

6
WORLD

8
NATION

- 11 killed, dozens injured in Israeli strikes in Beirut
- At least 37 killed in sectarian violence in Pak's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province
- No row over Maha CM's post; leaders of Mahayuti will decide: Fadnavis
- TMC hits a six: Sweeps by-polls, snatches one from BJP



25 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

www.thehillstimes.in

# THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI &amp; DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol. No. XXV Issue No. 312 RNI-ASSEN/2000/12862 DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2024 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

## NDA sweeps Assam bypolls; wins all 5 seats

**Dholai, Samaguri and Behali go to BJP**  
**● AGP retains Bongaigaon ● UPPL keeps Sidli**

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: The BJP and its allies Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL) swept the five assembly constituencies, retaining four and wresting one from the Congress.

The BJP wrested the high-profile Samaguri assembly seat, which witnessed widespread violence during campaigning, from the Congress which had held sway over the constituency for the last five terms.

BJP's Dipu Ranjan Sarma defeated his opponent Tanzil Hussain of the Congress, son of former minister and the constituency's five-time MLA Rakibul Hussain, by 24,501 votes.

Sarma polled 81,321 votes while Hussain secured 56,820 votes, among 11 candidates in the fray. The seat had fallen vacant after the election of the senior Hussain to the Lok Sabha from Dhubri by a record margin of over 10 lakh votes.

BJP's Nihar Ranjan Das won from Dholai (SC) constituency by



a margin of 9,098 votes over his nearest rival Dhrubajyoti Purkayastha of the Congress.

Das polled 69,945 votes, while the Congress candidate secured the second place with 60,847 votes, among eight candidates in the fray.

Bypoll to the constituency was necessitated following the election of former minister Parimal Suklabaidya to the Lok Sabha from the Silchar (SC) constituency.

AGP retained Bongaigaon as its candidate Diptimayee Choudhury defeated her nearest rival Brajenjit Singha of the Congress by a margin of 35,164 votes. The wife of eight-time MLA Phanibhushan Choudhury polled 74,784 votes while Singha secured 39,570 votes, among eight contesting candidates.

UPPL's Nirmal Kumar Brahma won the Sidli (ST) constituency by a margin of 37,016 against his near-

est rival Shuddho Kumar Basumatary of BPF. The Sidli (ST) constituency was earlier held by UPPL's Jayanta Basumatary, who was elected to the Lok Sabha earlier this year. Brahma polled 95,243 votes while Basumatary secured 58,227 votes and Congress's Sanjib Warie bagged 7,634 votes.

BJP retained Behali with its candidate Diganta Ghatowal polling 50,947 votes, while Jayanta Bora of the Congress secured 41,896 votes. There were four candidates in the fray in the constituency, including Lakhikanta Kurmi of the CPI(ML) Liberation and Ananta Gogoi of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), with both losing their deposits. The seat was earlier held by Ranjit Dutta, who was elected to the Lok Sabha from Tezpur parliamentary seat.

The counting of votes for five assembly constituencies, where the bypolls were held on November 13, began at 8 am on Saturday amid tight security to decide the fate of 34 candidates. Bypolls were held in the five assembly constituencies in Assam as (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### 'Clean sweep testament of good governance'

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: As the BJP-led ruling NDA made a clean sweep in Assam bypolls on Saturday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma termed it a testament of people's support to "good governance and development".

The chief minister extended his gratitude to the people for their support and reiterated his commitment to work for the development of the state.

"We bow in gratitude to the people of Assam. The NDA's 5/5 victory in the current by-elections is a resounding testament to Assam's unwavering support for Adarniya @narendramodi Ji's vision of good governance and development", Sarma posted on X.

"A big shoutout to our dedicated Karyakartas who took our message of development to every booth!" he added. (PTI)

## BJP-led Mahayuti sways Maharashtra

*Oppn INDIA bags Jharkhand*



MUMBAI/RANCHI, Nov 23: The BJP-led Mahayuti coloured Maharashtra a vivid saffron on Saturday as it swept aside the MVA for a landslide win while the opposition INDIA bloc retained Jharkhand, voters in both states giving the parties in power an emphatic thumbs up.

Counting of votes for the two assembly elections underscored with slogans such as "katenge toh batenge" and "ek hain toh safe hai" began at 8 am, signalling very soon that it was celebration time for the BJP in Maharashtra.

The party was winning or leading in 132 of the 149 seats it contested in the powerhouse state. Together with its partners Shiv Sena and NCP, the ruling Mahayuti alliance could win 228 of the 288 seats in the state, leaving the Congress-Shiv Sena (UBT)-NCP (SP) tie-up virtually decimated with just 47 seats.

As the opposition reeled under the impact of the decisive mandate against it in Maharashtra, Jharkhand offered consolation with voters giving a possible two-third victory to the JMM-led alliance.

In the 81-seat Jharkhand assembly, the BJP had won or was leading in 20 seats, while the Chief Minister Hemant Soren's JMM could score 35, the Congress 16, the RJD four and the CPI-ML in one, adding to 56 seats, according to the Election Commission website.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

congratulated the JMM-led alliance for its win in Jharkhand and thanked the people of the state for their support to the BJP. As party workers smeared colour on each other, danced to drumbeats and distributed sweets in various places, Modi was fulsome in his praise for the Maharashtra victory.

"Development wins! Good governance wins! United we will soar even higher! Heartfelt gratitude to my sisters and brothers of Maharashtra, especially the youth and women of the state, for a historic mandate to the NDA. This affection and warmth is unparalleled," Modi said in a post on X.

With the Mahayuti walking the road towards power in a runaway win that went ahead of what exit polls had predicted, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said, "People have rejected politics of hatred and revenge, accepted politics of welfare and development."

Describing the day as historic, the Shiv Sena leader said the "people took election in their hands to give the Mahayuti a landslide victory".

As his alliance colleagues attributed the stunning win to welfare schemes such as the Ladki Bahin scheme, his son and Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde said the mandate shows who is taking Balasaheb Thackeray's ideals forward. It was a pointer to the fractured legacy of the Shiv Sena founder (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Eight killed, three injured in road mishaps

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Eight persons were killed and three critically injured in two separate road mishaps in Assam's Bajali and Dhubri districts on Saturday, police said.

Five persons were killed and two critically injured when the vehicle in which they were travelling hit a stationary truck in Bajali district.

In another accident, three persons died and another was seriously injured when the vehicle in which they were travelling collided with a stationary truck near Garehat in the Agomoni area of Dhubri district.

In the Bajali mishap, the deceased were returning home to Nalbari after witnessing the ongoing 'Ras' festival when their van hit the truck at Bhabanipur, killing five persons on the spot.

The two injured persons have been admitted to Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Medical College and Hospital and their condition was stated to be critical, police added.

The deceased have been identified as Ashish Habib Khan, Mizanur Rahman, Royal Khan, Mizanur Khan, and Moinal Haque.

The injured are Amir Khan and Kazi Chakra Ahmed, police said. In the Dhubri mishap, the victims were on their way from Gauripur to visit an ongoing 'Ras' fair at Cooch Behar in West Bengal when the accident occurred killing three persons on the spot.

The deceased have been identified as Dhanjay Roy, Bikas Kalita, and Ram Roy, while the injured, Khanindra Roy, is currently undergoing treatment at Dhubri Medical College Hospital. (PTI)

### Four hacked to death at Garajan

HT Correspondent  
 NAGAON, Nov 23: In a sensational incident, a group of miscreants hacked four persons including three persons of a family to death in Nagaon's Garajan Pashim Amarakanda village on Friday night.

According to eyewitnesses, a group of miscreants entered into the house of a retired government employee identified as Gunadhar Sarkar, located at Paschim Amarakanda village and beheaded four people with sharp weapons inside the house.

The eldest daughter of Gunadhar Sarkar, Navasmita Sarkar, a TET-qualified teacher, was scheduled to get married on Wednesday. She was reportedly at a marketplace with her brother during the heinous incident.

The victims included Gunadhar Sarkar, his wife Sarudhari Sarkar, their younger daughter Jayasmita Sarkar, and a young relative identified as Anupam Sutradhar.

Upon receiving the news, the police rushed to the crime spot and started their investigation.

## BJP gains in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan; TMC reigns in West Bengal

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: Ruling parties held sway in most of the 13 states in the assembly byelection results declared on Saturday, with the BJP and its allies wresting seats in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan and the Trinamool Congress sweeping West Bengal.

Out of the 46 seats where byelections were held, the BJP and its allies won 26, a gain of nine seats, followed by Congress with seven -- a loss of six seats.

The Trinamool Congress won six, the Aam Aadmi Party three and the Samajwadi Party two seats. The LDF in Kerala and BAP in Rajasthan got one each. Apart from this, two seats in Sikkim were won unopposed by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) candidates.

In the bypolls to two Lok Sabha constituencies, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi cruised to her maiden electoral victory from Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in Kerala with a margin of over 4.1 lakh votes against CPI(M)-led LDF's Sathyan Mokeri, but the party lost Nanded in Maharashtra to the BJP. After the reverses in the

### Nation Bypolls

Lok Sabha election, the ruling BJP-led alliance secured its hold over the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh with its candidates winning seven out of nine seats. The BJP retained four seats -- Ghaziabad, Khair, Majhawan and Phulpur -- and wrested Kachari and Kundarki from the SP while its ally RLD retained one. The Samajwadi Party, which had four of these seats, retained Sishamau and Karhal.

As the results came in, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said it was a testament to the people's unwavering faith in the successful leadership and guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "This victory is the result of the security, good governance and public welfare policies of the double-engine government and the tireless hard work of dedicated workers," Adityanath said on X.

The ruling BJP won five of the seven seats in Rajasthan, wresting three from Congress and

one from the RLP. The Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) and the Congress retained one seat each.

In a boost to the Bhagwant Mann-led government, the ruling AAP in Punjab wrested Gidderbaha, Dera Baba Nanak and Chabbewal assembly segments from the Congress, which ousted AAP from Barnala.

The ruling NDA in Bihar swept the bypolls to four assembly segments, retaining Imamganj (HAM) and wresting from the INDIA bloc Tarari (BJP), Ramgarh (BJP) and Belaganj (JD-U), receiving a boost ahead of the assembly elections due next year.

The TMC trounced the opposition in West Bengal, retaining five seats and wresting Madarihat from the BJP, further cementing its political dominance in the state despite the ongoing protests over the RG Kar incident.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the results of the byelections would help her work for the people. "I would like to thank and congratulate the 'Maa, Mati and Manush' from the bottom (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Himanta deeply pained by BJP's poll debacle in 'second home' Jharkhand



GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said he is "deeply pained" by the BJP's poll debacle in Jharkhand which he described as "second home" a few days ago.

He also congratulated the people of Maharashtra and the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance for retaining power, while expressing gratitude to the people of Assam for supporting NDA nominees in by-polls in all five seats in Assam.

Sarma, the party's co-in-charge for Jharkhand polls, congratulated the JMM for its impressive victory in Jharkhand while asserting that the NDA wanted to protect the state from infiltration and to lead it towards

the path of development.

"The loss in Jharkhand is deeply painful for me personally, even though we secured victory in all five byelections in Assam," Sarma said in a post on X.

The BJP leader said he is humbly accepting the mandate of the people, for that is the true essence of democracy.

"I have witnessed the unwavering dedication and relentless efforts of our Karyakartas in Jharkhand, who gave their all in this election. We fought with a vision to protect the state from infiltration and to lead it on the path of development, fulfilling the aspirations of students and youth," Sarma added.

During the electioneering, the BJP focused on "infiltration from Bangladesh" and alleged corruption of the JMM-led coalition, which is now set to storm back to power for the second time in a row.

"JMM and its allies have secured an impressive victory in Jharkhand. My heartfelt congratulations to Shri @HemantSorenJMM and his entire team on this achievement. I am confident that under his leadership, Jharkhand will embark on a path of progress and development," Sarma said.

As the BJP's co-in-charge of the Jharkhand election, Sarma frequently visited that state and addressed numerous public meetings. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Priyanka establishes her maiden win in Wayanad

WAYANAD/NEW DELHI, Nov 23: Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday won the Wayanad Lok Sabha bypoll with a thumping margin of over four lakh votes, surpassing her brother Rahul Gandhi's victory margin in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, in her electoral debut.

The 52-year-old Congress leader defeated Sathyan Mokeri of the CPI(M)-led LDF by securing more than six lakh votes to succeed her brother, Rahul Gandhi, in the hill constituency, which he had won twice since the 2019 elections.

Mokeri got 2,11,407 votes while BJP candidate Navya Haridas finished third with 1,09,939 votes.

Due to a low voter turnout, Priyanka Gandhi received 6,22,338 votes, less than her brother Rahul's tally of 6,47,445 votes during the April Lok Sabha election in the constituency. However, her margin of 410,931 votes surpassed his lead of 364,422 votes, making her maiden victory extra sweet. With Priyanka's victory, for the first time in decades, all three members of the Nehru-Gandhi family—Sonia, Rahul, and Priyanka—

are now in Parliament.

Buoyed by the victory, Priyanka Gandhi, addressing the people of Wayanad as her "dearest sisters and brothers," said she was "overwhelmed with gratitude for the trust" the people of Wayanad had placed in her.

"I will make sure that over time, you truly feel this victory has been your victory and the person you chose

to represent you understands your hopes and dreams and fights for you as one of your own," the Congress general secretary said in a post on X.

In her post, Priyanka Gandhi also thanked her colleagues in the UDF, leaders from across Kerala, workers, volunteers and everyone else who supported her and worked "incredibly hard" in her poll

campaign, by "tolerating" her "12 hour a day (no food, no rest) car journeys, and for fighting like true soldiers for the ideals we all believe in".

"To my mother, Robert and my two jewels- Raihan and Miraya, no gratitude is ever enough for the love and courage you give me. And to my brother, Rahul, you are the bravest of them (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



**'Hope for a world where voices of victims are heard louder than perpetrators'**

## UNGA adopts 1<sup>st</sup> ever treaty on crimes against humanity

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 23: A key United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) committee adopted a resolution late Friday paving the way for negotiations on a first-ever treaty on preventing and punishing crimes against humanity after Russia dropped amendments that would have derailed the effort.

The resolution was approved by consensus by the assembly's legal committee, which includes all 193-member UN nations, after tense last-minute negotiations between its supporters and Russia that dragged through the day.

There was loud applause when the chairman of the committee gavelled the resolution's approval. It is virtually certain to be adopted when the General Assembly puts it to a final vote on Dec 4.

"Today's agreement to start up



negotiations on a much-needed international treaty is a historic achievement that was a long time coming," Richard Dicker, Human Rights Watch's senior legal adviser

for advocacy, told The Associated Press. "It sends a crucial message that impunity for the kinds of crimes inflicted on civilians in Ethiopia, Sudan, Ukraine, southern

Israel, Gaza, and Myanmar will not go unheeded," he said.

The resolution calls for a time-bound process with preparatory sessions in 2026 and 2027, and three-week negotiating sessions in 2028 and 2029 to finalize a treaty on crimes against humanity. Dicker said Russia's proposed amendments left in question whether treaty negotiations would have been completed. Russia's deputy UN ambassador Maria Zabolotskaya said Russia withdrew the amendments "in a spirit of compromise." But she said Russia "disassociates itself from consensus".

"This, of course, does not mean that we are not ready to work on this crucial convention," Zabolotskaya told the committee. The International Criminal Court was established to punish major perpetrators of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Court seeks ED's response on Kejriwal's application

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: A Delhi court on Saturday directed the ED to file a response to former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking a copy of the requisite sanction to prosecute him in the alleged excise scam money laundering case.

Special judge Kaveri Baweja passed the directions on Kejriwal's application, who claimed that he had not been served a copy of the sanction.

In his plea, Kejriwal pointed out that during a recent hearing before the Delhi High Court, the ED stated that the required sanction had been obtained from the authorities concerned when the chargesheet was filed.

The judge issued a notice to the ED and directed it to file its reply by November 26, the next date of the hearing.

The money laundering case

### Excise scam



stems from a CBI case lodged after Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended a probe into the alleged irregularities in the implementation of the excise policy.

According to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED), irregularities were committed while modifying the excise policy and undue favours were extended to the licence (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# BJP win in Maharashtra: Breather for Adani's USD 3-bn Dharavi project

**NEW DELHI, Nov 23:** The landslide victory for ruling BJP-led Mahayuti in Maharashtra will booster billionaire Gautam Adani-led group's USD 3-billion project to redevelop Mumbai slum of Dharavi into a "world-class" district.

Opposition Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) had pledged to reclaim all land given to the Adani group for redeveloping Asia's largest slum and promised to scrap the project altogether, if voted to power.

For Adani, who is facing bribery charges in a US court, the scrapping of his pet Dharavi project would have been a big setback.

With election results showing the BJP and its allies Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party factions led by Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, winning more than three-fourths of the 288 seats in the Maharashtra assembly, those anxieties have now been set to rest.

Adani plans to turn 620 acres of prime land, about three quarters of the size of New York's Central Park, into a glitzy urban hub. About seven lakh living in rickety shanties with open sewers and shared toilets in the densely populated slums located close to Mumbai's international airport, are to be given flats of up to 350 sq ft free of cost.

The redevelopment had become a political hot potato with the opposition alleging that that group received undue favours from the state government in awarding the contract. The group has denied benefiting from the government's favouritism.

Congress leader and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had repeatedly raised the award of Dharavi redevelopment, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party BJP of enriching cronies such as Adani.

## Kolkata Jewellery & Gem fair aims to expand in national market

**Kolkata, Nov 23:** The 5th edition of the Kolkata Jewellery & Gem Fair (KJGF), which commenced on Saturday, highlighted East India's rich jewellery heritage and its evolution in a globalised market, aiming to help the region maintain a critical market share in the over USD 43 billion national industry, growing at a 17 per cent CAGR.

The three-day event, unveiled by West Bengal Chief Secretary Manoj Pant and West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC) Managing Director Vandana Yadav runs until November 25.

It brings together over 60 exhibitors, 200 plus renowned brands and a dazzling array of jewellery innovations.

Speaking at the event, Yadav emphasised the need to modernise Bengal's traditional strengths in jewellery craftsmanship.

"While jewellery has been a cornerstone of Bengal's cultural and economic identity, we must bridge tradition with innovation," she remarked. (PTI)

## None of Adani portfolio cos subject to any legal case: Group CFO

**NEW DELHI, Nov 23:** None of Adani group portfolio companies, comprising 11 listed firms, have been accused of any wrongdoing, conglomerate's CFO Jugeshinder Robbie Singh said on founder and chairman Gautam Adani's indictment on bribery charges in the US.

In a post on X, Singh said the group would make a detailed comment on the US indictment once it gets counsel approvals.

Adani and seven other defendants, including his nephew Sagar Adani, allegedly agreed to pay about USD 265 million in bribes to Indian government officials between approximately 2020 and 2024 to obtain lucrative solar energy supply contracts on terms that were expected to yield USD 2 billion of profit over 20 years, according to an indictment unsealed in a New York court on Wednesday. The Securities and Exchange Commission of the US has also charged Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani, executives of Adani Green Energy Ltd and Cyril Cables, an executive of Azure Power Global, for "conduct arising out of a massive bribery scheme".

"There is a lot of news and reports that will try to pick unrelated items and create a headline. My humble request is that we will respond in the fullness of time once we review in detail the matter as presented in the legal filings," Singh said. He hastened to add that



Project supporters in the ruling dispensation say the project holds out promise to make it a global model for slum redevelopment.

While an estimated 1 million (10 lakh) reside in Dharavi, about 700,000 are thought to be eligible because of the resident definition of ones having proof of living in the area prior to January 1, 2000.

The rest will get homes in other parts of the city, a proposal some locals opposed as they want no resident or business owner to be uprooted.

Adani had in 2022 won a contract to remake the slum, which sits on prime real estate in the overcrowded financial capital, in seven years. Weeks before the poll, the Maharashtra government had approved the acquisition of 256 acres of salt-pan land for the Dharavi redevelopment. The salt-pan land is to be acquired from the central government and leased to the government of Maharashtra, which is redeveloping the 620-acre slum, the largest in Asia.

The Dharavi Redevelopment Project Pvt, in which the Adani Group holds an 80 per cent stake, along with the state government, is implementing the project.

The land will be used to build

low-cost and affordable housing for residents of Dharavi. A survey of existing residents and businesses is being done to determine who would be rehoused in Dharavi or be relocated.

The slums -- key backdrop in Oscar winner Slumdog Millionaire -- houses shanties where often eight people are squeezed in a 100-sq ft tenement and ten times that number sharing a toilet. Dharavi is also a massive hub for small-scale businesses ranging from leather goods to pottery and textiles.

The Maharashtra government in 2022 issued a new tender to redevelop Dharavi after an earlier remake deal was cancelled.

Adani Group, which also runs Mumbai's airport and distributes electricity in the city, had in 2022 won the project by offering to pay ₹ 5,070 crore -- more than 2.5 times the sum quoted by the next highest bidder -- to provide houses, with a kitchen and a toilet, to eligible slum dwellers in revamped Dharavi. The group has an 80 per cent stake in the firm executing the project, with the remainder held by the state.

Seclink Technologies, a Dubai-based consortium that initially won the cancelled 2018 tender, chal-

lenged the new contract in the Bombay High Court, alleging the process "unlawfully" favoured Adani by raising bidders' net worth requirements and limiting consortium members.

The state government said no contract had been agreed with Seclink and that the new tender was ordered because of the changed financial and economic situation in view of Covid pandemic. It also insisted that the Seclink consortium was not excluded from the bidding.

Starting from the 1950s, the several state governments had floated tenders to redevelop Dharavi, but none took off. The redevelopment essentially required acquiring large tracts of land, attracting investors to build modern utilities and resettlement of local residents.

The current redevelopment plan -- the state government's fourth attempt via a global tender -- has made the most progress. The project aims to transform the slum, which is around the size of Monaco, into modern apartments, offices, and malls.

Dharavi started as an informal settlement for Muslim leather tanners but soon turned into a cosmopolitan melting pot with migrants from across India making it their home. As Mumbai expanded, the slum was no longer on the fringes of the city and is now home to a large collection of cottage industries. The Adani-led redevelopment project includes initiatives like sustainable transportation systems and modern infrastructure utilities. It includes vocational training to empower youth and aspiring workers in Dharavi, helping them secure eco-friendly jobs and improve their earning capabilities. These efforts are designed to create a more prosperous and environmentally friendly future for the community. (PTI)

## TRA Chairperson inaugurates Livelihood Business incubator

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Nov 23:** Tea Research Association (TRA) Chairperson Nayantara Palchoudhuri on Friday inaugurated the Livelihood Business Incubator (LBI) for Small Tea Growers (STGs) at the Indian Institute of Plantation Management (IIPM) in Jorhat, which is within the Tocklai Tea Research Institute (TTRI) campus at Cinnamara here.

A TTRI official informed that the LBI, established with support from the Union Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME), is aimed at playing a key role in empowering STGs of the region by equipping them with the skills needed to thrive in an evolving tea market.

The centre (LBI) would offer hands-on training in tea processing, quality testing, and market-oriented cultivation practices. The centre's mission 'Know your Tea Leaf' is designed to empower STGs with knowledge on quality leaf production, sustainable cultivation, and market integration, the official stated.

The LBI facility includes mini tea processing units for both orthodox and green tea and provides a comprehensive learning environment for smallholders. The centre will also educate STGs on the entire tea value chain, from plucking and handling to processing and marketing. As part of the event an office room and a classroom at the Small Tea Growers' Training and Research Centre, which is within the TTRI campus, were formally handed over to representatives of the STGs. It may be mentioned here that the Small Tea Growers' Training and Research Centre was established in 2020

with financial support from the Assam Government.

Later, the TRA Chairperson Nayantara Palchoudhuri presented certificates to selected women STG entrepreneurs in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the tea sector. In her address, Palchoudhuri congratulated the IIPM management for establishing the LBI and expressed confidence in the facility's potential to empower STGs, guiding them to enhance the quality of their yields. She acknowledged the vital role of STGs as major contributors to India's tea production and encouraged them to elevate the quality of their produce through innovation and improved practices. The TRA Director Dr A Babu, speaking on the occasion, expressed his gratitude to the State Government for extending financial support that enabled the establishment of the training facility for STGs.

Dr Babu also highlighted the world-class National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL)-accredited laboratory within the facility, which is equipped to test tea samples for residues, heavy metals, and iron filings, as well as for FSSAI quality parameters, soil analysis, and agro-inputs.

The IIPM Director Professor S John Mano Raj, thanked the TRA Chairperson and the Council of Management of TRA for extending all support to utilize the space at TTRI campus. The event was attended by TRA Vice-Chairman Sunil Sikand, Raj Barooah, a known tea planter, D Buragohain, Chief Advisory Officer, Assam, (TRA), along with representatives from various small tea growers' associations and a large group of STGs of the State.



no court has ruled on the indictment, and as outlined by lawyers of the US Department of Justice, these are "allegations and the accused have a presumption of innocence". The CFO, who was the first line of defence when US short-seller Hindenburg Research had accused the ports-to-power conglomerate of fraud in January 2023, said the group became aware of the "specificity" of the US indictment against founder and chairman Gautam Adani two days ago.

"We were aware that something is afoot (and in February 2024 144a offering circular in Risk Factors we disclosed as such. This was the first public issuance of any of our portfolio companies or their subsidiaries or joint venture companies after our annual results of 31st March 2023)," he said.

He, however, did not state what the company had disclosed in February 2024. Adani Group, he said, has a portfolio of 11 public companies and "none are subject to indictment (i.e. defendants in any legal proceedings in the recent DOJ lawyer filings to a court in NYC)".

"None of the issuers (i.e. companies in our portfolio or specific issuers that are subsidiaries of the public companies) are accused of any wrongdoing in the said legal filing," he said. The indictment "relates to one contract of Adani Green, which is roughly 10 per cent of overall business of Adani Green (there is a lot more precise and comprehensive detail of this which we will elaborate in an appropriate forum)," he said. The statement comes two days after Gautam Adani was charged by US prose-

cutors over his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 265 million (about ₹ 2,200 crore) bribes to Indian officials to secure solar energy contracts. The conglomerate has denied the allegations, calling them baseless, and announced plans to seek legal recourse. The Adani Family has 11 listed entities on the Indian stock exchanges - flagship incubator Adani Enterprises Ltd, electricity producer Adani Power Ltd, ports company Adani Ports & SEZ, power transmission firm Adani Energy Solutions Limited, renewable arm Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL), city gas distributor Adani Total Gas Ltd, commodities firm Adani Wilmar Ltd, media firm New Delhi Television Ltd and cement companies Ambuja Cements Limited, ACC Ltd, and Sanghi Industries Ltd.

"There is a lot of news and reports that will try to pick unrelated items and create a headline. My humble request is that we will respond in the fullness of time once we review in detail the matter as presented in the legal filing (Please note that no court has ruled on this and as outlined by lawyers of DOJ these are 'allegations and accused have a presumption of innocence'). We will make a more detailed comment once we get counsel approvals to discuss what we can in public on a matter that is sub-judice," he added. (PTI)

## US SEC summons Gautam Adani, nephew Sagar in bribery case

**NEW YORK, Nov 23:** Adani group founder and chairman Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar have been summoned to explain their stand on the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) allegation of paying USD 265 million (Rs 2,200 crore) in bribes to secure lucrative solar power contracts.

Summons have been sent to Adani's Shantivan Farm residence in Ahmedabad and his nephew Sagar's Bodakdev residence in the same city for a reply to SEC within 21 days.

"Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it)...you must serve on the plaintiff (SEC) an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure," said a November 21 notice sent through the New York Eastern District Court.

"If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court," it added. (AP)

*Contd. from Page 1..*

## BJP-led Mahayuti sways Maha

whose son Uddhav heads the Shiv Sena (UBT). On the other side of the spectrum was Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut who alleged that there was a "big conspiracy" and something was "fishy". Adding that there was little doubt in his mind that money was used in the polls, Raut said, "How can all MLAs of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde win? How can Ajit Pawar, whose betrayal angered Maharashtra, win?" Voters in the politically significant western state, which sends 48 MPs to the Lok Sabha and gave the MVA a decisive 30 seats, clearly decided to go against the trend of that parliamentary victory just five months ago.

The BJP was winning or ahead in 132 seats, close to the halfway mark of 144 on its own, while the Shiv Sena totted 56 and the NCP 41. In contrast, the Congress was ahead in just 16, the Shiv Sena (UBT) in 21 and the NCP (SP) in 10. The mandate gives a fillip to the BJP, which won an unprecedented hat-trick in Haryana last month, and helps the party overcome some of its reverses in the general elections where it bagged just 240 seats. After the certainty of the poll outcome, the focus shifted to BJP leader Devendra Fadnis, the architect of his party's stunning victory. Political circles are abuzz with reports that the state's second Brahmin to become the CM will don the post for the third time. "Leaders of Mahayuti parties will decide (on next CM)," Fadnis said on his part. "Today's verdict shows that the entire community stands united behind Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 'ek hain toh safe hai' slogan has been a success, particularly for ladki bahins (dear sisters) who benefit from this scheme, receiving Rs 1,500 per month," he said. The Maharashtra verdict -- which gives primacy to the BJP within the Mahayuti alliance -- was also the stuff of sober introspection too for the Congress and Maratha strongman Sharad Pawar once considered invincible.

The three Congress big guns in the state - Nana Patole, Balasaheb Thorat and Prithviraj Chavan - were trailing till late evening. The Congress, for which Priyanka Gandhi's win the Wayanad Lok Sabha bypoll is the proverbial silver lining in a dark cloud, counted its reverses in Maharashtra. "It's devastating, heartbreaking for us... The BJP is leading due to the amazing ground work they must've done and seat distribution," Congress spokesperson Lavanya Ballal told deKoder. In the ruling Mahayuti alliance, the BJP contested 149 assembly seats, the Shiv Sena 81 seats, and the Ajit Pawar-led NCP in 59 constituencies. In the MVA combine, the Congress fielded 101 candidates, Shiv Sena (UBT) 95 and the NCP (SP) 86.

In Jharkhand, Chief Minister Hemant Soren expressed his gratitude to the people of the state for the INDIA bloc's stellar performance and said it had passed the exam of democracy. "We are going to get the reward for the work we did... and also for the manner in which we remained connected to the public," Congress leader Rajesh Thakur told PTI Videos as the INDIA bloc neared victory in Jharkhand. The BJP's poll plank was driving out "infiltrators" from the Santhal Parganas region, but it seemed to have fallen flat in front of the 'Adivasi' card played by the JMM, which also sought the people's sympathy over the arrest of Soren. (PTI)

## BJP gains in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar,

of my heart. Your blessings will help us work for the people in the coming days. We all are common people and that is our identity. We are not zamindars, but the custodians of the people," she posted on X. The ruling National People's Party (NPP) in Meghalaya also got a boost as party candidate and Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's wife Mehtab Chandee Agitok Sangma wrested the Gambegre seat from Congress.

The Congress won the byelections to all three assembly seats in Karnataka, wresting one each from the BJP and its ally JD(S). In Kerala, it retained the Palakkad assembly seat while the ruling LDF maintained its hold in Chelakkara assembly seat. Giving credit to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's leadership as well as the five guarantees for the Congress party's success, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said it was a prelude to the 2028 assembly election where the party would once again win. The ruling BJP wrested the Vav assembly constituency in Gujarat from the Congress and retained the Raipur City South assembly seat in Chattisgarh and Kedarnath assembly seat in Uttarakhand.

In Madhya Pradesh, BJP retained the Budhni seat, where byelection was necessitated following the resignation of former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, but suffered a setback as state minister Ramniwas Rawat lost in the Vijaypur assembly seat with the Congress retaining the seat. Rawat had won the seat on a Congress ticket in the 2023 assembly polls but then switched over to the BJP, which made him forest minister in the Mohan Yadav government. He had won from Vijaypur in Sheopur district as a Congress candidate in 1990, 1993, 2003, 2008 and 2013 as well.

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) candidates Aditya Golay and Satish Chandra Rai were on Saturday elected unopposed in the bypolls to Soreng-Chakung and Namchi-Singhithang assembly constituencies, officials said. The assembly bypolls were held in nine seats in Uttar Pradesh, seven seats in Rajasthan, six seats in West Bengal, five seats in Assam, four seats each in Punjab and Bihar, three seats in Karnataka, two seats in Madhya Pradesh and Kerala, and one seat each in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Uttarakhand and Meghalaya. (PTI)

## Himanta deeply pained by BJP's

On November 19, he said in an X post: "Over the past four months, Jharkhand has truly felt like a second home to me." The CM also expressed his gratitude to the people of his state for their support of the NDA candidates through another post on the micro-blogging site. (PTI)

## Priyanka establishes her maiden

all... thank you for showing me the way and having my back, always," she said. Since filing her nomination on October 23, Priyanka Gandhi launched an energetic campaign in the Lok Sabha constituency, which includes three Assembly segments in Wayanad district, three in Malappuram, and one in Kozhikode, reaching out to voters in almost every village in the region. Her mother, husband, son, and brother Rahul, along with top Congress leaders including AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, party general secretaries, and the Chief Ministers of party-ruled states, visited Wayanad when she held a roadshow in Kalpetta just before filing her nomination in October. Priyanka Gandhi's campaign was strongly backed by Congress ally, the Indian Union Muslim League, which has a significant vote share in the constituency.

Rahul Gandhi's decision to resign from the Wayanad seat and retain the Rae Bareilly constituency after winning the two seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in April necessitated the bypoll. Priyanka Gandhi fought back against opposition claims that she would also "abandon the Wayanad seat as her brother did" if elected. The BJP and the Left also alleged that she would not be present in the constituency when the people needed their representative during emergencies. Her victory from Wayanad comes at a time when the hilly region is still struggling to recover from the devastating landslides that struck two villages in Meppadi grama panchayat in July, killing over 200, injuring many, and displacing thousands.

Priyanka Gandhi's entry into Parliament also comes at a difficult time for the party, which has been jolted by electoral defeats in Haryana and Maharashtra. It would be interesting to see if she is able to give a much-needed fillip to the grand old party and help put it back on the electoral track. Often drawing comparisons with her grandmother Indira Gandhi for their similarity in looks and way of speaking, Priyanka Gandhi has been the go-to campaigner for the party since her entry into active politics and even before that when she campaigned for her mother Sonia and brother Rahul.

In New Delhi, the Congress general secretary met party president Kharge at his residence and thanked him for his support during the campaign. With Kharge by her side, Priyanka Gandhi said, "I thank the people of Wayanad for giving me the honour to represent them, for giving me so much love when I was there campaigning and then voting for me in the manner that they have. It's a testament to the fact that my brother worked hard there and their love for him, and their trust in me." "I feel it's a great honour and I will respect it fully... I was just happy getting the love of the people," she told reporters. (PTI)

## UNGA adopts 1st ever treaty

war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide and it has 124 countries that are parties to it. The ICC says crimes against humanity are committed as part of a large-scale attack on civilians and it lists 15 forms including murder, rape, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, sexual slavery, torture, and deportation.

However, the ICC does not have jurisdiction over nearly 70 other countries. There are global treaties that cover war crimes, genocide and torture -- but there has been no specific treaty addressing crimes against humanity. According to sponsors of the resolution, led by Mexico and Gambia and backed by 96 other countries, a new treaty will fill the gap.

Kelly Adams, legal advisor at the Global Justice Centre, also called the resolution "a historic breakthrough" after many delays. Pointing to "the proliferation of crimes against humanity around the world," she expressed hope that a treaty will be "strong, progressive and survivor-centric". Amnesty International's secretary general Agnes Callamand expressed disappointment that the timeline had been extended until 2029, but said, "What's important is that this process will deliver a viable convention." "It is long overdue and all the more welcome at a time when too many states are intent on wrecking international law and universal standards," she said. "It is a clear sign that states are ready to reinforce the international justice framework and clamp down on safe havens from investigation and prosecution for perpetrators of these heinous crimes."

After the resolution's adoption, Gambia's counselor Amadou Jateth, who had introduced it hours earlier, called its approval "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a difference," to hope for a world without crimes against humanity, "and a world where voices of victims are heard louder than their perpetrators." (AP)

## Court seeks ED's response

holders. The Delhi government implemented the policy on November 17, 2021, and scrapped it by the end of September 2022 amid allegations of corruption. (PTI)

## NDA sweeps Assam bypolls

These seats fell vacant following the election of the elected representatives to the Lok Sabha earlier this year. The BJP contested three of the five constituencies -- Behali, Samaguri and Dholai (SC) -- while its alliance partner AGP and UPPL had put up candidates in Bongaigaon and Sidli (ST) seats, respectively. The Congress had contested all the five constituencies. (PTI)



## Two-day zonal cultural festival in Budhamayang

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Nov 23: Morigaon Karbi Cultural Society is holding a two-day zonal cultural festival in Budhamayang, Morigaon district, on November 23 and 24.

On the first day after the inauguration, traditional games competitions were conducted. The main gate in memory of Dharmeswar Killing was inaugurated by Secretary, Karbi Adarbar, Ajit Kathar.

Ganesh Timung inaugurated Hari Prasad Timung memorial cultural evening at 6 pm.

Artists Kamal Rongpi, Prahlad Pratim, Raja Rongpi, Chitrali Bangthai, Richav Kathar and Bhumita Kathar performed in the evening.

## Foundation day celebrated

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Nov 23: The 8th foundation day was celebrated by Delta Public School (DPS) with pomp and gaiety on Saturday.

Like every year, the school committee started the programme with a Bargeet performed by Jyotismita Deka of class 3 student.

Earlier the principal of DPS Ratul Basumatary inaugurated the programme in the presence of chief guest Shyam Subba who delivered a speech on the day at length.

Thereafter students of different classes and teachers performed songs and dances in the programme. The DPS has successfully 8 years since it had established.

# Nirmal Kumar Brahma defeats Suddha Kumar Basumatary UPPL retains 31-Sidli Assembly Constituency, defeats BPF by 36,888 votes



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Nov 23: The ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has retained the 31-Sidli Assembly Constituency by defeating the BPF candidate with a margin of 36,888 votes.

The bye-election results, declared on Saturday, were announced alongside those for four other constituencies in Assam.

UPPL's candidate Nirmal

Kumar Brahma, backed by the NDA alliance, emerged victorious in a triangular contest, defeating Suddha Kumar Basumatary of the BPF. Brahma secured 94,767 votes, while Basumatary received 57,879 votes. On the other hand, Congress candidate Sanjib Wary garnered 7,601 votes.

The bye-election was necessitated following the resignation of Joyanta Basumatary, who was

elected to the Lok Sabha from the Kokrajhar Parliamentary Constituency in June.

Brahma, formerly an MCLA of the Bodoland Territorial Council and currently the president of UPPL's Chirang district committee, thanked voters for their support.

Expressing gratitude to party leaders, workers, and the chief executive member (CEM) of the

Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro, he described the victory as "the people's win."

"I thank the voters, party leaders, workers, and the NDA alliance for their support. I look forward to serving the people of Sidli through social integration and development," Brahma said.

UPPL president and BTR CEM Pramod Boro congratulated Brahma on the win, attributing the victory to the faith voters placed in the UPPL and NDA alliance. He commended the efforts of party workers and alliance partners for their dedication and leadership.

"This remarkable victory reflects the people's trust in our journey toward peace, progress, and good governance," Boro added, thanking BJP National President JP Nadda and Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for their leadership.

In another bye-election, AGP candidate Deeptimoyee Choudhury won the Bongaigaon Assembly Constituency, defeating Congress' Brajenjit Singha by a margin of 32,252 votes. Choudhury secured 70,478 votes, while Singha received 38,225 votes.

## Sonowal credits Maha, Assam bypoll victories to PM's good governance



GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday credited the BJP-led NDA's win in Maharashtra Assembly election and bypolls in Assam on the brand of good governance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He also extended his gratitude to the people of both the states for reposing their trust in the alliance.

"Under the dynamic leadership of Modi ji, the transformative policies have won the hearts of the people across the country. The results of today's assembly elections in Maharashtra and bypolls in Assam are a clear reflection of the people's trust and confidence in the leadership of Modi ji and the NDA government", the Union minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways said

in a statement.

Sonowal expressed gratitude to the people for their support in ensuring NDA's clean sweep of the five seats in Assam Assembly bypolls and also extended his congratulations to the winning candidates.

The BJP leader also acknowledged the contributions of party leaders and workers, who played significant roles in the election campaign. Sonowal maintained that the new era of governance has ushered in peace and prosperity for the North East region.

"The BJP government has brought about rapid infrastructural development in the North East, reducing travel time between states and opening up new opportunities for growth", he added. (PTI)

## BJP snatches Samaguri assembly seat with a historic margin after 2 decades

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Nov 23: BJP candidate Diplu Ranjan Sarma defeated Congress candidate Tanzil Hussain in Samaguri assembly by-election with a huge margin of 24,423 votes on Saturday.

BJP candidate Diplu Ranjan Sarma bagged a total of 81,160 votes while Congress candidate Tanzil Hussain secured 56,737 votes only.

Former Congress minister Rakibul Hussain retained the Samaguri seat in 2001 assembly polls after it was snatched away by then AGP leader Atul Sharma in 1996 assembly polls from his father then Congress minister Lt Nurul Hussain. But since after 2001, Rakibul Hussain dominated the constituency and won the seat consecutively for five times.

As soon as Rakibul Hussain defeated AIUDF supremo Badruddin Ajmal in Dhubri parliamentary constituency in last general election, he had to resign the post of public representative of Samaguri assembly constituency.

It's reported that the administration scheduled only fifteen rounds

in counting of votes for Samaguri by-election. But during counting, three Electoral Voting Machines (EVM) found technical defects as well as other inconvenience, the counting rounds have been extended by the authority concerned from 15 to 19 rounds for especially counting of VV pads and other, sources from district election media cell added.

Following the historic win of Diplu Ranjan Sarma, a young and energetic youths leader in constituency like Samaguri, a minority dominated constituency, the workers and supporters of the ruling saffron became jubilant, celebrating the afternoon with fire crackers nearby the office of the district commissioner as well as its district office.

Besides, it was seen that two state cabinet ministers -Keshab Mahanta and Bimal Bora, BJP MLAs Rupak Sarma, Jitu Goswami, AGP leader Moni Madhab Mahanta and other party leaders rushed to spot of the counting campus, enjoying the historic triumph in Samaguri after two decades.

## Fire damages shops and e-rickshaws repair centre

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Nov 23: In a devastating fire incident, several shops and e-rickshaws repair centre was completely damaged on Friday night.

The fire broke out at the market house of Hafizia and Qariana Madrassa at Dandua on Friday night where it completely destroyed the e-rickshaw sales and repairing shop of one Minarul Haque.

Beside this, a fertiliser shop and a warehouse were also damaged.

As the information of fire incident received, the two fire extinguisher vehicles reached the spot and douse the devastating fire immediately.

Meanwhile, the exact cause of the fire is unknown but locals suspect that it was caused by an electrical short circuit.

## RPF of NFR recovers 49 lost phones of railway passengers

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: In a significant move, 49 mobiles have been successfully recovered with arrest of 12 criminals by RPF/NFR, an official statement said on Saturday.

Tracing stolen and lost mobile phones from trains and railway premises has now become easier for Railway Protection Force (RPF) of NF Railway (NFR).

Once passenger reports their lost/theft mobile phones in the Rail Madad App; Cyber Crime Wing of NFR facilitates tracing the mobile with the help of Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) portal of Department of Telecommunications (DoT).

As of now, the portal is helping in tracing such lost devices across telecom service networks of Assam.

Principal Chief Security Commissioner (PCSC)/NFR coordinated with CID team, Assam Police and Department of Telecommunication of Guwahati to chalk out the access plan for CEIR for NFR.

Representative from PCSC office of NFR coordinated with concerned officials of the Ministry of Communication at New Delhi. Since May, 2024, RPF/NFR started operations by uploading the details of lost/stolen mobiles in the CEIR portal.

As on November 21, 2024, 687 lost/stolen mobiles have been blocked through CEIR portal by RPF/NFR.



So far 277 mobiles got activated and traceability report received on CEIR of the lost/stolen mobile. Out of 277 mobiles, 49 mobiles have been successfully recovered with arrest of 12 criminals by RPF/NFR.

RPF of NFR is the first zonal railway of Indian Railways to get access to this CEIR facility. RPF/NFR is also planning to use to CEIR facility across all the states under its jurisdiction. Rampant incidences of cell-phone thefts from within train compartments and on railway premises have emerged as a serious concern, putting a strain on the resources of RPF. To overcome this, the access to CEIR portal will play a major role in dealing with such type of menace.

## Shramik Kalyan Divas observed in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Nov 23: The Department of Labour in Yuva Dal Auditorium observed the "Shramik Kalyan Divas" in the memory of noted labour leader Santosh Kumar Topno here on Saturday.

Addressing the meeting of the workers and leaders -- Ishanu Shah - deputy labour commissioner said that a new scheme will be made available for all workers which is linked with the Adhar card, and it will benefit all construction workers of the state.

"Collaborating with ILO, two na-

tional seminars were organised to discuss accidental deaths in factories which will provide inputs to workers protection," she added.

On the other hand, Nakul Chawra, adviser of Santosh Kumar Topna Smriti Rakhyia Samity opined that after the death of Topno, the labour minister of the state urged the labour organisations to observe the day officially on November 23 every year.

"The government needs to implement a new scheme to keep alive the memory of Topno," he added.

Dr Anil Kumar Tanti, in his speech said that Topno first organised Chot-

nagpuri Sanmilani Chatra Sangathan which paved the way for the Assam Tea Tribe Students' Association.

"Topno was not a mere labour leader but a visionary for the workers on whose sacrifices the labour community is deriving benefits today," he said.

Rinki Bora, PRO, Sukapha Multi-Specialty Hospital, Manoj Kr Borthakur, journalist, ATTSA district president, Raj Kishore Bhumi, Brojen Baruah, assistant labour commissioner, and Diganta Tasha, former ATTSA leader were present in the meeting.

## Campaign to eradicate social evils' held in Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Nov 23: A block level awareness campaign to eradicate social evils' 'Drive against Superstition' was organised by Aryabhata Science Centre at Padium Pukhuri Higher Secondary School in Assam's Karbi Anglong.

On the occasion, a science-based awareness meeting was held which was chaired by the principal of the school Navneet Kumar Mishra.

The meeting was attended by senior teachers of Padium Pukhuri Higher Secondary School, Dilip Daimari, Haliram Basumatari, Atul Chandra Khakhlari, senior teachers of Howraghat Town Girls Higher Secondary School, Krishna Rajbanshi and Aryabhata Science Center Karbi Anglong district coordinator Bhawananda Khakhlari.

The program was moderated by coordinator, Aryabhata Science Centre, Howrah Zone, Praveen Nath.

Guests spoke about superstitions as how it affected society.

The winners of the science based drawing competition on superstition were awarded prizes.

Similar awareness programs were conducted at Howraghat Town Girls High School, Belguri Higher Secondary School, Okkereng Higher Secondary School and Kajechara ME School since October 26.

## Territorial Army recruitment rally in Kokrajhar extended

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: The Territorial Army recruitment rally which was scheduled to be held on October 10 in Kokrajhar, has now been extended by one day, said an official statement on Saturday.

"In continuation of the advertisement published in Aasomiya Pratidin on October 10, 2024, it is informed that the Territorial Army Recruitment rally at 7 Assam

Police Battalion Ground, Choraikhola, Kokrajhar, Assam, has been extended by one day," the statement read.

The rally will now also be held on November 27, 2024, exclusively for aspirants from the districts of Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri, Chirang, and Tamulpur who participated in the "Police Recruitment Rally" conducted from November 22 to 26, 2024.

# SITA vice chairman visits Kanai Barasi Bowa on 'World Heritage Week' celebration Stressed on protection and preservation of the rich cultural heritage of Assam



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Vice-Chairman Narayan Chandra Borkataky of State Innovation & Transformation Aayog (SITA) visited Kanai Barasi Bowa on the occasion of World Heritage Week celebration on

Saturday.

On the occasion, an awareness meeting was jointly organised by the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam, and the Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture Department in association with the District Administra-

tion, Kamrup.

Addressing a largely-attended meeting, vice-chairman said that they are proud of their nation because of its cultural and archaeological heritage.

"It is our utmost duty to conserve the heritage sites of Assam," he added.

He also spoke at length about preservation and accessibility of cultural heritage which have become essential with the rapid advancements of globalisation and modernisation endeavors constantly threatening historical artifacts and sites across the world.

He further stressed the importance of creating awareness amongst the people for the protection and preservation of the rich cultural heritage of Assam for the next generation.

Adding to it, he also mentioned that he would give utmost support from SITA, Assam in conserving and preservation of the heritage of Assam.

The awareness meeting aimed at preserving and protecting heritage was organised as part of World Heritage Week.

The event was attended by Deba Kumar Mishra, district commissioner, Kamrup; Dr Sudeshna Bhattacharya, director of ABILAC, Dr Bhaskarjyoti Sarma, associate professor dept of language and linguistics, ABILAC and officials from the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam.

## Keherukhunda village embarks on 'Green Revolution'

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Nov 23: In a bid to combat climate change and conserve ecology, keeping in mind the ongoing COP29 in Azerbaijan, a landmark initiative was launched at Keherukhunda Panchayat office on Saturday under Dhekiajuli PS in Sonitpur District.

The project aims to transform Keherukhunda into a model Green Village, setting a precedent for sustainable development in Assam.

The event was organised by Dipankar Sundi, a research fellow, farmer, conservationist and engineer, local stakeholders, including the Keherukhunda Panchayat Committee, Agriculture Development Office, and members of the Keherukhunda Sports Club.

The meeting, chaired by veteran tea planter Chandra Kurmi, was attended by distinguished guests, including Beni Tanti Sundi (Veteran Advocate and Social Worker), Dhruba Deka (agriculture development officer, Dhekiajuli), Batash Orang (social worker), and Sangeeta Deka (fellowship lead, IBTI). Eminent personalities, such as Churamon Rajbongshi, Kushal Kurmi, Jibon Ch Kurmi, Krishna Sundi, Ghanashyam Ghatowar, Lalit Sundi, Jogeshwar Hazam, Narayan Mahato, Ratan Saha, Maheshwar Orang, Naushad Ali also participated in the discussion among other villagers of Ke-



herukhunda and nearby villages.

The meeting was also aired online and joined by Fellows across states like Delhi and Jharkhand and across Borders from Indonesia & Nepal and presided over by Shiphi Singh from IBTI).

"The initiative centers around two primary objectives: the restoration of 100 hectares of natural habitat and the implementation of integrated organic farming practices. These efforts aim to establish a thriving ecosystem, foster sustainable income opportunities for local youth, and unravel the mystery behind the disappearance of the medicinal Keheru fruit, from which the village derives its name. The goal is to revive this vital species naturally, reintegrating it

into the village's ecosystem," Dipankar said.

The attendees brought their conversation full circle by taking a proactive step towards sustainability – planting trees around the Keherukhunda Panchayat office's border. This symbolic gesture not only marked the end of their discussion but also signalled the beginning of their eco-friendly endeavours.

The project is set to commence in 2025, and environmentally conscious individuals from across Assam are invited to join the effort. "Together, let's make Keherukhunda a beacon of sustainability and inspire a greener future for Assam," Dipankar further asserted.



## Editor's pick

## G20: coping with new realities

By: Kumardeep Banarjee

The recently concluded G20 summit in Brazil, could well serve as an early preview in what could be the realignment of global forces in the next year and beyond with the new incoming President of the USA. First, some major optics moments, such as the family picture for G20 leaders, which didn't have US President (of course some others were missing too).

Second, winding down of several commitments from the Delhi declaration to just passing mention regarding the situation in Ukraine and climate finance. Third, the entire G20 summit is being riddled with speculation on whether the multilateral platform would survive a Trump presidency, and if so, with what effectiveness.

The view in Washington DC is similar, especially in the government circles. Every government official, some of whom may have served under Trump's first presidency, is well aware of his working ways. The incoming administration has an additional extra non government supervisor, the world's richest person Elon Musk, who has his own unique style of functioning. Many in DC, understand that their managers have one foot out of the door, and things would change, at least for the next four years post the inauguration on January 20. Trump's foreign policy outlook, if the past presidency is any reference, is likely to be transactional.

Trump can parallel have public shouting matches and back door negotiations with friends and foes. He has already talked about ensuring long lasting peace in Ukraine, at a time, when under President Biden's patronage, US missiles are landing in Russian territory. Similarly, the proposal to impose higher tariffs on Chinese products may sound sweet to many, but knowing the sharp businessman Trump is, he may well cut a sweet deal with President Xi Jinping, which could potentially be of benefit to both nations. On India, Trump has called it out to be the tariff king and likely to make a case for imposing tariffs in reciprocal approach, for sectors where he thinks, US exports are getting impacted.

India's chief economic advisor has already sounded out a cautionary note on incoming Trump presidency. He has been quoted as saying that with Trump administration's views on trade and tariffs, plus a slowing global economy, India may have to look beyond exports as the primary drivers of growth. India has taken several steps such as providing incentives for manufacturing in various sectors, but except for mobile phones, the growth has been slow.

It would not be hard to assume that the sluggish offtake for India for manufacturing in sectors it has recently provided incentives, may well be on the slow lane for some years. What can however, change the game would be the transactional style Mr Trump has, which is well known not just to senior India ministers and bureaucrats but the PM Modi himself (who is known to share a warm relationship with Trump).

Coming back to G20, while Delhi declarations had significant paragraphs on India promoted "not an era of war for Ukraine, the Rio De Janeiro declaration just mentioned, "Specifically concerning the war in Ukraine, while recalling our discussions in New Delhi, we highlight the human suffering and negative added impacts of the war with regard to global food and energy security, supply chains, macro-financial stability, inflation and growth." Clearly the world leaders didn't want to come out with any peace formulas, in face of President Trump assuming office next year.

Similarly, the paragraph on West Asia focused on humanitarian aid, instead of taking either party's side. It read "While expressing our deep concern about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the escalation in Lebanon, we emphasize the urgent need to expand the flow of humanitarian assistance and to reinforce the protection of civilians and demand the lifting of all barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance at scale." (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

## Huge shortage of skilled personnel hits India's renewable energy sector



By: Tirthankar Mitra

India's aim to achieve 500 Giga Watt (GW) of renewable energy capacity by 2030 is facing a roadblock. At this critical juncture it is faced with a shortage of 1.2 million skilled workers in the renewable energy sector. This target is pivotal for the meeting of international climate commitments. It is more than a technical shortcoming.

For it is a stumbling block in the path to realise energy security, energy growth and global leadership in green manufacturing. The gap is likely to widen as this shortage of skilled manpower in a sector which is poised to be the cutting edge of the economy is projected to rise to 1.7 million in 2027.

The entire gamut of green energy ranging from solar panels to batteries to field operations like installations and maintenance is spanned by this deficit. One cannot overlook that government has allocated funds for the skilling programme. But it is inadequate. A 10-fold increase to bridge the gap is advocated by industry leaders.

Funding apart, structural reforms in education and training is essential to step up the skill of the workforce in the renewable energy sector. The traditional curriculum of Indian engineering is not equipped to address the nuances of renewable energy sector.

Institutions imparting engineering education must integrate specialised programmes to prepare the graduates for real world application. These are to be about solar, wind and battery technologies. Partnerships with global energy leaders are called for too. It would facilitate knowledge transfer and enhance local expertise.

The fallout of the skill shortage

is already being felt. It is inflating operational costs and delaying project timelines. The problem is further exacerbated in remote regions where retaining talent is difficult. Rural projects remain understaffed as the personnel tend to gravitate towards urban centres.

Together with employers offering competitive salaries and better compensation packages as well as opportunities for skill development, the government has to more than chip in. It has to prioritise skilling programmes in rural areas creating employment opportunities nearer home for aspiring workers. Targeted training in localised skill hubs in renewable energy areas could go a long way in retaining talent. It would boost both employment and project efficiency.

In this regard, private sector efforts are encouraging. Some private firms have set up dedicated skilling centres focused on green technologies and practical applications. These initiatives are certainly commendable. But they ought to be part of a national strategy which is yet to be rolled out. To meet the growing need of skilled personnel in renewable energy sector, a collaborative approach in involving the government, the industry and the academia is called for.

Renewable energy sector lies at the heart of the country's climate strategy and economic aspirations. Addressing the skill gap is a national imperative. The deficit of skilled workers is renewable energy sector is an essential prerequisite in the country's energy transition journey. The skill shortage gap must not be allowed to yawn any further. An ambitious target is to be achieved. The time to act is now. (IPA Service)

## Narendra Modi should now agree to Opposition demand for setting UP JPC

Media should stop using "alleged" when reporting Gautam Adani's many exploits. Why will someone so stinking rich need to bribe and commit fraud? "Alleged" robs the seriousness of the charge, and partially exonerates the man, who has friends in high places, which is all the more reason for setting up a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe, which will also clear Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the charge of guilt by association.

Gautam Adani has been charged in the United States. Left to Indian agencies, he would have gone scot-free. Adani and his nephew, and a few Adani Group executives, have been charged with "bribery and fraud", crimes committed in India, which makes it imperative that he clear his fair name. The huge money he has pumped into projects in several opposition-ruled states should not be an excuse for clean-chit.

A JPC is not always to indict. A JPC is also a vehicle to come clean. Gautam Adani and his friends in very high places should welcome the Opposition's call for a JPC. That is better than LoP Rahul Gandhi's call for "arrest". But for arrest, the Congress should file FIR in India. The lame-duck Biden Department of Justice apparently has no jurisdiction in India.

What can the court in the United States do except give a bad name to Adani, which it already has? Gautam Adani can't be touched in India unless the Government of India wants to. The charges against Gautam Adani in the US have divided India. One-half led by the Congress wants him nailed to the rafters. The other-half led by friends of the BJP, is laughing at

Rahul Gandhi's "frustrations".

The Congress' target is not Adani, it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Nobody is going after Gautam Adani because he has committed crimes for which he should be punished. Gautam Adani is at the receiving end because he is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "friend" and what are friends for if not to discredit and disfigure character? Gautam Adani has been in the middle of the Opposition's "Oust Modi" campaign. Gautam Adani shouldn't have left himself and his pal Modi vulnerable by bribing government officials for government contracts.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi should agree to a JPC investigation if only to clear his reputation and name. Prime Minister Modi just yesterday was honoured with Guyana's top civilian award and his international image, which he values more than the memory of his dear departed mother, is what keeps him afloat in the most choppy of political waters.

Gautam Adani's name should be cleared for Modi's name to be cleared. The charges against Adani won't dissipate when President-elect Donald Trump assumes office on January 20. Modi cannot just up and ask pal Trump to drop the charges against Adani. There is no guarantee Trump will follow-through, but he might. After all, what are friends for, as Prime Minister Modi himself would admit?

That said, Gautam Adani is not new to charges of wrongdoing. It isn't his fault Prime Minister Modi and Union Home Minister Shah are also Gujarati. When mother-tongue is the same, friendship is thick. Bringing down Gautam Adani will tantamount to bringing down Modi. Gautam Adani cannot protect Modi and should therefore

undergo the JPC test.

The Modi government should not oppose the Opposition's call for setting up a JPC. Gautam Adani's stock is falling and his commitment to honesty is the best policy is left to doubt. Also, this is not the first time Adani has been charged on the international stage. Before being charged with bribery and fraud, crimes committed in his home-country India, Adani was embroiled in the "Hindenburg fiasco".

All this "vindicates" the Opposition's demand for a JPC investigation into "scams" his sprawling financial-industrial complex is said to be involved in. Gautam Adani is the only billionaire in the billion-dollar club whose billions haven't done any good for him. The Congress senses Adani will not escape the international dragnet this time.

The Congress wants "a new and credible" SEBI Chief to investigate the "Adani Mega Scam". SEBI Chief Madhabi Puri Buch is also in the whirl of a storm of her own wrongdoings. Congress communications head Jairam Ramesh said the "indictment of Gautam Adani" by the US Securities and Exchanges Commission vindicates the demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the various "Modani scams".

US prosecutors have charged Gautam Adani with paying bribes totalling \$250 million to Indian bureaucrats to give the Adani Group solar power government contracts, solar energy contracts that would have fetched Adani over \$2 billion in profit after tax!

Congress strategist Jairam Ramesh has charged SEBI with

doing a lousy job investigating the Adani Group. The Congress has been demanding a JPC since January 2023. The Congress asked a "hundred questions" to bring out the various dimensions of the scams and the intimate nexus that existed between Prime Minister Modi and Adani. "These questions have remained unanswered," Ramesh said. "The Congress reiterates its demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee."

The Adani Group's growing monopolisation of key sectors is also the reason why PM Modi should send the Adani nexus to the JPC. LoP Rahul Gandhi is convinced 'Modani' will meet its Waterloo and India's economy will surge once Adani and Modi are out of the way. And India's neighbours will heave a sigh of relief. Is the US indictment a blow to India? US citizen Sam Pitroda says yes, it is a blow to the "Indian name and fame."

"Very surprised and shocked to see that SEC charges three senior executives in two actions alleging (a) massive bribery scheme involving Indian Energy companies #Adani Green and #Azure Power. It is a huge blow to the #Indian name and fame," Pitroda said in a post on 'X'. "I am sure there is more to come." Fact is, the Congress is banking on "more to come".

Congress leader Manish Tewari also sought a JPC into the Adani group's dealings. So did Rajya Sabha member Manoj Jha of Lalu Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal. Tewari called it "JPC into L'Affaire Gautam Adani". Adani and "others" paid bribes and concealed them from US investors is

the charge. Adani also lied to India's stock exchanges BSE & NSE, which is a serious offence. The Congress called it "Adani's criminal activities."

US prosecutors said Gautam Adani and his executives, which includes his nephew Sagar R Adani, paid over \$250 million (Rs 2,100 crore) in bribes to Indian government officials for lucrative solar energy supply contracts, which would have generated more than \$2 billion (Rs 16,800 crore) in net profits. "All of this is consistent with a long record of fraud and criminality carried out with impunity with the obvious protection of the Prime Minister," the Opposition said, while asking for a JPC.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's name is at stake. Wasn't it Modi who said "Na Khaunga Na Khane Doonga"? Gautam Adani escaped scrutiny for a long time and would have gone scot-free but for the "foreign investigators" who investigated his sorties into criminal activities. Left to India's investigating agencies working under BJP supervision; Gautam Adani would have enriched more and more greedy bureaucrats and power-hungry leaders.

The Opposition wants a "new and credible" SEBI head to investigate the "Adani Mega Scam", and a JPC. Pursuing foreign corruption allegations is allowed in the USA if it involves links to American investors or markets. Prime Minister Narendra Modi should not balk at setting up a JPC into "La' Affaire Gautam Adani". History is full of backstabbing friends. At the end of the day, as Sam Pitroda put it, is saving "Indian name and fame", and Sam is no less a Gujarati than Gautam Adani and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. (IPA Service)

## Donald Trump's return reflects the global crisis of centrism

By: Zoltan Zigedy

In the wake of the election, I have read many insightful and thoughtful assessments of how we have arrived at the point where Donald Trump was re-elected. I highly recommend the recent scathing essay by my colleague at Marxism-Leninism Today, Chris Townsend (www.bit.ly/MLTelection), on the crying need for an alternative to the two-party charade and the bankruptcy of the Democratic Party as a representative for working people. But for every good analysis, there are a dozen awful commentaries that ultimately blame the voters' judgement or endorse their worst fears.

However, if pressed for a simple explanation of the election results, one might consider the following: Once again, offered the odious, devil's choice between two candidates who are rich, elitist and completely detached from "ordinary" people, the US voter chose a candidate who was rich, elitist and completely detached from the lives and interests of most people.

Of course, people want to know why the voters chose this particular rich elitist at this particular time. That question calls forth both a specific, practical response and a far deeper, concerning answer.

Polls and disregarded economic data show that most voters have a profoundly negative and often painful relationship with their economic status - they are not doing well. They typically punish incumbents when under economic distress.

This should come as no surprise. But the highly paid consultants of both parties - with approaching two billion dollars to spend - chose to press many other issues as well and deal with the economy only superficially.

But in the end, exit polls show that economic distress played a decisive role in shaping voters' choices. Appar-

ently, the pundits forgot how persistent, value-sucking inflation led to the election of Ronald Reagan 44 years ago.

Again, like today, the 1970s were a period of realignment. The Democrats had lost the South to the Republicans over desegregation and the civil rights legislation. After the Nixonian scandals associated with the Watergate burglaries and other dirty tricks, the Democrats won over suburbanites disgusted with Republican chicaneries - a demographic thought by many functionaries to be the needed replacement for the lost South.

In 1976, the Democrats swept in with a squeaky-clean, untarnished candidate, James Carter. With the decade-long stagflation coming to a climax, the Carter regime was short-lived; despite a rightward turn on his part, Carter was beaten by an ultra-right movie star turned politician, Ronald Reagan. Reagan was the default choice for voters wanting change after a lost decade.

For those who like their history repeating from tragedy to farce, consider the transition from the self-righteous old red-baiter, Reagan, to the pompous, supercilious windbag, Trump. History has a wicked sense of humour.

Few pundits acknowledge that Democratic Party strategists decided in the 1980s that the future of the party would be determined by the interests and concerns of metropolitan voters, especially those in the suburban upper-middle stratum who were "super voters," economically secure and attuned to lifestyle and identity liberalism.

While they represented the legacy of "white flight," the suburbanites contradictorily espoused the urbanity of tolerance and personal choice. Coincident with the embrace of the suburban vote, Democratic Party strategists saw no need to attend to past central components of their coalition: the working class and multi-class blacks.

Loyal union leaders would corral the

working-class vote, and ascendant black leaders would rally African-Americans of all classes.

Besides, it was believed that neither had any other place to go besides the Democratic Party. Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer revealed this thinking in 2016 when he said: "For every blue-collar Democrat we lose in Western Pennsylvania, we will pick up two moderate Republicans in the suburbs in Philadelphia, and you can repeat that in Ohio and Illinois and Wisconsin."

Even before that careless remark, both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama - in moments of candour - revealed their contempt for working people outside of the metropolis.

This election stamped "paid" on this programme, with nearly all the assumed components of the Democratic coalition drifting towards the Republicans.

The always insightful Adam Tooze, writing in the London Review of Books, concludes that the Democratic Party's failings demonstrate "the high-achieving, insincere, vacuous incoherence that thrives at the top of the US political class."

There is, however, a far deeper explanation of the Trump phenomenon seldom mentioned by mainstream commentators. Those who cite the specific issues of abortion rights, immigration, trans rights, crime, racism, etc - issues that indeed played a role in the November election - neglect the fact that Trumpism is part of an international trend that infects the politics of such far-flung countries as India, Japan and Argentina, as well as many European countries for often vastly different reasons.

The rise of right populism in virtually all European countries - Victor Orban's Hungary, Giorgia Meloni's Italy, RN in France, AfD in Germany, Vox in Spain, Chega in Portugal, and similar parties

in virtually every other European country - share one defining feature with the politics of India's Narendra Modi and Argentina's Javier Milei: a rejection of centrist, traditional parties.

Right populism rises as a response to the ineffectiveness of the politics of normality. It reflects the dissatisfaction with business as usual. For hundreds of millions throughout the world, the 21st century has brought a series of crises eroding, even destroying, their quality of life.

Ruling classes have stubbornly refused to address these crises through the indifference of traditional bourgeois political parties.

Voters have punished these parties by turning to opportunist right-populist formations that promise to give voice to their anger. Of course, this often takes the form of ugly, reprehensible claims and slogans - appealing to the basest of motives.

But it is not enough to denounce these backward policies without addressing the desperation that unfortunately popularises those policies. It is not helpful to righteously raise the alarm of "fascism" if we fail to offer an alternative that will answer the hopelessness and misery that serves as the fertile soil for reaction.

From the tragedy of the Reagan election to the farce of the Trump re-election, we have suffered from two sham parties taking turns representing the "people," while neither did. Isn't it time for an independent people's party - a party of the working-class majority - that addresses the 21st century economic crises and their aftermath, the acute environmental crisis, the broken public health and healthcare systems, the insidious impoverishment of inflation, the crumbling infrastructure, and a host of other urgent demands, a party dedicated to serving the working people of the US and not its wealthy and powerful? (IPA Service)

## Ukraine's firing of British missiles deep into Russia is a slur on labour govt

By: Ben Chacko

Every day, another lurch nearer the precipice. The British Establishment appears bent on dragging the country to war without telling anyone. As anticipated, it seems that Keir Starmer has authorised Ukraine to fire British-supplied Storm Shadow missiles deep into Russia and that Kiev has commenced doing so.

The change of policy is of course not really Starmer's. He is merely following the US lead, as ever, reversing his stance because he now has permission from President Joe Biden to do so. It is a decision driven by panic, as the centrist elite worries that its proxy war in Ukraine may be terminated by the arrival of President Donald Trump in office in January. Biden

and Starmer want to make it as difficult as possible for him to follow through on his stated policy of seeking to bring the conflict to an end.

But it is not a decision British ministers want to own up to. There has been no announcement of the change of policy in Parliament. As Jeremy Corbyn rightly asks, Starmer should explain "why this action was taken without any approval from Parliament." Directly challenged on the matter by MPs, Defence Secretary John Healey simply refused to answer, although he confirmed that the government is "doubling down" on its support for the war.

This is beyond irresponsible. Britain is marching into a direct confrontation with a nuclear-armed power without debate or public explanation beyond trite

soundbites. Kiev is now alleging that Russia fired an intercontinental ballistic missile at the city of Dnipro today, although many experts doubt that this is actually the case. There seems no reason for Russia to use a missile designed for use over thousands of miles to strike a target so near to its forces.

Whatever the truth, it is a further sign of an escalating confrontation. It should escape no-one's attention that ballistic missiles could very easily carry nuclear warheads. The alternative to escalation is not surrender by Ukraine, it is negotiation. The British people should demand their politicians change course while there is still time.

TELEGRAPH columnist Allison Pearson is a provocative Farageist who sometimes pays scant regard to facts, and never to

the feelings of those she offends. Last year she published a tweet, since deleted, that could easily be described as racist and was almost certainly a libel on some of those identified.

A year later she was visited by her local police, apparently acting on a complaint that her tweet had incited racial hatred. This has caused much outrage, some of it rather performative. Since she herself deleted the offending tweet, most likely on legal advice, the principles of free speech are hardly engaged.

Nevertheless, it must be concerning when the police visit journalists because of what they have written. Pro-Palestinian writer Asa Winstanley has recently had his home turned over by police because of his opinions and in general this is a form of intimidation

more frequently directed at the left and anti-imperialists.

However, socialists must be consistent in their defence of democratic values, including the right to say things which others find deeply offensive. The alternative - policed speech and a more oppressive bourgeois state - is worse.

This is the consideration of principle in the Pearson affair, although one could also argue that pursuing people over their twittering, where no incitement to violence is involved, is hardly the best use of limited police resources.

Allison Pearson should not be made a martyr. Those many millions who find her opinions objectionable should simply refrain from paying for the Telegraph or following her on X. But leave the police indoors. (IPA Service)



# The Battle of Saraighat: Military strategy and diplomatic intricacies in the Ahom-Mughal conflict

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Battle of Saraighat (1671) unfolded as a multifaceted encounter, blending military prowess with a psychological chess match typical of medieval Indian warfare. The dynamic exchange of diplomacy between Lachit Barphukan and Ram Singh (Ram Singh I) laid bare the profound psychological struggle that played out between these two seasoned generals. In the tapestry of Ahom-Mughal conflict, perceptions and propaganda wove themselves seamlessly into the fabric of the narrative, underscoring the nuanced nature of this historical confrontation.

The Battle of Saraighat marked not only a clash of military might but also a intriguing duel of personalities embodied by the commanders leading the opposing forces - Ram Singh of the Mughals and Lachit Barphukan of the Ahoms. Mirroring each other in background, both commanders hailed from the aristocratic echelons and were scions of esteemed officials in their respective kingdoms. The convergence of these two leaders, with shared lineage and elevated status, added a distinctive layer to the complex tapestry of this historical confrontation.

The Mughal Empire and the Kingdom of Assam bore witness to the convergence of two formidable patriarchs, shaping the destinies of their successors in the Battle of Saraighat. Within the Mughal realm, Jai Singh (Jai Singh I), acclaimed as the Mirza Raja and Raja of Amber, emerged as a seasoned general whose strategic brilliance echoed in campaigns across the Indian sub-continent and Afghanistan. Proficient in the nuances of psychological warfare, Jai Singh achieved a

rare feat by compelling Shivaji to yield at Purandar, escorting him to Aurangzeb's court with his son, Ram Singh.

On the opposing front, Lachit Barphukan's father, Momai Tamuli Barbaruia, held a dual mantle as councillor and commander-in-chief of the Ahom army during the Mughal conflicts in the era of Pratap Singha (1603-1641). Bestowed with executive and judicial powers, the position of Barbaruia carried significant weight. Lachit himself, having fought in the Ahom ranks against Mir Jumla's Mughal forces, embodied the legacy of resistance. The intricate dance of lineage and strategic experiences set the stage for a balanced and compelling struggle between these two adversaries in the impending conflict.

Lachit Barphukan, in August 1667, initiated his march towards Guwahati, setting in motion a sequence of events that would redefine the course of the conflict. By year-end, the Mughals found themselves vanquished and expelled from Kamrup, yielding territories to the Ahoms up to the Manaha (Manas River). In December 1667, news of this setback reached the ears of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, prompting the swift appointment of Ram Singh as the Commander of the imperial Mughal army. Ram Singh, at the helm of a formidable force comprising 18,000 cavalry, 30,000 infantry, 15,000 archers, 5,000 gunners armed with over 1,000 cannons, and a significant navy, descended upon Assam in February 1669. Lachit, ever vigilant, recognized the strategic challenge posed by the Mughal juggernaut.

Acknowledging the impracticality of confronting the enemy at outlying forts, he orchestrated a systematic withdrawal of Ahom forces from Manaha. The

three Rajkhowas overseeing the tactical retreat cleverly positioned themselves beyond the reach of Mughal cannon fire. Under the cover of night, they established riverbank encampments, adorning trunks of plantain with torches. At dawn, they seamlessly sailed ahead of Ram Singh's advancing army. The orchestrated retreat created a deceptive perception of a vast army in retreat, leading Ram Singh to believe in his good fortune, akin to Mir Jumla's unchallenged advance up the Brahmaputra in 1662. On the sixth day of this strategic dance, two sleep-stricken attendees left behind by the Dihingia Rajkhowa were captured by Mughal forces. Presented before Ram Singh, the general surprised them by ordering their release and instructing them to convey a bold message to Barphukan: to engage the Mughals in battle for a mere hour. The stage was set for a battle of wits and tactics in the unfolding saga of Saraighat.

Lachit Barphukan, in a strategic gambit, began assessing his adversary while fortifying an impenetrable defense system in Guwahati. Recognizing the value of time, he engaged in astute negotiations with the Mughals, demonstrating a blend of military acumen and diplomatic finesse. As part of this tactical approach, Barphukan released Firoz Khan, the former Faujadar of Guwahati, from captivity. Through Khan, he conveyed a pointed message to Ram Singh, emphasizing the need to understand the purpose of the Mughal incursion. Barphukan's diplomatic stance was clear: war should not be the sole means of resolving issues, and true wisdom lies in adapting measures to the demands of the situation (Bhuyan, 1947).

In response, Ram Singh articulated his demands—restora-

tion of territories according to the 1639 Treaty and the release of Mughal commanders captured in the previous conflict. Undeterred by the Mughal ultimatum, Lachit Barphukan faced the challenge head-on. Ram Singh provocatively proposed a one-hour confrontation, even offering to supply war materials to the Ahom commanders if shortages plagued their camp (Bhuyan, Baruah). In the delicate dance between negotiation and confrontation, Lachit Barphukan stood poised at the epicenter, orchestrating a symphony of strategy to safeguard the lands of the Ahoms.

Lachit Barphukan, resolute in his defense of Guwahati, issued a firm response to Ram Singh's demands. Emphatically, he asserted that Guwahati and Kamrup were not the rightful domain of the Mughals, but rather, had temporarily fallen into their hands by chance. Barphukan conveyed a profound conviction that the return of these territories to the Ahoms was an act of divine will. He stated, "Now God has been pleased to give it back to us. When He pleases to give it to our brother sovereign, the Mogul Emperor, he will get Gauhati, but not before that."

Undeterred by Ram Singh's provocation for a one-hour battle, Barphukan declared an unwavering commitment to fight as long as a drop of blood coursed through Ahom veins. Addressing the Mughal offer of war materials, he responded with confidence, "Our Majesty, the Heavenly King, has nothing unavailable to him. If the Rajput Raja finds himself in need, let him ask, and I shall endeavor to oblige him" (Bhuyan, p. 49). In this eloquent exchange, Lachit Barphukan wielded both the sword and the pen, asserting the Ahom sovereignty and preparing for a battle where determination and divine favour stood

as formidable allies.

The ebb and flow of diplomatic exchanges persisted, woven into the fabric of psychological warfare. By March 1669, the unfolding drama saw Ram Singh's forces reaching Hajo, a mere 25 kilometers northwest of Guwahati, where they took their strategic stance. In a shrewd move, Ram Singh dispatched a messenger to Lachit Barphukan from Hajo, presenting a bag of poppy seeds along with a message asserting the overwhelming numerical strength of the Mughal army. The message was clear: "The Barphukan should evacuate Guwahati. Our army is as numerous as the poppy seeds in this bag."

Undeterred, the Barphukan responded with a counter-reply that spoke volumes. Sending back a tube filled with sand, he conveyed, "The poppy seeds, if pounded down, will become a thin paste. Our army is as numerous and indissoluble as the sands in the tube despatched herewith" (Bhuyan, 1947, p. 50). In this symbolic exchange, the sands of resolve and unity stood against the ephemeral nature of poppy seeds, signaling the unwavering determination of the Ahom forces in the face of numerical rhetoric.

The Ahom and Mughal forces engaged in sporadic clashes between 1669 and 1670, with losses incurred on both sides. As the monsoons descended, ushering in the flooding season, the Mughal army faced increasing discomfort as their units became detached. Lachit Barphukan, strategic and patient, awaited the depletion of enemy provisions and the potential outbreak of disease. The Ahom forces, demonstrating unwavering vigor, launched guerrilla attacks with precision, emerging from their forts to inflict casualties and swiftly retreating if faced

with a counterattack (Bhuyan, p.56). Ram Singh dismissed these tactics as "thieves' affairs," attributing them to the cunning of his adversary.

In response, Barphukan defended the unconventional approach, stating, "We wanted to test whether Ram Singh possesses stamina to fight on land. It must be remembered that lions alone fight at night, while others fight during the daytime, whether on land or water." Despite Ram Singh's insistence that night engagements were impermissible, Ahom envoys explained that their army, housing a force of one hundred thousand Rakshas or demons, were man-eaters and night-rovers.

Initially skeptical, Ram Singh was ultimately convinced through a clever ruse, leading him to acknowledge the presence of demons and cannibals in the Ahom ranks. This revelation carried significant weight in those times, to the extent that Ram Singh sought the assistance of Guru Tegh Bahadur to counteract these perceived magical forces. The unfolding dynamics hinted at the emergence of an inferiority complex within Ram Singh, a psychological undercurrent in the intricate tapestry of the Ahom-Mughal conflict (Barpujari, p.231).

The Ahom commander, having thwarted Ram Singh's attempts at evacuation through both warfare and negotiations, faced a new challenge orchestrated by the Mughal general. Ram Singh, resorting to psychological tactics, attached a letter to an arrow and launched it into the Ahom camp. The message, addressed to Lachit Barphukan, insinuated that the Ahom leader had accepted a reward of one lakh rupees and signed an agreement to cease hostilities, raising doubts about his commitment to the agreement.

The letter, finding its way to

Gargaon, cast a shadow of suspicion over Lachit Barphukan for a period.

In this critical juncture, Atan Buragohain, the Chief Councillor, played a pivotal role in dispelling the cloud of doubt. He skillfully elucidated the diplomatic ruse to the Ahom king, navigating the crisis with tact and ensuring that the unity among the Ahom commanders remained unscathed. The attempt to sow dissension among the ranks was thwarted, highlighting the resilience and strategic acumen of the Ahom leadership in the face of Mughal machinations.

The Battle of Saraighat unfolded not only on the battlefield but also through the intricate tapestry of diplomatic exchanges between the adversaries. In this dance of diplomacy, the relationship between Ram Singh and Lachit Barphukan bore the weight of mutual respect and regard, even as they engaged in subtle attempts to outwit each other. The ultimate outcome of the battle saw Ram Singh facing defeat, yet in the aftermath, he was generous with his praise for the heroism of Lachit Barphukan. In defeat, Ram Singh's words echoed with admiration and acknowledgment, as he declared, "...Glory to the King, Glory to the Councillors...Glory to the Commanders, Glory to the country. One single individual leads all the forces... Even I, Ram Singh, being personally on the spot, have not been able to find any loophole and an opportunity" (Sinha, 1999). This testament to Lachit Barphukan's leadership and the indomitable spirit of the Ahom forces underscored the profound impact of both military strategy and diplomatic finesse in shaping the narrative of the Battle of Saraighat. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

## Defender of the homeland: The story of Lachit Borphukan

By: Satyabrata Borah

Lachit Borphukan is one of the greatest heroes in the history of Assam and India. He is remembered for his courage, leadership, and unwavering dedication to his homeland. He was a commander in the Ahom kingdom, which ruled Assam for over six centuries. His bravery and intelligence helped protect the Ahom kingdom from the mighty Mughal Empire, which was one of the most powerful empires of the time.

Lachit Borphukan was born in 1622 into a noble family. His father, Momai Tamuli Barbaruia, was a high-ranking official in the Ahom administration. From a young age, Lachit was trained in various aspects of administration, military tactics, and statecraft. He also received formal education in archery, horse riding, and sword fighting, which were essential skills for warriors in that era. These qualities shaped him into a capable and determined leader who was ready to serve his kingdom with loyalty and strength.

The Ahom kingdom faced many threats from the Mughal Empire, which sought to expand its territory into the northeast. The Mughals had already captured large parts of India and were determined to conquer Assam as well. The region was not just strategically important but also rich in resources. The Ahom rulers,

however, fiercely resisted Mughal invasions and stood as a barrier against their expansion. It was during one of these critical times that Lachit Borphukan emerged as the commander who would lead the defense of Assam.

One of the most significant events in Lachit Borphukan's life was the Battle of Saraighat, which took place in 1671. This battle is considered one of the most important in Indian history. The Mughals, under the leadership of Raja Ram Singh, launched a massive attack to capture Assam. They brought a large army and a strong navy, intending to defeat the Ahoms once and for all. The situation was dire, and the Ahom king, Chakradhwaj Singha, entrusted Lachit Borphukan with the responsibility of defending the kingdom.

Lachit Borphukan showed extraordinary leadership and intelligence in preparing for the battle. He understood the strengths and weaknesses of both his own forces and the Mughals. Although the Ahoms were fewer in number and had less advanced weaponry compared to the Mughals, Lachit used clever strategies to level the playing field. He focused on guerrilla warfare, hit-and-run tactics, and the use of the terrain to his advantage.

The Brahmaputra River played a crucial role in this battle, as Lachit knew how to use its currents and narrow passages to trap the

Mughal navy.

The Battle of Saraighat is a testament to Lachit Borphukan's brilliance as a military strategist. Despite being outnumbered, he inspired his troops with his courage and determination. He did not just command from the back but actively participated in the fighting. His famous words, "My country comes first, even before my family," reflect his selfless devotion to Assam. It is said that even when he was unwell, he led his forces with unwavering determination, refusing to rest or step back.

During the battle, Lachit Borphukan displayed remarkable tactical skills. He set up blockades on the river to restrict the movement of the Mughal fleet. He also used small, fast-moving boats to attack the larger Mughal ships. These tactics created confusion and panic among the Mughal forces. The Ahoms also took advantage of the dense forests and narrow waterways to launch surprise attacks. Lachit's leadership ensured that every soldier fought with courage and discipline.

The turning point of the battle came when Lachit Borphukan led a final assault on the Mughal forces. His daring move caught the Mughals off guard, forcing them to retreat. The Mughal army, despite its size and strength, was unable to overcome the strategic brilliance and resilience of the Ahoms. The victory at Saraighat not only saved

Assam from Mughal domination but also became a symbol of resistance against foreign aggression.

Lachit Borphukan's legacy extends far beyond the battlefield. He is celebrated as a hero who defended his homeland with unparalleled courage and determination. His leadership, patriotism, and tactical brilliance have made him an enduring figure in Indian history. Even today, he is remembered and honored for his contributions. The government of Assam observes Lachit Divas every year on November 24 to commemorate his bravery and achievements.

Lachit's story is an inspiration for people of all ages. It teaches us the importance of love for our country and the need to stand up against injustice. His life reminds us that even in the face of overwhelming odds, determination and unity can lead to victory. Lachit Borphukan's name will forever remain etched in the hearts of the people of Assam and India.

Through his actions, Lachit Borphukan has left a legacy of patriotism, resilience, and courage. His victory at Saraighat is a shining example of how leadership and strategy can overcome challenges. His life serves as a reminder of the rich history of Assam and the bravery of its people. As we remember Lachit Borphukan, we honor not just a great warrior but also the spirit of a nation that refuses to bow to external threats.

## The national hero Lachit Barphukan

By: Lalit Nath

Lachit Barphukan is the embodiment of valour, strength, bravery and pride of the Assamese people. This immortal hero's unparalleled courage, profound patriotism, strong leadership and unwavering dedication to duty thwarted the Mughal's ambitions. Lachit, the great Ahom general of Assam, continues to inspire the Assamese nation with his ideals of patriotism across generations.

The Ahom dynasty had a prominent clan called the Lakhurakhan clan, whose ancestors arrived in Assam alongside Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom. From this clan, Momai Tamuli Barbaruia, a visionary, skilled administrator and staunch patriot, emerged as a trusted confidant of Swargadeo Pratap Singha, known as a just and wise king.

Initially appointed as a tamuli due to his brilliance, Momai rose to become the first Borbaruia (chief executive officer) of the Ahom kingdom. Lachit Borphukan, the indomitable leader, was the youngest son of Momai Tamuli Barbaruia and Kunti Moran, later known as Nageshwari Aideo. Lachit had three elder brothers Lalukola, Morangi and Bhadhara.

Born into a royal family, Lachit was educated in both civil and military disciplines. Under the guidance of his father, he acquired knowledge of governance, administration, diplomacy and war tactics, as well as principles of honesty and duty. This education shaped him into a towering personality. Initially, he served as a hachathihara tamuli under Prime Minister Atan Burhagohain, showcasing exceptional skill.

Later, he held positions such as Ghora Barua (in charge of horses), Dulia Barua and Simuluguriya Phukan.

On January 4, 1662, Mir Jumla invaded Assam, capturing Samdhara, Salagarh and Lakhogarh before seizing Garhgaon. The fall of Lakhogarh forced King Jayadhwaj Singha to flee to Namrup. This invasion led to the Ghila Dhari Treaty of 1663, which imposed heavy reparations on Assam, nearly depleting the royal treasury. Humiliated, King Jayadhwaj Singha succumbed to grief in the same year. Being childless, his nephew Supungme (Chakradhwaj Singha) ascended the throne in 1663.

The growing Mughal aggression deeply troubled Chakradhwaj Singha, who declared, as noted by Dr. Suryakumar Bhuyan in 'Lachit Barphukan and His Times': "Death is preferable to a life of subordination to foreigners. I have surrendered my independence for a suit of sewn garments." With this resolve, Chakradhwaj Singha vowed to fight the Mughals but heeded Atan Burhagohain's advice that defeating them required thorough preparation.

For two years, the Ahom kingdom prepared for war, building armaments and a vast fleet. However, the aging Laisai Ghora Konwar Borphukan's inability to lead necessitated a new, energetic commander. On Atan Burhagohain's recommendation, Lachit was appointed Bor-Senapati (chief commander), receiving a golden sword of honour.

By August 20, 1667, Lachit mobilized 150,000 Assamese soldiers, advancing towards Guwahati with an armada. After establishing

camp at Kaliabor, the Assamese army launched surprise attacks, capturing Kajoli, Sonapur and Barnhetri forts and planning to seize the impregnable Itakuli fort. On November 4, a midnight assault led by Lachit overpowered the Mughal forces, reclaiming Guwahati. The Ahoms chased the Mughals beyond the Manas River, restoring their lost territories.

However, Lachit was not content. Following the victory, he supervised fortification efforts along both banks of the Brahmaputra. During an inspection, he discovered negligence by his maternal uncle, Sanda Barua and confronted him. Despite Sanda's defiance, Lachit declared, "My country is dearer to me than my kin," and executed him on the spot to set an example of duty. In 1668, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb sent Raja Ram Singh of Amber with a massive force, including 21 Rajput generals, 4,000 cavalry, 30,000 infantry, and additional troops, to Assam. In February 1669, the bloody Battle of Alaboi claimed 10,000 Ahom lives in a single day. In 1671, as Assamese forces grew weary, the decisive Battle of Saraighat ensued.

Though gravely ill, Lachit led his army, declaring, "I will fight till my last breath. Even if I die, my land will never bow down." Despite their exhaustion, the Assamese forces formed a strategic defense, inflicting heavy losses on the Mughals. Lachit's inspiring leadership culminated in a glorious victory at Saraighat, preserving Assam's independence and leaving an indelible mark on history.

Lachit Borphukan's legacy remains a beacon of patriotism and courage, a testament to the indomitable spirit of Assam.

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Lachit Borphukan remains an enduring symbol of Assamese pride and resilience, celebrated for his unparalleled leadership and valour in the Battle of Saraighat (1671). His name evokes a sense of duty, patriotism, and the indomitable spirit of resistance against foreign domination. At a time when the Mughal Empire sought to expand its influence over the northeastern frontiers of India, Lachit Borphukan emerged as a decisive force that turned the tide of history. The story of Saraighat, intertwined with his heroics, is a testament to the strategic genius and determination that preserved Assam's sovereignty.

Born in 1622, Lachit Borphukan was the son of Momai Tamuli Barbaruia, an influential officer in the Ahom Kingdom. Raised amidst the traditions of the Ahom aristocracy, Lachit imbibed a deep sense of responsibility and loyalty to his kingdom. His education in both military tactics and statecraft prepared him for the challenges that lay ahead. Under King Chakradhwaj Singha, who reigned during a period of sustained Mughal incursions, Lachit was appointed as the Borphukan, the commander-in-chief of the Ahom army. This appointment reflected the king's confidence in Lachit's ability to safeguard the Ahom kingdom, a trust that Lachit would repay in full measure.

The Battle of Saraighat stands as Lachit's most celebrated achievement. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, intent on subjugating the resource-rich Ahom kingdom, dispatched a formidable army under the command of Raja Ram Singh. The Mughal forces, equipped with superior artillery and vast manpower, aimed to crush Assamese resistance and establish Mughal dominance over the Brahmaputra valley. The stakes were high; losing Saraighat would have meant the erosion of Assam's independence and the collapse of its cultural and political identity.

Lachit Borphukan's genius lay in his ability to recognize and exploit the geographical advantages of the Brahmaputra River. Saraighat, located on the river's banks, became the perfect battleground for his unconventional warfare tactics. The Assamese forces, despite being numerically and technologically inferior, displayed remarkable ingenuity under his command. Lachit's strategy was grounded in guerrilla warfare, naval maneuvers, and the adept use of natural terrain to offset the Mughal advantage. His emphasis on speed, surprise, and precision played a crucial role in neutralizing the Mughal forces.

The climax of the battle was marked by Lachit's extraordinary leadership during the final confrontation. Suffering from a debilitating illness, he could have delegated command to his subordinates, but his sense of duty transcended personal suffering. As the Mughals launched a massive assault, Lachit led his fleet into the thick of the battle, inspiring his troops to fight with unparalleled courage. His iconic declaration, "If you want to flee, you may. Tell the king that I, his general, fought well to the last," underscores his steadfast commitment to the cause of freedom. This act of selflessness and bravery galvanized the Assamese soldiers, who repelled the Mughal navy in a decisive victory.

The significance of Lachit Borphukan's victory at Saraighat extends beyond the confines of the battlefield. It marked the first major defeat of the Mughal Empire in the northeastern region, halting its expansionist ambitions in Assam. The victory ensured the preservation of the Ahom kingdom's sovereignty for another century, during which it flourished as a bastion of cultural and political independence. Lachit's

triumph also demonstrated the power of strategic ingenuity and collective resolve, serving as a model of resistance against imperial aggression. Lachit Borphukan's legacy is deeply enshrined in Assamese culture and history. His heroics are celebrated annually on Lachit Divas, observed on November 24, as a reminder of his unparalleled contributions. The Lachit Borphukan Gold Medal, instituted by the National Defence Academy, underscores his relevance as a symbol of military excellence and patriotism. His story transcends regional boundaries, resonating with the universal values of courage, leadership, and self-sacrifice.

However, Lachit's legacy is not without its challenges. The historiography surrounding him has often been shaped by regional and nationalist narratives, which sometimes overlook the broader historical context of the Mughal-Ahom conflict. The tendency to romanticize his achievements risks diminishing the complexity of his strategies and the collective efforts of the Ahom administration. Additionally, the geopolitical implications of the Battle of Saraighat, particularly its impact on the Mughal Empire's northeastern policies, deserve greater scholarly attention. In contemporary times, Lachit Borphukan's legacy assumes renewed significance. His story serves as an inspiration for addressing modern challenges such as cultural preservation, regional identity, and national unity. In a world increasingly driven by global forces, the celebration of figures like Lachit underscores the importance of rootedness and resilience. His leadership offers valuable lessons in crisis management, strategic planning, and the mobilization of collective will, qualities that remain relevant across domains. Moreover, Lachit Borphukan embodies the spirit of resistance against cultural and political subjugation. His actions during the Battle of Saraighat highlight the importance of defending one's heritage and values against external threats. This aspect of his legacy resonates strongly in Assam, where efforts to preserve the region's linguistic, cultural, and ecological heritage often draw inspiration from his example.

The story of Lachit Borphukan is also a reminder of the enduring significance of regional histories in shaping the broader narrative of India. The Ahom kingdom, with its unique administrative system, cultural synthesis, and military achievements, represents a distinctive chapter in Indian history. Lachit's victory at Saraighat exemplifies the resilience of regional powers in resisting centralizing forces, a theme that continues to inform India's federal structure and identity. At the heart of Lachit Borphukan's legacy lies his unwavering commitment to duty and his ability to inspire others to rise above personal and collective limitations. His leadership during the Battle of Saraighat stands as a beacon of hope and resilience, reminding us that even in the face of overwhelming odds, the human spirit is capable of extraordinary feats. As we reflect on his life and achievements, we are reminded of the timeless values of courage, sacrifice, and the unyielding pursuit of justice. In the annals of Indian history, Lachit Borphukan occupies a place of honour not merely as a military commander but as a symbol of Assamese identity and pride. His story continues to inspire generations, urging us to uphold the principles of integrity, perseverance, and unity. As we commemorate his contributions, we reaffirm our commitment to the ideals he so valiantly defended, ensuring that his legacy remains a guiding light for future generations. *(The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*



Israeli bombardment has killed more than 3,500 people in Lebanon and wounded more than 15,000

## 11 killed, dozens injured in Israeli strikes in Beirut as diplomats push for cease-fire

**BEIRUT, Nov 23:** Israeli airstrikes on Saturday killed at least 11 people and injured dozens in central Beirut, as diplomats scrambled to broker a cease-fire.

Lebanon's civil defence said the death toll was provisional as emergency responders were still digging through the rubble looking for survivors. The strikes were the fourth on the Lebanese capital in less than a week.

The escalation comes after US envoy Amos Hochstein travelled to the region this week in an attempt to broker a cease-fire deal to end the more than 13 months of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, which has erupted into full-on war in the past two months.

Israeli bombardment has killed more than 3,500 people in Lebanon and wounded more than 15,000, according to the Lebanese health ministry. It has displaced about 1.2 million, or a quarter of Lebanon's population. On the Israeli side, about 90 soldiers and nearly 50 civilians have been killed by rockets, drones and missiles in northern Israel and in fighting in Lebanon.

The strikes occurred at 4 am local time, destroying an eight-story building and leaving a crater in the ground. Also on Saturday a drone strike killed one person and injured another in the southern



port city of Tyre, according to the state-run National News Agency.

The agency said the people killed and injured in Tyre were fishermen.

An Associated Press journalist, who saw the strike from a nearby hotel overlooking the beach, said he had watched the fishermen set up their nets beforehand and they appeared to both be young teenagers.

The strikes came a day after heavy bombardment of Beirut's southern suburbs and as heavy ground fighting between Israeli forces and Hezbollah militants continues in southern Lebanon, with Israeli troops pushing farther from the border.

Israel's military did not issue a warning for residents to evacuate prior to the strikes in central

Beirut and would not comment on those strikes or on the one in Tyre.

The army said in a statement Saturday, that over the past day it had conducted intelligence-based strikes on Hezbollah targets in Dahiyeh, a Hezbollah stronghold in Beirut's southern suburbs, including on several command centres and weapons storage facilities. The army said prior to the strikes it issued advance warnings to civilians in the area.

Strikes also continued in Gaza on Saturday. At least six people were killed, half of them children, and two women, in the southern city of Khan Younis, according to Associated Press reporters and staff at Nasser hospital.

After the attack, AP reporters saw people grieving over what appeared to be the lifeless body of a

man, and bloodied children were seen helping each other away from the wreckage.

The death toll in the fighting in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Hamas has surpassed 44,000 this week, according to local health officials. The Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count, but it has said that more than half of the fatalities are women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year.

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

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

## At least 37 killed in sectarian violence in Pak's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

**PESHAWAR, Nov 23:** At least 37 people have been killed and over two dozen others injured in tribal sectarian violence in northwest Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province during the last 24 hours, police said on Saturday.

The clashes between Alizai and Bagan tribes in Kurram district, bordering Afghanistan, took place following Thursday's attack on a convoy of passenger vans near Parachinar in which 47 people were killed.

Top ranking officials from the administration and police have rushed to the area in a helicopter.

"At least 37 are dead as at now (but) the death toll is still rising," an official tasked with collecting details of the carnage told the media here.

More than 30 people are injured, he added.

The tribes are targeting each other with heavy and automatic weapons, police said.

Homes and shops have been damaged in the fighting and people from various villages have fled to safer locations. All educational institutions in the district remained closed on Saturday, confirmed Muhammad Hayat Hassan, chairman of the Private Education Network. Videos shared from the area showed at least six bodies of the attackers and some charred bodies of the victims. Police also said that there were reports of six women taken as captives but "due to limited connectivity, information and communication is scant to ascertain anything more."

Gunfire continued in Balishkhel, Khar Kali, Kunj Alizai and Maqbal through the day, police said, adding, currently there is intermittent firing from at least three areas in the district, while the Thall-Sada-Parachinar Highway remained closed from traffic towards Kohat district.

As officials struggled to reinforce peace in the volatile region, communication from the elders of both the tribal sects suggested further intensified attacks.

A high-level government delegation comprising Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Law Minister, Chief Secretary and Inspector General of Police, has departed for Kurram tribal district by helicopter, officials said.

The delegation aims to calm the security situation in the district which has been marred by extreme sectarian violence.

Tribal leaders have expressed deep concerns as for the past one and a half months, they had been demanding the government to ensure safe travel for common citizens. Two weeks ago, more than 1,00,000 people participated in a peace march to reopen and secure the main highway, after which the government assured them of safe convoys.

In September, more than 50 people were killed and 120 others injured in clashes spread over eight days between Shia and Sunni tribes over a piece of land in Kurram district.

The intensity of the fighting had led to the closure of the Parachinar-Peshawar main road and the Pak-Afghan Kharlachi border, disrupting transportation and movement. The road blockade has caused a shortage of essential items, including food, fuel, and medicines, worsening the situation for residents.

The fighting had spread to areas such as Balishkhel, Sada, Khar Kallay, Peewar and Maqbal in the district, which borders Afghanistan's Khost, Paktia, Logar and Nangarhar provinces, which are considered strongholds of the ISIS and the Pakistan Taliban.

Similar clashes in the same region in July left dozens of people dead and more than 225 injured. (PTI)



## Sri Lanka's new govt gets IMF approval for fourth tranche of USD 3 billion

**COLOMBO, Nov 23:** Sri Lanka's new NPP government on Saturday got the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approval for a staff-level agreement to secure the fourth tranche of the nearly USD 3 billion bailout facility.

"Once the review is approved by the IMF management and completed by the IMF executive board, Sri Lanka will have access to about USD 333 million," a statement issued by the international money lender here at the end of the third review said.

The previous Ranil Wickremesinghe administration entered the IMF bailout in March 2023 at the height of the island's economic bankruptcy.

However, in the run-up to the September presidential election at which Wickremesinghe was defeated, the National People's Power (NPP) and incumbent President Anura Kumara Disanayake were critical of the bailout, especially its rigid reforms which made the 75-year-old president unpopular.

After forming the government, they have assured the continuation of the programme. "The new govern-

ment's commitment to the programme's objectives has enhanced confidence and ensures policy continuity," the IMF said.

The IMF stressed that Sri Lanka's reform agenda was delivering results.

"The economy expanded on average by four per cent in the four quarters ending June 2024," the Washington-based money lender said.

The IMF said Sri Lanka reaching an agreement with private bondholders has put debt on a path of sustainability.

"The new government's mandate will reinvigorate governance reforms addressing corruption risks, rebuilding economic confidence and making growth more robust and inclusive," the IMF said.

Sri Lanka's economic reform programme is supported by the IMF's Extended Fund Facility.

A few days ago, Disanayake met the IMF's Sri Lanka mission chief Peter Breuer and the delegation. He urged the IMF team to consider the economic hardships faced by the people and strike a balance in the economic recovery programme. (PTI)

## South Korea will not attend Sado mines memorial event in Japan amid lingering historical tensions

**SEOUL, Nov 23:** South Korea's government said on Saturday it will not attend a memorial service near Japan's Sado Island Gold Mines due to disagreements with Tokyo over the event, which stirred longstanding tensions over the abuse of Korean forced labourers at the site before the end of World War II.

The decision marked a rare display of friction between the countries since the 2022 inauguration of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol. Yoon has prioritised improving relations with Japan following years of disputes over their bitter history and solidifying three-way security cooperation with Washington to counter North Korean nuclear threats, but has faced accusations at home that he was neglecting the suffering of Korean survivors.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said in a statement it was impossible to settle the disagreements between both governments before the planned event near the mines on Sunday.

Masashi Mizobuchi, assistant press secretary at Japan's Foreign Ministry, called the South Korean decision "disappointing."

He said Japan has thoroughly communicated with the South Korean side, but declined to comment on details of the diplomatic exchanges.

Some South Koreans had criticised Yoon's government for throwing its support behind an event without securing a clear Japanese commitment to highlight the plight of Korean labourers.

South Korean sentiment over the event worsened after the Japanese government said this week it would send Akiko Ikuma, a parliamentary vice minister, to the event. Ikuma had reportedly visited Tokyo's controversial Yasukuni Shrine following her election as a lawmaker in 2022.

The shrine honours the country's 2.5 million



war dead, including convicted war criminals. Japan's neighbours view the shrine as a symbol of the country's past militarism.

In an interview with MBN television, South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul acknowledged that Ikuma's Yasukuni visit was an issue of contention between the countries' diplomats.

"That issue and various other disagreements between diplomatic officials remain unresolved, and with only a few hours remaining until the event, we concluded that there wasn't sufficient time to resolve these differences," Cho said. "We notified them of our decision in the afternoon."

There were also complaints over South Korea agreeing to pay for the travel expenses of Korean victims' family members who were invited to attend the ceremony.

Ties between Seoul and Tokyo have long been complicated by grievances related to Japan's brutal rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945, when hundreds of thousands of Koreans were mobilised as forced labourers for Japanese companies, or sex slaves at Tokyo's military-run brothels during World War II.

Many forced labourers are already dead and survivors are in their 90s.

Historians say hundreds of Koreans were forced to labour at the Sado mines under abusive and brutal conditions during World War II.

Japan's government has said Sunday's ceremony will pay tribute to "all workers" who died at the mines, without specifying who they are. Critics saw this as part of a persistent policy of whitewashing Japan's history of sexual and labour exploitation before and during the war.

The 16th-century mines on the island of Sado, off the western coast of Niigata prefecture, operated for nearly 400 years before closing in 1989 and were once the world's largest gold producer.

The mines were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site earlier this year after Tokyo and Seoul settled a yearslong dispute. South Korea withdrew its opposition to the listing after Japan agreed to acknowledge Korean suffering more clearly in the site's exhibition and to include Koreans in a memorial ceremony.

Mizobuchi said Tokyo expects that the event will be held by the local representatives as planned, in line with a Japanese government statement released during the July meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage committee, where it was decided to register the mines as a cultural heritage site.

In 2023, Yoon took a major step toward improving ties with Japan that had deteriorated for years over historical grievances and trade disputes, by announcing a plan to compensate Korean forced labourers from the colonial period without requiring contributions from Japanese companies.

Yoon's plan, which relies on money raised in South Korea, drew an immediate backlash at home from former forced laborers and their supporters, who had demanded direct compensation from the Japanese companies and a fresh apology from the Japanese government. (AP)

## NATO head, Trump meet in Florida for talks on global security

**BRUSSELS, Nov 23:** US President-elect Donald Trump and the head of NATO have met for talks on global security, the military alliance said on Saturday.

In a brief statement, NATO said Trump and its secretary general, Mark Rutte, met on Friday in Palm Beach, Florida.

"They discussed the range of global security issues facing the Alliance," the statement said without giving details.

It appeared to be Rutte's first meeting with Trump since his November 5 election. Rutte had previously congratulated Trump and said "this leadership will again be key to keeping our Alliance strong" and that he looked forward to working with him.

Trump has for years expressed scepticism about the Western alliance and complained about the defence spending of many of its member nations, which he regarded as too low. He depicted NATO allies as leeches on the US military and openly questioned the value of the alliance that has defined American foreign policy for decades. He threatened not to defend NATO members that fail to meet defence-spending goals.

Rutte and his team also met Trump's pick as national security adviser, US Rep. Michael Waltz, and other members of the president-elect's national security team, the NATO statement said.

Rutte took over at the helm of NATO in October. (AP)

## Philippine VP publicly threatens to have President assassinated

**MANILA, Nov 23:** Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte said on Saturday she has contracted an assassin to kill the President, his wife and the House of Representatives speaker if she herself is killed, in a brazen public threat that she warned was not a joke.

Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin referred the "active threat" against President Ferdinand Marcos Jr to an elite presidential guards force "for immediate proper action". It was not immediately clear what actions would be taken against the vice president.

The Presidential Security Command immediately boosted Marcos' security and said it considered the Vice President's threat, which was "made so brazenly in public," a national security issue.

The security force said it was "coordinating with law enforcement agencies to detect, deter, and defend against any and all threats to the president and the first family". Marcos ran with Duterte as his vice-presidential running mate in the May 2022 elections and both won with landslide victories on a campaign call of national unity.

The two leaders and their camps, however, rapidly had a bitter falling-out over key differences, including in their approaches to China's aggressive actions in the disputed South

China Sea. Duterte resigned from the Marcos Cabinet in June as education secretary and head of an anti-insurgency body.

Like her equally outspoken father, former President Rodrigo Duterte, the vice president became a vocal critic of Marcos, his wife Liza Araneta-Marcos and House Speaker Martin Romualdez, the president's ally and cousin, accusing them of corruption, incompetence and politically persecuting the Duterte family and its close supporters.

Her latest tirade was set off by the decision by House members allied with Romualdez and Marcos to detain her chief of staff, Zuleika Lopez, who was accused of hampering a congressional inquiry into the possible misuse of her budget as vice president and education secretary. Lopez was later transferred to a hospital after falling ill and wept when she heard of a plan to temporarily lock her up in a women's prison.

In a pre-dawn online news conference, an angry Sara Duterte accused Marcos of incompetence as a president and of being a liar, along with his wife and the House speaker in explosive-laden remarks.

When asked about concerns over her security, the 46-year-old lawyer suggested there was an unspecified plot to kill her. "Don't worry about my security because I've talked with some-

body. I said 'if I'm killed, you'll kill BBM, Liza Araneta and Martin Romualdez. No joke, no joke,'" the vice president said without elaborating and using the initials that many use to call the president.

"I've given my order. If I die, don't stop until you've killed them." And he said, "yes," the vice president said. Under the Philippine penal code, such public remarks may constitute a crime of threatening to inflict a wrong on a person or his family and is punishable by a jail term and fine.

Amid the political divisions, military chief Gen Romeo Brawner issued a statement with an assurance that the 160,000-member Armed Forces of the Philippines would remain non-partisan "with utmost respect for our democratic institutions and civilian authority".

"We call for calm and resolve," Brawner said. "We reiterate our need to stand together against those who will try to break our bonds as Filipinos." The former president denied authorizing extrajudicial killings under his crackdown but has given conflicting statements. He told a public Philippine Senate inquiry last month that he had maintained a "death squad" of gangsters to kill other criminals when he was mayor of southern Davao city. (AP)

## Polish PM's party picks Warsaw mayor as its candidate for President

**WARSAW, Nov 23:** Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski has been selected by Prime Minister Donald Tusk's centrist Civic Coalition as its candidate in next year's presidential election, beating out Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski.

Tusk announced the decision at a party gathering on Saturday, a day after more than 22,000 party members voted in a primary. Tusk said that Trzaskowski won nearly 75% of the votes, and Sikorski slightly over 25%. Political observers in Poland say that Tusk's party has already put itself in a strong position ahead of the presidential election by showing that it had two strong candidates, generating a buzz around them, and by allowing party members to choose in a democratic process.

"We are responsible people, we are responsible for the fate of our homeland today," Tusk told supporters at the party event. He also noted that it is only the start. The primary process distinguishes Tusk's party from its main rival, the national conservative Law and Justice party, known by its acronym PiS, whose candidate will be handpicked by leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

In PiS, one vote matters, while we value every vote, and that's how we differ," Trzaskowski told party members in his acceptance speech. "I'm convinced that we're coming out of this elections stronger, we're all stronger, and I have a very strong mandate and a lot of energy, determination and courage to beat PiS." Sikorski accepted the result and congratulated Trzaskowski. Trzaskowski has long been considered the obvious candidate for Tusk's party, but was recently challenged by Sikorski, who has also held the role of foreign minister and defense minister in past governments and has ties in Washington. He argued that his experience made him the better choice at a time of war in neighboring Ukraine and political change in the United States. (AP)

## Royal tour of India in offing for King Charles, Queen Camilla: media report

**LONDON, Nov 23:** Britain's King Charles III is planning an official visit to India in the near future as part of a government charm offensive and an added boost for his health since a cancer diagnosis earlier in the year, a UK media report claimed on Saturday.

According to the 'Daily Mirror', the visit will also include stops in Pakistan and Bangladesh as part of a subcontinent tour that had been abandoned in the wake of his mother Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022.

The 76-year-old monarch and his wife, Queen Camilla, 77, made a "private stopover" at a wellness resort in Bengaluru last month on their way back from Australia and Samoa and are believed to be planning a return.

"It's hugely encouraging to be able to make such plans for the King and Queen given the year the monarch has had, but it's very much full steam ahead," the newspaper quoted a source

as saying. "A tour of the Indian subcontinent is in the offing, which will be of huge political and cultural significance for Britain on the world stage. The King and Queen are the perfect ambassadors at such a time," the source said.

Buckingham Palace had revealed the King's cancer diagnosis in February and a spokesperson has since confirmed that with his medical treatment progressing well they were considering a "pretty normal-looking full overseas tour programme for next year".

Against that backdrop and the recent meeting between Prime Ministers Keir Starmer and Narendra Modi at the G20 Summit in Brazil, Downing Street is said to be keen on drafting the senior royals to launch a so-called charm offensive as post-Brexit Britain seeks to establish closer economic ties with India. "Foreign Office officials have been given the green light to open discussions with potential host nations for royal visits, and proposals for tours of India, Pakistan and

Bangladesh are being drafted. Indian PM Narendra Modi is understood to have expressed his desire to host the King and Queen Camilla after they had to cancel their trip last time," the 'Daily Mirror' report claims.

The couple's last official visit to India was in 2019, when Charles was the Prince of Wales, with the focus areas being climate change, sustainability and social finance. More recently in October, they stopped over at the Soukya International Holistic Health Centre (SIHHC) in Whitefield, a suburb of Bengaluru, to "help break the long journey back" from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa.

According to palace officials, it was not health related or linked with the King's ongoing medical treatment for the unspecified form of cancer. The private stop was reportedly factored in as part of appropriate periods of rest advised by Charles' doctors as part of the first long-distance royal tour since his diagnosis.

Both the King and Queen are known for their affinity with the concept of holistic health and wellness, with Charles and Modi known to have discussed the many benefits of yoga and ayurveda during the latter's UK visit back in April 2018. (PTI)





## Meghalaya CM's wife Chandee wins Gambegre bypoll

SKM nominees elected unopposed from two assembly seats

**SHILLONG, Nov 23:** In a boost to the ruling National People's Party (NPP) in Meghalaya, party candidate and chief minister's wife Mehtab Chandee Agitok Sangma won the Gambegre constituency bypoll by a margin of over 4,500 votes.

Chandee secured 12,679 votes while her nearest candidate Sadhiarani M Sangma of AITC managed to secure 8,084 votes, followed by Congress' Jingjang M Marak with 7,695 votes.

With this win, the NPP strength in the House increased to 32 in the 60-member Meghalaya Legislative Assembly.

BJP's Bernard N Marak secured 710 votes whereas two independent candidates, Jerry A Sangma and Sengkrabir M Marak, bagged 706 and 147 votes, respectively.

In her reaction soon after getting elected, Chandee said, "We were hopeful that we will win and that



is what has happened".

Chief minister Conrad K Sangma said the result was on expected lines as the people of Gambegre wanted for change especially in terms of develop-

ment.

"We are very happy that the people of Gambegre voted for development and we are committed to that. I take this opportunity to thank the people of Gambegre,"

said Sangma.

"Voters are intelligent. They know what is good for them and how they should vote in every election. In this election, people have voted specifically for change in terms of the constituency and development," he said.

On the other hand, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) candidates Aditya Golay and Satish Chandra Rai were on Saturday elected unopposed in the bypolls to Soreng-Chakung and Namchi-Singhithang assembly constituencies, officials said.

Golay was the only candidate in the fray for the bypolls to Soreng-Chakung seat after SDF's Probin Hang Subba withdrew his nomination.

Rai was elected unopposed from Namchi-Singhithang assembly constituency as he was the sole candidate in the fray, following the withdrawal of candidature by SDF nominee Daniel Rai. (PTI)

## 2 more arrested for arson at residences of MLAs

**IMPHAL, Nov 23:** Two more persons were arrested in Manipur for allegedly being involved in vandalism and arson at residences of legislators in Imphal Valley on November 16, police said on Saturday.

With these arrests, the number of people apprehended for arson at the residences of MLAs reached 34, a senior officer said.

Police also said that they are examining inputs and looking for additional suspects in various localities of Imphal Valley for arson incidents on November 16.

An investigation into the incidents of vandalism and arson at the residences of legislators is underway, the officer said.

The violence escalated after three women and three children belonging to the Meitei community had gone missing from a relief camp in Jiribam district after a gunfight between security forces and suspected Kuki-Zo



militants resulted in the deaths of 10 insurgents on November 11. Bodies of those six were later found.

Mobs set fire to the residences of three BJP legislators, one of whom is a senior minister, and a Congress MLA in various districts of Imphal Valley where an

indefinite curfew has been clamped.

At least 258 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year. (PTI)

## Court to review NEHU case on December 6



**SHILLONG, Nov 23:** The Meghalaya High Court recently decided to review the situation in the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) on December 6, after the inquiry committee probing allegations against the incumbent vice chancellor Prof PS Shukla and administrative irregularities submitted its report and recommendations.

In its order passed after hearing a PIL, the bench comprising of Chief justice IP Mukherji and justice B Bhattacharjee said, "We think that at this stage, it would be fit and proper for this Court to wait for the report of the committee, its recommendations and any 'corrective actions' if any that may be recommended by the committee and taken by the University. We adjourn this matter till December 6, 2024, to review the situation."

The Court also noted with satisfaction that the hunger strike by a section of students of NEHU has been called off after the pronouncement of its order on November 20. "As noted in our earlier order dated November 20, 2024, an order dated November 14, 2024 was made by the Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi appointing a committee to inquire into the allegations against the Vice Chancellor and also those relating to administrative irregularities in the University."

The committee was directed to submit its report within a period of 15 days from the date of issuance of the order "along with necessary recommendations for corrective actions". This stipulated time expires on November 29, 2024, the court said in its order. (NNN)

## Manipur ethnic violence claimed 258 lives since May last year

**IMPHAL, Nov 23:** The ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur has claimed 258 lives since May last year, the state government's security advisor Kuldeep Singh said on Friday.

He said that the state would get around 90 companies of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), over and above the 198 companies that are already in Manipur.

"The total number of deaths is 258 including militants," Singh while addressing a press conference after holding a security review meeting here.

The security advisor said that 32 people were arrested in connection with vandalism and torching of properties of ministers and MLAs while around 3,000 looted weapons have been recovered.

"We are getting approximately 90 companies of CAPF, over and above the 198 companies which were earlier sent to the state. A sizeable number of them have already reached Imphal. We are



distributing forces to protect the lives and properties of the citizens and vulnerable points," Singh said.

The authorities would set up coordination cells and joint control rooms in each district, he said after the meeting which was attended by representatives of the Army, BSF, CRPF, Assam Rifles, SSB, ITBP and the Manipur Police.

"A number of SOPs (standard operating procedure) have been prepared for deployment of forces for coordination, for functioning, for fringe area security, for national highways security, and for any other important points which have to be taken care of," Singh said.

Chief minister N Biren Singh would be briefed about the outcome of the meeting as is done in all similar cases, he said.

He said that nine bodies, including those of the victims including those of the six abducted and killed in Jiribam, were buried peacefully under tight security.

The bodies include three women and three children, who were allegedly abducted from a relief camp on November 11 by Kuki-Zo militants from Jiribam's Borobekra area when a group of Kuki youths were engaged in an encounter with CRPF in which 10 of them were killed.

"The CRPF post was attacked during which 10 militants were neu-

tralised. Soon after that, it came to light that three women and three children were abducted," Singh said.

It will be found out whether the abduction happened in presence of the security forces, he said.

No information is available if the militants involved in the abduction belonged to Suspension of Operations (SoO) groups but it will be checked, Singh said adding that NIA is looking into the cases.

The SoO pact was signed by the Centre, the Manipur government and two conglomerates of Kuki militant outfits - Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF). The pact was signed in 2008 and extended periodically thereafter.

The violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups, besides inflicting heavy casualties, rendered thousands of people homeless since May last year. (PTI)

## Maha win shows PM's development-oriented policies intact: Khandu



**ITANAGAR, Nov 23:** Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu on Saturday said that the NDA's massive victory in the assembly elections in Maharashtra proved that the aura of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's development-oriented policies was intact.

The counting of votes showed that the saffron party-led coalition was heading for a landslide victory in Maharashtra, with the BJP having won 68 seats and leading in 65 others in the 288-member House. Its allies Shiv Sena won 35 and was leading in 22 others and NCP won 29 and was leading in 12 others seats, as per the latest trends available with the EC website till 6 pm.

"Stunning victory of @BJP4India in Maharashtra assembly has once again proved that

the aura of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji's development-oriented policies is intact. Amazing result, indeed! Salute to the dedication and hard work of BJP Karyakartas!" Khandu posted on X.

The chief minister said that under Modi's leadership, the country witnessed unparalleled trust and progress.

"Under Hon PM PM Shri @narendramodi Ji's visionary leadership, the nation continues to witness unparalleled trust and progress," the chief minister said on the micro-blogging site.

"Maharashtra has set a historic milestone with the biggest coalition victory since 1972! A resounding mandate for development and good governance," Khandu added. (PTI)

## TTDC tea sold for ₹ 213 per kg at auction

**AGARTALA, Nov 23:** Finished tea of Tripura Tea Development Corporation Ltd (TTDC) sold at an average price of ₹ 213 per kg at the Guwahati tea auction centre, the highest-ever price earned by the government-run public sector undertaking, an official said.

Last year the average selling price of finished tea of TTDC was pegged at ₹ 129 per kg at auction markets. The northeastern state, which has 54 tea gardens and 24 tea processing factories, produces 90 lakh kg to 1 lakh kg of finished tea annually.

"The TTDC for the first time sold finished tea at an average price of ₹ 213 per kg at auction markets which is the highest ever price earned by the corporation. This is a big achievement not only for TTDC but also for hundreds of small tea growers who supply tea leaves to us", TTDC chairman Samir Ranjan Ghosh told PTI on Friday.

TTDC has produced around 6.84 lakh kg of finished tea in the current year (2024-25) till October, 2024 while it had produced 7.18 lakh kg of finished tea during 2023-24 financial year.

"After joining TTDC, I emphasized quality right from plucking to finished product to get a better price at auction markets. I told the small tea growers that if

they supply quality leaves, we will get the best price. From collection to finished product we maintained quality and it paid off", Ghosh said.

Asserting that the tea sector had largely been ignored in the northeastern state in the past, he said it was the BJP-led government that had given due importance to the tea industry since 2018.

"A logo has been unveiled for the state's tea to promote the tea on the national stage. Besides, tea produced in the state has been named as Tripureswari tea. An ₹ 85 crore scheme for development of tea industry and tea workers was launched. All these factors have contributed to the present day's tea industry", Ghosh said.

"Having knowledge about tea industry, I personally talked to registered brokers at the Guwahati auction market to bring the best price for the finished tea produced by TTDC", he said.

At present, the TTDC runs two tea processing factories one at Durgabari and another at Brahmkunda in West Tripura.

"With growing demand for finished tea of TTDC, construction work has already begun for setting up another tea processing unit at Machmara in Unakoti district", he added. (PTI)

## Last rites of 9 people held in Jiribam

**IMPHAL, Nov 23:** The last rites of the nine persons, including three women and three children, belonging to the Meitei community were held amid tight security in Manipur's Jiribam district on Friday, officials said.

The bodies were brought to Jiribam from the nearby Silchar Medical College and Hospital in Assam's Cachar district with hundreds of people lining the two sides of the road to pay their tributes.

The bodies were taken to the SMCH for post-mortem examinations. They were brought back after the Joint Action Committee, formed in response to the killing of these nine people, relented as the state government referred the case to the NIA for investigation.

A few people, including three women and three children, went missing after a gunfight between security forces and armed Kuk-Zo men broke out on November 11.

The gunfight broke out after these armed men allegedly attacked the Borobekra police station and an adjacent CRPF camp, which led to the deaths of 10 suspected insurgents. These missing women and children, allegedly abducted by the retreating insurgents, were living in a relief camp that was running in the police station's compound.

A day after the attack, the charred bodies of two elderly men were found in the burnt debris of torched houses and shops at the nearby Jakuradorh market.

In the following days, the bodies of the missing women and children were found floating in the Jiri and Barak rivers in Jiribam and Assam's Cachar district, respectively. (PTI)

## NSCN-IM survives till date despite conspiracy: Leader

**DIMAPUR, Nov 23:** One of the top NSCN-IM leaders, Rh Raising, a 'member of collective leadership' of the organisation, talked about how the NSCN survived till today in spite of attacks and plans by traitors and by various other forces to destroy the organisation. He also talked about the Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015, saying that it is one of the "options" where India and Nagas can meet".

In a statement issued recently, Rh Raising said, "We all talk of unity and solution: NSCN talks of unity and solution. The state politicians talk of unity and solution. The civil society organisations talk of unity and solution. The Church leaders talk of unity and solution. The Naga intellectuals talk of unity and solution. Even the Indian leaders talk of unity and solution, but the sage says unity and solution are not the issues, the heart of the matter is the basis of unity and solution". The NSCN-IM leader also said that the Naga people led by the past leadership created a political situation for a political solution, but that finest opportunity was murdered by a few Naga traitors in the name of the so-called 16-point agreement. However, the agreement was condemned and rejected by the Naga people, he added.

Rh Raising then said the Naga people again created another conducive atmosphere for political talks. Thus, the first ceasefire agreement was signed on September 6, 1964 for political talks. But talk failed as both the parties took their respective rigid stands, he pointed out. In order to find an amicable solution R. Suissa worked out an option for a solution called 'Suissa's proposal.' It was a kind of solution which is transitional to the final goal, Rh Raising said. But it was rejected by the hardliners to be regretted later. Before long, they brought the infamous Shillong Accord of November 11, 1975, Rh Raising added.

The statement then said, "However, the Naga people under the dynamic leadership of Isak and

Muivah continued the movement under the banner of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim. After forty years of confrontations, the government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim finally signed the historic Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015".

According to Raising, the Framework Agreement also says that the Nagas and India will coexist as two entities, but the Nagas will not merge with India. "There will be a joint defence in the event of invasion on Nagalim by any external forces. The Nagas will be using the Indian passport with Naga nationality/Indian for a certain period of time. There will be a joint venture in the case of drilling oil in Nagalim. But Nagas will exercise their sovereign power in the matter of their own affairs," Raising added.

He also said that the Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015, "recognizes the unique history of Naga independence; the sovereignty of the Nagas, the identity of the Nagas, the territory of the Nagas, and the integration of all Nagas areas". According to the NSCN-IM leader, the Framework Agreement also talks about peaceful coexistence of the two entities sharing sovereign power.

In the past, according to Raising, the Indians and the Nagas took diametrically opposite stands so that the parallel lines saw no meeting point. The Framework Agreement is one of the options where India and Nagas can meet, he said. It will guarantee the future of the Nagas and strengthen the security of India, Raising stated. The Framework Agreement is the kind of solution the two parties have been looking for, he also said. It is one of the options for a solution, but never a roadblock, the NSCN-IM leader added. It will be a great mistake on the part of the Indian and Naga leaders who interpret the Framework Agreement from Indian constitutional perspective, Raising further said. "The problem is political which calls for a political solution. It is never a constitutional

problem of India," he added.

Since the government of India has recognized the sovereignty of the Nagas, no one can twist its interpretation, he said. Flag and constitution are the composite materials of sovereignty. Sovereignty without flag and constitution is a form without content, the NSCN-IM reasoned.

"Our chief negotiator Mr. Th. Muivah said a solution without a flag and constitution would be unacceptable to the Naga people. Solution without the Naga flag and constitution would be a repetition of the past mistakes," Raising stated.

He then said, "This battle will decide our future. We cannot afford to lose it. If we lose this battle - our land, our identity, our culture, our literature, our history, our politics, our religion, our future and everything of us will fall from us. That will be an irreparable loss for the Nagas. For the Nagas, it is a do or die battle. Our survival strategy lies in resistance to the aggressors or we perish".

The NSCN-IM leader also said enemies in the form of Naga traitors tried to finish the NSCN, but "we survived by his grace". Enemies in the name of Khaplang tried to liquidate the Naga revolutionary patriots, but "we survived by his grace," Raising also said. Enemies in coalition with the enemies of the Naga people tried to uproot the NSCN, but "we survived by his grace," he further said.

Again, enemies of all hues have started forming coalition forces to give a final blow to the NSCN, but "we will stay the course in the name of the Lord, God of the Nagas," the NSCN-IM leader also said. "We cannot run away from our country, from our people and from our God. We do not fear any power because the mighty name of the Lord is with us".

The NSCN-IM leader then concluded by saying, "Let us look up to the Lord and rebuilds our faith. Victory of a battle is decided by the Spirit of the Lord, neither by might nor by power of man. Ours is the Lord's battle". (NNN)

## Tripura CM to inaugurate Tourism Promo Fest-2024 on December 3

First-ever tourism promotion festival in Tripura aimed at increasing tourist footfall

**AGARTALA, Nov 23:** Tripura chief minister Manik Saha is slated to inaugurate Tripura Tourism Promo Fest-2024 on December 3 in Gomati district, a senior minister said on Saturday.

The first-ever tourism promotion festival in Tripura aimed at increasing tourist footfall in the northeastern state by 39-50 per cent will be organised in four popular destinations till December 14.

"Chief minister Manik Saha is scheduled to inaugurate Tripura Tourism Promo Fest-2024 on December 3 at Narikel Kunja in Gomati district," state Tourism Minister Sushant Chowdhury told the reporters.

He said musical concerts involving local bands, traditional cos-



time show showcasing the culture of the tribes of the state and indigenous food festival will be organised during the programme.

Various events will be organised at Neermahal Water Palace in Sepahijala on December 9, while sev-

eral other programmes will be held at Jampui Hill in North Tripura district on December 11, he said.

Chowdhury said the main programme will be held at Vivekananda Ground in Agartala from December 12 to 14.

"Our main objective is to promote the state's tourism, culture and heritage not only at the national level but also internationally. We want to increase tourist footfall in the state by 30-50 per cent. Around 40 top tourist operators of the country will be invited to the festival," he said.

Eminent playback singer Shreya Ghoshal will enthral attendees at the closing ceremony at Vivekananda Ground in Agartala on December 14, he said.

Prashanta Badal Negi, the director of the Tourism Department, said a programme will be held on various aspects of the tourism sector in Tripura in which tourist operators from outside the state will take part. (PTI)



# No row over Maharashtra CM's post; leaders of Mahayuti will decide: Fadnavis

**MUMBAI, Nov 23:** Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday said there was no dispute over the chief minister's post and leaders of Mahayuti will decide on the issue together as the saffron party-led coalition is heading for a landslide victory.

Addressing reporters, Fadnavis said the results of the Maharashtra assembly polls show that the state supports PM Narendra Modi and also thanked women voters.

"The opposition's efforts to propagate a fake narrative, and polarise voters based on religion was foiled by masses," said Fadnavis.

The deputy CM said he succeeded in breaking the 'chakravayuh' of opposition due to the support of voters, the BJP team and party leaders.

With some leaders in BJP demanding that Fadnavis don the mantle of the next CM, the BJP stalwart said there was no row over the CM's post in Mahayuti-comprising BJP, Shiv Sena, and NCP.

"Leaders of Mahayuti parties will decide (on next CM)," Fadnavis told reporters in Mumbai.

He said the people of Maharashtra have shown that the party headed by Eknath Shinde is the real Shiv Sena of Balasaheb Thackeray.

Fadnavis expressed gratitude to the beneficiaries of the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana, highlighting its impact on women in the state.

"Today's verdict shows that the entire community stands united behind Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 'ek hain toh safe hai' slogan has been a success, particularly for ladki bahins (dear sisters)



who benefit from this scheme, receiving Rs 1,500 per month," he said.

The deputy chief minister further noted that the Maha Vikas Agadhi propagated a false narrative, which the BJP and its allied organisations successfully countered.

"The issue of polarisation arose during the campaign, but thanks to the efforts of certain seers and our party workers, we were able to maintain unity among people," he said.

Acknowledging the contributions of grassroots workers of the Mahayuti, he said the victory was a testament to their dedication and unity.

Fadnavis also extended his thanks to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, saying, "His energising presence and the support of our national president J P Nadda, Union Ministers Nitin Gadkari, Bhupendra Yadav and Piyush Goyal, played a crucial role in our success."

"We humbly bow before the people of Maharashtra, who stood against the poisonous campaign directed at us."

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies are poised for a landslide win in the Maharashtra assembly elections, with the party expected to secure more than 130 out of 288 seats.

Fadnavis said, "Our party also helped our allies and candidates in their victories, with CM Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena winning more than 50 seats and Ajit Pawar's NCP leading in 40 seats."

He expressed the importance of having a strong opposition, assuring that irrespective of their numbers, they would be respected in the assembly.

The deputy chief minister rubbished Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut's charge about EVMs and parties facing defeat must find out the true cause for their loss.

"When the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Congress ally) wins elections, EVMs there are tamper-proof, but they are sup-

posedly vulnerable in Maharashtra. The opposition should stop making such claims. I am not big enough to advise them, but they need to introspect," he said.

Fadnavis further said that Union Home Minister Amit Shah had already made it clear that there was no formula for the chief minister's post.

"We will discuss this with CM Shinde and Ajit Pawar. There is no confusion or conflict over it. It was decided quite early. These individuals will discuss it, and it will be acceptable to them. Ajit Pawar and I are going to meet Shinde at his official residence, Varsha," he said.

The deputy chief minister said the people of the state have decided, and now the legitimacy of Balasaheb Thackeray's Shiv Sena is with Eknath Shinde, and the NCP is with Ajit Pawar.

On Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange's criticism of him, Fadnavis said, "When you consistently target one person, it loses momentum and intensity. People realise the truth behind it, which can create sympathy towards that person. The MVA deliberately targeted us, but gradually, the public learned about us, and our track record worked in our favour, leading to their support."

The BJP and Shiv Sena alliance initially secured the mandate in the 2019 assembly elections, only for the latter to form the MVA government with the Congress and NCP.

Fadnavis said, "I have not taken any revenge. It is the people who decide who to elect. Perhaps this time, the public stood with us. I do not evaluate my opposition by their numbers. I can achieve so much with my party's support." (PTI)

## TMC hits a six: Sweeps by-polls, snatches one from BJP

*RG Kar protests fail to impact voters*



**KOLKATA, Nov 23:** The TMC swept by-polls in West Bengal on Saturday, retaining five seats and wresting Madarihat from BJP, further cementing its political dominance in West Bengal, even as the ongoing protests over the RG Kar incident failed to sway voters.

The bypolls were held in six constituencies — Naihati, Haroa, Medinipur, Taldangra, Sitai (SC), and Madarihat (ST) — following the resignation of MLAs who had vacated their assembly seats after securing victories in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

These elections held on November 13 were seen as a crucial test for the ruling party amid a politically charged atmosphere, with protests over the RG Kar issue intensifying.

Despite these protests, the TMC emerged victorious across the board, in both rural and urban areas, continuing its winning streak of 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Five of the six constituencies are located in South Bengal, a TMC stronghold, while Madarihat is in the north, which the BJP had won in 2021. In Haroa, where over 70 per cent of the voters belongs to the minority community, the BJP came a distant third and failed to retain its deposit, prompting party leader Suwendu Adhikari to comment: "Minorities don't vote for BJP".

The CPI(M)-led Left Front, which had hoped to capitalise on the RG Kar protests to revive its fortunes, faced a crushing defeat, losing its deposit in Sitai, Taldangra, Medinipur and Madarihat.

Its ally CPI (ML) Liberation too lost its deposit in Naihati, while the All India Secular Front (ISF) faced the same fate in Haroa. The Congress, which contested without an alliance with the Left for the first time since 2021 but fared no better, lost deposits in all six constituencies.

In Sitai (SC), TMC's Sangita Roy won by a margin of 1,30,636 over BJP's Dipak Kumar Ray, who garnered only 35,348 votes. TMC's vote share surged to 76 per cent, compared to 49 per cent in the 2021 state elections, while the BJP's share plummeted from 45 per cent to just 16 per cent.

The Madarihat (ST) seat, previously held by the BJP, marked another significant victory for the TMC. The ruling party's Jayprakash Toppo won with 79,186 votes, securing a lead of 28,168 votes over BJP's Rahul Lohar.

This victory is historic for the TMC, as it marks the first time the party has taken control of Madarihat, a key seat in the tea garden belt. Differences between BJP's Alipurdur MP Manoj Tigga and former union minister John Barla over selection of the candidate seem to have cost the seat for the party.

The TMC's vote share surged to 54.05 per cent, while the BJP's share dropped to 34 per cent, nearly mirroring TMC's vote share of 34.13 per cent in 2021.

In Naihati, TMC's Sanat Dey won with 78,772 votes, defeating BJP's Rupak Mitra by 49,277 votes. TMC's vote share increased to 62.97 per cent, up from 50 per cent in 2021, while BJP's share fell to 23.58 per cent, a significant drop from 38 per cent in 2021. In Haroa, TMC's SK Rabiul Islam won with 1,57,072 votes, maintaining a commanding margin of 1,31,388 votes over Piyarul Islam of the ISF, who secured only 25,684 votes.

This result underscores TMC's dominance among minorities in South Bengal. TMC's vote share surged to 76.63 per cent, while the ISF managed just 12.53 per cent, compared to 57.34 per cent for the TMC in 2021.

In Medinipur, TMC's Sujoy Hazra won with 115,104 votes, a margin of 33,996 votes over BJP's Subhajit Roy, who secured 81,108 votes.

TMC's vote share reached 53.43 per cent, compared to the BJP's 37.67 per cent, reflecting a similar outcome to 2021, when TMC had 50.72 per cent and the BJP had 40.51 per cent in this tribal-dominated seat.

In Taldangra, TMC's Falguni Singhbabu won by bagging 98,926 votes, maintaining a margin of 34,082 votes over BJP's Ananya Roy Chakrabarty. The TMC increased its vote share to 52 per cent, up from 46 per cent in 2021, while the BJP's share dropped to 34 per cent from 39.9 per cent.

West Bengal chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee expressed her gratitude to the people of the state for their continued support, saying, "I would like to thank and congratulate the 'Maa, Mati, and Manush' from the bottom of my heart. Your blessings will help us work for the people in the coming days," in a social media post.

TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee congratulated all six TMC candidates for their decisive victories, claiming they had "defied the narratives created by the Zamindars, the media, and a section of the Calcutta High Court to defame Bengal for their own vested interests."

He also expressed special thanks to the people of Madarihat. "I bow before the people of West Bengal for democratically dismantling the Bangla Birodhis, their fake narratives, and reaffirming their trust in us."

BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar downplayed the significance of the results. "Bypoll results cannot serve as a reliable indicator. Whether the people are with the TMC or against them will be reflected in the upcoming assembly elections," Majumdar said. (PTI)

## Look forward to being your voice in Parliament: Priyanka to people of Wayanad



**NEW DELHI, Nov 23:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said on Saturday that she looks forward to being the voice of the people of Wayanad in Parliament and thanked Rahul Gandhi for "showing her the way and having her back always".

Her remarks came after she took an unassailable lead of over 4 lakh votes in the byelection to Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in Kerala.

The Congress general secretary also met party president Mallikarjun Kharge at his residence here and thanked him for his support during the campaign.

With Kharge by her side, Priyanka Gandhi said, "I thank the people of Wayanad for giving me the honour to represent them, for giving me so much love when I was there campaigning and then voting for me in the manner that they have. It's a testament to the fact that my brother worked hard there and their love for him, and their trust in me."

"I feel it's a great honour and I will respect it fully... I was just happy getting the love of the people," she told reporters.

Earlier, in a post on X, Priyanka Gandhi said, "My dearest sisters and brothers of Wayanad, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the trust you have placed in me. I will make sure that over time, you truly feel this victory has been your

victory and the person you chose to represent you understands your hopes and dreams and fights for you as one of your own."

"I look forward to being your voice in Parliament!" she said.

After winning from Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, as well, in this year's polls, Rahul vacated the Wayanad seat, and the party nominated his sister Priyanka, paving the way for her electoral debut.

"My colleagues in the UDF, leaders from across Kerala, workers, volunteers and my office colleagues who worked incredibly hard in this campaign, thank you for your support, for tolerating my 12-hour a day (no food, no rest) car journeys, and for fighting like true soldiers for the ideals we all believe in," Priyanka Gandhi said.

"To my mother, Robert and my two jewels - Raihan and Miraya, no gratitude is ever enough for the love and courage you give me. And to my brother, Rahul, you are the bravest of them all... thank you for showing me the way and having my back, always!" she added.

Earlier, Congress general secretary, in-charge organisation, K C Venugopal also congratulated the people of Wayanad for having elected a "fierce and committed" leader as their voice in Parliament.

"The love reposed by all sections of Wayanad shows that the Congress flag will always fly high! Just as Rahul Gandhi ji always kept the interest of the people of Wayanad as his priority, Priyanka ji will also ensure that the welfare of every segment of society is looked after and their concerns are heard in Delhi," she said.

"On behalf of the entire Congress party, I convey immense gratitude to the people of Wayanad for their continued support and we will always remain committed to your welfare!" he said. (PTI)

## BJP leaders laud Maha win as people's faith in Modi's leadership

**NEW DELHI, Nov 23:** BJP leaders, including Union ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, on Saturday hailed the party's grand win in Maharashtra as people's faith in the "double-engine" government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Thanking people for the "historic victory" of the Mahayuti alliance, Shah said that by giving such a "huge mandate amidst illusion and lies," people have shut shops of "fake well-wishers" of the Constitution — a swipe at the opposition-led alliance, which had flagged the alleged threat to the Constitution from the saffron party and used claim as its main call to voters.

BJP president J P Nadda said the landslide victory of the alliance was a reflection of the people's unwavering faith in the welfare policies and good governance of the double-engine government under Modi's able leadership. Rajnath Singh said the mandate underscored the people's trust in the BJP's commitment to good governance and development, and the credibility of the prime minister's stewardship.

Amit Shah on X said, "Jai Maharashtra! Heartfelt gratitude to the people of Maharashtra for this historic mandate."

Maharashtra, the holy land of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, B R Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and Veer Savarkar, has always kept culture and nation supreme along with development, the BJP leader said.

"By giving such a huge mandate to the Mahayuti alliance amidst illusion and lies, the

people have closed the shops of those who are fake well-wishers of the Constitution. This victory is the victory of every Maharashtra resident," he said.

The victory of the Mahayuti alliance is the victory of "politics of performance" of the double-engine government, he added.

Nadda said people of the state completely rejected the dynastic, appeasement and divisive politics of the opposition, including the Congress. The BJP president said his party accepted the mandate received in the Jharkhand assembly elections, where it suffered a big defeat from the incumbent Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led alliance.

In a democracy, people's mandate is paramount, he said.

Shah praised the BJP workers in Jharkhand and asserted that fulfilling the aspirations of tribal society and protecting their identity was the top priority for his party.

"The NDA's central government is committed to the development, progress and protection of tribal heritage of the people of Jharkhand and under the leadership of Modi ji, we will continue to work in this direction. The BJP will play the role of a positive opposition in Jharkhand," he said.

Union minister Nitin Gadkari said the BJP-led alliance consistently prioritised development.

"I firmly believe that the double-engine government, inspired by PM Modi's vision, will accelerate the state's growth to greater heights," he said. (PTI)

## Hemant Soren-led alliance all set to retain Jharkhand; BJP emerges as second largest party

**RANCHI, Nov 23:** Hemant Soren's JMM-led alliance was all set to retain Jharkhand as it was leading in at least 56 seats in the 81-member state assembly, as per Election Commission data on Saturday afternoon.

The performance of the BJP-led NDA, which was confident about its prospects in the state after an aggressive campaign, was poorer than its expectations. It was leading in just 23 seats.

The BJP's poll plank was driving out "infiltrators" from the Santhal Parganas region, but it seemed to have fallen flat in front of the 'Adivasi' card played by the JMM, which also sought the people's sympathy over the arrest of Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

Also, bickering within the BJP over giving nominations to turncoats seemed to have cost the party.

According to the latest EC figures, the JMM was leading in 33 of the 43 seats it contested, the Congress was ahead in 16 of the 30 seats where it fielded candidates, the RJD pulled a surprise and was leading in five of the six seats it fought, while the CPI(ML) Liberation was ahead in two of the four seats it fought.

The ruling coalition witnessed friendly fights in some seats. The BJP was leading in 21 of the 68 seats it contested, while the LJP (Ram Vilas) was leading in the lone seat it fought, and the JD(U) was ahead in one of the two seats it contested. The AJSU Party was virtually wiped out with its candidates, in-

cluding chief Sudesh Mahto, trailing in all 10 seats it contested.

The majority mark in the assembly is 41.

The chief minister was leading in the Barhait seat by 20,469 votes after 12 rounds of counting. His wife Kalpana Soren, credited with revitalising the JMM after the arrest of her husband, was leading by 1,612 votes in the Gandey seat after 14 rounds.

State BJP president Babulal Marandi was leading in the Dhanwar seat by 16,691 votes, former CM Champai Soren was nearing victory in Serailakea with a lead of 28,905 votes and Leader of Opposition Amar Kumar Bauri was trailing in the Chandankiari seat by 33,426 votes. (PTI)

## Pets, street animals suffer as pollution levels rise in Delhi

**NEW DELHI, Nov 23:** Rising pollution levels in Delhi are impacting pets and street animals, causing health issues and behavioural changes that have concerned pet owners and animal welfare activists, veterinarians said.

Many animals are experiencing respiratory problems, with symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, vomiting, diarrhea, and chest congestion attributed to the city's worsening air quality, they said.

Sumit Nagar, a consulting veterinary doctor with the Delhi Forest and Wildlife Department, said that there has been an increase in cases of respiratory distress among animals.

Animals face issues similar to humans, including suffocation, lung damage, and respiratory inflammation. During during Diwali, there are additional cases of shock from noise pollution and burns, particularly in monkeys that accidentally touch wires, he said.

Pet owners are taking measures such as limiting outdoor walks to



protect their pets from toxic air, but this has led to behavioural issues like pent-up energy and aggression in some dogs.

"The morning smog makes it difficult to take my dogs for walks. Exposure to toxic air causes them to cough and vomit," Sujata Bhat-tacharya, a resident of Pitampura said.

"Since masks are not an option for them, we have reduced outdoor time, but this has made them more aggressive. Outdoor activities are crucial for dogs to release energy, but even bathroom breaks expose them to harmful air," she said.

Cat owners have also observed changes, with many reporting their pets experiencing eye irritation

and sneezing while avoiding outdoor spaces. Ranjana Mukherjee, a pet owner from Gurugram said that her three cats have been sneezing and suffering from eye irritation.

She said her cats have stopped going outdoors, which is unusual for them and they seem low on energy due to the prevailing conditions.

For street animals, the situation is even worse. Reduced visibility during smoggy mornings and nights has led to an increase in hit-and-run cases, some animal activists claimed.

"Low visibility makes driving dangerous, and street animals often fall victim to accidents. Without shelter or protection, they are especially vulnerable," said Kanika Diwan, an animal welfare activist. Street animal feeders are also facing challenges.

"The number of feeders has decreased because of the pollution. There's little awareness about how poor air quality impacts animals. Governments often ignore their is-

sues because animals don't vote," said Gaurav, a feeder from Dwarka.

Sanjay Mohapatra, founder of a non-governmental organization, 'House of Stray Animals', emphasised the harmful effects of toxic air on street animals.

"Pollution irritates their eyes and skin, particularly for those living near industrial areas or busy roads. The situation is dire," he said.

Delhi has been grappling with a severe pollution crisis over the past few days, with a thick layer of smog enveloping the city particularly during early mornings and evenings.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) has consistently remained in the "severe" category in several areas, posing significant health risks to residents.

## Devendra Fadnavis emerges as Maharashtra's man of the moment

**MUMBAI, Nov 23:** Devendra Fadnavis, the political stalwart who rose from humble beginnings to become a key figure in Maharashtra politics, is on course to regain chief minister's post — a position he has held twice before. The 54-year-old leader, whose career has been marked by a blend of resilience and strategic manoeuvring, is positioned to lead the state for the third time following a decisive showing of the BJP in the assembly polls.

Fadnavis' political journey has been nothing short of remarkable. From serving as an obscure corporator to becoming the youngest mayor of Nagpur, he has strengthened his status as a prominent leader within his party. Notably, he is only the second Brahmin to serve as Chief Minister of Maharashtra, following the Shiv Sena's Manohar Joshi.

His ascent began in earnest ahead of the 2014 assembly elections, where he garnered significant support from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior BJP leader Amit

Shah. Modi famously referred to him as "Nagpur's gift to the country" during a campaign rally, underscoring the confidence placed in Fadnavis.

Though Modi had launched a campaign blitzkrieg in the 2014 Lok Sabha and Maharashtra assembly polls, a portion of the credit also went to Fadnavis, then state BJP president, for the party's unprecedented victories in the elections.

Son of Jan Sangh and later BJP leader late Gandharv Fadnavis, whom his fellow Nagpur politician and former BJP chief Nitin Gadkari calls his "political guru", Devendra cut his teeth in politics at a young age when he joined Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the students wing of RSS, in 1989.

At 22, he became a corporator in the Nagpur civic body and its youngest Mayor in 1997 at the age of 27. Fadnavis contested his first assembly election in 1999 and won. There was no looking back for him as he won three subsequent assembly elections. (PTI)



# Not many takers for NOTA in these assembly polls

**NEW DELHI, Nov 23:** The NOTA option once again found few takers, with 0.75 per cent of the electorate pressing the button in Maharashtra and 1.32 per cent in Jharkhand. Votes for the assembly elections in these two states were counted on Saturday. According to Election Commission (EC) data, less than one per cent (0.75 per cent) electors used the 'none of the above' or NOTA option in Maharashtra where elections were held for 288 seats.

In Jharkhand, a little over one per cent (1.32 per cent) of the electorate exercised the option.

According to the EC, Maharashtra witnessed a 65.02 per cent voter turnout in its single-phase polls on November 20.

Jharkhand recorded a voter turnout of 66.65 per cent in the first phase and 68.45 per cent in the second phase on November 13 and November 20, respectively.

In the previous set of assembly polls, more voters in Jammu and Kashmir used the NOTA option



against those in Haryana.

In the elections to the 90-member Haryana Assembly, out of over two crore electors, 67.90 per cent had exercised their franchise. Of these, 0.38 per cent had used the NOTA option.

Introduced in 2013, the NOTA option on electronic voting machines (EVMs) has its own symbol

-- a ballot paper with a black cross across it.

The EC added the NOTA button on EVMs as the last option on the voting panel after a September 2013 Supreme Court order. Before the apex court's order, those not inclined to vote for any candidate had the option of filling what is popularly called Form 49-O.

But filling out the form at the polling station under Rule 49-O of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, compromised the secrecy of the voter.

The Supreme Court had, however, refused to direct the EC to hold fresh polls if the majority of the electorate exercised the NOTA option while voting.

Recently, former chief election commissioner OP Rawat had said, "In the present situation, NOTA has only symbolic significance and it cannot have an impact on the election result of any seat."

"More than 50 per cent electors will have to opt for NOTA in a seat to show the political community that they do not consider candidates with criminal backgrounds or other undeserving ones worthy of their votes. Only after this, pressure on Parliament and the Election Commission will increase and they will have to think about changing laws to make NOTA effective on the election results," he had said. (PTI)

# India's first Constitution Museum chronicles values and ideas that shaped country

**SONIPAT (HARYANA), Nov 23:** India's first Constitution Museum opened at the O P Jindal Global University is designed to provide the citizens with a deep and engaging exploration of the Constitution's essential elements and key provisions that helped shape the nation.

The first-of-its-kind museum was inaugurated by Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Saturday in the presence of university chancellor and BJP MP Naveen Jindal.

At the museum, the visitors can immerse themselves in the sights and sounds of pre-Independence India through a 360-degree visual spectacle. Equipped with cutting-edge technology and multimedia storytelling, the exhibit unfolds the chronological tapestry of events leading to the drafting of the Constitution.

The aim is to make the Constitution both accessible and relevant, demonstrating how its values and ideals have shaped the nation, Professor C Raj Kumar, founding vice-chancellor of the university, said.

"All of us just visited the Constitution Museum. It was certainly an amazing experience, far beyond what I had imagined," Naveen Jindal said. "I plan to spend a whole day at the museum as it would teach me a lot more about the Constitution than by just reading it," Jindal added.

A collaboration between the O P Jindal Global University and IIT Madras, the museum offers a unique experience through a tour guide robot called 'SAMVID' to commemorate the most significant document that defines India as a republic, Kumar said.

The museum is dedicated to commemorating the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution on November 26, 1949.

On display at the museum is one of the 1,000 photolithographic reproductions of the Constitution.



The elaborately crafted original edition which took nearly five years to complete bears the signatures of the framers of the Constitution.

Prem Behari Narain Raizada rendered the calligraphy, while Nandalal Bose and other artists illustrated the original text. The manuscript was published in Dehradun and photolithographed by the Survey of India.

Anchita B Nair, CEO, Culture, and Head, Centre for Museums, has curated the museum emphasising how it steers away from the typical unidirectional tone taken by conventional museums using a multitude of formats for innovative storytelling.

The museum specifically highlights the role of the women members of the Constituent Assembly with animations about their lives highlighting their contributions to the making of an Independent India. To commemorate the memory of nearly 300 members of the Constituent Assembly, sculptured busts of each of them have been placed at the museum to recognise their contributions.

The gallery also explores the global inspirations and historical frameworks that influenced the creation of the Constitution, highlighting how these ideas were reimagined and adapted to suit the unique needs and aspirations of India's diverse populace.

The mezzanine floor holds a

hologram exhibit of B R Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Constitution. The installation brings his words and vision to life, allowing visitors to experience his legacy first-hand.

The answers have been crafted based on his speeches and writings. Also, the artworks displayed at the museum are anticipated to be a major attraction for the visitors.

Rajesh P Subramanian's sculpture 'We, The People of India' embodies 'unity in diversity', a core constitutional principle.

In 'Echoes of Liberty', Rahul Gautam creates a mural that fuses elements from the constitutional manuscripts with modern design.

Harsha Durgadda's 'Triad of Unity' links themes of unity, justice and sovereignty, while Nishant S Kumbhatil's creation 'Insaaf Ki Devi' portrays lady justice holding a balance, a powerful emblem of impartiality in Indian law.

Pradeep B Jogdand's 'Equality Before Law' symbolises equality and justice, while 'Freedom' by K R Nariman celebrates 'We, the People' who uphold constitutional values in their daily lives as citizens.

Rahul Gautam's second work 'Founding Mothers' represents an imagined photograph featuring the 15 women members of the Constituent Assembly, honouring their contributions to shaping the country's constitutional framework. (PTI)

## Shivraj Singh Chouhan to launch campaign against gender-based violence

**NEW DELHI, Nov 23:** Rural Development and Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will launch the third edition of Nayi Chetna-Pahal Badlaav Ki, a national campaign against gender-based violence on November 25, an official statement said.

Minister of Women and Child Development Annpurna Devi will also be present at the event in "a collective effort of the government to eliminate gender-based violence", the Rural Development Ministry said in a statement issued on Saturday.

The month-long campaign, organised by the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Development, will run across the country until December 23.

This initiative, led by DAY-NRLM's extensive Self-Help Group (SHG) network, embodies the spirit of Jan Andolan.

The campaign is a collaborative effort and will witness participation of nine ministries and departments, including Ministry of Women and Child Development; Health and Family Welfare; Department of School Education and Literacy; Home Affairs; Panchayati Raj; Social Justice and Empowerment and Information and Broadcasting.

"The Nayi Chetna campaign aims to amplify awareness and drive informed action against gender-based violence through grassroots initiatives. Since its inception, Nayi Chetna has mobilized millions nationwide, fostering a significant movement for gender equality and women's empowerment," Rural Development Ministry said in the statement.

They said the first edition reached 3.5 crore people, supported by multiple line ministries, while Nayi Chetna 2.0 engaged 5.5 crore participants across 31 States and Union Territories, with over nine lakh awareness activities on gender-based violence conducted nationwide.

"The objectives of the campaign include raising awareness of all forms of gender-based violence, encouraging communities to speak out and demand action, providing access to support systems for timely assistance and empowering local institutions to act decisively against violence," the Ministry said.

They added that the campaign's slogan, "Ek Saath, Ek Awaaz, Hinsa Ke Khilaaf," embodies the call for collective action through convergence efforts, adopting a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach. (PTI)

## Half of Goa takes online route for services, saves trips to government offices

**PANAJI, Nov 23:** More than half of Goa's population no longer needs to visit government offices for various works as the state continues to expand the user base of its e-governance portal 'Goa Online', officials have said.

Of the 16 lakh residents in the coastal state, about 8.6 lakh people are currently using the portal, offering 241 services, which ensures doorstep governance and improves transparency, they said.

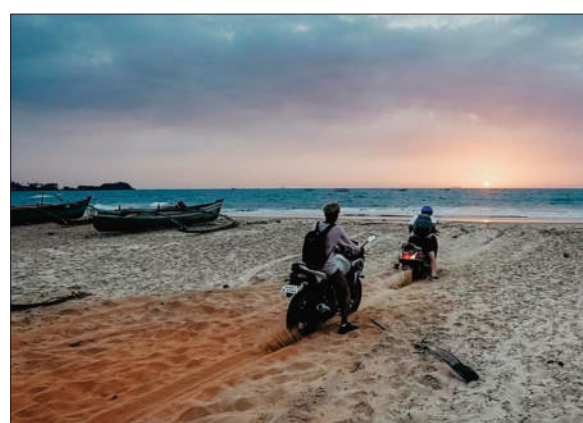
An initiative by state IT Minister Rohan Khaunte, the portal was launched in 2017 when the late Manohar Parrikar was the chief minister. His successor Pramod Sawant is taking it forward, said the officials.

"Goa Online is a single-window system and single-window platform, where all the services of the G2B (government to business) and G2C (government to citizen) are catered," said Sangita Shirodkar, manager (IT) of Goa Electronics Limited (GEL).

A subsidiary of the state government, GEL has developed the Goa Online portal, which began with 11 online services, and maintains it, she said.

The e-governance portal now has 241 services, including residence certificates, property-related documents and payment of water and electricity bills, offered by 41 state departments with a user base of 8.6 lakh, more than half of Goa's population.

So far, 29 lakh applications have been processed through the portal. The official said



any person in India can apply for documents (related to Goa) online and submit applications through the portal.

"The application is directed to the department concerned which then processes it and responds. The status of the application is also informed to the applicant at regular intervals," she said.

Neville Noronha, the officer on special duty to the tourism and IT minister, said 'Goa Online' was a part of the Centre's e-district project in 2017. "It was initiated by minister Rohan Khaunte along with the then CM Manohar Parrikar, who promoted this vision," he said.

Noronha said the vision was that every Goan citizen should get services from the comfort of their home. The online service gained strength during the COVID-19 pandemic. The overwhelming response to this online platform has prompted the government to explore ways to add more services, he said.

The beneficiaries of this online platform are from

urban and rural areas alike, he said.

According to Lawyer Mangurish Usgaonkar of Panaji, one-click deliveries available through Goa Online help not just people living in the coastal state but also those across the globe looking for services in Goa.

"There was a time when people would stand in long queues or take political or government servants' influence to apply for a certificate. Now, the process has become hassle-free through the Goa Online portal. It's a great initiative under 'Digital India' by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said.

Dayesh Vengurlekar from St Cruz village near Panaji said that the e-governance platform has been a great help to people from rural areas as they now don't have to travel to taluka or district headquarters to get government documents. Ajit Vengurlekar, who lives under Mercas panchayat in North Goa, called the portal a "good initiative" that saves time and money. (PTI)

## J-K: Strike against Vaishno Devi ropeway project enters second day, pilgrims face hardships

**JAMMU, Nov 23:** Hundreds of pilgrims visiting the Vaishno Devi shrine atop the Trikuta hills in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district faced hardships as a 72-hour strike by local stakeholders against a proposed ropeway project entered the second day on Saturday.

The strike by shopkeepers, and pony and palanquin owners started on Friday amid apprehension that the ropeway project would render them jobless, officials said.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board recently decided to move forward with a ₹ 250-crore passenger ropeway project between Tarakot Marg to Sanji Chhat along the 12-kilometre track to the shrine after shelving the project in the past due to similar protests.

While shops and business establishments remained open in Katra town, the base camp for pilgrims visiting the shrine, shopkeepers along the trek route downed shutters for the second day, the officials said.

Pony and palanquin owners also stayed away, causing hardships to many pilgrims during their journey. The protesters assembled at Shalimar Park in Katra town and held a peaceful sit-in, raising slogans against the shrine board's decision.

"The ropeway project will be completed within the next two years and lead to the loss of opportunity to earn livelihood for the service providers. The government should come out with a proper rehabilitation plan for the poor

labourers who will get affected by this project," senior Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Jamwal said in an address to the protesters.

Suggesting a financial assistance of ₹ 20 lakh for each affected person, he said they would meet on Sunday to chalk out the future course of action.

The shopkeepers and pony and palanquin owners -- who routinely assist thousands of pilgrims -- are apprehensive that the ropeway will render them jobless.

"We will not allow the ropeway project to be implemented in Katra. We have been fighting against it for three years. Assurances were given to us in the past but now they have gone ahead with the project," shopkeepers' association leader Prabhat Singh said. (PTI)

## Tab money row: School heads urges improved security for Banglar Siksha portal

**KOLKATA, Nov 23:** Amid reports of misappropriation in allocation of tab money for higher secondary students, an organisation of school heads of West Bengal on Saturday asked the school education department to minimise the possibility of hacking the Banglar Siksha portal, which facilitates the transfer of ₹ 10,000 to every student's bank account to buy digital tools for e-learning.

In a letter to the department's principal secretary, the Advanced Society for Headmasters and Headmistresses said, "The Banglar Siksha portal's vulnerability to hacking is posing a significant risk to sensitive information of teaching and non-teaching staff, students, and parents," and emphasised that strengthening the server is crucial.

Chandan Maity, general secretary of the society, explained that the portal frequently takes hours to upload content on mobile devices and laptops during evening hours, "which leads to the possibility of hacking of the bank accounts."

Reports surfaced in October revealing that around 1,900 bona fide students out of 16 lakh students did not receive the ₹ 10,000 allocated by the state government for their accounts, triggering an outcry.

Earlier, a senior police official had said a nexus, operating across states including Jharkhand, was behind siphoning the money from various social welfare schemes.

The districts where such cases were reported include Malda, Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas, Cooch Behar, Bankura, and Jalpaiguri. "The portal is open in the



evening hours when the buffering continues indefinitely and it takes a long time for the data to load. There is a possibility of the data being hacked during that period of loading," Maity said.

"Hence, we call for strengthening the Banglar Siksha server, implementing robust encryption and firewall systems, conducting regular security audits, and issuing immediate alert notifications to affected individuals in case of a breach," he added.

Maity also suggested that the Banglar Siksha portal be OTP-based, with a message notification being sent to the school concerned whenever anyone from the school education headquarters at Bikash Bhavan or the district inspector of schools logs into the respective school's page.

The state government announced that deprived students will receive the money again, and over 100 of them have already been compensated. The process of sending funds to the remaining students is currently underway.

At least 15 arrests have been made in connection with the siphoning of money allocated for the tablets since early November. (PTI)

## Priyanka Gandhi: Cong's talismanic campaigner enters Parliament after 'long, long time'

**NEW DELHI, Nov 23:** Will she? Will she not? And on Saturday, she did. After years of frenzied speculation, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is finally entering the Lok Sabha after a resounding win from Wayanad with many a hope that she will re-energise her party and its dwindling electoral fortunes.

The 52-year-old, who joins her mother Sonia and brother Rahul as an MP in what is a rare instance of three members of a family together in Parliament, would visit Parliament as a teenager to listen to her father Rajiv Gandhi speak as prime minister. Four decades later, she joins as member herself -- her detractors crying nepo politics and her party supporters laying out the proverbial red carpet for a promise finally met.

She should have been a politician to the manner born given the Gandhi legacy. But Priyanka Gandhi took the long and winding way into mainstream politics. First were the questions of whether the mother of two would join active politics, and then whether and when she would contest elections. In September 1999, she told a journalist her entry into politics may take a "long, long time". And it actually did. She took the plunge 20 years later in 2019 and was later appointed Congress general secretary.

Five years after that, Priyanka Gandhi begins her journey as an elected representative of the people.

With a winning margin of more than 4.1 lakh votes, she has sur-



passed the tally of her brother Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad in Kerala.

Priyanka Gandhi's entry into Parliament comes at a difficult time for the party, which has been jolted by electoral defeats in Haryana and Maharashtra. It would be interesting to see if she is able to give a much-needed fillip to the grand old party and help put it back on electoral track.

Often drawing comparisons with her grandmother Indira Gandhi for their similarity in looks and way of speaking, Priyanka Gandhi has been the go-to campaigner for the party since her entry into active politics and even before that when she campaigned for her mother Sonia and brother Rahul.

And more than both, she is the

establishing a connect and giving people the impression that here was a person who was known to them, someone sharing her feelings and thoughts with them.

As star campaigner and strategist, Priyanka Gandhi helped the Congress make impressive gains in some states as well as in the Lok Sabha polls held earlier in the year. Her campaign helped the Congress get 99 seats in the general election, up from 52 in 2019.

As the curtains came down on the 2024 general election, analysts totted up the numbers to highlight that she has proven to be the party's talisman. Priyanka Gandhi took part in 108 public meetings and roadshows. She campaigned in 16 states and a Union territory, and also addressed two party workers' conferences in Amethi and Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh.

Priyanka Gandhi has often been projected as a possible challenger to Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi and also as a successor to Congress veteran Sonia Gandhi in the family pocket borough of Rae Bareilly.

Soon after the Election Commission announced the Wayanad bypoll, the Congress declared that Priyanka Gandhi would be its candidate from the seat in Kerala. Rahul Gandhi, it decided, would retain the Rae Bareilly parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh and vacate the Wayanad seat he won for the second consecutive time.

After her name was announced for the Wayanad bypoll in June, Priyanka Gandhi said, "I am not nervous at all.... I am very happy

to be able to represent Wayanad. All I will say is that I will not let them feel his (Rahul Gandhi's) absence. I will work hard and try my best to make everybody happy and be a good representative."

"I have a good relationship with Rae Bareilly as I worked there for 20 years and that relationship will never break," she said, adding that both she and her brother will work together in both the constituencies.

Priyanka Gandhi was made Congress general secretary in-charge of the crucial eastern Uttar Pradesh region in January 2019 and then general secretary in-charge of the entire state.

In December 2023, Priyanka Gandhi was made Congress general secretary "without a portfolio". She helped strengthen the organisation and led the party's campaign in Himachal Pradesh, where the grand old party wrested power from the BJP.

Born on January 12, 1972, Priyanka attended New Delhi's Modern School and the Convent of Jesus and Mary. She holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, and also has a master's degree in Buddhist studies.

Priyanka Gandhi is married to businessman Robert Vadra. The couple has two children -- Raihan and Miraya.

Her entry into Parliament has been long awaited by party workers and supporters and they are hoping she will provide the booster shot the party needs in its difficult phase at the hustings going forward. (PTI)



# Varun Grover, 'First Act' director Deepa Bhatia part of BAFTA Breakthrough India 2024

MUMBAI, Nov 23: The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) on Friday named lyricist-writer-director Varun Grover, filmmaker Deepa Bhatia, sound designer Dhiman Kar-makar and six others among its emerging talents who will participate in the 2024 edition of its BAFTA Breakthrough India initiative.

Other participants of the India initiative, supported by Netflix, are Abhinav Chokhvatia, Game Producer "Down and Out", Christo Tomy, director of "Curry and Cyanide: The Jolly Joseph Case", Jaydeep Sarkar, showrunner and series director of "Rain-bow Rishita", Monisha Thyagarajan, who served as a producer for the series "The Hunt For Veerappan", director-producer Sindhu Sreenivasa Murthy, and Producer and developer Neeraj Kumar.

Jane Millichip, Chief Executive Officer, BAFTA, said this year they've a great emerging tal-

ent lineup.

"This year we have an amazing roster of casting directors, producers, writers, performers, lead artists, cinematographers, lead developers, and more," Millichip said in a statement.

Bhatia, who made her directorial debut with docu series, "First Act", said she feels honored to be recognized by BAFTA.

"This recognition is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the entire team behind 'First Act'. It's a privilege to share the stories of these young talents and shed light on the challenges they face," Bhatia, who has worked as an editor on films like "Kai Po Che!", "My Name is Khan", and the documentary "Sachin: A Billion Dreams", said.

"Thrilled to be selected for @BAFTA Breakthrough program this year," Grover posted on X. The Breakthrough India participants were selected by a jury of industry experts including

film producer Guneet Monga Kapoor, Vice President, Content - Netflix India Monika Shergill, veteran actor Ratna Pathak Shah, Palomi Ghosh actor and former Breakthrough India talent, filmmakers Rajiv Menon, Sangeeta Datta, Shonali Bose, Sushmit Ghosh, and Manvendra Shukul, CEO, Lakshya Digital.

Monga Kapoor, BAFTA Breakthrough India Ambassador and Jury Chair, said that the BAFTA Breakthrough demonstrates that there is no shortage of creative talent in India.

"It was extremely difficult to narrow down the pool of talented candidates. I can't wait to see how this year's cohort harnesses BAFTA Breakthrough's opportunities to hone their craft," the producer said.

Monika Shergill, Vice President of Content, Netflix India, said the experience of nurturing talent has been "fulfilling".

"India is brimming with storytellers and this collaboration al-

lows us to support emerging voices as they make their mark across industries in the creative landscape. Congratulations to this year's nine Breakthroughs—we're excited to see where this journey takes them," Shergill said.

Throughout the year-long programme, the Breakthroughs will benefit from professional development while connecting with the academy's global network of over 12,000 members. As BAFTA Breakthrough artists, they will be promoted on a global stage, gaining access to opportunities beyond Indian shores, it said.

As part of this programme, the Breakthroughs were provided with invaluable support in networking and learning from a global creative community, including experts such as Richie Mehta, Siddharth Roy Kapur, Phoebe Waller Bridge, Paul Laverty, Graham Broadbent, amongst others. (PTI)

## I WANT TO MAKE A WEB SERIES: FILMMAKER RAHUL RAWAIL



PANAJI, Nov 23: Veteran director Rahul Rawail, known for movies such as "Love Story", "Betaab", "Arjun", and "Aur Pyaar Ho Gaya", says he wants to venture into the streaming space with a web series.

"I want to be in the OTT space. I want to make a web series," he told PTI in an interview on the sidelines of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) here.

Rawail, whose last film as a director was 2007's "Buddha Mar Gaya", said he "misses" being on movie sets.

"I stopped making films some years ago because a time had come where it was the actor who started deciding who would be the director of a film. Everything was taken over by the actor and producers were also happy as long as they had the actor," he added.

Rawail, who also takes classes for aspiring filmmakers across the country, recalled the time a student asked him what could he do to become a director.

"I told him to start working for an actor. You clean his house, take his friends to school, buy groceries for him, etc."

"After three-four years when he feels you're a hardworking person, he will make you a director one day. So that's the thing which did not suit me at all, so I stopped making films for that (reason)."

The 73-year-old filmmaker said he is happy with how life has shaped up for him. "God has been kind. The kids are doing well for themselves. I'm at an age where I don't know till when it's going to last."

"But I just can't stop working, that's my problem. I think I travel more than the airline crew travels in a month. I enjoy working. If I'm not working I feel sick," he added.

Rawail also spoke fondly about his popular film "Betaab", which turned 40 years in 2023. The love story was the debut film of actors Sunny Deol and Amrita Singh.

"The whole film runs in my head when I think about it... 'Betaab' has very pleasant memories for me." (PTI)



## Assam CM watches 'The Sabarmati Report'

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday watched the Hindi film 'The Sabarmati Report', based on the train burning incident at Godhra in Gujarat in 2002.

He urged the people to watch the film with their families.

"Today I watched the film 'Sabarmati Report' with my colleagues. After watching this film, you will be surprised how an ecosystem ran its agenda based on lies for years and damaged national unity," he posted on X.

"In a new India, their propaganda has to be ended and people will have to be made aware of the realities," he added.

"The Sabarmati Report", produced by Ektaa Kapoor, was released on November 15. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have also praised the film. (PTI)

## PUNJABI SINGER SHUBH ROPED IN AS GLOBAL CLIMATE BRAND AMBASSADOR FOR UN

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: Renowned Punjabi musician Shubh has been named the Global Ambassador for the UN-FCCC Digital Climate Library (DCL).

The announcement was made by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the UN climate conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, a press release said.

As the Global Ambassador, the Canada-based rapper and singer-songwriter will engage audiences to raise awareness about climate change and promote sustainable solutions.

Through his appointment, the 28-year-old artist will empower young people to become agents of change and address the issue of climate change.

"Through this role, I hope to use my platform to bring attention to the issue, share knowledge, and be part of a movement that pushes for a better future, not just for all of us, but for future generations as well."

"I hope our combined efforts create a positive impact in addressing global warming and fostering sustainable living for all species on our planet," Shubh said.

Shubh rose to fame in 2021 with his single "We Rollin" and has built a discography that includes hits like "Cheques", "Baller", "No Love", "Be Mine" and "One Love". Jingwen Yang, Information Management Officer at the UNFCCC, said Shubh exemplifies the power of art to raise awareness about the importance of preserving endangered archival collections documenting the history and legacy of the climate change process. (PTI)



## Closer the gap between literature and films, better Indian cinema will be: Mani Ratnam

PANAJI, Nov 23: Celebrated filmmaker Mani Ratnam, who adapted Kalki Krishnamurthy's Tamil novel "Ponniyin Selvan" into a two-part film saga, says Indian cinema could benefit by translating great literary works for screen.

Ratnam said it doesn't get better if a director is able to reinvent a work by a master writer like Kalki.

"The fantastic solution is to take literature and make it into films. Tamil is really rich in terms of the literature... Ideally, you'd like to write something that is far above what you do. It makes your job as a director easy... The closer the gap between literature and cinema, the better Indian cinema will be," the filmmaker said at a session on the fourth day of the International Film Festival of India here on Friday.

Ratnam, who was in conversation with filmmaker Gautham Vasudev

Menon, said he's currently reading Salman Rushdie's novel "Victory City", based on the early days of the Vijayanagar kingdom.

"It's stunning, it's like watching a film. The way he writes, the mixture between fiction, fact and history is so brilliant. It's amazing," he added.

Asked if there was any literary character which was close to his real self, Ratnam said, "No one can come anywhere near me. I meant no one could be as confused."

Ratnam, a seven-time National Award-winning artist, said he has always taken inspiration from mythology, be it films "Thalapathi", starring Rajinikanth, or "Ravanaan" with Vikram.

"Mythology is relevant even today. We can interpret it today, we can relate to it in today's day and time in our issues and problems that continues to fascinate me. If I can

find a mirror image here, it pushes me to make it into a film," he added.

Recalling his hostel days in Kala Kshetra, the filmmaker said every Friday students there had to attend the dance programme at the venue.

"There was always Kathakali which I could never figure out. All of them dealt with characters which were portrayed as villains normally."

"Whether it is Ravana or Karna, it was an interesting interpretation which has always been there in South Indian art form. Seeing it from a different perspective."

Ratnam also reflected on the use of visual effects in cinema today, adding he shot "Ponniyin Selvan" on real locations because he wanted "dust, dirt and sweat" to be visible on people.

"Some people do it in VFX. If you're happy with it, good luck to you. I feel VFX helps you when you

can't do it in real time. Not the other way around," he added.

Asked if "Ponniyin Selvan" could have been a web series, the director said he always imagined it as a full-feature film. He shot the movie in one go but released it in two parts.

Ratnam said he wouldn't probably venture into making a web series as it doesn't feel "natural" to him.

"Long format storytelling is a completely different art... I'm still very happy struggling with 2.5 hours. If you give me 6-7 hours to make something, I'll just get lost."

The filmmaker, also known for movies such as "Raja", "Bombay", "Dil Se", "Nayakan", and "Kaatru Veliyidai", said he wants his cinema to stand the test of time like Guru Dutt's "Pyasa".

"Something that stays relevant for years to come. That's what I strive for," he added. (PTI)





## JAISWAL, RAHUL SHINE BRIGHT

# 1st Test: India gain complete control with 218-run lead

PERTH, Nov 23: Yashasvi Jaiswal combined game awareness with perfect shot selection while KL Rahul remained technically unflappable in an unbroken opening stand of 172 as India looked set to bat Australia out of the match with an overall lead of 218 runs on the second day of the opening Test here.

After skipper Jasprit Bumrah's game-changing 11th five-wicket haul decimated Australia for 104, young Jaiswal (90 batting, 193 balls) and seasoned Rahul (62 batting, 154 balls) decided to grind it out with some old fashioned Test match batting by waiting for the loose deliveries and respecting good fast bowling.

The Indians showed their compact defense by scoring 88 runs in 31 overs during the post-tea session as Jaiswal inched towards a coveted ton on his maiden outing on Australian soil.

With enough time at their disposal and signs of cracks appearing on the surface, this is going to be India's Test match to lose.

The way Rahul wore down the Australian attack was a sight to behold. There was no chatter from the slip cordon and at one point, the stitches of the Kookaburra came out.

The live grass died by the second afternoon and the seam movement also went out of equation making batting easier.

But no one can take away any credit from the two who were hardly troubled except for a mix-



up that could have led to Rahul's run-out.

Jaiswal also showed that he had learnt his lessons from the first innings and curbed his urge to drive on the up initially, which was the best part about his batting. Each of his seven fours and two sixes were well-executed shots.

Once he had defended enough deliveries, the Australian pacers didn't have any option but to try either short or full length which he utilised well.

The whip over mid-wicket to hit

Starc for one-bounce four and then induce a grin from the pacer by telling him "you are slow", spoke volumes about how fearless the current generation of Indian cricketers is.

In the final session, he flicked him for good measure for a maximum.

Rahul's back-drive off Pat Cummins can easily be called the shot of the match but it was heartening to see Jaiswal put in a big stride forward while driving Mitchell Starc through covers apart from

getting under the bounce and playing the ramp shot.

In case of Rahul, he kept a very loose bottom-hand and that helped with the deliveries, even the ones that took the thickish edge only to fall way in front of the slip cordon.

There was a spell of play in the post-tea session when Indians were kept quiet by Nathan Lyon but neither Jaiswal nor Rahul ran out of patience. Jaiswal's half-century came off 123 balls, his slowest in 15 Tests and spoke volumes about his adaptability.

For Rahul, it was about forgetting the unfortunate dismissal on Friday and concentrate, which he did splendidly.

Any target above 300 would be very difficult to chase on this track and Washington Sundar can come into play if those cracks open up, not to forget the three quicks who can use the variable bounce to good effect.

In the morning, India captain Bumrah deservedly got his 11th five-wicket haul while debutant Harshit Rana bowled a fiery opening spell to dismiss the hosts for 104 at the stroke of lunch despite a stiff last-wicket resistance from Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood.

Starc (26 off 113 balls) shielded Hazlewood (7 not out off 31 balls) admirably during their 25-run last-wicket stand that lasted 18 overs.

The day began with Bumrah (5/30 in 18 overs) getting one to rear up from back of the length and Carey's edge carried at a good height to Rishabh Pant behind stumps.

The skipper's celebration was understated as he purposefully strode back to his bowling mark even before Nathan Lyon had arrived. At the other end, the burly Harshit Rana (3/48 in 15.2 overs) carried on from where he had left off on the opening day.

The rookie speedster used more short balls, and one such well-directed delivery accounted for Lyon, who was pounced at gully by KL Rahul. (PTI)

## Kane hat trick helps Bayern edge past Augsburg



BERLIN, Nov 23: Harry Kane scored a hat trick including two penalties for Bayern Munich to beat Augsburg 3-0 in the Bundesliga on Friday.

The win stretched Bayern's lead to eight points ahead of the rest of the 11th round, and Kane took his goals tally to a league-leading 14.

The England forward is the fastest player to 50 goals in the Bundesliga in what was his 43rd game.

However, coach Vincent Kompany should be concerned by his team's ongoing difficulty of scoring in matches it dominates. Bayern previously defeated St. Pauli and Benfica only 1-0.

Kompany's team had to wait until stoppage time before Kane sealed the result with his second penalty. Two minutes later, Kane scored with a header after controlling Leon Goretzka's cross with his first touch for a flattering scoreline.

"We had to be patient," Kane said. "And at halftime that's what we said, to keep doing what we're doing. We had a few chances in the first half and we just had to be a bit more clinical and obviously, thankfully, we got the penalty to kind of open the game up."

Mads Pedersen was penalized

for handball following a VAR review and Kane duly broke the deadlock in the 63rd.

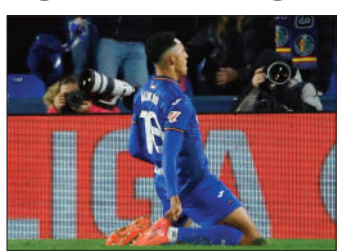
Bayern continued as before with 80% possession, but had to wait for Keven Schlotterbeck to be penalized through VAR for a foul on Kane. Kane sealed the result in the third minute of stoppage time and there was still time for him to grab another.

It's Bayern's sixth consecutive win without conceding a goal since it conceded four at Barcelona (4-1) on Oct. 23 in the Champions League.

"You can see now that we have a solid defense and that's the basis, also in games like today's," Bayern midfielder Joshua Kimmich said. "When it's a game of patience, then it's important for us to know that sometimes one goal will have to do. Like today we added two more before the finish, but in the end you only need to score one more than the opponent."

Bayern next hosts Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League on Tuesday, then Borussia Dortmund away in the Bundesliga next weekend, before defending champion Bayer Leverkusen visits in the third round of the German Cup. (AP)

## Valladolid loses again in La Liga



MADRID, Nov 23: Getafe scored twice in three minutes midway through the second half to beat struggling Valladolid 2-0 and record only its second win in La Liga on Friday.

The victory ended Getafe's five-game winless run and lifted it into 15th place in the 20-team standings. Valladolid remained second to last.

In the buildup to the match, Getafe sporting director Rubén Reyes described the game as a final but his team was lucky not to go behind as Valladolid created more of the early chances.

However, the home side took control in the 69th minute when substitute Álvaro Rodríguez got the opener. Three minutes later, man of the match Allan Nyom made it 2-0.

"There's been a lot of games where we've run and fought but lost or drawn," Nyom, the veteran Cameroonian full back, said. "A game that reflects the effort we've put in in training is very welcome."

Adding to Valladolid's woes, coach Paulo Pezzolano was sent off before halftime. The Uruguayan has the league's worst disciplinary record, with seven yellow cards before Friday's red. (AP)

## Stalling Verstappen's title chances Red Bull makes mistake with rear wing in Las Vegas

LAS VEGAS, Nov 23: Max Verstappen, needing just three points over Lando Norris at the Las Vegas Grand Prix to seal a fourth consecutive Formula 1 championship, is suddenly in jeopardy of being denied the crown Saturday night.

The most jarring sign of trouble came in Thursday night's second practice when the Dutchman was a dismal 17th on the speed chart compared to Norris, who was among the top three fastest drivers in both sessions.

The problem?

Red Bull apparently made an incorrect adjustment to the rear wing of its car at Las Vegas and GPS data showed its two cars to be significantly slower on the straights than both McLaren and Mercedes, which led both practice sessions with Lewis Hamilton. The Red Bull rear wing is adjustable and was set to give the team more straight-line speed. While that worked, it compromised other aspects of the car.

The team believes the issue has been resolved ahead of Friday night practice and qualifying.

Verstappen, however, proved two weeks ago in Brazil that adversity is nothing he can't overcome. He started 17th on a wet and rainy circuit and still managed to win his first race since June by nearly 20 seconds.

Verstappen, whose eight wins this season are his fewest since 2020, has not won back-to-back races since Canada and Spain in June. But the Brazil win widened his lead over Norris in the standings to 62 points and the championship is his barring a complete collapse over the final three races.

He is not sure what to expect Saturday night.

"I just want to focus on the weekend and try to have a good performance. Brazil was a very welcome victory for us after a while, but this is again very different," said Verstappen, who won the inaugural Las Vegas Grand Prix last year.

Prior to discovering the rear-wing issue, Ver-



stappen felt decent about his chances in Las Vegas.

"Three races left, you're getting close to the end of the season and it's looking good in the championship, but we still need to score a lot of points so we'll just focus on that," he said. "Once we are doing that then you get closer to the end result." Norris was admittedly downtrodden after Brazil, where he started on the pole but finished sixth and lost ground to Verstappen after first cutting the lead to 44 points by winning the sprint race.

"This was almost a defining moment for the championship. It was a defining moment for the championship. The doors are almost shut," Norris said. "For a week, I was pretty down because I had that realization of things pretty much out of my control now, not within reach necessarily. That's a tough realization when your hopes and belief are so high. For it to get knocked down so much all of a sudden was pretty demoralizing."

Even so, Norris is convinced he will one day be F1 world champion.

"I have what it takes," Norris said. "I think it's the first time in the last six years of F1 when we've had a chance to fight at the front. This is our, and my, first opportunity to do so, and my

first opportunity to see where I stand. I definitely was not at the level I needed to be at at the beginning of the year.

"I still need to make tweaks and I still need to improve on things, that's clear. I'm not completely satisfied with how I've done and I definitely know I need to make improvements," he added. "But, for the first time, I'm confident to say I have what I think I need to fight for a championship."

Norris has the first three wins of his career this season and has McLaren currently atop the constructor championship standings. He knows he's got more work to do to be champion, especially against Verstappen.

"It doesn't mean I'm complete, it doesn't mean I'm perfect. When you're competing against drivers who are close to that, like Max, you have to be close to perfect if you want to challenge him," Norris said.

McLaren is still clinging to a 36-point lead over Ferrari in the battle for the constructor championship, a title worth a bonus estimated to be \$150 million.

McLaren last won that title in 1998, while Ferrari last won in 2008. Red Bull has won the last two titles. Ferrari could chip away at McLaren's lead at Las Vegas.

"Ferrari have been strong for a long time," said Norris. "They have two very good drivers, they're a very good team, they've clearly improved their car a good amount and found a better direction to head down. We do know that Vegas is probably a track that will suit the Ferraris a bit more, it suited them well last year, but Qatar we know maybe will be more favorable to us."

Carlos Sainz Jr., in his final three races for Ferrari before he is replaced by Hamilton and moves to Williams, wants to close his tenure by helping the team win the constructors title. (AP)

## Angel Yin rides a hot putter to 2-shot lead in LPGA finale

NAPLES (FLORIDA), Nov 23: Angel Yin rammed in a 30-foot par putt on her opening hole, setting the tone for a day of big putts and 3-under 69 that gave her a two-shot lead Friday in the CME Group Tour Championship and the chase for the \$4 million prize.

Very clear in her rearview mirror was Nelly Korda.

Korda, coming off her seventh win of the season last week, opened with a 72 and was eight shots behind. She found a simple swing thought after the round and was back to her old self with a 66 that cut the deficit in half with 36 holes left to play.

"Golf is just crazy," Korda said. "You go from playing so well last week to not being able to find the center of the clubface yesterday. Always humbles you, but what's that you love so much about it. Went to the range after my round yesterday. Tried to find a different feel. Felt a little better out there today, and hopefully I can keep progressing."

Yin followed that 30-foot par putt with a 40-foot birdie putt on the next hole. She also holed a birdie putt from about 35 feet on the 11th hole that put her in the

lead for good.

She was at 10-under 134. Hye-Jin Choi (68) and Narin An (72) were 8 under.

Korda, who already has captured her first award as player of the year, was tied for fourth at 138 with four other players who are either major champions or have been No. 1 in the women's world ranking — Jeeno Thitikul, Ayaka Furue, Ruoning Yin and Amy Yang, the defending champion at Tiburon Golf Club.

Furue also is in a tight battle for the Vare Trophy for the lowest scoring average, and she pulled within a fraction of a point of Haeran Ryu.

Yin's round had enough bogeys to slow her momentum, along with a discussion with a rules official over where she took her drop after going in the water on the par-3 fourth hole.

"It looked like I took an improper drop where I went up closer than I should have, where I should have dropped further back," Yin said, who was asked to review footage. "They thought I didn't take the drop properly. I explained to them that I believe I did take the drop properly." (AP)

SINGAPORE, Nov 23: Indian chess prodigy D Gukesh has more than 50 per cent chance of becoming the youngest-ever world champion, feels the international federation (FIDE) CEO Emil Sutovsky.

The 18-year-old Indian will take on defending champion Ding Liren in the 14-round World Chess Championship clash beginning on Monday.

"He's (Gukesh) almost there and enters the match as favourite... It's definitely possible," Sutovsky told FIDE Chess on YouTube.

"His chances are not less than 50 per cent... I would say higher. So, yes, he seems to be very much focussed on that."

"Obviously it is possible. But, I don't think Ding is ready to accept it," added Sutovsky, who reached a peak ranking of world No. 17, in 2004.

One reason for Gukesh being the favorite is Ding's lacklustre performance this year, while the



Indian recently led his team to a historic gold medal at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest.

However, Sutovsky cautioned against underestimating Ding, noting the Chinese Grandmaster's potential to recover his form.

"I think it would be very excit-

ing, not because I'm officially here, but as a fan. I think Ding, who has had an unimpressive year, would recover."

"I don't think he would be the same Ding who was, let's say, beating everyone in 2019 when I think he climbed to No. 2 in the

## 'Ding has ability to shine back'

# Gukesh has over 50% chance to become world champ: FIDE CEO

world. But let's say he would be worthy of a world championship (opponent) in this match."

Sutovsky further said despite speculations over Ding's form, there could be lots of surprises in store for the fans.

"And the question on how high can Gukesh go, so I expect it to be a rather close match with unexpected twists throughout. So, let's see if my forecast works."

At 32 years of age, the Chinese is more experienced than Gukesh, and Sutovsky indicated that if the matches prolong, it could be advantage Ding.

"We could see many games where younger players were collapsing against older (in the past). It's also where your experience tells more in the final part of the game and you know more patterns, you know how to handle it (pressure) more."

"So, I wouldn't say that youth necessarily gives you an advantage in very long games," he

added.

A lot has been spoken about the classical game of chess and how being in good physical shape is important to survive endless hours on the board.

But Sutovsky feels that beyond a point, hours don't matter.

"I'm not sure that you need exactly physical shape on a seven-hour (game) actually. I think the physical shape tells more (in) the fourth or fifth hour and then, if you overcome certain moment, you play once again pretty well."

"At least that was my experience and that's what I spoke about with many players... That's a critical moment as fatigue comes (after four or five hours)."

"Now, typically, if you go to hours six or seven, the position is already pretty simplified, so it's a technical position and often you can play either by hand or by intuition and there maybe you are... you don't need necessarily to calculate as much," he added. (PTI)



## THE MAN WHO BEAT RAFAEL NADAL

# Botic van de Zandschulp helps Netherlands to reach Davis Cup final

MALAGA (SPAIN), Nov 23: The last man to face — and beat — Rafael Nadal in professional tennis, 80th-ranked Botic van de Zandschulp, converted his 10th match point Friday to finally close out a 6-4, 6-7 (12), 6-3 victory over Daniel Altmaier and help the Netherlands reach its first Davis Cup final by sweeping Germany.

Tallon Griekspoor, who is ranked 40th, sealed the 2-0 win for the Dutch in the best-of-three-match semifinal by hitting 25 aces and coming back to defeat Jan-Lennard Struff 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-4. When it ended, appropriately, on an ace, Griekspoor shut his eyes, dropped to his knees and spread his arms wide.

"We have been talking about this for two, three years," Griekspoor said. "We believed in ourselves so much. We always felt like this was possible. To do it now feels unbelievable."

The other semifinal is Saturday, with No. 1-ranked Jannik Sinner and defending champion Italy taking on Australia. The championship will be decided Sunday.

"We don't have that top 5 player. We don't have that top 10 player. We don't have that top 15 player," Dutch captain Paul Harhuus said. "But it's a team effort. ... So proud of these guys."

In Friday's opener, van de Zandschulp was up a set and just a point away from leading 5-2 in the second when Altmaier began playing more aggressively and interacting more with the German fans, yelling and throwing uppercuts or raising his arms after key points. In the tiebreaker, Altmaier managed to save five match points before



converting his own fourth set point to extend the contest.

But van de Zandschulp — who upset four-time Grand Slam champion Carlos Alcaraz at the U.S. Open — quickly moved out front in the final set, even if he eventually needed five more match points in the last game before serving it out.

"At some point, I didn't know what to do any more on the match points," van de Zandschulp said. "I had the toughest match of my life on Tuesday (against Nadal), so everything that comes next is maybe a little bit easier."

In the quarterfinals, van de Zandschulp outplayed Nadal for a 6-4, 6-4 result that marked the end of the 22-time Grand Slam cham-

pion's career because the Netherlands went on to eliminate Spain 2-1.

The 38-year-old Nadal announced last month that the Davis Cup would be his final event before retiring.

Presumably because people purchased tickets ahead of time with plans to watch Nadal compete in the semifinals, there were hundreds of unoccupied blue or gray seats surrounding the indoor hard court at the Palacio de Deportes Jose Maria Martina Carpena in southern Spain on Friday.

Now truly a neutral site, the place was not nearly as loud and rowdy as on Tuesday, although there were shouts of "Vamos, Rafa!" that drew laughter while

van de Zandschulp played the 88th-ranked Altmaier.

It took Griekspoor more than 75 minutes and nearly two full sets to figure out how to break No. 43 Struff and then did it twice in a row — to lead 6-5 in the second set, and then go up 1-0 in the third. That was plenty, because Griekspoor saved the only two break points he faced.

The Netherlands hadn't been to the semifinals since 2001. The Germans — whose best current player, two-time major finalist Alexander Zverev, is not on the team in Malaga — have won three Davis Cups, but not since 1993, when 1991 Wimbledon champion Michael Stich led them to the title. (AP)

# Louis, Athanaze miss centuries for West Indies against Bangladesh on Day 1

NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA), Nov 23: Mikyle Louis and Alick Athanaze fell agonizingly short of maiden centuries as the West Indies rallied from 25-2 to reach 250-5 against Bangladesh on the first day Friday of the first test.

Louis was out for 97 and Athanaze on 90 after sharing a dogged 140-run partnership for the fourth wicket.

At stumps, Justin Greaves was 11 not out and Joshua Da Silva 14 not out.

Louis shared a 59-run partnership for the third wicket with Kavem Hodge (25) which steadied the West Indies innings after captain Kraigg Brathwaite (4) and Keacy Carty (0) fell early to the bowling of Taskin Ahmed.

Louis and Athanaze then came together to wrest the advantage on the first day to the home team which had been sent in after losing the toss.

Louis was the senior partner for most of the fourth-wicket stand but as he became bogged down in the 90s Athanaze became the more assertive batter.

Athanaze was 49 when Louis reached 90. When Lewis was out 25 balls later for 97, Athanaze was 88 and scoring freely.

Athanaze reached a chancy half-century — his third in tests — from 85 balls with six fours. When he fell in the 78th over with stumps approaching, he had 90 from 130 balls with 10 fours and a six, the last 40 runs from 45 balls.

Louis was dropped on 90 by Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz at first slip from the bowling of Tajul Islam, a chastening experience which seemed to make him more cautious. He stepped back to cut a short ball from Tajul but simply guided to the left of Mehidy, who extended his hand but



couldn't hold the catch.

From then on, Louis advanced to 94 with a boundary off Hasan Mahmud, then to 97 with singles. He reached his half-century with care and concentration from 104 balls, eclipsed his previous highest score in tests of 57, and seemed set to go on to a century in his sixth test.

But he fell three runs short. Clearly affected by frustration, he charged a ball from Mehidy which sat up enticingly outside off, intended to hit it down the ground but instead edged to Shahadat Hossain at slip.

"Initially the pitch had an element of moisture so it was difficult at first for the pair opening the batting," Louis said. "As it went on it got a bit easier, the ball started coming on a bit better. Just unfortunate I couldn't get to three figures."

Athanaze approached his century with a feeling of inevitability, looking on top of the bowlers. But at 90 he tried to sweep a ball from Tajul, mis-timed his shot and the ball popped from a top edge to wicketkeeper Litton Das.

It was the second time in four innings Athanaze has been out in the 90s. He was out for 92 against South Africa in August.

Earlier, the first session belonged to Bangladesh as the West Indies went to lunch at 50-2. Brathwaite was trapped lbw by Taskin in the 14th over and Carty was bowled for a duck two overs later. Hodge was run out by Tajul's throw from fine leg as he attempted a second run when the West Indies was 84-3 in the 38th over.

Taskin took 2-46 as the most successful of the Bangladesh bowlers. (AP)

# Pant may go for higher than ₹ 25 crore: Raina

KOLKATA, Nov 23: The "X-factor" that Rishabh Pant offers will trigger a bidding war for him in Sunday's IPL mega auction in Jeddah and the wicketkeeper batter could smash the ₹ 25 crore barrier, reckoned former India batter Suresh Raina.

Kolkata Knight Riders shelled out ₹ 24.75 crore to acquire the services of Australian pacer Mitchell Starc ahead of IPL 2024, the highest in the tournament's history so far, and Raina felt it could be broken this time.

"More than his batting and keeping, he's a great character to have in the team when he is a captain. Any owner or coach would not like to miss his X-factor," Raina, IPL Expert, JioStar, told PTL.

So will Pant break the ₹ 25-crore mark?

"I think he will go for more than that. Punjab, Delhi, KKR, and RCB have the money. So, when he comes to the auction, expect him to go 4-5 crores higher than ₹ 25 crore," said Raina, the first player to breach the 5000-run mark in IPL history.

Highlighting Pant's on-field energy and rapport with players, Raina, a four-time IPL winner with Chennai Super Kings, said: "He has that strength, the bonding he has with players, and everyone wants to play under him, which makes him special."

"No one will leave him. This is a three-year auction. If you're getting Rishabh Pant for three years. CSK



don't have that budget, but I definitely see him going to RCB or maybe as the captain of KKR. He will bring a lot of fans if he goes to KKR," the former India left-hander added.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru needs a captain after releasing Faf du Plessis, and Raina said they have many options in the auction room like KL Rahul, Pant or can even go back to Du Plessis.

"Virat Kohli knows the DNA of RCB but he has declined to captain the side. As for captaincy, KL Rahul and Rishabh Pant could be one of the options," the 37-year-old said.

"I'm sure they will go for Faf also. He's playing in the global leagues and performing really well. RCB had very good bonding with Faf also he's a very good captain.

"He's fit, scoring a lot of runs. I don't think so there would not be any issue. It would be up to Virat if he would wish to change the opening slot.

**Advantage Arshdeep**  
Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh, who led India's bowling attack with eight wickets at an impressive average of 15.37 in the recent 3-1 T20I series win against South Africa, was surprisingly not retained by Punjab Kings.

Raina said Punjab could have kept him by offering a higher bid, but that may turn out fine for Arshdeep in the auction.

"He has been the biggest surprise of the year. He's a proven performer. Despite Bumrah not being there, he has done really well in South Africa. He is a gun player. Punjab could have shelled out 3-4 crores extra to retain him, but now, in the auction, he has the advantage.

"He brings 'Punjab tadka' to any team. He's a great team-man. Today's youth are strong characters; they believe in themselves.

**CSK, MI need to bolster spin attack**

CSK have a modest budget of ₹ 55 crore and their strategy should be to rope in a good spinner like Sri Lankan Maheesh Theekshana or Yuzvendra Chahal.

"They should really target domestic players. They have (Matheesh) Pathirana, but they definitely need a good spinner — someone like Theekshana. (PTI)

# Messi's former teammate Mascherano close to becoming Inter Miami coach

MIAMI, Nov 23: Lionel Messi is on the cusp of reuniting with former Argentina national teammate Javier Mascherano with Inter Miami, this time as player and coach, a person with knowledge of the negotiations told The Associated Press on Friday.

Multiple reports out of Argentina said Mascherano has already agreed to take over as coach at Inter Miami as the replacement for Gerardo "Tata" Martino — who stepped down citing personal reasons. Mascherano emerged as Inter Miami's frontrunner earlier this week, said the person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because no decision has been revealed by the team.

Inter Miami co-owner Jorge Mas said the team had three finalists in mind for the job, then made a pick on the replacement Wednesday — but would not confirm that the deal with Mascherano is done, or that he even was the final selection.

"We are very near the end of the process," Mas said. "We will be announcing a new coach for Inter Miami in the upcoming days."

Messi and Mascherano were teammates both for Argentina and with Barcelona; for the Spanish club, Mascherano also played alongside current Inter Miami standouts Jordi Alba, Sergio Busquets and Luis Suarez. Mascherano, at one time, was the all-time leader for Argentina's national team in international appearances; Messi has since broken that record.

Mas said he spoke with Messi last week about the coaching search. It's not known if Messi played an active role in recruiting Mascherano, who currently is Argentina's U-20 national coach.

"I asked him, 'What is important to you? And what do you think is important to get the best out of our roster and out of our 11 and how do we improve?'" Mas said. "And Leo shared with me his thoughts. ... Without a doubt, a familiarity with Leo and the other stars is an advantage in every aspect. Obviously, I want Leo to feel comfortable with the new trainer, with the new coach coming in."

Martino guided Inter Miami to the best regular season record in Major League Soccer history this season. He was hired in July 2023, right around the time that Messi debuted for the club and insisted Friday that he needs to leave for personal reasons.

Inter Miami — which won the 2023 Leagues Cup and MLS Supporters Shield this season under Martino — was eliminated in the first round of this year's MLS Cup playoffs. The team's 2025 season starts with training camp in January.

Martino also had deep ties to Messi before coming to Inter Miami; he coached the world's most decorated men's player and eight-time Ballon d'Or winner with Barcelona and Argentina's national team before reuniting with him in South Florida. Martino said Friday he decided just before the start of the playoffs that he would not be back with Inter Miami next season.

"Needless to say, we've enjoyed it a lot and I'm grateful for the opportunity, on behalf of my entire coaching staff, to have been able to work at this club," Martino said Friday in his farewell news conference. "The truth is that it's been very captivating being part of the change during this year and a half." (AP)

# Tilak Varma makes record-setting hundred Shreyas smashes ton ahead of IPL auction

MUMBAI, Nov 23: Tilak Varma became the first batter ever to notch three successive hundreds in T20s, while Shreyas Iyer underlined his credentials with a smooth century ahead of the IPL mega auction, as the two Indian batters hogged the limelight in the first round of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy on Saturday.

In a Group A match, Tilak, who made hundreds recently against South Africa at Centurion and Johannesburg, added one more three-figure knock to the list against Meghalaya in Rajkot.

The left-hander made 151 off just 67 balls with 14 fours and 10 sixes to guide Hyderabad to 248 for four in 20 overs. In the process, he also became the first Indian male cricketer to score a 150-plus score in T20s.

India woman batter Kiran Navgire had made a 162 for Nagaland against Arunachal Pradesh in the senior Women's T20 Trophy in 2022. Opener Tanmay Agarwal supported his skipper Tilak with a 55 off 23 balls.

Aniketreddy and Tanay Thyagarajan shared seven wickets among them as Hyderabad bundled out their rivals for 69 to celebrate a massive 179-run victory.

**Shreyas shines**  
Shreyas, who was released by Kolkata Knight Riders despite leading them to the IPL 2024 title, made a timely reminder about his skills with an unbeaten 57-ball 130 (11x4, 10x6) for Mumbai against Goa in a Group E match. Shreyas' hundred led Mumbai to 250 for four, but Goa made a spirited chase before ending up at 224 for eight, going down by 26 runs. Suyash Prabhudesai was their top-scorer with a 52 off 36 balls.

**Brief scores**  
Hyderabad 248/4; 20 overs (Tilak Varma 151, Tanmay Agarwal 55) beat Meghalaya: 69; 15.1 overs (G Aniketreddy 4/11, Tanay Thyagarajan 3/15) by 179 runs. Mumbai 250/4; 20 overs (Shreyas Iyer 130 not out) beat Goa 224/8; 20 overs (Suyash Prabhudesai 52, Vikash Singh 47 not out; Suyansh Shedge 2/18) by 26 runs. (PTI)

# IOA President PT Usha has raised concerns about the Board's mandate

# No interference, regulatory board will ensure good governance: Mandaviya

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: Playing down concerns surrounding the autonomy of national federations and the IOA if a regulatory board comes into existence, sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya has asserted that the body is an essential step towards ensuring good governance and does not intend to interfere in day-to-day operations.

The establishment of a Sports Regulatory Board is one of the key features of the draft National Sports Governance Bill, which the government intends to introduce in the Parliament soon.

The regulatory body will have the authority to grant, renew, and suspend the affiliation of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and national sports federations, among others.

"We don't want to interfere. That's why I did a lot of dialogue, I had a lot of consultations with the federations. I consulted with eminent sports personalities and even lawyers who are against us," Mandaviya told reporters during an interaction on Friday.

"We don't want to take control, but

we can't leave it unattended. It is the responsibility of the government," he added. IOA president PT Usha has raised concerns about the Board's mandate, stating that it could undermine the autonomy of the IOA and national federations, putting India at risk of being suspended by the International Olympic Committee.

"This was a very important observation (Usha). It is not wrong. We have to follow the rules and regulations of the International Olympic Committee (IOC)," he said.

"All these things have to be aligned. I will have to keep a close eye on the bill. We have to implement the regulations that the IOC and the International Federations are bringing from time to time. If we don't do it, they will suspend us. We will suffer then. That's why I want everyone's consensus."

The minister, however, did not give an exact timeline for the introduction of the long-pending bill in the Parliament.

"Work is going on; we will introduce the bill soon," he said.



As per the draft bill, the national Olympic committee, national sports federations, the national paralympic com-

mittee, and their affiliates will also be annually required to make public disclosures as prescribed by the Sports Regu-

latory Board.

The draft bill has a provision for one Khel Ratna and one Dronacharya awardee in the five-member regulatory body, with the Secretary (Sports) as its chairman and the Director-General of the Sports Authority of India as an ex-officio member. The fifth member will be the Vice-Chancellor of the National Sports University.

Expressing concern about the autonomy of the IOA and National Sports Federations (NSFs), Usha, in a letter to the minister few weeks ago, had said the Board's over-riding powers can be construed as government interference by the IOC.

Mandaviya, however, reiterated that the Ministry does not wish to meddle.

"We are not interfering in anyone's autonomy. What is autonomy in a federation? When the court tells us that there should be an election, someone should be responsible for ensuring it is conducted properly."

"A separate system should be made for it, and they (regulatory board) will

look at it, we will not look at it...there will be no interference from the government. We will bring a mature bill," he assured.

Mandaviya cited his recent intervention in ensuring that wrestlers compete in a world championship after the national federation could not send a team due to an ongoing court case as an example of how necessary his ministry's role becomes in certain circumstances.

The wrestlers had protested outside his residence requesting him to ensure they compete after the Wrestling Federation of India withdrew the nation's entries from the prestigious tournament owing to a High Court order which barred it from selecting teams.

"Let's assume that I don't intervene, what will be the situation? The wrestling people said it will be contempt of court if we send our wrestlers to international championships."

"How can I deprive my children of this opportunity? Ultimately, if our children don't go, it will be the government's failure." (PTI)