

India, Australia firm up clean energy partnership; pushing for mega trade pact

RIO DE JANEIRO, Nov 20: India and Australia sealed an ambitious renewable energy partnership and set their eyes on a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese vowed to significantly ramp up overall bilateral ties.

A raft of issues including ways to boost ties in areas of defence and security ties, mobility, science and technology and education figured prominently at the second India-Australia annual conclave held on the sidelines of the G20 summit late on Tuesday.

The two leaders also looked forward to a long-term vision of defence and security collaboration to enhance collective strength, contribute to both countries' security, and make an important contribution to regional peace and security, according to a joint statement.

The Renewable Energy Partnership (REP) would provide the framework for practical coopera-



tion in priority areas such as solar energy, green hydrogen, energy storage, investments in related projects and allied areas.

In his media statement after the summit talks with Albanese, Modi said both sides will work on new possibilities of cooperation in areas like defence industry, critical minerals, renewable energy, ship building, space and sports.

The two prime ministers welcomed further work towards an "ambitious, balanced and mutually

beneficial" Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) to realise the full potential of the bilateral economic relationship, the joint statement said.

Both sides are keen to build on the momentum created by the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) which was signed in 2022.

In his remarks, Modi said work will be done for a mutually beneficial CECA and that Albanese committed to protect the interests

of the Indian community in Australia, especially Indian students. After the implementation of 'ECTA', our mutual trade has increased by 40 per cent in the last two years, he said.

Modi also emphasised the need to resolve conflicts and tensions through dialogue and diplomacy.

"We have been and will continue to support peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region together. We have emphasised on dialogue and diplomacy to resolve global conflicts and tensions," he said.

The prime minister said both India and Australia are also unanimous on the need for reform in global institutions.

Modi said Albanese has accepted his invitation for the Quad summit to be held in India next year.

"I am confident that in the times to come, the partnership between India and Australia will touch new heights and will become a force for the global good," he said. (PTI)

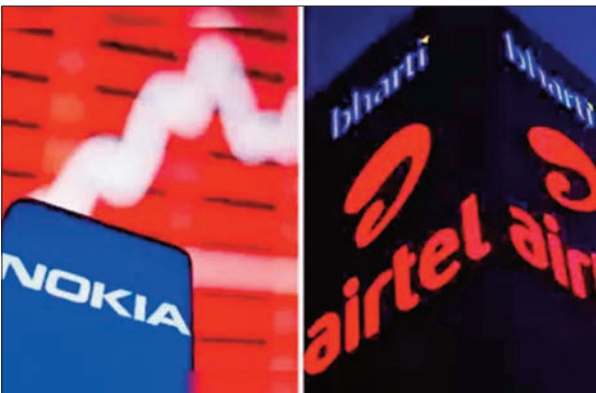
Bandhan Mutual Fund launches Bandhan Nifty 200 Quality 30 Index Fund

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 20: Bandhan Mutual Fund announced the launch of the Bandhan Nifty 200 Quality 30 Index Fund, an open-ended index scheme that tracks the Nifty 200 Quality 30 Index. This fund offers investors access to 30 high-quality companies within the Nifty 200 universe, selected based on key financial metrics such as Return on Equity (ROE), Debt-to-Equity ratio, and Earnings Per Share (EPS). The fund aims to provide both resilience and growth potential, positioning it as a reasonably attractive option for investors seeking relative stability amid market volatility. The New Fund Offer (NFO) will open on Monday, November 18, and close on Friday, November 29. Investments in the Bandhan Nifty 200 Quality 30 Index Fund can be made through licensed mutual fund distributors, online platforms, or directly at <https://bandhanmutual.com/nfo/bandhan-nifty-200-quality-30-index-fund/>.

Highlighting the key reasons to invest in the Bandhan Nifty 200 Quality 30 Index Fund, Vishal Kapoor, CEO, Bandhan AMC, said, "As economies face increasing headwinds, there is a growing shift towards large-cap, high-quality stocks that offer resilience and stability. Quality stocks, with their solid financial fundamentals, have become a favoured choice, especially in uncertain markets. The Nifty 200 Quality 30 Index targets companies with robust profitability, manageable debt levels, and consistent earnings, aiming to deliver better risk-adjusted returns with lower volatility. Focused on sectors like Consumer Discretionary and FMCG, these companies have historically shown steady performance and smaller declines during global crises, providing investors with potential downside protection. This fund may be ideal for long-term investors aiming for both relative stability and growth potential in today's evolving landscape", a release stated.

Nokia secures multi-billion 5G deal with Bharti Airtel in India



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 20: Nokia has clinched a multi-year, multi-billion-dollar deal with Bharti Airtel to expand the telecom operator's 4G and 5G networks across key regions in India. The agreement underscores the growing demand for cutting-edge connectivity in one of the world's largest mobile markets.

Under the contract, Nokia will supply equipment from its advanced AirScale portfolio, including base stations, baseband units, and next-generation Massive MIMO radios, all powered by its energy-efficient ReefShark System-on-Chip technology. These tools will boost Airtel's 5G capacity and coverage while enhancing its

overall network performance. Nokia will also upgrade Airtel's existing 4G infrastructure with multiband radios and baseband equipment that are future-ready for 5G integration.

Additionally, Airtel plans to adopt Nokia's AI-driven MantaRay Network Management solution, which offers intelligent network monitoring and management. This system leverages digital tools for deployment, optimization, and technical support, ensuring seamless operations and enhanced customer experiences.

Gopal Vittal, Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Bharti Airtel, hailed the partnership as a step toward building a future-ready network. "Airtel has always

been at the forefront of network innovation. This collaboration with Nokia strengthens our infrastructure to deliver unparalleled connectivity while aligning with our sustainability goals," he said.

Pekka Lundmark, Nokia's President and CEO, echoed the sentiment, emphasizing the significance of the deal in reinforcing their long-standing relationship with Airtel. "Our industry-leading AirScale portfolio and AI-based solutions will empower Airtel to deliver premium 5G services with energy efficiency and the highest quality standards," Lundmark stated.

This partnership builds on over two decades of collaboration between Nokia and Airtel, during which the two companies have deployed 2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G networks across India. The deal also advances the companies' joint Green 5G Initiative, aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of Airtel's network operations.

The agreement marks another milestone in India's journey toward widespread 5G adoption, ensuring Airtel remains a leader in the rapidly evolving telecom sector.

Bitcoin, cryptocurrencies hit headlines for wrong reasons

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: Bitcoin and cryptocurrency are in news again after allegations were levelled against Congress's Maharashtra president Nana Patole and NCP (SP)'s Supriya Sule of being involved in "illegal bitcoin activities" to fund their poll campaign. Here is a look at what cryptocurrency/bitcoins are:

A cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency secured by cryptography, which makes it nearly impossible to counterfeit or double-spend. They exist on decentralised networks using blockchain technology -- a distributed ledger enforced by a disparate network of computers. Bitcoin is the name of the most recognized cryptocurrency, the one for which blockchain technology was created.; cryptocurrency has no intrinsic value and is not redeemable for another commodity, such as gold; has no physical form and exists only in the network; its supply is determined by the protocol, not a central bank.

India is formulating a framework for cryptocurrencies, but until it is enacted, crypto is not yet illegal.

In 2022, the government announced a flat 30 per cent tax on gains arising from cryptocurrencies. Taxing income from cryptocurrencies does not necessarily and explicitly legalise cryptocurrencies.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) too has been skeptical about the use of private crypto assets and considers it as a major threat to macroeconomic and financial stability of the country.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has repeatedly stated that cryptocurrency issued by private entities cannot be the currency. Currency it would be when the Reserve Bank of India issues a digital currency, he had stated. Private digital currencies/virtual currencies/crypto currencies have gained popularity in the past one decade or so. Regulators and governments have been sceptical about these currencies and are ap-

prehensive about the associated risks.

It can be noted that on March 4, 2021, the Supreme Court had set aside an RBI circular of April 6, 2018, prohibiting banks and entities regulated by it from providing services in relation to virtual currencies.

Currently, crypto assets are unregulated in India. Here cryptocurrencies are regulated from the perspective of anti-money laundering law. Besides that, income tax and TDS is levied on earnings from trading in such virtual digital assets. Also, GST is levied on cryptocurrency exchanges. In July last year, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said that "international collaboration" would be needed for any effective regulation or ban on cryptocurrency.

Earlier, the Reserve Bank of India had proposed a ban that was set aside by a court order. The RBI considers cryptocurrencies as huge risks to financial stability, and monetary stability. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das had last month said that such virtual assets may create a situation where the central bank may lose control of money supply in the economy.

The RBI has recommended that crypto assets should be prohibited. Crypto assets are by definition borderless and require international collaboration to prevent regulatory arbitrage. Therefore, any legislation for regulation or for banning can be effective only with significant international collaboration on evaluation of the risks and benefits and evolution of common taxonomy and standards.

Currently, an inter-ministerial group (IMG), comprising officials from RBI, Sebi and finance ministry, is looking into a wider policy for cryptocurrencies. A discussion paper from the IMG is awaited, which will give the stakeholders an opportunity to give their views before India decides on its policy stance on crypto currencies. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1..

Complete elevated corridor

₹ 5,500 crore has been allocated for constructing an elevated expressway as a wildlife-friendly measure for the Kaziranga National Park. The four-lane elevated road along NH-715 (old NH-37) will be at three locations with a total length of 34.28 km and this will also include two tunnels, the chief minister had said.

The concept of the wildlife-friendly road was developed in consultation with the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, and will have elevated roads and tunnels to act as animal underpasses and overpasses respectively. Samra had said. Besides rhinoceros, animals that can be seen in the elephant grass, marshland and dense tropical moist broadleaf forests of the Kaziranga National Park include hoolock gibbon, tiger, leopard, Indian elephants, sloth bear, wild water buffalo and swamp deer. (PTI)

Killers of 6 people

take up necessary steps to ensure the safety of our people irrespective of which community they belong to. Let us all condemn such barbaric violence in the strongest terms. The killing of women and children is a crime against humanity and such acts can never be justified. Together we will overcome these dark times and work towards a more peaceful future," Singh added. (PTI)

Security Council structure doesn't

the status quo. Those who are already permanent members do not wish to vacate it. Those who are already permanent members do not wish to give up the veto. Those who feel that their neighbours may have a chance to become a member would oppose expansion in the permanent category at all costs," he said.

"This is the way nations behave, very much like people, in terms of motivations." Pakistan is part of the group 'Uniting for Consensus' that opposes permanent seats for India and other G4 nations Brazil, Germany and Japan. Of the five Permanent members of the Council, France, Russia, the UK and the US have voiced strong support for India's bid for a permanent seat in a reformed Council.

China has said that Security Council reform is an important part of the reform of the multilateral governance architecture but also pointed to the "practice of a few countries and interest groups who pursue their own selfish and small-circle interests when it comes to Council reform".

Harish described the process as being "very difficult" and "complex".

"Yes, we are unsatisfied with the pace of progress in the last 15-16 years and urging the co-chairs of the Inter-Governmental Negotiation process to decisively move forward on this. "Is it going to be easy and will it happen tomorrow? Probably not. What should we do? We should keep at it because eventually, things will not remain the same. Nothing remains the same. Change is a natural order of things. It will happen, if not today, tomorrow. If not tomorrow, the day after. We are engaged with this process because we need a multilateral system that works, and is fit for purpose to deal with today's challenges, problems and also opportunities."

Harish emphasised the institutions of multilateralism that "we have today are a product of the post Second World War." "The reality of 1945 is long gone, the institutions remain. They are not fit for purpose for dealing with today's challenges and opportunities. Yet they have not been reformed, whether it is the UN, the UN Security Council, international financial institutions, trade bodies, each one of them needs to be made fit for purpose for today's realities," he said. Harish said that changing the status quo is not easy. "You have a lot of status quo supporters, and you need to build consensus for this. It's a difficult process which is still ongoing," he said.

"We are a multipolar world, and we in Asia are clear that a multipolar Asia in a multipolar world is the way ahead," he said.

Summarising the "India way", Harish underlined that the "world is not a zero-sum game". The 'India way' that has emerged is a "proactive India playing on the front foot", he said using cricket terminology, of "Go ahead and engage, manage difficult partners, cultivate new friends that you have not dealt with before, reassure old friends with whom you have had many years of productive partnership, draw in new stakeholders to all the things that you want to bring about, reach out both to old friends and new partners as you come up with new approaches of dealing with things, extend a hand of friendship and collaboration to all, and finally, expand the outreach, the footprint, and hands of friendship to everybody." (PTI)

Congress teachers' wing stages

"As educators, we envision a harmonious society where every citizen's voice is heard, and their rights are protected. We appeal to the Home Minister to consider our concerns with the seriousness they deserve and take immediate action to restore peace in Manipur," it said.

Violence in Manipur has flared up again as a fresh wave of protests erupted after six people went missing from a camp for displaced persons in Jiribam on Monday, following a gunfight between armed men and security forces that resulted in the deaths of 10 Kuki youths. (PTI)

Tax at entry gate

by the taxation department. Bay said, "The checkpoint was set up just four days back and we collected taxes as the list given to us by the taxation department. We have done nothing illegal. But some businessmen from Nagaon district have created confusion and stopped vehicles from Karbi Anglong from entering Nagaon."

He also informed that on Monday, Kampur Circle Officer, Ananya Lahkar entered Karbi Anglong and told Bay that the checkpoint is illegal as it is in Nagaon district. Bay replied to the Circle Officer that the checkpoint was set up inside West Karbi Anglong, hence not illegal.

Bay also stated that many traders were doing business without proper documents and trade licenses issued by the taxation department of KAAC.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the Taxation Advisory Board, Lipson Bey convened a meeting with leaseholders (lessees) of goods entry gate checkpoints of Baithalangso, Ranima, Tumpreng, Oguri and Langhemphi (Khanduli) and businessmen at Forest Guest House, Dongkamukam to discuss the functioning of the checkpoints as per Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of the taxation department.

Bay informed that the meeting with businessmen and leaseholders was attended by KAAC secretary, I/c taxation department, Ibon Teron; additional SP of West Karbi Anglong, Faiza Ahmed Borbhuiya; superintendent of taxes, Mongolsing Taro and others.

Peru 3rd country to

that artists, cultural performers and dancers from the South American country are expected to participate in various events of the festival. Welcoming the participation of Peru at the forthcoming festival, Rio exuded confidence that the partnership would bring the two countries closer, strengthen bilateral ties and enhance people-to-people contact. He appreciated the efforts of the Peru Ambassador in making the partnership a reality. He conveyed that Nagaland is looking forward to welcoming the Peru delegation to the "Festival of Festivals".

India faces urgent challenges

climate hazards, India ranks 26th in the Children's Climate Risk Index. Indian children face acute risks from extreme heat, floods, and air pollution, particularly in rural and low-income communities. The report predicts that climate crises will disproportionately impact their health, education, and access to essential resources like water. Bhadval emphasised the urgent need for climate action: "Children are vulnerable to direct and indirect impacts of climate change. By involving them as active agents of change, we can address these challenges collectively."

Frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence, hold both promise and peril for children. However, the digital divide remains stark, with only 26% of people in low-income countries connected to the internet, compared to over 95% in high-income countries. The report called for inclusive technological advancements to bridge this gap and ensure safe, equitable access for children. (PTI)

'Feel Good With Fiama' surveys mental wellbeing fitness

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 20: With mental health conversations gaining traction, ITC's 'Feel Good With Fiama Mental Wellbeing Survey 2024' marks its 4th year by exploring the perceptions and realities of mental health in India.

Commissioned with NielsenIQ, the survey unveils the awareness, attitude and behavioural landscape for mental wellbeing in India. It reflects progressiveness in acknowledging the need for mental wellbeing while also indicating the persistent barriers in accessing professional support.

Despite growing awareness, many individuals still struggle in silence, hesitant to openly discuss their emotional well-being or seek professional help. There is a tendency to downplay struggles, or a belief that seeking help is only for those experiencing severe mental illness. This often leads to delaying professional support. This disconnect between awareness and action raises a crucial question: Why, in an age of information and acceptance, are so many still hesitant to embrace therapy as a path to genuine well-being? The survey delves into this question further and reveals the paradox.

While 83% of the survey participants believe mental health issues are nothing to be ashamed of, 81% feel ashamed of telling others that they are taking therapy. While we are becoming more accepting of mental health issues in general, the act of seeking help still carries a heavy weight of perceived societal judgment. This inherent fear of judgement prevents individuals from having open conversations about their mental well-being hindering access to support.

This year's survey also reveals 80% of the participating Gen Z believe their parents would support them in therapy. There is a growing acceptance among close social circles and is a step towards normalizing mental health conversations.



The key findings of the survey are- Cost, a barrier to therapy, with 77% of surveyed individuals finding therapy expensive. In addition to this, 74% do not go for therapy as health insurance does not cover mental health services.

55% believe therapy is for the weak, highlighting the enduring stigma surrounding mental health support. 83% respondents believe that youth report experiencing more anxiety and fear of change than older generations, emphasizing the unique pressures faced by younger demographics.

82% of the surveyed individuals believe that it takes a lot of effort to find the right therapist.

82% of the participating Gen Z believe people miss out on spotting the symptoms of mental health concerns, indicating a need for greater awareness and education.

69% of the surveyed individuals feel issues with mental wellbeing negatively impacts their health condition.

65% of the surveyed individuals feel issues with mental wellbeing negatively impacts their sleep.

Among the surveyed individuals who have experienced stress at workplace, 90% would appreciate better work-life balance policies.

21% of participating Gen Z identify work-life imbalance as a major contributor to their mental health

concerns.

Among the surveyed working individuals who are suffering or have family members suffering from mental health issues, there is a notable increase in the adoption of online counselling at 46% as compared to 33% last year.

42% of the surveyed individuals feel that their worry about career decisions negatively impacts mental wellbeing.

Among the surveyed individuals who have experienced stress at workplace, 71% feel that they suffer a burnout to live up to societal standards of success.

64% of surveyed Gen Z feel that issues with mental well-being negatively impact their relationship with friends

55% of surveyed Millennials feel that issues with mental wellbeing negatively impact their relationships with their spouses.

50% of the surveyed individuals confide in their parents if they were to undergo therapy. There is no difference in Gen Z and Millennials in this regard. Among the surveyed individuals in the top 4 metros, pressure due to toxic relationships impacts mental wellbeing the most in Bangalore at 41%.

Cost is a major deterrent to seeking therapy, with 77% of survey participants finding it expensive. Virtual therapy is a more accessible

Demonstrations in Dibrugarh, Nagaon, and Jorhat demand urgent govt action to curb inflation & ease public distress

AASU stages protests against rising prices of essentials

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Nov 20: The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Wednesday staged a protest in front of the Dibrugarh District Commissioner's Office against the rising prices of essential commodities.

The members of the students' union raised slogans against the government for failing to curb the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities.

"The BJP government, both at the Centre and in the state, has been turning a blind eye to the increasing prices of essential commodities like rice, pulses, vegetables, petrol, and diesel, which have greatly impacted the common masses," said AASU Dibrugarh district general secretary Rupjyoti Borthakur.

He said, "Due to the heavy price hike, people are facing problems in running their families. The present government has failed to curb the price hike. We demand that the government, led



by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, take necessary steps to control the prices of essential goods and commodities."

Our Nagaon correspondent adds: As per the call of the central body of the All Assam Students' Union, along with the rest of the state, the district unit of the student-oriented state organisation also staged a demonstration against the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities in the state and demanded immediate action to

control the prices of these commodities. Over a hundred agitators from the student organisation participated in the demonstration and shouted slogans against the government for its failure to control the prices of essential commodities.

Our Jorhat correspondent adds: As per the call of the Central Committee of AASU to protest against the steep rise in prices of essential commodities like food items (mainly groceries), fuel,

LPG cylinders, life-saving medicines, and other goods, the Jorhat district unit of the students' body staged a sit-in demonstration in front of Jorhat's DC Office complex on Wednesday.

AASU state literary secretary Niharika Saikia, Jorhat district unit president and general secretary - Pritom Jyoti Saikia and Riyaz Husain, respectively - took part in the protest, in which functionaries of Jorhat sub-divisional and regional units also joined.

Nagaon gears up for Samaguri by-election vote counting

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Nov 20: A meeting was held regarding the counting of votes for the Samaguri assembly by-election in the conference hall of the District Commissioner's Office here on Wednesday. The district commissioner and district election officer, Narendra Kumar Shah, chaired the meeting.

The meeting was attended by journalists and election agents of candidates to discuss the counting of votes for the Samaguri assembly by-election, scheduled for November 23.

During the meeting, it was informed that the counting of votes will begin at 8:00 am in Room No 51 under the supervision of the returning officer. The counting of postal ballots and ETPBs will start at 7:30 am in Room No 52 under the assistant returning officer, Pankaj Nagbanshi. A total of 14 tables will be set up for counting, with 15 rounds of counting. One



table each will be dedicated to postal ballot and ETPBs counting.

A total of 42 counting personnel, 19 micro-observers, and 8 sealing personnel will be deployed during the counting of votes. It is pertinent to mention that the administration has restricted mobile phones inside the counting centers and also limited media personnel to designated areas.

District commissioner Narendra

Kumar Shah assured stringent security arrangements and sought co-operation for peaceful counting.

Additional deputy commissioner Gunajit Kashyap, district police superintendent Swapnil Deka, additional police superintendent Pranab Kumar Kalita, election officer Shekhar Phukan, journalists, and election agents of all candidates participated in the meeting, an official press note added.

BTC chief welcomes US Embassy delegation to Kokrajhar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 20: A high-level delegation from the US Embassy in New Delhi, led by Graham Mayer, minister-counsellor for Political Affairs, met with BTC chief Pramod Boro in Kokrajhar on Tuesday during their two-day visit to the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The delegation also included A Sukesh, senior political advisor; Dan Robbins, political officer; and Tinku Roy, political consultant.

During the meeting, they discussed potential collaborations in key sectors such as health and education, focusing on supporting BTR's development initiatives. The visit highlighted the growing interest in strengthening ties between the United States and the BTR, with an emphasis on fostering socio-economic development. The discussions are expected to lay the groundwork for meaningful collaborations that will support the region's long-term progress.

BTC chief Pramod Boro expressed his pleasure at hosting the delegation. "We are delighted to welcome Graham Mayer and his team to BTR," Boro said. "Their insights and discussions promise to foster meaningful partnerships for the region's growth and progress."

The delegation's itinerary included meetings with local stakeholders and visits to significant sites such as the mini spun mill and the Bodoland Silk Park in Adabari, where they gained insights into BTR's development priorities. This visit underscores the BTC government's commitment to building international partnerships aligned with its vision for the sustainable growth and socio-economic advancement of the region.



GU VC visits Dighing College

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Nov 20: Professor Dr Nani Gopal Mahanta, vice-chancellor of Gauhati University, delivered the noted academician Lt Lakshmi Kanta Mahanta Memorial Lecture, organised by Dighing College on Tuesday. Professor Dr Mahanta attended the program as the key resource person and delivered his first commemorative lecture. Besides this, he ceremonially inaugurated a classroom at the Digen Ch Bora Memorial Science Building and also released a newsletter, 'Verve', on the occasion. Dr Dibya Jyoti Mahanta, a noted professor of NCTE, Abdus Salam, former vice-principal of the college, and other dignitaries, faculty members, and students of the college participated in the program.

While delivering the lecture, Professor Dr Mahanta laid stress on the implementation of NEP 2020 in letter and spirit, along with proper mentoring and nurturing of hidden talents in rural area colleges. He emphasised that skill education and soft skill development are essential to shaping perfect students in the changing scenario. He also encouraged the student community to be employers rather than employees, laying thrust on entrepreneurial education.

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT
E-Tender Notice No. M-TSK-2024-19; Dated: 18-11-2024. Tender No.: M-TSK-2024-19. Name of work: Annual Maintenance Contract of Fire Extinguishers at various Depot/Sheds/ Administrative building in Mechanical Department of Tinsukia Division for a period of 03 (three) years. Location of work: Mariani, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, North Lakhimpur, Murkongselek & various station of Tinsukia Division. Tender Value: ₹23.52.315.21. Last date and time for submission of tender: 10-12-2024 at 13:00 hrs. Date and time of opening of tender: After 15:00 hrs. of 10-12-2024. Website particulars where complete details of the tender can be seen and downloaded: www.irps.gov.in
Sr. DME, Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

Welfare initiatives reviewed

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Nov 20: Chairperson of the Assam State Commission for Safai Karmacharis, Bajinath Basfore, and member Priyanka Basfore of the Assam State Commission for Safai Karmacharis under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, government of Assam, reviewed the welfare of safai karmacharis in Sonitpur district during a three-day visit.

GOVT. OF ASSAM

**OFFICE THE SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE
UDALGURI :: DISTRICT :: UDALGURI ASSAM ::**



The above is photograph of Jaysri Sarania (27Yrs), W/O- Hitesh Sarania, Vill- Jhargao, PS- Khoirabari, Dist- Udalguri who has been missing 02/11/2024 from his house.

This refers Khoirabari PS GDE No-06, Dtd. 4/11/2024 and this office Man Missing Register Entry No.184. Dtd. 08/11/2024.

Descriptive Roll of the Missing Person:

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| 1. Complexion | - Fair |
| 2. Age | - 14 Yrs |
| 3. Height | - 5.1Ft |
| 4. L/known | - Assamese, Bodo |
| 5. Wearing | - Mekhela Sador |

All efforts may be made to trace out/recover the above noted missing person at the earliest and result thereof may be intimated to this office at the following helpline numbers for further necessary action: 6026901138 (Cell phone).

Sd/-

Superintendent of Police,
Udalguri, Assam.

Janasanyog /D/9012/24/21-Nov-24

LIC SILCHAR DIVISIONAL OFFICE
P.B.No.54, MEHERPUR,
SILCHAR-788015, CACHAR (ASSAM)

SDO/OS/Tender/BO shifting Tender Date : 21.11.2024

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders are hereby invited from interested & reputed vendors for shifting of Furnitures / Computers / Printers / Cash Vault / Documents / Electronic & Electric Equipments & Other Goods from the current premises of our Haflong BO to our new premises. Last date of receipt of tender is 12.12.2024 within 3.00 P.M. For further details visit our Corporation's website www.licindia.in/Tenders. Any subsequent change in stipulated dates or Terms & Conditions of the tender will be published on our website only.

SR DIVISIONAL MANAGER

Stranded tiger sparks panic in Kaliabor

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Nov 20: For over the past six years, a massive man-eating Royal Bengal Tiger has been wreaking havoc in a vast area of Kaliabor. Over the past three days, the tiger has been spotted at Borbhakati, Debsatra, Katiyari, Dhekial, and Miribheti areas near Jakhalabandha under Kaliabor sub-district, killing several livestock.

The sudden appearance of the tiger has created panic among locals, who are currently hesitant to venture out. The Forest Department and police have been informed, and officials are monitoring the situation.

It is pertinent to mention here that several areas in Kaliabor, including Shilghat, Kaliabor Tea Estate, Sonarishakha Tea Estate, Sonarigaon, Kamakhya village, and Hatimura, have been terrorised by multiple tigers for nearly six years, resulting in over half a dozen livestock deaths.

Recently, an Anganwadi worker and several students narrowly escaped a tiger encounter in Hatimura. The Forest Department had set up a cage to capture the tiger but remained unsuccessful.

Due to the tiger's presence, life has been disrupted in the affected areas. People are spending sleepless nights, and normal life has been severely paralyzed. Significantly, the tiger was spotted today near Jakhalabandha, forcing the closure of Ayus Public School, Ramananda Balika Vidyalaya, and Kolongmukh Vidyapith. Meanwhile, the local administration has restricted the movement of locals on six roads in the area from 4:00 pm to 9:00 am.

The Forest Department has assured that all necessary measures are being taken to drive the tiger away, sources added.

Mason succumbs to injuries after stray dog attack

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Nov 20: A person identified as Islamuddin Laskar, a mason residing in a rented house in the Gohain Tekela Gaon area, succumbed on Tuesday to injuries sustained in an attack by a pack of street dogs late on Monday night.

According to sources, Laskar, originally from the Hailakandi district, was returning to his house from work on Monday night when he was severely bitten by a pack of street dogs near a private school on the Gohain Tekela Gaon road.

Local residents found Laskar early Tuesday morning lying on the road with multiple injuries on his body and his clothes torn. He told them he had been attacked by over 10 stray dogs the previous night while returning home from work. Though he tried to flee the spot, the canines chased and bit him all over his body.

Laskar was taken to the Jorhat Medical College and Hospital by locals, where he was treated but later succumbed to his injuries. According to residents of Gohain Tekela Gaon, located beside AT Road, a pack of stray dogs numbering about 10 to 15 has recently been creating havoc for people, especially after sunset, as the dogs try to attack those using the road.

The residents have urged the local administration to take note of the problem and implement necessary measures to address it.

NFR to enhance passenger comfort with additional coaches

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 20: Indian Railways (IR) is taking several steps to ensure comfortable journeys for general-class passengers. As part of its commitment to providing better services and accommodating increasing passenger demands, IR has planned to introduce over 1,000 new GS (general seating) coaches to nearly 370 regular trains by November 2024. This initiative will enable approximately 1 lakh additional passengers to travel in GS coaches daily, demonstrating the Railways' focus on inclusivity and convenience.

The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is also playing a vital role in this initiative, contributing to Indian Railways' success. Currently, NFR has already augmented 36 trains/69 rakes with 276 GS coaches, providing greater convenience and accessibility to passen-

gers across and beyond its zone. Furthermore, NFR plans to augment three additional trains with 16 more GS coaches by the end of December 2024. These efforts underline NFR's dedication to improving passenger services and making train journeys more comfortable and inclusive for all segments of society.

Recognising the growing public interest in rail travel, IR is accelerating its efforts by expanding its fleet by augmenting GS coaches in its trains. Between July and October alone, 600 GS coaches were added to approximately 370 trains, with the total count reaching 1,000 by November 2024. Moreover, plans are underway to induct more than 10,000 non-AC coaches, including over 6,000 GS coaches and additional sleeper-class coaches, over the next two years. This ambitious expansion will en-

able approximately 8 lakh additional passengers to undertake rail journeys daily, significantly enhancing accessibility for general-class travelers. These newly manufactured coaches are of the advanced LHB (Linke Hofmann Busch) design, offering greater comfort, speed, and safety. LHB coaches are not only lighter and sturdier but also sustain minimal damage in case of accidents, ensuring improved passenger safety compared to traditional ICF coaches.

NFR, on its part, remains steadfast in its commitment to prioritising the needs of general-class passengers, thus improving travel experiences within the zone and nationwide. The ongoing expansion of facilities reflects its vision to transform rail travel into a safer, more convenient, and inclusive mode of transportation for all.

Haflong Fire & Emergency Services conducts ring well rescue

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Nov 20: A dramatic rescue unfolded at Lower Haflong near Sitla Mandir when the Haflong Fire & Emergency Services Station (F&ESS) and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel responded to a distress call at 2:59 pm on Tuesday. The operation involved the rescue and recovery of three individuals who were trapped in a ring well during a cleaning attempt in Lower Haflong, near Sitla Mandir.

Tusar Khamti Das, 35, son of Torun Das, was rescued alive by SDRF and fire personnel. Amu Das, 35, son of Sushil Das, was recovered dead by the team. Sanjib Deb Nath, 42, son of Romoni Deb Nath, was rescued alive by local residents.

The incident occurred when three individuals, all residents of Lower Haflong, entered the well one after another during a cleaning task. One person accidentally fell into the well, prompting the others to attempt a rescue. Tragically, all three became trapped, likely due to oxygen depletion or exposure to toxic gases in the confined space.

Local residents managed to rescue Sanjib Deb Nath before the emergency response team arrived. Once at the scene, SDRF and fire personnel launched a coordinated operation, successfully rescuing Tusar Khamti Das alive and recovering the body of Amu Das. The operation concluded at 4:30 pm, with all recovery efforts completed by 4:00 pm.

Emergency services commended the swift actions of local residents and the coordinated efforts of the rescue teams. They emphasised the importance of safety protocols when working in confined spaces and urged the community to seek professional assistance for high-risk tasks to prevent similar incidents in the future.

The Haflong community is mourning the loss of Amu Das, with heartfelt condolences extended to his family. Officials have reiterated the need for awareness and training to avoid such tragedies. Further investigations are underway to determine the exact cause of the accident.

Bodo Sahitya Sabha unveils 'Abegni Jilingani' and 'Rajgarhni Jarimin'

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Nov 20: Ghoramari Primary Boro Sahitya Sabha launched a collection of poetry entitled 'Abegni Jilingani', penned by Anima Mahela, and a souvenir containing the history and a brief account of the Rajgarh area, located by the bank of the Jia Bharali, edited by Minuma Boro, during its annual conference held on the inception day of Bodo Sahitya Sabha at Rajgarh here recently.

Tezpur MLA Prithiraj Rabha, unveiling the souvenir of Ghoramari Primary Boro Sahitya Sabha entitled 'Rajgarhni Jarimin', elaborated on the history of the Boro nation and its distinctive features in his speech. The poetry collection by Anima Mahela was unveiled by Jugal Higher Secondary School. Attending the open session as chief guest and distinguished guest respectively, assistant professor of Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College Phanidhar Basumatary and president of Nagaon District Boro Sahitya Sabha Prashanta Boro discussed the aspects of Boro literature and the role of Bodo Sahitya Sabha in the overall development and growth of the Boro language and literature.

The open session, inaugurated by Md Khairul Akond, headmaster of Fakharuddin Ali Ahmed High School, was chaired by Ghoramari Primary Boro Sahitya Sabha president Dandiram Swargiary. The entire programme, moderated by Chitramani Boro, was graced by dignitaries, including former MLA of Borsola Kamal Basumatary, and social activists Pabitra Kumar Boro, Dipak Boro, Aparna Hainary, Deba Kumar Boro, Gulzar Hussain, Kalyan Boro, and several others.

The delegate meeting, followed by the open session, was inaugurated by Jatin Basumatary, a member of Bodo Sahitya Sabha. The meeting also formed the new executive committee of Ghoramari Primary Boro Sahitya Sabha, headed by Dipak Boro as president. At the very outset, the flag of Bodo Sahitya Sabha was unfurled by Dandiram Swargiary, and president of Bathou Mahasabha Deba Kumar Boro led the tribute-paying programme at the newly constructed altar of martyrs at Rajgarh. The captivating cultural events and Bagumba dance presented during the programme mesmerised the guests, audience, and delegates of Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

Kaliabor College conducts training on advanced technologies

Five-day national program equips students with skills in AI, robotics & Python

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Nov 20: The comprehensive five-day national training program entitled 'Application of Advanced Technologies and AI Tools for Students of Higher Education', organised by the department of Computer Science, Kaliabor College, and supported by the Department of Science & Technology (DST), government of India, and IIT Roorkee, concluded on Tuesday. The initiative aimed to significantly enhance participants' technical knowledge and provide them with exposure to contemporary technological advancements, thereby improving their technical skills.

Amit Dutta, head of the department of Computer Science, hosted the event, which was inaugurated by Dr Pompi Baruah, vice-principal of Kaliabor College, in the presence of various faculty members and students. A total of 196 participants, including undergraduate and postgraduate students



along with several faculty members from diverse departments, actively engaged throughout the program. Tapan Ch Nath from IGNOU, Guwahati, and Narottam Bhattacharjee from Tezpur University attended as resource persons in the program. The experts utilised Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources to provide in-depth explanations of

several advanced topics, including Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Python Programming, Google Colab, ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, and Turnitin, to name a few. Participants also benefited from hands-on training sessions focused on using AI tools and developing both basic and advanced programs using Python. Furthermore, the experts highlighted the constructive

use of social media and various AI tools for career diversification.

On the concluding day of the program, certificates of participation were distributed to all attendees, and feedback was collected, demonstrating high satisfaction levels among participants. They expressed strong interest in engaging in similar programs in the future. During the valedictory session, Dr Uttam Kr Baruah, principal of Kaliabor College, commended the department and the involved agencies for their commendable efforts in advancing students' understanding of modern science and technology. He expressed his commitment to organising similar programs in the near future, reinforcing the institution's dedication to fostering educational excellence. The department further acknowledged the significant roles that faculty members Parag Dahal, Anuradha Hazam, Anjan Kr Sarma, Priyakshi Mahanta, and Sudarshana Kaushik played in the event.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Change is the end result of all true learning
- Leo Buscaglia

Slogans and Maharashtra elections

Cash, Caste, Crop. Add to that Crypto! Right from 7am in the morning on November 20, when voters stepped out in twos and threes and fives to cast their votes, election aficionados have been placing their bets on the three 'C' as the moving force behind polling in Maharashtra, refusing to pin the voting trend on the conflicting narratives of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', which dominated this latest phase of the elections. Question is, why deny reality, or is it yet another example of misleading political correctness? Certainly, it defies logic. Throughout the campaigning, there was nothing else but talk of Muslims for Maha Vikas Aghadi and Hindus for Mahayuti dominating the discourse. Then, suddenly, on the evening before polling day, cash comes into play, along with the dazzling electoral possibilities of the mysterious crypto currency, the Bitcoin! Also crop and caste, two issues which are endemic to Maharashtra. NCP (Sharad Pawar) working president Supriya Sule was accused of "crypto fraud" along with Congress state unit Chief Nana Patole. This after the BJP's Vinod Tawade was charged with the crime of "cash for votes", after a lot of hard liquid cash was found in his keep. Sule became the issue and Tawade became the issue. But whatever happened to Muslim and Hindu? Wasn't there saturation coverage of Muslims putting pressure on MVA to fulfill certain demands specific to the Muslim community in return for en bloc Muslim votes? Wasn't there also realization in the opposite camp that Hindus must ape Muslims and vote en bloc for the BJP? Throughout campaigning no media spoke of cash, caste, crop and crypto; media only gave saturation coverage to Hindu and majoritarian, and Muslim and minority appeasement. Didn't the All India Muslim Personal Law Board promise to vote for the Maha Vikas Aghadi if the MVA promised to fulfill 17 Muslim recommendations? Didn't prominent Muslim scholars warn the MVA of what awaited them if the Muslim community was left in the lurch on the Waqf Board amendments? The point being made is that all through campaigning nothing dominated the discourse more than Hindu and Muslim. Star campaigners of all political parties, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Sharad Pawar, from Uddhav Thackeray and Eknath Shinde, from Devendra Fadnis to Asaduddin Owaisi, every one of them fanned to flames issues concerning Hindu and Muslim. They went to key constituencies and harangued each other with dog-whistles.

To some extent 'caste' figured but 'cash', 'crypto' and 'crop' didn't debut till towards the final days of the campaigning. Then again, isn't it a fact that "caste" went under an avalanche of 'Hindu-Muslim' except when Congress leader Rahul Gandhi cut through Maharashtra with 'Caste Census' on his tongue? 'Maratha Reservation' was an election issue, but the demand for a 'Caste Census' went under the bus when the BJP took to 'Batenge toh katenge'. If any slogan rang loud and clear throughout the electioneering, it was the Yogi's 'BTK'. If caste, crop, and cash had set the tone, then why did posters and hoardings displaying 'Batenge toh katenge' remain aloft and stuck throughout the campaigning? Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was the most sought-after BJP campaigner, more sought-after than even Prime Minister Narendra Modi. And the Yogi did not waste breath on "cash, crop and caste", he stuck to 'BTK' in answer to Muslims resorting to voting en bloc.

The fact is, cash, crop and caste weren't the main factors at play, not even the splits in the NCP founded by Sharad Pawar, and in the Shiv Sena, founded by Balasaheb Thackeray, mattered at the end of the day. The political realignments following the twin splits was also why 'secular' and 'Hindutva' became the defining factors. This was the first assembly polls after the break-ups and both fronts, Mahayuti and Maha Vikas Aghadi, were banking on 'Hindutva' and 'Secular' to trounce the other.

Increasing collaboration between Britain and China is imperative at the present moment

By: Ben Chacko

The meeting between a British prime minister and China's President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro on November 18 was long overdue. Reportedly, Keir Starmer wants a "consistent, respectful and pragmatic" relationship between the two countries, with an emphasis on progress towards clean energy. But he is especially keen to improve Britain's prospects for economic growth by increasing British exports to China and Chinese investment in Britain.

Britain's economy has grown by just 3 per cent from its pre-Covid level, less than any other G7 country except Germany. IMF and OECD forecasts indicate further small advances this year and next, thanks in part to the October Budget. Even so, the Office for Budget Responsibility projects a slowdown in growth from 2 per cent in 2025 to 1.5 per cent before the end of the decade.

Despite all the tax cuts, tax breaks and state subsidies, many of our much-vaunted "entrepreneurs" have concentrated more on filling their boots and stashing their wealth overseas than they have on investing in their workforce and creating a modern, productive economy.

For the past 20 years, Britain has been at or near the bottom of the G7 league of biggest capitalist economies when it comes to business investment (as a proportion of GDP). Our "entrepreneurs" languish in 28th place out of 31 in the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Without our admittedly average level of state capital spending, Britain would be rock-bottom in the G7 and OECD in terms of overall economic investment. Yet no Labour minister praises public-sector "entrepreneurship".

Investment, like growth, must also consider quality as well as quantity. In Britain, far too much capital is channelled into the financial markets, real estate and cheap

labour and production overseas.

Fawning upon "entrepreneurs" in the embarrassing manner of Chancellor Rachel Reeves and Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds will not make them change their ways. Slapping a wealth tax on them and taking vital industries - water, gas, electricity, armaments, pharmaceuticals - out of their hands would have a more sobering impact.

Unfortunately, we have a Labour government that is afraid of its own shadow despite its overwhelming majority at Westminster. It is too afraid to take the bold measures necessary to raise the British economy to a qualitatively higher level. So Starmer turns to China, Britain's fifth biggest trading partner, looking to boost exports and inward investment after several years of heavy decline.

There is plenty of room for growth, especially in exports to China, where Britain lags far behind Germany, France and Italy. Relaxing the US-inspired ban on selling key electronic, micro-processing and "dual use" (civilian-military) engineering products to China would help.

Restrictions on Chinese investment in Britain already hold back the roll-out of 5G technology and the application of quantum physics - in which China leads the world - to computing, communications, geology and medicine.

China will reciprocate any moves towards stronger economic relations, all the more so if we abstain from US-led military provocations around Taiwan and the South China Sea.

The likely response to a Britain-China rapprochement from a US Trump administration packed with anti-China war hawks will be decidedly cooler.

The Starmer-Labour government will have to choose: the servile "special relationship" with a US in decline or friendship with a China on the rise as part of a genuinely independent, peace-seeking and green foreign policy for Britain? (IPA Service)

Bulldozer justice: A new chapter for rule of law in India

The Supreme Court of India, in a historic judgment, has put an end to what has come to be known as "Bulldozer Justice," where state governments have wielded demolition drives as a tool of retributive punishment. This ruling addresses the recent trend of using bulldozers to demolish the homes and properties of individuals accused of crimes, a practice that has been criticized for circumventing due process and violating fundamental rights. The judgment underscores the principle that the executive branch cannot act as both prosecutor and executioner, thereby reinforcing the constitutional concept of separation of powers and the sanctity of due process.

Context and Background of Bulldozer Injustice

The practice of punitive demolitions has seen a sharp increase in recent years, particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Assam. Under the banner of delivering swift "justice," authorities have razed hundreds of homes belonging to individuals accused of participating in riots or other crimes. This form of extrajudicial punishment became most prominently associated with the administration of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, where bulldozers were touted as instruments of strong governance.

However, critics argue that such measures were less about maintaining law and order and more about projecting power, often targeting marginalized communities and individuals based on mere suspicion. The Supreme Court's intervention comes at a crucial time when the line between lawful governance and arbitrary state action

appeared increasingly blurred. The ruling highlights that any act of demolition must follow due legal process, emphasizing that homes—often built through years of savings and loans—are not just structures but sanctuaries for families, including those uninvolved in the alleged crimes of their relatives.

Key Aspects of the Supreme Court's Judgment

In its judgment, the Supreme Court has laid down comprehensive guidelines to prevent the misuse of demolition as a punitive measure. These include:

1. Mandatory Notice and Hearing: A 15-day prior show-cause notice must be issued before any demolition can take place. The individual must be given an opportunity for a personal hearing, ensuring that there is adequate time to respond or seek legal recourse.

2. Detailed Final Order: The decision to demolish a property must be justified through a detailed final order, explaining why demolition is necessary and confirming that all legal avenues have been exhausted.

3. Grace Period: A 15-day grace period post-final order is mandatory to allow affected parties to challenge the decision or vacate the premises.

4. Accountability Measures: Officials who carry out demolitions without following the established procedure will be held personally liable. This includes potential contempt proceedings and deductions from their salaries to compensate affected individuals.

5. Real-Time Transparency: The entire demolition process must be recorded and monitored, with updates provided on a digital portal to ensure transparency and pre-

vent arbitrary actions.

6. Videographic Evidence: To bolster accountability, the entire process should be videographed, and a list of involved officials must be maintained.

Implications for Governance and Rule of Law

This judgment serves as a powerful reminder of the limitations imposed on the executive branch by the Constitution. The Supreme Court's ruling reaffirms that India's democracy is built on the rule of law, where due process must be observed before any punitive action can be taken. By emphasizing the need for procedural safeguards, the court has effectively curtailed the practice of meting out extrajudicial punishment under the guise of justice.

The ruling also highlights the broader implications of such practices on societal trust. "Bulldozer Justice" had become synonymous with a "might is right" approach, where the state's coercive power was showcased as a political tool.

This practice not only undermined the judiciary but also fostered a culture of fear and intimidation, particularly among vulnerable communities. The Supreme Court's emphasis on due process ensures that justice cannot be arbitrary and that state power must be exercised with responsibility.

Historical Context and Legal Precedents

The apex court's judgment draws upon the constitutional framework that mandates the separation of powers and guarantees the protection of fundamental

rights. The case evokes memories of Justice Krishna Iyer's liberal interpretation of laws aimed at safeguarding the rights of individuals. His poignant reminder that "every saint has a past and every sinner has a future" is echoed in this decision, which seeks to prevent punitive actions that indiscriminately impact entire families.

The Supreme Court's invocation of Article 142, which allows it to pass orders necessary to do "complete justice," signals the gravity of the situation. The decision warns that violating these principles will result in severe consequences for officials, including being held in contempt of court. This reinforces that no official, regardless of rank, can bypass the rule of law.

Criticisms and Challenges Ahead

While the Supreme Court's ruling has been lauded for its intent to uphold constitutional

values, it does face certain criticisms. One notable shortcoming is that the judgment does not explicitly place accountability on political leaders who may direct such actions. While the ruling mandates that officials face consequences, the political figures who encourage or endorse these demolitions remain untouched.

Furthermore, there are concerns about the practical implementation of these guidelines. India's bureaucracy is often influenced by political pressures, and lower-level officials may hesitate to defy orders from higher authorities, even when these orders contravene legal procedures. The success of the Supreme Court's ruling will depend significantly on the willing-

ness of both the judiciary and civil society to hold officials accountable and push for systemic change.

The Road Forward: Ensuring Compliance and Justice

To truly internalize the Supreme Court's ruling and prevent future abuses, it is essential for administrative bodies to adopt transparent practices and reinforce training on constitutional mandates. Ensuring real-time updates on a public digital portal and mandating videographic evidence are steps in the right direction, but continuous monitoring and public scrutiny are necessary.

Moreover, the judiciary must remain vigilant in enforcing these guidelines and be prepared to address violations swiftly. The Supreme Court's ruling must serve as both a deterrent and a framework for protecting citizens' rights. The onus is now on state administrations to respect and implement this mandate in spirit, not just in letter.

A Victory for Constitutional Democracy

The Supreme Court's judgment on "Bulldozer Justice" is a significant milestone in upholding the rule of law in India. It underscores the judiciary's role as a guardian of fundamental rights and a bulwark against executive overreach. By establishing procedural safeguards and enforcing personal accountability, the Court has sent a clear message: state power must be exercised judiciously, and every citizen's right to due process must be protected. As India moves forward, this ruling stands as a testament to the enduring principles of justice and fairness enshrined in the Constitution. (The writer can be reached at dipakurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Modi-Shah caution against Bangladesh infiltration in Jharkhand is ominous

By: Arun Srivastava

RSS and BJP have been consistently raising the issue of Bangladesh infiltration but the manner in which they are putting it in the Jharkhand assembly elections, makes it obvious that they are working on some treacherous plot. More than merely being a design to polarise the Hindu votes and put the Vanvasis against Mool Adivasis and Christians, it is part of their bigger plan to make "intrusion" a big issue in the sub-continent.

RSS and BJP for more than two decades have been complaining of Bangladeshis having settled in UP, Delhi, MP, Maharashtra, and even in Gujarat. Their number is not so alarming and moreover they have assimilated into the main Indian life. It is very difficult to segregate them from a common Indian. But even then, the saffron ecosystem has been demanding for their identification and deporting them.

But in their election campaigning in Jharkhand this time, Narendra Modi and particularly Amit Shah have been harping that "infiltrators" from Bangladesh are "snatching bread, daughters and land" of the state's original inhabitants.

What has been quite significant and probably has remained unnoticed is that a short of catch words - Roti-Beti-Mati (Bread-Daughter-Land) is quite attractive to the Jharkhandis and it angers a one section against the other.

RSS has been working amongst the Adivasis for last 80 years, decades before Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar. During these years saffron ecosystem's primary enemies were the Christian missionaries.

Obviously an organisation having its strong base in the Adivasi belt ought to have raised its voice when the Bangladeshis started intruding the region. They would have entered into matrimonial relations, as alleged by our learned Modi and Shah, much after their entry.

Significantly during the 24 years of existence of Jharkhand, the BJP was in power for 17 years. Why the BJP stalwarts and their state chief ministers did not initiate measures to check this, if at all it was happening.

The only reason for their turning blind eyes to this trend may be attributed to their obsession to serve their corporate and big business masters.

They turned Jharkhand into a colony of the corporates... Their allegation that this is because of the support the "infiltrators" get from the JMM-Congress-RJD alliance government; the "intrud-

ers" are the vote banks of the INDIA bloc partners, is merely an attempt to fool the people and serve the political and economic interest of their masters.

It is worth mentioning that barely a month back the Union minister Giriraj Singh had organised a Hindu Swabhimana Yatra in Bhagalpur, Purnea, Katihar, Araria, Madhepura and Kishanganj, bordering districts of Seemanchal. These districts of Bihar have high proportion of the Muslim population, more than in the remaining areas of the state.

Saffron ecosystem singling out Muslims certainly is a move to polarise the Hindus. But it has no more a peripheral importance. It ought to be seen in proper perspective. Jharkhand is the mineral rich state in India and has international importance. Modi's friend Adani has already set up its power plant in Godda which supplies power to Bangladesh.

It ought to be mentioned that BJP has long been harping on the need for a separate Union territory along the border of Bihar and Bengal. According to the saffron ecosystem, this is necessary to form a Centrally-governed area to deal with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh. By putting forward this argument in public domain; they were in fact trying to conceal some big plan.

By entrusting the Assam chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sharma, to plan and manage the assembly election in Jharkhand, the saffron camp has made its intention clear. Sharma has already implemented the strategy. Of course he is a rich politician with contacts supposed to finance the BJP electioneering. His primary task has been to ensure that the issue of intrusion attracts the attention of the people of state. It is worth recalling that Shah had threatened to "hang the intruders upside down" after Hasina had taken shelter in India.

One aspect is also noticeable. Majority of the people from Bengal who migrated to Adivasis areas of Jharkhand belong to the ST community in West Bengal. Modi and Shah ought to know that Mahatos and Kurmis who constitute significant portion of the Jharkhand population belong to the Adivasi community and have played a major role in the liberation of the area from British rulers. They had played a major and significant role in creating JMM and shaping Shibu Soren as the Adivasi leader.

In an affidavit filed before the high court in September 2024, the Union government pleaded that the decline could be because of migration, high infant mortality, or conversion to Christianity. Astonishing it did not mention is

that an increasing number of tribals have been insisting that they are not Hindus and that their faith should be described as 'Sarna Dharma'. The practice of clubbing all non-Christian Adivasis as 'Hindu' is no longer valid.

Only couple of days back Hemant Soren accused the BJP of squeezing the state like a lemon" for almost two decades and "smashing" the backbones of poor states. He also charged the BJP-led Centre with "destroying" the federal structure of the country. They plundered Jharkhand's wealth. It is a paradox that Jharkhand, rich in mineral resources, is one of the poorest states," Jharkhand Chief Minister Soren claimed.

First Muslim contingents arrived in Jharkhand territory 800 years ago and settled in the villages of Mundas. They mixed with the locals in such a way that they forgot their own culture, language and life-styles. The most surprising matter is that the residents of this territory not only treated them as their own but according to Father Hoffman, "they adopted Arabic and Persian words in their own language."

Muslims set up their mosque in Jharkhand territory for the first time in 1661 in Dayoodnagar. Later on madrasas were set up. In 1740 it was the first chance when a Muslim known as 'Hidamatullah Khan' was nominated as jagirdar of Japla in Jharkhand.

Unfortunately contribution of Muslims in the formation of Jharkhand state is being ignored. Saffron ecosystem creates the impression that Muslims are outsiders. They fought to liberate India from the clutches of the British colonial rule. Shaikh Bhikhari is one of the heroes who fought against the Britishers and sacrificed his life for the country.

When he was 38 years old in 1857, Thakur Vishwanath Shahdeo gave him an opportunity to become an active member of Mukti Vahini. He helped the Indian army when there was revolt at Doranda (Ranchi) on 31 July 1857. Bhikhari awakened the Santhalis of Santhal Pargana to revolt against the Britishers.

It is a fact that Muslims throughout Jharkhand region were first to raise the Jharkhand issue. In 1912 Asmat Ali gave a call for the separation of Jharkhand from Bihar for the first time. And in 1936 Momin Conference passed the resolution calling for a separate Jharkhand state. In 1952 Chiragh Ali Shah raised the voice for the fulfillment of this demand and in 1989 Jharkhand Qaumi Tahrik played an important role to lead Jharkhand movement. (IPA Service)

India is ready to become a Hub for Medical Tourism?

By: R.K. Sinha

Recently, Britain's King Charles visited India on a private trip with his wife, Queen Camilla. During their three-day stay, they stayed at a modern holistic health center near Bengaluru, where they participated in yoga, meditation sessions, and yoga therapy. This illustrates that even global elites, from ordinary patients to royalty, are realizing the benefits of seeking treatment from India's modern doctors and traditional healing methods to maintain good health and youthfulness.

In recent years, India has become a preferred destination for patients seeking treatment for heart diseases, bone disorders, kidney and liver transplants, dental care, cancer, and even conditions deemed incurable. Patients are coming not only from South Asian countries but also from Africa, Central Asia, Gulf nations, and even Western countries in the millions every year.

Alongside affordable and successful modern medical treatments, traditional Indian healing methods such as Ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy, dietetics, and millet-based therapies are gaining popularity among foreign patients. For instance, the daughter of Kenya's former Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, regained her vision after receiving treatment at Sreedhareeyam Ayurvedic Eye Hospital in Ernakulam, Kerala. This success led to a significant rise in patients from East Africa seeking Ayurvedic treatments in India.

During my frequent travels to Dehradun, I often encounter foreign tourists—men and women of all ages and professions—on flights and trains. Many of them are headed to ashrams or health centers in places like Haridwar, Rishikesh, and Dehradun for stays ranging from two weeks to three months. Their length of stay and the cost—often equivalent to or exceeding luxury five-star hotel rates—depend on the severity of their condition and the treatment required.

In addition to traditional treatments, modern hospitals in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chandigarh are drawing a large number of international patients seeking cosmetic procedures to enhance their appearance. Plastic surgeons report seeing dozens of foreign patients each month for treatments such as burn injury repair, hair transplants, and skin-tightening procedures.

This trend represents a golden opportunity for India to attract more foreign patients. Medical tourism not only earns valuable foreign exchange but also supports local economies, as patients often arrive with caretakers who stay in hotels for weeks or months. Indian expatriates living abroad are also increasingly returning

to India for affordable and high-quality medical care.

India's edge lies in offering top-tier pre- and post-surgical care at a fraction of the cost of similar services in Europe or the US. Cosmetic surgeons in India treat patients seeking procedures like fat reduction and skin tightening, as aging and environmental factors accelerate skin issues. With growing awareness of beauty treatments, both men and women are increasingly opting for cosmetic and surgical solutions.

Globally, millions of cosmetic surgeries are performed annually, with the US being a leader in this sector. While initially popular among women, plastic surgery is now equally common among men. Broadly, plastic surgery can be divided into two categories: cosmetic surgery, which enhances appearance, and reconstructive surgery, which repairs damage from injuries, illnesses, or birth defects.

India, with its highly qualified medical professionals, advanced equipment, and cost-effective treatments, is well-positioned to take a giant leap in medical tourism. Treatment costs in India are about one-fourth of those in the US, without compromising on quality. If India strategically strengthens this sector, patients will increasingly choose India over competitors like Thailand, Singapore, China, and Japan, which are also vying for medical tourists.

Medical tourism is a multi-billion-dollar industry globally. To secure a larger share, India must develop internationally accredited hospitals and clinics, provide specialized care in fields like cardiology, oncology, orthopedics, and transplantation, and embrace telemedicine and digital healthcare services.

India's millet-based therapies also offer a unique edge. Padma Shri awardee Dr. Khadar Vali claims that millet can cure even the most severe illnesses within six weeks to six months without any medication. Such unique approaches, along with robust policy support from the government, can further elevate India's medical tourism potential.

Marketing campaigns, patient-centric packages, visa facilitation, language translation services, and accommodation arrangements can make India a more attractive destination for international patients.

The figures speak for themselves—14 lakh foreign patients came to India for treatment in 2022. To meet the ambitious target of attracting 1 crore international patients annually by 2030, India must ensure world-class healthcare services and develop specific areas of expertise. With proper planning and execution, India can establish itself as a global hub for medical tourism. (The author is a senior editor, columnist, and former MP)

Brahmaputra at risk: The need for immediate action

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The Brahmaputra River, one of the world's mightiest and most ecologically significant rivers, is facing an existential crisis. Originating from Tibet and flowing through India and Bangladesh, it is not only a lifeline for millions of people but also a vital force that sustains biodiversity, agriculture, and culture across the region.

However, the river's future is uncertain, threatened by an unprecedented combination of climate change, pollution, and anthropogenic pressures. The need for immediate, concerted action to save this vital watercourse has never been more urgent.

The Brahmaputra's ecosystem is uniquely rich and diverse, supporting a variety of flora and fauna that depend on the river's health for survival. It serves as a critical water source for the densely populated region it flows through, providing drinking water, irrigation for crops, and sustaining livelihoods for millions of people, including farmers, fishermen, and indigenous communities.

The river also plays a major

role in transportation, commerce, and even religious practices in the areas surrounding it. The river's significance cannot be overstated; it is an essential part of the economic and social fabric of the regions it touches.

Yet, the river is at significant risk due to the intensifying impacts of climate change and the unchecked pollution that continues to degrade its waters. The effects of climate change, especially the accelerated melting of glaciers in the Tibetan Plateau and the changing monsoon patterns, are altering the hydrology of the Brahmaputra.

As the glaciers retreat, the river's flow is becoming more erratic, leading to both extreme flooding during the monsoon season and reduced water availability in the dry months. These variations in water levels put communities at risk, often leading to disastrous floods or severe droughts that threaten food security, destroy homes, and disrupt the local economy.

The problem is compounded by the rising levels of pollution in the Brahmaputra. Industrial waste, untreated sewage, plastic, and other forms of waste have been dumped into the river for decades. The burgeoning population along the river's

banks has only exacerbated this issue, with rapid urbanization and a lack of effective waste management systems.

In cities like Guwahati, one of the largest urban centers along the Brahmaputra, the river is increasingly becoming a dumping ground for all manner of pollutants. The water quality has deteriorated significantly, affecting both the river's aquatic life and the people who depend on it for drinking water and sustenance.

In addition to the health risks posed by contaminated water, the pollution also hampers the river's ability to function as a natural purifier of the surrounding environment.

Moreover, the construction of dams and other hydropower projects on the Brahmaputra in both India and China is further endangering the river. These developments disrupt the natural flow of the river, threaten fish populations, and alter the delicate balance of the river's ecosystem. The damming of tributaries that feed into the Brahmaputra also reduces the river's ability to flush out pollutants, making the situation even more dire.

The lack of regional cooperation regarding the management

of the river's resources is also a significant hurdle, as countries along its course struggle with competing interests and fail to implement a unified approach to protecting this shared natural resource.

The ramifications of these combined threats are vast. Biodiversity is suffering as fish species and other aquatic life are being pushed to the brink of extinction. The loss of these species has a cascading effect on the entire ecosystem, disrupting food chains and altering the dynamics of the river's environment.

For the communities that rely on the river for their livelihood, the situation is even more dire. Fishing, agriculture, and other river-dependent activities are becoming increasingly unsustainable as water quality deteriorates, water availability fluctuates, and natural habitats are destroyed. The challenges presented by the Brahmaputra's declining health are not limited to environmental concerns but have wide-ranging social, economic, and political implications as well.

Despite the growing threats, there is still hope for the Brahmaputra, but only if immediate and coordinated action is

taken. The first and most important step is to address the root causes of pollution. Comprehensive waste management systems need to be established in the cities along the river, with a strong focus on reducing industrial effluent and treating sewage before it reaches the water.

Governments and industries must be held accountable for the pollution they contribute to, and stricter environmental regulations must be enforced to curb harmful practices. Public awareness campaigns, aimed at educating citizens about the importance of the river and the role they can play in protecting it, are also essential to drive change at the grassroots level.

Another crucial step is the establishment of regional cooperation for the sustainable management of the river. India, China, and Bangladesh must come together to formulate a shared strategy for the Brahmaputra's protection. This could involve establishing joint monitoring systems to assess the river's health, coordinating flood control efforts, and ensuring the equitable distribution of the river's resources.

International bodies, such as the United Nations, could play

a significant role in facilitating this cooperation, ensuring that all stakeholders have a seat at the table and that the needs of the communities along the river are met.

The impact of climate change must also be addressed through adaptive measures that account for the changing dynamics of the river's flow. This could include the construction of more resilient infrastructure, better flood management systems, and policies that promote water conservation.

At the same time, efforts should be made to protect the river's ecosystems, including reforestation projects and initiatives to restore wetlands, which act as natural filters for the water and provide essential habitats for wildlife.

Additionally, sustainable development practices must replace the traditional focus on economic growth at the expense of the environment. Large-scale hydropower projects on the Brahmaputra should undergo rigorous environmental impact assessments, with alternatives considered that would not disrupt the river's natural flow or biodiversity.

The focus should shift to low-impact renewable energy

sources that can meet the region's growing energy demands without further endangering the river.

Saving the Brahmaputra is not just about protecting a river; it is about safeguarding the future of the people who rely on it. A healthy river is vital to ensuring the economic, social, and environmental well-being of millions.

The task ahead is formidable, but it is not impossible. It requires the collective will of governments, industries, local communities, and international organizations to come together and prioritize the long-term health of the river over short-term gains.

The situation is urgent, and the consequences of inaction are too severe to ignore. The Brahmaputra is a treasure that must be preserved for future generations. We must act now, not only for the river itself but for the countless lives that depend on it. Only through coordinated, comprehensive action can we hope to restore the Brahmaputra to its former glory and secure its future as a sustainable, thriving waterway for all. *(The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

Kaziranga: The migratory birds' haven of Assam

By: Lalit Nath

Kaziranga National Park, rich in diverse biodiversity, is known not only for its one-horned rhinoceros but also as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. During the winter, countless colorful migratory birds transform Kaziranga into a paradise. The sounds of their calls and the breathtaking scenes of them playing in the wetlands evoke a heavenly sense of love. According to surveys, over 30,000 birds migrate annually to Kaziranga and Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary.

Bird experts state that these aquatic birds migrate thousands of miles to various countries, overcoming geographical challenges like rivers, oceans, mountains and more, primarily due to food scarcity and breeding needs during the winter.

Many of these migratory birds come from far-off places like Antarctica, North America, Russia, Ladakh, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Guinea, Siberia, Central Asia, Mongolia, China, Myanmar and Tibet, adding vibrancy to the wetlands of Assam.

Among these is the famous Bar-headed Goose, which migrates over the high peaks of the Himalayas. Other species such as the Lesser Whistling Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Pintail, White Winged Wood Duck, Pelican, Spot-billed Duck, Greylag Goose, Gadwall, Purple Swamphen, Brown-headed Gull, Marsh Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper, among others, contribute to the mesmerizing beauty of Kaziranga.

These birds are often seen in the shallow wetlands of Kaziranga during winter, where they feed, rest and sometimes breed in a peaceful, quiet environment. Migratory birds form an essential part of Kaziranga's ecosystem, helping maintain balance within the local biodiversity and creating a food chain.

Despite the favorable conditions, migratory birds are affected by various factors such as pollution, climate change, and habitat loss. Pollution from agricultural runoff and plastic waste has led to contamination of water bodies, affecting

not only the birds but also the fish and plant life that depend on them.

The construction of tall buildings and towers, along with loud noise, poses additional dangers to these birds. Such situations can disorient the birds, sometimes resulting in deadly collisions. Climate change also impacts food availability and alters breeding patterns, forcing birds to change their migratory routes or delay breeding, disrupting their life cycles.

Another threat to migratory birds is poaching. Illegal hunters target birds for various uses and recently, some poachers have been mixing poisonous substances into food to kill them. If this mass slaughter continues, these vi-

brant species could eventually become extinct.

To address these challenges, Kaziranga National Park has implemented several measures to protect migratory birds. Every year, the park celebrates 'World Migratory Bird Day,' focusing on habitat restoration, anti-poaching measures and raising public awareness. The day is dedicated to ensuring safe habitats and preserving the migratory paths of these birds.

Additionally, local communities are involved in educational programmes, where the threats faced by these birds and the importance of their conservation are highlighted. The theme of World

Migratory Bird Day celebrated in October 2024 was 'Protecting Insects, Protecting Birds,' emphasizing that many migratory bird species rely on insects for food and climate change, habitat loss and the excessive use of pesticides have significantly reduced insect populations, directly affecting bird life cycles and ecosystems.

This campaign stresses the importance of insect conservation to ensure the survival of birds that rely on them for sustenance during migration and breeding. The aesthetic beauty of these migratory birds in Kaziranga continues

to captivate visitors. Kaziranga National Park is an invaluable asset to our country, not only for its inherent biodiversity but also as a symbol of Assam's responsibility.

The sincere involvement of local people and timely action by authorities have strengthened its existence.

Recently, Kaziranga has become the second-largest destination for migratory birds in India, primarily due to its unique habitat and conservation efforts.

More than 84,839 birds were recorded during the most recent waterfowl census, a 27% increase from the previous count. Conservation initiatives and effective habitat management have contributed to this success.

Kaziranga serves as a vital stopover for migratory birds along their flight paths in Central Asia, making it crucial for global bird biodiversity. The migratory birds of Kaziranga do not just reflect the beauty of biodiversity, they play an indispensable role in nature's life cycle. Their conservation is not only essential for maintaining local ecological balance but also symbolizes our responsibility towards natural resources.

Permanent solutions to issues like pollution, habitat loss and poaching, combined with public awareness, will ensure a bright future for Kaziranga's diverse bird species. With the heartfelt cooperation of local people, timely actions by authorities and united efforts from society, Kaziranga can continue to be a model for global biodiversity conservation.

Clearing the air: How India is facing its pollution crisis

By: Satyabrata Borah

Air quality and environmental concerns have become a pressing issue in India, affecting millions of people each day. The situation is particularly dire in urban areas where pollution from vehicles, industries, and other human activities has caused a steady decline in air quality. During the winter months, especially around the festive season, the air in cities like Delhi and its surrounding regions becomes extremely polluted. Smog blankets the cities, leading to respiratory issues, eye irritation, and more serious long-term health problems like lung and heart diseases. People of all ages are affected, but children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions are most vulnerable.

One of the main reasons for this severe air pollution is the high concentration of particulate matter, often referred to as PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀, which are tiny particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs and even enter the bloodstream. These particles are released from various sources, such as vehicles, construction activities, industrial emissions, and the burning of fossil fuels.

Vehicles contribute a significant portion of this pollution, especially in densely populated areas. Diesel and petrol engines release a high amount of pollutants, and despite the introduction of cleaner fuel standards, the number of vehicles on the road continues to rise, negating some of these improvements.

Another major source of pollution in India is the practice of crop burning. Every year, farmers in states like Punjab and Haryana burn the residue of harvested crops to clear their fields for the next planting season. This burning releases vast amounts of smoke and particulate matter into the air, which is then carried by the wind to nearby cities, including Delhi.

This practice is often defended by farmers as the quickest and most economical way to prepare fields, though it has a devastating effect on air quality. Efforts have been made to find alternative methods, but the cost and lack of resources often prevent large-scale adoption of these solutions.

During the festive season, particularly Diwali, the use of firecrackers adds to the already severe pollution. Firecrackers release a cocktail of toxic chemicals into the air, increasing pollution levels overnight.

While there are laws restricting the use of firecrackers, enforcement is difficult, and many people continue to use them, unaware of the severe impact on air quality. Schools and public health officials often urge people to avoid firecrackers, and there is a growing awareness about the need for cleaner celebrations, but changing traditions takes time.

The health impacts of poor air quality are extensive and alarming. Respiratory diseases such as asthma, bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are on the rise, especially among children who are more susceptible to the effects of pollution. Doctors in major hospitals frequently report a spike in cases related to respiratory issues, particularly during the winter months.

For the elderly and those with

pre-existing heart conditions, exposure to polluted air can be life-threatening, as it exacerbates their health problems and makes them more vulnerable to complications. Studies have shown that prolonged exposure to polluted air reduces life expectancy and affects the overall quality of life, making it a significant public health concern.

To address the problem, the government and various organizations have implemented a number of measures. One of these is the promotion of cleaner fuels, such as compressed natural gas (CNG) in public transport.

Many buses and auto-rickshaws now use CNG, which is less polluting than traditional fuels like diesel and petrol. Electric vehicles are also gaining popularity, although their adoption is still slow due to high costs and limited charging infrastructure. In addition, the government has introduced stricter emission norms for vehicles, and there is ongoing development of metro systems and other public transportation networks to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads.

The government has also launched several initiatives to monitor and control air pollution levels. The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is one such initiative, aimed at reducing particulate pollution by 20-30% in the next few years. Under this program, cities with high pollution levels are given specific targets to improve their air quality.

Various air quality monitoring stations have been set up across the country to track pollution levels and provide real-time data to the public. This data is used to issue warnings on days when pollution levels are particularly high, allowing people to take precautions such as staying indoors or wearing masks. However, while monitoring and awareness are important, they are only part of the solution, and actual reduction in pollution levels requires stricter enforcement of laws and more effective action.

Public awareness campaigns have played a significant role in educating people about the health risks of pollution and the steps they can take to protect themselves. Messages on social media, posters, and announcements in schools have helped to spread awareness about the harmful effects of pollution and the importance of making eco-friendly choices.

For example, using carpooling, taking public transport, or switching to bicycles are encouraged as simple ways for individuals to contribute to cleaner air. Additionally, people are urged to avoid open burning of garbage and to properly dispose of waste, as burning trash is another source of harmful pollutants.

The issue of waste management is closely tied to air quality, as improper disposal of waste often leads to burning, which releases toxic substances into the air. In many parts of India, waste segregation is still not practiced consistently, and large amounts of waste end up in landfills where they are eventually burned. Proper waste management and recycling can reduce the amount of waste that needs to be disposed of and minimize the release of harmful chemicals into the air.

Green spaces and tree planting

initiatives are also being promoted as ways to combat pollution. Trees and plants naturally filter the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Urban areas often lack adequate green spaces, and there is a need to increase the number of parks and trees to help improve air quality. Some cities have launched tree-planting drives, and environmental groups often organize activities to plant trees and promote awareness about the benefits of green spaces. While these efforts alone cannot solve the problem, they do help to mitigate pollution to some extent.

The use of technology and innovation is becoming increasingly important in the fight against air pollution. Startups and companies are developing air purifiers and filters that can be used in homes, schools, and offices to improve indoor air quality. There are also large-scale air purifiers that have been installed in some public places, although their effectiveness on a city-wide level is still debated.

In addition, researchers are exploring new materials and technologies that can capture or reduce pollutants in the air. For instance, some materials are being designed to absorb harmful gases, and there are experiments with drones and other devices to monitor and potentially reduce pollution levels.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain. The population of India continues to grow, and with it, the demand for energy, transportation, and industrial production, all of which contribute to pollution. Balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability is a complex issue, as industries and infrastructure are essential for development, but they also produce emissions.

In rural areas, the use of traditional fuels like wood and coal for cooking is still common, contributing to indoor and outdoor pollution. Efforts are being made to provide cleaner cooking options, but adoption can be slow due to cultural and economic factors.

Another major challenge is the enforcement of environmental regulations. While laws exist to control emissions from vehicles and industries, enforcing these laws is difficult. Corruption, lack of resources, and limited public support often hinder the effectiveness of environmental policies. Additionally, local authorities may lack the power or resources to implement and monitor pollution control measures effectively.

Air quality and environmental concerns in India require urgent attention and concerted effort from all sectors of society. From government policies to individual actions, every step counts in the fight against pollution. Cleaner fuels, better waste management, increased green spaces, and innovative technologies all play a role in improving air quality.

However, the challenge is vast and requires a long-term commitment. As awareness grows and more people become involved in the movement for cleaner air, there is hope that India can overcome this issue and create a healthier environment for future generations. By working together, implementing effective policies, and making sustainable choices, we can address the air quality crisis and build a future where everyone can breathe cleaner air.



2024 to cross 1.5°C, be hottest year on record

By: Akshit Sangomla

The year 2024 is well on its way to become the hottest year since the preindustrial period, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S). The year may also be the first year to cross the 1.5°C above the preindustrial annual average temperature, according to the C3S. The C3S concluded this after analysing the data for the first 10 months of 2024.

This would be the second year in a row when the global annual temperature record would be broken.

"This marks a new milestone in global temperature records and should serve as a catalyst to raise ambition for the upcoming Climate Change Conference, COP29," said Samantha Burgess, deputy director of the C3S. The WMO's analysis of six different temperature datasets from January to September 2024 also found that the year may be the warmest on record.

"Today, the WMO and partners tell us that 2024 is on track to be the hottest year ever recorded - almost two months before it ends," said Antonio Gutierrez, the secretary general of the United Nations in a WMO press statement. "Humanity's torching the planet and paying the price," he added.

WMO uses data from the observational sites and instruments on land and over the oceans from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Aeronautical and Space Administration's (NASA) Goddard Institute for Space Studies, The United Kingdom's Met Office Hadley Centre, University of East Anglia's Climate Re-

search Unit, the Berkeley Earth Group, C3S and the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA). The last two datasets are reanalyses datasets which combine observational data with weather models to get a complete picture of temperature data even from places where there are no observational sites such as the Polar Regions and the oceans.

The month of October 2024 was 1.65°C above preindustrial levels and the 15th month out of the last 16 months when the monthly global average air temperature crossed 1.5°C above preindustrial levels, according to C3S. This also made October 2024 the second warmest October since 1850-1900 period.

2024 to cross 1.5°C, be hottest year on record

C3S had also indicated back in July that 2024 was on a pathway to break the annual temperature record. And there are many indicators of the trend. "The global-average temperature for the past 12 months (November 2023- October 2024) was 0.74°C above the 1991-2020 average, and an estimated 1.62°C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial average," said C3S in its statement.

"The average global temperature anomaly for the first 10 months of 2024 (January to October) is 0.71°C above the 1991-2020 average, which is the highest on record for this period and 0.16°C warmer than the same period in 2023," C3S added.

The average temperature anomaly would have to drop to zero for the next couple of months for 2024 not to be the warmest year surpassing 2023. It is also likely that the average annual temperature may be above preindustrial levels by more than 1.55°C.

While crossing the 1.5°C mark in individual months or years does not imply that the Paris Agreement's average global temperature threshold of 1.5°C has been exceeded, repeated crossings do bring the planet closer to that critical barrier. The oceans also were much warmer-than-normal in October, similar to the atmospheric temperatures.

The average sea surface temperatures for October 2024 for the tropical and sub tropical regions of the planet was 20.68°C, the second warmest since the preindustrial period and only 0.1°C below October 2023. The warm atmosphere and warm oceans have led to an increase in moisture levels in the atmosphere which can clearly be evidenced by the extreme weather events experienced around the world.

2024 to cross 1.5°C, be hottest year on record

These included the catastrophic floods in Spain in late October and early November that have killed more than 200 people, Hurricane Milton in the Gulf of Mexico in the second week of October which showed explosive rapid intensification fuelled by ocean warming and devastated the US state of Florida and Cyclone Asna which unusually formed and intensified on land in its formative stages fuelled by soil moisture and brought huge torrents of rainfall to Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh states in India killing dozens.

According to the Clausius-Clapeyron equation, for every 1°C rise in global average temperature there would be seven per cent rise in atmospheric moisture levels. As the planet warms further, extreme weather events would only become much more intense, frequent and unpredictable. *(Courtesy: Down To Earth)*

First issue in engaging with Pakistan is cessation of terrorism: India's Ambassador at UN

NEW YORK, Nov 20: The first issue in engaging with Pakistan is the cessation of terrorism, India's envoy at the UN said, underlining that India has been a long-standing victim of cross-border and global terrorism and has zero tolerance towards the scourge.

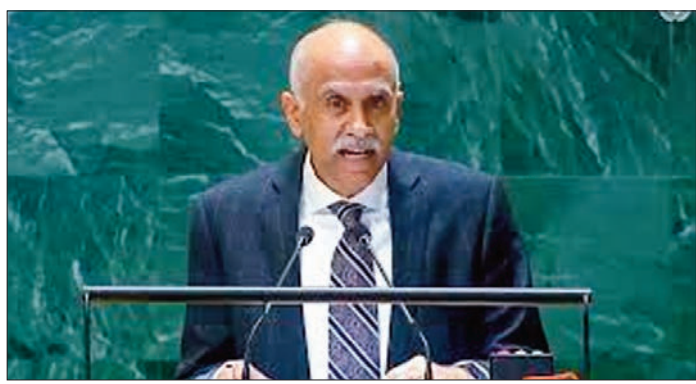
"With Pakistan, the main issue we have is of terrorism," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said during a conversation here on Tuesday.

Harish delivered the keynote address on 'Responding to Key Global Challenges: The India Way' at an event at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

Responding to a question on Pakistan during an interactive session after the keynote address, Harish said Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an effort to reach out and engage with Pakistan.

"Terrorist activities in India have eroded the trust. The first issue in engaging with Pakistan is the cessation of terrorism. That is a key issue," he said.

The event was co-sponsored by the MPA programme in Global Leadership and the International Organisation and UN Studies pro-



gramme (IO/UNS) and attended by students, faculty and policy experts.

In his address, Harish emphasised that terrorism is a big issue on the global stage.

"India has been a long-standing victim of cross-border and global terrorism," he said as he described terrorism as an "existential threat" to humanity that knows no borders, no nationality and for which there can be no justification.

"Terrorism can only be combated through international collaboration," he said.

On what is the 'India Way' in dealing with terrorism, Harish underlined that a "big focus" for the country has been on taking along

its international partners to combat terrorism as he stressed that India has zero tolerance for the scourge.

"A single attack is one too many. A single-life loss is one too many. How do we reinvigorate the international counter-terrorism agenda, including at the UN and especially at the UN? How do we address new challenges in dealing with terrorism, cyber terror, new technologies, terror financing, state culpability and online radicalisation?" How do we ensure that justice is delivered to victims of terrorism," he said adding that accountability and justice delivery are very important.

Emphasising that justice delayed is justice denied, Harish said the

end goal is "Never again. We don't want a 9/11, has happened here. We don't want a 26/11. Has happened in Mumbai," a reference to the September 11 terror attacks on the World Trade Centre twin towers in Manhattan carried out by Al Qaeda and the November 26, 2008 terror attacks across Mumbai perpetrated by Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba.

He further noted that unfortunately, there has been an enhanced salience of nuclear weapons now. "India has always stood for universal, verifiable, non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament. We do not believe that you can create pools of nuclear weapons-free zones in a world where the means of delivery are global, so we stand for universal disarmament, of course, verifiable and non-discriminatory."

India follows a policy of maintaining a credible minimum deterrence based on no first use and non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states, he said.

"In recent years, a big issue, of course, is new threats and increasingly, the international community is called upon to collaborate to come up with measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction," he said. (PTI)

US Embassy in Kyiv shuts due to Russian air attack threat after Biden policy shift

KYIV, Nov 20: The US Embassy in Kyiv said it would stay closed on Wednesday after receiving a warning of a potentially significant Russian air attack on the Ukrainian capital.

The precautionary step came after Russian officials promised a response to President Joe Biden's decision to let Ukraine strike targets on Russian soil with US-made missiles — a move that angered the Kremlin.

The war, which reached its 1,000-day milestone on Tuesday, has taken on a growing international dimension with the arrival of North Korean troops to help Russia on the battlefield — a development which US officials said prompted Biden's policy shift.

Russian President Vladimir Putin subsequently lowered the threshold for using his nuclear arsenal, with the new doctrine announced on Tuesday permitting a potential nuclear response by Moscow even to a conventional attack on Russia by any nation that is supported by a nuclear power. That could potentially include Ukrainian attacks backed by the US.

Western leaders dismissed the Russian move as an attempt to deter Ukraine's allies from providing further support to Kyiv, but the escalating tension weighed on stock markets after Ukraine used American-made AT-ACMS longer-range missiles for the first time to strike a target inside Russia.

The US Embassy said its closure and attack warning were issued in the context of ongoing Russian missile and drone attacks on Kyiv and anticipated a quick return to regular operations.

Western and Ukrainian officials say Russia been stockpiling powerful long-range missiles, possibly in an upcoming effort to crush the Ukrainian power grid as winter settles in.

Military analysts say the US decision on the range over which American-made missiles can be used isn't expected to be a game-changer in the war, but it could



help weaken the Russian war effort, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank.

"Ukrainian long-range strikes against military objects within Russia's rear are crucial for degrading Russian military capabilities throughout the theatre," it said.

Meanwhile, North Korea recently supplied additional artillery systems to Russia, according to South Korea. It said that 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 front lines.

Ukraine struck a factory in Russia's Belgorod region that makes cargo drones for the armed forces in an overnight attack, according to Andrii Kovalenko, the head of the counterdisinformation branch of Ukraine's Security Council.

He also claimed Ukraine hit an arsenal in Russia's Novgorod region, near the town of Kotovo, located about 680 kilometers (420 miles) behind the Ukrainian border. The arsenal stored artillery ammunition and various types of missiles, he said. It wasn't possible to independently verify the claims. (AP)

Argentina's Milei pivots to pragmatism in 1st talks with China's Xi after shaking up G20

LA PAZ (BOLIVIA), Nov 20: Last year, then-presidential candidate Javier Milei declared Argentina would not "make deals with communists" in China or Brazil, calling their leaders "murderers" and "thieves" in a bid to channel the populist energies of Donald Trump and other global far-right icons into a winning political message.

But Tuesday, President Milei found himself at the Group of 20 summit in Rio de Janeiro shaking hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping and vowing to boost trade with the Asian powerhouse, a day after his economy minister signed a preliminary agreement to export Argentine natural gas to Brazil.

Milei even acquiesced to a joint declaration endorsed by world leaders late Monday despite his earlier attempts to play spoiler to the G20 host, Brazil's left-wing president Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva who was once called by Milei a "corrupt communist".

The final moments of the summit revealed Milei's more pragmatic streak, coming as a surprise after the irascible president sought to undercut various international initiatives — withdrawing Argentine negotiators from the UN climate summit, casting the only "no" votes on two UN resolutions, one supporting Indigenous rights and another advocating for an end to violence against women, and roiling negotiations at the G20 summit.

Argentina has also dramatically reshaped its foreign policy in line with its hard-right allies in Italy — with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni headed to Buenos Aires on Tuesday to spend more time with Milei — and in Israel. On Tuesday,

Andrea Tenenti, a spokesperson for the UN peacekeeping mission operating along Lebanon's southern border, told reporters in Geneva that Argentina had decided to withdraw its peacekeepers from the force, known as UNIFIL.

He did not say why, but Israel has repeatedly requested that peacekeepers leave the area since the military's October 1 invasion of southern Lebanon. Despite Israeli attacks on peacekeepers, UNIFIL has vowed to stay put and none of the other 47 troop-contributing countries has pulled out.

In the past few days, Argentine resistance to the joint G20 communiqué focused on clauses related to the taxation of the super-rich and regulation of online speech, diplomats said. Argentine delegates also sought to block language about gender equality and references to the UN 2030 agenda on sustainable development, which Milei has derided as socialist.

Critics in Rio saw the Argentine president as a saboteur. Supporters back home cheered Milei as a leader of the "new world disorder." Fresh off a trip to Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida where he ranted against socialism and rubbed shoulders with the president-elect and tech billionaire Elon Musk, Milei initially seemed immune to such concerns in Rio.

Milei's office issued a harsh statement citing his objections to the G20 declaration. But the president ultimately signed onto it under enormous international pressure.

"Argentina is not a great power and it is in a very difficult situation economically," said Roberto Goulart Menezes, a professor of in-

ternational relations at the University of Brasilia. That pressure, he added, was "enough for Argentina to finally reduce its opposition."

During Milei's first-ever meeting with Xi on Tuesday, the leaders discussed their "current trade and financial ties" and "desire to continue exploring new opportunities to expand and improve," the Argentine presidency said in a statement, along with a photo of the presidents sharing a warm handshake. It said the leaders had invited each other to visit.

With Argentina highly reliant on China as a market for its soybeans and other crops, the cordial tone made clear that the crisis-stricken South American nation has no desire for relations with its second-largest trading partner and crucial source of financing to further deteriorate.

A statement from China's foreign ministry said Xi expressed his appreciation for Milei's "willingness to continue deepening bilateral cooperation".

China has maintained strategic assets in Argentina, including stakes in lithium mines and a space station in Patagonia. Earlier this year, former Foreign Minister Diana Mondino, whom Milei recently fired, led a successful visit to China to patch up relations strained by Milei's colorful insults ("Would you trade with an assassin?" he asked on the campaign trail last August, accusing China of killing dissidents).

After Mondino's trip, Beijing in June resumed a currency swap deal worth billions of dollars that boosted Argentina's depleted reserves. (AP)

Multiple election offices report receiving mailed ballots misdirected from other states

HELENA (MONTANA), Nov 20: Terry Thompson had an election to run for voters in Cascade County, Montana. Why then, she thought, was her office in Great Falls being sent mailed ballots completed by voters in places such as Wasilla, Alaska; Vancouver, Washington; and Tampa, Florida?

It was only about a dozen ballots total from voters in other states. But she said it still raised concerns about the ability of the US Postal Service to deliver election mail and whether the errant ballots would ever be counted.

"I mean, I would have had to be doing FedEx overnight envelopes to all these states to try to get them where they needed to go," said Thompson, the county's election administrator.

She received about a half dozen others that should have gone to county election offices in other parts of Montana. For those, she said she

"just had to hope and pray" they made it back on time.

While a stray ballot ending up in the wrong place can happen during election season, the number of ballots destined for other states and counties that ended up at Thompson's office is unusual. AP found it wasn't an anomaly. Election offices in California, Louisiana, New Mexico and elsewhere also reported receiving completed ballots in the mail that should have gone to other states.

The Postal Service said on Tuesday that without additional information or tracking data from bar codes on ballot envelopes, it cannot comment further on those cases. It said earlier this month that it had been working closely with local election officials to resolve concerns.

But to some election officials, the misdirected ballots confirm concerns they raised be-

fore the November 5 presidential election about the US Postal Service's performance and ability to handle a crush of mail ballots, as early voting has become increasingly popular with voters.

State election officials warned in September that problems with the nation's mail delivery system threatened to disenfranchise voters in the upcoming presidential election.

In Louisiana, state election officials said some 40 to 50 ballots destined for 10 other states ended up being delivered to local election offices, mostly in Orleans Parish. Deputy Secretary of State Joel Watson Jr said the Secretary of State's Office had "extraordinary frustration" for the Postal Service's continued "inconsistencies" and "lack of accountability".

Dozens of mail ballots from inside the state also were delivered to the wrong local election office, Watson said. (AP)

North Korea sent more conventional weapons to Russia: South Korea

SEOUL, Nov 20: North Korea recently supplied additional artillery systems to Russia to support its war efforts against Ukraine, while some of the thousands of North Korean troops deployed in Russia have begun engaging in combat, South Korea's spy agency told lawmakers on Wednesday.

The South Korean assessment came after Russia warned on Monday that US President Joe Biden's decision to let Ukraine strike targets inside Russia with US-supplied longer-range missiles adds "fuel to the fire" of the war.

US officials said Biden's decision was triggered almost entirely by North Korea's entry into the war. In a closed-door briefing at parliament, the National Intelligence Service said that North Korea exported 170mm self-propelled guns and 240mm multiple

rocket launch systems to Russia, according to lawmaker Lee Seong Kweon, who attended the meeting.

Lee told reporters that the NIS assessed those weapons are a type of artillery the Russian military doesn't operate so North Korea likely dispatched personnel to teach the Russians how to use them and handle their maintenance.

Last week, Russian Telegram channels and other social media posts published photos apparently showing North Korea's "Koksan" 170mm self-propelled guns being moved by rail inside Russia.

The Financial Times, citing Ukrainian intelligence assessments, reported on Sunday that North Korea in recent weeks sent some 50 domestically produced 170mm self-propelled howitzers and 20 240mm multiple launch rocket systems to Russia.

The artillery systems are the latest conventional weapons that North Korea is believed to have provided to Russia as the two countries are sharply expanding their military cooperation in the face of separate confrontations with the US and its allies.

Last month, the NIS said that North Korea had sent more than 13,000 containers of artillery, missiles and other conventional arms to Russia since August 2023 to replenish its dwindling weapons stockpiles.

During its Wednesday briefing, the NIS said 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, Lee said.

He cited the NIS as saying 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.

The US, Ukraine and others have similar estimates on the size of North Korea's troop deployment. They say the North Korean soldiers arrived in Russia in October and that some of them have since engaged in combat in the Kursk region. Observers say North Korea's participation in the almost 3-year war threatens to escalate the conflict.

Park Sunwon, another lawmaker who was present at the NIS meeting, made similar comments on the briefing. He said the spy agency couldn't provide an assessment on possible North Korean casualties. (AP)

Ukraine has seen success in building clean energy, which is harder for Russia to destroy

BAKU (AZERBAIJAN), Nov 20: Maxim Timchenko, CEO of DTEK, the largest private energy company in Ukraine, pulls out a piece of paper with bar charts showing how much new electricity his company has brought online this year in the country versus how much Russian bombs have destroyed.

Total electricity goes up, then down, then up, then down — capturing the company's constant rebuilding each time Russian missile attacks take out a facility, which include wind and solar farms and thermal (coal or gas-fired) generating stations.

The Russian strikes are part of a campaign to target energy infrastructure to reduce power in Ukraine as winter looms.

"What other choice do we have?" said Timchenko during an interview on the sidelines of this year's UN climate talks, taking place in Azerbaijan. "Sit and wait and pray that they don't hit us, or do our job and bring lights back to our people?"

The nearly three-year-long Russia-Ukraine war, which has left large swaths of Ukraine destroyed, has accelerated a transition to clean energy. At Ukraine's pavilion at COP29, on display is a large smashed solar panel, destroyed in an attack this year.

Russian forces continue to make



small but steady gains in capturing Ukrainian territory at a time when there are questions about how much the United States, which has been providing weapons and money, will continue to support the country once President-elect Donald Trump assumes office in January. During the campaign, Trump repeatedly said he could quickly end the war if elected, although he hasn't said how.

Whatever the future, the decentralized nature of some clean energies, in particular wind and solar, has allowed Ukraine to quickly restore power in ways that would be impossible with Ukraine's more traditional energy sources, such as coal-fired power plants.

In centralized systems, all power is generated and sent to the grid over transmission lines from the same area. That means if the plant goes down, say in an attack, a large section of grid, or even the entire grid, comes to a halt.

By contrast, wind and solar installations are usually more scattered, so less of the system goes down with one hit, and if the solar is on rooftops, the impact can be even more limited.

Attacks on two DTEK solar farms last spring is a good example. They destroyed many solar panels and some of the transformers, which step up voltage for long distances or step it down for use in homes. Replacing the transformers

and swapping out destroyed panels allowed the farms, which generate 400 megawatts, to be back up in seven days.

Timchenko said an attack on a thermal generating station, which experienced a similar amount of damage, took three to four months to rebuild.

"That's the difference between centralized and so-called decentralized generation. It's much more resistant and difficult to destroy," said Timchenko.

Geoffrey Pyatt, assistant secretary of the US State Department's Bureau of Energy Resources, said that Russian attacks on energy infrastructure have evolved. In 2022 and 2023, they focused on transformers.

"The Ukrainians were incredibly efficient in working around those attacks. So Putin changed his tactics beginning in March to go after generation capacity," said Pyatt, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Since then, about 50 per cent of Ukraine's total power generation has been knocked out, leaving mostly nuclear, some hydropower and large new renewable projects, like a wind farm being built by DTEK, he added.

Renewable and other infrastructure projects are financed by partnerships between governments and

businesses, spreading out the risk, since there is no guarantee that something built isn't destroyed by missiles. In June, turbine maker GE Vernova and manufacturer Honeywell announced plans to partner with DTEK for major wind and battery storage projects in Ukraine.

Roger Martella, chief sustainability officer for GE Vernova, said that developing public-private partnerships was key to lowering risk and making investment more attractive. Ukraine's resistance was also an inspiration, Martella told a panel on Ukrainian renewables at COP29.

"We're humbled by the fact that Ukraine has done something no one has ever done before, which is to maintain the grid in a war-torn environment," said Martella.

Pyatt, a former ambassador in Ukraine, said he has seen widespread support for Ukraine's energy systems in the G7, a group of leading industrialised nations.

While making clear he couldn't speak for the incoming Trump administration, Pyatt said he believed support for Ukraine in the energy sector would "continue in any scenario".

"If you start to get big American companies like GE and Fluxus and Honeywell involved in energy reconstruction, and there's going to be billions of dollars of energy reconstruction," he said. (AP)

US support for Ukraine, Israel eating into weapons stockpiles, Indo-Pacific commander says

WASHINGTON, Nov 20: The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are eating away at critical US weapons stockpiles and could hamper the military's ability to respond to China should a conflict arise in the Indo-Pacific, the top US commander for that region said on Tuesday. Head of US Indo-Pacific Command Adm Samuel Paparo cautioned that the US providing or selling billions of dollars worth of air defences to both Ukraine and Israel is now impeding his ability to respond in the Indo-Pacific, such as if China invades Taiwan.

"Up to this year, where most of the employment of weapons were really artillery pieces and short-range weapons, I had said, 'not at all,'" when asked if the conflicts were hampering US ability to respond to threats in the Indo-Pacific, Paparo said.

"It's now eating into stocks, and to say otherwise would be dishonest," he told an audience at the Brookings Institution in Washington. China has ramped up its military pressure against Taiwan, including a massive military exercise that involved 125 warplanes in October, and has said annexing Taiwan is a historical inevitability.

China's military has increased its encircling of Taiwan's skies and waters in the past few years, holding joint drills with its warships and fighter jets on a near-daily basis near

the democratically run island. The US, like most countries, does not recognize Taiwan as a country but is the island's main partner and is bound by US laws to provide it with the means to defend itself.

Ukraine just passed its 1,000th day since Russia invaded, and in that timeframe the US has provided more than USD 60.4 billion in military assistance, including three Patriot air defence systems and missiles, more than 40 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems and ammunition, and the coveted longer-range Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMS, which Ukraine deployed in Russia for the first time on Tuesday.

In October, after Iran launched hundreds of ballistic missiles into Israel, the US deployed one of its few Terminal High Altitude Area Defense batteries to Israel and about 100 troops to help operate it.

The US also has regularly shipped air defence munitions as Israel presses its offensives against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The conflicts have killed tens of thousands of civilians.

The outgoing Biden administration has committed to spending the remaining USD 7.1 billion in presidential drawdown authority — meaning weapons pulled from US stockpiles — to send weapons to Ukraine before President-elect Donald Trump takes office. (AP)

COCOMI suspends agitation for a week, sit-in protests continue in Imphal districts

Resolution adopted for 'mass operation' against suspects during a meeting

IMPHAL, Nov 20: The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a civil society organisation representing the people of Imphal valley, on Wednesday suspended its agitation for a week after the state's NDA legislators adopted a resolution calling for "mass operations" against suspected Kuki militants involved in civilian killings.

Briefing reporters, COCOMI coordinator Somorendro Thokchom also called for the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in areas where it was recently re-imposed.

"We will observe how the resolution passed by the legislators is implemented. Further action will be decided after that," Thokchom said.

A meeting of MLAs of the ruling BJP-led NDA in Manipur on Monday adopted a resolution calling for a "mass operation" against suspected Kuki militants responsible for killing three women and three children in Jiribam district within seven days, a statement said.



The meeting, held on Monday night, was attended by 27 MLAs.

"To start mass operations against the Kuki militants responsible for the killing of the 6 (six) innocent women and children within 7 (seven) days," the statement said.

However, the decision to suspend the agitation was not well received by sev-

eral women's organisations, who insisted that the protests will continue.

In the meantime, defying curfew orders, sit-in protests demanding swift action against the killing of three women and three children by suspected Kuki militants in Jiribam continued across parts of Imphal East and West. (PTI)

Tripura CM pays tribute to martyred Indian Army soldier Subhankar Bhowmik



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Nov 20: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday paid his last respects to Indian Army soldier Subhankar Bhowmik, who made the supreme sacrifice at Siachen.

CM Saha also announced financial assistance of ₹ 4 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) for the family of the martyred soldier.

The mortal remains of Subhankar Bhowmik, a resident of

Amarpur in the Gomati District, were brought to Agartala.

Upon arrival at MBB Airport, CM Saha, along with Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu, paid tribute by laying wreaths on the soldier's body.

Speaking to the media, CM Saha said, "Our son from Tripura, Subhankar Bhowmik, made the ultimate sacrifice at Siachen on Monday after a massive avalanche struck. Unfortunately, the incident occurred at night, making an immediate rescue operation impossible. He was found the next morning but had already passed away. This is a deeply painful incident. He leaves behind a young daughter and his wife.

"Subhankar gave his life while safeguarding the nation. The state government will provide all necessary support to the family. Additionally, I will extend personal assistance to them as well."

Dist Cong flags poor condition of roads in Dimapur

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Nov 20: With the festive season approaching in Nagaland, the Dimapur District Congress Committee (DDCC) on Wednesday flagged the poor condition of roads in Dimapur district.

Addressing a press conference at Congress Bhavan Dimapur, DDCC president Kutoho Chishi highlighted the pathetic condition of roads with innumerable potholes in the district, causing immense hardship to commuters for past several years. Pointing out that people from across the state and outside come to Dimapur for shopping and purposes, Chishi urged the state government to take note of the issue and urgently repair the pothole-riddled and dusty roads.

He also raised the issue of traffic congestion in the town. Chishi said the under-repair road overbridge on National Highway 29 near Dimapur district sports complex stadium added to the traffic congestion in the town with the traffic police imposing restrictions on different routes until the completion of repair work on the bridge.

He reminded the state government, the legislators of Dimapur, and the newly elected councilors of Dimapur Municipal Council to fulfill their poll promises to develop the roads to mitigate the hardship faced by the commuters. Further, Chishi also raised the issue of alleged irregularities in implementation of many government schemes meant for the people.

Kuki organisation condemns killing of Meitei women, children

IMPHAL/GUWAHATI, Nov 20: The Kuki Organisation For Human Rights Trust (KOHUR) has condemned the killing of six Meitei women and children by militants in Jiribam district and urged the administration to arrest those involved in the "heinous act" that sparked large-scale protests in the state.

The KOHUR also demanded that the government also bring to book the people who killed a number Kuki-Zo women and children since May last year when ethnic violence broke out in the northeastern state between the Meiteis and Kukis.

"The Kuki Organisation For Human Rights Trust (KOHUR) strongly condemns the killing of six Meitei women and children by armed miscreants in Jiribam district. The killing of fellow human beings irrespective of ethnicity or religion should be condemned by all."

"The Kuki-Zo remains steadfast in our commitment to not kill civilians even in times of war. We beseech the law enforcement agencies to find out the culprits behind the heinous acts," the tribal body said in a statement.

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

The six bodies were found in the Jiri river in Jiribam and Barak river in Cachar of neighbouring Assam over the past few days.

The KOHUR also claimed that attention is given by the state government and the national media only when Meiteis are killed. "...it has already happened countless number of times to the Kuki-Zo. Kuki-Zo women and children have been killed, burned and mutilated as if they were animals," the statement said on Tuesday.

The Kuki organisation also demanded that law enforcement agencies investigate the deaths of a one-month-old baby and a



seven-year-old boy who was "burnt alive" inside an ambulance along with his mother soon after the violence broke out in May 2023.

KOHUR also alleged that the 10 insurgents killed in a gunfight with security forces in Jiribam were Kuki-Zo volunteers who were shot from behind after having some conversation with the CRPF.

"The CRPF jawans responsible for killing fellow Indian citizens without mercy should be investigated and prosecuted for their crime against humanity while being on duty to protect them," the statement said.

It maintained that Kuki-Zo women and children have been 'killed, burned and mutilated' several times over the last 18 months, but these cases have been 'overlooked and ignored', demanding that the 'law must treat everyone without partiality'.

More than 220 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence in the northeastern state since May 3 last year. (PTI)

Naga Tribes urged to unite for progress

Minister calls for harmony to strengthen Nagaland's future

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Nov 20: Nagaland PHED and cooperation minister Jacob Zhimomi on Wednesday urged the Nagas must unify and speak in one voice to get "recognition".

Addressing the cultural exchange programme of the Central Nagaland Tribes Council (CNTC), formed by the Sumi, Ao and Lotha tribes of Nagaland, at Senden Riju, Purana Bazaar, here, Zhimomi underscored the importance of unity among various tribes for the state's progress.

Zhimomi, a Sumi Naga who was the chief host of the CNTC programme, urged the communities to prioritise harmony and collaboration, stressing that overcoming internal differences is crucial for social, political, and economic development.

He reflected on the history of the Naga community, noting its strength and solidarity before statehood. He expressed concern over the divisions among them that have since hindered collective growth.

"Unity is the cornerstone of our development. We must work together to create a stronger and more prosperous Nagaland," he stressed.

Special guest of the programme, PWD



(road and bridges) minister G Kaito Aye, in his address, commended the initiative for bringing together the three distinct tribes under one platform, symbolising harmony and collective progress.

He said such programmes celebrate togetherness and mutual understanding, adding these initiatives are vital for strengthening bonds among the Naga tribes.

"Highlighting the significance of cultural collaboration, Aye emphasised the need for more events of this nature to bridge divides and uphold the shared her-

itage of the Naga community."

In his welcome address, CNTC president Khondao Ngully said diverse culture and traditions shape a community's identity. He called for setting aside differences and unites for progress.

The programme featured cultural performances, discussions, community-building activities and indigenous games.

Performances of folk songs and dances by the Ao, Sumi, and Lotha communities, as well as a captivating display of traditional attire added colour to the programme.

JAL, Jiribam strongly condemns militant attack on innocent civilians

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 20: A horrifying attack in Jakuradhor Village, Manipur, has left eight innocent civilians dead and several homes destroyed, sparking outrage and grief across the region.

The attack, carried out on November 11 2024, by armed militants identified as members of the Chin-Kuki-Zo-Hmar group, has been condemned as an act of organised terrorism.

The militants brazenly entered the Meitei-dominated village in broad daylight, setting 16 houses ablaze in the presence of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel. In this act of barbarity, two elderly villagers, Laishram Barel Singh (63) and Maibam Kesho Singh (71), were burned alive inside their homes.

In response, security forces engaged in a fierce gunfight with the militants, resulting in the deaths of 10 assailants. Their identities were later confirmed, revealing them to be heavily armed in-

dividuals from Churachandpur and Pherzawl districts. Security forces recovered a significant cache of weapons, including AK rifles, SLRs, INSAS rifles, and RPGs, further substantiating their role as organised militants rather than community volunteers, as claimed by affiliated organisations.

Tragically, the militants also abducted six civilians during the attack, including three women and three children.

The victims were subjected to horrific torture and sexual violence before being killed. Over the course of several days, their bodies were recovered from the Barak River, with the final discovery made on November 18 2024.

The victims included Yurembam Rani Devi (60), Telem Thoibi Devi (31), Telem Thajamanbi Devi (8), Laishram Heitonbi Devi (25), Laishram Chingkhinganba Singh (2.5), and Laishram Langamba Singh (8 months). The brutality of the incident has

drawn widespread condemnation. Jiri Apunba Lup (JAL), a local organisation, has described the attack as inhumane and a clear act of terrorism. They rejected claims by militant-affiliated groups portraying the attackers as innocent village defenders, labelling such assertions as baseless and deceitful.

The attack has also triggered protests in the region. In one such protest, Khundrakpam Athouba Meitei (24) was shot dead by Nectar Sanjenbam, SP (Combat), while another protester, Keisam Bison Singh (26), sustained serious injuries. JAL has demanded immediate action against the officer responsible for Athouba's death and called for justice for all victims of the atrocities committed on November 11.

This tragic incident has left the region in mourning and further heightened tensions in Manipur. Authorities are under mounting pressure to deliver justice for the victims and ensure the perpetrators face the full extent of the law.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER (R&B) HILLS, ASSAM DIPHU

NoACEH/CS/Spl.G. KAAC/03/2024-25/03

Dated : 19/11/2024

PRESS NOTICE INVITING BID

The Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D(R&B), Hills, Assam Diphu, on behalf of Governor of Assam invites Item Rates bids / Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode from registered contractors of Class-(A&B) category for various works / projects under Special Grant To Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council for the year 2024-25 in Karbi Anglong District and West Karbi Anglong District. Details may be seen at e-procurement portal website www.assamtenders.gov.in. and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 27/11/2024 to 17/12/2025. The Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam.

Sd/-

Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D., (R&B),
Hills, Assam, Diphu.

Memo No. ACEH/CS/Sp1.G.KAAC/03/2024-25/03-(A)

Dated 19/11/2024.

GOVT. OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (AGRI.) KARBI ANGLONG DIVN. DIPHU

No. No.EE/AGRI/KA/Advertisement /2024-25/1897

Dtd. 20-11-24

NOTICE FOR FARMERS

It is for general information to all the farmers of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong District that the following scheme under Agriculture Department. Govt. of Assam will be implemented at subsidized rate

Name of scheme: - Solar STW under RIDF-XXX

Eligible Subsidy:-

Sl. No	Component where applicable	Approved unit cost (Rs.)	Admissible subsidy in %	Maximum admissible Govt. subsidy (Rs.)
1	a) Installation of STW including boring materials for admissible Depth of 60.00 meter submersible)	1,00,950.69	75%	75,712.69
2	b) SPV water Pumping System consisting of Submersible Pump) (Type/model)	1,66,006.00	85%	1,41,105.00

Interested Farmers are requested to apply in the prescribed format with required documents to the Executive Engineer (Agril), Karbi Anglong Division. Diphu & the Asstt. Executive Engineer (Agril), Hamren Sub-Division, Baithalangso.

For detail information, farmers may contact the following mobile no. of office of the Executive Engineer (Agril), Karbi Anglong Division, Diphu & the Asstt. Executive Engineer (Agril), Hamren Sub-Division, Baithalangso.

Contact No.

- 1) 9435575975 (Karbi Anglong)
- 2) 8638176430 (Karbi Anglong)
- 3) 8638859463 (West Karbi Anglong)
- 4) 7896688222 (West Karbi Anglong)

Sd/-

Executive Engineer (Agril.)
Karbi Anglong, Divn. Diphu

BJP, SP faceoff over allegations of manipulation, hooliganism

LUCKNOW, Nov 20: A fierce political faceoff erupted Wednesday between the ruling BJP and main opposition Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh amid the ongoing by-elections to nine assembly seats with both parties accusing each other of foul play.

While the SP alleged the BJP was manipulating the electoral process and questioning the role of the Election Commission, the BJP claimed SP workers are engaging in hooliganism and bogus voting with women and men donning burqa.

At a presser in Lucknow, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of misusing the administrative machinery to secure a win in the bypolls "through manipulation".

Yadav claimed his party had lodged complaints with the Election Commission (EC) regarding "irregularities" in multiple constituencies, including Karhal, Sisamau, Meerapur, Kundarki, Phulpur, and Majhawan. Despite these complaints, Yadav alleged that the EC was turning a blind eye to the issues.

"The BJP wants to win these bypolls not through votes, but through manipulation," the former chief minister claimed and added that the ruling party was "pressuring the administration to act unfairly" and preventing opposition supporters from voting.

"I urge voters to go to polling booths... and stay there until they



have cast their vote. This is a right granted to us, and everyone must exercise it," he added.

Yadav further slammed the BJP over "violation" of the EC's guidelines on checking voter IDs and for obstructing people from casting their ballots.

Earlier in the day, the EC ordered the suspension of police personnel found violating these guidelines after Yadav presented video evidence showing voters being harassed and blocked from voting. Yadav alleged that the BJP was preventing many people who intended to vote for opposition parties from casting their ballots to make up for a lack of enthusiasm among their own supporters.

"Many of their own people are opposing them. Their voters are slipping away and even voting against them," he claimed.

Yadav said the BJP's actions showed signs of panic and desper-

ation, indicating that their "throne is shaking." He added that both the public and internal factions within the BJP were turning against them.

In a counterattack, BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit president Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary accused Samajwadi Party workers of engaging in hooliganism during the by-elections. He claimed that SP supporters were attempting to influence the polls by bringing in outsiders and anti-social elements, alleging that women wearing burqas were participating in bogus voting.

"The red-capped goons of Akhilesh Yadav, who gave the slogan of 'PDA' (pichhde, Dalit, and alpsankhyak), are trying to spread terror," Chaudhary charged during a presser in Lucknow.

"Neither the government nor the Bharatiya Janata Party nor the people of Uttar Pradesh will tolerate this," Chaudhary also slammed the SP for demanding that police not

check voters' identification cards, accusing them of using fake IDs to manipulate the election process.

"Fake voting has become the trademark of the Samajwadi Party," he stated, emphasising the importance of ID checks to maintain the transparency of the elections.

Chaudhary also claimed that in the by-election areas, the SP had brought in outsiders and anti-social elements to influence the polls.

"The way women wearing burqas are participating in fake voting is evident to all," he added. Chaudhary said in Mainpuri, the Saifai family and Akhilesh Yadav's goons were allegedly attempting to spread terror, referring to the murder of a 23-year-old woman allegedly over her voting preference for the bypoll.

"Neither the government nor the Bharatiya Janata Party nor the people of Uttar Pradesh will tolerate this. The red-capped goons of Akhilesh Yadav, who gave the slogan of 'PDA' (pichhde, Dalit, and alpsankhyak), should be kept under control. The police and administration will take action as necessary," Chaudhary added.

Chaudhary went on to accuse the SP of damaging its own credibility by questioning the EC's integrity. "They are creating chaos, which is their trademark. They are outsourcing voters by creating fake identity cards," he claimed.

Chaudhary also stated that the SP's "frustration" stemmed from the public's growing discontent

with their leadership. "The SP, which once looted ballot boxes to form a government, has been rejected by the people. Their behaviour reveals their true character," Chaudhary said, vowing that the BJP would secure a massive mandate in these by-elections and ensure the Samajwadi Party's defeat.

Chaudhary also asserted that the accusations made by the SP regarding the by-elections were baseless. "By playing the victim card, the SP cannot hide its incompetence," he remarked.

Meanwhile, in a separate press conference, Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader Brajesh Pathak claimed the SP is a party of hooligans and criminals.

"Whenever they got power in the state, they supported criminals. The bypoll is taking place peacefully but their gunde, mafia are creating chaos in every assembly seat. The innocent public is not voting for them but they are intimidating voters to get their vote," he said.

"We have seen in these polls that men are donning burqas to cast vote and BJP has regularly lodged complaint with the EC over this," Pathak claimed, accusing the SP of flouting constitutional values.

Referring to the Karhal incident, Pathak said he wants to appeal to the Dalit community to take note of the crime and never forgive SP.

"SP is no longer a party of Yadav community also. It is now limited to a family only, which is condemnable," he added. (PTI)

Centenarians, elderly citizens cast votes at polling stations in Mumbai

MUMBAI, Nov 20: A 113-year-old woman and a 103-year-old wheelchair-bound freedom fighter voted in the Maharashtra assembly elections in Mumbai on Wednesday, showcasing their commitment to the democratic process in the metropolis ill-famous for voter apathy.

Several octogenarians exercised their franchise in various assembly segments in Mumbai since 7 AM, thanks to facilities such as wheelchairs, wheelchair-friendly vans, Divyang-friendly buses, stair-climbing wheelchairs etc being made available at polling booths by the Election Commission.

Kanchanben Nandkishor Badshah, a 113-year-old resident of Nepean Sea Road, went to a polling station at Malabar Hill to exercise her franchise with the help of her relatives, a civic official said.

Though the Election Commission of India has provided a home voting facility for senior citizens above 85 years, 103-year-old wheelchair-bound GG Parikh preferred to cast his vote by visiting the polling station at Gorton High School in Grant Road in the morning hours, a civic official said.

A neighbour and his housekeeper helped Parikh enter the polling booth in his wheelchair. The centenarian freedom fighter has been voting since India's first general elections in 1951-52, his aides said.

Many elderly voters cast their votes at various polling booths in Mumbai since morning, reflecting

enthusiasm.

Hareshwar Barkale, an 81-year-old resident of Worli Koliwada, noted that the candidate in his constituency had arranged for golf carts and taxis to help senior citizens reach the polling stations, while wheelchairs and volunteers were stationed at the booths to assist them.

"We were given priority at the polling station and did not have to wait in line," Barkale said.

Similarly, 83-year-old Ramchandra Shirke from Kalachowki said he had no trouble casting his vote early in the morning.

The election process for the Assembly elections began at 7 AM and will conclude at 6 PM, with facilities ensuring that senior citizens and differently-abled voters face no inconvenience.

In line with the Election Commission's "No Voter Left Behind" initiative, the district administrations in Mumbai City and its suburbs took extensive measures to make the voting process accessible.

Despite urban voter apathy, Mumbai city and Mumbai suburban district registered voter turnouts of 40.89% and 39.34%, respectively, till 3 PM.

Altogether 420 candidates are in the fray for 36 assembly constituencies in Mumbai with more than 1 crore eligible voters.

As per the civic body, Mumbai has a total of 10,117 booths located at 2,085 locations, where voting will begin at 7 am and end at 6 pm. (PTI)

DMK slams Centre for 'sidelining state languages,' celebrating Hindi month, week

CHENNAI, Nov 20: Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK on Wednesday condemned the BJP-led Centre, alleging it ignored state languages including Tamil and celebrated Hindi, month and week.

The party urged its cadres to right away begin the campaign for 2026 Assembly election, by reminding people of the momentous schemes and the visionary leadership of Chief Minister M K Stalin, and expressed confidence of winning the polls.

Fare-free travel for women in government town buses and the ₹ 1,000 monthly assistance for women under the Kalaigarn Magalir Urimai Thogai (Kalaigarn scheme for women's rights) Thitnam are among the host of schemes being implemented by the DMK regime.

The Dravidian party, in its high-level panel meeting chaired by party president and Chief Minister M K Stalin, also targeted the Union government for what it called 'delaying' the caste census.

Several resolutions were adopted at the meeting which outlined the party's stand on various issues and one of the resolution condemned the Centre over a string of issues including the 9.2 per cent unemployment rate.

It condemned, "ignoring state languages including Tamil and conducting celebratory events of Hindi month and Hindi week."

The ruling party hit out at the Central government for its proposed Waqf Amendment Bill and said it was tantamount to taking away the rights of minorities.

It condemned the BJP-led regime for its "anti-democratic, anti-people, and anti-constitutional" pursuits and alleged that the rule of reservation was not fully

implemented in all the Central government departments.

Also, the DMK slammed the Centre for 'not preventing rail accidents that are continuing to kill people' and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure the safety and security of all sections of people in Manipur.

The party reiterated its opposition to the 'One nation, one election' proposal and decried what it called non-release funds to the state under the Central schemes such as the Samagra Shiksha. The DMK alleged that the union government usurped the rights conferred on the states by the Constitution. It blamed the Centre for 'partiality' in release of disaster relief funds to non-BJP governed states.

It alleged reduction in allocation of funds for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in the budget and blamed the Centre for 'sluggish governance.'

The DMK alleged that the BJP regime was intent only in implementing its 'communal thoughts,' and claimed that none of the assurances made by the Saffron party before the 2014 Lok Sabha polls were implemented.

The party, citing the state government's demand to the 16th Finance Commission, seeking 50 per cent share in Central taxes, said the union government must accept it.

The DMK urged the Centre to take steps for the release of Tamil Nadu fishermen imprisoned in Sri Lanka and also demanded that initiatives be made for the release of their seized boats.

Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin, party leaders including Duraimurugan, TR Baalu, A Raja, RS Bharathi, Kanimozhi took part. (PTI)

Cong to launch Bharat Jodo Samvidhan Abhiyan on Nov 26: Party leader Ajay Yadav

CHANDIGARH, Nov 20: Senior Congress leader Ajay Singh Yadav on Wednesday said the party will launch the 'Bharat Jodo Samvidhan Abhiyan' next week, as he targeted the ruling BJP, alleging they were depriving everyone of their rights by not conducting the caste census.

The campaign will be launched at Delhi's Talkatora Stadium on November 26 and continue till January 26, said Yadav, the chairman of AICC's OBC wing.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior party leader Rahul Gandhi, along with other Congress leaders will participate in the event, he added while speaking to reporters here. Yadav said the 'abhiyan' will be conducted by Congress' SC, ST, OBC and Minorities wings.

He alleged that the BJP dispensation at the Centre is extending benefit to a few industrialists, who are holding most of the country's wealth and controlling assets such as mines, gas mines, and irrigation

projects, among others.

Yadav said the Congress will make people aware of the BJP's designs and raise the party's demand for a caste census through the campaign, under which seminars will be held at various places.

The former Haryana minister also accused the BJP-led Centre of depriving everyone of their rights by not conducting a caste census. Even the count of elephants and tigers is done and a forest survey is regularly conducted, but a caste census is not being done, he said.

"The Constitution talks of equality, then why is a caste census not being done? For social justice and equality, we will impress that caste census should be held. This government wants to benefit only a handful of industrialists," he alleged. Yadav highlighted that the 'abhiyan' will start on November 26, which marks the 75th anniversary of when Dr B R Ambedkar presented the final draft of the Constitution before the Constituent

Assembly in 1950.

Asked about the Congress failing to come to power in Haryana in the recently assembly polls, Yadav pointed out several issues, including the party fielding less number of OBC candidates.

"One thing I can say frankly, that the OBCs did not get as many tickets as they should have. Like in Karnal for instance, for the Kashyap Samaj, we did not give a ticket," he said.

He also claimed that the "Kumari Selja factor" had some impact "as the senior leader stayed away from campaigning for many days".

There was open projection by some leaders for the chief ministerial post, which was wrong, he said.

"Distribution of tickets was also a factor. If tickets were given to Sharda Rathore and Chitra Sarwara in Ballabhgarh and Ambala, respectively, the party would have won these seats," he said. (PTI)

Amid complaints of harassment of voters in UP bypoll, EC orders suspension of five cops

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: At least five police personnel were suspended and many others removed from poll duty in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday for flouting Election Commission guidelines and stopping electors from casting votes in the ongoing assembly bypolls, officials said.

The action by the poll authority came amid complaints by opposition parties, mainly Samajwadi Party that people from a particular community were being prevented from casting vote.

SP president Akhilesh Yadav urged the EC to suspend all police officers who are checking voter cards and Aadhaar IDs on basis of video evidence.

Acting on the Commission's directions, district election officers and superintendents of police, after verifying the complaints, have suspended the police personnel for their conduct.

EC officials said in Muzaffarnagar, two sub-inspectors have been suspended for "non-compliance" of EC guidelines for voter checking.

In view of complaints received regarding checking of identity cards of voters by police personnel in Moradabad, a thorough investigation was conducted, the officials said.

The cases pertained to Bhikanpur Kulwara and Milak Siri vil-

lages.

In this regard one sub-inspector, two head constables, and two women constables have been removed from poll duty and sent to the police lines.

In another complaint regarding police personnel entering a polling booth, the investigation found that he had entered the booth to inquire about the smooth conduct of the polling process.

However, as this is against EC guidelines, the erring police official has been suspended and department proceeding will be initiated, the poll panel said.

Similar suspensions were ordered in Sisamau assembly constituency of Kanpur district.

Taking cognisance of the complaints on social media by the Samajwadi Party that some communities were prevented from voting during the bypolls, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar gave strict instructions to chief electoral officer of Uttar Pradesh and all district election officers and returning officers to ensure fair and smooth voting process.

They were told to take immediate cognisance of all complaints and take prompt action and inform the complainant through social media also by tagging them. (PTI)

NCP (SP) man assaulted, polling booth vandalised in Parli



BEED, Nov 20: A polling booth was vandalised and a worker of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) was assaulted on Wednesday in Parli assembly constituency, from where minister Dhananjay Munde of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP is seeking re-election, an official said.

Madhav Jadhav, a local leader of the Sharad Pawar-led party was assaulted in Bank Colony area of Parli town and the video of the assault went viral on social media, after which a polling booth at Ghatnandur in the constituency was vandalised, an official said.

Jadhav hails from Ghatnandur. Some people entered the polling booth at Ghatnandur, threw the EVM on the ground and damaged the furniture in the booth, the official said.

Beed Collector Avinash Pathak said that after some persons tried to damage EVMs at Ghatnandur, the administration replaced the EVMs and voting resumed.

The data of votes cast through the earlier EVMs is safe in their control units and will be included during counting, he said.

"We are taking strict action against those who tried to damage the EVMs," he said.

The NCP (SP) candidate from Parli assembly constituency, Rajeshaheb Deshmukh claimed that a CCTV camera was disabled at a polling booth in Dharmapuri in the constituency.

In a viral video, a visibly annoyed Deshmukh can be seen talking to the polling staff about the "detached" cable of a CCTV camera and demanding to know who had done it. Deshmukh later told reporters that the CCTV had been made dysfunctional.

"People from minority communities are not being allowed to come to the booth to vote. Someone else is pressing the button (on EVM). If this is the case, why do we even need an election? It seems the administration is merely completing a formality," he claimed.

Polling in all 288 assembly seats in Maharashtra began at 7 am and will end at 6 pm. (PTI)

If India can make rocket sensors, it can also make car sensors: ISRO chief Somanath

BENGALURU, Nov 20: ISRO Chairman S Somanath on Wednesday highlighted the need to manufacture car sensors domestically instead of relying on imports.

Speaking at a session on space technology and defence during the Bengaluru Tech Summit, which also saw the launch of the Draft Karnataka Space Tech Policy, Somanath emphasised the importance of cost-effective production.

He pointed out that while India invests significantly in producing rocket sensors, the high production cost of car sensors makes domestic manufacturing less viable.

"For car sensors, viability is achievable only if production costs are low and manufacturing is scaled up," he said.

Somanath called for greater industry collaboration to address this challenge and noted that policy interventions like those unveiled at the summit could provide a solution. He praised the 2020 space sector reforms and the Space Pol-



icy of 2023 for creating an ecosystem conducive to private sector growth.

"There is a lot of interest in the sector. I hear from many aspiring to build the next SpaceX in India," he added. Highlighting progress, Somanath mentioned that five companies are currently building satellites, with many enhancing their capacity to develop subsys-

tems for rockets and satellites. However, he identified a lack of major players and insufficient investment in upstream space capabilities as key challenges.

"To address this, we are focusing on developing downstream capabilities, which can generate demand and eventually attract upstream investments. I believe this model will work well for the na-

tion," he explained.

Somanath also stressed the role of technology transfer in enabling private sector participation, saying, "Many technologies developed within ISRO are now accessible to industries for further development into products, services, or software."

The session featured other notable speakers, including B K Das, Director General of the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO), and Anne Neuberger, Deputy National Security Advisor of the United States.

Priyank Kharge, Karnataka's Minister for IT, Biotechnology, Science and Technology, and Kropo Caur, Secretary to the Government, Department of Electronics, IT, and Biotechnology, also participated.

Kharge stated that the draft policy envisions Karnataka capturing 50 per cent of the national space market and establishing itself as a global hub for space technologies. (PTI)

SC restores criminal proceedings against ex-Kerala minister in 1990 evidence tampering case

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: The Supreme Court on Wednesday restored criminal proceedings in a trial court against former Kerala transport minister Antony Raju for alleged tampering of evidence in a drug seizure case reported in 1990.

A bench of Justices CT Ravikumar and Sanjay Karol held that it can't be said that the high court order allowing fresh proceedings against Raju was bad in law. The top court asked the trial court to conclude the proceedings within a year.

"The accused shall appear before the trial court on December 20, 2024 or on next working day of court concerned," the bench said.

The Kerala High Court on March 10 last year had quashed the proceedings noting some technical grounds in the case.

The case against the minister, a leader of Janadhipathya Kerala Congress, which is an ally of the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF), was related to an alleged tampering of evidence in a drug seizure case reported in 1990.

Raju was the lawyer of the accused in the drug case.

The accused in the drug case, an Australian citizen, was arrested from the international airport in Thiruvananthapuram on charges of carrying hashish and the prosecution had produced an innerwear as part of the evidence against him saying the contraband was smuggled in that.

The Australian citizen was sentenced to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment.

However, he was acquitted by the high court in 1993 after his counsel proved that the innerwear was too small for him.

A police probe later showed that Raju, who had appeared for the accused, had received the underwear from the court and returned it four months later before the accused moved the high court.

Following this, a district court had ordered a case to be registered against Raju and court clerk K Jose in connection with the tampering of the material evidence.

Observing that the contention raised in the case relates to a fun-

damental defect in the initiation of the proceedings, which cuts the root of the proceedings, the high court said, "Therefore, it is absolutely necessary in the interest of the prosecution also that, such defect is rectified, and the proceedings are initiated in a proper manner in due compliance with the statutory stipulations".

Allowing the plea, the high court had said the order of taking cognisance on the final report and all further proceedings pursuant to the same, including the proceedings on the files of Judicial First Class Magistrate-I Nedumangad are hereby quashed.

"However, it is clarified that this would not preclude the competent authority, or the court concerned from taking up the matter and pursuing the prosecution in compliance with the procedure contemplated under Section 195(1)(b) of the CrPC.

"Though, this court interfered in the proceedings for technical reasons, it cannot be ignored that the allegations raised are serious in nature," it had said. (PTI)

Regional imbalances in Bengal led to disconnect between govt and people: Governor Bose

KOLKATA, Nov 20: Days before completing two years in office, West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose drew upon his grassroots experiences to highlight "regional imbalances" between the state's northern and southern districts and claimed that lack of prosperity in the former region has led to a "disconnect" between the state government and its people.

Speaking exclusively to PTI about various issues, Bose refrained from evaluating his constitutional colleague, Mamata Banerjee, but made it clear that he was "more concerned" about her performance as Chief Minister than as a politician.

Expressing satisfaction with his tenure in office so far, Bose said, "These two years have taught me many positive things. It is a very refined state, which gives a lot of emphasis on art and culture."

"But the state has some problems especially in north Bengal, where there are

regional imbalances and a disconnect that arises because of that," he added, while explaining that "economic backwardness" in districts north of the Ganga has led to that "detachment" of people from the state administration.

Bose took over as Governor on November 23, 2022, from his predecessor, now Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar.

Since then Bose has had several run-ins with the West Bengal government over various issues, including the appointment of vice-chancellors to state universities, Kolkata Police's alleged snooping on his office, and, most notably, the allegations of sexual molestation made against him by a woman contractual worker of Raj Bhavan.

"Mamata Banerjee's evaluation will be kept confidential. It will first be informed to appropriate competent authorities," Bose said. "But from a common man's perspective or as a Constitutional colleague, my concern is the performance of

the Chief Minister and not that of a politician. I don't want to bring politics into my purview of how she functions as a leader. Let political leaders of the other parties decide that, not me as Governor," he added.

The Governor, however, emphasised that he maintains a strong professional relationship with the CM, but added, "Politician Mamata Banerjee is not my cup of tea."

Speaking about his achievements in office, Bose said, "My biggest takeaway is the understanding of the mind of Bengal, which has brought me closer to its people. I would like to be the Governor who is accessible to the people. Some media called me 'Ground Zero Governor', and I am delighted. I want to be in Ground Zero," Bose said.

"Whenever there is trouble, I go to the field, to the place of incident, to the hospital, to the families of the victims, and try to support them in whichever way I

can as a Governor.

"I am not a Governor who wants to rule by reports. I don't want filtered information. I want to be directly in touch with people," he said.

Responding to the alleged molestation incident involving a woman employee at Raj Bhavan, Bose expressed his disgust and described the matter as "false and fabricated by a woman with a criminal intent".

"Some false and fabricated allegations were made against me as an individual. That was done by a woman who has a criminal mentality. I have filed a suit before the Calcutta High Court," Bose clarified.

Referring to reports from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Controller and Auditor General (CAG) regarding financial irregularities in Bengal, the former IAS officer alleged that the state government had violated the Constitution by not placing these reports in the As-

sembly. "This calls for a very serious look into the grave financial management of the state. The Constitutional obligation of the government is to place the report of the CAG in the Assembly. That has not been done by this government, which is a constitutional violation," he alleged.

Asked about the law and order situation in the state, especially in light of rising criminal cases such as the RG Kar incident, Bose refrained from making a direct comparison with other parts of the country.

"But one thing which I am convinced of is that the two enemies of Bengal society are violence and corruption," he said.

"I cannot comment on a particular incident, but from media reports and after interacting with people, I find there is a growing feeling that violence and corruption allegedly linked to the RG Kar incident could have been prevented by the government. There is also a sense among

people that the government has not taken effective action against it. Since the matter is sub-judice, I do not want to comment on the merits of that at this stage," he said.

Discussing his future plans for the people of Bengal, Bose said he prioritized his "duty, responsibility, and the authority to intervene when there is a violation of the Constitution".

"As far as violence is concerned, the right to life is a fundamental right. As a Governor, it's my duty to see that Constitutional rights are protected. I will certainly take up the fight against violence with all the strength that I have under the Constitution," he said.

Looking ahead, Bose expressed his desire to launch people-oriented programmes during his third year in office and added that he plans to link these initiatives with the welfare and development activities of the government of India. (PTI)

ED raids premises of audit company employee amid charges of Bitcoin use in Maha polls

MUMBAI, Nov 20: The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday conducted searches at the Chhattisgarh premises of an auditing company employee, allegedly linked to a political Bitcoin transactions case in Maharashtra, as part of a money laundering investigation, official sources said.

The house of Gaurav Mehta in Chhattisgarh's capital city Raipur is being covered under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said.

The ED action comes when polling for the Maharashtra Assembly elections is underway.

The BJP on Tuesday played purported voice notes of NCP (SP) leader and Baramati MP Supriya Sule and Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole alleging attempts were being made to encash Bitcoins to influence the elections.

ED sources said the agency has widened its ongoing money laundering probe into a crypto (Bitcoin) assets ponzi scam and is investigating the "links" of Mehta and some others with politicians, politically exposed persons and bureaucrats.

The agency attached assets worth Rs 98 crore of actor Shilpa Shetty and her husband Raj Kundra in April as part of this crypto-ponzi



probe. The couple challenged the ED action and got relief from the Bombay High Court.

Sharing some audio clips, in which voices and signal chats purportedly of Sule and Patole allegedly indicate that Bitcoins were used for funding the poll campaign, BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said it is clear that the MVA has seen the writing on the wall that it will be defeated in the polls.

Sule has denied the charges and said she has filed a complaint with the Election Commission and the cybercrime department of the state against the false allegations. She told reporters on Wednesday that she "did not know Gaurav Mehta".

Patole also dismissed the BJP's allegations and said, "The voice in the clip being circulated is not mine. Even (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi recognises my voice."

The ED's money laundering probe in the crypto-ponzi case stems from FIRs of Maharashtra Police and Delhi Police against a company named Variable Tech Pvt Ltd; individuals named (late) Amit Bhardwaj, Ajay Bhardwaj, Vivek Bhardwaj, Simpy Bhardwaj and Mahender Bhardwaj; and a number of multi-level marketing agents who are alleged to have collected huge amounts of funds in the form of Bitcoins (worth ₹ 6,600 crore in

2017) from the public with the "false promise" of 10 per cent per month return in the form of Bitcoins.

It was alleged by the ED that the Bitcoins were supposed to be utilised for mining and investors were supposed to get huge returns in crypto assets but the promoters "cheated" the investors and have been concealing the "ill-gotten" Bitcoins in obscure online wallets.

Kundra, the ED alleged, received 285 Bitcoins from the "mastermind" and promoter of Gain Bitcoin Ponzi "scam" Amit Bhardwaj for "setting up" a Bitcoin mining farm in Ukraine.

These Bitcoins were sourced from the "proceeds of crime" collected by Amit Bhardwaj from gullible investors, it said.

The agency arrested three people -- Simpy Bhardwaj, Nitin Gaur and Nikhil Mahajan -- in the case last year.

The main accused Ajay Bhardwaj and Mahendra Bhardwaj are absconding, the ED said, adding that it attached properties worth ₹ 69 crore in the case earlier.

Two chargesheets have been filed in the case till now -- the first in June 2019 and the second in February this year. (PTI)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh holds talks with Chinese counterpart in Laos



NEW DELHI, Nov 20: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday held delegation-level talks with his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun in Vientiane, weeks after Indian and Chinese militaries completed disengagement of troops from two last face-off points in eastern Ladakh.

The meeting took place in the capital city of Laos on the sidelines of a conclave of 10-nation ASEAN grouping and some of its dialogue partners.

"Raksha Mantri Shri @rajnathsingh holding bilateral meeting with Chinese Defence Minister Mr Dong Jun in Vientiane, Lao PDR," Singh's office said on 'X'.

Indian and Chinese militaries completed the disengagement exercise in Demchok and Depsang late last month after the two sides

reached an agreement following a series of negotiations to resolve the festering border row.

The two sides also resumed patrolling activities in the two areas after a gap of almost four-and-a-half years.

Singh began his three-day visit to Vientiane on Wednesday, primarily to attend a meeting of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus).

ADMM-Plus is a platform comprising 10-nation ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and its eight dialogue partners -- India, China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States.

Laos is hosting the meeting in its capacity as the current chair of ADMM-Plus. (PTI)

SC cancels bail of three accused in ex-Sarpanch murder case

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: The Supreme Court on Wednesday set aside the bail granted by the Rajasthan High Court to three accused in the cold-blooded murder of a former village sarpanch in Neemrana on May 31, 2023.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar heard submissions from advocate Ronak Karanpuria, who represented the deceased Dinesh Kumar Yadav's brother, and overruled the high court verdict of July 8.

The apex court directed the accused -- Abhimanyu alias Pintu, Jaiveer, and Satya alias Chinnya -- to surrender and asked the lower court to expedite the trial.

The CJJ said the accused may seek bail again in case there are changes in circumstances and if the trial proceedings get delayed due to reasons that cannot be attributed to them.

Karanpuria argued that the high court erred in granting bail to the accused without considering the gravity of the offence, the evidence of a premeditated conspiracy, and the potential threat to witnesses.

The case stems from the brutal killing of Dinesh Kumar Yadav, the former sarpanch of Gram Panchayat Silapur, Neemrana in Rajasthan.

On the morning of May 31, 2023, Dinesh was ploughing a field near a well with his tractor when two assailants shot him multiple times.

According to the FIR lodged by his brother, Roopesh Kumar, the murder was part of a premeditated conspiracy fuelled by political rivalry and disputes over illegal encroachments.

Roopesh, who witnessed the attack, identified the assailants and named several conspirators in his complaint, including Abhimanyu, Jaiveer, and Satya.

Despite being rushed to Kailash Hospital in Behror, Dinesh succumbed to his injuries. Police investigations revealed that the murder was meticulously planned.

The accused allegedly collaborated to eliminate Dinesh Kumar after multiple failed attempts. They allegedly hired shooters, Sachin and Yashpal, paid ₹ 23,000 to them and arranged a stolen motorcycle for their escape. (PTI)

HC rejects plea to give details of deceased PMJJBY policy holders' information to LIC for claim

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: The Delhi High Court has dismissed a plea seeking directions to the Union Home Ministry to provide information about Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana policyholders who have died to the Life Insurance Corporation of India so that their families can get the claim.

The high court said if the course of action suggested in the petition is adopted, it may lead to a scam as benefits under the policy may be appropriated by individuals who have not applied for it.

The court said the public interest litigation (PIL) was based on the presumption and assumption that the family members or nominees of the deceased were not aware that they held an insurance policy under the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima (PMJJBY) and that no

policy documents had been provided to the policyholders.

"No letter written by any of the family members/nominees of the deceased has been enclosed complaining of non-issuance of policy documents to the policyholders. Consequently, there is no material on record justifying the said presumption and assumption," a bench of Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said.

The bench said policyholders cannot be presumed to be illiterate or incapable of approaching the courts for redressal of their grievances and added that there was no justification or rationale to entertain the petition.

"This court is further of the view that if the course of action as suggested in the present writ petition is adopted, it may lead to a scam as

benefits under the policy may be appropriated by individuals who have not applied and who are not verified.

"Further, it is settled law that an insurance contract is a contract between the parties and no public interest petition is normally maintainable with regard to such contracts," it said.

The court was dealing with a PIL seeking directions to the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) to provide policy documents to all the policyholders of PMJJBY.

The petitioner also sought directions to the ministry to directly provide information about all the deceased individuals to the LIC so that their nominees or family members can directly get the insurance claim of ₹ two lakh under the scheme. (PTI)

Army Chief Gen Dwivedi embarks on 4-day visit to Nepal

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi embarked on a four-day visit to Nepal on Wednesday to further ramp up the already close defence and strategic ties between the two countries against the backdrop of the evolving regional security situation.

Gen Dwivedi will be conferred the honorary rank of "General of the Nepal Army" by Nepalese President Ramchandra Paudel on Thursday in continuation of an age-old tradition that first started in 1950, reflecting the strong ties between the two militaries.

The Army Chief's visit to Nepal from November 20-24 aims to strengthen military cooperation between the militaries of India and Nepal, besides exploring new avenues of collaboration between the two nations, the Indian Army said.

In Kathmandu, Gen Dwivedi is set to hold extensive talks with his Nepalese counterpart Gen Ashok Raj Sigdel and will call on President Paudel, Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and Defence Minister Manbir Rai.

Gen Dwivedi will also be briefed by the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) of the Nepali Army on issues of common interest at the Nepali Army headquarters on Thursday, officials said.

Nepal is important for India in the context of its overall strategic interests in the region, and leaders of the two countries have often noted the age-old "Roti Beti"

relationship. Landlocked Nepal relies heavily on India for the transportation of goods and services. Nepal's access to the sea is through India, and it imports a predominant proportion of its requirements from and through India.

Gen Upendra Dwivedi is also likely to visit the Shri Mukhtinath temple in the Mustang region of Nepal.

It is learnt that India's first Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat also wanted to visit the temple. In his memory, a Bell named 'Bipin Bell' was installed in the temple in February 2023.

Nepal has continued its close ties with India, with regular exchanges of military training, visits, and defence modernisation.

India and Nepal are critical partners in enhancing mutual military capabilities, particularly through training programmes.

Gen Dwivedi's visit is expected to focus on the on-going defence modernisation in both militaries, through various initiatives, officials said.

A key pillar of India-Nepal military cooperation is the annual 'Surya Kiran' joint military exercise, which enhances interoperability between the two armed forces. This exercise, which focuses on counterterrorism, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, will see its 18th edition in December in Nepal. (PTI)

Delhi govt implements 50% work-from-home policy, urges private offices to follow suit

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: Half of the staff in Delhi government offices will work from home while private organisations have been urged to follow suit amid alarmingly high air pollution in the national capital.

However, essential services such as healthcare, sanitation, public transport, fire services, law enforcement, power supply, water treatment, and emergency response operations will continue to work in full capacity to ensure public services remain unaffected.

Nearly 80 departments and different agencies in the Delhi government, including the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, employ approximately 1.4 lakh people.

On Wednesday, Delhi witnessed yet another dawn with a blanket of toxic air as it recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 426 in the "severe" category, which followed the coldest night of the season in the city so far. Residents have reported eye irritation, respiratory discomfort, and other health issues.

Delhi environment minister Gopal Rai, in a post on X, said 50



per cent of the staff in government offices will work from home.

He also urged private offices, industries and businesses to implement similar measures to help mitigate the city's air pollution crisis.

Rai suggested that private entities consider shifting office hours to begin between 10:30 am and 11:00 am to reduce vehicular congestion during peak hours. "Adjusting office timings will not only ease traffic pressure but also curb

vehicle emissions," he said.

To address vehicular pollution, the government has advised companies with a large workforce to arrange shuttle bus services for employees, similar to the measures the Delhi government has implemented for its own staff.

"We are continuously working to reduce pollution levels and today's decisions are part of that effort. We hope the situation improves in the coming days," Rai said. He also criticised the BJP-led

governments in neighbouring states, including Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh, for "failing" to take adequate measures to control pollution.

"Delhi is surrounded by BJP-ruled states and their lack of proactive action is affecting us. I urge them to participate in these efforts to combat pollution, just as the Delhi government is doing," Rai said.

The combination of falling temperatures and dense smog has worsened the situation, further reducing visibility and exacerbating health concerns. The city has been under Stage IV restrictions of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) since Monday.

These restrictions include a ban on construction and demolition activities, curbs on diesel vehicles, school closures and a prohibition on the entry of diesel-powered medium and heavy goods vehicles into Delhi, except those transporting essential goods. Industrial operations contributing to air pollution have also been restricted. (PTI)

Bitcoin misappropriation allegation: Ex-IPS officer writes to EC seeking probe

PUNE, Nov 20: Former IPS officer Ravindranath Patil, who has levelled allegations of bitcoins misappropriation against some opposition leaders in Maharashtra, on Wednesday said he has approached the Election Commission for a probe into the matter.

Patil has claimed he is in possession of some voice notes of alleged conversations of these leaders, in which they are seeking encashment of bitcoins to fund elections.

The BJP on Tuesday played purported voice notes of Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole and NCP (SP) leader Supriya Sule to allege attempts to encash bitcoins to influence the state elections, claiming it poses a serious question on the conduct of polls in a free and fair manner. Both Sule and Patole have denied the allegations.

Speaking to PTI, Patil said the Pune police had roped him and cyber expert Pankaj Ghode to help investigate a 2018 case pertaining to a bitcoin cryptocurrency fraud.

However, in 2022, when Amitabh Gupta was the Pune commissioner of police, Patil and Ghode were arrested for allegedly cheating investigators by fraudulently transferring money to the tune of several crores

from a bitcoin wallet, he said. Patil claimed he was falsely implicated in the case in 2022.

"I was in jail in the said case for 14 months. On November 17 this year, I started getting frantic calls on my Signal (app) account. When I checked the number, I found that it belonged to Gaurav Mehta who, as a forensic expert, had assisted police during a probe against me in the case," said Patil.

He claimed Mehta shared with him 10 voice notes on the Signal app which had purported audios of Supriya Sule, Nana Patole, Amitabh Gupta and Bhagyashree Navtake, who was the DCP (cyber) when he was arrested.

"I am in receipt of 10 audio clips of different people, including two politicians - Supriya Sule and Nana Patole - and three other persons -- IPS officer Amitabh Gupta, IPS officer Bhagyashree Navtake and Gaurav Mehta," Patil said.

Three voice notes were sent by Sule to Mehta, in which she is purportedly heard asking the latter to encash the bitcoins as the funds are needed for elections and assuring him that he need not be worried about inquiries and once they come to power, they will handle them, he

alleged. Patil also said there are voice notes of Patole purportedly asking Amitabh Gupta as to why money was not received and saying he should not make fun of him.

He claimed that in one of the voice notes, Gupta is purportedly heard giving instructions to Mehta to cash out the bitcoins.

"I have written to the Election Commission today, asking to initiate a probe into the matter," Patil said.

In his complaint sent to the EC via email, Patil stated that according to the chat messages which he claims to be in possession of, it appears that hundreds of bitcoins of billions of rupees may have been pumped in the previous Lok Sabha elections and during the ongoing assembly polls.

It also appears that Mehta is currently having the custody of the misappropriated bitcoins, amounting to hundreds of crores of rupees, Patil said in the complaint. "This is a very serious matter involving a criminal offence, blatant money laundering and use of massive cash during the election funding. Hence, it is requested to urgently investigate the matter. I am ready to support the investigation whenever I am called for," he said. (PTI)

Maharashtra polls: Actors Akshay Kumar, Rajkummar Rao, Shubha Khote cast vote

MUMBAI, Nov 20: Several Bollywood celebrities, including actors Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar and Ranbir Kapoor, cast their vote on Wednesday in the Maharashtra assembly elections, adding a touch of glamour to the festival of democracy.

Elections to the 288-member state assembly are currently underway. Voting began at 7 am and will end at 6 pm.

Among the early voters in Mumbai were actors Akshay Kumar, Rajkummar Rao, actor-director Farhan Akhtar, his director-producer sister Zoya Akhtar, veteran actor Shubha Khote, and her daughter Bhavana Balsavar.

Talking to reporters after casting his vote, Kumar said, "The best thing is that the arrangements are good (at the polling booth), especially for senior citizens, there's cleanliness. Everyone should come and vote because that's the most important thing."

Rao urged people to cast their birth right, so please come and cast your vote.

"It is our right in democracy to vote, so it's important we step out and vote in Maharashtra. I've performed my duties. It's your turn, please vote, it's very important," the "Street 2" actor told PTI.

Ranbir Kapoor said, "Let's forget the issues and right now it is voting day and it's your

birth right, so please come and cast your vote."

Salman Khan arrived at his polling booth around 4.45 pm amid tight security. His father and screenwriter Salim Khan, brothers Arbaaz and Sohail and mother Salma Khan arrived before him.

Veteran lyricist-director Gulzar, who came to cast vote with his filmmaker daughter

Meghna, said he is confident that people will "not get swayed" by the promises made by politicians and that they will make a wise decision in choosing the right candidate.

"The issues are more and very clear. The glamorous gifts that have been promised to the common man, seem like Dhanteras day - that you will get this and that. But our common man will not be swayed and vote for the candidate who will address their issue," Gulzar said. Other notable Bollywood celebrities who got their fingers inked include Kareena Kapoor Khan, her husband Saif Ali Khan, Shraddha Kapoor, Kartik Aryan, Madhuri Dixit-Nene, Govinda, John Abraham, Ananya Panday with father Chunky Panday and mother Bhavna, Prem Chopra, Arjun Kapoor, Sonali Bendre, Suresh Oberoi, Tusshar Kapoor. Singer Anup Jalota, known for his devotional songs, also cast his vote. (PTI)



Norman Reedus on bringing 'Walking Dead' franchise to India: I think it would be awesome

NEW DELHI, Nov 20: Hollywood star Norman Reedus would love to bring his long-running TV franchise "The Walking Dead" to India as the actor says he is curious to see how different cultures would react to a zombie apocalypse.

"The Walking Dead" franchise, based on Robert Kirkman's comic series, is set in a post-apocalyptic world overrun by zombies, called "walkers", and explores themes of survival, morality, and relationships of various groups. It started with the eponymous show that ran from 2010 to 2022 on American network AMC.

Reedus plays the role of Daryl Dixon in the franchise, starting with "The Walking Dead", set in the US, and now in the spin-off series "The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon", which travels to France.

"I would love to explore more and more of this (show) in different places and see how different cultures deal with a zombie apocalypse. I could see it going to a whole bunch of different places," Reedus told PTI in an interview.

Asked if he would like the franchise to travel to India, the 55-year-old actor said it would be "awesome".

"All the delicious food, all the colours, it would be great... It's interesting. I remember at one point Kirkman and all were talking about doing spinoffs... They were talking about different cultures, different languages. I know there were conversations. Not that I had anything to do with it, I was just lucky I was still coming back," Reedus added.

The USP of the franchise is the relationships between disparate characters that feels relatable to the audiences,

he said.

"It was a group of people that were in the situation together that never would have been in the same room. Like none of those people would have hung out with each other and they were forced to get along, fight together, live together, work together, make decisions together in order to survive."

"I think those people started relationships and certain pacts were made and they became like a real functioning family. And I think watching all those different characters, people could relate to someone in that group," he said.

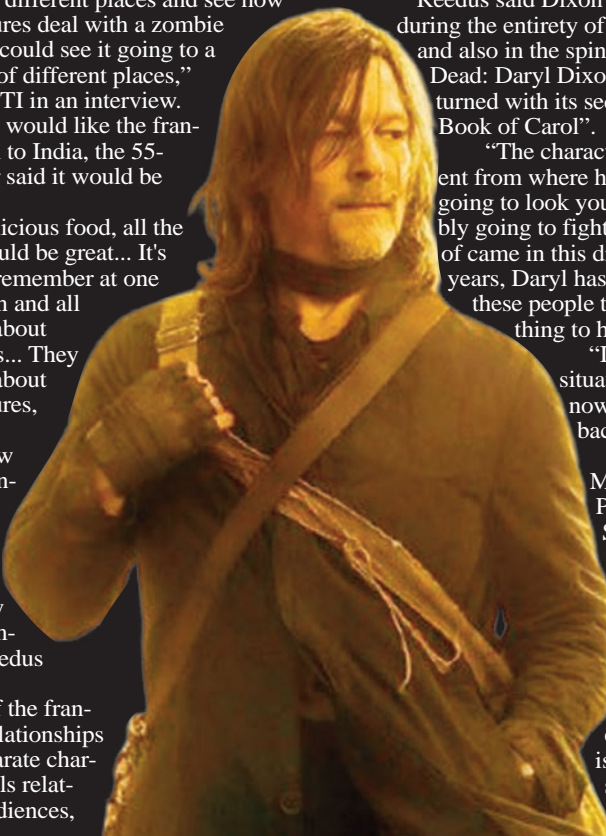
The actor has been associated with the character of Daryl Dixon for more than a decade. Dixon is a skilled tracker, hunter, and fighter, who was initially introduced as a lone wolf with a tough exterior but came to be known as a deeply loyal and compassionate figure.

Reedus said Dixon has changed a lot as during the entirety of "The Walking Dead" and also in the spin-off "The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon", which recently returned with its second season, titled "The Book of Carol".

"The character of Daryl is so different from where he started. If he was going to look you in the face, he's probably going to fight you. Everything kind of came in this direction. Through the years, Daryl has learned a lot from all these people that have meant something to him."

"I think he'll look at his situation a little differently now than he would have back then," he said.

Also starring Melissa McBride, Clémence Poesy, Louis Puech Scigliuzzi, Laika Blanc Francard, Charrier, Romain Levi and Eriq Ebouaney, "The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon - The Book of Carol" is shown by David Zabel. The six-episode second season is currently available for streaming on Prime Video. (PTI)



Rahman's children request privacy after musician and wife announce separation

MUMBAI, Nov 20: Oscar-winning composer A R Rahman and Saira Banu's three children have asked for privacy and respect after their parent's announced that they were separating after 29 years of marriage. The couple, who got married in 1995, broke the news on Tuesday night in a joint statement, which was released by prominent divorce lawyer Vandana Shah.

Their three children -- daughters Khatija, Raheema, and son Ameen -- posted messages on Instagram Stories after the news broke at night.

Ameen wrote, "We kindly request everyone to respect our privacy during this time. Thank you for your understanding."

Khatija and Raheema both posted, "I would greatly appreciate it if this matter could be treated with the utmost privacy & respect. Thank you for your consideration."

Raheema also reposted his father's post on X and captioned it, "Keep us in your prayers."

In their statement, Rahman and Banu said they took the decision to separate after "significant emotional strain in their relationship".

"After many years of marriage, Saira and her husband A R Rahman have made the difficult decision to separate from each other. This decision comes after significant emotional strain in their relationship."

"Despite their deep love for each

other, the couple has found that the tensions and difficulties have created an insurmountable gap between them, one that neither party feels able to bridge at this time," read the joint statement, issued to media by Shah.

They said the decision to separate comes out of "pain and agony", and requested "privacy and understanding from the public" as they navigate this "difficult chapter" in their life. Banu was first to announce the separation in a statement, which was followed by a joint statement.

Rahman later posted on X, saying that he had hoped to complete 30 years of marriage with Banu but "all things, it seems, carry an unseen end".

"Even the throne of God might tremble at



the weight of broken hearts. Yet, in this shattering, we seek meaning, though the pieces may not find their place again. To our friends, thank you for your kindness and for respecting our privacy as we walk through this fragile chapter," he said.

The couple's most recent appearance was at the grand wedding of Mukesh Ambani's son Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant in Mumbai in July this year.

Rahman's post on X came as a shock to his ardent fan base with many asking the music maestro to "stay strong".

"Even 29yrs not enough I guess to stay together," wrote one fan.

Another said, "Stay Strong Sir. Let us Respect their Privacy!!!"

"Hope everything will be alright bhai," a user commented on Rahman's post.

"Stay strong RAHMAN sir we pray to give you peace of mind..." read a post.

A user said, "Hugs to you Sir. I have tears in my eyes and in my heart. Love you forever. I am so sorry to hear about this. It feels heart breaking. I pray for both of you to find peace and strength. Love you forever and forever."

Another fan said, "Stay strong sir. May Allah grant peace to both the hearts. You have always been an amazing son, husband and father. You will always be. We love you so much ARR sir. Lots of love and respect to you. strong hugs." (PTI)

Rajasthan fourth BJP-ruled state to make 'The Sabarmati Report' tax-free

JAIPUR, Nov 20: Hindi film 'The Sabarmati Report', based on the 2002 Godhra train burning incident in Gujarat, has been made tax free in Rajasthan, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma said on Wednesday.

Rajasthan follows three other BJP-ruled states -- Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh -- in giving the tax-free status to the Vikrant Massey-starrer film, which released in theatres last week.

"Our government has taken a meaningful decision to make the film 'The Sabarmati Report' tax-free in Rajasthan," Sharma posted on X.

"This film realistically depicts that horrific period of history, which some selfish elements tried to distort to fulfil their vested interests. The film not only effectively exposes the reality of the then system, but also refutes the misleading and false narratives propagated at that time," he added.

Directed by Dheeraj Sarna, the film is inspired by true events and also stars Raashii Khanna and Ridhi Dogra in pivotal roles. It is produced by Balaji Motion Pictures. On February 27, 2002, 59 people, mostly kar sevaks, were killed when a coach of the Sabarmati Express train was set afire near Godhra station, triggering widespread riots in Gujarat.

The Gujarat Police had blamed a Muslim mob for starting the fire, while an enquiry commission constituted by the Railway ministry under the Congress-led UPA government claimed that it was an accident. Courts, however, convicted a number of accused chargesheeted by the police, validating its charge. (PTI)



Proud to be part of generation that's changing conversation: Himesh Patel on diversity in Hollywood



NEW DELHI, Nov 20: British star Himesh Patel says he draws inspiration from artists like Riz Ahmed and Dev Patel for opening doors for actors of South Asian descent in cinema but the work of representation is far from done and he has set high standards for himself.

Patel started his journey with a role on the long-running British soap opera "East-Enders" and then shot to fame with Danny Boyle's 2019 movie "Yesterday". Since then, he has been part of diverse projects like Christopher Nolan's sci-fi film "Tenet", Adam McKay's "Don't Look Up", dystopian series "Station Eleven" and now dark comedy "Greedy People". Growing up in the UK to Indian parents, Patel said it was only when he started working as an actor that he was exposed him to the barriers South Asian artists face and that deepened his understanding of the challenges that lie ahead of him "The feeling of like wanting to see yourself and not seeing yourself as much, I think I was perhaps

only subconsciously aware of it when I was growing up. I was lucky I started acting when I was very young."

"It was when I started professionally working and I was working with other South Asian actors who had struggled to get to where they were, that I realized the battle that we kind of have," Patel told PTI in a virtual interview.

The actor said he is proud to be part of a generation that's changing the conversation. Patel is optimistic about making further strides when it comes to inclusivity and diversity after seeing the careers of Ahmed and Dev Patel.

"Riz is a great example and Dev for me, he was a spearhead of everything that's happened over the last many years. I feel 'Slumdog Millionaire' was a real turning point and then the career he's built off the back of that has been a real sort of calling card. It sets a bar."

"I take a lot of encouragement and I try to follow the example of people like that.

I just think the only way I can navigate it is to set my bar high. I think we have to value ourselves highly and then we can get to where we need to get to," he added.

Patel said another welcome change in the industry is that actors of colour are being roped in for parts that were earlier played by white actors.

In his career, Patel has managed to essay varied characters, be it his role as Jack Malik from "Yesterday", Phillip Kaj from "Don't Look Up" or even his cameo appearance as Dr John Watson in "Enola Holmes 2". "In terms of actors like myself and other actors of colour, being considered for roles that would otherwise have just gone to a white actor, I think that's a positive thing."

"I'm glad that casting directors and filmmakers are willing to cast their net wide. A role may have been, I guess, written ostensibly as a white character, but if they are then willing to go that this is just a charac-

ter, let's cast on that wide and whoever ends up being the right person for the role will play it, I think that's a very positive thing to do."

Patel's latest film is "Greedy People", a darkly comedic crime thriller from Patsy Ponciroli. In the movie, set to premiere on Lionsgate Play on Friday, the actor features alongside Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Lily James, his co-star from "Yesterday". There were a lot of different factors, Patel said, that made him say yes to the movie, starting from its script, which the actor found quite interesting.

"It leads to a really thrilling climax. I thought the character was really interesting, his sort of contradictions and moral ethical position," said the actor, who plays the role of Will Shelley, a rookie cop. "And then, of course, I knew that Lily James was attached, we've worked together before, I had a great time. So I was happy to sort of dive into something very different with her," he added. (PTI)

World of Tennis bids adieu to the Clay King

Nadal loses to van de Zandschulp, Spain fails to advance in Davis Cup

MALAGA (SPAIN), Nov 20: Rafael Nadal's last match as a professional was a 6-4, 6-4 loss to No 80 Botie van de Zandschulp in the Davis Cup as Spain was eliminated by the Netherlands.

Spain lost 2-1 in the quarterfinals of the team event that marked the last tournament for Nadal after more than 20 years on tour and 22 Grand Slam titles.

The crowd yelled "Rafa, Rafa, Rafa" when it was all over, and a special ceremony took place at center court to celebrate his career. After speaking to the fans, he cried while a video with his career highlights was shown.

"The truth is that nobody ever wants to arrive at this moment," Nadal said. "I'm not tired of playing tennis, but it's my body that doesn't want to play anymore, so I have to accept the situation. Honestly, I feel super privileged for having been able to make a career out of my hobby, and for having played for much longer than I could ever have imagined. I can only be grateful to life and to all the people that I have here behind me."

After the ceremony was over, Nadal hugged his teammates and left the court while waving both arms and saluting the crowd one last time.

"I'll speak in the name of Spanish tennis and in the name of the tennis world," Spain captain David Ferrer said moments earlier. "You know very well what you have meant to the tennis world. We will miss you a lot. The Vamos, Rafa, chant will always be part of history."

Carlos Alcaraz had extended Nadal's career for a little longer by defeating No 40 Tallon Griekspoor 7-6 (0), 6-3 in the second singles



match, but Alcaraz and Marcel Granollers then lost the decisive doubles 7-6 (4) 7-6 (3) to van de Zandschulp and Wesley Koolhof.

The Dutch will play in Friday's semifinals against either Germany or Canada, which meet on Wednesday. The Netherlands hadn't played in the semifinals since 2001.

"It was a tough match to play. Playing Rafa here in Spain, probably the biggest sportsman here in Spain," van de Zandschulp said. "Atmosphere was crazy, and for me, when I grew up he was an idol of me. It was a really tough match, but yeah, happy I got it done in the end."

It wasn't clear if Nadal would have played another match even if Spain had advanced, as he said

after his loss that if he was Ferrer he would not pick himself to play again in the semifinals.

"Probably the easy move and maybe the right move is to change," Nadal said. "I mean, if I would be the captain, probably I will change, I don't put myself the next day. If we go through, that's my feeling."

After his loss, the 38-year-old Nadal was cheering for his teammates on the Spain bench by center court, often yelling and pumping his fist after crucial points won by his younger teammates. He was standing up near the end, vividly cheering for Spain's duo on the court, but as the Dutch celebrated their victory the Spain great could only look on in apparent despair. Nadal was later biting his finger-

nails while sitting alongside Alcaraz ahead of the ceremony prepared for him.

Nadal was used to winning in the Davis Cup, earning 29 singles victories in a row in the tournament. He helped Spain win the Davis Cup in 2004, 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2019.

"It's in some ways good, maybe, if that was my last match," Nadal said. "I lost my first match in the Davis Cup, and I lost my last one. So we close the circle."

Nadal hadn't played an official match anywhere in 3 1/2 months and had a 12-7 singles record in 2024.

His last official competition was the Paris Olympics in August, when he lost to longtime rival Novak Djokovic in the second

round. Nadal reached the doubles quarterfinals with Alcaraz in Paris, and last month he played two exhibition matches in Saudi Arabia.

"I knew it could be my last match as a professional and the emotions were difficult to manage," Nadal said. "I wasn't able to read the game quickly enough to feel in control. When you've spent so much time out of competition, everything is decided by small details and I'm not in the same form as players who are on the circuit. Today won't be the day for me to criticize myself."

Nadal put up a good fight against the big-serving van de Zandschulp in the first set but had his serve broken late. He was also broken to start the second set, and was never able to fully get back into the match on an indoor hard court at the sold-out Palacio de Deportes Jose Maria Martin Carpena in southern Spain.

"That was a tough, tough match to play," van de Zandschulp said. "Playing Rafa here in Spain, probably the biggest sportsman here in Spain, so the atmosphere was crazy. For me, when I grew up he was an idol of (mine)."

Nadal had said ahead of Spain's debut he would not want to play any singles match if he didn't feel he was ready, and said he wanted Ferrer to make what he thought was the best decision for the team without taking the hype about his retirement into consideration.

"I'll retire from the sport but I will continue to be available for whatever is needed, and to being a good ambassador, which is what I have tried to do my entire life," he said.

The 35-year-old Koolhof was also playing in his last tournament before retiring. (AP)

TILAK 3RD AMONG BATTERS

Hardik reclaims top spot among T20I all-rounders



DUBAI, Nov 20: Star India player Hardik Pandya on Wednesday reclaimed the top spot in the T20I all-rounders' list while rising star and teammate Tilak Varma made a massive jump of 69 runs to occupy the third place among batters in the latest ICC men's player rankings.

Pandya overtook England dasher Liam Livingstone and Nepal dynamo Dipendra Singh Airee at the top of the T20I all-rounder charts on the back of some strong form during India's recent series in South Africa, with the 31-year-old producing some eye-catching efforts with both bat and ball.

His innings of 39 not out in the second game of the four-match series helped balance India's innings, while his spell of 1/8 from three overs during the decisive fourth contest ensured his side claim an impressive 3-1 series triumph.

It is the second time Pandya has held the No.1 ranking for T20I all-rounders, with the consistent India performer first rising to the top at the end of this year's ICC men's

T20 World Cup.

Pandya wasn't the only India player to make giant strides in the latest rankings update, with Player of the Series and rising player Varma shooting up the batting charts a whopping 69 places following his two centuries and 280 runs for the series against the Proteas. The rise sees Varma improve to third place overall behind No.1-ranked T20I batter Travis Head and England's Phil Salt and means he is now the highest-rated batter from India, with skipper Suryakumar Yadav dropping one spot to fourth behind him.

Teammate Sanju Samson -- who also managed two centuries during the series with South Africa -- climbs 17 spots to 22nd on the same list for T20I batters.

Australian duo Adam Zampa and Nathan Ellis are among the biggest movers on the updated rankings for T20I bowlers, with India seamer Arshdeep Singh gaining three places to move to ninth and a new career-high rating following his efforts against South Africa. (PTI)

Argentina beats Peru to close in on World Cup spot

BUENOS AIRES, Nov 20: Lautaro Martinez's goal gave Argentina a 1-0 win over Peru in a South American qualifying match in Buenos Aires and left the hosts close to a spot in the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Its main continental rivals Brazil drew 1-1 against Uruguay in Salvador, Brazil with two impressive goals in an otherwise lackluster match. Federico Valverde gave Uruguay the lead with a curled shot from the edge of the box, and Gerson netted his first for Brazil in similar fashion at the Arena Fonte Nova.

Argentina leads South American qualifying with 25 points from 12 matches, five points clear of its closest competitor, Uruguay. Ecuador and Colombia are next with 19 points each.

Brazil lags in fifth position with 18 points after several uninspiring performances, still hoping that striker Neymar will return from injury and fit in again. Paraguay, with 17 points, is in sixth place.

South American qualifying will give six direct berths in the next World Cup. Seventh-place Bolivia, with 13 points, is in the international playoff position. Venezuela (12), Chile (9), and Peru (7) are out of qualifying spots. The next round of South American World Cup qualifying will be played in March.

UNINSPIRING ARGENTINA

Martinez's goal was his 32nd for the national team, which puts him level with the legendary Diego Maradona.

Until Martinez scored, Argentina's best chance was in the 21st minute, when striker Julian Alvarez hit the Peruvian goalkeeper's right post. Messi once again had a modest performance, as he did in his team's 2-1 defeat at Paraguay on Thursday. Messi crossed the ball in the penalty area in the 55th minute to give Martinez one of the few clear opportunities of the match. The striker moved his body with more grace than power to put the ball in the back of the net.

Despite the disappointing performance at home, Lionel Messi's team will finish the year with few question marks beyond its performances in November.

"We won Copa America, we lead South American World Cup qualifying," said goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez. "We must be proud of ourselves." (AP)

Slovakia beats Britain 2-1 in Billie Jean King Cup



MALAGA (SPAIN), Nov 20: Slovakia rallied to beat Britain 2-1 and reach its first Billie Jean King Cup final in more than two decades.

Viktoria Hrunceakova and Tereza Mihalikova defeated Olivia Nicholls and Heather Watson 6-2, 6-2 in the decisive doubles match, putting Slovakia back in the final for the first time since 2002 to face last year's runner-up Italy on Wednesday.

"Absolutely special moment for our country, for our players, for tennis in Slovakia," captain Matej Lip-tak said. "It's so many years when we won it once only. But today it's

really real, and we are just one step from the maybe biggest victory of our team or team members. We will try to enjoy it." Britain was trying to reach the final of the women's team event for the first time in more than four decades.

"We're all absolutely gutted," Britain team captain Anne Keothavong said. "We came into this event really believing that we had a good shot at it and unfortunately we fell short. We came up against a better team. It's still pretty raw right now. It's quite difficult to find the right words."

Slovakia forced the deciding

match after Rebecca Sramkova rallied to defeat Katie Boulter 2-6, 6-4, 6-4 in the second singles match of the tie.

Britain had taken the lead when Emma Raducanu defeated Hrunceakova 6-4, 6-4 in the first singles, a result that ended Hrunceakova's six-match winning streak in the competition counting both singles and doubles matches.

"I had some good performances on the court this week. I played three matches, which is great for me. I haven't played in a while, so I think being able to score a point and get on the board was helpful," Raducanu said. "We definitely have a winning team. We can improve certain things, but overall, I think we did a really good job and there is a lot of positives to take." Britain last reached the semifinals in 2022, when it lost to Australia.

Slovakia was playing in the semifinals for the first time since 2013. Before that it had made it to the last-four in 2002 when it won the title in a final against Spain.

Slovakia upset 18-time champion United States in the first round and defeated Australia in the quarterfinals. Britain picked up 2-0 wins against Germany and defending champions Canada in the last-eight. (AP)

Venue and the opponent team would be decided at a later stage

Argentina featuring Lionel Messi to play in Kerala next year

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Nov 20:

The Kerala government announced on Wednesday that the Argentina national football team, led by legendary player Lionel Messi, will visit the state next year for an international friendly match.

Addressing a press conference, sports minister V Abdurahiman said that the world-renowned team would play two friendly matches in Kerala, with the event being conducted under the complete supervision of the state government. The venue and the opponent team would be decided at a later stage, Abdurahiman said, reacting to a query.

"The world's number one football team, Argentina, including Lionel Messi, is coming to Kerala... There will be two matches," he said. The management of the Argentina team would make an official announcement in this regard upon arriving in the state, Abdurahiman said.

Representatives of the football team are expected to visit the southern state within one and a half months, the minister said.

"We (government) have decided to make a joint announcement in this regard with the



Argentina national team management," he said.

The minister said that he had recently visited Spain to hold discussions with representatives of the Argentina national team and to extend an official invitation for their visit to the state.

He said that talks were held with individuals associated with the team, who agreed to visit India in 2025 and participate in the friendly match event. Responding to a question, he said that the decision regarding the team's arrival has been finalised, and there are no changes to it.

He noted that the govern-

ment would directly oversee the match, security, and other arrangements.

The minister said that the match would take place next year, but the date would be announced by the Argentina Football Association (AFA) in accordance with their procedures.

Making it clear that the match would be held in a stadium with a capacity of at least 50,000 people, he indicated that Kochi is likely to be the venue.

The minister pointed out that India has the largest support base for the Argentina football team, with one-fourth of the

fans residing in Kerala. This is the primary reason for the Argentina team's decision to visit the state.

Financial support for organising the high-profile football event will be provided by the traders of the state, he added.

Abdurahiman also expressed confidence in Kerala's capability to host this historic occasion.

In September this year, a delegation from Kerala, led by Abdurahiman, visited Spain to seek collaboration with the Argentine Football Association (AFA).

After holding a meeting with its office-bearers in Madrid, Abdurahiman said that the collaboration with AFA would be a significant investment for Kerala and expressed his desire to make it a reality as soon as possible.

"The possibility of considering Kerala as a venue for international friendly matches was discussed. As part of this, the association representatives expressed interest in visiting Kerala soon. AFA also expressed interest in setting up football academies in Kerala in collaboration with the state government," he had said in a Facebook post. (PTI)

Nayanika takes one-shot leader over Hitaashee and Jasmine

HYDERABAD, Nov 20:

Nayanika Sanga, looking for her maiden win on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour, carded a solid four-under 68 to take a slender one-shot lead after the opening day in the 15th and final leg of the Tour here on Wednesday.

Nayanika, 20, had seven birdies, including three in a row on the back nine from the 11th to the 13th at the Boulder Hills Golf & Country Club. (PTI)

No. e.DME/RP/2024/556041/2

EDUCATIONAL NOTICE
COUNSELLING FOR FMG'S & NON FMG'S FOR UNDERGOING ONE YEAR COMPULSORY RURAL POSTING UNDER NHM, ASSAM

This is for information to all the concerned candidates who are permanent resident of Assam, who have passed their MBBS degree from outside the state of Assam (FMG's & Non-FMG's) and have applied vide this Directorate Notice No. e.DME/RP/2024/556041, dated 19/09/2024 & e.DME/RP/2024/556041/1, dated 12/11/2024, for undergoing compulsory one year rural service under NHM, Assam, that the counselling is scheduled to be held on 25th November, 2024 at the office of the DME, Assam, Sixmile, Khanapara, Guwahati-22 as per schedule mentioned below:

Date of Counselling	Non-Foreign Medical Graduate	Reporting time
25 th November, 2024	11:00 AM	12:30 PM

All the candidates are hereby directed to physically appear along with their original documents/ testimonial, etc. for the offline counselling at the office of the Director of Medical Education, Assam as per schedule.

Sd/-
Prof.
Janasanyog /D/8996/24/21-Nov-24
Director of Medical Education, Assam

No. UDB/Tender/01/2022-23/

Date: 20/11/2024

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & twenty five paise) only with a validity period of 180 Days which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors of Class -II and Class -I (A,B, & C) category of Assam PWD (Road & Building) and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under SOPD & various schemes under BTR for the year 2023-24 & other financial years as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 12.00 Noon on 16/12/2024 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.00 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Tender Amount (In Rs.)	Cost of Tender Paper	Time of Completion of Work
1	Const of community toilet at Kundarbil CNI Church under 15ASFC	11,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3(three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
2	Construction of Community toilet at Paharpur Kali Mandir under 15ASFC	10,47,960.00	Rs.500.00	3(three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
3	Construction of community toilet at St Teresa Catholic Church under 15 ASFC	10,47,960.00	Rs.500.00	3(three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order

Detailed N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 21/11/2024 to 16/12/2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment.

Sd/- Block Development Officer
Udalguri Development Block

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/906

Lakshya, Sindhu, Malvika enter second round of China Masters

Lakshya played with vengeance, surging to an 11-4 lead in the opening game



SHENZHEN (CHINA), Nov 20: Star Indian shuttlers PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen progressed to the second round with superlative wins in the women's and men's singles events at the China Masters Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

In-form Malvika Bansod, ranked 36th in the world, also registered an upset, defeating Denmark's world No. 21 Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt 20-22, 23-21, 21-16 to advance to the second round.

World No. 19 Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist, dispatched the higher-ranked Busanan Ongbamrungphan 21-17, 21-19 in 50 minutes, notching up her 20th win in 21 meetings with the Thai shuttler.

The 29-year-old from Hyderabad will next face Singapore's Yeo Jia Min, while Malvika will meet eighth-seeded Supanida Katethong.

Lakshya, meanwhile, avenged his Olympic bronze medal loss with a 21-14, 13-21, 21-13 win over seventh seed Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia in 57 minutes. Lakshya will next face either Denmark's Rasmus Gemke or Japan's Kenta Nishimoto.

The victory was a balm for Lakshya, who had lost to Lee in the Paris Olympics bronze medal match from an advantageous position.

In their first meeting since that defeat, Lakshya played with vengeance, surging to an 11-4 lead in the opening game before sealing it.

Lee bounced back in the second game, racing to a 7-1 lead before extending it to 17-8 to level the contest.

In the decider, Lakshya took a 5-1 lead, but Lee fought back to level at 5-5. However, Lakshya held firm, taking an 11-8 lead at the break with a precise smash.

He then moved to 14-10 with two diagonal shots before reaching 18-11 with a cross-court smash.

The Indian held his nerves and wrapped up the match after Lee hit wide.

Sindhu vs Busanan

Both shuttlers started off the match on an even keel with Busanan taking a 14-10 lead thanks to two unforced errors by the Indian.

However, Sindhu went on a roll, winning the next nine points to take a 19-14 lead before closing the first game in her favour.

But the loss in the first game didn't deter Busanan as she started the second game strongly. Although Sindhu trailed for most part of the second game, she continued to chip away at the points deficit with her aggressive play to take the lead for the first time in the game at 18-17.

The star Indian shuttler then sealed the match. (PTI)

WACA curator believes Perth pitch free of 'snake cracks'

PERTH, Nov 20: WACA head curator Isaac McDonald on Wednesday said the unusual rain in Perth has impacted the pitch preparation for the first Test of Border-Gavaskar Trophy and though he doesn't expect the surface to develop "snake cracks", there will still be plenty of bounce and carry.

The surface at the Optus Stadium or at the nearby WACA ground is known for its pace and bounce and when the cracks open up in dry conditions, it provides more assistance to the seamers besides bringing the spinners into play.

The city has witnessed rain over the past few days and the pitch was covered for the whole day on Tuesday, cutting down preparation time for the curator.

"Yeah, it's definitely not traditional Perth Test prep. Yesterday we pretty much lost the whole day of prep with it being under cover. So we kind of saw the forecast early on and we started prep a little bit earlier than we normally would."

"So we're sitting quite comfortable still. It'd be nice if the sun would pop out and do its job but as of this morning we're in a good spot, we're really comfortable as a curating team," McDonald told media ahead of the series opener beginning on Friday.

The pitch is likely to retain moisture come match day, effectively ruling out the possibility of major deterioration over the course of five days.

"I don't think the weather is going to make this pitch fall apart. There'll be some deterioration, grass will stand up during the game and offer that variable bounce but in terms of big snake WACA cracks, unfortunately I don't think the weather is going to get us there," said the head curator.

The forecast is clear for Friday as well as the remaining four days but the temperatures are unlikely to increase drastically. McDonald

wants the sun to emerge from the clouds at the earliest so that the surface can behave close to its traditional nature.

"I mean everyone talks about the traditional baking of the top. We can kind of manufacture that with more rolling and less water on top if we have to. We're testing the wicket hour by hour so it's quite conditions based at the moment."

"So at the moment we're leaning towards rolling it a bit more on top to get that firmness and that happy medium between bat and ball. But yeah, fingers crossed the sun pops out," he said.

and bounce in the pitch.

"It'll just come in how well they look after the ball and how true the surface stays. We're meant to get to 30-32 degrees over the weekend so we'll see what the grass on top does there but in terms of coming off cracks I just don't think we're going to get there," felt McDonald.

Perth is hosting the opening game of a marquee series and that is bound to put some pressure on the groundstaff. However, McDonald is not feeling the heat.

"I don't think it's pressure, it doesn't change what I do. I've still got to deliver the best playing



Pakistan recently bundled out Australia for 140 in an ODI at the Optus Stadium here. The grass cover was expectedly less for a limited overs game, 4mm to be exact. It will be at least double for the India-Australia Test opener.

How much grass will we get to see before toss?

"We've still got to try and get to a point where we think we're going to be fine by Friday. We're still in around the ballpark, 8 to 10 mm, was where we were last year as well."

"So we're sitting quite comfortable and having quite open conversations within the curating team of what we feel is appropriate and where to go from there. There's still be really good pace

surface I can. So in terms of pressure, I don't know if we're, another word for pressure, I suppose, you know. It's nice to be the first test. It's the excitement around it is nice. The buzz is nice. The energy in our team is great. And it's something that we all look forward to every year."

He chose to stay on the fence when asked what he would do if he wins the toss on Friday.

"It's way above my pay grade mate. I think we're setting ourselves up really nicely for it. All things are leading to getting that pitch rock hard come Friday morning and as I said people above my pay grade will get to choose and see what they do," McDonald added. (PTI)

Yash Dayal replaces injured Khaleel Ahmed in reserves



PERTH, Nov 20: Left-arm seam bowler Yash Dayal has been added to India's reserve pacers' list after Khaleel Ahmed had to be sent back home due to an unspecified niggle.

Dayal, who was added in the Test squad during the Bangladesh series, was in South Africa for the T20I series but didn't play a single match.

He flew directly to Perth from Johannesburg after Khaleel developed a niggle and was unable to bowl in the nets.

The medical team advised the Rajasthan left-arm rest and hence it was decided that Dayal would fly in while Khaleel fly back home.

"It was a like for like replacement because the Indian team needs to do simulation for Mitchell Starc. Dayal was originally supposed to play the A Test but was sent to South Africa. If Khaleel can't bowl then there was no point of keeping him back," a BCCI source privy to the development told PTI on Wednesday.

It is not clear whether Khaleel can play Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament matches before auction as he has been released by Delhi Capitals and would like to enjoy a bidding war among franchises during the upcoming mega auctions.

Dayal has been retained by Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

On Tuesday, Yashasvi Jaiswal felt a jerk on his shoulder while batting which needed medical attention.

However much to the relief of team, Jaiswal was back in the nets on Wednesday. (PTI)

Government of Assam
Department of Fisheries

World Fisheries Day

21 November 2024

Highlights of the program

Public Meeting

Seminars and Discussion Sessions

Workshops

Objectives of the Program

- To highlight the importance of sustainable fishing practices and policies
- To draw attention towards threats to marine and freshwater resources
- To strengthen human rights for small scale fishing communities
- To eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing practices
- To improve working conditions for the fishing community

Convention Hall and Training Centre of Public Works Department, Dispur, Guwahati

9:30 AM

Heartfelt greetings to all the people associated with the fisheries sector

With warm regards
Shri Keshab Mahanta
Minister, Fisheries, Transport etc

The integration of modern technology has unlocked immense possibilities in the fisheries sector, particularly in areas like biofloc, Recirculatory Aquaculture System (RAS), fish seedling, and ornamental fish farming. These innovative approaches are poised to inject new vitality into our state's fisheries industry. With vast fish stocks available in our rivers, lakes, and ponds, there's tremendous potential for startups to revolutionize the supply chain. It is of utmost importance for the new generation to recognize and understand the possibilities in the fisheries sector.

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

The theme of World Fisheries Day 2024 is
"India's Blue Transformation: Strengthening Small Scale and Sustainable Fisheries"

Janasanyog /D/9024/24/21-Nov-24

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