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Economy recovering from slowdown witnessed in Q2: RBI

MUMBAI, Dec 24: The Indian economy is recovering from the slowdown in momentum witnessed in the September quarter, driven by strong festive activity and a sustained upswing in rural demand, according to a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) bulletin released on Tuesday.

An article on the 'State of the Economy' in the December bulletin noted that the global economy continues to exhibit resilience with steady growth and moderating inflation.

"High frequency indicators (HFIs) for the third quarter of 2024-25 indicate that the Indian economy is recovering from the slowdown in momentum witnessed in Q2, driven by strong festive activity and a sustained upswing in rural demand," it said. The article further said the growth trajectory is poised to lift in the second half of 2024-25, driven mainly by resilient domestic private consumption demand.



"Supported by record level foodgrains production, rural demand, in particular, is gaining momentum. Sustained government spending on infrastructure is expected to further stimulate economic activity and investment," the authors said.

Global headwinds, however, pose risks to the evolving outlook for

growth and inflation, said the article authored by a team led by RBI deputy governor Michael Debabrata Patra. India's GDP growth slowed to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent during the July-September period of the current fiscal year. The article said that from the expenditure side, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam only state to reduce road fatalities, says Himanta Intensified road safety drive till Magh Bihu on cards

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 24: Assam is the only major state in the country to register a reduction in road accident fatalities, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma asserted on Tuesday.

He said that while the state has witnessed dip in accident fatalities, the time period till January is very crucial to maintain these numbers. "Assam is the only major state in the country to see reduction in road accident fatalities. Overall accidents and fatalities have seen a reduction of around 15 per cent. Many districts have seen a dip in accidents following enforcement of instructions of last review meeting," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X after chairing a review meeting on road safety in Dibrugarh. The chief minister said that



the state will carry out extensive measures to ensure that the state roads are safe for all.

Among steps to ensure continued improvement in road safety indices are strict enforcement of the 'No Drink and Drive' rule with intensified checking after 10 pm, especially in Guwahati, he said.

Sarma said an intensified road safety drive and monitoring will be carried out till 'Magh Bihu', the harvest festival celebrated in mid-January, while an SOP will be published to ensure safety in picnic spots. The excise department will also explore regulating bar timings and enforcing dynamic seasonal timings, he said.

Police and district administrations will take out extensive road safety campaigns on social media platforms to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong protest to continue till Shah resigns

GUWAHATI, Dec 24: The Assam Congress on Tuesday said its protests against Union home minister Amit Shah's alleged remarks against Babasaheb Ambedkar will continue until he publicly apologises and resigns.

During the day, the party held demonstrations in Guwahati, Tezpur and Goalpara and other places led by Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah, deputy leader of Congress in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi and leader of the opposition Debabrata Saikia.

"When Amit Shah made derogatory remarks against Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, it actually showed the real picture of RSS and Hindu Mahasabha. These two organisations never recognised the Indian Constitution," Gogoi said while addressing party workers.

He said it was unfortunate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who "indulges in optics by bowing

in front of the Constitution", remained a "mute spectator" when one of his colleagues disrespected the architect of the Constitution.

"We will submit a memorandum to the district commissioner. We demand that Amit Shah must offer a public apology and resign. Unless he does this, our movement will continue," Gogoi said.

Saikia and four other senior leaders submitted the memorandum addressed to President Droupadi Murmu in the office of Kamrup Metropolitan district commissioner.

Shah has come under fire from the Congress and other opposition parties over his remark on Ambedkar in the Upper House of Parliament on December 17.

"Abhi ek fashion ho gaya hai - Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. Itna naam agar bhagwan ka lete to saat janmon (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jobs, farm productivity, funds for infra boost figure at PM-economists meet

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Job creation, improving farm productivity, and mobilising public funds for infrastructure development were some of the issues that figured during the interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and economists ahead of the 2025-26 Union Budget.

The Prime Minister on Tuesday met eminent economists and sectoral experts at NITI Aayog to hear their views and suggestions for the upcoming Budget.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Budget for 2025-26 in the Lok Sabha on February 1, 2025.

According to an official statement, the Prime Minister emphasised that Viksit Bharat can be achieved through a fundamental change in mindset, which is focused towards making India developed by 2047.

The participants shared their



views on several issues, including navigating challenges posed by global economic uncertainties and geopolitical tensions, strategies to enhance employment particularly among the youth, and create sustainable job opportunities across sectors.

Suggestions were also made on

aligning education and training programmes with the evolving needs of the job market, enhancing agricultural productivity and creating sustainable rural employment opportunities, attracting private investment and mobilising public funds for infrastructure projects to boost (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP MP Manoj Tiwari shares old video of Kejriwal, calls him 'fraud'

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: BJP MP Manoj Tiwari on Tuesday courted controversy by sharing on X an old clip of former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, alleging that he said framers of the "constitution" were drunk when they made it.

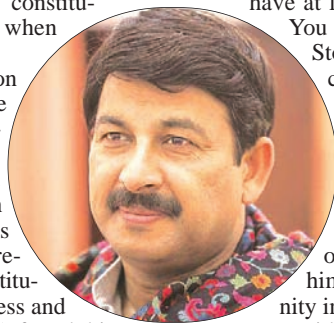
Several users on X claimed the video was truncated and responded with a longer video, in which Kejriwal is purportedly seen referring to the "constitution" of the Congress and not the country's. "I found this video of the smiling chief of Delhi's Aam Aadmi Party... after listening everyone will be able to see the true colours of such an impersonator," Tiwari, the North East Delhi MP, said in a post with the hashtag Dalit_Virodhi AAP.

Sisodia, a former deputy chief minister of Delhi, taking umbrage over Tiwari's post, also shared the longer version of the video on X and said, "Tiwari ji you are an MP, have at least some shame."

You are tweeting a lie. Stop behaving like a cheap troll. Maintain the honour of at least the post of MP if not yourself." Tiwari responded to Sisodia with another post, advising him to maintain dignity in a debate.

He said, "...you can run away to avoid the questions of the people of Patparganj, but we will not let you run away from here."

Sisodia who represented the Patparganj constituency thrice since 2013, is going to contest from the Jangpura (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



BRICS' influence growing among countries of Global South: China

BEIJING, Dec 24: China on Tuesday said the appeal and influence of the BRICS bloc is growing more saliently as it is becoming the main platform to promote solidarity and cooperation between the Global South.

With the partner countries on board the BRICS family, the BRICS cooperation is elevated to a new height, the BRICS mechanism has greater representation, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told the media here while responding to a question on Russia announcing new BRICS partner countries.

Mao said a list of BRICS partner countries was finally agreed on with consensus among the member countries. The list included Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Belarus, Bolivia, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong to decide 2025 action plan, take up Ambedkar 'insult' issue at Belagavi CWC meet

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: In a bid to get battle-ready for challenges ahead, the Congress will decide on an action plan for the next year at its CWC meeting named 'Nav Satyagraha Baiithak' being held in Karnataka's Belagavi to mark the 100th anniversary of the Belgaum session presided over by Mahatma Gandhi.

The opposition party asserted that the "insult" to B R Ambedkar by home minister Amit Shah will be taken up for deliberation at Belagavi and that there will be a "strong follow-up" on the issue.

Addressing a joint press conference along with Congress general secretary organisation K C Venugopal and AICC media and publicity department head Pawan Khara, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting on December 26 has been named 'Nav Satyagraha Baiithak' which would see two resolutions being passed.

Ramesh said the Congress is marking the current week as the 'Ambedkar Samman Saptah' against the "insult" of B R Ambedkar by home minister Shah.

He said there is only one solution to the issue which is that the home minister be sacked and must apologise for his remarks.



Ramesh said that on December 27, a 'Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally will be held in Belagavi.

The Congress general secretary alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP want to change the Constitution and are acting contrary to its spirit.

"When Prime Minister Modi became an MP and entered Parliament, he prostrated on the steps. The result is that the old Parliament building was abandoned and new building was inaugurated. On November 26 this year, the PM prostrated on the original copy of the Constitution, which means a new Constitution will be brought," Ramesh claimed. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Wrong to compare 5 PM voter turnout data with final polling data: EC to Cong

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: The Election Commission on Tuesday asserted that there were no arbitrary additions or deletions of voters in Maharashtra where assembly polls were held recently.

In its response to the Congress, the poll authority also said it would not be correct to compare 5 PM voter turnout data with final polling data.

The Congress had approached the poll panel in November flagging various concerns related to the Maharashtra assembly polls.

Coming out with a detailed note and frequently asked questions (FAQs), the poll authority told the Congress that increase in voter turnout from 5 PM to 11:45 PM was normal, being part of the process of aggregation of voter turnout.

It said there can be bona fide but inconsequential differences in votes polled and votes counted.

The EC asserted that it is impossible to change actual voter turnout as statutory Form 17C giving de-



tails of voter turnout is available with authorised agents of candidates at the time of close of poll at the polling station itself.

It said rule-based process was followed with transparency in Maharashtra electoral roll preparation and there were no irregular pattern in voter deletions in the state.

It told the Congress that due process was followed, including participation of Congress representatives in preparation of electoral rolls. The commission told the party that its complaint of an average addition of 50,000 electors between July and November in 50 assembly seats, out of which 47 have been (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

348 unemployed youths recruited at job fair in Jorhat

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Dec 24: A total of 348 unemployed youths from five districts of Assam were recruited by private companies at a job fair held at the Jorhat Engineering College (JEC) auditorium on Monday.

The mela, under the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojana, was organised by the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission.

The districts covered were Jorhat, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Majuli, and Charideo.

The job fair was inaugurated by Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, MP from Kaziranga Lok Sabha Constituency, and Bipul Kumar Das, chief executive officer of the Jorhat Zila Parishad. A total of 742 unemployed youths were interviewed by more than 35 private companies from Assam, the Northeast, and other parts of India, with 348 deemed eligible. The selected candidates were officially handed their appointment letters at the fair.

Some companies also conducted interviews virtually during the event. The meeting was attended by state project manager Ankur Chowdhury. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'A mix of different financial resources and strategies will be necessary'

India's environmental leadership can drive regional climate action: Atul Bagai

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: India played a crucial role in helping Bhutan comply with the Montreal Protocol and has the potential to lead South Asia by sharing its knowledge and technology with other countries to combat climate change, former UNEP India head Atul Bagai said on Tuesday.

Bagai received the National Order of Merit from Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck on December 17 for his instrumental contributions to the Himalayan country's environmental governance, particularly its successful compliance with the Montreal Protocol.

India played a key role as a trading partner by adjusting its policies to support Bhutan's targets to phase out hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) in the air conditioning sec-



tor by 2025, he said. For example, India agreed not to export equipment or gases that Bhutan is phasing out after 2025, Bagai, a former career diplomat, said.

Beyond Bhutan, Bagai's insights extend to the broader environmental

challenges of South Asia. The region faces a paradox: it is one of the most climate-vulnerable areas in the world while grappling with poverty and development priorities.

He told PTI that balancing development and environmental priori-

ties remains the key challenge for countries in the Global South. However, India is demonstrating that "development and environment can go hand in hand". He said South Asia cannot wait for international resolutions and it must act now.

"South Asia, and particularly the Asia-Pacific, can take a leading role in finding and implementing solutions to climate issues. India, for example, has already started taking action despite the lack of progress in international talks. Investments in renewable energy and land restoration continue, and India's ambitions in these areas remain high," he said.

"India can play a leadership role by sharing its knowledge and technology with other South Asian countries. For example, India has made significant progress in energy efficiency (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NIA chargesheets two for conspiring to establish Islamic caliphate in India



CHENNAI, Dec 24: The NIA has chargesheeted two men for allegedly conspiring to establish an Islamic caliphate in India, besides spreading terror in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring states, it said in a statement.

According to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) investigation, the accused were actively involved in recruiting "Daris/students" to "secret classes" of the

Hizb ut Tahrir (HuT) terror organisation.

In its chargesheet filed before the special NIA court, Poonamallee, Chennai, Abdul Rehman alias Abdul Rahman and Mujibur Rehman alias Mujibur Rahman Altham Sahib have been charged under sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for conspiring and preparing to undertake terrorist acts to promote the HuT ideology in Tamil Nadu and other places.

"They had also conducted Bayan (religious exposition) classes and had made several short films to further the organisation's anti-India ideology on social media platforms. They had further organised an exhibition to showcase the military might of Islamic nations that would be invited (Nussrah) to overthrow the legally established government in India through violent jihad and war," according to the NIA statement. The NIA investigations revealed that the accused had conspired with self-styled HuT officebearers (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sensex, Nifty settle almost flat in highly volatile trade; metal, power stocks drag

MUMBAI, Dec 24: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended on a flat note in a volatile trade on Tuesday, as investors preferred to stay on the sidelines awaiting further triggers amid persistent foreign fund outflows.

After gyrating between highs and lows, the 30-share index declined 67.30 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 78,472.87. During the day, it dropped 142.38 points or 0.18 per cent to 78,397.79.

The NSE Nifty dipped 25.80 points or 0.11 per cent to 23,727.65.

As many as 2,019 stocks declined, while 1,977 advanced and 96 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"The domestic market concluded flat ahead of the holiday, with metal and power stocks dragging performance while FMCG and auto sectors gained from recent corrections.

"The near-term market trajectory hinges on the outcome of Q3 results and the Union budget, but caution prevails due to a strong dollar, high bond yields, and concerns over rate cuts. The rupee hitting an all-time low further evoked the caution," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30 blue-chip stocks, Power Grid, State Bank of India, Titan, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, Adani Ports and Infossys were among the laggards.

In contrast, Tata Motors, ITC, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC and Zomato were among the gainers.



The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.37 per cent, and the BSE midcap index rose 0.09 per cent.

"The Nifty index saw a lacklustre start to the much-anticipated 'Santa Claus Rally Period,' with the index closing at 23,728, down 26 points. The sluggish session was attributed to persistent selling by FIIs, concerns over India's slowing economic growth, and a weakening Indian rupee, which hit a record low of Rs. 85.13 against the dollar.

"These factors weighed on investor sentiment, keeping the market directionless and choppy throughout the day. Our earlier call suggested a low-volume trading session, and that prediction held true as Nifty traded in a volatile range," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Among sectoral indices, metal slumped 0.93 per cent, power declined 0.73 per cent, utilities

(0.52 per cent), consumer durables (0.50 per cent) and commodities (0.33 per cent).

BSE Consumer Discretionary, energy, healthcare, telecommunication, auto, oil & gas and services were the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) off-loaded equities worth ₹ 168.71 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled higher, while Seoul and Tokyo ended in negative territory.

European markets were trading with gains in mid-session deals. Wall Street ended in the positive zone overnight trade on Monday.

The rupee extended the slide for the second straight session and depreciated 9 paise to settle at a fresh all-time low of 85.20 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.62 per cent to USD 73.08 a barrel.

"Investors are now turning their attention to the Reserve Bank of India's upcoming monetary policy and the Union Budget for 2025, anticipating measures that could support economic growth and market stability," Ameya Ranadive Chartered Market Technician, CFTe, Sr Technical Analyst, StoxBox, said.

The BSE benchmark jumped 498.58 points or 0.64 per cent to settle at 78,540.17 on Monday. The Nifty surged 165.95 points or 0.70 per cent to 23,753.45.

Equity markets will remain closed on Wednesday for Christmas. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1..

Economy recovering from

the major factor contributing to the decline in the growth rate of the economy is fixed capital formation and from the production side, the main concern is manufacturing. "Undermining both is inflation. The erosion of purchasing power due to repeated inflation shocks and persisting price pressures is starkly reflected in weakening sales growth of listed non-financial nongovernment corporations," it said.

Their outlook on demand conditions also remains subdued as no let-up in the incidence of price shocks seems to be in sight; they will increasingly be inclined to pass on input costs to selling prices.

Consequently, there is no robust capacity creation by investing in fixed assets. Instead, corporations are churning and utilising existing capacity to meet the inflation-dented consumer demand, the article said. "The result is lacklustre private investment. The slowdown in consumer demand seems to be associated with slower corporate wage growth," it said. The authors further said another headwind emerging is the slowing rate of nominal GDP growth, which could hinder fiscal spending, including on capex, to achieve budgetary deficit and debt targets.

The article also noted that as per the projections based on the in-house Dynamic Stochastic General Equilibrium (DSGE), real GDP growth is likely to recover to 6.8 per cent and 6.5 per cent in Q3 and Q4 of 2024-25, respectively. Growth for 2025-26 is projected at 6.7 per cent while headline CPI inflation (retail) is projected to average 3.8 per cent in 2025-26. In the December monetary policy, the RBI had projected the GDP growth for 2024-25 at 6.6 per cent with Q3 at 6.8 per cent; and Q4 at 7.2 per cent. GDP growth for the April quarter of 2025-26 was projected at 6.9 per cent; and Q2 at 7.3 per cent. The RBI said the views expressed in the bulletin are of the authors and do not represent the views of the central bank. (PTI)

Intensified road safety drive

spread awareness, and road safety video/drama will be played before the start of any public event, Sarma said. He said work on installing streetlights, foot overbridges and reflection patches on the Guwahati National Highway bypass to check rising accidents will be expedited, while putting up streetlights in all major towns will be carried out in mission mode.

The chief minister said provision of building speed breakers, crash barriers, signages and fluorescent lights will be included in the 'Scope of Work' by the PWD. Special instructions have also been issued to SPs of border districts to implement installation of reflective patches on rear side of commercial trucks and vehicles, while vision test of drivers of such vehicles will be conducted and treatment facilitated as well, he said. Medical colleges and hospitals will provide the best possible care to accident victims, and security in such facilities will also be enhanced to ensure safety of doctors, Sarma added. (With inputs from PTI)

Cong protest to continue

tak swarg mil jata (It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. If they had taken God's name so many times, they would have got a place in heaven)," Shah had said. Taking part in the programme in Tezpur, Sonitpur district, Borah said the party carried out the 'Ambedkar Samman March' in all districts of the state.

"Personally I along with party leaders and thousands of workers participated in Tezpur. We not only submitted the memorandum but we also placed a big portrait of Babasaheb Ambedkar in the DC office," he added. Borah submitted the memorandum to Sonitpur DC and placed a portrait of Dr Ambedkar in his chamber. (PTI)

Jobs, farm productivity, funds

economic growth. Suggestions were also made for promoting financial inclusion and boosting exports and attracting foreign investment, as per the statement.

Renowned economists and analysts present at the interaction included Surjit S Bhalla, Ashok Gulati, Sudipto Mundle, Dharmakirti Joshi, Janmejaya Sinha, Madan Sabnavis, Amita Batra, Ridham Desai, Chetan Ghate, Bharat Ramaswami, Soumya Kanti Ghosh, Siddhartha Sanyal, Laveesh Bhandari, Rajani Sinha, Keshab Das, Pritam Banerjee, Rahul Bajoria, Nikhil Gupta, and Shashwat Alok, the statement added. The meeting comes in the backdrop of worries around deceleration of economic growth.

The Indian economy grew 6.7 per cent in the June quarter and 5.4 per cent in the July-September period. Recently, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) lowered India's economic growth forecast to 6.5 per cent for the current financial year from its earlier estimate of 7 per cent due to lower-than-expected growth in private investment and housing demand.

The multilateral development bank has also lowered India's growth forecast for the 2025-26 financial year. Earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India also significantly lowered the growth projection for the current fiscal year to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent earlier. Next year's Budget will also be watched for any pre-emptive measures the government might take in response to a possible hike in US tariffs after US President-elect Donald Trump last week said India charges a lot of tariff and threatened to impose reciprocal tax. (PTI)

BRICS' influence growing among

Cuba, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Uganda. BRICS originally consisted of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have been admitted as new members. China stands ready to work with other BRICS members and partner countries to follow the spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation, Mao said. (PTI)

BJP MP Manoj Tiwari shares

constituency in the Assembly elections due in February next year. In the video Tiwari shared, Kejriwal is heard saying that he read the constitutions of all parties and Congress' constitution said no party worker will consume alcohol. He follows it up by saying, "Somebody said 'whoever wrote the constitution would have written the constitution after drinking liquor.'" (PTI)

Cong to decide 2025 action

"They (BJP) do not want the Constitution. The RSS has opposed the Constitution since November 26, 1949... Constitution principles and institutions are being attacked with attempts to make institutions such as the EC being made an attached office of the home minister," he alleged. Ramesh also lashed out at RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's recent statement about not raising 'mandir-masjid' disputes, terming it as "double standards". At the presser, Venugopal said the Congress has strongly taken up the issue of the "insult" of Ambedkar by the home minister and has been demanding the sacking of Shah as well as an apology from him.

He said the issue would be strongly taken up in Belagavi and ways to take it forward in the future will also be deliberated upon. "Over the last week, Congress party workers all over India have been participating in agitation. Today, all District Committees are doing demonstrations and will be submitting a memorandum to the President of India through the district collectors, demanding the resignation of Home Minister Amit Shah," Venugopal said. (PTI)

Wrong to compare 5 PM voter

won by the Mahayuti, is factually incorrect and misleading. It said the fact is that only six assembly constituencies had total additions of over 50,000 electors during the period. Hence the question of winning in 47 seats on this basis does not arise. While detailing the well laid out mechanism with sufficient checks and balances and disclosures, the EC emphasised that the watertight statutory scheme ensures that deletion and addition of voters is done strictly according to rules with fullest involvement of political parties at every stage.

It underlined that there were no bulk deletions or unusual deletion patterns of noticed across all assembly seats. Deletions of an average of 2,779 electors per seat happened on account of death or shifting and duplicate entries after following due process, including participation of party representatives. The Commission also listed out nearly 60 instances of proactive involvement of political parties or candidates during the entire electoral process. The Commission reiterated that political parties, being key stakeholders, are involved scrupulously at each and every stage of the election process from 'Roll to Poll' (preparation of electoral rolls to completion of poll process). (PTI)

NIA chargesheets two for

to propagate the outfit's ideology, aimed at establishing an Islamic caliphate in India and enforcing the Sharia-based draft constitution written by HuT founder Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, it said. (PTI)

348 unemployed youths

executive project manager Manav Jyoti Buragohain (MIS), and executive project Manager Dennis Neog. Mariani MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi, principal of Jorhat Engineering College Dr Rupam Baruah, and project managers from the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission for the five districts, including Dr Suraj Jyoti Gogoi (Jorhat) and R Buragohain (Golaghat), were present and distributed appointment letters to the selected candidates.

India's environmental leadership

through programmes like the star-rating system for appliances," he said. Bagai said that as a major trading partner, India has a responsibility to provide technical support to neighbouring countries that import equipment from India. Many of these countries are eager to establish policies and standards to adapt this technology to their needs. By sharing its expertise and building partnerships, India can help lead South Asia in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, he said.

Bagai's journey with Bhutan began in 2004 when he was stationed in Bangkok as a senior regional coordinator for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). At the time, only four countries globally had not ratified the Montreal Protocol - two of them were Afghanistan and Bhutan. "My task was to help the Bhutanese government understand the implications of ratifying the protocol and the benefits it would bring. Bhutan ratified it in 2004, and that marked the start of my close collaboration with the country," Bagai recalls.

The Montreal Protocol, adopted in 1987 and often hailed as the most successful international environmental agreement, aims to phase out ozone-depleting substances (ODS). For nearly 12 years, Bagai worked alongside Bhutanese officials to craft and implement a comprehensive strategy for compliance. "Advocacy was a major focus. Bhutan's Queen was designated as the country's ozone ambassador, and she played a key role in spreading awareness," he said. One of Bhutan's most significant achievements under Bagai's guidance was its early commitment to phase out hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) in the air conditioning sector by 2025. This was well ahead of the 2040 deadline set for developing countries.

This bold move became a global example and inspired other nations to consider accelerated timelines for phasing out ODS, Bagai noted. As the UNEP India head from 2017 to 2024, Bagai strengthened the bilateral relationship between India and Bhutan on environmental collaboration by developing and leading a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries. This MoU serves as the cornerstone of their environmental partnership, with India providing technical and financial support to Bhutan on various environmental issues, including waste management. (PTI)

Gold plummets; silver leaps

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Gold price slipped ₹ 100 to ₹ 78,600 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal had closed at ₹ 78,700 per 10 grams in the previous trading session.

However, silver jumped ₹ 500 to ₹ 90,500 per kg against the previous close of ₹ 90,000 per kg.

The price of 99.5 per cent purity gold dipped ₹ 100 to ₹ 78,200 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February rose ₹ 35 or 0.05 per cent to trade at ₹ 76,179 per 10 grams. Silver contracts for March delivery went lower by ₹ 87 or 0.1 per cent to ₹ 89,031 per kg.

Globally, Comex gold futures traded flat at USD 2,628.30 per ounce. "Gold traded steady in a holiday thin session with prices seen consolidating last week's fall but remained weighed by a stronger dollar in the overseas market," Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG - Commodity & Currency Research, JM Financial Services Ltd, said.

According to HDFC Securities' Senior Analyst of Commodities Saumil Gandhi, the trading volume remains relatively calm this week ahead of the Christmas holiday. (PTI)

NFRA penalises Deloitte Haskins & Sells LLP, 2 auditors for lapses in ZEEL audits

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) has imposed a fine of ₹ 2 crore on Deloitte Haskins & Sells LLP as well as penalties on two chartered accountants for lapses in auditing of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd during 2018-19 and 2019-20 financial years.

Along with slapping a fine of ₹ 10 lakh, A B Jani has been barred from taking up any audit work for 5 years while the fine is ₹ 5 lakh on Rakesh Sharma and the debarment period is 3 years.

Jani was the Engagement Partner (EP) and Sharma was the Engagement Quality Control Review (EQCR) Partner for the audit of the company for 2018-19 and 2019-20. The regulator had suo motu examined the audit file for the statutory audit of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) for the given periods to assess whether the auditor committed any professional misconduct.

After examining the audit file and responses of the audit firm to its queries as well as other records, NFRA said prima facie the auditors had not discharged their professional duties under the Companies Act as well as the Standards on Auditing (SA).

In its 30-page order dated De-



cember 23, NFRA said auditors failed to meet the relevant requirements of the SAs and violated the Act in respect of certain significant related party transactions.

The watchdog has imposed a monetary penalty of ₹ 2 crore on Deloitte Haskins & Sells LLP apart from penalties on Jani and Sharma.

Both individuals have been debarred from "being appointed as an auditor or internal auditor or from undertaking any audit in respect of financial statements or internal audit of the functions and activities of any company or body corporate," for varying periods.

The ban on Jani and Sharma is for 5 and 3 years, respectively.

In September 2018, ZEEL Chairman, who is also the promoter of Essel Group of companies, issued a letter to Yes Bank, committing ₹ 200 crore fixed deposit of ZEEL as a guarantee for the loans given by Yes Bank to a promoter group company Essel Green Mobility Ltd.

The bank appropriated the fixed

deposit in July 2019, towards settlement of loan amounts due from seven promoter group companies.

"Neither the creation and maintenance of fixed deposit nor its reappropriation by the bank was with the approval of the board or shareholders of the company. The statutory auditors failed to identify and report this misrepresentation," the regulator said.

Further, NFRA said its examination showed that the auditors were grossly negligent, failed to apply professional skepticism and due diligence, did not adequately challenge the management's assertions, and failed to evaluate reporting of suspected fraud. This was evident from unauthorised guarantees/securities, premature closure of the fixed deposit by the bank and unauthorised use of ZEEL's funds for settling the loan of the promoter group companies, with the knowledge of the Chairman of the group and management of ZEEL, the regulator said in the order.

A show cause notice was issued to the audit firm and the two auditors, and after considering their responses, the watchdog found that the audit firm and the two auditors, "are guilty of professional misconduct". Subsequently, the latest order was passed by it. (PTI)

Indian Oil Corp to invest ₹ 61,000 crore for naphtha cracker project in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, Dec 24: State-owned Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) will invest ₹ 61,000 crore to set up a naphtha cracker project at Paradip in Odisha, a statement said on Tuesday.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for this will be signed between the Odisha government and the IOCL in January during the 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha 2025' summit, it said. The foundation stone of the IOC's upcoming ₹ 4,352 crore yarn project at Bhadrak will also be laid at that time, it added.

The decisions were taken at a meeting between

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and IOCL Chairman AS Sahney in Bhubaneswar.

"The Naphtha Project in Paradeep has received in principle approval and IOCL will invest over ₹ 61,000 crore for the project. It is likely to be one of the largest projects in the sector in the country. The State Government is an equity holder of this project, and will earn dividends in addition to taxes," said the statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office.

"It was also decided that, the foundation for the upcoming Yarn project of IOCL at Bhadrak

will also be laid in January. ₹ 4,352 crore will be invested for this project. It was informed that once the project is completed, various large scale garments manufacturing units will come up in the area. Both the projects will create huge employment opportunities for the youth (sic)," it added.

Meanwhile, the ongoing Px-PTA (Para-xylene Purified Terephthalic Acid) project will be commissioned by June, it was informed in the meeting. The CM also discussed with the IOCL's top brass the proposed floating solar project and ethanol project in the state. (PTI)

Bajaj Finserv launches ELSS tax saver fund



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 24: Bajaj Finserv AMC has announced the launch of Bajaj Finserv ELSS Tax Saver Fund, an open-ended equity linked saving scheme with a statutory lock-in period of 3 years and tax benefits.

The fund opens for subscription on December 24, 2024, and the New Fund Offer period ends on January 22, 2025.

"We are committed to empowering individuals with smart financial solutions that align with their long-term goals. While equity markets may be volatile in the short term, they have the potential to generate wealth over the long term. ELSS, with its triple advantage of tax-saving (under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act), wealth creation through equities, and the lowest lock-in period compared to other tax-saving instruments, can help investors attain their financial goals," an official

statement quoted Ganesh Mohan, chief executive officer, Bajaj Finserv AMC as saying.

Commenting on the same, Nimesh Chandan, chief investment officer, Bajaj Finserv AMC, said that the fund follows a long-term oriented stock selection process, which includes identifying and investing in quality businesses through comprehensive fundamental analysis.

"It focuses on selecting companies with robust, growth-oriented business model, good management and available at reasonable valuation. It is built on our inhouse INQUBE investment philosophy, which makes use of superior information collection, behavioural insights, and quantitative analysis to create a robust and well-balanced portfolio," he added.

Bajaj Finserv ELSS Tax Saver Fund aims at fulfilling the dual benefits of tax saving and wealth accumulation over long term by in-

vesting in equities. The scheme is suitable for investors who seek the potential for wealth creation over the long term and want to invest predominantly in equity and equity related instruments with tax benefit under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act, 1961. The scheme is benchmarked against BSE 500 Total Return Index (TRI).

ELSS has a lock-in period of 3 years, the lowest among all tax-saving avenues under Section 80C. In comparison, options like PPF, NSC, or Tax-Saving Bank FDs have lock ins of 5 - 15 years. This dual benefit of saving tax and wealth growing potential over the long term makes this scheme suitable for long-term investors aiming for wealth creation through equities. Additionally, the option to invest in affordable and disciplined instalments through Systematic Investment Plans can make ELSS a compelling choice for salaried individuals as well as first-time investors.

The Bajaj Finserv ELSS Tax Saver Fund is available in both Growth and IDCW options under the Regular and Direct Plans. Investments in the scheme can be made either as a lump sum or through SIPs, with a minimum contribution of ₹ 500. The fund will be managed by Nimesh Chandan and Sorbh Gupta for the equity portion and Mr. Siddharth Chaudhary for the debt portion.

S&T WORK
E-Tender No. SNT-39-LMG-2024-25; Dated: 20-12-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work. Name of work & its Location: Interlocking of 08 nos of manged Engineering LC gates with provision of ELB and emergency Sliding Boom in Badarpur Jn.-Agartala section of Lumding Division. Tender Value: ₹ 6,75,60,287.47; Bid Security: ₹ 4,87,800.00. E-tender will be Closed at 15:00 hrs. on 16-01-2025 and Opened at 15:30 hrs. on 16-01-2025. For details visit: www.irps.gov.in
Sr. DSTE, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
(Grouped contractors only & single)

AFFIDAVIT

I, Din Islam do hereby affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of the below mentioned address and citizen of India by birth. That my actual and correct name is DIN ISLAM but in my Passport vide No. M3278793 File No. GU1067645245214 wherein my name has been recorded as MD DIN ISLAM in place of DIN ISLAM. That MD DIN ISLAM and DIN ISLAM are the same and one person.
Sd/-
Din Islam
SO- Rehan Ali
Vill- No. 7/2 Baruahar
PO- Jangalpara,
PS- Dalgaoon
Dist- Darrang (Assam)

EM of KAAC launches new IPR website

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 24: Executive Member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Surjya Rongphar officially launched the IPR website during a function held in Diphu on Tuesday.

The newly launched website—<https://iprkaac.com/>—will serve as a dedicated platform for disseminating information and updates related to the Information and Public Relations department along with the council's activities, initiatives, and policies. This user-friendly website will enhance transparency, accessibility, and communication with the citizens of the region.

Speaking on the occasion, the EM emphasised the importance of digital platforms in bridging the gap between the administration and the public. He encouraged citizens to utilise the website to stay informed about the initiatives and activities undertaken by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council through this IPR website conveniently from anywhere.

Officials from the Information and Public Relations department of Karbi Anglong were present to witness the launch.

'Directed the police to maintain a tight vigil to prevent road accidents'

Assam CM announces ₹ 300 crore residential project for AMCH

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced a ₹ 300 crore residential project here in Dibrugarh on Tuesday.

The announcement was made after cm Sarma visited the Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH).

During the visit, Sarma said also took note of the construction of a residential colony at the medical college.

"The chief minister stated that the colony, which is estimated to cost ₹ 300 crore, will provide accommodation for the hospital staff, thereby enhancing the overall infrastructure and facilities at the AMCH," an official statement said.

During his visit to the AMCH, Sarma held a review meeting with the medical college authorities to assess the existing facilities and infrastructure.

Furthermore, he addressed about the issue of urban flooding and



water logging in Dibrugarh town during a meeting with officials of the Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation. The discussions focused on finding sustainable solutions to mitigate the impact of flooding in the town.

"He also stressed on the importance of road safety and directed the police to maintain a tight vigil until January 15 to prevent road

accidents during the New Year celebrations. He specifically highlighted the need to crack down on drink driving and rash driving to ensure the safety of commuters," the statement concluded.

The meeting was attended by top officials including director general of police GP Singh, special DGP Harmeet Singh, commissioners of 9 upper Assam districts.

ACJMS holds an awareness meeting

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 24: The Asom Chutiyia Jati Mahila Sammilan (ACJMS) held an awareness meeting on political, cultural traditions and socio-economic problems of the Chutiyas on Tuesday.

The meeting was held in Sivasagar Rangpurjyoti Club in the presence of over a hundred delegates from various districts.

The meeting was addressed by Jaya Barua, president, Chutiyia Jati Sammelan, Asom, Ranjit Tamuly, educationist, Sivasagar district unit, journalists Manoj Kr Borthakur, Bhairav Munda, Debajit Saikia, secretary, Chutiyia Jati Sammilan, Ringkumoni Sadhan Barua, prof Khirod Khanikar, Kamal Bora, human right activist, Parag Saikia, secretary, Sivasagar district Chutiyia Jati Sammilan, Debasish Chutia and Parag Chutiyia.

The speakers spoke on diverse topics as such as political, cultural traditions and socio-economic problems of the Chutiyas.

and Northeast to participate in the event, highlighting its international significance," it added.

Mahakumbh-2025 starts from January 13 to February 26 2025, it will be held on the sacred banks of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers in Prayagraj, a UNESCO-recognised heritage site.

The minister promised that the 2025 Mahakumbh will surpass the 2019 edition in both scale and grandeur, expecting over 450 million pilgrims, saints, and tourists to attend. As per the statement, the event will be a "Swachh, Swasth, Surakshit, and Hari Mahakumbh," with major initiatives to ensure cleanliness, environmental sustainability, and digital integration.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief minister Yogi Adityanath, the event will showcase India's cultural and spiritual heritage to the world, with invitations extended to people from across India and globally to partake in this sacred pilgrimage," the statement said.



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 24: Uttar Pradesh minister Ravindra Jaiswal led an outreach event in Guwahati to promote the upcoming Prayagraj Mahakumbh-2025, said an official statement on Tuesday.

He emphasised the Uttar

Pradesh government's commitment to organising a grand, spiritually enriching, and digitally enhanced event.

"Minister Jaiswal described the Mahakumbh as a symbol of India's unity in diversity and extended an invitation to the people of Assam

Acharya greets people on Christmas

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 24: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya extended his warm greetings and best wishes to the Christians in particular and all the people in general on the occasion of Christmas, an official statement on Tuesday.

The Governor while greeting the people on Christmas said that since the day is celebrated commemorating the birthday of Jesus Christ and everybody should take the occasion as an opportunity to learn from the virtues of Lord Jesus.

"He also urged upon everyone to follow the teachings of Lord Jesus, recalling his efforts to create a compassionate society filled with love and humanity," the statement said.

Governor Acharya requested the people to use this occasion to spread the message of love, peace, friendship and universal brotherhood among mankind.

"He also said that the occasion resonates with the teachings of Christ, which remind all of the noble life and sacrifices of Jesus Christ," the statement added.

Minister Bhagirath visits Nagaon to attend review meeting

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 24: Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Bhagirath Choudhary visits Nagaon to attend a review meeting with senior officials of various departments on Tuesday.

During the meeting, district commissioner Narendra Kumar Shah highlighted the geographical boundary, administrative structure, and various schemes being implemented by the Central and State governments for the benefit of the public, especially in the agriculture sector.

The minister emphasised the importance of organic farming, stating that the use of chemical fertilisers has adversely affected farmers, agricultural land and the environment.

He urged farmers to adopt organic farming practices to improve soil fertility and reduce environmental pollution.

He further highlighted the Prime Minister's vision of developing India by 2047, emphasising that the upliftment of the poor and farmers is crucial to achieving this goal.

During the meeting, minister Choudhary inquired about the progress of various schemes implemented by NABARD in the district. He also discussed the progress of palm oil cultivation in the region with officials from the Horticulture Department.

1st Annual Conference of NFR sportspersons held

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 24: The 1st Annual Conference of the association of retired Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) sportspersons was held in Maligaon on December 22, an official statement said on Tuesday.

It was held with a befitting manner with the theme "Sports Persons Retired; Sportsmen Spirit Never."

"The program started with a morning Walkathon along with a theme song that was written and composed by Debasish Bhattacharjee, a renowned musician of Assam," the statement said.

"The Walkathon was flagged off by renowned sports personalities Tayabun Nisha, Chandan Sengupta, Abdul Barek and president Pradip Hajerika of the organisations who once represents NFR in various sports categories," the statement added.

The program was graced by the presence of Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, general manager, Northeast Frontier Railway with other senior officials.

Millet promotion programme inaugurated

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 24: A programme for promoting the nutritional and agricultural benefits of millets known as India's "Golden Grain," was inaugurated at the Bodoland Administrative Staff College in Kokrajhar.

The event was organised on Monday by the North-East Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC) under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) and sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.

The initiative aimed at boosting millet consumption and production across the region.

The event saw the participation of over 50 farmers, entrepreneurs and stakeholders with stalls showcasing a variety of millet-based products that attracted the participants.

NERAMAC deputy general manager (DGM), Anjal Kumar Dutta, BTC principal secretary Akash Deo, chief scientist of KVK Kokrajhar Sunil Kumar Pal,



nodal officer for millets in Assam, Sailendra Saikia and Kokrajhar district commissioner, Masanda Magdalin Pertin spoke on the occasion and underscored the historical significance of millets in traditional diets and their role in food security.

Dutta stated that the program

was organised to promote the nutritional and agricultural benefits of millets amongst the citizens.

"Government of India and state government are jointly working for bringing this initiative to have beneficial to the common masses across the region," Dutta said.

Governor releases two books



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 24: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya released two books named Chanyakya and Vidur which was authored by Padmashree Dr Joyshree Goswami Mahanta, at a function held in Guwahati.

The book was released on Monday which synchronises with the birthday of former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Acharya wished Prafulla Kumar Mahanta on his 72nd birth-

day and congratulated Dr Mahanta for authoring the two books.

"You have been a pioneer in preserving and promoting literature and culture. It is heartening that you have been honoured with numerous awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award," Acharya said.

Governor Acharya emphasised the significance of books in reflecting the culture, ideology, and knowledge.

"The books are the mirror of culture, ideology, and knowledge,

he advocated that the books should be companion to every individual," Acharya added.

The Governor commended Dr Mahanta's dedication to promoting India's rich cultural heritage, aligning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of advancing development while nurturing country's heritage.

He further said that the two books, Chanyakya and Vidur reflects Dr Mahanta's profound thought process and deep contemplation of India's historical and mythological lineage.

"He believed that these two significant works will help the masses comprehend the intellect, wisdom, and philosophies of India's great personalities," Acharya concluded.

The function was attended by chancellor of Assam Down Town University Dr Narendra Nath Dutta, chairman of Sankardev Nethralaya Padma Shri Dr Harsh Bhattacharya, retired professor of Gauhati University Dr Aparajita Barkataki along with a host of other dignitaries.

Social activist to receive Krantikal Sanman 2024

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 24: Social activist Noushad Akhtar Hazarika to be awarded with Krantikal Samman 2024 for his contributions to the cultural and social landscape of the state.

The secretary of the Shivakanta-Krantikal Nyas Kailash Rajkhwa stated that the award is a tribute to Hazarika's selfless contributions to the cultural and intellectual landscape of Nagaon.

This prestigious award recognises individuals who have made significant contributions to the cultural and social landscape of the state.

Hazarika was a native of Nagaon where he has been instrumental in shaping the cultural and intellectual environment of Nagaon town for over decades since 1972.

As the founder general secretary of the pioneer cultural organisation Kallol Sangskritik Gosthi, he has played a pivotal role in promoting art, literature, and culture in the region. His efforts have also led to the establishment of the Kallol Art School, Nagaon Cine Club, and Nagaon Book Fair.

A pioneer of the food movement and medium movement, Hazarika has been associated with almost every social and cultural organisation in Nagaon for the past five



decades. He has also mentored numerous talented individuals, helping them achieve recognition and success.

The Krantikal Samman is a testament to Hazarika's tireless efforts and contributions to the cultural and social development of Nagaon.

The previous recipients of this award include notable personalities such as Kabin Phukan, Ananda Chandra Dutta, Dhani Bora, Jyotish Sikdar, Sananta Tanti, Pranab Jyoti Deika.

NTPC, GRIDCO, and CRUT join hands to launch Green Hydrogen Mobility Scheme in Odisha



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 24: In a landmark step towards advancing green energy initiatives, National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) signed a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Grid Corporation of Odisha (GRIDCO) and the Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) in Bhubaneswar.

The agreement was signed on Monday which focused on the implementing green hydrogen technologies to revolutionise urban mobility in Odisha. The MoU was exchanged among DMR Panda, CGM (RE), NTPC; Trilochan Panda, MD, GRIDCO and Dr N Thirumala Naik, IAS, MD, CRUT.

As part of the initiative, the NTPC will establish a state-of-the-

art green hydrogen fuelling station in Bhubaneswar and introduce hydrogen-powered buses for both short-haul and long-haul operations. This shift aims to replace fossil fuel-based buses, reducing carbon emissions and enhancing energy security. The project has received partial funding from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).

The event was graced by Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, deputy chief minister of Odisha; Dr Krushna Chandra Mohapatra, housing and urban development minister; V K Dev, IAS, principal secretary of Energy; and Usha Padhee, IAS, principal secretary of housing and urban development, alongside other senior officials.

'Over 3,000 Christians are expected to gather for the midnight mass'

Christmas spirit grips Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 24: The Christian community in Dibrugarh is bracing up to celebrate the big day symbolising the birth of Jesus Christ.

The Catholic Church at Khalihamari is one of the oldest churches of the Northeast which was constructed in 1931 and has been exquisitely decorated with colourful flickering lights, stars and illuminated Christmas trees.

Various churches in the town have been buzzing with Christmas preparation - Catholic Church at Khalihamari, Baptist Church at Jail Road, Church of Jesus Christ at Kadamoni, Presbyterian Church of India at Paltan Bazar, Church of North India at South Khalihamari.

A strikingly elegant tableau of Jesus Christ adorns the inside of the cathedral along with other prettily decorated cribs symbolising



the birth of Jesus.

An assistant Parish priest Gabriel Kujur stated that Christmas is an occasion to pray for harmony and goodwill, a time for love

and forgiveness and a time to celebrate and rejoice. People of all faiths congregate here on Christmas.

"Over 3,000 Christians are ex-

pected to gather for the midnight mass on Tuesday. The church choir group will also present Christmas carols on the occasion," Kujur said.

HIV/AIDS screening and awareness camp held

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Dec 24: An HIV/AIDS screening and awareness camp was held on Tuesday in Margherita. The event was organised by the Margherita De-Addiction cum Rehabilitation Centre in collaboration with ICTC Margherita CHC/FRU.

A total of 15 youths from various parts of Tinsukia district including the center itself participated in the screening tests.

Many key personnel's were present at the event including Joyshri Dutta, counsellor at ICTC Margherita CHC/FRU; Esanul Hasim, laboratory technician; Suman Limbu, project coordinator from Lekhapani; Dyoti Borgohain, physiologist and counsellor from Margherita De-Addiction cum Rehabilitation Centre; and Dr P Sonowal, trained at NDDTC, AIIMS.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

For it is in giving that we receive.
- Francis of Assisi

Using Hindutva for personal gains

RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat is desperate to fix the soup he has landed in. His advice to Hindu society to refrain from raking up temple-mosque is part of this course-correction exercise. While suggesting to neo-Hindutva crusaders to refrain from raking up such issues, Bhagwat also cautioned that nobody can become a "leader of Hindus" by continuing to "raise temple-mosque disputes." In the 11 years of the Modi rule, Hindutva propagators have mushroomed everywhere and in his eagerness to emerge as the supreme leader of the Hindutva, Bhagwat allowed them to grow. He patronised "sants and swamis" whose job is to propagate the Hindutva philosophy of RSS and Bhagwat. They have one thing in common: both crave power, for which they use the political philosophy of Hindutva. These people have been using Hindutva and propagating ultra Hindutva line for their personal gains. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has never been associated with the RSS. Yogi has his own Hindu Yuva Vahini.

Demand for excavation of masjids for tracing Hindu temples has been acute in UP. Yogi contradicting Bhagwat was seen in the BJP circles as his attempt to emerge as the worthy successor of "Hindu Hriday Samrat" Modi. But a quick learner, Yogi preferred to fall in line and stand by Bhagwat. RSS had planned to use Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj to project Yogi as a Modi-like brand, a Hindutva icon. Having come to realise that his protest to Bhagwat may jeopardise his future, Yogi endorsed Bhagwat's line that the protection of Sanatan Dharma is essential for world peace. Bhagwat was forced to come out with this statement to counter the pro-Modi leaders and elements in the saffron ecosystem and to frustrate the attempt to hijack RSS's agenda. After the 2019 Lok Sabha win, Modi has been assiduously trying to project himself as the supreme leader of the saffron ecosystem. It was only recently, just ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, could Bhagwat and other RSS leaders showed Modi his right place.

It is only now that Modi has become proactive and not loosen his grip on the party. A large number of saffron leaders are advocating Modi's line. The Akhil Bharatiya Sant Samiti (AKSS), which is close to Modi, has criticised Bhagwat's remarks, saying that these are matters for religious leaders to decide and not for the RSS. The war of supremacy between Bhagwat and Modi has been raging and has now turned aggressive and sharper with the date for the election of a BJP president of BJP comes closer. Bhagwat has also come to realise that the RSS and BJP have been losing their support base. The various Hindu groups are sharpening their attacks on Muslims. Nearly two months back Bhagwat had advised the saffron rank and file to maintain restraint. The latest developments have fallen flat. Bhagwat sees them as open defiance and this is unacceptable to the RSS leadership. The dissent between the RSS and the BJP will be playing a pivotal role in the fast evolving "Hindutva" philosophy which can be seen branching from its very foundation. A crystalline propagation of a synchronised philosophy can work for the progress of the people of the nation.

The joyful essence of Christmas

Christmas is more than just a holiday or seasonal celebration; it represents an emotional and spiritual experience that reverberates across cultures, religions, and societies. Its deep meaning extends beyond the traditional giving of gifts and festive meals and instead resonates with the ideals of love, compassion, unity, and hope. Christmas provides the increasingly fragmented world with a moment of shared humanity, challenging people to focus on what really matters: other people's welfare and richness in human connection.

Christmas, essentially, celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, a central figure of Christianity, whose teachings about love, peace, and forgiveness have inspired millions over the past two millennia. The holiday, however, has grown beyond religious roots into a cultural celebration with various traditions, customs, and rituals. Although the customs vary from one country to another and even from one region to another, the core essence of the holiday remains the same: the spirit of giving, joy of family and togetherness, and reflection over the year that has passed.

Christmas has now become a part of the social fabric in most parts of the world, irrespective of the religion. In fact, its cultural relevance can be seen in the global celebration that spans beyond churches and communities, seeping into commercial spaces, public events, and everyday life. The music, lights, decorations, and the unmistakable air of festivity are everywhere, creating a sense of communal participation in something that is both universally human and, at the same time, deeply personal.

However, this general celebration comes with its contradictions. Christmas, over the years, has become a period of conspicuous consumption where materialism sometimes overshadows the deeper, more meaningful aspects of the holiday. Many may feel stressed rather than happy from efforts to be forced into gift buying and dinner affairs which are expensive to host. For others, commercial Christmas is out of sorts with the simplicity or rather selfishness message presented around that time. In this regard, it is important to take a moment and recall that the true spirit of Christmas does not lie in the tangible gifts exchanged but in the intangible gifts of kindness, generosity, and goodwill that we offer to each other.

There is also a growing recognition of the emotional toll that the holiday season can have, particularly for those facing loneliness, loss, or hardship.



While Christmas is a time of much bonding with family, there are many of whom feel loneliness and even sadness because of the cheer that highlights their absence due to a loved one or from the straining of challenging circumstances that are faced.

In these respects, the holiday also reminded us of empathy and helping hands for those who actually need it. This can be the best time for communities, families, and individuals to reach out in acts of comfort to the person in distress, who will not only receive material assistance but may also receive emotional care and comfort, companionship, and kindness. Christmas time provides an opportunity to reflect about issues of broader social justice and equity. The celebration of holiday season times can only be improved when it's shared. During this

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

season of giving, the spirit nudges people to donate to charity or volunteer at shelters and helps give an opportunity for social equality to contribute towards the welfare of others who are not as well-off. To that extent, Christmas stands as a small-scale miniature of humanitarian activities as they would prove effective throughout the entire year when put into action. This is reminding us that the happiness we should not feel only for ourselves but more for others, especially to those who need it.

Christmas joy is also attached closely with tradition and rituals. Traditions make people feel belonging and a sense of continuity while bringing comfort. Whether it is decorating a tree, attending a midnight Mass, or sharing a festive meal with loved ones, these rituals create a warmth and sense of connection between generations. For children, the magic of Christmas will often come alive in visions of Santa Claus, the excitement for gifts, and the joy that comes with family celebrations. It is a time of peace, rest, and

The Christmas tree: A testament to resilience and reverence

By: Shashanka Das

The Christmas tree, majestic in its simplicity, is a symbol as enduring as life is evolving. Its roots stretch deep into the soil of ancient pagan solstice rituals, where the evergreen served as a beacon of resilience, a living testament to life's persistence amid the desolation of winter. In those early ceremonies, the tree was more than a mere decoration; it was an emblem of eternal life, a participant in the sacred interplay between light and darkness. Through its unyielding green, even in the harshest winters, it whispered of hope, echoing humanity's primal urge to consecrate meaning in the cyclical rhythms of existence.

As humanity moved from the shadows of superstition into the dawn of reason, the Christmas tree stood as a bridge between these epochs. In early modern Europe, a time of profound uncertainty, it became a vessel for spiritual symbolism. The world was expanding—as astronomers like Kepler charted the heavens, and philosophers like Descartes redefined the very act of thinking—yet humanity grappled with its place in this newly unveiled cosmos. It was during this liminal period, in Germany, that legend tells of Martin Luther adorning an evergreen with candles inspired by the star-strewn sky. In doing so, Luther imbued the tree with a dual significance: as a reflection of celestial wonder and as a terrestrial beacon of faith.

This transformation of the Christmas tree into a sacred icon marked the convergence of human yearning and divine contemplation. Its luminous candles mirrored the stars above, creating a dialogue between the infinite and the intimate. The tree became not just an object of beauty but a profound metaphor: life's light endures, even amidst the longest nights.

Yet, as centuries unfolded, the Christmas tree's trajectory mirrored the shifting sands of human culture. The sacred often dances precariously close to the mundane, and in 1848, this dance took a pivotal turn. An engraving of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, surrounded by their family and an elaborately decorated Christmas tree, appeared in *The Illustrated London News*. This image, disseminated widely through the burgeoning reach of mass media, reframed the Christmas tree. What had once been a solemn act of reverence was now celebrated as a symbol of domestic festivity. The tree, adorned with ornaments and lights, entered the realm of commodity. Even amid this commodification, the Christmas tree retained a glimmer of its sacred origins. Its evergreen branches continued to speak of resilience; its twinkling lights still whispered of humanity's quest to illuminate the dark. The tree's journey reflects a universal truth: every ritual carries within it the seeds of consecration.



or commodification. Rituals are the anchors of human existence, grounding us in meaning and memory. Yet they are fragile, vulnerable to the forces of routine and commodification. The challenge lies in whether we approach these rituals as rote habits or as profound opportunities to infuse life with reverence.

The poet Rumi, with his timeless wisdom, captured the essence of this choice when he wrote, "Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray." Love, Rumi suggests, is the force that elevates the mundane into the sacred, transforming routine into ritual. Modern thinkers like Brian Doyle echo this sentiment, presenting love not as a passive sentiment but as an act of radical resistance. "Bring love like a bright weapon against the dark," Doyle urges, challenging us to confront cynicism with compassion and to meet despair with hope. Love, in this context, becomes a transformative force, capable of transmuting the ordinary into the extraordinary.

The Christmas tree, in its evolving symbolism, invites us to choose connection over division, reverence over indifference. It calls us to resist the gravitational pull of anger and division, to stand against the erosion of meaning in an increasingly commodified world. Leonard Cohen, in his hauntingly beautiful anthem, captures this ethos: "Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in." Cohen reminds us that love and light find their way through the imperfections, binding the cosmos together in a tapestry of connection.

Walt Whitman, too, spoke to this truth in his exultant ode to existence, *Leaves of Grass*: "I am large, I contain multitudes." Whitman's words remind us that to be human is to be intricately woven into the universe, to carry within ourselves the echoes of countless connections. This recognition is both a celebration and a call to action—to honor the sacredness inherent in every interaction, every relationship, and every ritual.

As we gather around the Christmas tree each year, we are offered a choice. Will we reduce this moment to mere routine, or will we elevate it into an act of consecration? The tree, with its storied history and enduring presence, beckons us to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. Its evergreen needles remind us of resilience; its lights evoke the eternal dance of stars. It is a symbol of humanity's quest to find meaning, to connect, and to love in a world often fraught with darkness.

To consecrate rather than commodify, to honor rather than exploit, is no small task. It requires a deliberate resistance to the forces of fragmentation and indifference. Yet it is in this resistance that we find the essence of life. For love—luminous, stubborn, and transformative—is the force that keeps the cosmos connected. It is the thread that weaves isolated moments into a harmonious whole.

In the end, the Christmas tree is more than an ornamented evergreen; it is a metaphor for humanity itself. It stands as a testament to our enduring quest for connection, our capacity to bring light to the darkest nights, and our ability to transform existence through love. As we stand before it, let us remember the sacred choice it embodies. Let us choose to see the tree not merely as a decoration but as a symbol of our interconnectedness. (The author can be reached at 9706619975)

Christmas: A reflection on hope, redemption, and the year ahead

By: Dipak Kurni

As humanity grapples with an ever-changing world marked by natural calamities, human-made disasters, and the creeping sense of uncertainty, the collective spirit often finds itself weighed down by fear and hopelessness. In the midst of this chaos, Christmas arrives—a beacon of hope and a reminder of divine intervention in human affairs. It is not merely a season of celebration but a profound acknowledgment of God's entry into human history, offering joy, goodwill, and life in abundance to all.

At its core, Christmas is a testament to the transformative power of God's love, as embodied by the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. The incarnation of Christ—God taking human form—stands as the pivotal moment in history, altering the trajectory of human existence and imbuing it with divine purpose. Without Christ's entry into the human realm, life would have followed a different, uncertain path, devoid of the hope and assurance that now anchor it.

The fusion of divinity and humanity, encapsulated in the birth of Jesus, is a profound mystery that lies at the heart of Christmas. Yet, this message is often misunderstood or reduced to a mere annual festivity marked by shopping, gifts, and revelry. For some, the season is an opportunity for commercial gain; for others, it is a nostalgic return to Bethlehem, with its starry skies, shepherds, and angelic choirs. Meanwhile, others see in the season a stark contrast to the dystopian realities of the world—a planet riddled with hatred, conflict, and despair.

In such a world, where questions abound about the presence of the "Prince of Peace" amidst suffering, the deeper meaning of Christmas shines through. It heralds the historic and divine intervention of God through Jesus Christ, offering solace to humanity's despair and afflictions. This act of divine grace brought life in its fullness, addressing humanity's longing for justice, peace, freedom, and love.

The arrival of Christ is not merely an event of the past; it is an ongoing reality that assures us of God's covenantal promises. Christmas 2024, therefore, is not just a reminder of a sacred moment in history but a celebration of the enduring presence of Jesus Christ in our midst. It is a time to reflect on the true facets of Christmas—Manger, Messiah, and Mercy—each representing a vital aspect of God's relationship with humanity.

The manger symbolizes humility and simplicity, the setting in which the divine entered the human world. The Messiah signifies the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem humanity, bringing salvation and eternal hope. Mercy reflects God's boundless love and compassion, extended to all regardless of their circumstances. These elements together encapsulate the profound truth of Christmas: the triumphant entry of the Lord Jesus Christ into a world fraught with despair, to offer redemption and a path toward eternal life. The Good News of Christmas, as proclaimed in the Gospel of Luke, resonates with the angel's message to the shepherds: "Fear not, I bring you good news." This proclamation, echoing through the centuries, assures humanity that God sent His only Son to Earth to save us from all forms of iniquity. Christmas is not a mere story, a utopian ideal, or a riddle to unravel; it is the most transformative event in human history.

The salvific act of Jesus—His birth, suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection—continues to manifest God's intervention in human affairs. It is this assurance of God's active presence in our lives that fills Christmas with profound meaning. In the face of volatility, Jesus Christ offers stability; in moments of insecurity, He provides security; and in times of chaos, He brings clarity and purpose.

As we celebrate Christmas 2024, we are reminded of our role in carrying forward the message of hope and redemption. Christ's light continues to shine in the darkness, offering guidance and assurance to a world in need. Entering into the year 2025, this light illuminates the path ahead, promising grace, mercy, and blessings in all aspects of life.

Romans 14:5-6 reminds us of the importance of discernment in our journey of faith: "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind." This passage underscores that every moment is a gift from God, an opportunity to honor Him through our words and deeds. Whether we celebrate specific days or regard every day as sacred, what matters is our commitment to living in alignment with God's will.

As we step into 2025, the promise of God's presence reassures us that no matter the turmoil or trials, His grace will sustain us. In our earthly journey, marked by challenges and triumphs alike, we are called to reflect the light and love of Jesus Christ. His coming into the world has brought life and hope in abundance, enabling humanity to move forward with confidence and resolve.

Christmas, therefore, is more than a seasonal celebration; it is an enduring affirmation of God's love for humanity. It reminds us that, through Christ, we are never alone in our struggles. As we embrace this truth, may we carry forward the message of Christmas into the year ahead, living as witnesses to the hope, peace, and salvation offered by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurni@gmail.com)

Celebrating the legacy of the country's unparalleled leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee

By: Dr. Satyawan Saurabh

Good Governance Day is observed every year in India on 25th December to commemorate the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. First observed in 2014, the day underlines the government's commitment to providing transparent and accountable governance and ensuring that the benefits of development reach every citizen. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a prominent Indian politician and a founding member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Known for his eloquence and poetic skills, he was respected across party lines for his liberal political views and consensus-building efforts. Vajpayee's political career spanned over five decades, during which he played a key role in shaping India's domestic and foreign policies. In recognition of his service to the nation, he was awarded India's highest civilian honor, the Bharat Ratna, in 2015.

Born on December 25, 1924, in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was an eminent statesman, poet, and orator. He served as the Prime Minister of India thrice and left an indelible mark on the country's development trajectory. His tenure included significant economic reforms, infrastructure projects such as the Golden Quadrilateral, and efforts to improve India's global standing. Vajpayee's leadership was characterized by his commitment to democratic ideals, which makes his birth anniversary an appropriate occasion to celebrate Good Governance Day. Good Governance Day 2024 not only commemorates Vajpayee's legacy but also urges citizens and officials to promote transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance for the overall development of the country. Good Governance Day this year holds special significance as it is the 100th birth anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

To celebrate this milestone, the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances has announced a week-long campaign titled 'Going to Village' from 19 to 24 December 2024. The initiative aims to bring governance to the grassroots level to ensure that administrative services reach the rural population. Good Governance Day is a reminder of the importance of governance that is transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the people.

Good governance is a process of managing public resources and institutions honestly and fairly, without corruption or abuse of power. It ensures that laws are followed, human rights are protected, and the needs of society are met.

It aims to raise awareness among people about the responsibility of the government to effectively serve citizens and encourage public participation in the governance process. To recognize his contribution to Indian politics and his vision for a transparent and accountable government. To promote awareness, educate citizens about the importance of good governance and their role in the democratic process. To strengthen the government's commitment to serving the public effectively and ethically. It can be defined as the process of making and implementing decisions within an organization or society.

Governance is not only necessary to maintain order; it also helps to achieve objectives and address the needs of a community or group. According to the World Bank, good governance is "the manner in which power is exercised in managing a country's economic and social resources for development." Institutions should operate in such a way that it is easy for others to see what actions are being taken. It also prevents corrupt practices.

The ruling class must be accountable to the people. This will ensure the well-being of the people and the entire society.

Governing bodies should be sensitive to the concerns of the people and address their needs within a reasonable time. People from all sections of society should be provided equal opportunities for improvement without any discrimination. Decisions should be taken with the consent of a large section of the society so that it is not detrimental to anyone. Available resources should be used efficiently to achieve results that meet the needs of their community.

Legal frameworks should be implemented in a fair manner to maintain the rights of every individual. People of the society should be able to express their opinions through legitimate organizations or representatives. This also includes weaker and backward groups. Good governance practices help in maintaining the interests of the public. Good governance enables an organization to make optimal and efficient use of existing resources to deliver quality service. Good governance practices also ensure checks and balances against excessive use of power and position.

Public participation in the governance process can only be achieved when good governance practices are implemented. Good Governance Day emphasizes ethical governance, transparency, and citizen participation through various initiatives. These initiatives aim to make administration more efficient, accountable, and citizen-centric. Promotes e-governance, digital literacy, and seamless access to government services. Ensures transparency by empowering citizens to access public information.

Encourages citizen participation in policy making by providing feedback on government projects. Focuses on improving sanitation, cleanliness, and waste management across India. Transfers subsidies directly to beneficiaries, reduces corruption, and ensures targeted delivery. Monitors timely execution of government projects while addressing delays for efficient governance. (The author is a poet, freelance journalist and columnist, radio and TV panelist)

Digital dreams are turning into dangerous realities for women

By: Avesha

I enjoy posting pictures and sharing content on Instagram, but I always do it cautiously. My private account feels like a safer space since I carefully choose who can see my posts, but even then, I am careful. I do have a public account where I post under a pen name, yet I'm always consciously aware of what I share.

There's always a lingering fear what if my pictures are stolen or misused? What if my thoughts are criticized or twisted into something I never intended? I want to post freely, without overthinking every detail, but I can't. Even in the "safe" digital space I've tried to create, there's no real guarantee of safety. Sadly, this isn't just my experience; it's a reality faced by countless women worldwide.

The internet has become a significant part of our lives, offering a platform for self-expression, learning, and connection. But for women, especially Gen Z, it's also a space filled with challenges. Online harassment, stalking, cyberbullying, and identity theft are alarmingly common. According to a study by the National Commission for Women, 54.8% of women have experienced cyber harassment, while 26% of them have reported cases of morphed images or videos. Moreover, cybercrime has also had a significant economic impact on women, with many losing jobs or experiencing financial losses due to online fraud. Women who step into public-facing careers or advocacy roles often face even more scrutiny. A striking example of this is Miss Universe 2021, Harnaaz Sandhu, who faced relentless online trolling for her weight gain after winning the title. Despite her achievements and the positive messages she shared about self-love and body positivity, she was subjected to widespread criticism and body-shaming on social media.

Harnaaz courageously addressed the issue, explaining that her weight gain was due to a medical condition, but the abuse she endured highlights the intense scrutiny women in public-facing roles face. The impact of online harassment is not just emotional but has real-world consequences, with some women experiencing anxiety, depression, or a loss of confidence as a result of cyberattacks on their

reputations.

The fear of being judged or targeted often shapes how women interact online. Many of us hear things like, "Why are you posting your pictures online? Isn't that asking for trouble?" or "Stay away from social media if you don't want issues." Such remarks not only shift the blame onto women but also silence them. It forces us to think twice before sharing anything, making even simple acts like posting a photo or expressing an opinion feel risky.

Privacy, which should be a given, is a constant battle. A woman shared how a harmless picture she posted with friends on her private account was stolen, edited, and used inappropriately by someone she knew. The incident left her shaken, while her parents blamed her for posting the picture. Despite filing a complaint, she felt like justice was out of reach. Stories like these aren't rare. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), one in four people who experience cybercrime in India are women.

In 2019, cybercrime incidents increased by 18.4% overall, and cybercrime against women increased by 28% including influencers and journalists, shared their experiences. They spoke about the constant threats and relentless trolling they face for simply expressing their thoughts. They explained that, as long as you conform to societal narratives, you might endure online spaces a little longer, but even then, there's no guarantee of feeling digitally safe. The speakers also revealed that this fear extends beyond them to their families, as online abusers often target loved ones, making the digital world even more riskier.

For Muslim women, this anxiety takes on an even more intense form. Online platforms become spaces where our faith, identity, and beliefs are often questioned or ridiculed. Muslim women who wear hijabs or follow other Islamic practices are frequently targeted because of their visible religious identity. For instance, an article I wrote for Youth Ki Awaaz about my experience of exclusion while wearing a hijab received a comment claiming that Muslim women deserve discrimination and accusing hijabis of promoting "love jihad."

While I wasn't personally offended by the



comment, it was a small glimpse into the misinterpreted hate that often escalates into brutal messages and threats that women receive online. Incidents like the "Sulli Deals" and "Bulli Bai" tech tools, where Muslim women's pictures were auctioned without consent, were not just shocking but terrifying. The violation of privacy and dignity was blatant, yet many victims felt abandoned by the system. One victim shared how she was repeatedly told to "ignore it" or to "delete her account," as though the solution lay in erasing her digital existence.

The rise of AI and deepfake technology has worsened the situation. India has recorded 37% of cases related to the harassment of women due to morphed images, also known as deepfakes. Explicit deepfake videos of Indian actresses have circulated online, despite being fabricated. The emotional and professional damage caused by such videos can be devastating.

Similarly, Rana Ayyub, an Indian journalist who spoke out against the government's response to the rape of an eight-year-old girl, was targeted with a deepfake video as part of a coordinated hate campaign. AI tools, once celebrated for their innovation, are now being

weaponized, making women increasingly vulnerable to new forms of abuse.

This growing threat has prompted many women to seek ways to protect themselves. A lot of Gen Z women are now more cautious about what they share online, fully aware of the dangers of digital footprints. While privacy settings and security features are readily available, many women still feel like they don't have full control over their online identities. In response, women like me turn to pseudonyms, use private profiles, and share content only within small, trusted circles. However, even these precautions don't always work.

The numbers speak volumes. A survey by Amnesty International found that 38% of Indian women have faced online abuse for expressing opinions on politics, gender, or human rights. This silencing effect discourages women from participating in important conversations, effectively erasing their voices. Cultural expectations add another layer of difficulty for women, both in the real world and in digital spaces. Women are often told to behave a certain way, even online. For example, a young woman faced backlash from her relatives after posting pictures from

a solo trip, with comments like, "Girls shouldn't attract attention," as though her photos were an invitation for criticism. This mindset makes online platforms feel less like spaces of freedom and more like areas that require constant monitoring.

Furthermore, the intersectionality of gender, race, and religion deepens the issue. Women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from marginalized communities are disproportionately targeted by online abuse. For them, the internet often becomes a hostile environment where their identities are exploited to fuel hateful agendas, amplifying their vulnerability and silencing their voices.

As we look toward the future, ensuring digital safety for women requires urgent action. Governments, tech companies, and online platforms must take greater responsibility in addressing these threats. Policy changes, stronger laws against online harassment, and tools to combat deepfakes are essential for creating safer digital spaces. Education on digital literacy and online safety must also be prioritized so that women are better equipped to protect themselves. The online world has become an integral part of our lives, but finding the balance between expression and safety remains a challenge for women. As more young women take to social media to share their stories and raise their voices, it's vital to remember that their security should never be compromised. When women with privileges whether they are celebrities or public figures can be so easily harassed and exploited through such technology, it raises an even more daunting question: What will happen to ordinary citizens who lack the visibility or resources to protect themselves?

While influential women may have the means to take legal action or publicize their struggles, many women, especially those in vulnerable or marginalized communities, are left powerless in the face of such digital abuse. By raising awareness, advocating for better policies, and empowering women with the right tools, we can work toward a digital space where women can truly thrive without fear. Can we ensure that every woman, regardless of her background, is given the digital safety and freedom to express herself without fear of exploitation? (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

A fight for women's rights



By: Amarpal Singh Verma

Madhu Charan, a daughter of Rajasthan, is fighting against discrimination against women at the government level. For several decades, unmarried women in Rajasthan were being denied the right to become workers and assistants in Anganwadi centers. The Women and Child Development Department had made it mandatory for women applying for these posts to be married. Unmarried women could not even apply for it. Madhu fought a long legal battle in the Rajasthan High Court against this discrimination and won, but the government department is still imposing conditions.

When applications were sought for the appointment of Anganwadi worker in Gudri village of Balotra district in the year 2019, Madhu also applied but she was denied work saying that she is not yet married. On this, Madhu knocked the door of the High Court. After a legal battle that lasted for about five years, the Rajasthan High Court gave a verdict in favor of Madhu on 4 September 2023. In this decision, the High Court declared the condition of women being married as illegal and unconstitutional, calling it illogical and a violation of the rights of unmarried female candidates. However, the government argued in the High Court that if an unmarried girl is appointed in the Anganwadi center, then after marriage she will go somewhere else, which will disrupt the work of the Anganwadi center, but the court did not accept this argument. The High Court made a strong comment in the decision and said that "The Rajasthan government has started a new chapter of discrimination between unmarried women and married women. Which is illegal and arbitrary. Considering a candidate ineligible for public employment just because she is unmarried is illogical. This is discriminatory and comes under the category of violating the fundamental rights given by the Constitution."

The Women and Child Development Department wanted to appeal against the

court's decision because the government advocate had advised to appeal. The department would have appealed but before that the matter came to the notice of the state's Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari. The Deputy Chief Minister gave instructions to employ unmarried women by complying with the order of the High Court. On this, the government on 28 February 2024 approved the amendment in the rules and selection conditions for unmarried women to become Anganwadi workers and assistants in the state. On this, the selection conditions were amended by the department, making all women eligible to apply for the posts of Anganwadi workers and assistants. But the unfortunate situation is that despite this victory, the struggle of Madhu and thousands of women like her has not stopped yet.

In fact, the Women and Child Development Department has accepted unmarried women as eligible under the court's decision but has imposed a new condition. The department is asking women to sign an affidavit, in which it is written that if in future the woman will not be a resident of the concerned village due to marriage or any other reason, then she will automatically resign from the honorarium service and her honorarium service will be considered over. Now the department is ready to appoint Madhu as Anganwadi worker in compliance with the court's decision but she is being asked to submit an affidavit as mentioned above. Madhu is not willing to give this affidavit. Madhu says that the Women and Child Department does not seem to intend to comply with the decision of the Rajasthan High Court. Therefore, I do not accept this affidavit and signing it. The attitude of the department is anti-women. I will continue to fight against it.

Madhu has questioned the state government and the Women and Child Department about this new condition. Madhu has said in a letter sent to the department that when such a condition is not imposed while giving work on honorarium or contract to men in any government department, then

why is it being imposed on women?

This question is not of Madhu alone, but of thousands of women of the state who have been deprived of jobs for many years just because they are not married. The format of the affidavit is like imposing a new condition in a way.

There is a huge number of single women in the country including Rajasthan, who are living a lonely life due to social neglect and social cultural reasons. Many women are forced to live an unmarried life due to reasons like not getting married due to some circumstances, not being able to get married due to illness or disability etc. If we look at the census data, the number of single women in India has increased by 30 percent between the years 2001 and 2011. There are seven crore women in India who are either not married or are living as divorced or widows. This number is 12 percent of the population of our country.

According to the report of a survey conducted by the National Forum for Single Women Rights (NFSWR) in seven states including Rajasthan, the condition of single women is worse in the states of North India as compared to the South. According to this report, single women in rural areas have to constantly grapple with social prejudices and struggle for survival. Single women are not only victims of physical and financial insecurity, but they also often have to face open discrimination. This is a class of single women who are victims of circumstances. It is unfortunate that in our society the identity of women has been linked to men. Single, unmarried women are not seen in a positive light. Often their character is maligned. The kind of negative environment that exists in society towards single women is not seen towards single men. On one hand, governments claim to run welfare schemes for single women, while on the other hand, they are being denied jobs due to being unmarried. Madhu's struggle is against such discrimination and injustice, which should be appreciated. (The author is a Laadli Media Fellow and an independent journalist)

Domestic disputes lead to men getting entangled in false dowry cases

By: Priyanka Saurabh

Men's rights refer to legal and social rights that specifically address issues faced by men. In India, while women's empowerment is important to focus on, challenges faced by men are often overlooked, such as false allegations in domestic violence cases under Section 498A IPC, lack of mental health support, and limited parental rights. Recent debates around shared parenting laws highlight the need for a balanced approach to gender justice. Men's rights in India often receive less attention in broader discussions on gender equality. Men do not receive legal recognition as victims of domestic abuse, making it challenging to seek protection or report cases of abuse. Men who are victims of emotional, financial, or physical abuse by a spouse face social stigma and do not receive legal recourse under existing frameworks such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

Societal expectations for men to suppress emotions lead to neglect of their mental health, leading to increased suicide rates and untreated psychological problems. NCRB data for 2022 shows that 72.5% of suicide cases are by men, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive mental health policies. Divorce or separation laws favor maternal custody, marginalizing the role of fathers and denying them equal rights in child rearing. The Guardians and Wards Act, 1890, prefers maternal custody unless the mother is deemed unfit, thereby limiting fathers' opportunities for parental involvement. Gender-specific laws such as Section 498A (dowry harassment) are sometimes misused, causing reputational, financial, and emotional harm to innocent men. In *Rajesh Sharma v. State of UP* (2017), the Supreme Court noted the misuse of Section 498A and introduced safeguards against false accusations.

Men lack dedicated institutions or helplines to redress grievances. Social stereotypes portray men as perpetrators, influencing institutional attitudes and limiting appropriate remedies in cases such as workplace abuse or sexual harassment. The Vishaka Guidelines cover workplace harassment only for women,



denying male victims equal protection under Indian law. Adult male survivors of sexual abuse remain unrecognized in the legal framework, depriving them of statutory remedies or institutional support. For example, Section 375 of the IPC defines rape only from a woman's perspective, leaving male survivors of sexual harassment without any recourse. Policy reforms to ensure a balanced approach to gender justice, including gender-neutral laws.

Amend existing laws such as the Domestic Violence Act and Section 498A of the IPC to make them gender-neutral, ensuring equal protection for men against domestic violence and false allegations. In countries such as Canada and the UK, domestic violence laws are gender-neutral. This promotes the best interests of the child while addressing parental grievances. The concept of shared parenting is well established in Australia, which mandates equal consideration for both parents in custody decisions. Establish dedicated policies focusing on men's mental health by integrating mental health services into workplace wellness programs and creating awareness campaigns. Japan has introduced workplace mental health programs targeting stress reduction, which can be adapted to include gender-specific concerns.

Addressing false allegations: Put in place stringent mechanisms to prevent and punish false allegations in cases of domestic violence, dowry harassment, and sexual harassment to prevent misuse of laws. Institutional measures to ensure a balanced approach towards gender justice are the establishment of men's wel-

fare commissions. Create statutory bodies at national and state levels similar to women's commissions to address specific issues related to men, including legal aid and counselling. The United Kingdom has a "Men and Boys Coalition" that advocates for issues such as mental health and paternal rights. Set up gender-neutral helplines and shelters to ensure access to immediate help and support for male victims of domestic violence or abuse. The MEN Against Violence and Abuse (Men Against Violence and Abuse) initiative in India provides support to male victims of abuse. Train judiciary and law enforcement officials on gender-neutral approaches and challenges faced by men to ensure fair treatment in cases related to domestic violence, custody, and abuse.

Regular sensitization workshops for the police in Kerala have resulted in a more balanced handling of gender-based complaints. Force organizations to adopt inclusive workplace policies that address issues such as paternity leave, sexual harassment faced by men, and mental health support. Sweden's parental leave policy provides equal leave to fathers, promoting shared parenting and gender equality at home. Men's rights need to be addressed with equal sincerity to ensure a balanced approach to gender justice. Gender-neutral laws, increased mental health support, and awareness campaigns to eliminate social stereotypes are important steps. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." A truly inclusive system uplifts all genders, promoting fairness and harmony in society.

'We should try again': Punjab Assembly Speaker on Vajpayee's failed India-Pak peace initiative

LAHORE, Dec 24: "Even though the chance was missed, we should try again," says Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Ahmad Khan when asked about Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 1999 'bus yatra', a bold attempt by the then Indian prime minister to put India-Pakistan relations on the peace track.

Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore on February 19, 1999. He and Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif signed the Lahore Declaration after a historic summit here. The agreement signalled a breakthrough, but just months later a Pakistani intrusion led to the Kargil War.

Wednesday is Vajpayee's 100th birth anniversary.

"Vajpayee's visit to Lahore in 1999 was a defining moment. Even though the chance was missed, we should try again. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who follows Vajpayee's vision, leading India, and Shehbaz Sharif, Nawaz's brother, in charge in Pakistan, there is a real possibility of restarting the peace process," says Khan, who is a senior member of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

Khan says the future of the region depends on free trade and unrestricted movement between countries.

"Peace in the region is not just a good idea — it is necessary for growth and prosperity," the Punjab Speaker adds.

Another senior PML-N leader from Punjab, Mohammad Mehdi, describes Vajpayee's Lahore visit as historic. He believes the visit could have led to lasting peace if the Kargil conflict had not happened.

"The Western media paid a lot of attention to Vajpayee's visit because it came just months after both countries became nuclear powers," Mehdi says, referring to nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in May 1998.

"There was excitement, espe-



cially within PML-N ranks, when Vajpayee arrived in Lahore in February 1999. His speech, saying 'Pakistan is a reality, and both countries now need to move forward and leave the past behind,' gave hope to many," Mehdi recalls.

Unfortunately, the Kargil conflict happened soon after, and the peace efforts were unsuccessful, he says.

Mehdi says Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) held protests during Vajpayee's visit, which many believe were organised by the military led by General Pervez Musharraf.

"Jamaat-i-Islami workers even attacked the Turkish ambassador's car near Lahore Fort, mistaking it for an Indian delegation," he says.

Mehdi believes back-channel talks between Pakistan and India are still happening.

"Right now, relations between the two countries are at their lowest point. Neither country has an envoy in the other's capital. However, businessmen on both sides desperately want to restore ties to improve trade and use shorter routes through Pakistan to reach Central Asia and Europe," he says.

Political expert Brig (retd.) Farooq Hameed says Nawaz Sharif should have involved the powerful Pakistan Army in the peace process.

"The initiative failed because the military was not consulted, which

led to the Kargil conflict and ended the peace process. If Nawaz Sharif had taken the military on board before Vajpayee's visit, the chances of the peace talks being successful would have been higher."

Hameed says Nawaz has repeatedly shown interest in improving ties with India, including his desire to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi after returning to Pakistan last year from a four-year self-imposed exile in London. However, he pointed out, that Nawaz's younger brother, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, has not made any recent public statements indicating a similar desire.

"Nawaz should first consult Shehbaz, who enjoys the military establishment's favour, to determine if he shares this vision for improved relations with India," he says.

He also notes the lack of progress after Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar visited Pakistan recently.

"Most Pakistanis are not anti-India. Unlike in India, politicians here do not need to criticise India to win elections," Hameed says.

However, terrorism remains a major obstacle to reconciliation, he says.

India has often accused Pakistan of supporting terrorism, while Pakistan now blames India for terror attacks in Balochistan. (PTI)

Bangladesh launches \$5 billion graft probe against Sheikh Hasina in nuclear power plant case

Allegations of corruption in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project were brought to light by Bobby Hajjaj

DHAKA, Dec 24: An anti-graft panel in Bangladesh has launched an investigation against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her family in connection with the allegations of embezzling USD 5 billion in the Rooppur nuclear power plant, according to a media report.

Indian companies are participating in constructing the Rooppur nuclear power plant which is being built by Rosatom, Russia's state-run corporation, in Bangladesh.

The first Bangladeshi nuclear power plant, the Russian-designed Rooppur, is being built 160 km west of the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka.

Rosatom has refuted the "provocative statements" in the media about the Rooppur NPP project.

Along with Hasina, her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and Tulip Siddiq, her niece and the UK's Treasury minister, were also questioned, BDNews reported on Sunday.

There are accusations of embezzling USD 5 billion in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project were brought to light by



the report added.

The development came two days after the High Court issued a rule asking why the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) inaction over an alleged transfer of USD 5 billion from the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project to a Malaysian bank by Hasina, Joy, and Tulip should not be declared illegal, the report added.

According to ACC documents, the allegations of corruption in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project were brought to light by

Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of the National Democratic Movement (NDM).

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 when she fled the country following a massive student-led protest that toppled her 16-year regime.

Her sister Rehana accompanied her. Joy resides in the US, while her niece Tulip is a member of the British parliament.

Bangladesh-based International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and sev-

eral former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide".

They are also named in multiple murder cases filed in connection with the demonstrations.

Refuting the allegations, the Russian Corporation said that it is committed to a policy of openness and the principle of combating corruption in all its projects and maintains a transparent procurement system.

"Rosatom State Corporation refutes provocative statements about the implementation of the Rooppur NPP project that have appeared in the media," the statement said.

"Rosatom State Corporation is ready to defend its interests and reputation in court.

We consider false statements in the media as an attempt to discredit the Rooppur NPP project, which is being implemented to solve the country's energy supply problems and is aimed at improving the well-being of the people of Bangladesh," it said. (PTI)

South Korea's opposition party vows to impeach acting president

SEOUL, Dec 24: South Korea's main opposition party said Tuesday it will seek to impeach acting leader Han Duck-soo after he missed an opposition-set deadline to approve independent investigations into impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol and his wife.

If realised, Han's impeachment would further deepen South Korea's political tumult and worries by neighbouring countries caused by Yoon's stunning December 3 martial law declaration and ensuing impeachment. Han, the country's No. 2 official, has taken over presidential powers and duties since Yoon's impeachment. If he's impeached too, the finance minister is next in line.

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which holds a majority in parliament, has slammed Han for vetoing several opposition-sponsored bills, including a controversial agriculture bill. It also urged Han to quickly appoint justices to vacant seats on the Constitutional Court, which is reviewing Yoon's impeachment and will determine whether to dismiss or reinstate him.

Filling the court's three empty posts could make conviction more likely, as it requires the support of six of the court's nine possible members.

The Democratic Party also demanded that Han approve by Tuesday bills calling for the appointments of special prosecutors to investigate Yoon for rebellion over his martial law decree, and his wife for corruption and other allegations.

But Han didn't do so during Tuesday's Cabinet Council meeting, calling for the ruling and opposition parties to negotiate.

Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae responded that there's no room for negotiations about a Yoon investigation, and that his party would begin steps toward an impeachment at once.

"We've clearly warned that it's totally up to Prime Minister Han Duck-soo whether he would go down in history as a disgraceful figure as a puppet of rebellion plot leader Yoon Suk Yeol or a public servant that has faithfully carried out the orders by the public," Park told a televised party meeting.

Korean prosecutors and other officials are separately probing whether Yoon committed rebellion and abuse of power, but he's ignored requests by investigative agencies to appear for questioning and allow searches of his office.

Yoon's defence minister, police chief and several other senior military commanders have already been arrested over the deployment of troops and police officers to the National Assembly, which prompted a dramatic standoff that ended when lawmakers managed to enter the chamber and voted unanimously to overrule Yoon's decree.

The governing People Power Party said that the opposition's impeachment threats are interfering with Han's "legitimate exercise of authority." Floor leader Kwon Seong-dong, a Yoon loyalist, said the Democratic Party's "politics of intimidation have reached their peak."

An impeachment vote would face legal ambiguities. Most Korean officials can be impeached with a simple majority of parliament, but impeaching the presidents takes two-thirds. The rival parties differ on which standard would apply to an acting president.

The Democratic Party controls 170 of the National Assembly's 300 seats, so it would need support from members of other parties including Yoon's own to get a two-thirds majority.

The Constitutional Court has up to six months to determine Yoon's fate. If he's thrown out of office, a national election to find his successor must take place within two months. (AP)

Biden signs defence bill despite objections



WASHINGTON, Dec 24: President Joe Biden on Monday signed into law a defence bill that authorises significant pay raises for junior enlisted service members, aims to counter China's growing power and boosts overall military spending to USD 895 billion despite his objections to language stripping coverage of transgender medical treatments for children in military families.

Biden said his administration strongly opposes the provision because it targets a group based on gender identity and "interferes with parents' roles to determine the best care for their children." He said it also undermines the all-volunteer military's ability to recruit and retain talent.

"No service member should have to decide between their family's health care access and their call to serve our nation," the president said in a statement.

The Senate forwarded the bill to Biden after passing it last week by a vote of 85-14. In the House, a majority of Democrats voted against the bill after House Speaker Mike Johnson insisted on adding the provision to ban transgender medical care for children. The legislation easily passed by a vote of 281-140. Biden also objected to other language in the bill prohibiting the use of money earmarked to transfer detainees held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to some foreign countries and into the United States. He urged Congress to lift those restrictions.

The annual defence authorisation bill, which directs Pentagon policy, provides a 14.5 per cent pay raise for junior enlisted service members and a 4.5 per cent increase for others.

The legislation also directs resources towards a more confrontational approach to China, including establishing a fund that could be used to send military resources to Taiwan in much the same way that the US has backed Ukraine. It also invests in new military technologies, including artificial intelligence, and bolsters the US production of ammunition. The US has also moved in recent years to ban the military from purchasing Chinese products, and the defense bill extended that with prohibitions on Chinese goods from garlic in military commissaries to drone technology. (AP)

UN investigative team says Syria's new authorities 'very receptive'

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 24: The U.N. organization assisting in investigating the most serious crimes in Syria said Monday the country's new authorities were "very receptive" to its request for cooperation during a just-concluded visit to Damascus, and it is preparing to deploy.

The visit led by Robert Petit, head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, was the first since the organization was established by the U.N. General Assembly in 2016. It was created to assist in evidence-gathering and prosecution of individuals responsible for possible war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide since Syria's civil war began in 2011.

Petit highlighted the urgency of preserving documents and other evidence before it is lost.

Since the rebel overthrow of Syria's President Bashar Assad and the rebel opening of prisons and detention facilities there have been rising demands from Syrians for the prosecution of those responsible for

atrocities and killings while he was in power.

"The fall of the Assad rule is a significant opportunity for us to fulfill our mandate on the ground," Petit said. "Time is running out. There is a small window of opportunity to secure these sites and the material they hold." U.N. associate spokesperson Stephane Tremblay said Monday the investigative team "is preparing for an operational deployment as early as possible and as soon as it is authorized to conduct activities on Syrian soil."

The spokesperson for the organization, known as the IIM, who was on the trip with Petit, went further, telling The Associated Press: "We are preparing to deploy on the expectation that we will get authorization."

"The representatives from the caretaker authorities were very receptive to our request for cooperation and are aware of the scale of the task ahead," the spokesperson said, speaking on condition of not being named. "They emphasized that they will need expertise to help safeguard the newly accessible documentation." (AP)

Balkans snowstorm leaves normal lives in doldrums

SARAJEVO (BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA), Dec 24: Tens of thousands of homes in Bosnia were without electricity on Tuesday after more heavy snow and winds that also brought traffic chaos in neighbouring Croatia and Serbia.

In Slovenia, the resumption of a search for an injured Hungarian hiker missing in the Alps north of the capital Ljubljana since Sunday was temporarily suspended because of strong winds. Rescuers on Monday reached his female companion and transferred her to safety, but they were unable to locate the man and couldn't use a helicopter because of strong winds. Throughout the

Balkans authorities issued travel warnings as snow drifts closed some major routes, including sections of motorways in Croatia.

Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia banned the movement of heavy vehicles and imposed limited traffic levels on affected roads.

Parts of Bosnia faced a total halt of railway traffic because of the snow. Bosnia's state power company described the situation as "extremely hard" in some areas of the country. The weight of heavy, moist snow brought down distribution lines which are hard to access due to snow drifts, the company said in a statement. (AP)

Man faces murder charges in death of woman lit on fire in NYC subway

NEW YORK, Dec 24: A man is facing murder and arson charges in New York City for allegedly setting a woman on fire inside a subway train and then watching her die after she was engulfed in flames, police said Monday.

The suspect, identified by police as Sebastian Zapeta, was taken into custody hours after the woman died on Sunday morning.

Zapeta, 33, is a Guatemalan citizen who entered the US illegally after he had been previously removed in 2018, said Jeff Carter, a spokesman for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Surveillance video showed the suspect approach the woman, who was sitting motionless and may have been sleeping, on a stationary F train at the Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue subway station in Brooklyn and set her clothing on fire, police said.

The woman's clothing "became fully engulfed in a matter of seconds," said Jessica

Tisch, the New York City police commissioner, while the suspect remained at the scene, watching her burn from a bench on the subway platform as police and a transit worker extinguished the flames.

The woman was pronounced dead at the scene. Police have not yet released her identity.

Tisch called the incident "one of the most depraved crimes one person could possibly commit against another human being."

Police arrested Zapeta later Sunday, riding the same subway line, after getting a tip from a group of high school students who recognised images of the suspect that were circulated by police. It is unclear when and where Zapeta reentered the US after being removed about six years ago.

In a statement, Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said, "The depravity of this horrific crime is beyond comprehension, and my

office is committed to bringing the perpetrator to justice." "This gruesome and senseless act of violence against a vulnerable woman will be met with the most serious consequences," he said. It was unclear if Zapeta has an attorney or when he would be arraigned.

A Brooklyn address for Zapeta released by police matches a service centre for Samaritan Daytop Village, which provides housing and substance abuse support. The organisation did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul this year has sent New York National Guard members to the city's subway system to help police conduct random searches of riders' bags for weapons following a series of high-profile crimes on city trains. Hochul recently deployed additional members to help patrol during the holiday season. (AP)

Sudan's war 'deepening, widening' a famine crisis: Report

CAIRO, Dec 24: Famine is spreading in Sudan due to a war between the military and a notorious paramilitary group that has wrecked the country and created the world's largest displacement crisis, a global hunger-monitoring group said on Tuesday.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, said it detected famine in five areas, including in Sudan's largest displacement camp, Zamzam, in North Darfur province, where famine was found for the first time in August.

"This marks an unprecedented deepening and widening of the food and nutrition crisis, driven by the devastating conflict and poor humanitarian access," an IPC report said.

As well as in the Zamzam camp, which hosts more than 400,000 people, famine was also detected in two other camps for displaced people, Abu Shouk and al-Salam in North Darfur, and the Western Nuba Mountains, IPC's report said.

Five other areas in North Darfur are projected "with reasonable evidence" to experience famine in the



next six months, including el-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur, it said. Seventeen areas in the Nuba Mountains and the northern and southern areas of Darfur are at risk of famine, it added.

The report said some areas in Khartoum and the east-central province of Gezira "may be experiencing" famine-like conditions. It said experts were unable to confirm whether famine threshold has been surpassed due to lack of data.

Ahead of the IPC's report, Sudan's government said it had suspended its participation in the global system, according to a senior United Nations official with knowledge of the move.

In a letter dated December 23, Agriculture Minister Abu Baker al-Beshri accused the IPC of "issuing unreliable reports that undermine Sudan's sovereignty and dignity," said the UN official, who spoke in condition of anonymity.

Sudan has been roiled by 20-

month war that has killed more than 24,000 people and driven over 14 million people — about 30 per cent of the population — from their homes, according to the United Nations. An estimated 3.2 million Sudanese have crossed into neighbouring countries, including Chad, Egypt and South Sudan.

The war began in April 2023, when long-simmering tensions between its military and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, before spreading to other urban areas and the western Darfur region.

The conflict has been marked by atrocities, including ethnically motivated killing and rape, according to the UN and rights groups. The International Criminal Court is investigating alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity.

There is widespread hunger, with food in markets now scarce and prices have spiked. Aid groups also say they're struggling to reach the most vulnerable as warring parties limit access, especially in North Darfur province.

Dervla Cleary, a senior emer-

gency and rehabilitation officer at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, said 638,000 people are experiencing famine.

"The situation in Sudan is just awful. It is unacceptable in a world like today," she said. "We need the violence to stop so people can access food, water, health, nutrition and agriculture."

According to the IPC report, a total of 24.6 million Sudanese — half of the population — faces high levels of acute food insecurity.

Sudan is the third country where famine was declared in the past 15 years, along with South Sudan and Somalia, where a 2011 major famine was estimated to have killed a quarter of a million people — half of them children under 5 years old.

The IPC comprises more than a dozen U.N. agencies, aid groups, and governments that use its monitoring as a global reference for analysis of food and nutrition crises.

The organisation has also warned that large parts of Gaza's Palestinian population face the threat of famine. (AP)

Hong Kong police issue arrest warrants, bounties for six activists

HONG KONG, Dec 24: Hong Kong police on Tuesday announced a fresh round of arrest warrants for six activists based overseas, with bounties set at USD 1 million Hong Kong dollars for information leading to their arrests.

According to the warrants, the six are wanted for national security offences such as secession, subversion and collusion with foreign forces. They include Tony Chung, the former leader of now-defunct pro-independence group Student-localism.

UK-based Carmen Lau, a former district councillor and current activist with the Hong Kong Democracy Council, as well as Chloe Cheung, an activist with the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong, also had warrants issued against them. The latest round of warrants signals that the Hong Kong government is targeting vocal critics based abroad.

The government had previously issued two rounds of arrest warrants and bounties for more prominent activists, including ex-lawmakers Ted Hui and Nathan

Law.

The increasing number of wanted individuals abroad come as Hong Kong continues to crack down on political dissent following massive anti-government protests in 2019 that resulted in a wave of pro-democracy movements. Many outspoken pro-democracy activists have since been jailed, with others fleeing abroad.

"The Hong Kong government's latest round of arrest warrants and bounties against six Hong Kong activists is a cowardly act of intimidation that aims to silence Hong Kong people," said Maya Wang, associate China director at Human Rights Watch.

"The six — including two Canadian citizens — live in the UK and Canada. We call on the UK and Canadian governments to act immediately to push back against the Hong Kong government's attempts to threaten Hong Kongers living in their countries."

Tuesday's arrest warrants take the total number of wanted people to 19. (AP)

No question of violating constitutional provisions as alleged by Cong: Manipur minister

'In normal times, govt always summoned House thrice'



IMPHAL, Dec 24: Manipur law minister Th Basanta Kumar Singh on Tuesday rejected Congress's allegation that the state government had violated constitutional rules by not holding the winter session of the Assembly.

Talking to reporters, Kumar said Article 174 of the Constitution states that Houses of the legislature of the state shall be summoned to meet at least twice every year, and six months shall not intervene between the last sitting and the date appointed for the next session. The Budget and the Autumn sessions were held earlier this year.

"Manipur Congress's allegation that rules of the Constitution have been violated is false. During the chief ministership of O Ibobi Singh from 2002 to 2016, there have been five occasions when assembly sessions were held twice in a calendar year. There is no question of vio-

lating constitutional provisions by the BJP-led government in the state," he said.

Kumar's remark came in the wake of recent allegations by CLP leader O Ibobi Singh that the BJP-led government violated constitutional provisions by not holding the winter session of the assembly.

"The state government has always made efforts to implement the mandatory provisions of the Constitution and rules framed by the Manipur Legislative Assembly. It is pertinent to mention that in normal times, the government had always summoned the House three times, from 2017 to 2020," he added.

"Following the Covid outbreak pandemic in 2021 and the unfortunate incident of May 3, 2023, the state government could not fulfil the conditions provided in the rules due to unavoidable circumstances and hardship faced by people during this period," the minister added.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the pen-down strike by employees of the Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BOSEM) following the appointment of Akham Joykumar Singh as its chairman, Kumar said he was appointed in accordance with the rules and regulations.

"There were five applicants for the post and after examination of the eligibility criteria, Joykumar was appointed as chairman," he added.

The minister appealed to call off the strike in the interests of the students. (PTI)

Prakash Karat to inaugurate CPI(M) Tripura state conference

AGARTALA, Dec 24: Senior CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat would inaugurate the party's 24th Tripura state conference here on December 29, a party leader said on Tuesday.

The three-day CPI(M) Tripura state conference will be held at Town Hall from December 29 to 31.

"CPI(M) coordinator Prakash Karat and CPI(M) politburo member Brinda Karat will arrive here to attend the party's state conference beginning on December 29. To mark the programme, a rally will be held at Vivekananda ground where Karat and senior party leaders will address", CPI(M) Tripura secretary Jitendra Chowdhury told PTI.

Chowdhury said the party has almost completed conferences of branch committees, local committees, divisional committees, and district committees to pave the way for the state conference.

The party has over 4,000 branches, more than 300 local, 24 divisional and eight district committees in Tripura.

"During the conference, the party leaders will throw light on the state's political, social, economic situation and issues related to the people of the state. After deliberation, we will finalise the party's roadmap for the future", he said.

The CPI(M) was in power in Tripura for 35 years in two phases (1978 to 1988 and 1993 to 2018). It lost to the BJP-IPFT coalition in the 2018 Assembly elections. (PTI)

BSF jawan commits suicide



IMPHAL, Dec 24: A BSF jawan allegedly committed suicide by shooting himself with his service rifle in the Kakching district of Manipur on Sunday morning.

The deceased jawan has been identified as Sunil Kumar Hooda. He belonged to A-Company of 126 Battalion BSF stationed at Kakching Keirak Dam under Kakching Police station, reports said.

According to the reports, the incident occurred around 7:10 am. Sounds of gunfire were heard by some jawans inside the camp, and upon inspection they found Sunil Kumar Hooda in a pool of blood.

Sources said the death of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) personnel was a case of suicide. Later, a team of Kakching police accompanied by forensic science experts rushed to the spot to collect and analyze

evidence.

In a separate incident, unidentified miscreants placed a hand grenade at the gate of Bikund Roofing, a roofing supply store located at Mongshangei under Singjamei Police Station, Imphal West on Sunday morning.

According to sources, a team from Singjamei Police Station arrived at the site before retrieving the bomb. The shop is located next to the headquarters of 109 Battalion CRPF located at Mongshangei Makha Leikai.

No groups have so far claimed responsibility. The motive behind the grenade threat is yet to be established, a source said. However, sources believed the bomb threat might have been served over monetary demand.

A case has been registered at Singjamei Police Station over the incident and investigations are on. (NNN)

Three arrested for killing sambar deer in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, Dec 24: Three poachers were held for killing a sambar deer recently inside the Daying Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary (DEMWS) in Arunachal Pradesh's East Siang district, an official said.

Acting on a tip-off, a team led by Borguli range forest officer CK Chowpoo arrested the poachers, the Divisional Forest Officer of DEMWS, Kenpi Ete, said. The poachers, identified as Mibom Perme and Doping Taying, were from

Borguli village in the Mebo subdivision of the district on December 20.

The third poacher, identified as Toni Perme, was arrested on Tuesday, she said. Ete said the poachers entered the sanctuary using a machine boat and shot the animal using a single-barrel gun in an isolated pocket under Borguli Wildlife Range.

She said the accused were booked under various sections of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and section 25

1(B) of the Arms Act 1959.

The seized articles were handed over to the police, and an FIR has been registered at Mebo police station, she said.

Sambar deer is a Schedule I species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, of 1972. The DFO said stringent action as per the provisions of the Wildlife Act will be taken against any person involved in hunting or abetment of hunting inside the sanctuary.

She also expressed dismay that de-

spite continuous efforts by the department officials to gain the confidence of the fringe villagers for their support in protecting the sanctuary, such hunting incidents by a few put the conservation efforts in vain. Directing the field officers to intensify surveillance in and around the sanctuary to prevent such incidents in future, Ete appealed to the general public to report hunting incidents to sanctuary officials for prompt action. (PTI)

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF JUDICIAL MAGISTRATE:: KARBI ANGLONG:: ASSAM

ADVERTISEMENT

Dated, Diphu the 20th December, 2024

Applications are invited from the citizens of India as defined under Articles 5 and 6 of the Constitution of India for filling up of 02 (Two) Nos. of existing vacancy of PEON in the establishment of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Karbi Anglong, Diphu (Assam) in the Pay Scale as shown below:-

Sl. No.	Name of Post	No. of Vacant Post	Scale of Pay	Qualification/Eligibility	Category
1.	Peon	02 (Two) Nos.	PB-1, (12000/- to 52000/-) + GP 3900/- P.M. + other allowances as admissible as per ROP Rules, 2017	Minimum educational qualification is Class-VIII standard; and those who have passed HSSLC or above shall be ineligible to apply for the said post.	ST(P)-1 ST(H)-1

ELIGIBILITY:-

1. The candidate must be an Indian Citizen.
2. The candidate must possess the minimum educational qualification of VIII standard and those who have passed HSSLC or above shall be ineligible to apply for the said post.
3. The candidate must not be less than 18 years and more than 40 years of age as on 01.01.2024. The upper age limit will be relaxed:-

i) By 5 years for ST and SC candidates i.e. upto 45 years as per Govt. Notification No. ABP.6/2016/51, dated 02-09-2020 issued by Department of Personnel, Government of Assam.

HOW TO APPLY:-

1. Eligible candidates will have to apply in Standard Form of Application (Published in the Gazette Part IX of Govt. of Assam) with the name of the post superscribed on top of the envelope and same must be addressed to "The Chief Judicial Magistrate, Karbi Anglong, Diphu, Near Diphu Medical College, Diphu-782460." The Last date of receipt of application is 20.01.2025 till 05:00 PM.
2. The application must be accompanied with the following:-
 - a. Three recent coloured passport size photographs with signature on the reverse side,
 - b. Self-attested copies of testimonials in support of his/her AGE, CASTE and EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS etc.
 - c. Mobile Nos. must be written on the top of the Standard Form in RED INK.
3. Candidates already in Govt. service must apply through proper channel along with "No Objection Certificate" from the proper authority.
4. Incomplete or late received applications will summarily be rejected.
5. If any candidate found canvassing directly/indirectly his/her candidature will be ejected.
6. The applications can be submitted through ordinary/Speed/Registered Post or directly to the office of the undersigned.
7. If the candidate is found to have suppressed his/her educational qualification or given any wrong information at the time of applying for the post, his/her candidatures shall be liable to be rejected or his/her candidature will be terminated.
8. Valid Employment Exchange Registration Number is mandatory for those who are not in service.
9. Candidates may also drop their applications in the "Drop Box for the post of Peon" to be kept at the premise of Office of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Karbi Anglong on or before 20.01.2025 within office hours on every working day.

SELECTION PROCEDURE:-

The candidates will have to appear in an Interview (viva-voce) at their own expense. The selection will be made purely on merit basis.

No individual call letters will be issued to the candidates. However, the list of eligible candidates and Date of Interview will be uploaded in the official website <https://karbianglong.dcourts.gov.in> Candidates are advised to visit the official website regularly for updated information.

The Selection Board reserves the right to cancel, modify or alter the advertisement or other terms and condition of the advertisement without any prior notice.

Sd/-
Chief Judicial Magistrate
Karbi Anglong
Dated: 20.12.2024

No. CJM(KA)/F69/1782-1786/2024

IEDs, countrymade rockets seized in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 24: Improvised explosive devices (IEDs), countrymade rockets, and other arms and ammunition have been seized in Manipur during a search operation conducted by security forces, police said on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, security forces conducted a search operation in Teijang village in Churachandpur district on Monday and seized three countrymade

rockets, a .303 rifle with magazine, four pistols with magazines, six countrymade bombs and 45 sticks of low-grade explosives, and other cartridges, a police officer said.

In another operation in Lesiang village in the same district, security forces seized nine IEDs and detonators.

The security forces also seized a 7.62mm LMG with magazine, a single-barrel gun,

a 9mm pistol, and two grenades and other cartridges in another operation in Ngariyan hill ranges along Maring Sandangsgenga in Imphal East district, he said.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic clashes between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis since May 3, 2023. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, P.W.D. (R&B) HILLS, ASSAM, DIPHU

NoACEH/CS/Spl.G.KAAC/03/2024-25/18 Dated : 21-12-2024

PRESS NOTICE INVITING RE BID

The Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D(R&B), Hills, Assam Diphu, on behalf of Governor of Assam invites Item Rates bids from registered contractors of Class-(A&B) category for various works / projects under "Special Grant To Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council" for the year 2024-25 in Karbi Anglong District and West Karbi Anglong District. Details may be seen at e-procurement portal [website www.assamtenders.gov.in](https://www.assamtenders.gov.in). and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 24/11/2024 to 06/01/2025. The Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam.

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

Memo No. ACEH/CS/Spl.G.KAAC/03/2024-25/18-(A) Dated 21/12/2024

People struggling with rising prices, govt sleeping like 'Kumbhkaran': Rahul

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said that the people are struggling with rising prices and are forced to compromise on small things of daily needs while the government is sleeping like 'Kumbhkaran'.

Gandhi shared a video on his social media handles on his recent visit to a vegetable market in Giri Nagar here and interaction with housewives who narrated their ordeal due to rising prices of food items.

"A few days ago, I went to a local vegetable market and while shopping with customers, I talked to the vendors to know how the budget of the common people is deteriorating and how inflation has troubled everyone," Gandhi said in his post accompanying the video.

"People are struggling with rising prices and are forced to compromise on small things of daily needs," the former Congress chief said in his post in Hindi.

"We discussed the prices of garlic, peas, mushrooms and other vegetables, and heard the real experiences of the people. How garlic at ₹ 400 per kg and peas at ₹ 120 per kg have shaken everyone's budget," he said.

What will people eat and what will they save, he wondered.

"While talking over tea, we closely understood the problems of the lives of



housewives - how the income remained stagnant, inflation kept increasing uncontrollably. How saving has become impossible and how it has become difficult to arrange even a rickshaw fare of ₹ 10 due to just meeting the food expenses," Gandhi said.

He urged people to share their experiences with him if they are also feeling the effect of inflation.

"Tell us how you are struggling with this problem - you know the condition of the market, you too share your personal experiences with us," he said.

In a post on X, Gandhi said, "Garlic was once ₹ 40, today it is ₹ 400! Rising inflation has spoiled the budget of the common person's kitchen - the government is sleeping like Kumbhkaran!"

In the over five-minute video, Gandhi is seen accompanying some housewives as they buy vegetables and haggle with vendors.

The housewives tell Gandhi that they

have to curtail their eating habits as they are unable to afford the vegetables they used to earlier.

They also tell him that while wages have remained stagnant, prices have risen sharply.

The Congress on Monday took a swipe at the Modi government over "rising" prices of food items, saying the bullet train announced by it has not arrived but the inflation, which is spiralling upwards faster than the speed of a bullet train, has broken the back of the common person.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh had said the people want answers not more "jumbalabazi (rhetoric)".

He had shared a media report on X which claimed that the rates of daily essential goods are increasing day by day and in the last one year, the prices of flour, oil, spices and dry fruits have increased by one and a half to two times.

"The bullet train announced by the Modi government has not arrived, but the inflation, which is spiralling upwards faster than the speed of a bullet train, has broken the back of the common person," Ramesh had said in his post in Hindi on X.

The Congress has been attacking the government over its handling of the economy and raising concerns over increasing unemployment and price rise. (PTI)

Court summons AIMIM chief Owaisi over pro-Palestine slogans

BAREILLY (UP), Dec 24: A local court has directed AIMIM supremo Asaduddin Owaisi to appear before it over a plea that claimed he had violated the Constitution by raising a slogan hailing Palestine in Parliament.

Lawyer Virendra Gupta filed a petition against Owaisi over the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader voicing support for Palestine during his oath-taking ceremony in Parliament. Gupta said in his plea that the five-time MP had violated constitutional and legal beliefs. He told reporters on Tuesday that a petition was filed in the MP/MLA court on July 12 but it was rejected. Gupta then filed a revision petition in the court of the district judge.

District Judge Sudhir allowed the petition and issued a notice to Owaisi on Saturday, asking him to appear before the court on January 7. Gupta said he was hurt by Owaisi's slogan. His slogan was against the Constitution, he added.

Owaisi took oath as Hyderabad MP on June 25. After his oath-taking ceremony, he had hailed the conflict-hit West Asian country from the podium. The chairman later ordered the remarks to be expunged. Owaisi had justified his slogan after he came out of the House and told reporters there was nothing wrong in him saying "Jai Bheem, Jai Meem, Jai Telangana, Jai Palestine". (PTI)

NC MLA hits out at party MP for taking part in protests against reservation policy

SRINAGAR, Dec 24: In a sign of unease in the National Conference after its MP Aga Ruhullah joined a protest against the reservation policy, NC legislator Salman Sagar on Tuesday said he has hurt the party's interests by providing a platform to its "enemies".

"What he (Aga Ruhullah) did was wrong. In my opinion, it should not have happened. He provided a platform to the enemies of National Conference by these protests," Sagar told reporters.

He was referring to Ruhullah taking part in student protests against the existing reservation policy in Jammu and Kashmir on Monday outside the residence of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. PDP leaders Waheed Para and Iltija Mufti were among scores of people from political parties who joined the protesters to show their support.

Separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who is under house arrest, also voiced his support for the demand for "rationalisation" of quota for reserved categories.

After meeting the

protesting students, Chief Minister Abdullah had said on X that the channel of communication will remain open "without any intermediaries or hangers-on".

Sagar said Ruhullah's presence at the protests has done "more harm than benefit" to the cause of the open merit students.

"This is not democracy. Every party has discipline, he (Ruhullah) should have raised his concerns internally. You cannot disrespect the chief minister and your party through such theatrics," the MLA from Hazratbal said.

Sagar, however, said he was supportive of the cause of the general category students demanding rationalisation of quotas.

The NC leader dismissed suggestions that Monday's protests was an intra-party confrontation.

"Did you see any other NC leader there? He (Ruhullah) was there in his capacity as an MP. You would not find any born-NC leader in such gatherings," he said.

After meeting Abdullah on Monday, student leaders said that he had assured

them that the cabinet sub-committee formed to review the reservation policy will submit its report within six months.

The students are protesting against the reservation policy in Jammu and Kashmir implemented after the abrogation of Article 370.

Meanwhile, Peoples' Democratic Party chief Mehbooba Mufti on Tuesday asked the chief minister to find a way to resolve the issue of reservation.

Speaking to reporters, Mufti said the people of J-K, especially the youth, voted for the National Conference in large numbers in the assembly polls so that there would be rationalisation in the reservation and nobody's rights would be snatched.

"We do not want any politics in it but we are pushing open merit students to the wall. The chief minister has sought six months' time. They (NC) have three MPs, including the Ladakh MP and 50 MLAs, why do they need six months? They think a court decision will come by and they will not have to do anything," Mufti said. (PTI)

Vajpayee's legacy lives on as country marks his birth centenary

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Delivering one of his more famous speeches at the BJP's inaugural convention at Shivaji Park in Mumbai, Atal Bihari Vajpayee predicted on December 30, 1980 with his signature flourish: 'Andhera chhatega, suraj niklega, kamal khilega' (darkness will end, the sun will rise, lotus will bloom).

As his birth centenary arrives, his words have aged well, with the BJP returning to power for a third straight term at the centre and lotus in full bloom.

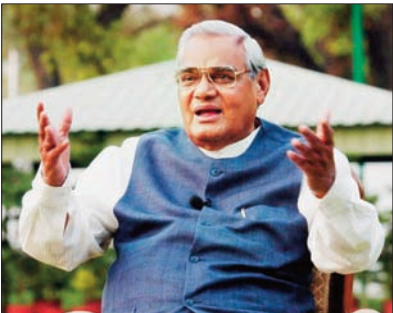
If Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the BJP's cultural agenda the centre of national politics, Vajpayee helped the party occupy this centre when its cultural agenda was considered an anathema.

A statesman politician and a peerless orator, India's first non-Congress prime minister to have served a full term commanded respect and affection from across the political aisle and stood tall with his innate democratic spirit, honed through decades in opposition, in a politics crowded with powerful satraps.

The three-time prime minister was the original builder of coalition politics at the national level, successfully running an alliance government for a full term while navigating some of the biggest national crises, including the plane hijack in 1999 and the terror attack on Parliament in 2001, both with direct links to Pakistan.

His government's measured handling of the two incidents drew criticism from some quarters, including right wing organisations considered ideologically affiliated to the BJP but less than friendly to him for not pushing their cultural and economic agenda, but his standing ensured that he faced no political threat or popular backlash.

And even as he was still smarting from the fall of his government by one vote in the Lok Sabha in April 1999, his firm military and deft diplomatic response to Pakistan's intrusion into Kargil as the head of a caretaker government earned him plaudits and powered the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance to a more stable majority, ensuring him a full term at the



helm.

Ashok Tandon, media adviser to Vajpayee during his six-year stint as PM, said besides being an outstanding parliamentarian who did his bit in "strengthening the roots of parliamentary democracy" after entering the Lok Sabha for the first time in 1957, he brought "good governance" at the centre of agenda as the head of government.

"Good governance was his landmark contribution. He headed a diverse coalition of parties and kept them together, while pursuing policies which helped the country in every field," he told PTI, citing the launch of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, PM Gramin Sadak Yojna and the Golden Quadrilateral highway project under his stewardship.

It was his boost to reforms, disinvestment and infra projects that made the idea of seven to eight per cent growth rate possible and his government legislated fiscal prudence through the FRBM Act in 2003.

However, the fruits of reforms came a little too late and this coupled with the BJP's political missteps, especially in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, and the Congress-led UPA's harnessing of rural distress delivered a shock defeat to Vajpayee in 2004 amid a decline in his health.

His public appearances were limited, he campaigned last for his party in the 2007 assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh before slowly fading away from the public eye as dementia hit him. He died in 2018.

The Modi government began observing

his birth anniversary as "Good Governance Day" and bestowed Bharat Ratna on him in 2015.

An impressive mix of tradition and modernity in his world view, Vajpayee, a full-time RSS worker before being sent by the Hindutva organisation to the Jana Sangh in 1951 when the party was founded, maintained a lifelong adherence to the Sangh's values even though he at times resented its methods.

Unlike his lifelong companion L K Advani, who despite being an ideological hardliner and more invested organisational leader fell from the RSS's grace due to his public airing of views, including his ill-fated praise of M A Jinnah, that were bound to antagonise the Hindutva organisation, Vajpayee used his cultivated ambivalence and gifted articulation to shape his image of a moderate while never crossing swords with it.

The only time he openly denounced a polarising Hindutva cause was when the Babri mosque was demolished in 1992, but his stand was considered an act of political pragmatism necessary for the BJP to realise its political ambitions after fetching merely two seats in the 1984 polls.

With the moderate, poet-at-heart and statesman-like Vajpayee as the BJP's prime ministerial face and the party agreeing to put a moratorium on its contentious ideological planks of the Ram temple construction, Article 370 repeal and the Uniform Civil Code, regional parties from across the country were drawn as he led them to poll wins.

His passionate moves to improve ties with Pakistan resulted in his spectacular journey to Lahore in a bus in February 1999 and then hosting the Agra Summit with Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf in 2001 but they met with little success.

As the army chief before he deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Musharraf was behind his country's misadventure in Kargil, which followed months after Vajpayee's bus journey. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE PROGRAMME OFFICER, DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT DIVISIONAL ICDS CELL, DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG

No.PO(ICDS)KA/37/Esstt./2024-25/1647

Dated Diphu the 24th Dec'2024

ADVERTISEMENT

In pursuance of KAAC, Diphu vide their letter No. KAAC/Esstt-677/P(B)/ICDS/Prior Approval of Post/2023-24/25, Dt. 23/09/2024, applications are invited in the prescribed standard form of application as published in the Assam Gazette (Part-IX) from the intending eligible local candidates from within Karbi Anglong for filling up of the following temporary sanctioned Grade-III & Grade IV vacant posts under ICDS, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.

Sl. No.	Name of post (s)	Total No. of vacancies	Pay Structure/Emoluments	Minimum education qualification & other qualification
1	Supervisor (only female candidates to apply)	6 Nos.	Rs. 14000-70000+7600/- (Grade pay)	(a) Graduate in Arts/Science, Commerce from any recognized University Preference will given to a graduate in Social Work, Home Science or related subjects like Nutrition, Anthropology, Sociology, Education, Psychology etc OR (b) AWWs who have completed 10 years of continuous service & passed HSLC or equivalent examination from recognized board/ Council OR (c) Anganwadi Worker who are graduate.
2	Statistical Assistant	1 No.	Rs. 14000-70000+7600/- (Grade pay)	Graduate in Arts, Science or Commerce from a recognized university with Economics, Statistics or Mathematics as one of the subject at degree level Desirable: Candidates proficient on computer application / operation (MS-office) or having diploma in computer application from any Govt recognized institution will be given preference
3	LDA-Cum-Typist	3 Nos.	Rs. 14000-70000+6200/- (Grade pay)	Graduate in Arts, Science or Commerce from a recognized university (b) Diploma in Type Writing in English with minimum typing speed of 40 words per minute Desirable: Preference will be given to the candidates having working knowledge in computer operation / DTP etc
4	Office peon	1 No.	Rs. 12000-5200+3900/- (Grade pay)	Minimum HSLC passed from a recognized institution

(The vacancy positions may likely to increase or decrease subject to the approval of the KAAC authority).

AGE LIMIT: - i) Not less than 18 years and more than 38 years as on 01.01.2024. The upper age limit is relaxable by 5 years in case of SC / ST candidates.

ii) For the category of candidates for the post of Supervisor at SL No. 1 (b) & I (c) above, the upper age Limit is 45 years as on 01.01.2024.

HOW TO APPLY:- The candidates for the above posts should submit the following:-

1. Duly filled in application as per prescribed standard form with affixing KAAC receipt of Rs 10/- addressed to the Programme Officer, Divisional ICDS Cell, Karbi Anglong Diphu.

2. 2 (two) copies of recent passport size photograph duly signed by the candidate indicating full name on the back side should be attached alongwith the application.

3. All copies of Certificates, Marksheets and other testimonials duly attested by self must accompany the application in support of the following -

a) Educational Qualification & other qualification including diploma of type writing/computer etc.

b) Birth Certificate / Admit Card or Pass Certificate of HSLC.

c) Caste Certificates (incase of SC/ST/OBC/MOBC) issued by the competent authorities.

d) Experience Certificate from the competent authority wherever applicable.

4. A self addressed envelop of size (10 inch X 5 inch) affixing with Rs 5/- (five) postal stamp on it must be enclosed with the application.

LAST DATE OF SUBMISSION:-

i) The last date of submission of application is 10/01/2025 upto 4:00 P.M.

ii) Completed applications along with all required documents/enclosures in a sealed envelope clearly mentioning the name of post applied for on the top of the envelop should be submitted by hand or by post to the Programme Officer, Divisional ICDS Cell, Shiv Bari Road, Diphu so as to reach on or before 4:00 P.M. on 04/01/2025.

iii) Applications may also be deposited between 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. on working days in the drop box kept in the office of the undersigned for this purpose on or before closing date.

GENERAL INFORMATION:-

1. Eligible candidates whose applications are found to be in order and correct in all respect will be called for interview to be held at a venue, date and time to be notified later on whenever scheduled through News Papers/Office Notice Board

2. No TA / DA will be entitled for attending the test / interview

3. Candidates should bring all relevant certificates in original at the time of interview for verification failing which their candidatures will not be considered

4. Candidates only from KAAC area need to appear/apply

5. This office will not be responsible for loss of application due to improper tagging/transit or postal delay

6. No applications will be entertained after the last date as scheduled/fixed

7. The name of the post applied for must be mentioned on the top of the envelop containing the applications.

REJECTION OF APPLICATION:-

1. Application of ineligible candidates

2. Applications not properly filled in or incomplete/defective in any respect

3. Furnishing of untrue/false for particulars/information

4. Canvassing directly or indirectly in any form

5. Applications, not in conformity with requirements as per advertisement.

These applications as mentioned above will be summarily rejected without any intimation to the applicant.

Sd/-
Programme Officer
Divisional ICDS Cell, Diphu
Karbi Anglong

Memo No. PO(ICDS)KA/37/Esstt./2024-25/1647 (A)

Dated Diphu the 24th Dec'2024

THEATRE STAMPEDE CASE

Police grill actor Allu Arjun for over 3 hrs, lawyer says actor cooperated

HYDERABAD, Dec 24: Top Telugu actor Allu Arjun was on Tuesday grilled by police for over three hours when he appeared before them for questioning in connection with the death of a woman in a stampede during the screening of 'Pushpa-2' here on December 4.

Arjun reached the Chikkadpally police station accompanied by his father Allu Aravind and lawyers a little after 11 AM and the questioning was held till 2.45 PM. A police team led by Central Zone DCP Akshansh Yadav questioned the actor. "He cooperated with the Police fully. If required, they said they'll call him again. They (the police) wanted to question him and he cooperated. They treated him very well," Arjun's advocate Ashok Reddy told PTI.

The interrogation centred around Allu Arjun's entry into the theatre, exit and role of bouncers in crowd controlling near the star, sources close to the development said.

The police have also posed questions whether he was aware of



the permission being denied for his visit. The police also asked him about the details of his private security. The police alleged that bouncers, who accompanied the star when he arrived for the film screening, allegedly pushed fans leading to the stampede.

The police also asked him about his knowledge of the tragic incident when he was watching the film. He was also asked about the sequence of events.

"The police have recorded the statement of Allu Arjun with regard to the case," sources told PTI.

After the questioning, Allu Arjun returned to his home at posh Jubilee Hills in the city. The actor held a press conference on December 21, describing the stampede incident as purely accidental and denied the allegations made by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on the "roadshow" before film screening.

Hours after Reddy slammed the actor for holding a roadshow and waving to the crowds at the theatre, without referring to anyone, the 'Pushpa 2' star refuted the allegations and said it was not a procession or a roadshow.

Tight security arrangements were made at the Chikkadpally police station in view of the star's appearance. Heavy police deployment was made, while police also imposed restrictions on traffic on the roads leading to the police station.

The actor was issued a notice on December 23 to appear before the police at 11 AM today.

The police, in their notice, said his presence is essential before the SHO of Chikkadpally police station to elicit answers about the stampede incident and if necessary for visiting the scene of offence, in order to ascertain the facts.

Earlier in the day, security was stepped up at his residence at posh Jubilee Hills here and the actor waved to the media before leaving for the police station. Allu Arjun

has earlier said he would cooperate with the investigation.

The notice to Allu Arjun on December 23 came a day after police commissioner C V Anand released a video showing the sequence of events at the theatre.

A 35-year-old woman died during the stampede at the Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad on December 4 and her eight-year-old son was hospitalised.

Following the incident, the city police registered a case against Allu Arjun, his security team, and the theatre management under different sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at the Chikkadpally police station based on the complaint lodged by the deceased woman's family.

Allu Arjun, named as accused no 11, was arrested by the city police in connection with the death of the woman on December 13. The Telangana High Court granted him a four-week interim bail on the same day and he was released from a prison here December 14 morning. (PTI)

Lokpal calls SEBI chief, complainants for 'oral hearing' over corruption charges



NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal has called SEBI chief Madhabi Puri Buch and also complainants, including TMC MP Mahua Moitra, for "oral hearing" next month in connection with corruption complaints being heard by it, alleging impropriety and conflict of interest on the basis of a Hindenburg Research report, according to an official order. The Lokpal had on November 8 sought Buch's "explanation" on the complaints filed by Moitra, a Lok Sabha member, and two others. Buch, the chairperson of capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), was asked to submit her response within four weeks.

Hearing the case, the Lokpal said the named RPS (respondent public servant) "has filed her response by way of affidavit sworn on 07.12.2024 in time, raising preliminary issues as well as giving explanation allegation-wise".

"Further, we deem it appropriate that the RPS as well as the complainants can be given opportunity of oral hearing to clarify their positions taken in the complaints or the affidavit, as the case may be," according to the December 19 order signed by Lokpal chairperson Justice AM Khanwilkar and five other members.

Accordingly, the Lokpal has asked the registry to issue notices to the RPS as well as the complainant(s) to avail of the opportunity of oral hearing on January 28.

"It will be open to the RPS as well as the complainant to authorise an advocate to espouse their cause, if they so desire at the time of oral hearing," the order said.

The Lokpal said "it is appropriate and in the interest of justice that the complainants are provided a copy of the affidavit and documents filed by the RPS by way of response to the respective complainants and the supplementary affidavits". The anti-graft ombudsman asked its registry to forward a copy of Buch's affidavit and its accompaniments to the complainants in respective complaints. "The complainants, however, shall ensure that confidentiality of the process and the contents of the affidavit is maintained..." the order said.

Without mentioning the name of the complainant, the Lokpal in its September 20 order had also sought details "regarding the efforts made by the respective complainant to verify the authenticity and credibility of the claims in the recent report of Hindenburg Research published on August 10, 2024". The matter was then posted for hearing on October 17 and later on November 8. A third complaint was also filed on October 14 by "yet another complainant, once again raising the same issues", according to the Lokpal's order of November 8. (PTI)

SEBI chief Buch and the complainants, "if (they) wish to rely on any reported decisions must file compilation(s) of such decisions duly paginated, well in advance and not later than 18.01.2025", it said and listed the matter for 11:30 am on January 28.

In an order dated September 20, the Lokpal had said the complaint by the parliamentarian, alleging impropriety and conflict of interest by the SEBI chief, "falls short" of persuading it to order any probe.

The anti-corruption ombudsman's observation came while hearing two complaints, including one by the TMC MP, filed on the basis of a report by the US-based "activist short-seller".

In its report, US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research alleged that Buch and her husband had stakes in obscure offshore funds used in the alleged money siphoning scandal involving the Adani Group. They denied the allegations, saying the short-seller was attacking the capital markets regulator's credibility and attempting a character assassination.

The Adani Group had also termed Hindenburg Research's allegations malicious and manipulation of selective public information.

In a post on X, TMC MP Moitra on September 13 said she had filed a complaint against the SEBI chief with the Lokpal and asserted that the anti-graft ombudsman should forward it to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) or the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for preliminary probe followed by a "full FIR enquiry".

Without mentioning the name of the complainant, the Lokpal in its September 20 order had also sought details "regarding the efforts made by the respective complainant to verify the authenticity and credibility of the claims in the recent report of Hindenburg Research published on August 10, 2024". The matter was then posted for hearing on October 17 and later on November 8. A third complaint was also filed on October 14 by "yet another complainant, once again raising the same issues", according to the Lokpal's order of November 8. (PTI)

Prez to confer Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children



NEW DELHI, Dec 24: President Droupadi Murmu will on Thursday confer the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children from 14 states and Union territories. The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development said in a statement that it would celebrate Veer Bal Diwas and the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar with nationwide activities, highlighting the achievements and potential of India's youngsters.

This year, 17 children from 14 states and Union territories will be conferred with the prestigious Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar by President Droupadi Murmu, it added.

The award recognises exceptional achievements in seven categories -- art and culture; bravery; innovation; science and technology; social service; sports; and environment. The honourees -- seven boys and 10 girls -- will receive a medal, certificate and a citation booklet as part of the recognition.

The centerpiece of the celebration, the national programme for Veer Bal Diwas, will take place at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be present on the occasion, inaugurating the Suposhit Panchayat scheme that aims to bolster nutritional security at the grassroots.

The event will also feature a march-past led by children, representing diverse cultures.

Union Minister of Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi will deliver the opening address, setting the tone for a day dedicated to nurturing young minds and fostering creativity, the ministry said in its statement.

Approximately 3,500 children, including the awardees, will participate in the event, which will feature cultural performances showcasing India's rich heritage.

Educational and creative activities will engage children around the country.

Schools, childcare institutions and Anganwadi centres will host storytelling sessions, creative writing competitions, poster-making events, essay writing, poetry recitals and quizzes. Online platforms such as MyGov and MYBharat will also facilitate participation.

Veer Bal Diwas is dedicated to inspiring young Indians to contribute to the nation's progress by upholding the values of courage, innovation and service.

Through programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar and Suposhit Panchayat, the government reaffirms its commitment to empowering the next generation and fostering a culture of excellence, the ministry said. (PTI)

Odisha signs agreement to operate hydrogen-powered buses

BHUBANESWAR, Dec 24: In a move towards launching green hydrogen mobility project in Odisha, a tripartite agreement was signed between three state-

owned agencies, an official said on Tuesday.

The agreement was signed on Monday by Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) managing director Tirumala Nayak, Grid Corporation of Odisha Limited (GRIDCO) managing director Trilochan Panda and NTPC CGM M R Panda in the presence of Odisha Deputy Chief Minister K V Singhdeo and Housing and Urban Development minister K C Mohapatra, the official said.

The agreement to be implemented over the next five years has outlined the key roles and responsibilities of the three entities involved. While CRUT has been given the responsibility of maintaining hydrogen-powered buses, NTPC will focus on hydrogen production and GRIDCO will ensure the supply of renewable energy, the official said.

This hydrogen powered bus will go a long way in bringing about a permanent solution to the state's climate change, said Principal Secretary, Housing and Urban Development department, Usha Padhi. (PTI)

Shah emphasises use of biometrics technology to identify unidentified bodies

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday stressed the need for using biometrics technology to identify unidentified bodies and unidentified "found persons". Chairing a review meeting on the implementation of the three new criminal laws with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) here, Shah also emphasised the use of technology in all criminal investigation matters.

He said alerts should be generated for all the cases at predefined stages and timelines should be fixed -- from the registration to disposal of the case -- for the benefit of victims and complainants.

Biometrics technology should be adopted to identify unidentified bodies and unidentified found persons,

Shah asserted.

According to an official statement, Shah said regular dispatch of alerts to investigating officers as well as senior officers as per pre-defined timelines will help expedite the process of investigation.

The meeting reviewed the implementation and integration of Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) 2.0 and Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS), the New Criminal Laws and National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS), prisons, courts, prosecution and forensics with ICJS 2.0 at all India level.

During the discussion, the home minister asked the NCRB to facilitate the complete implementation of the new criminal laws in the ICJS 2.0,

the statement said.

He emphasised the use of applications like eSakshya, Nyaya Shruti, eSign and eSummons in every state and Union Territory.

Shah said a team of officers of the Ministry of Home Affairs, NCRB should visit the states and Union Territories to increase the adoption of technical projects and assist them in all possible ways.

He emphasised regular interaction with senior police formations of states and Union Territories to monitor the progress of CCTNS and ICJS regularly and provide impetus to the project.

The NCRB should create a data rich platform to benefit the investigation officers and other stakeholder of criminal justice system, he said. (PTI)

7 more arrested in Sambhal violence case

SAMBHAL (UP), Dec 24:

Seven men were arrested on Tuesday in connection with the November 24 Sambhal violence that left four people dead, police said.

So far 47 people have been arrested in the case and 91 people identified, Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Shrish Chandra told reporters here.

Those arrested on Tuesday

were identified as Shoaib, Sujauddin, Rahat, Mohd Azam, Azharuddin, Javed and Mustafa, police said.

Teams have been set up to arrest other accused involved in the incident.

According to police, 11 FIRs have been registered in connection with the violence.

Sambhal remained tense since November 19, when

the local Shahi Jama Masjid underwent a survey following a court order on a petition claiming that there was a Harihar temple earlier.

Violence broke out on November 24 when the mosque was being surveyed again.

Stone pelting took place in Pakka Baag Hindu Pura Kheda, a police motorcycle

was burnt, and magazine and cartridges of a police pistol were looted, following which a case was registered at Nakhasa police station.

Four people died and scores of others were injured in a clash between protesters and police.

According to police, 29 police personnel were injured in the flare-up. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER (PHE) KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL::DIPHU

No. Addl.CPHE/DIP/Misc-10/2024-25/ 1812

Dated: - 24/12/2024

The office of the Additional Chief Engineer (PHE), KAAC Zone, invites application for walk in interview to fill up the following contractual position

Sl. No.	Name of Post	No. of Vacancy	Place of Vacancy	Remuneration	Required Qualification & age	Condition	Date & Time of walk in interview	Venue
1	Micro Biologist	1 (One)	O/o the E.E. (PHE) Hamren Division	Rs. 30,000.00 (Inclusive of all incentives & perks)	1. M. Sc. In Micro-Biology/ Bio Technology/ Biological Science from a recognised University / Institution. 2. Age minimum 21 Years maximum 35 years as on 01/01/2025	At least one year experience in relevant field.		Office of the Additional Chief Engineer (PHE), KAAC Zone, Rongmir-jeng Near AGCC Colony, Diphu, Karbi Anglong
2	Technical Officer (TO)-I SBM (G)	2 (Two)	O/o the E.E. (PHE) Howraghat Division O/O the EE (PHE) Ulukunchi Division	Rs. 30,000.00 (Inclusive of all incentives & perks)	1. B.E./B. Tech in Civil Engineering from a recognised University/Institution. 2. Age minimum 21 Years maximum 40 years as on 01/01/2025	At least one year experience in relevant field.	03/01/2025 at 11 A.M.	
3	Lab Asstt.	1 (One)	O/O the EE (PHE) Ulukunchi Division	Rs. 18,500.00 (Fixed)	1. H.S. (Science) from a recognised Institution. 2. Age minimum 21 years maximum 40 years as on 01/01/2025	At least one year experience in relevant field.		

For further details and Terms of reference, please visit website of vacancy may increase or decrease at time of interview Recruitment and Website of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu (url:https://karbianglong.co.in/notification)fitecruitecoll and Website of Karbi indorse autonomous Council.

Sd/-
Additional Chief Engineer (PHE)
KAAC Zone, Diphu, Karbi Anglong

MODERNISATION OF SIGNALLING ARRANGEMENT

E-Tender Notice No. Sr. DEEL/MG/ 27 of 2024-25, dated: 20-12-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **SN.1; Tender No: EL/LM/24-25/33; Name of work:** Modernisation of Signalling arrangement by provision of Electronic Interlocking at 3 Station (Sarupathar, Barpathar & Bhilgaon) in Lumding-Furkating Jn. Section of Lumding Division (Electrical portion). Tender Value: ₹52,13,176.78; Earnest Money: ₹1,04,300.00. **E-tender will be closed at 11:00 hrs. on 13-01-2025 and Opened at 11:30 hrs. on 13-01-2025. SN.2; Tender No: EL/LM/ 24-25/34; Name of work:** Provision of New Earthing, RCCB & MCCB and repair of existing earthing at Service building, Quarter & sub-stations at Lumding Division. Tender Value: ₹1,39,23,405.48; Earnest Money: ₹2,19,600.00. **E-tender will be closed at 11:00 hrs. on 13-01-2025 and Opened at 11:30 hrs. on 13-01-2025.** The complete information with the tender document of above e-tenders will be available upto 11:00 hrs on 13-01-2025 on website <http://www.freps.gov.in>

Sr. DEE/G&Chg, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

MUMBAI, Dec 24: His lens empathetic, rooted to Indian reality and always political, Shyam Benegal was the arthouse pioneer who rewrote the rules of cinema with films such as "Ankur", "Nishant" and "Bhumika" that blazed an alternate path to mainstream movies.

The pioneer of parallel cinema, one of India's greatest directors whose work found an audience in the most discerning of global film circles, died in a Mumbai hospital on Monday evening. It was just nine days after he celebrated his 90th birthday.

Benegal, who burst on the scene with his first film "Ankur" in 1974, was a chronicler of India's times and politics, that rare artiste who worked both in non-fiction and fiction across varied mediums -- films, documentaries, biopics and ambitious TV shows. The title of his debut film, translating to seedling, was perhaps prophetic. "Ankur", which delves into feudalism and exploitation of women in a small village in India, prepared the ground for a cinema without artifice in an era dominated by superman heroes and loud song and dance routines. It was the first of his more than 25 films that included "Mandi", "Manthan", "Junoon", "Kalyug" and "Zubeidaa". The remarkable oeuvre boasts the documentary on an-

other great, "Satyajit Ray, Film-maker", and television shows, the ambitious "Bharat Ek Khoj", based on Jawaharlal Nehru's book "Discovery of India", and "Samvidhaan", a 10-part serial on the making of the Constitution.

Through his work, which was distinctly different and alternate to mainstream movies as audiences knew till then, Benegal made several stars out of great actors. There was Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah and Girish Karnad of course. And then there were those stars such as Shashi Kapoor and Rekha who gave arguably their best performances in "Kalyug".

The filmmaking was both deeply personal and inherently political. Telling stories of class and caste struggles, feminist concerns, rural distress and community dynamics. The gaze was incisive, the themes serious and the treatment sometimes sombre and other times satirical.

If "Kalyug" is a modern day retelling of the Mahabharata, "Bhumika" is a searing profile of a woman filmstar and her often exploitative relationships. "Mandi" deals with a brothel and its occupants who deftly navigate the men in their lives and "Welcome to Sajjanpur" about an aspiring novelist turned letter writer is an outright satire.

Fondly called Shyam Babu by

SHYAM BENEGAL

Prolific arthouse auteur whose lens captured the many realities of India

friends and colleagues, Benegal was a pillar of meaningful cinema of the 1970s and 1980s alongside Sai Paranjpye, Govind Nihalani, Mani Kaul, Saeed Akhtar Mirza, and Kumar Shahani.

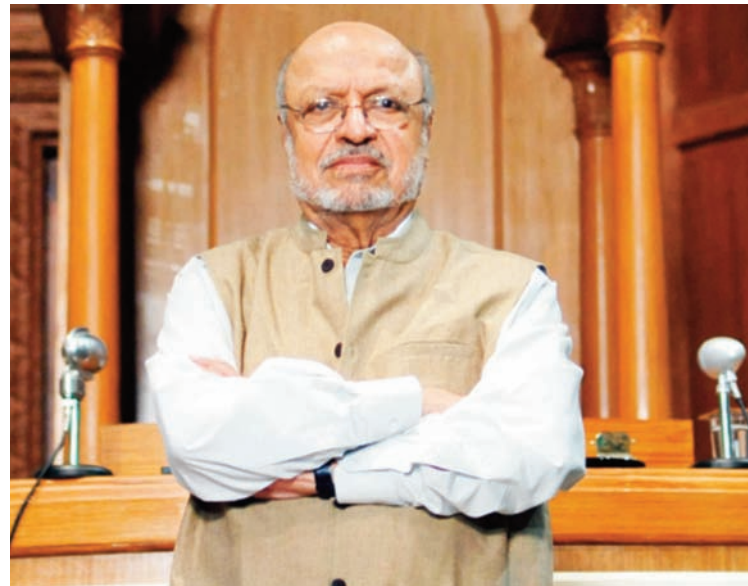
Benegal disliked the term "middle cinema" used to bracket his films and preferred that his work be called "new or alternate cinema".

"I don't remember who said this: 'Every social act of yours is also a political act whether you like it or not'," he told PTI in 2022.

"One has to be as objective as possible and the second point is to be sympathetic. If you are not objective, you are already colouring the story with your subjectivity. Sympathy is necessary. When I say sympathy, I mean empathy so you can be one with the subject," Benegal said.

His was the cinema of and by the erudite, attracting some of the most talented in the business.

The late playwright Vijay Tendulkar wrote the screenplay "Manthan", a film on the milk cooperative movement in Anand, Gujarat, made with Rs 2 funding from five lakh farmers, and "Nishant", set in a feudal family. The late music composer Vanraj

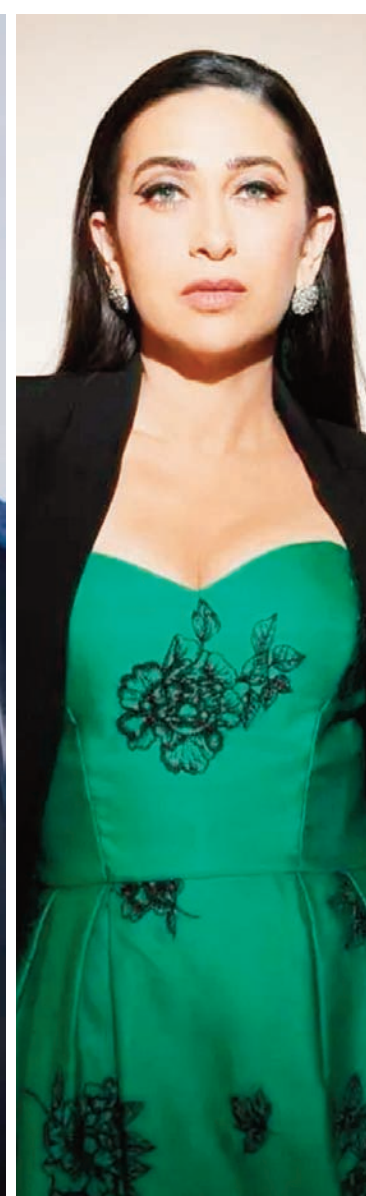


Bhatia, cinematographer Govind Nihalani and the great theatre director Satyadev Dubey worked with him in multiple films. Girish Karnad wrote the screenplay for "Bhumika" and Ruskin Bond for "Junoon".

Benegal was understated about his achievements.

"There are people who have done wonderful things. There's nothing unique in what one has done. You do what you think you want to do. That's not unique. Climbing Mount Everest is unique," he said. Interestingly, Mahatma Gandhi was the one personality Benegal explored in all his complexities and significance.

In "The Making of the Mahatma", Rajit Kapoor portrayed Gandhi during his South African years. Gandhi appeared in two episodes of "Bharat Ek Khoj" and was played by Neeraj Kabi in 10-part series "Samvidhaan". In his biopic on Netaji, 2005's "Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero", the role of Gandhi was enacted by Surendra Rajan. (PTI)



Amitabh Bachchan, Nafisa Ali, Karisma Kapoor pay rich tributes to Shyam Benegal

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Tributes continued to pour in for celebrated filmmaker Shyam Benegal, with Amitabh Bachchan, Nafisa Ali, Karisma Kapoor and Ajay Devgn remembering the "stalwart" and "legend" for his contribution to Indian cinema.

Benegal, a pioneer whose films such as "Ankur", "Mandi", "Nishant", and "Junoon" defined the Indian 'parallel cinema movement' in the 1970s and 1980s, died on Monday at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital due to chronic kidney disease. He was 90.

Shabana Azmi, a close friend and Benegal's frequent collaborator, shared the funeral details on her Instagram Stories. The last rites will take place at 3 pm on Tuesday at Shivaji Park Electric Crematorium in Mumbai's Dadar neighbourhood.

Bachchan paid homage to the director in an X post. "We have lost another stalwart of the Film Industry

today .. Shyam Benegal passes away .. Prayers and condolences (sic)" he wrote.

Ali, who worked with Benegal in 1978's "Junoon", said the filmmaker made her world "so special".

"... and saw in me something that no one else did, my vulnerability and captured eternity, the essence of me... Condolences (are) not enough, my heart is in turmoil. Why is life so short?" she wrote as she sent love to Benegal's wife Nira and daughter Pia.

"May you change the canvas of the universe and teach humanity that life is a film created by our vision," Ali added in her post. Kapoor shared a still from Benegal's 2001 film "Zubeidaa" in which she played the titular role.

In another post on her Instagram Story, the actor shared a behind-the-scenes picture with the director from the set of "Zubeidaa".

"Rest in Peace Shyam Babu. Legend forever. Ur Zubeidaa..

#ShyamBenegal," she wrote in the caption. "Your films were more than just stories - they were lessons in humanity and culture. You've left an indelible mark on all of us. Rest in peace, Sir. Om Shanti #ShyamBenegal," actor Ajay Devgn wrote on X.

Be it short films, documentaries, TV dramas or non-fiction serials, Benegal dabbled in different mediums of cinema with equal flair.

In an X post, documentary filmmaker Rakesh Sharma remembered his "first boss" Benegal, whom he assisted on the Doordarshan series "Bharat Ek Khoj", based on Jawaharlal Nehru's book "Discovery of India".

"For 3 rather intense years of work, soaking, absorbing, learning, arguing and fighting on 53 episodes of Discovery Of India/ #BharatEkKhoj. An incredible experience that shaped and enriched me. You will be missed, ShyamBabu!" Sharma wrote. (PTI)

Christopher Nolan's next film titled 'The Odyssey'

LOS ANGELES, Dec 24: Acclaimed director Christopher Nolan's new film is titled "The Odyssey", which is based on the epic Greek poem by Homer.

Featuring a star-studded cast comprising Matt Damon, Tom Holland, Zendaya, Robert Pattinson, Lupita Nyong'o, Anne Hathaway and Charlize Theron, the movie is set to hit the big screen on July 17, 2026.

Universal Pictures, the studio behind the film, made the title reveal announcement on its official X page.

The film will feature a star-studded cast, including Tom Holland, Zendaya, Lupita Nyong'o, and Charlize Theron. Matt Damon and Anne Hathaway, who worked with Nolan in the 2014 film Interstellar, and Robert Pattinson, who appeared in Tenet (2018), will also appear.

While the Inception director will create the screenplay for the film, his wife Emma

Thomas will bankroll the production under the Syncope banner, founded by the couple. (AGENCIES)

Shabana Azmi: 'Shyam Benegal was like a guru to me, he was progressive and well-informed'

MUMBAI, Dec 24: Shyam Benegal, the pioneer of parallel cinema, played a pivotal role in Shabana Azmi's career as the actor says he was a guru who influenced not only her approach towards acting but also her understanding of life.

Benegal, known for his socially relevant and thought-provoking films such as "Ankur" (1974), "Mandi" (1983), "Mammo" (1994) and "Zubeidaa" (2001), died in Mumbai on Monday evening, just nine days after his 90th birthday.

It was Benegal who gave Azmi her first acting role in his directorial debut "Ankur", which explored themes of caste, class, and sexual politics, with a focus on the struggles of rural women. Over the years, the duo collaborated on several projects, including "Nishant" (1975), "Junoon" (1978), "Susman" (1978) and "Antarnaad" (1992).

"Shyam Benegal has been my guru in everything, not just in acting but in the way I view the world. When I went abroad for Ankur with him to the Berlin Film Festival and, as a young kid with stars in my eyes, I wanted to run to the first shopping place. "But he asked all kinds of questions to the taxi driver; he wanted to know about the garden and the history," Azmi told PTI in a recent interview.

The 74-year-old actor described Benegal as a "progressive" and "well-informed" filmmaker.

"He opened me up in different ways. When we went to the (Berlin) festival, he would say, 'Let's watch

this film for this reason'. So he was like a guru to me," she added.

Azmi was among the actors who celebrated Benegal's 90th birthday on December 14. The actor had shared a picture with Benegal and Naseeruddin Shah, another frequent collabora-



tor of the director, on social media.

"On #ShyamBenegal's 90th birthday with my co-actor of many films and my favourite actor @NaseeruddinShah. Why aren't more people casting us together?!!" Azmi had

posted on Instagram. The birthday celebration was also attended by Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Divya Dutta, Rajit Kapur and Kunal Kapoor, son of late actor Shashi Kapoor, who had also featured in "Junoon". (PTI)

It took Benegal's genius to see me beyond my looks: Manoj Bajpayee on 'Zubeidaa'

NEW DELHI, Dec 24 It took the genius of Shyam Benegal to see beyond his looks, says actor Manoj Bajpayee who never imagined himself playing a royal and did so in the 2001 film "Zubeidaa" after the filmmaker convinced him. Benegal, who pioneered the art house cinema movement in the country with films such as "Mandi" and "Ankur", died in Mumbai on Monday evening just nine days after his 90th birthday.

The actor met Benegal a couple of years after his breakout role as the mafia don Bhiku Mhatre in the 1998 crime classic "Satya" by Ram Gopal Varma.

"He sent me a message through Ram Gopal Varma. And Varma told me only one thing, 'Shyam Benegal wants to work with you. He wants to cast you in some role. I don't know what the film is all about but you are not going to say no to anything that he offers. That should be our regard and respect to that filmmaker, so you are going to say yes. You are not going to say no.'

"And I was so grateful to Ram Gopal Varma that I decided that I will do whatever he gives me," Bajpayee told PTI in a recent interview. So the actor did say yes to Benegal's film but was taken aback when he found that the role was that of Prince Vijayendra Singh of Fatehpur opposite Karisma Kapoor. (PTI)



Konstas set to make Test debut at MCG

MELBOURNE, Dec 24: Teen batter Sam Konstas is set to make a dream debut at the MCG during the Boxing Day Test against India even as an injury cloud looms over prolific run-getter Travis Head, who suffered a quadriceps muscle strain during the third game at the Gabba.

Konstas, 19, will become the 468th Australian men's Test cricketer to don the Baggy Green during the fourth Border-Gavaskar game on December 26 after selector Tony Dodemaide informed him about his inclusion during training at the MCG here on Tuesday morning.

Konstas will become the youngest Test debutant for Australia since 18-year-old Pat Cummins broke into the squad in 2011.

"We wanted clarity for our batting unit before the team meeting," Australia coach Andrew McDonald said ahead of the fourth Test with the series locked at 1-1.

Dodemaide informing Konstas about his inclusion was a departure from protocol as traditionally, it's the Australian skipper who confirms the playing XI on match eve or on the morning of the match.

"It's (breaking the news) something we don't usually do because haven't had too many moving parts, but we



thought we'd get that out of the way so everyone knows that he's in the team," said McDonald.

"He (Konstas) has been very similar to what I've seen on the outside within (the team) -- composed, relaxed, knows his game. And what he's shown is an array of shots, the ability to put pressure back on to opponents and he gets his opportunity," he added.

Konstas replaces Nathan McSweeney in the side after the opener was dropped because of a string of poor scores in the three Tests so far.

However, McDonald said, Head, one of the in-form batters having scored two centuries so far in the series, had a "a small strain to the quad" picked up during the last day of the third Test at the Gabba.

The 'player of the match' in the last two Tests faced only throw-downs from assistant coach Brad Hodge rather than his fast-bowling teammates at the nets on Tuesday.

"I thought he looked good with the bat in his hands so obviously the skills are in good order. It will just be what

risk is associated with that," said McDonald.

"But no concerns from my end, he's been able to do his running so I think he'll be functional come game time."

The coach did not speculate on who could fill the spot in the middle-order if Head fails to prove his fitness. The uncapped pair of Josh Inglis and Beau Webster are the stand-bys in the squad.

However, pacer Scott Boland has been all-but confirmed to replace Josh Hazlewood, who is nursing a calf strain.

McDonald said with temperatures expected to soar to over 40 degrees during the Boxing Day Test, the pitch could end up being more batter-friendly.

"I think this wicket might offer the batters a little bit more in terms of the surface as the game draws on. If we didn't pick Scotty (Boland) here -- and I know I'm not allowed to declare the team because that's Pat's (Cummins) job tomorrow -- but I don't think I'm coming to the ground Boxing Day if Scotty's not in the eleven.

"We've got great depth in our bowling, and (all-rounder) Mitch Marsh is fully fit and able to bowl. But he (Boland) is ready to go and I think he'll play a role in this Test match with the ball more so than the previous ones." (PTI)

Rana questions Sports Ministry, NRAI for ignoring Manu's Khel Ratna bid

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Double Olympic medallist shooter Manu Bhaker's coach Jaspal Rana on Tuesday castigated the Sports Ministry, Sports Authority of India and the National Rifle Association of India, holding them responsible for "ignoring" his ward's credentials for the Dhyani Chand Khel Ratna award.

The champion shooter's omission has sparked a controversy even though ministry sources have asserted that the names are yet to be finalised and her name will be there when the final list is released in a week's time.

In August, Bhaker became independent India's first athlete to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics with her bronze-winning show in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team events.

"I will hold all of them responsible. How can anyone even say Manu did not apply? She made history by becoming the first Indian to win two Olympic medals in the same Olympics. Her name should have been there automatically. Don't the people at the helm know who Manu Bhaker is and what are her credentials? This humiliation might just affect her progress," Rana, who was the personal coach of Manu when she won the medals at the Paris Games, told PTI.

"I can say that a wrong precedent is being set. Things like this can destroy an athlete's confidence."

Reports of her omission from the national honours evoked shock with her family insisting that application was duly submitted.

"If this can shock the sports fraternity, if you are speaking to me regarding this, if people are writing about this, then how come the committee that decides the names fail to understand that she deserves the honour," Rana asked.

"What is their job otherwise. Isn't it to go through the performance of the athletes over the last cycle and then arrive at a conclusion and recommend the names. According to me this is not a mistake and this is not an oversight," Rana said.

The award selection committee is a 12-member panel headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice V Ramasubramam. It includes former athletes like women's hockey captain Rani Rampal among others.

The ministry norms allow athletes to self-nominate instead of relying on federa-

tions and other institutions for it. The selection committee is, however, allowed to consider names which may not be among the applicants.

While the ministry claimed that Bhaker did not apply for the award, her father Ram Kishan Bhaker, a chief engineer in Merchant Navy, said the youngster had followed the due process.

Rana added, "Even if the athlete was not able to apply for the award for some reasons, what is stopping the committee from recommending names. Hasn't she done enough to deserve an award?"

"Anyway, it is not the first time. It has happened with me too. I have never received the Khel Ratna award," said the shooter who won three gold medals and equalled the world record in 25m centre fire pistol at the 2006 Asian Games in Doha.

"It's really appalling. Why should a top sportsperson apply or request for an award? Awards should come naturally and automatically. How can it be ignored? There has to be some system in place," Rana observed.

"Does every athlete know how to apply? Does it make sense that only an athlete can apply? Why not the federation, Sports Authority of India (or the) ministry," the coach asked.

A ministry source had earlier told PTI that Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will decide on the recommendations of the 12-member award selection committee and, in all likelihood, Manu's name will be there in the final list.

"There is no final list of nominees at this point. Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will decide on the recommendations in a day or two and her name, in all likelihood, will be there in the final list," the source said.

The legendary Rana returned as Bhaker's coach exactly one year before the Paris Olympics, and was by her side as she went on to create history in the French capital.

Under Rana's guidance, Bhaker enjoyed a fruitful period between 2018 and 2021, during which she won multiple ISSF World Cup medals and became a Commonwealth Games champion at Gold Coast 2018.

However, the two parted ways in 2021 ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in which Bhaker would go on to endure a disastrous outing while suffering a pistol malfunction. (PTI)

India name 15-member squad

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: India on Tuesday named a 15-member squad for next year's ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup to be played in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from January 18 to February 2.

The Women's Selection Committee of the BCCI announced the squad to be led by Niki Prasad, while Sanika Chalke will be the vice-captain.

The squad has two wicketkeepers in Kamalini G and Bhavika Ahire, while three standby players, Nandhana S, Ira J and Anadi T, have also been included.

The 16 competing teams have been divided into four groups.

India are the defending champions, and are placed in Group A alongside hosts Malaysia, West Indies and Sri Lanka.

The tournament will be hosted by Bayuemas Oval. India will begin their campaign against West Indies on January 19, followed by matches against Malaysia (January 21) and Sri Lanka (January 23).

Following the group phase, which runs from January 19-23, the top three teams from each group will advance to the Super 6 stage -- two groups of six --, which will take place from January 25-29.

Group 1 in Super 6 will include the top three teams each from Group A and D, while Group 2 will have the top three teams each from Group B and C.

The teams will carry forward their points and net run rates (NRR) from the initial group phase and will play the two sides who were not in their original group and who finished at a different position.

The top two sides from the two Super 6 stage groups will qualify for the semifinals, slated for January 31 while the final will be played on February 2.

Australia, Bangladesh, England, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the West Indies have qualified through their participation in the 2023 edition, while Malaysia earned automatic qualification as hosts.

Nepal, Nigeria, Samoa, Scotland and the United States have earned their spots through the various regional qualification tournaments.



India squad: Niki Prasad (captain), Sanika Chalke (vice-captain), G Trisha, Kamalini G (wk), Bhavika Ahire (wk), Ishwari Awasthe, Mithila Vinod, Joshitha VJ, Sonam Yadav, Parunika Sisodiya, Kesari Driithi, Ayushi Shukla, Anandita Kishor, MD Shabnam, Vaishnavi S.

Standby players: Nandhana S, Ira J, Anadi T. (PTI)Chennai's Ali Hatim Lakdawala, riding Leonardo Van Holli, clocked an impressive 33.31 seconds to clinch the Young Rider Showjumping champion title at the Junior National Equestrian Championship here.

Siddhant Jaiswal, Jaiveer Verma, and Geethika Tikkiisetty secured the first place with a cumulative score of 178.22 in the the Young Rider (age group 18-21) team dressage event at the Army Polo & Riding Club.

Lakdawala edged past AEF Cup CSIY-B silver medallist E Surya Aditya, astride Calimero, (37.22 seconds), while AEF Cup CSIJ-B silver medallist

Geethika Tikkiisetty, riding Brogonenn Saint Paer, secured third place with a time of 40.93 seconds in the show jumping category.

In the Children I (age group 12-14) team dressage event, the quartet of Inaara Mehta Luthria, Ananya Sajit Haridas, Subh Chowdhari and Pranav Deepak emerged victorious with 226.18 points.

Divyaraj Singh Rathore, Jaiwant Nawle, Aradhy Singh Chouhan and Sresh Raju Mantena (210.24 points) secured the silver medal, while Puneet Jhakhar, Swara Tihrani, Zara Swittens and Agastya Sharma (206.26 points) finished third.

The tent pegging event had Dhoni Om Chand, riding Mrignani, take first place in the lance category with 51.5 points, winning the tie-breaker against Mohammad Alhamad Chishty astride Rani. Sahil (Candy) finished third with 47.5 points. (PTI)

Lakdawala clinches Young Rider showjumping Champion title

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FIFPRO against FIFA's temporary changes to transfer rules

ZURICH, Dec 24: The world soccer players' union disagreed with FIFA's temporary changes to transfer rules on Monday following the landmark Lassana Diarra judgement.

Former France international Diarra challenged FIFA's rules due to a dispute with a club dating to 2014, and the European Court of Justice ruled in October that some rules were contrary to European Union law because they restricted freedom of movement and were anti-competitive.

FIFA then opened a "global dialogue" and on Monday published interim amendments which take effect in time for the January transfer window. They "strike a balanced compromise," FIFA said in a statement.

But global players' union FIFPRO was against the changes, and accused FIFA of failing to reach consensus.

"Following Lassana Diarra's successful challenge against the legality of Article 17 of the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players, FIFPRO informed FIFA of the conditions under which it could negotiate the amendments to the regulations to reflect the ruling," a union statement said.

"Until now, we have been unable to reach a consensus. We do not agree with the temporary measures announced by FIFA which have been introduced with-

out a proper collective bargaining process. "The measures do not provide legal certainty to professional footballers and do not reflect the judgement by the European Court of Justice."

FIFA said there was "a clear understanding" between all parties that the interim measures have no impact on ongoing discussions over long-term amendments to the rules, and introduced interim changes to offer stability and certainty for the upcoming transfer window.

"FIFA looks forward to continuing its close cooperation with key stakeholders as part of the global dialogue launched in October with the objective of developing a robust, transparent, non-discriminatory, objective and proportionate regulatory framework that will apply uniformly to professional football at a global level," it said in a statement.

FIFA legal director Emilio Garcia Silvero posted on X on Monday saying the next goal was to have "a permanent framework that fully aligns with the ECJ's views & has the support of all parties before July 2025."

Diarra took his case to the ECJ after he sued FIFA for damages in the Belgian courts. Diarra cited FIFA rules for the collapse of a move to Belgian club Charleroi after the termination of his contract with Russian club Lokomotiv Moscow in 2014. (AP)

Gukesh's triumph underlines India's status as global chess superpower

BENGALURU, Dec 24: The image of a smiling D Gukesh standing with outstretched hands will forever be embossed in the memory of a nation of billions.

The moment, which came right after his victory over Ding Liren of China in the World Chess Championship in Singapore, was a bold signature on India's rise as a true global chess super power in the post Viswanathan Anand era.

Year 2024 was a story of resurgence in Indian chess, crafted by Anand himself.

The fearless and ambitious teenagers or "Vishy's children" as Garry Kasparov calls them, now have a role model to emulate -- an 18-year-old from Chennai, the youngest ever world champion in the long history of chess.

But the genesis of that success was during the FIDE Candidates tournament in April. He emerged as the youngest ever winner of that tournament, setting up a title clash with 32-year-old defending champion Liren.

The Gukesh moment Gukesh was viewed as the favourite going into the title matches, consisting of 14 rounds. That tag itself might have been a pressure point. But with wins in Games 3, 11 and 14, the Indian managed to seal an epochal feat.

Gukesh showed immense presence of mind to carry an entire nation's hope on his tender



shoulders. But a crumb of credit should also go to a highly-efficient and varied support staff that included the Anand, the pioneer of chess revolution in India, and renowned mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton.

Chess Olympiad triumph Before Gukesh, India showed its prowess in chess with the team category. In the 45th Chess Olympiad, the country walked away with six gold medals in team and individual categories.

In the men's team category final, India defeated Slovenia while their women counterparts subdued Azerbaijan to join China and erst-

while USSR as the only three nations to bag the men's and women's gold medals in the same edition of the event.

In the individual section, Gukesh (Board 1), Arjun Erigaisi (Board 3), Divya Deshmukh (Board 3) and Vantika Agarwal (Board 4) walked away with gold medals.

Siblings impress

The Rameshbabu household in Chennai have two Grandmasters -- R Praggnanandhaa and Vaishali, who had crossed the 2500 ELO ratings last year. This year, they became the first siblings to play the Candidates, adding another feather to an already burgeoning cap. They are also the first siblings

to achieve the GM norm.

Pragg tells Carlsen

How about having arguably the world's best player in knots? Magnus Carlsen is not an unfamiliar rival to Praggnanandhaa, whom he had beaten earlier in Rapid and Blitz formats.

But beating the world No. 1 in the Classical version is a different challenge altogether. Praggnanandhaa achieved this feat during the Norway Chess, Carlsen's home tournament, in May.

Milestone for Erigaisi, Divya This is more technical but significant, nonetheless. Erigaisi became the second Indian, after Anand, of course, to cross the 2800 Elo rating points.

The Indian beat Russia's Dmitry Andreikin in the fifth round of the European Chess Club Cup 2024 to achieve this rare feat. He was also the 15th GM in the history of chess to go past this mark.

Currently, Erigaisi is world No.4 with 2801 points behind Carlsen (2831), Fabiano Caruana (2805) and Hikaru Nakamura (2802).

Divya managed to cross the 2500 Elo rating barrier this year to join an elite club of GMs.

Deep talent pool

Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa, Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi and P Harikrishna are the frontline men's players, while D Harika, Vaishali, Divya, Vantika and Tanya Sachdev form a formidable women's lineup.

But the real strength of Indian chess is elsewhere.

"These are famous names because they have achieved several honours. But what makes India a strong chess nation is the fact that thousands of kids are now taking to chess. They have seen Gukesh or Praggnanandhaa climbing heights, and now they think: 'why can't we do this?'," says DP Ananth, Vice-President of All India Chess Federation.

"That increasing talent pool is our real strength. I don't think any other nation can match us now in that aspect. We will see many young names coming forward next year," he added.

Perhaps, it's apt to borrow a catch line from the 80s to describe India's chess present chess landscape -- 'Neighbours Envy, Owner's Pride.'

Big 2025 loading

India are currently ranked fourth in the FIDE team rankings. The nation has 64 Grand Masters, logging an average Elo rating of 2668 and a good number of them are less than 25.

Many of them will be seen in action in tournaments such as Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour, FIDE Women's GP, FIDE Women's World Cup in Georgia and Asian Championships in the UAE etc.

So, keep those seat-belts fastened, more excitement is on the way! (PTI)

Hitman manages 10, 3 and 6 runs in the last three innings My knee is fine, let's not worry about batting position: Rohit Sharma

MELBOURNE, Dec 24: Ahead of the Boxing Day Test, India skipper Rohit Sharma on Tuesday dismissed fears about the knee injury he suffered during practice, saying it was fine, while keeping the suspense over his batting position.

Rohit had got hit on the left knee during the training session at the MCG on Sunday and there was speculation about the seriousness of the injury. "My knee is fine," said Rohit during a media interaction ahead of the fourth Border-Gavaskar Test here from December 26.

Rohit missed the opening Test Down Under to be with his family for the birth of his second child. He was expected to reclaim the opener's spot but KL Rahul's impressive 77 in India's win at Perth prompted a rejig of the batting order with the skipper moving down to No.6.

The change though has not been



fruitful for Rohit as he has managed 10, 3 and 6 runs in the last three innings, while Rahul has cashed on the opportunity by notching up a fine 84 in the first innings at Brisbane in the third Test.

The skipper said, he would do

whatever is best for the team.

"Let's not worry about who bats where. Something that we need to figure and not something I would be discussing here. We will do what is best for the team," Rohit

On Kohli's form, and his sup-

posed shortcoming outside off-stump, Rohit said, the stalwart will find a way out of the slump. "Kohli's off stump... you only say modern day great. Modern-day greats figure out their own path," said the skipper.

Kohli scored a century in the second innings of the Perth Test, which India won after being dismissed for 150 in the first essay.

However, he was dismissed for 7 and 11 in the second Test, which Australia won by 10 wickets to level the series, while in the drawn third Test at Brisbane he made 3.

Young Yashasvi Jaiswal has failed to fire following his match-winning 161 in the first Test but Rohit said he will be encouraged to play his natural free-flowing game. "You don't want to tamper Jaiswal's mindset. He understands his batting more than anyone of us. You encourage him to play freely." (PTI)

Lapse in filing nominations on my part: Manu on Khel Ratna furore

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Paris Olympics' double bronze-medallist Manu Bhaker on Tuesday admitted that "there has been a lapse may be on my part" while filing nominations for this year's National Sports Awards amid a raging controversy over her exclusion from the list of Khel Ratna awardees.

A day after the sports ministry had to step in to do damage control after the awards selection committee shockingly did not recommend her name, the 22-year-old pistol ace took to social media to clarify her position.

"With regards to ongoing issue for my nomination for the most prestigious Khel Ratna award -- I would like to state that as an athlete my role is to play and perform for my country.

"I believe there has been a lapse, maybe on my part while filing for the nomination which is being corrected," Bhaker wrote on X.

Bhaker said her aim is to perform for the country whether she gets an award or not.

"Awards and recognition keeps me motivated but are not my goal," she asserted.

"Irrespective of the award I shall remain motivated to win more medals for my country. It is a request to everyone, please do not speculate on this," she said.

This was after her personal Jaspal Rana and father Ramkishan Bhaker lambasted the sports ministry and the selection committee for overlooking her despite her monumental achievements.

The youngster is the first athlete from independent India to win two medals in a single edition of the



Olympics.

She won her bronze medals in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team (with Sarabjot Singh) events in Paris. (PTI)

Meeting held to finalise date for MAC Cup 2025 in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 24: In a bid to finalise the date and venue for the Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) Cup for 2025, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), at the conference hall of the Arboretum-cum-Craft Centre in Diphu's Matipung area on Monday.

Explaining the game format and fixture, Rajeshan Terang, secretary of the KAAC Sports & Youth Welfare Department, and Ruplongki Bey, liaison officer of KAAC, presented how the game will be played through a league system in group stages.

"Each MAC constituency will have one team, and the MAC Level Organising Committee will conduct the games in their respective MAC constituencies. One of the rules is that no MAC team can hire or bring players from outside. All players must be from within the respective MAC constituency," Terang informed. Terang also mentioned that there will be 3 groups for West Karbi Anglong and 5 groups in Karbi Anglong district, adding, "Each MAC team will play two matches, one at home and the other away at a different location. The group matches will

end on February 3, after which the tournament will proceed to the knockout stages, beginning with the round of 16." He further explained that the two teams from each group with the highest points will compete in the round of 16, followed by the quarter-finals, semi-finals, and ultimately the final.

"There will be a third-place match between the two losing teams from the semi-final encounters," he added. He also informed that there will be a total of 76 matches from the group stages to the final.

The inaugural match, scheduled for January 11, will be played between Khorkhanti and Mahamaya at the Samelangso stadium. The final will take place in February during the Karbi Youth Festival at the Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) stadium, he said.

In addition to the game overview provided by secretary Terang, CEM Ronghang said, "We are introducing FIFA rules this season so that our players can learn how to play according to international standards. From this season onward, the MAC Cup will follow a new roadmap for football in the district." The CEM urged all MACs and EMs present at the meeting to begin preparing their teams for the upcoming four-week football carnival.

Christmas Greetings



"May the festive season sparkle with joy and laughter." "I hope the magic of Christmas fills every corner of your heart and home with joy now and always."


Sri Richard Tokbi
Executive Member (EM),
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu.
Education Department, KAAC.

Christmas Greetings





Let us all celebrate the spirit of service for humanity on this Christmas. Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year everyone.

Domic Uphing Maslai
Executive Member (EM),
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu.
Animal Husbandry & Veterinary department



সত্যমেব জয়তে
অসম চৰকাৰ









শুভ বৰদিন

প্রভু যীশুখ্রীষ্টৰ ত্যাগ, দয়া আৰু
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 সমূহ অসমবাসীলৈ বৰদিনৰ আন্তৰিক
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