really hard," said Agarawal, part of India's 2-1 win on the 2018-19 tour.

"You want to put yourself out there with a mindset of saying, 'I want to be in that tough situation, or, I want to be in a situation where the chips are down and I can find a way and win the situation and win the game for the team,'" he

said.

Agarawal backed his long-time mate KL Rahul, who is set to open in place of Rohit Sharma in the opening Test, crediting him for his flexibility in the batting line-up.

"The real question here is that whenever you are going to play for India, when you are going to represent your national team, there is going to be pressure. The situations have been (different), where he has been asked to open and he has been asked to play different roles," he said.

"I give him credit that he is somebody who is adapted to playing everywhere. We have seen that he has done really well overseas. He is very calm and he is very collected. He just needs to go about doing his routines, going about playing the way he plays and just stay calm," he said. (PTI)

Opening Act: Under pressure India meet edgy Australia

PERTH, Nov 21: The nostalgia of Brisbane 2021 refuses to fade but India, still reeling from a bitter home debacle, will be under tremendous pressure when they face an equally circumspect Australia in a battle of two out-of-form batting units in the opening Test of the marquee Border-Gavaskar Trophy, starting here on Friday.

In 2018-19 and 2020-21, India proved that lightning can strike twice with back to back series wins but the manner in which New Zealand came, saw and decimated them on home turf recently has certainly hit the psyche of an otherwise world-class unit.

The undeniable truth is that some of the stars driving this unit are in the twilight of their hallowed careers. How the five-match rubber against Pat Cummins and his men unfolds could well decide their future.

A record third World Test Championship final entry that looked imminent before the start of the New Zealand series, now seems like a distant dream. A 4-0 score-line has become an absolute necessity for India to avoid relying on other teams.

And a 4-0 scoreline on Australian soil is as improbable a proposition as an Indian football team beating Brazil or Argentina in a FIFA friendly.

But anyone who has seen this current bunch from close quarters will vouch that this team can bounce back from the brink. It also tends to play its best cricket when Doubting Thomases enjoy a condescending chuckle at their expense.

In this backdrop, Australia, ready to avenge the humiliation suffered in last five years, face a team that enters the cage without its regular skipper (Rohit Sharma on paternity break), its best exponent of reverse swing (Mohammed Shami, still not 100 per cent fit) and a future skipper (Shubman Gill, thumb fracture).

An Australia series is known to make or break careers. Sachin Tendulkar scored a hundred on a WACA track with 'snake cracks' and the world took notice while Dili



Vengsarkar and Krishnamachari Srikanth were forced to walk into the sunset back in 1991-92.

Virat Kohli, Rohit, who will arrive before the second Test in Adelaide, and senior off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin are facing that moment of reckoning yet again and an indifferent result could have repercussions.

Kohli's coronation as 'King Kohli' happened in 2014 in this very country with those four hundreds while Cheteshwar Pujara and Rishabh Pant still make appearances in the nightmares of the Aussie bowling quartet, which will certainly be playing its last Border-Gavaskar series together.

This will perhaps be the series which will be decided by bowlers more than ever with Jasprit Bumrah, leading in the opening game, entrusted with the duty of setting the tone against a line-up which has been far from its best even at home in recent times.

Mohammed Siraj and Akash Deep are likely to be Bumrah's partners but the lanky Prasidh Krishna and the burly Harshit Rana are also staking a claim with impressive skill sets.

Whatever be the composition, the home batters cannot afford to take it lightly. Steve Smith's average in the current WTC cycle (2023-25) is just around 36 while his career average is an impressive 56 plus in over 100 Tests.

Marnus Labuschagne's career average is nearly 50 but in the last two years, it has nose-dived to less than 30.

Travis Head has been India's nemesis in back to back ICC finals within months of each other but even his average is a lowly 28 plus in this cycle.

Save for Usman Khawaja, who even at the business end of his career epitomises consistency, keeper Alex Carey and skipper Cummins, who is now a proper all-rounder, the

batting hasn't exactly inspired confidence.

Australia's tail has a better chance of wagging given that India are mulling on playing the better spinner in Ravichandran Ashwin instead of a far better batter in Ravindra Jadeja.

It could be a tactical call looking at the moisture and bounce available on a first track and the world knows that Ashwin is a shade better compared to Jadeja when it comes to bowling on opening day tracks if need be.

To ensure that India's tail isn't as big as that of Kangaroos found in Australian Outbacks, rookie all-rounder Nitish Reddy is expected to be thrown at the deep end of the pool with hope and a prayer that he can be a steady fourth pacer giving 12 to 15 overs per day.

In batting, three of India's top six batters have never played in Australia and two of them have a cumulative Test experience of four games.

But there's something in Yashasvi Jaiswal, Devdutt Padikkal and Dhruv Jurel that inspires confidence.

They will have Rishabh Pant, perhaps one of the finest Test batters India have produced in the last five years, and a mildly underconfident but stylish KL Rahul for company.

If they fire in unison, India will be more than handful.

Teams

India: Jasprit Bumrah (C), Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul, Devdutt Padikkal, Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant (wk), Dhruv Jurel, Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Siraj, Akash Deep, Harshit Rana, Prasidh Krishna, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Washington Sundar.

Australia: Pat Cummins (C), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Marsh, Nathan McSweeney, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc.

Match Starts: 7:50 am IST. (PTI)

Pujara backs KL Rahul at No 3, believes Jaiswal can do a Warner



PERTH, Nov 21: Cheteshwar Pujara, who knows a thing or two about grinding the Australian attack in their den, on Thursday backed KL Rahul to bat at the vital number three slot in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, and said the swashbuckling Yashasvi Jaiswal is capable of doing what David Warner did in his prime.

The five-match Test series begins here on Friday.

"I don't know the batting order. I would prefer him (Rahul) at No. 3 because he has the experience to bat there," Pujara said in Star Sports press room.

Rahul, however, is expected to open with youngster Yashasvi Jaiswal, while Karnataka's Devdutt Padikkal is being considered for No. 3 to maintain a left-right combination.

"It seems the team is preferring Devdutt (Padikkal) at No. 3 for the left-right combination. He has batted at 5-6 and in the middle order. It will be easier to bat at No. 3 than opening. If he can bat at No. 3, it will be good."

Pujara, currently sidelined from the Test set-up, praised Jaiswal and compared his batting with that of Australian great David Warner.

"One of the most talented cricketers India has produced... I'm very confident that going forward, he has a lot to prove. I know he will play a key role in this series if we have to win."

"His role would be one of the most important ones. He can play a role similar to what David Warner used to do for the Australian team."

"Being an opener, he holds the key. He's mentally tough. He loves batting, hits a number of balls. He has a long way to go across the formats."

Pujara said the youngsters must play with self-confidence and without the fear of failure.

"I will tell them the first battle is a mental battle. Self-confidence and belief are needed to make runs in these conditions. When there is pace and bounce, there is a chance of the ball hitting the body. You have to come out of that fear," Pujara said.

On tackling short-pitch deliveries in Australian conditions, Pujara said the batters will have to identify the deliveries they should leave.

"As a batter, you need to understand your strengths. We often end up playing hook shots we aren't quite capable of. On Indian pitches, most short-pitched deliveries are below shoulder level. But in Australia, they're often above shoulder height."

"As a batter, you need to identify which balls to leave and

which to play. Those below the shoulders are the ones you can pull, but you need to be in control of the shot. Sometimes you leave the ball, and sometimes you pull. You can't have a set rule -- you just need to look at the ball and play according to the situation. Be in the present moment," he said.

Virat Kohli may be going through a lean patch but Pujara believes his past success in Australia will help him to turn things around.

"There is a lot of expectation of him. The number of matches he's playing and the athlete Virat is, he doesn't get enough breaks in between. That is why sometimes, when you're not getting enough breaks, your body and confidence go down a bit. That's normal."

"He has got some break. He's at a place where he likes to compete. If someone is having a go at him, he would like to give it back to the bowlers -- that's how he started his journey."

"He has set high standards for himself. He has that awareness. He has been a leader and is probably the best in the circuit. He's aware of what's expected of him and how many runs he has to make." Under Kohli's captaincy on the 2017-18 tour of Australia, Pujara aggregated over 500 runs and played a significant role in India's historic Test series triumph.

"I'm confident that once he gets going, he needs to spend some time in the game. He's capable of doing all things. Always leading from the front, it's about getting a 50-60-70. If he gets a hundred, then he will have a great series ahead," Pujara said of Kohli.

"In every match, he is motivated, whatever the format. Definitely, he has worked on it. It's about getting that start and spending time at the crease."

Rishabh Pant has been the architect of their epic triumph in the 2020-21 series, and the wicketkeeper-batter has returned after surviving a horrific car accident two years ago.

Pujara feels the left-hander is a lot smarter now and will be one to watch out for.

"Australian bowlers struggle a bit to bowl to lefties. There's a different kind of enjoyment watching him. He's an attacking player who puts pressure on the bowlers. It becomes easy for me to play my natural game as they try to stop runs."

"Whoever bats with Rishabh in that partnership, it will be crucial. Batting at No. 5-6, with the ball a bit old, he plays attacking cricket. He can change the entire match in one session. (PTI)

Independence Day Cup Prize Money Football Tournament from Nov 24

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Nov 21: The 76th edition of Nagaon Sports Association's prestigious Independence Day Cup Prize Money Football Tournament will begin on November 24. The tournament, to be held at the Nurul Amin Stadium, will feature 16 teams, including top teams from Assam and across the country, along with two local teams that secured the first and second positions in the association's current year's First Division League.

As per the schedule of the association, the initial pre-qualifying round will feature matches between Amlan Gusthi - Halowating United Football Club (Sivasagar), Star Sporting Club - Karchang Majuli Football Club, Eleven Star Club (Bongaigaon) - Kasha Academy (Barauni, Madhya Pradesh), and Inter North East Football Club - Kasha Eleven (Diphu).

On the other hand, Global Football Club (Kokrajhar), F Four C (Manipur), Assam Police, and PFR Football Club (Shillong) have been directly selected for the pre-quarterfinal round. Conversely, Assam State Electricity Board Guwahati, Chennaiyin Football Club, Oil India Football Club, and Kalliat Sports Lovers Association have been directly selected for the quarterfinals, a press note stated, adding that matches will be held daily from 2 pm, and the tournament's finale will take place on December 8 next.

Stay calm, avoid knee-jerk reactions: Shastri's advice to Gambhir ahead of Border-Gavaskar Trophy

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: Ravi Shastri guided India to back-to-back series wins in Australia and his short advice to current head coach Gautam Gambhir is to "stay calm" over the course of five Tests Down Under and avoid knee-jerk reactions.

Known for his aggressive temperament, Gambhir has been recently labelled "prickly" by a few former Australian cricketers as he faces his biggest challenge since taking charge in July.

"The first thing would be to stay calm and not let outside elements influence you in any way," Shastri advised Gambhir while talking to media in the Star Sports press room.

"Avoid getting into positions where knee-jerk reactions happen. Stay calm and focus on understanding your players. You'll notice what it takes for a player to thrive."

Shastri said the key to success lies in understanding players and empowering them in match situations.

"You'll understand team situations where a certain player might be better suited than another, based on your understanding of their temperament."

"These insights don't come overnight -- it took me some time to understand everyone. Gautam might already have a basic understanding of the players' temperaments. He might have seen them in the IPL or sat in the dressing room with them when he played."

"However, there are many players with different mindsets, cultures, and backgrounds. For example, there could be a player who's an introvert, but with the right push and confidence, he could become a match-winner for you. "Understanding those kinds of players and enabling them to work and play in a way that brings out their best would be crucial."

India may have gone to Australia on the back of an unprecedented 0-3 loss to New Zealand at home but Shastri feels Pat Cummins and Co will never underestimate the visitors who have



held the trophy since 2016-17.

"One thing is clear -- this Australian team will never underestimate India, no matter who has come to play. They'll be quietly confident but won't let that confidence get too high."

"They'll be desperate to win, as they haven't won in their own country the last two times and haven't had their hands on the trophy in close to 10 years. That desperation will be there," he added.

Asked if there would be additional pressure on premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who would stand-in as skipper in the Perth Test with Rohit Sharma on paternity leave, Shastri said he should not "overtry".

"These are things that happen naturally, beyond your control. There's nothing you can do about it. You have to think ahead, see what's in your hands, and act accordingly."

"You've got the ammunition and players with experience, so it's important for Gautam to motivate them to take on Australia," Shastri said. Shastri believes Bumrah will face pressure as

captain.

"Pressure will be on Bumrah, no doubt about that. Any captain will feel the heat in this situation."

"But Bumrah is a mature and competitive cricketer. Let's not forget he's the best fast bowler in the world right now. The Aussies know what they're up against—they might come after him, but they also know he'll come after them."

"He shouldn't overtry due to captaincy pressure. If he sticks to his strengths and bowls like a team player, he'll be fine."

A key man in India's historic Test wins in Australia, Cheteshwar Pujara, is not part of the Test side anymore and Shastri feels KL Rahul is one player who can "bat long".

"Pujara is Pujara. Please don't compare him with anyone. People used to literally do "puja" to Pujara, asking him to stay at the crease, and we'd win the series in Australia -- and it happened that way. So don't compare. What he did was outstanding. (PTI)

Don't look at captaincy as a post but responsibility: Bumrah



PERTH, Nov 21: Jasprit Bumrah has always loved responsibility and taking on tough jobs which is why he is relishing the prospect of leading India against fierce riv

vals Australia in a much-anticipated Test series opener in their backyard.

This is the second time that Bumrah will captain the team in the absence of Rohit Sharma after the Edgbaston Test against England in 2022, and the 30-year-old would like to skin the cat in his own way.

"I don't look at captaincy as a post but I have always loved responsibility," Bumrah said at a press conference ahead of the first Test.

"I wanted to do the tough job since I was a child. You want to do things and get thrown in tough scenarios, this adds a new challenge for me," India's pace spearhead said, summing up his feelings about leadership.

He knows it is for only one Test match and as much as he tried to portray that he wants to be in the present, there was no denying that he would want a leadership role in future.

"Obviously, I won't be telling Rohit ki main kar leta hoon (I would do this) (laughs). He is our captain and he is doing a wonderful job and right now it's one game and you don't know what will happen tomorrow," Bumrah tried to put things on record.

"In the next game, things change and

that's how cricket works. Right now, I am in the present. I have been given a responsibility. I did it once and enjoyed it thoroughly. I am thinking how I can contribute to the best of my capacity. Future, I can't control it."

Bumrah also understands that it doesn't help if one is trying to ape someone else's leadership traits.

"You have to find your own way as you can't blindly copy anyone. Virat and Rohit have been very successful and have gotten results but my way is that I have always never followed a copybook plan."

"And even with my bowling you can see, I go with my instincts and that's how I have always played my cricket. I have a lot of faith in my guts and instincts," Bumrah said.

He believes that fast bowlers are "tactically smart" and do make good captains, and praised Pat Cummins for doing a "phenomenal job" with the Australian team. He also cited Kapil Dev's example.

Does bowler captains tend to over-bowl or under-bowl themselves?

"Well, I look at it in a different manner. I can manage myself the best when I am the captain. I know when I am fresh and I know when I need to push myself, and I

know when I have to take extra responsibility," he put forth his case in a strong manner.

"I look at the advantages. I understand that the wicket is changing, you have to understand what field settings are good at the moment and obviously bowlers are more data driven and research oriented than batters and that's how the game is headed."

"There are more positives than negatives. Yes, there are challenges but you want to be tested and you want to face challenges."

Bumrah has always seen himself as a leader of the group, even when others have led the side.

"I am always wanting to add more when Rohit is there and when Virat was there. I tried to learn from them and when I became a senior player, and new guys started coming in, I started passing on information."

"That's how I look at it. It feels good and there is no greater honour than leading your country. I have always wanted to play this format, and very few players have played this format, and captains are even less, so I am very privileged and happy to be in this position." (PTI)

Former Pak cricketer Muhammad Nazir passes away

KARACHI, Nov 21: Former Pakistani cricketer and umpire, Muhammad Nazir junior passed away in his hometown of Lahore on Thursday after prolonged illness. He was 78.

Nazir, who had given some torrid time to West Indian legend Viv Richards with his off-spin, was bed-ridden for the last few months, Noman Nazir, his son, confirmed.

"My father was badly injured in a road accident some five years back and after that he never got over his health problems and for the last few months was bed-ridden. He passed away in hospital," Noman said.

Noman had made an appeal last week to the Pakistan Cricket Board to help his ailing father.

Nazir junior gained fame for his off-spin bowling when he was recalled to the Pakistan team after a five-year gap by Imran Khan in 1979/80 to play against the West Indies at home. (PTI)