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- After Aleppo, Syrian insurgents advance to nearby province
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- Delay in govt formation 'insult' to Maharashtra: Aadiya Thackeray
- Our fight is for the spirit of our country, says Priyanka Gandhi

HT BRIEFS

Counterfeiter nabbed

GUWAHATI: A raid by the STF Assam at Khanapara Research Gate under Dispur PS Jurisdiction led to the arrest of an alleged counterfeiter on Sunday. The alleged counterfeiter was identified as Rajiv Rongpi (33). "The counterfeiter was apprehended with FICN (Fake Indian Currency Notes) of face value ₹ 2,99,500 (599 notes of denomination 500), a mobile phone," an official statement said. The alleged person originally hails from Harlong juve under West Karbi Anglong district, is currently under legal proceedings.

Drugs peddler

GUWAHATI: A raid by the STF Assam at Pachim Boragaon under Gorchuk Police Station led to the arrest of an alleged notorious drugs peddler on Sunday. The Notorious drugs peddler was identified as Eliyas Ahmed (22). "The drugs peddler was apprehended with 23.43 grams of suspected heroin, a mobile phone, and ₹ 100 in cash," an official statement said. The culprit originally hails from Chenglimari village in Barpeta district, is currently under legal proceedings.

New thinking needed for India's economy, Rahul



NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi expressed concern on Sunday over India's GDP growth rate declining to its lowest in two years and said the country's economy cannot progress as long as a handful of billionaires accrue its benefits.

He said a new thinking is required for India's economy and a new deal for businesses should be an important part of it.

"When everyone gets an equal opportunity to move forward, only then will the wheel of our economy move forward," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

The leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha said India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate has fallen to 5.4 per cent, its lowest in two years.

"The thing is clear -- the Indian economy cannot progress as long as a handful of billionaires are accruing its benefits and the farmers, labourers, middle class and the poor are struggling with various economic problems," he asserted.

Sharing some facts, Gandhi said it is a worrying situation as retail inflation has risen to a 14-month high of 6.21 per cent.

The price of potatoes and onions has increased by almost 50 per cent this year compared to October last year, he noted. Gandhi said the rupee has reached its lowest level of Rs 84.5 and the unemployment rate has broken a 45-year record. "In the last five years, the income of labourers, employees and small businessmen has either stagnated or reduced (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NGT takes suo motu cognisance of newspaper report on forest encroachment in Kamrup

Green Tribunal notice to principal chief conservator

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: The National Green Tribunal has sought a response from the principal chief conservator of forest, Assam, in a matter regarding alleged encroachment of forest land in the Kamrup metropolitan district of the state.

The NGT has taken suo motu cognisance of a newspaper report claiming that a substantial portion of the 16 reserved forests covering more than 35,329 hectares in the Kamrup metropolitan district had been encroached.

The illegal encroachments in the district included ecologically important hills like Fatasil, South Kalapahar, Jalukbari, Gotanagar, Hengrabari, Sarania, and Garbhanga, the report alleged.

In an order dated November 19, a bench of NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member A Senthil Vel said noting the re-

port, "Due to the encroachment of the forests, the man-animal conflict is increasing in several parts of the state, which has become a major cause of concern. Forest encroachments have also increased air temperature and this year, Assam faced the hottest September month ever." It said as per the report, in the last few years, over 113 eviction drives had been launched, clearing 402.32 hectares in 2022-23 and 564.58 hectares in 2023-24.

"Furthermore, it is asserted that in some forests, people are staying for years and it may be difficult to evict them. Forests along the inter-state boundaries are also under encroachment by the neighbouring states and those can be cleared only after the boundary disputes are completely settled," the tribunal noted.

It said that the report raised "substantial issues" regarding compliance



with environmental norms and also "indicated violation of the Forest Conservation Act, and the Environment Protection Act".

The tribunal impleaded as parties or respondents the state's principal chief conservator of forest and the district commissioner of Kamrup metropol-

itan district.

"Issue notice to the above respondents for filing their response/reply by way of affidavit before the eastern zonal bench of the tribunal (in Kolkata)," the tribunal said.

The matter has been posted for further proceedings on January 21. (PTI)

Manipur situation will impact Assam: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday that the situation in neighbouring Manipur will have an impact on the state.

Additional police forces have been deployed in Barak Valley which shares a border with violence-hit Manipur to ensure no spill-over effects.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme in Cachar district, Sarma said, "I think the situation in Manipur will definitely have some impact on Assam. That is why we have deployed additional police forces in Barak Valley to see that nothing spills over to Assam." The Barak Valley of Cachar district shares a border with Jiribam of Manipur.

The ethnically diverse Jiribam, which was largely untouched by the clashes in Imphal Valley and the adjoining hills, witnessed violence after the mutilated body of a farmer was found in a field in June this year.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year.

The violence escalated in Manipur after three women and three children belonging to the Meitei community had gone missing from a relief camp in Jiribam district, following a gunfight between security forces and suspected Kuki-Zo militants that resulted in the deaths of 10 insurgents on November 11. Bodies of those six were later found. (PTI)

Ready to ban beef in Assam if Congress writes to me: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he was ready to ban beef in Assam if state Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah writes to him, seeking it.

Responding to the allegation that BJP distributed beef to win the Muslim-dominated Samaguri, which was under Congress control for five consecutive terms, Sarma said he was happy that the opposition party raised the matter.

"Samaguri was with Congress for 25 years. Congress losing a constituency like Samaguri by 27,000 votes (sic) is the biggest shame in its history. It is Congress's defeat more than BJP's win," he told reporters after a party meeting here on Saturday.

BJP's Dipu Ranjan Sarmah defeated Congress's Tanzil, son of party MP Rakibul Hussain, by 24,501 votes in a bypoll last month.

"But amidst sadness, Rakibul



Hussain said one good thing that eating beef is wrong, isn't it? He said that it was wrong for Congress-BJP to win elections by offering beef to voters," the CM said when asked about the MP's reported comment.

"I want to know if Congress was winning Samaguri by offering beef

to voters. He knows Samaguri very well. Does it mean that Samaguri can be won by offering beef?" asked Sarma.

Hussain, who won the Dhuri Lok Sabha seat this year by a record margin of over 10.12 lakh votes, was an MLA from Samaguri for five (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Giriraj Singh stresses on nature-based solutions to meet global challenges

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Union minister Giriraj Singh on Sunday stressed the importance of nature-based solutions and promotion of sustainable practices for meeting global challenges such as pollution and climate change.

He also highlighted the need for collaborative efforts and exploring innovative solutions for a sustainable future.

Inaugurating a two-day international conference on nature-based solutions (NBS) for sustainability and climate change here, the Union textiles minister said, "The present government is committed to promoting sustainable practices in all sectors, including the textile sector. This conference provides an excellent platform for sharing knowledge and best practices."

The meet, organised by the National Technical Textiles Mission and Indian Jute Industries Research Association under the Ministry of Textiles, brought together experts, researchers, industry leaders and policymakers from around the world to discuss innovative approaches for achieving carbon neutrality in sectors such as textiles, packaging and lightweight composites, with a focus on nature-based solutions.

Highlighting the importance of NBS in addressing global challenges such as environmental pollution and climate change, he added, "We are focused on



achieving carbon neutrality and reducing pollution, and NBS is a key pathway to this goal."

Singh emphasised the significance of fostering a collaborative community among stakeholders, noting that the conference would allow participants to exchange research findings, explore innovative solutions and build stronger connections for future advancements.

Union MoS for Textiles, Pabitra Margherita, focused on the unique role of the northeastern region in the global sustainability agenda. "The region is blessed with rich biodiversity and nature-based solutions are especially (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Northeast witnessing multidimensional development under present govt: Devi

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Union minister Annpurna Devi on Sunday claimed that the northeastern region is witnessing multidimensional development under the current government.

The central government is especially committed to the development of women and various initiatives have been undertaken to promote healthy lifestyle for women and children, she said.

Speaking at a 'Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi' programme here, the Union Minister for Women and Child Development lauded the northeastern region's multidimensional development over the past decade under the Narendra Modi government.

She underlined the ministry's dedication to combating malnutrition through initiatives like Poshan Pakhwada and Poshan Maah, with Assam contributing to over 30 lakh campaign activities (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Highlighting women empowerment, Devi said that through the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), nearly 10 crore women, including 43 lakh from Assam, have achieved self-reliance.

She underlined the ministry's dedication to combating malnutrition through initiatives like Poshan Pakhwada and Poshan Maah, with Assam contributing to over 30 lakh campaign activities (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Maharashtra CM to be decided by BJP; will have my support: Shinde

MUMBAI, Dec 1: Maharashtra's caretaker chief minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday said the BJP will decide on the state's new CM who will have his full support, and asserted there were no differences among Mahayuti partners on government formation.

Talking to reporters at his native Dare village in Satara district, Shinde also said talks were underway on government formation and all decisions will be taken through a consensus by the three Mahayuti allies - Shiv Sena, BJP and NCP.

Shinde also said he comes to his village regularly and wondered why should there be any confusion (over his visit) when he cleared his stand on the CM's post last week.

The Shiv Sena leader, who headed to his native village on Friday amid speculation that he was not happy with the

way the new government was shaping up, had taken ill and will return to Mumbai on Sunday evening, an aide said earlier in the day.

The Mahayuti alliance of the BJP, Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP retained power with a landslide victory in the assembly elections, the results of which were announced on November 23.

The oath-taking ceremony of the new Mahayuti government will take place on December 5 evening at the Azad Maidan in south Mumbai and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend it, state Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule said on Saturday. While there was no announcement yet on who would be the chief minister, BJP sources said Devendra Fadnis, who has been chief minister twice and was deputy CM in the last Ek-



nath Shinde-led government, was the frontrunner for the post.

Shinde last week said the Shiv Sena would support the decisions of PM Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah to name the next (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam will also send teams to Jharkhand to study 'two-three things': Himanta

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: In a tit-for-tat response, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he would send two delegations to study a few things in Jharkhand, days after his counterpart Hemant Soren took a cabinet decision to despatch an all-party team to study the plight of tea tribes in the northeastern state.

Sarma, however, did not specify the areas of concern for the Assam government for deciding to send inspection teams to Jharkhand.

"In our cabinet on December 5, we will make some decisions regarding visiting some Jharkhand areas. We will also go and see two-three things there," he told reporters after a BJP meeting here on Saturday night when asked about the Jharkhand government's decision to send a team to Assam.

Hours after JMM leader Hemant Soren was sworn in as the 14th chief minister of Jharkhand on November 28, his government approved the formation of an all-party panel to study the plight of the "marginalised" tea tribes in Assam.

"We will be happy if somebody looks after us because we have so much work to do. They are sending one team here, but we will send two delegations to Jharkhand to see two special things. We will make a decision next week.

"They will come to see us, we will also go to see them," said Sarma, who was the BJP's co-in-charge for the recently held assembly elections in Jharkhand.

The decision taken in the first cabinet meeting of the Soren government came in the backdrop of the poll battle between the JMM-led coalition and NDA, in which Sarma repeatedly raised the issue of the "predicament" of Jharkhand's tribal community due to alleged large-scale infiltration from Bangladesh.

Soren had raised the issue of the tea tribes in Assam earlier also and now, after winning the elections, he decided to form the panel which is viewed as taking the fight to Sarma's turf.

On September 25, he had written to Sarma claiming the marginalisation of tea tribes from Jharkhand in Assam despite their significant contributions to the economy.

Soren had expressed grave concern about the community's situation and advocated for their recognition as STs.

The tea tribes in Assam have the status of Other Backward Classes. The Moran, Motok, Chutia, Tai-Ahom, Koch-Rajbongshi and Tea-Tribes communities have been demanding ST status for years. Amid this, Soren had appealed to all (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The state has 32,031 estimated People Living with HIV (PLHIV)' Adult HIV prevalence rate in Assam lower than national average

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Adult HIV prevalence rate in Assam is lower than the national average, an official statement said.

Injecting Drug Use has emerged as the main route of HIV transmission in the state during 2024-25 so far, followed by hetero-sexual route, the statement said on the occasion of World AIDS Day on Sunday.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma affirmed a collective effort to strive for a future with no AIDS and extend support to those living with the infection.

"On World AIDS Day, we reiterate our collective responsibility to support those living with HIV, fight stigma and strive for a future without AIDS. Let's educate, support & fight for a world where AIDS is no more and provide the best care to



those affected," he posted on X.

A statement by the Assam State AIDS Control Society (ASACS) said the state has an adult HIV prevalence rate of 0.13 per cent, which is lower than the all-India prevalence rate of 0.20 per cent, as

per India's HIV Estimation Report 2023.

The state has 32,031 estimated People Living with HIV (PLHIV) as per the report.

Although the HIV prevalence rate is low, new HIV infections in the

state are on an increasing trend, the statement said.

The new HIV infections in the state was 2021 in 2023, a 22 per cent increase against the year 2010.

The new HIV infection rate is increasing significantly in four North Eastern states, including Assam.

Tripura has the highest new infection rates at 524.41 per cent, followed by Arunachal Pradesh with 469.84 per cent, Meghalaya with 124.70 per cent and Assam 22.11 per cent, it said.

The statement said during the financial year 2024-25 (April-October 2024), 4,37,830 persons have been tested at Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres (ICTC), out of which 3,947 have been detected HIV (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India, France looking at strong economic ties: French foreign trade minister

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: After forging close partnership in the defence domain, India and France are now looking at significantly deepening economic and trade ties especially in sectors like clean energy, new technologies and aviation, French foreign trade minister Sophie Primas has said.

At the end of her three-day visit to India, Primas said France is looking forward to further negotiations between New Delhi and the European Union for finalisation of a "mutually beneficial" free trade deal that could expand two-way economic engagement.

India and the EU restarted negotiations for the ambitious trade deal in June 2022 after a gap of over eight years but the talks have dragged on for a variety of reasons, including the 27-nation bloc's position on carbon tax.

"I would also like to add that, at the European Union level, we remain committed to reaching a trade deal between the EU and India, which is mutually beneficial and has ambitious sustainable development goals. We are looking forward to further talks with India at the EU level," Primas told PTI.

On India-France trade relations, the French minister said the focus now is on expansion of the economic engagement as both sides have already built a robust partnership in the strategic domain.

The French foreign trade minister visited India from November 27 to 29 during which she held talks with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on a range of issues, including ways to encourage more investment flows between the two countries.

"India is a fast-emerging economy with vast opportunities for French investments in India. We



see major potential in aeronautic, sustainable development and emerging technologies," she said in a written response.

The trade relations between the two sides are on an upswing in the last few years but both sides are of the view that there is huge potential to enhance the engagement.

On boosting bilateral trade, Primas indicated having certain issues but did not elaborate on them.

"There are still a number of issues that we must address to support what I consider as untapped commercial potential," she said.

The French minister also called upon Indian investors to take advantage of the France-India 2047 partnership that was unveiled in July last year.

The bilateral trade between India and France has remained steady in the USD 11-13 billion range in the last five years ending financial year 2022-23.

France has emerged as a major source of FDI for India with more than 1,000 French establishments

already present in India. France is the 11th largest foreign investor in India with a cumulative investment of USD 10.84 billion from April 2000 to December 2023.

The Horizon 2047 partnership was unveiled following wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron with an aim to shore up bilateral ties, including in trade and investment.

India and France are intensifying their bilateral dialogue in order to resolve as soon as possible the difficulties encountered by Indian and French exporters and investors in their respective markets, particularly in the context of the bilateral 'Fast Track' procedure, the document mentioned.

Asked about the fast-track mechanism, which was aimed at addressing issues pertaining to investments, Primas did not give a direct reply.

"Yes, investing in talent has been a cornerstone of our strategy, and the fast-track mechanism is a

big part of it. We've made substantial investments in internships, vocational training, and university reforms to ensure that educational outcomes meet the evolving needs of industry," she said.

France's tradition of excellence in mathematics and science education produces world-class talent, particularly in AI and quantum sciences, she said.

"To attract top international expertise, France offers competitive settlement options, including multi-year residence permits (Talent Passport) and a fast-track procedure for coming to France (French Tech visa)," the minister added.

Asked about the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) project, Primas said it will strengthen strategic supply chains and that Paris views it as a source of regional integration, peace and stability.

Billed as a pathbreaking initiative, the IMEEC envisages a vast road, railroad and shipping networks among Saudi Arabia, India, the United States and Europe with an aim to ensure integration among Asia, Middle East and West.

The IMEEC also envisages to include an electricity cable network, a hydrogen pipeline, high-speed data cable network to facilitate overall economic growth in the partner countries.

The project is also seen as an initiative by like-minded nations to gain strategic influence in the face of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that has faced increasing criticism over lack of transparency and disregard for sovereignty of the nations. The BRI is a mega connectivity project that connects China with Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Russia and Europe. (PTI)

Wedding season, rural traction, SUVs drive domestic PV sales of top automakers in Nov

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Leading automakers Maruti Suzuki India, Tata Motors and Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Sunday reported growth in their domestic passenger vehicle sales riding on ongoing wedding season demand, continued rural traction and strong offtake of SUVs.

On the other hand, newly-listed Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) registered a 2 per cent year-on-year decline in domestic sales to 48,246 units last month as against 49,451 units in the year-ago period.

Market leader Maruti Suzuki India posted domestic passenger vehicle (PV) wholesales of 1,41,312 units in November as compared with 1,34,158 units in the year-ago month, a growth of 5 per cent.

"Our November sales were driven by a variety of factors, including the ongoing wedding season demand, continued traction in the rural market, introduction of limited editions and the ongoing robust uptake for SUVs," Maruti Suzuki India senior executive officer, marketing and sales, Partho Banerjee told PTI.

The company's rural penetration increased to 48.7 per cent in November this year, which is 2.2 per cent higher than the same month last year, he added.

On the urban market, Banerjee said, "We are not seeing that sort of traction that we saw in October. Generally what happens is that the urban customers wait for December and hold back a little in November expecting better offers (in the year-end).

In November, he said, "We could maximise contribution of SUVs (in our portfolio) which has now gone up to 29 per cent."

MSIL's utility vehicles, consisting of Brezza, Eriga, Grand Vitara and XL6, clocked sales of 59,003 units last month as compared to 49,016 units earlier. However, sales of mini-segment cars, comprising Alto and S-Presso, were down at 9,750 units as against 9,959 units in November 2023. Sales of compact cars, including Baleno, Celerio, Dzire, Ignis, Swift, Tour S and WagonR, declined to 61,373 units as compared to 64,679 units in the year-ago month.

Another major player, Tata Motors said its domestic PV sales, including EVs were up 2 per cent at 47,063 units as against 46,068 units in November 2023.

Similarly, Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) said its total sales rose 44 per cent year-on-year to 25,586 units in November as compared to 17,818 units in the same month last year.



"Our diverse portfolio, spanning from hatchbacks to SUVs, continues to offer tailored mobility solutions that resonate with varying lifestyles," TKM vice president, Sales-Service-Used Car Business Sabari Manohar said in a statement.

On the other hand, Hyundai Motor India Ltd said its domestic sales declined 2 per cent year on year to 48,246 units in November as against 49,451 units in the year-ago period. Exports declined 20 per cent year on year to 13,006 units last month.

The company said it achieved its highest-ever monthly rural contribution of 22.1 per cent in November 2024, augmenting its reach in the hinterland of India.

The company's push towards fortifying SUV supremacy continued in November with SUVs contributing 68.8 per cent of total domestic sales, Hyundai Motor India Whole-time director and chief operating officer Tarun Garg said.

JSW MG Motor India reported a 20 per cent rise in wholesales at 6,019 units in November 2024 as compared to the same month last year.

The company's electric crossover utility vehicle Windsor continues with its strong performance for the second month in a row with 3,144 wholesale units, JSW MG Motor India said in a statement.

New energy vehicles (NEVs) account for a substantial 70 per cent of the total monthly sales, it added.

"This underscores the position of NEVs as a significant contributor to the company's overall revenue," the company said. (PTI)

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Ready to ban beef in Assam if

consecutive terms before becoming a parliamentarian. "I want to tell Rakibul Hussain that beef should be banned as he himself said it is wrong. He only needs to give me in writing that neither BJP nor Congress should speak about beef, in fact, it should be banned in Assam. If we do that, all problems will be solved," Sarma said.

The CM further said that he would write to the state Congress president about his stand on beef in the backdrop of Hussain's statement.

"So, I will write to Bhupen Borah and ask him if he also advocates banning beef in line with Rakibul Hussain, and just inform me. I will ban beef completely in the next assembly (accordingly). Then BJP, AGP, CPM, nobody will be able to offer, and Hindus, Muslims and Christians all should stop eating beef, and all problems will be solved," he added.

"I am happy that Rakibul Hussain has made this statement because at least one step has been taken. Now, the second step should be taken by Bhupen Borah," Sarma stressed.

Consumption of beef is not illegal in Assam, but the Assam Cattle Preservation Act of 2021 bans cattle slaughter and sale of beef in areas where Hindus, Jains and Sikhs are in majority and within a five-km radius of a temple or satra (Vaishnavite monastery). (PTI)

Giriraj Singh stresses on nature

relevant here. By harnessing local resources and knowledge, we can drive sustainable development and contribute significantly to global climate action," he said. Margherita urged local industries, researchers and community leaders to actively participate in adopting sustainable solutions that will not only benefit the region but also serve as a model for other parts of the world. (PTI)

Northeast witnessing multidimensional

promoting healthy lifestyles for women and children. The minister highlighted that in the 2024-25 budget, Anganwadi workers and assistants have been included in the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, providing an annual health cover of ₹ 5 lakh per family. Over 60,000 Anganwadi workers and helpers in Assam now have Ayushman cards, ensuring better healthcare access, Devi added.

During the programme organised by the Women and Child Development Department of the Assam government, the Union minister distributed certificates to the state-level master trainers.

Devi also highlighted the ministry's commitment to early childhood development through the 'Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi' programme, which focuses on quality education for children in the age group of 3-6 years.

She said that 21,772 master trainers from 35 states and 42,308 Anganwadi workers from 20 states, including 1,600 master trainers from Assam, have been trained under this initiative.

Assam Women and Child Development minister Ajanta Neog, also present on the occasion, emphasised the importance of the development of women and children for the state's overall progress. The Union minister also held a review meeting to assess the progress of schemes under the Women and Child Development Department in the state. (PTI)

New thinking needed for India's

significantly. "Demand has also declined due to reduced income. The share of cars priced below ₹ 10 lakh in sales has dropped to less than 50 per cent from 80 per cent in 2018-19," Gandhi said.

"The share of affordable homes in total sales has dropped to around 22 per cent from 38 per cent last year. The demand for FMCG products is already declining. "The share of corporate tax has decreased by 7 per cent in the last 10 years, while income tax has increased by 11 per cent," he also noted.

Due to demonetisation and the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the former Congress chief said the share of manufacturing in the economy has fallen to just 13 per cent, the lowest in 50 years.

"In such a situation, how will new job opportunities be created?" he asked, stressing that a new thinking is required for the Indian economy. (PTI)

Maharashtra CM to be decided

Maharashtra CM. Talking to reporters on Sunday, Shinde said, "I always come to my village. Why should there be any confusion when I have already made my stand clear last week. I have already said the decision on CM's post taken by the BJP leadership will be acceptable to me and Shiv Sena and will have my full backing." To a query on his health, the Shiv Sena leader said he was fine now and had come to his native village to rest.

"We will provide a government that people want. Our responsibility has now grown because of the massive mandate given by people as reciprocation of our work in the last two-and-a-half years," he said. On speculation that his son and Lok Sabha member Shrikant Shinde will be the CM, Shinde said talks were on.

"One meeting took place in Delhi last week with (Union minister) Amit Shah and now we three alliance partners will discuss the nitty-gritty of government formation," he said.

"The BJP is yet to announce its legislature party leader. We will fulfil people's aspirations. There are no differences amongst us. We will take a decision in the interest of the people. There is no need to repeat my stand," Shinde added. (PTI)

Assam will also send teams

original inhabitants of Jharkhand in Assam to return. The JMM-led alliance stormed to power in Jharkhand for the second time in a row, securing 56 seats in the 81-member assembly, while the BJP-headed NDA managed 24 seats. (PTI)

Adult HIV prevalence rate

positive. Regarding district-wise HIV detection, 533 cases were detected in Kamrup Metropolitan during April-October 2024, 375 in Nagaon and 360 in Cachar. Among these newly detected cases, the main route of transmission was found to be Injecting Drug Use (64.6 per cent), followed by hetero-sexual route (25.2 per cent).

The ASACS said it has been undertaking various initiatives to prevent new HIV infections and provide the necessary care support and treatment to already diagnosed cases.

Integrated health camps are organised in different parts, in which not only HIV tests but also tests for detecting TB, Viral Hepatitis, Syphilis, STI, etc. were done.

In order to provide testing and treatment services to inmates in prisons and other closed settings, similar integrated camps are conducted in jails, detention centres and other closed settings.

Awareness campaigns at different places, including educational institutions, are also being conducted by the ASACS, the statement added. (PTI)

Italy can be India's landing base for Europe: Minister Urso

MUMBAI, Dec 1: Italian minister Adolfo Urso has said his country can be the "landing base" for India to access the European market.

In a similar way, India can act as the landing base for Italy, the European country's minister for business and 'Made in Italy' told PTI here on Saturday.

Speaking on the sidelines of 93-year-old Italian ship Amerigo Vespucci's call on Mumbai port and the Villaggio Italia exposition arranged to coincide with that, Urso also said "new geopolitical events" make it necessary to consolidate the lines of communication between the two countries.

"India can be for Europe the landing base in Asia in the great south-eastern Asian basin, and Italy can be for India the landing base in Europe, for the most significant and richest world market," he said in an interview to PTI.

This line of communication passes through the Arabian peninsula which has a very important place in the economic realm, he added.

While this is a preferred line of commercial communication between the two continents of Asia and Europe, the same route can also double up as a significantly important line of connectivity in terms of data and information, Urso said.

"It is certainly the preferred main line of commercial communication between our continents, but it can also be the line of connectivity as regards the transport of data and therefore of information, on one side above the seas, maritime trade; on the other side under the seas, the connection lines that transport information and data," he said. (PTI)

Roundtable held to showcase Nagaland's investment potential to UK delegates

KOHIMA, Dec 1: A roundtable discussion was held between the Nagaland government and a delegation from the UK on the state's growing opportunities and investment potential.

The programme was held Saturday upon the arrival of the UK delegation for the Hornbill festival, a statement said. Discussions were held on partnerships in key sectors such as agritech and creative economy, it said.

In his opening remarks, Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland Chairman Abu Metha emphasised the global significance of the Hornbill Festival as a venue for networking and collaboration.

He noted Nagaland's transformation into a "land of opportunities" while retaining its rich identity as a land of festivals.

Stressing the potential for agritech and the creative economy to drive economic growth, Metha underscored the importance of



strategic collaborations with the United Kingdom to usher in a new era of sustainable development for the state.

British High Commissioner

restrictions," Progressive Potato Traders' Association secretary Lalu Mukherjee told PTI. He criticised the government's decision, stating, "Such abrupt measures disrupt our business and cause huge losses as we fail to fulfil commitments." Traders and cold storage associations blamed the state government for failing to control prices in the local markets, attributing it to profiteering by intermediaries.

"Despite the wholesale price of potatoes in Kolkata being ₹ 27 per kg, how is it retailing at ₹ 35-40?" a trader questioned. Neighbouring states such as Odisha and Jharkhand rely heavily on West Bengal for their potato supply. After the restrictions were imposed, prices

in these states have also gone up. Odisha's Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra on Saturday alleged that the Mamata Banerjee government was playing politics over the supply of potatoes.

"West Bengal also depends on other states for fish and other items. If desired, Odisha can also stop the goods vehicles at its border. But, we are not going to do so," he said. "We have made arrangements for the supply of adequate potatoes to consumers in the state. Potatoes have started arriving in the state from Uttar Pradesh. Besides, the tuber can also be brought from Punjab," he added. (PTI)

Advisor for Industries and Commerce Hekani Jakhlu stressed the need to nurture a robust startup ecosystem in Nagaland with the support of international partners.

She spoke about the state's commitment to creating an enabling environment for businesses and entrepreneurs, particularly in sectors with high growth potential. Director of British Council India Alison Barrett and British Deputy High Commissioner Andrew Fleming also addressed the roundtable, emphasising the importance of cultural and educational exchanges in fostering long-term partnerships.

Both leaders reaffirmed the UK's dedication to working closely with Nagaland to create impactful programs that benefit communities and enhance the state's global visibility, the statement said. (PTI)

Lindy Cameron and Director of International Relations and Trade for the Wales government Andrew Gwatkin hailed Nagaland's efforts to strengthen bilateral ties and fos-

District-level consultation on women's welfare and violence prevention held

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 1: A district-level consultation on the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 2005, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act, and women-related schemes was held at the DC Conference Hall, Kokrajhar, on Saturday.

The event aimed to raise awareness about violence against women and various welfare schemes in the district.

The consultation, organised by SANKALP: Hub for Empowerment of Women in association with the Kokrajhar district administration, was part of the ongoing 16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence, observed globally from November 25 to December 10, 2024.

Discussions focused on key issues, including the Domestic Violence Act, the PoSH Act, the She-Box Portal, the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), and legal provisions under BNS, BNSS, and BSA. Participants also deliberated on initiatives like National Gender Campaign 3.0, the Gender Resource Center, and Mission Shakti Schemes, all aimed at improving women's welfare.

Speaking at the event, district commissioner Kokrajhar, Masanda Magdalin Pertin, highlighted the evolving nature of gender-based violence, which now includes cyber-bullying, photo morphing, and social media harassment. She emphasised the importance of identifying and addressing these subtle yet harmful forms of abuse. DC Pertin also stressed the need for strong legal protections, government programs, and economic and educational support to empower women and enable them to overcome challenges.

The meeting concluded with participants pledging to work collectively toward eliminating gender-based violence.

The program was attended by ADC Kabita Deka, officials from the Home Department, SSA, NHM, PNRD, ASRLM, CDPOs, and representatives from Shakti Sadan, BPM, BCCC, NERSWN, NEDAN, CINI, and others.

KAAC CEM highlights record budget at agricultural distribution event

HT Correspondent

DONGKAMUKAM, Dec 1: Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) chief executive member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang has asserted that the Council's budget surpasses that of any other Autonomous Council in Northeast India. He made this claim during a seeds and farming equipment distribution ceremony held at Dongkamukam, West Karbi Anglong, on Sunday.

Ronghang emphasised that the substantial budget allocation enables the Council to significantly invest in key sectors such as agriculture, education, potable water supply, road infrastructure, and healthcare, benefiting people from all communities and religions across the district. He highlighted the implementation of various government schemes, including the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), to further improve the lives of the residents.

During the ceremony, beneficiaries received essential agricultural inputs such as mustard seeds, spades, sickles, sprayers, and shovels.

Prior to the ceremony, the CEM inaugurated the MB High School building at Taradubi, laid the foundation stone for the construction of Kolonga High School under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) XXIX 2023-24, and laid the foundation stone for the Krungjeng Cultural Complex at Kolonga.

Legal fraternity must avoid misusing loopholes in cases against women, children: Himanta

CM attends inauguration of Sub-divisional Judicial Magistrate (M) court building at Lakhipur

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court Vijay Bishnoi inaugurated the court building of the Sub-divisional Judicial Magistrate (M) at Lakhipur in Cachar district on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, chief minister Sarma said that the inauguration of the court building will not only enhance the efficiency of the judiciary in Lakhipur and Cachar district but will also have a positive impact on fulfilling the aspirations of the people across Barak Valley. He also noted that with Lakhipur now recognised as a co-district, this new judicial building is expected to play a significant role in shaping the future of the judiciary in the region.

The chief minister remarked that before independence, the judicial administration of Cachar district, the heart of the Barak Valley, was under the Sylhet Sadar Court, with a circuit court operating in Silchar. However, after independence, the undivided Cachar district came under the jurisdiction of the Jorhat district and the Sadar Judge. To address the legal needs of the district and expand its judicial framework, a separate and independent post of District Judge for Cachar was created in 1955, CM Sarma added.

The chief minister further said that to strengthen the state's judicial system, the present state government has undertaken several significant initiatives. He mentioned that, as a result of these efforts, the judicial infrastructure in the state has seen remarkable progress in recent years. Highlighting these proactive steps, the chief minister said that the present state



government has built and inaugurated new District Judicial Court buildings in Barpeta and Sivasagar districts. Similarly, on November 23, the Sub-divisional Judicial Magistrate Court building in Bokakhat, under Golaghat district, was also inaugurated.

He added that these new court buildings, in addition to housing courtrooms and chambers for judges, are equipped with modern facilities such as libraries, video conferencing rooms, various office spaces, a Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre, meditation rooms, and CCTV control rooms, among other advanced amenities.

Moreover, the construction of court complexes and residential quarters in Dhubri, Goalpara, Tinsukia, and Gohpur is progressing at a fast pace. The construction work of the court complexes in Goalpara and Darrang districts is almost

complete. Soon, the court complex being built in Diphu, Karbi Anglong, will also be inaugurated. Additionally, district judicial systems have been established in the newly formed districts of South Salmara-Mankachar, Bajali, Biswanath, Majuli, and West Karbi Anglong.

Chief minister Sarma said that the present state government is taking all steps to turn Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Ease of Justice' into reality. In order to bring the judiciary closer to the common people, the state government has taken several steps to make justice more accessible. He stated that to protect children from sexual abuse and ensure swift resolution of cases related to child marriage, POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) courts have been established in 17 districts. He also said that two such courts have been established in Nagaon district.

With the state's economic development, the number of commercial disputes has increased. Therefore, a plan has been made to establish a dedicated Commercial Court in Guwahati. Similarly, a specialised NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) court is also being planned. Efforts are underway to establish a Directorate of Prosecution in the state, which will function as the controlling authority for all administrative tasks related to prosecution.

CM Sarma also said that to reduce the number of pending cases in courts and decrease the number of prisoners, the state government has implemented measures to withdraw petty cases. Under this initiative, nearly 81,000 petty cases were withdrawn by March of this year. The chief minister further said that to ensure a safe environment for witnesses, safe deposition centers have been established, and several of these centers are already operational.

Highlighting various initiatives taken by the state government, CM Sarma said that E-service centers and the mobile app 'Borsha' have been launched to provide affordable legal information and emergency assistance to distressed women. He emphasised that the legal fraternity has a responsibility to not weaponise loopholes in delaying trials in cases involving crimes against women and children.

The chief minister also said that under the decisive leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home minister Amit Shah, India has ushered in a revolutionary transformation in its legal framework by replacing the colonial-era Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure

(CrPC), and Indian Evidence Act with the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA). This new legal framework has facilitated a more efficient and technology-driven judicial process, making justice delivery smoother and reducing the burden of excessive cases on the judicial system.

CM Sarma added that the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam has now placed special emphasis on the use of scientific methods for the collection of evidence. As a result, in the coming days, the role of forensic experts in the investigation process will significantly increase. To aid this, the construction of the National Forensic Science University campus in Guwahati has already begun. CM Sarma said the university will provide advanced training opportunities to investigating officers, enhancing the scientific approach to criminal investigations. Additionally, special attention is being given to the training of police officers on the new criminal laws and the appropriate use of information technology in law enforcement and investigations.

It may be noted that the new judicial magistrate court building has been constructed at a financial outlay of ₹ 3.78 crores. Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court Vijay Bishnoi, Justice Suman Shyam, Justice Kalyan Rai Surana, MLAs Kausik Rai, Dipyan Chakraborty, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Bijoy Malakar, Krishnendu Paul, Nihar Rangjan Das, and a host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Open forum in Guwahati highlights conservation of foxtail orchid

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Aaranyak, a premier biodiversity conservation organisation of Northeast India, as part of its WeForNature outreach programme, along with the Institution of Engineers (India) (IEI) in association with EIACP PC Hub Assam, ASTEC, and the government of Assam, organised an open forum discussion on the conservation significance of the Foxtail Orchid in Assam.

The event was held at the auditorium of the IEI, Assam Centre, Guwahati. The enlightening session featured Khyanjeet Gogoi, a renowned botanist and conservationist from Assam, fondly known as the 'Orchid Man of Assam', as the principal resource person.

It is worth mentioning that the foxtail orchid, with its rich ecological and cultural significance, is a crucial component of biodiversity. However, due to threats like overexploitation, habitat destruction, and climate change, immediate action for the conservation of this species has become an urgent necessity.

In this context, the event was organised on November 28 to raise awareness about the importance of conservation, as well as the various economic prospects of foxtail orchid species, among academia and to foster a sense of responsibility towards preserving these magnificent plants.

Faculty members and students from the Botany departments of various colleges in Guwahati, as

well as dignitaries from relevant fields, attended the event.

During his speech, Gogoi encouraged young students to come forward and explore the different prospects associated with orchid conservation.

He emphasised Assam's rich orchid diversity and its various economic opportunities, urging the government to prioritise research and documentation in this area.

From IEI, Er Mahesh Borkataky highlighted the importance of the event and called upon academic institutions to lead conservation efforts for the foxtail orchid.

Udayan Borthakur, senior scientist and organising secretary of Aaranyak, mentioned that Aaranyak, being a leading research-based environmental organisation in Northeast India, has numerous provisions for collaborative work with academic institutions and other organisations. Rupam Sankar Baruah, project scientist from ASTEC, shared the various initiatives taken by ASTEC in the restoration and conservation of orchids in Assam.

Dhrubajyoti Kalita, a dedicated life member of Aaranyak, played a significant role in conceptualising this event, while Pranab Goswami, organising officer of Aaranyak, coordinated various aspects of the event.

The discussion opened up several avenues for collective action towards the protection and conservation of the foxtail orchid and other orchid species.

NID Jorhat, Nakachari College win Creative Rube Goldberg Machine Challenge

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 1: Rector and director of I-CARD, Bosco Institute, Father Anto Tharakan, emphasised the importance of creative thinking, particularly among the youth, highlighting their significance in shaping a brighter future.

Father Anto Tharakan was addressing the award ceremony of the Creative Rube Goldberg Machine Challenge, organised by Makerspace at The Hub Jorhat, Bosco Institute, on Friday.

Father Anto Tharakan later handed over the awards and certificates to the winners. Each winning team in both the technical and non-technical categories received prize money of ₹ 15,000, while the first runners-up received ₹ 8,000.

The winners of the technical category (Eco-Cycle) were the National Institute of Design, Assam, and the first runners-up were the team from Jorhat Engineering College.

The winners of the non-technical category (Chain Reaction Chaos) were the team from Nakachari College, Jorhat, and the first runners-up were Jorhat Kendriya Mahavidyalaya.

The esteemed guests present at the program included Dr Ankur Gogoi, assistant professor, Jagannath Barooah University; Dr Bisheshwar Haorongbam, senior faculty, National Institute of Design, Assam; Dr Pushparani Maibam, assistant professor, Bosco In-

stitute, Jorhat; Dr Dinomoni Gogoi, assistant professor, Nakachari College; Abdul Amin, assistant professor, Nakachari College; and Sudip Adhikary, associate senior faculty, National Institute of Design, Assam.

About 100 people, including participants from Jorhat Engineering College, Nakachari College, National Institute of Design, Assam, Jorhat Kendriya Mahavidyalaya, and students and staff of Bosco Institute, Jorhat, attended the programme.

The primary objective of the creative challenge was to provide a platform for students to express themselves freely and develop their innovative skills. The event was divided into two categories, each with a unique theme. For the technical category, the theme was 'Eco Cycle', and the participants designed and built a Rube Goldberg machine demonstrating sustainable habits. The theme of the non-technical category was 'Chain Reaction Chaos', and participants created a Rube Goldberg machine that could switch on or off any electrical or mechanical device.

This challenge took place from November 11 to 16, and the final projects were displayed at Makerspace on November 15 and 16. The projects were evaluated by a panel of jury members.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dipjyoti Tanti, manager of The Hub Jorhat, Bosco Institute.

Centre using diplomatic channels for safety of Hindus in Bangladesh: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday that the central government is using its diplomatic channels to ensure safety of Hindus in Bangladesh as they have been facing atrocities in the neighbouring country. He also said that it is the responsibility of the Bangladesh government to provide security to Hindus, who are the neighbouring country's largest religious minority.

"The events happening in Bangladesh are sad. The government of India has already reacted. It is the responsibility of the government of Bangladesh to ensure safety of the religious minority Hindus there," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a programme in Cachar district.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been using various diplomatic channels to ensure that the Bangladesh government provides security to the Hindus," he added. Sarma said prayers of the people of India are with the Hindus of Bangladesh, adding, "We all are concerned about the insecurity, harassment, and arrests they are facing there. But we believe that through the efforts of Modi ji, their security will be ensured." The chief minister said strict vigil was being maintained along the state's boundary with Bangladesh. (PTI)

'Hangbadikotar Jolongaidi' released in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 1: A significant event took place at Diphu Club on Sunday, as a compilation of selected editorials, 'Hangbadikotar Jolongaidi', authored by the newspaper's chief editor, Mukul Ch Baruah of 'Paharidoot', based in Diphu, Karbi Anglong, was released. The book launch was graced by a distinguished gathering, including MLA Bidyasing Engleg, Padmasree Dhaneswar Ingli, noted writer and journalist Poibitra Bora, Chandrasing Kro, president of the Karbi Cultural Society, and several other notable figures.

Paharidoot, initially launched as a weekly newspaper in 1998, faced intermittent publication pauses. It resumed as a daily in 2008 but eventually ceased operations once again. Throughout its existence, Mukul Chandra Baruah served as both publisher and editor.

While releasing the book, Baruah expressed his intent to provide a valuable resource for aspiring journalists working across print, electronic, and digital media platforms. He believes that the compilation of his editorials can serve as a guide and inspiration for the younger generation of journalists.

Kokumbar Baruah, head of the Assamese department at Assam University's Diphu Campus, delivered a thought-provoking keynote address. He emphasised the paramount importance of upholding journalistic values and ethics, asserting that adherence to these principles is essential for a journalist's credibility and impact. He further highlighted the pivotal role of journalists in shaping society and influencing public opinion. The book launch event was a significant moment for the region, celebrating the legacy of 'Paharidoot' and recognising the contributions of its chief editor, Mukul Ch Baruah.

Special trains announced to ease passenger rush

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: In a bid to clear the extra rush of passengers, it has been decided to run a special train between Dibrugarh and Dhubri for one trip in both directions from December 4 to 7, 2024. Special train No 05938 (Dibrugarh - Dhubri) will depart from Dibrugarh at 07:30 hours on December 4, 2024 (Wednesday) to reach Dhubri at 02:05 hours the next day. In the return direction, special train No 05937 (Dhubri - Dibrugarh) will depart from Dhubri at 19:20 hours on December 7, 2024 (Saturday) to reach Dibrugarh at 16:30 hours the next day. The special train will run via New Tinsukia, Naharkatia, Simaluguri, Furkating, Lumding, Guwahati, Rangiya, New Bongaigaon, Fakiragram, and Golokganj during its journey in both directions. The train will consist of 22 coaches, including AC-I tier, AC-II tier, AC-III tier, sleeper class, and general seating coaches.

Waitlisted passengers of other trains traveling on the above route can avail themselves of the opportunity to travel comfortably. Passengers are requested to verify the details before undertaking their journey.

State marks World AIDS Day

ASACS leads state-level observance in Nagaon, while districts and organisations rally to educate communities on HIV prevention & rights

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Assam State AIDS Control Society (ASACS), in collaboration with the district administration, Nagaon, organised the state-level World AIDS Day on Sunday, at Nehrubali Playground in Nagaon with a flurry of activities.

The theme of World AIDS Day 2024 was 'Take the Rights Path: My Health, My Right!' The theme highlights the importance of upholding human rights and fostering the inclusion of all communities, through which the world can end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

The day began with a foot rally comprising college students, ASHAs, representatives of TI NGOs, and other stakeholders (with miking in IEC vans and muppets). The rally was flagged off at Nehrubali Playground, Nagaon, by the district commissioner, Nagaon, Narendra Kr Shah, IAS, in the presence of the project director of Assam State AIDS Control Society (ASACS), Dr Indranoshee Das, ACS, and other district-level and state-level officials.

This was followed by a public meeting at Nehrubali Playground, Nagaon, where Keshab Mahanta, minister for Transport, IT, etc., was the chief guest. Speaking on the occasion, the minister said, "Your health is your right, and sometimes we knowingly make mistakes by indulging in high-risk behaviours like unprotected sex and sharing needles and syringes while taking drugs as injecting drug users, which may lead to HIV." Thus, the minister appealed to the gathering, which comprised mainly college stu-



dents, to refrain from all kinds of high-risk behaviours and inculcate healthy lifestyles.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr P Ashok Babu, IAS, commissioner and secretary to the government of Assam, Health & Family Welfare Department, said, "There was a time when the main route of HIV transmission in the state was through unprotected sex, but now the main route of HIV transmission is through sharing needles and syringes by injecting drug users." "Out of the total HIV-detected cases, more than 60 percent are injecting drug users, and that is why there are Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) Centres in a few hospitals across Assam where injecting drug users are rehabilitated by offering legally prescribed drugs orally," he said.

Speaking on the significance of World AIDS Day, project director of Assam State AIDS Control Society,

Dr Indranoshee Das, ACS, in her speech, said that World AIDS Day gives an opportunity to people around the globe to unite in the fight against HIV and to commemorate those who have died due to AIDS-related illnesses. "In order to combat the HIV menace, Assam State AIDS Control Society, in the last couple of years, has taken up various kinds of campaigns like Integrated Health Campaigns in HIV-vulnerable districts, campaigns in prisons and detention centres, and Intensified IEC Campaigns in 10 HIV high-prevalence districts of Assam."

The 10 districts that successfully conducted the 60-day Intensified IEC Campaign during August-October 2024 were felicitated during the event.

The public meeting was followed by cultural programmes, including mime shows, street plays, flash mobs, etc. A blood donation camp was also organised at the venue.

Apart from the state-level event, World AIDS Day was also observed in all districts of Assam with public meetings, rallies, etc. World AIDS Day was also conducted in colleges across the state.

Our Hojai Correspondent adds: SOS Children's Village Hojai's Family Strengthening Program (FSP) observed 'World AIDS Day' with a series of awareness-raising events across its FS Clusters, including Dhanuhar Basti, Hira Basti, Milik Basti, and Hawaipur, on Sunday.

The program aimed to educate the community, especially children and youth, about HIV/AIDS, its transmission, and preventive measures.

A key feature of the day was a mass rally organised by the Bal Panchayat children and community members. Participants carried placards bearing informative messages and slogans designed to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. Additionally, a street play was performed by SRISTI, a social action cultural group from Guwahati, focusing on HIV prevention.

The event also highlighted important resources available for HIV/AIDS care and support, such as Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres (ICTCs), Red Ribbon Clinics, free medications, transportation assistance, and access to social security schemes for people living with HIV (PLWHIV). Attendees were also informed about the toll-free helpline 1097 for further guidance.

The program was coordinated by the animators and tutors of the FS Clusters, with oversight from Chitta Ranjan Mohanty, assistant director,

and Niranjana Das, senior co-worker of SOS Children's Village Hojai. Through this initiative, SOS CV Hojai demonstrated its commitment to empowering the community with essential knowledge and resources to protect themselves and others from HIV/AIDS, fostering a safe and informed environment for all.

Our Gossaigaon Correspondent adds: The 31st Battalion of Sashastra Seema Bal, stationed at Telipara in Gossaigaon, on Sunday observed World AIDS Day on its premises. Dr S Haldar, CMO SG, 6th BN SSB, Ranighuli, delivered an enlightening awareness speech on HIV/AIDS. The session aimed to educate the SSB personnel about the prevention, treatment, and social implications of HIV/AIDS, emphasising the importance of awareness and empathy in combating the stigma associated with the disease.

In addition, a significant Swachhata Abhiyan event was organised at the 31st BN SSB, Gossaigaon, under the Swachhata Pakhwada initiative, directed by Sh Dighade S R, deputy commandant. The event witnessed the participation of all personnel present at the BN Headquarters, who collectively took a pledge to uphold cleanliness and hygiene standards in the surrounding society.

The dual focus on cleanliness and health highlights the commitment of the SSB to the well-being and development of its personnel and the communities they serve. The event was a testament to their collective effort and dedication towards a healthier, cleaner, and more informed society.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Courage is found in unlikely places
- JRR Tolkien

Defence against US charges on Adani group

The defence mounted by the Adani Group, both by its leadership and by the Indian government, in the face of damning allegations of corruption and irregularities levelled by US authorities, raises serious questions about the interplay between corporate interests and political power in India. While the US investigation exposes what it claims are grave financial offences, including corruption, both the Adani Group and the Indian government have presented a united front to defend the company, framing the charges as mere technicalities and distancing the leadership from any involvement in misconduct. The US allegations, which point to potentially fraudulent activities, stock price manipulation. The US investigators have delved deep into the Adani Group's dealings, alleging irregularities that could have far-reaching implications on both international trade and domestic investment confidence. At the heart of these accusations is the claim that the Adani Group has been involved in a series of financial practices designed to artificially inflate stock prices, manipulate market values, and conceal financial misdeeds through complex offshore networks. These are serious allegations that, if proven, could constitute significant breaches of financial regulations and international laws.

Despite the gravity of the situation, the response from the Adani Group and the Indian government has been resolute. The group, led by billionaire Gautam Adani, has maintained that the charges against it are groundless, presenting them as nothing more than misunderstandings or, at worst, technical errors in compliance. In a series of statements, the company has claimed that the allegations are exaggerated and misinterpreted, downplaying the seriousness of the claims. From the Indian government's perspective, the Adani Group's defence has been met with strong political support. External Affairs Ministry spokespersons have gone on record to claim that this is a purely legal matter involving private entities, and thus, the government should not be expected to intervene in the ongoing legal proceedings. This rhetoric, however, has done little to quell suspicions about the underlying motivations. By positioning the matter as an issue of legal technicalities rather than a serious case of financial misconduct, both the Adani Group and the Indian government appear to be strategically deflecting attention from the substantive nature of the allegations. The response has been remarkably uniform, with key political figures and even media outlets in India rallying around the Adani Group, presenting it as a victim of foreign interference rather than a company embroiled in a financial scandal.

The broader implications of this defence are significant, as it raises questions about the extent to which corporate influence intersects with governmental action in India. The Adani Group, with its vast business interests spanning energy, infrastructure, and logistics, is one of India's most influential corporate entities. Its rise has been closely intertwined with India's own economic development under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Adani Group's meteoric growth over the last decade is often seen as symbolic of the country's booming economy and its aspirations to become a global economic powerhouse. As such, the defence of the group is not merely a corporate issue—it has been made to look like a matter of national interest.

Agricultural breakthroughs of 2024: Innovations shaping the future of farming

By: Mowsam Hazarika

The year 2024 marked significant strides in global agriculture, with innovative breakthroughs revolutionizing the way food is produced, managed, and distributed. From technological advancements to sustainable farming practices, these developments promise to address pressing challenges like food security, climate change, and resource management. Here are the most notable agricultural achievements of 2024.

1. AI-Powered Precision Farming

Artificial Intelligence (AI) took center stage in precision agriculture, enabling farmers to optimize resources and maximize yields. Advanced AI algorithms integrated with satellite imagery and IoT sensors helped predict crop diseases, manage irrigation systems, and monitor soil health in real time. This technology significantly reduced input costs while boosting productivity.

2. CRISPR-Enabled Crop Varieties

2024 witnessed a surge in CRISPR technology applications, leading to the development of resilient crop varieties. Genetically edited crops with enhanced resistance to pests, diseases, and extreme weather conditions were successfully commercialized, ensuring food security in regions vulnerable to climate change.

3. Vertical Farming Expansion

Urban farming reached new heights with expanded vertical farming initiatives. High-tech, soil-less farming systems in urban areas used minimal water and no pesticides, producing fresh, nutrient-rich vegetables and fruits. Countries like Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States led the way, scaling up production to meet growing urban demands.

4. Carbon-Neutral Farming Practices

Sustainable agriculture gained momentum with the adoption of carbon-neutral farming practices. Farmers employed regenerative techniques, such as cover cropping, agroforestry, and biochar applications, to sequester carbon and improve soil fertility. Incentives from governments and environmental organizations accelerated the transition toward

greener farming.

5. Breakthroughs in Agri-Biotechnology

Innovations in agri-biotechnology introduced microbial-based biofertilizers and biopesticides, reducing dependency on chemical inputs. These bio-based solutions not only enhanced crop yields but also restored soil biodiversity, contributing to long-term sustainability.

6. Agri-Drones for Efficient Resource Management

The deployment of drones for crop monitoring, spraying, and mapping saw exponential growth. Equipped with multispectral cameras, these drones provided actionable data, allowing farmers to identify stressed areas and take timely corrective measures.

7. Global Collaboration for Food Security

International collaborations, such as the "Global Crop Resilience Initiative," brought together governments, researchers, and corporations to tackle hunger and climate resilience. This initiative developed and distributed drought-resistant seeds to developing countries, benefiting millions of smallholder farmers.

8. Breakthrough in Alternative Proteins

Innovative research in alternative proteins produced scalable, plant-based, and lab-grown meat solutions. These breakthroughs addressed rising protein demands while reducing the environmental impact of traditional livestock farming.

Conclusion

The agricultural breakthroughs of 2024 demonstrate humanity's commitment to advancing food production in harmony with nature. As these innovations continue to unfold, they hold the potential to reshape global food systems, ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

Farmers, policymakers, and scientists must now collaborate to scale these advancements, bridging the gap between innovation and accessibility, particularly for marginalized communities. With the right policies and investments, these breakthroughs can transform agriculture into a resilient and sustainable sector, ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century. *(The author is a poet, freelance science journalist and people's science activist)*

Changing rural economy in Assam

The rural economy of Assam is undergoing a profound transformation. This change, while not entirely new, has become more visible in recent years due to a confluence of factors, ranging from shifts in agriculture to the rise of new industries and services. The landscape of rural Assam is no longer dominated solely by traditional agricultural practices; a complex mix of modern technologies, industrial activities, services, and rural entrepreneurship is now redefining the economic contours of the region. However, while this transformation holds promise, it is also accompanied by significant challenges, which must be addressed for sustainable growth to materialize. Agriculture remains the bedrock of Assam's rural economy, but the way it functions is increasingly being redefined. Historically, Assam's rural areas have relied on staple crops like rice, tea, and jute, with tea in particular playing a central role.

The state's tea gardens, primarily in the districts of Dibrugarh, Jorhat, and Tinsukia, have been instrumental in establishing Assam as a globally recognized brand for high-quality tea. In recent decades, however, the agricultural sector has been under pressure. Climate change, recurring floods, and an aging farmer population have all put stress on traditional agricultural practices. Despite this, the sector remains critical, though increasingly, farmers are looking for ways to diversify their sources of income and reduce reliance on monocultures.

The diversification of the rural economy in Assam is evident in the growth of non-farm sectors. Small-scale industries, rural entrepreneurship, and the rise of local services have begun to reshape the economic landscape. While agriculture continues to employ a large proportion of the rural workforce, non-agricultural activities are quickly becoming essential sources of income. Agro-processing industries, which add value to raw agricultural products, are expanding in both rural and semi-urban areas. These include food processing, oil mills, and local handicrafts, many of which are based on the region's abundant natural resources such as

bamboo, jute, and various agricultural by-products. These small industries are helping rural populations gain better access to markets, increase local employment, and contribute to economic diversification.

A noticeable change in Assam's rural economy is the rapid growth of rural entrepreneurship. More people, particularly young individuals, are choosing to start businesses that extend beyond agriculture. This shift can be attributed to a combination of factors, including government incentives, improved access to credit, and a more entrepreneurial mindset among the youth. The success of local handicrafts, small manufacturing units, and niche industries based on organic products and natural resources demonstrates the potential for economic diversification. Government schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) have also played a role in providing financial backing to rural entrepreneurs, enabling them to scale their businesses. Similarly, rural Assam has seen an increase in the establishment of small enterprises in sectors like hospitality, retail, and education. Such enterprises not only create jobs but also stimulate local economies by keeping money circulating within the community.

The agricultural shift toward diversification is also facilitated by modern technologies, though their uptake has been uneven. Mechanization, for instance, is making its way into the fields of Assam, albeit at a slow pace. While large farmers in the tea industry are embracing mechanization to boost productivity, small farmers have been slower to adopt technology due to a lack of awareness and resources. However, the growing realization that productivity must improve to meet increasing demands is pushing farmers towards more modern methods of farming. This includes the use of high-yielding crop varieties, mechanized irrigation systems, and better pest control techniques. The introduction of these technologies has the potential

to increase agricultural output significantly, although challenges like high initial investment costs and inadequate extension services have hindered widespread adoption.

Alongside these shifts in agriculture and industry, the services sector in rural Assam is experiencing a quiet revolution. With improvements in infrastructure and better access to education, rural areas are seeing a rise in demand for services. Healthcare, education, and digital services are no longer urban-centric; rural Assam is rapidly embracing these sectors. Rural healthcare services, for instance, are expanding as private healthcare providers and the government

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

focus on improving medical facilities in remote areas. Similarly, with the rise of mobile phones and internet connectivity, digital services have found a foothold in rural regions. Rural youth, who were once largely employed in agriculture, are now venturing into digital services, including IT-enabled businesses, e-commerce, and online education. This digital shift is opening new avenues for income generation and economic participation for rural populations, especially the youth.

Rural tourism has also emerged as a key driver of economic growth. Assam, with its rich biodiversity, tea gardens, and cultural heritage, has been gaining traction as a tourist destination. The state's rural areas, rich in tradition and scenic beauty, are becoming increasingly popular among tourists seeking an authentic experience. In particular, the island of Majuli, the world's largest river island, and the Kaziranga National Park, home to the one-horned rhinoceros, are attracting large numbers of domestic and international visitors. Local entrepreneurs are capitalizing on this trend by offering homestays, cultural performances, and guided tours. Rural tourism is not only boosting local incomes but is also creating new jobs in hospitality, handicrafts, and transportation. This growth in rural tourism is indicative of the broader economic shifts taking place, as rural areas

become more integrated into the state's broader economic framework.

Despite these positive trends, the rural economy of Assam faces persistent challenges. One of the biggest hurdles is infrastructure development. While some progress has been made, many areas still lack reliable roads, electricity, and telecommunication networks, all of which are crucial for economic growth. Poor road connectivity, for instance, hampers farmers' ability to transport produce to markets, leading to post-harvest losses. Similarly, limited access to electricity in many rural areas constrains industrial growth and affects the quality of life. Though some of these issues are being addressed through government initiatives, the pace of change remains slow, and there is still a large gap between urban and rural infrastructure.

Land issues are another challenge for the rural economy. In Assam, land tenure and ownership remain contentious, particularly in the tea garden areas, where workers and their families often lack legal ownership of the land they work on. This lack of security discourages investment in agricultural activities and makes it difficult for rural populations to gain access to credit. Moreover, land-related disputes in the state, often tied to ethnicity and identity, further complicate the situation. Without clear land titles, rural populations face limitations in improving their agricultural productivity or establishing non-agricultural enterprises.

Youth migration from rural areas to urban centers is another issue. While rural areas offer a growing range of economic opportunities, the youth often seek better prospects in urban centers. This migration, spurred by the desire for higher wages, better education, and improved living standards, poses a significant challenge to the sustainability of the rural economy. In the absence of sufficient job opportunities and a lack of infrastructure, many young people leave their villages in search of better prospects elsewhere, further depopulating rural areas and stalling their economic development. This trend also results in a shortage of skilled labor in rural areas, which could

hinder the growth of industries and services that depend on a local workforce.

Environmental concerns add another layer of complexity to the rural economy. Assam's vulnerability to flooding, soil erosion, and the impacts of climate change poses a significant threat to its rural livelihoods. The floods, which occur almost annually, wreak havoc on crops and infrastructure, destroying livelihoods and deepening poverty. Similarly, changing weather patterns, particularly erratic rainfall and prolonged dry spells, have disrupted traditional farming calendars. The challenge of adapting to these changes requires investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, water management, and sustainable agricultural practices.

The role of government policy in shaping Assam's rural economy is crucial. Various initiatives, including the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) for housing and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), have been beneficial in improving the living conditions of rural populations. Additionally, the state's push for organic farming and the promotion of rural industries are helping to modernize the rural economy and provide new sources of income. However, for these policies to have a lasting impact, a more integrated approach is needed, one that tackles infrastructure deficiencies, improves land rights, and provides better market access for rural producers.

In conclusion, Assam's rural economy is undergoing a transformation that holds considerable potential. As agriculture diversifies and non-farm sectors gain momentum, rural areas are beginning to embrace new economic opportunities. However, significant challenges remain, particularly in terms of infrastructure, land rights, youth migration, and environmental risks. Addressing these challenges will require sustained efforts from both the government and the private sector, with a focus on inclusive, sustainable development that ensures the long-term prosperity of Assam's rural population. *(The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

BJP's resurgence and Congress's struggles across India

By: Dipak Kurmi

The recent Assembly and bye-election results across India have once again reaffirmed the central role of electoral performance in shaping political narratives. While elections are undoubtedly about numbers, they serve as a barometer for public sentiment, political strategies, and the relevance of leadership. From the BJP's remarkable resurgence in Maharashtra to its clean sweep in Assam's bye-elections, these outcomes hold critical lessons for political stakeholders.

Maharashtra: BJP's Strategic Resurgence: Maharashtra, historically a complex political battlefield, witnessed a transformative election with the BJP securing a decisive victory. This success is particularly notable given the state's shifting alliances and power dynamics since the 2019 Assembly elections. The BJP faced significant challenges, including the defection of its ally, the Shiv Sena, and the consolidation of opposition forces against it. However, the BJP turned these adversities into opportunities, leveraging internal divisions within opposition parties like the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

The elections revealed the weakening of two stalwarts of Maharashtra politics, Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar, whose parties were bogged down by internal rifts. The Shiv Sena's factional struggles and the NCP's lack of cohesive strategy paved the way for the BJP to reclaim its foothold in the state. This outcome underscores the importance of internal unity and disciplined strategy in contemporary politics. By presenting

a united front, the BJP demonstrated its ability to adapt, restructure narratives, and mobilize voters effectively.

Moreover, the results exposed the Congress's inability to regain lost ground. The party's dismal performance in regions like Vidarbha highlighted its declining grassroots connect and lack of a coherent strategy to counter the BJP's dominance. While the Congress celebrates minor gains in states like Jharkhand, its structural and organizational weaknesses make a nationwide revival seem increasingly unlikely.

Jharkhand: A Fragile Success for Congress: The Jharkhand Assembly elections offered a glimmer of hope for the Congress, but the victory owed more to its alliance with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) than its own efforts. While the coalition managed to secure a majority, the Congress's contribution was marginal compared to the dominant role played by the JMM. This raises questions about the Congress's ability to position itself as a credible political force, even in alliance-led victories.

The BJP's relatively weak presence in Jharkhand politics has been a historical trend, yet its performance was not far behind that of the Congress. The possibility of a future alliance between the BJP and the JMM, while speculative, cannot be ruled out given the fluid nature of Indian politics. The Congress must reflect on its role in such coalitions and work toward building an independent organizational presence in states where it remains a junior partner.

Assam Bye-Elections: BJP's Unyielding Dominance: Assam's bye-election results were a resounding affirmation of the BJP-led

NDA's grip on state politics. Winning all five contested Legislative Assembly constituencies, including the symbolic victory in the minority-dominated Samaguri, the BJP demonstrated its ability to consolidate support across diverse demographics. Samaguri, held by the Congress for 25 years, was a high-stakes battle. The BJP's victory, spearheaded by youth leader Dipu Ranjan Sarma, reflected its capacity to dismantle entrenched political dynasties, such as that of Congress strongman Rakibul Hussain.

The BJP's junior allies, including the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), also played pivotal roles, retaining their strongholds in Bongaigaon and Sidli, respectively. The coordinated efforts of the NDA alliance highlighted the BJP's organizational strength and its ability to manage coalition dynamics effectively. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma lauded the results as a testament to Assam's faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's governance model. His emphasis on Samaguri, a constituency with a significant minority population, underscored the BJP's strategy of broadening its appeal beyond traditional vote banks. The Congress, on the other hand, faced criticism for its lack of cohesion and strategic vision. Despite marginal gains in vote share in some constituencies, internal squabbles and arrogance, as pointed out by opposition leader Akhil Gogoi, undermined its performance.

National Implications: The Invincibility of the BJP?

The electoral outcomes in Maharashtra and Assam underline the BJP's ability to adapt and thrive in challenging political ter-

ains. Unlike Congress, whose structural fragility has been exposed repeatedly since 2014, the BJP's year-round organizational activity and robust ground-level presence give it a decisive edge. These victories not only strengthen the BJP's position in regional politics but also have national implications, consolidating its leadership within the NDA and bolstering Prime Minister Modi's government.

The Congress, despite being a key player in the INDIA bloc, faces an existential crisis. Its repeated electoral failures raise questions about its relevance and ability to challenge the BJP in a bipolar contest. While the INDIA bloc provides a platform for collective opposition, the Congress's lack of organizational strength and strategic clarity could jeopardize its role within the coalition.

The Road Ahead: Indian politics is a dynamic arena where adaptability, strategy, and organizational strength often determine success. The BJP's recent electoral victories highlight its dominance and ability to turn adverse situations into opportunities. In contrast, the Congress must address its internal challenges and redefine its approach if it hopes to remain a viable political alternative.

Elections are not merely about winning or losing; they are about gauging public sentiment and evolving to meet the expectations of the electorate. As the BJP continues to consolidate its position, the opposition, particularly the Congress, must introspect and innovate. The road to 2029 is long, but the lessons from Maharashtra and Assam provide a clear map of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)*

Mamata overrules Abhishek plan on TMC revamping through 'new wave'

By: Tirthankar Mitra

Buoyed by a clean sweep in the November 13 by-elections to six assembly constituencies, Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee has reposed faith on veteran leaders. It puts on ice for the time being, the party's unofficial number two, chief minister Banerjee's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee's reign plan. To create a new wave in the party by inducting more youth workers in the leadership.

In a recent organisational meeting at Mamata Banerjee's Kalighat home, the chief minister reasserted her position as the party's sole decision maker. The decisions taken at the meeting are pointers that Abhishek's recommendations to remove underperformers as indicated in Lok Sabha poll results will not be implemented in a hurry.

Addressing the martyr's day rally of TMC on July 21, Abhishek had announced that the underperformers in the civic and rural bodies run by Trinamool would be acted against in three months. A similar fate awaited leaders in whose areas the TMC candidates trailed behind BJP nominees in the Lok Sabha elections.

Lest his decisions be termed as arbitrary, Banerjee's office had prepared a report of functionalities of 120 civic bodies. This "performance based" report had been given to party supremo and chief minister, Mamata Banerjee.

Abhishek, the national general secretary of the TMC had gone abroad thereafter for his eye treatment. In an informal talk with scribes on his birthday November 7, he had indicated that several district chiefs are likely to lose their posts.

The three month deadline went by without any change in the party hierarchy. Meanwhile, Abhishek's loyalists had started rooting for more organisational and administrative responsibilities be given to him.

One of them, Bharatpur MLA Humayun Kabir who had often hit the headlines for the wrong reasons demanded that Abhishek be made deputy chief minister. He further stated that home department be given to Abhishek.

There were subtle recommendations that Abhishek be given a higher position in the party hierarchy. Without actually taking sides, veteran leader and Dum Dum MP, Saugata Roy said that it is difficult for one person to look into all the aspects of the administration, meaning Mamata is burdened with too much government departments.

Though a part of the old guard and known for his proximity to the party supremo, Roy put in a word for Abhishek, the MP from Diamond Harbour. It was learnt from TMC sources that Roy was on a relationship mending mission with Abhishek who was unhappy at the veteran leader contesting yet again from Dum Dum in the recent Lok Sabha elections.

But there were dissenting voices too seeking that Mamata Banerjee was the only leader in the TMC who was a "vote catcher". Both Kolkata mayor, Firad Hakim and Serampur MP Kalyan Bandyopadhyay endorsed that Mamata Banerjee is the only leader in the Trinamool Congress who enjoyed the allegiance of one and all.

During the Lok Sabha elections campaign, Kalyan Bandyopadhyay had clearly said that he needed none other than Mamata Banerjee to campaign for him. He added for good

measure that he would not mind if Abhishek joined the campaign.

But just as a section of the TMC were looking forward to induction of Abhishek loyalists in key positions in the party, three disciplinary committees formed by the party supremo put paid to the idea. Mamata Banerjee made it clear that there is no possibility now of handing over the reins of authority in the party if the composition of the three disciplinary committees are anything to go by.

Comprising the leaders who had been with her when she broke away from Congress and floated Trinamool Congress like Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Firad Hakim, Sovande Chatopadhyay, Arup Biswas, Kalyan Bandyopadhyay, Mala Roy, Javed Khan and others. One of the disciplinary committees has already sent its first show cause notice to Bharatpur MLA Humayun Kabir who had charged a coterie in the party trying to influence every decision of Mamata Banerjee.

Not replying to three show cause notices would amount to suspension. Another Abhishek loyalist, Arup Chakraborty has been dropped as party spokesman; both moves are being interpreted in TMC circles as a warning to those seeking to overshadow Mamata by her nephew.

Earlier, a senior TMC leader, a part of the group of veterans had said that Kabir's remarks have been taken note of. Action will be taken against him once the party supremo gives her nod. The show cause notice to Kabir is a pointer to the receipt of that nod. It is a clear message that the old guard will be decision makers remaining in key slots of TMC for quite sometime now. *(IPA Service)*

Is stage 3 breast cancer curable? What causes upper stomach pain?

By: Dr Pritam Kataria

While advanced stages of cancer may not be completely curable, with timely awareness, appropriate diagnosis and medical intervention, you can try to tackle the symptoms and prolong your life span, points out Dr Pritam Kataria, consultant, medical oncology at the Sir H N Reliance Foundation Hospital. Breast cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in India, with more women being diagnosed with it than men. Globally too, the incidence of breast cancer is rising.

Self-examination, early diagnosis and mammography are some of the ways to detect and confirm if you have underlying symptoms. However, in most cases, women do not seek help until the cancer reaches its later stages.

In 2002, veteran actor Mumtaz was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was 54 and was able to recover after multiple rounds of radiation and chemotherapy. In September 2018, actor Ayushman Khurrana's wife Tahira Kashyap, was diagnosed with Stage 0 breast cancer (this is in the pre-cancer stage, affects the milk duct and is non-invasive). She underwent a mastectomy (removal of the breast) and later wrote a book documenting her journey to recovery.

Last week, actor Hina Khan - who is just 36 years old - announced that she has been diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer. While the news came as a shock, there were many who wondered why her cancer remained

undetected for so long.

More importantly, people want to know: Is breast cancer curable at Stage 3?

While advanced stages of cancer may not be completely curable, with timely awareness, appropriate diagnosis and medical intervention, you can try to tackle the symptoms and prolong your life span. Dr Pritam Kataria, consultant, medical oncology at the Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital, answers some of the most frequently asked questions about breast cancer:

What are the warning signs of breast cancer that women should not ignore?

The most common symptom of breast cancer is a new lump or mass in the breast; however, not all such lumps are signs of cancer. A painless, hard mass that has irregular edges is more likely to be cancer. But breast cancers can be also soft, round, tender or even painful.

Other possible symptoms of breast cancer include:

- Swelling of all or part of a breast (even if no lump is felt)
- Skin dimpling (sometimes looking like an orange peel)
- Breast or nipple pain
- Nipple retraction (turning inward)
- Nipple or breast skin that is red, dry, flaking or thickened nipple discharge (other than breast milk)
- Swollen lymph nodes under the arm or near the collarbone (Sometimes this can be a sign of breast cancer spreading even before the tumour in the breast is large enough to be felt.)

Breast cancer: How to do a self-examination

• Begin with a visual examination of your breasts.

• Sit or stand shirtless and braless in front of a mirror with your arms at your sides.

To inspect your breasts visually, do the following:

- Face forward and look for puckering, dimpling or changes in size, shape or symmetry.
- Check to see if your nipples are turned in (inverted).
- Inspect your breasts with your hands pressed down on your hips.
- Inspect your breasts with your arms raised overhead and the palms of your hands pressed together.
- Lift your breasts to see if ridges along the bottom are symmetrical.

If you have a vision impairment that makes it difficult for you to visually inspect your breasts, ask a trusted friend or a family member to help you.

Palpation of the breast

- With the flat of the hand, try to palpate (touch) the breast.
- Next, check for breast lumps or abnormalities by feeling your breasts while lying down, using your right hand to feel your left breast and then your left hand to feel your right breast.
- Use a firm, smooth touch with the first few finger pads of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together.

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray examination of the breast. It is used to detect and diagnose breast disease in women who have breast problems,

such as a lump, pain or nipple discharge, as well as for women who have no breast complaints. The procedure allows the detection of breast cancers, benign tumours and cysts before they can be detected by palpation.

Can breast cancer be treated/cured?

Yes, it can. There are typically five different stages of breast cancer, depending on the size and severity of the tumour. The risk of treatment and survival increases with each stage.

Stage 0 is one of the most difficult to detect due to poor symptoms. In stages 3 and 4, the tumour has probably grown in terms of size but may or may not have spread to other organs. In advanced stages, the tumour may have spread to other organs including the lungs, liver and the brain.

Based on the severity of symptoms and size of the tumour, there are two types of treatment -- local therapy and systemic therapy.

Local therapy includes radiation therapy and surgery. Systemic therapy includes chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy and hormonal therapy.

In most cases where women are diagnosed with stage 1, 2 or 3 of breast cancer, it can be cured with surgery and radiation therapy.

A few points to remember

Breast cancer can affect young and old alike. It affects men and women. In younger and middle-aged patients, the cause is mainly hereditary even in the absence of a positive family history. Younger patients can take the BRCA 1 & 2 mutation hereditary test. (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

What causes upper stomach pain?

By: Zawn Villines

Stomachaches are a common complaint. While many issues responsible for upper stomach pain, such as gas or a stomach virus, are not cause for concern, others may require medical treatment.

In this article, learn about ten possible causes of upper stomach pain, as well as treatment options and when to see a doctor.

Gas

Gas occurs naturally in the intestines and digestive tract. When this gas accumulates, it can cause feelings of pressure, bloating, or fullness.

Gas usually goes away without treatment within a few hours. If it occurs with a fever, uncontrolled vomiting, or intense pain, it is best to see a doctor.

Gas pain is not usually serious, and over-the-counter (OTC) medications can help. A person can also try eating more slowly to avoid swallowing air and prevent the gas from getting worse. Some people notice that certain foods are more likely to cause gas pain.

Indigestion

The medical term for indigestion is dyspepsia. It usually appears when there is too much acid in the stomach, which can happen after eating highly acidic foods. It can cause a burning feeling in the upper stomach and sometimes in the mouth or throat. The pain may also feel like it stems from the chest.

Less commonly, indigestion can result from a stomach ulcer, acid reflux, or even stomach cancer.

OTC medicines are highly effective at managing temporary indigestion. Identifying the triggers, such as certain foods, can help a person make healthful lifestyle changes.

Gastritis

Acute gastritis occurs in the short term and comes on quickly, usually because of a bacterial infection, such as with *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria. Gastritis causes the stomach lining to become swollen and painful.

Causes of chronic gastritis include:

- Crohn's disease
- autoimmune diseases
- sarcoidosis
- allergies
- viruses in people with weakened immune systems
- alcohol consumption

NSAID use

Antibiotics can usually treat bacterial infections. When gastritis is chronic, diagnosing and treating the underlying cause can help.

Stomach viruses

Gastroenteritis is a stomach virus that can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, in addition to upper stomach pain. Some people call gastroenteritis the stomach flu, but it is not actually a type of flu.

For most people, symptoms go away on their own within a few days. Avoiding heavy meals and drinking only clear liquids can help a person stop vomiting.

It is vital to avoid dehydration, so consider drinking something that restores electrolytes until the symptoms pass.

Muscle pain

Many muscles extend to the upper stomach. Pain from a mild muscle injury or spasms can cause temporary pain in the upper abdomen.

The pain often gets better with gentle massage and rest. Some people also find relief by using cold and hot packs.

Appendicitis

Appendicitis is an infection of the appendix. Without treatment, it can cause the appendix to rupture, and the condition can become life threatening.

In the early stages of appendicitis, a person may notice a dull ache around their belly button, but this pain can radiate to the upper stomach. As the infection gets worse, the pain moves to the lower-right side.

Gallstones

Gallstones are hard formations of cholesterol or bilirubin that can develop in the gallbladder. They do not always cause problems, but sometimes they block a biliary duct.

A blockage from a gallstone can cause intense pain in the upper-right stomach, as well as vomiting, fatigue, and exhaustion.

In some cases, surgery is necessary to resolve problems from gallstones. For example, if gallstones block the cystic duct, then a doctor will remove the gallbladder.

If gallstones block the common bile duct, then an Endoscopic retrograde cholangio-pancreatography (ERCP) may be needed to help extract them. This involves inserting a thin camera and other implements down your throat to manipulate and resolve the blockage.

Liver or pancreas issues

The liver, pancreas, and gallbladder work together to support digestion. All three organs are in the upper-right side of the stomach. Sometimes, untreated gallstones block biliary ducts, causing pain in the liver or pancreas.

Liver diseases, such as hepatitis, can cause liver pain. Pancreatitis, which is inflammation of the pancreas, may also cause pain. Some other causes, such as liver or pancreatic cancer, are less likely.

The right treatment depends on the underlying cause. People with pancreatitis may need to stay in the hospital for fluids and observation. Liver diseases require medication, and a liver transplant can treat advanced liver disease.

Bowel obstruction

A bowel obstruction blocks the intestines, making it difficult or impossible for anything to pass through. This can cause intense pain, constipation, and difficulty digesting and absorbing food.

A bowel obstruction is a medical emergency, as the bowel can tear or become seriously infected. Medications, fluid, and pain relievers often help. In some cases, a surgeon may need to remove the blockage.

Diverticular disease

Small pouches called diverticula can appear in the intestines, especially in the colon. Trusted Source. The presence of these pouches is known as diverticulosis.

When these pouches become inflamed or infected, a person can develop intense abdominal pain. Inflammation of the diverticula is known as diverticulitis.

The location of the pain depends on where the diverticula are. While diverticula are more common in the lower intestines, they can also appear in the upper intestines, causing pain in the upper stomach.

Probiotics and a high fiber diet often help treat diverticulitis. Antibiotics have been traditionally used to treat diverticulitis, but

emerging recommendations suggest supportive care only in uncomplicated diverticulitis.

If the infection worsens or does not go away, a doctor may perform surgery to remove the diverticula or a part of the intestines.

When to contact a doctor

In most cases, it is safe to wait and see if upper stomach pain goes away without treatment. If the pain persists or gets worse, it is best to see a doctor.

See a doctor within 24 hours if:

- Vomiting lasts longer than 12 hours.
- There is a fever along with abdominal pain.
- Abdominal pain occurs following an injury, such as a blow to the stomach.
- A person develops abdominal pain after taking a new medication.

• Stomach pain occurs in someone with a weakened immune system due to HIV, chemotherapy, or immunosuppressants.

Go to the emergency room or seek urgent care if:

- There is severe pain in the upper-right abdomen.
- The stomach pain is unbearable.
- There is stomach pain and white or pale stool.
- A pregnant woman develops severe abdominal pain.
- A person develops signs of severe dehydration, such as not urinating, chapped lips, very dry skin, confusion, dizziness, or sunken eyes.
- A newborn has persistent vomiting or a high fever.

Frequently asked questions

Below are frequently asked questions about the causes of abdominal pain.

Why does my stomach hurt at the top?

Pain in the upper part of the abdomen can have many causes, including:

- trapped gas
- indigestion
- muscle strains
- infections
- appendicitis
- gallstones
- pancreas or liver issues

What does upper gastric pain feel like?

Different causes of upper gastric pain produce different symptoms. However, this pain may feel like a dull ache, a burning sensation, or an intense expanding pressure pain.

When should I go to the ER for upper abdominal pain?

Seek immediate medical help if upper abdominal pain becomes severe, long lasting, or follows a direct injury to the area. If upper abdominal pain accompanies changes in stool color, fatigue, or severe dehydration, it is also essential to visit an emergency room.

How can I relieve my upper stomach pain?

Treatments to relieve upper abdominal pain depend on the cause. For example, a person can often relieve the pain from indigestion with OTC antacids, while pain from viral infections requires hydration and rest.

Summary

Abdominal pain can be a minor inconvenience or so intense that it makes functioning difficult. It is important to pay attention to other symptoms before deciding whether medical attention is necessary. In many cases, especially those due to minor infections or gas, upper stomach pain will disappear in a few hours or days. (Courtesy: Mediacra News Today)

How is digital technology affecting our kids' sleep

By: Simon Smith

Parents have been worried about their kids' sleep since time immemorial. And for valid reasons — good sleep is an essential part of a healthy childhood. Sleep is critical for physical growth, but also for many other aspects of brain development, learning and the development of important social skills. Children observe, experience or are taught things during the day, but they really only 'learn' overnight while they're asleep. In an increasingly digital world full of ubiquitous devices, the impact of technology on kids' sleep is of particular concern.

More children are using devices, and at an earlier age. This raises many questions about the costs and benefits of technology for healthy development. On one hand, parents and carers want children to learn as much as they can, be up-to-date and competent with technology, and be connected in new and meaningful ways with their families and friends.

On the other hand, increased screen time seems to be linked with decreased physical activity, poorer overall health, an increase in mental health and wellbeing concerns and poorer sleep.

Poor sleep has many costs. In the short term, tiredness can lead to irritability, meltdowns and poor concentration, and in the long term it can lead to increased risks for a range of health, social and wellbeing challenges. It is still not clear exactly how technology can impact kids' sleep, but researchers have some ideas to test out.

What role does technology play in your home?

Technology is not a new visitor to our homes. It has been evolving over time — at least from the advent of artificial lighting to radio, television, gaming consoles and podcasts. Even more traditional activities such as reading might have sometimes carried on into the night.

Kids' sleep has been a concern of parents right across this period. Children's sleep can be perplexing because it changes so much from birth through to the teenage years. The development from the almost 24-hour, anytime sleep of babies, through to regular naps in toddlers, then the end of daytime naps happens at different times for different children.

Children need a lot more sleep than adults do, and getting enough sleep at the right time can be challenging when there are a lot of demands on the time of children and their families.

Children and young people grow up in all sorts of different environments, places and circum-

stances. They also have their own individual personalities and preferences. At the same time, very significant global challenges - from pandemics to wars to climate change - will have impacts on their lives. This means it can be difficult to know if technology is 'good' for a particular child, let alone every child.

Instead, it might be important to first focus on the 'ingredients of life' such as good nutrition, plenty of activity and skills building, strong social relationships and regular and sufficient sleep. After that, the role of technology in relaxation, learning and connection might be easier to see.

Using technology to support healthy childhoods

Researchers are trying to understand the role of technology in a healthy childhood. Scientists are studying the way sleep changes across the early years, and the major family and social factors that interact with sleep, so that they can explain to parents and carers what to expect.

They are examining family routines at home in great detail to understand exactly what is happening in the hours before bedtime. For example, technology could be used as part of 'family time', it could be used alone or with siblings. Parents may find it relaxes their children or alternatively wakes them up. Researchers are also looking very carefully at the type and timing of light emitted by digital devices used by children, in the context of the rest of their day.

While the light emitted by screens may be a concern, the role of bright artificial lighting in the home and other light sources such as TVs and street lighting also needs to be considered.

Parents and carers also need to think about light during the day: in the home, early education settings or at school. It is possible that some children aren't getting enough light at the right times. The timing of light sends important signals to our bodies.

We expect relatively bright days and dark nights. It is more common now to experience relatively dim days, with little outdoor light, and artificial lighting in the home or from the street extended well after sunset.

How technology can make kids' sleep worse

There are three main theories about the ways technology might make kids' sleep worse.

The first is increased exposure to light in the evening. Most screens emit light and some devices are held quite close to our eyes. Our internal body clocks, or circadian rhythms, more or less depend on bright days and dark nights to keep time. Light at night, even in small doses, can surprise this sys-

tem. Children have strong body clocks, but are also very sensitive to light. The type of light emitted by devices, often quite blue light, seems especially powerful in its effects. This can lead to later sleep times, disruption of the body clock and increased risk of health problems.

The second theory is about displacement. Using technology at night is an additional, and often very engaging, activity. Spending time on screens makes it harder to fit in dinner, a bath, reading time or a regular bedtime wind-down routine. This can mean that sleep is pushed later just to fit everything else in.

This is hardly a new idea - it's likely today's parents were yesterday's children reading books by torchlight under the covers. The third theory is about the conflict between the technology-based activity itself and the need to relax and drift off to sleep. Some digital content can increase attention and focus. Some of it can be distressing, confusing or upsetting. If this is happening in the hours before bedtime, then it is another signal to delay sleep time. The challenge here is to measure and understand these emotional aspects of digital content, how it is used and how it is experienced by children.

How to help your kids get a better night's sleep

It's now understood that sleep is just as important as diet and exercise for children's development and wellbeing. And research has revealed some of the fundamentals of good sleep: a safe and secure bedroom environment, not too hot or cold, not too noisy, and nice and dark is a good starting point. A regular wake-up time and a regular bedtime routine help set and reinforce our body clocks. Researchers are also thinking of ways to use technology to help rather than hinder kids' sleep.

For example, technology could include alerts about bedtime and winding down time for children. It could suggest 'pro-sleep' content that isn't going to hype them up or upset them just before they need to fall asleep.

Technology could interact with smart homes and adjust lighting levels to reinforce sleep and wake times automatically. It could also be used to connect networks of young 'sleep champions' together or it could involve new programs for children to learn experiment and collaborate in developing better sleep habits.

There's never going to be a one-size-fits-all answer to helping our kids get a better night's sleep but there are things parents can do to help that don't involve ridding their homes of all digital devices. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Understanding brain stroke: Essential strategies for prevention and treatment

By: Dr Amit Shrivastav

Stroke, often termed a "brain attack," ranks as the second most common cause of mortality after heart attacks and stands as the leading cause of disability. It affects one in every four person once in their lifetime.

This medical emergency occurs when blood flow to part of the brain is disrupted, depriving brain tissue of oxygen and nutrients. Without immediate medical attention, brain cells can begin to die within minutes. Therefore, a thorough grasp of stroke prevention, diagnosis, and treatment is crucial in reducing both the frequency and impact of this critical health emergency.

Prevention

Stroke prevention primarily involves addressing risk factors and adopting a healthy lifestyle. Many strokes can be prevented through modifications in diet, exercise, and managing medical conditions. Adopting a healthy lifestyle is fundamental to stroke prevention. This includes a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins while limiting salt, sugar, and saturated fats to maintain healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Regular physical activity like brisk walking, swimming, or cycling helps keep a healthy weight and improve cardiovascular health. Quitting smoking significantly reduces stroke risk by preventing blood vessel damage and high blood pressure. Moderation in alcohol consumption is also important.

Medical management is vital for stroke prevention. Controlling blood pressure through regular monitoring and medication is crucial. Managing diabetes by keeping blood sugar levels under control also reduces stroke risk. Additionally, lowering high LDL cholesterol levels, which can lead to plaque buildup in arteries, is important.

Diagnosis

Prompt diagnosis of a stroke is critical for effective treatment and improving outcomes. The quicker a stroke is identified and treated, the better the chances of minimizing brain damage. The acronym "BEFAST" helps remember the sudden signs of a stroke: B for balance problems, E for eye vision or double vision issues, F for facial asymmetry, A for arm weakness,

S for speech disturbances, and T for time. If any of these symptoms are noted, it is crucial not to delay and to immediately transfer the patient to a stroke-ready facility. The golden period for effective medical therapy has been extended to 4.5 hours from onset of symptoms, and for clot retrieval procedures, it can extend up to 24 hours. Acting swiftly within these time frames significantly enhances the chances of minimizing stroke-related damage and improving patient outcomes.

Assessment of different types of strokes

Strokes are broadly categorized into two types based on their underlying causes: ischemic strokes, which account for approximately 80% of cases and occur due to blockage or narrowing of blood vessels supplying the brain; and haemorrhagic strokes, constituting about 20% of cases, which result from the rupture of a blood vessel in the brain.

Imaging tests, such as CT scans or MRIs, are used to determine the type of stroke and assess the extent of brain damage. Blood tests can identify conditions that increase stroke risk, like high cholesterol, elevated blood sugar levels, and blood clotting issues. An electrocardiogram detects heart conditions that may have contributed to the stroke.

Treatment

For an ischemic stroke, treatment includes clot-busting medications or mechanical thrombectomy. Thrombolytics, such as tissue plasminogen activator, can dissolve the clot if given within a few hours of symptom onset. Mechanical thrombectomy involves using a catheter to remove the clot from the blocked artery, typically within six hours of symptom onset.

For a haemorrhagic stroke, treatment approaches differ. Surgery, such as aneurysm clipping or arteriovenous malformation repair, can help stop the bleeding. Medications to lower blood pressure, control bleeding, and prevent seizures may also be administered. While strokes remain a significant health threat, understanding and managing risk factors, recognizing symptoms, and seeking immediate treatment can improve outcomes. A commitment to a healthy lifestyle and regular medical check-ups is key to prevention, and rapid response is essential for effective treatment. (The author is the Director and Head of Department, Neurology, Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida)

After Aleppo, Syrian insurgents advance to nearby province

Assad says he'll defeat 'them'

BEIRUT, Dec 1: Thousands of Syrian insurgents took over most of Aleppo on Saturday, establishing positions in the country's largest city and controlling its airport before expanding their shock offensive to a nearby province. They faced little to no resistance from government troops, according to fighters and activists.

A war monitor, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said the insurgents led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham seized control of Aleppo International airport, the first international airport to be controlled by insurgents. The fighters claimed they seized the airport and posted pictures from there.

Thousands of fighters also moved on, facing almost no opposition from government forces, to seize towns and villages in northern Hama, a province where they had a presence before being expelled by government troops in 2016. They claimed Saturday evening to have entered the city of Hama.

The swift and surprise offensive is a huge embarrassment for Syria's President Bashar Assad and raises questions about his armed forces' preparedness. The insurgent offensive launched from their stronghold in the country's north-west appeared to have been planned for years. It also comes at a time when Assad's allies were preoccupied with their own conflicts.

In his first public comments



since the start of the offensive, released by the state news agency Saturday evening, Assad said Syria will continue to "defend its stability and territorial integrity against terrorists and their supporters." He added that Syria is able to defeat them no matter how much their attacks intensify.

Turkey, a main backer of Syrian opposition groups, said its diplomatic efforts had failed to stop government attacks on opposition-held areas in recent weeks, which were in violation of a de-escalation agreement sponsored by Russia, Iran and Ankara. Turkish security officials said a limited offensive by the rebels was planned to stop government attacks and allow civilians to return, but the offensive expanded as Syrian government forces began to retreat from their positions.

The insurgents, led by the Salafi jihadi group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and including Turkey-backed fighters, launched their shock offensive on Wednesday. They first staged a two-pronged attack in Aleppo and the Idlib countryside, entering Aleppo two days later and securing a strategic town that lies on the highway that links Syria's largest city to the capital and the coast.

By Saturday evening, they seized at least four towns in the central Hama province and claimed to have entered the provincial capital. The insurgents staged an attempt to reclaim areas they controlled in Hama in 2017 but failed.

Syria's armed forces said in a statement Saturday that to absorb the large attack on Aleppo and save lives, it redeployed troops and

equipment and was preparing a counterattack. The statement acknowledged that insurgents entered large parts of the city but said they have not established bases or checkpoints. Later on Saturday, the armed forces sought to dispel what it said were lies in reference to reports about its forces retreating or defecting, saying the general command was carrying out its duties in "combatting terrorist organizations."

The return of the insurgents to Aleppo was their first since 2016, following a grueling military campaign in which Assad's forces were backed by Russia, Iran and its allied groups.

The 2016 battle for Aleppo was a turning point in the war between Syrian government forces and rebel fighters after 2011 protests against Assad's rule turned into an all-out war. After appearing to be losing control of the country to the rebels, the Aleppo battle secured Assad's hold on strategic areas of Syria, with opposition factions and their foreign backers controlling areas on the periphery.

The lightning offensive threatened to reignite the country's civil war, which had been largely in a stalemate for years.

Late on Friday, witnesses said two airstrikes hit the edge of Aleppo city, targeting insurgent reinforcements and falling near residential areas. The Observatory said 20 fighters were killed.

Insurgents were filmed outside

police headquarters, in the city center, and outside the Aleppo citadel, the medieval palace in the old city center, and one of the largest in the world. They tore down posters of Assad, stepping on some and burning others.

The push into Aleppo followed weeks of simmering low-level violence, including government attacks on opposition-held areas.

The offensive came as Iran-linked groups, primarily Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has backed Syrian government forces since 2015, have been preoccupied with their own battles at home. A ceasefire in Hezbollah's two-month war with Israel took effect Wednesday, the same day that Syrian opposition factions announced their offensive. Israel has also escalated its attacks against Hezbollah and Iran-linked targets in Syria during the last 70 days.

Insurgents raise flags over the Aleppo citadel.

Speaking from the heart of the city in Saadallah Aljibri square, opposition fighter Mohammad Al Abdo said it was his first time back in Aleppo in 13 years, when his older brother was killed at the start of the war.

"God willing, the rest of Aleppo province will be liberated" from government forces, he said.

There was light traffic in the city center on Saturday. Opposition fighters fired in the air in celebration but there was no sign of clashes or government troops present. (AP)

Trump threatens BRICS countries of 100% tariff if they drop dollar as currency

WASHINGTON, Dec 1: President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday warned BRICS countries against any move to replace the US dollar and has sought a commitment from the nine-member group that includes India, Russia, China, and Brazil.

BRICS, formed in 2009, is the only major international group of which the United States is not a part. Its other members are South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates. Over the past few years a few of its member countries, in particular Russia and China, are seeking an alternative to the US Dollar or create own BRICS currency. India has so far not been part of the move.

On Saturday, Trump warned BRICS nations against such a move.

"The idea that the BRICS Countries are trying to move away from the Dollar while we stand by and watch is OVER," the president-elect said in a post on Truth Social, a platform owned by him. "We require a commitment from these Countries that they will neither create a new BRICS Currency, nor back any other Currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar or, they will face 100% Tariffs and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful U.S. Economy," Trump warned.

"They can go find another 'sucker!' There is no chance that the BRICS will replace the US Dollar in International Trade, and any Country that tries should wave goodbye to America," he said. At the 2023 summit in South Africa, BRICS countries committed to study the feasibility of a new common currency. A proposal in this regard was made by the Brazil-

ian President Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva. India, an important pillar of BRICS, has said it is against de-dollarisation.

"...ask you about de-Dollarization as a possibility for the world. At times India has expressed interest in alternative currency. It can serve as a reserve mechanism. I wonder how do you see that right now what you see as the role of the dollar and these discussions about your national policy? India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said during his appearance at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace this fall.

"I think you have us confused for someone else because we have never actively targeted the dollar. That's not part of either our economic policy or our political or our strategic policy. Some others may have," Jaishankar said. "What I will tell you is a natural concern there. We often have trade partners who do not have dollars to take. So, we now have to look at whether we forgo dealings with them or do we find some settlement which works otherwise. So, there's no, I can say malicious intent vis-a-vis the dollar in business. We are trying to do our business," he said.

"Sometimes you make it difficult in the use of dollars. We have some trade partners with whom trade in dollars becomes difficult because of your policies. We have to obviously look for workarounds. But for us, as we spoke about rebalancing, we spoke about multiple obviously all of this is also going to reflect on currencies and economic needs," said the External Affairs Minister on October 1 this year. (PTI)

B'desh court to hear arrested Hindu leader's bail plea tomorrow

DHAKA, Dec 1: A court in Bangladesh has set December 3 as the date for the bail hearing of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das arrested last week on sedition charges, according to a media report.

Tuesday's hearing will be conducted by Metropolitan Sessions Judge Mohammad Saiful Islam, according to Additional Deputy Commissioner Mofizur Rahman of the Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

A Chattogram court official said that the date for the hearing had already been set but the announcement was delayed due to a boycott and work abstention by lawyers on Wednesday and Thursday.

The hearing will take place on December 3, bdnews24.com reported.

Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Monday for alleged sedition. He was denied bail and sent to jail by a Chattogram court on Tuesday, triggering protests by his supporters.

A lawyer was killed during violence in Bangladesh's southeastern port city of Chattogram over his arrest.

On October 30, a sedition case was filed against 19 people, including Das, at Chattogram's Kotwali Police Station, accusing them of disrespecting Bangladesh's national flag in Chattogram's New Market area during a rally of the Hindu community.

Bangladesh's authorities on Thursday ordered freezing for 30 days the bank accounts of 17 people associated with International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), including its former member Das. (PTI)

Social democrats gain, incumbents punished in Iceland's election

REYKJAVIK (ICELAND), Dec 1: Voters in Iceland appeared to have rejected incumbent parties in a parliamentary election, partial results showed Sunday, with a centre-left party leading the contest in the North Atlantic island nation.

With more than half of votes counted, the Social Democratic Alliance had won 15 seats in the 63-seat parliament, the Althingi, and secured more than 21 per cent of votes, according to national broadcaster RUV.

The conservative Independence Party had 14 seats and just under 20 per cent of votes, and the centrist Liberal Reform Party 11 seats and 16 per cent of votes.

Icelanders voted Saturday after disagreements over immigration, energy policy and the economy forced Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson to pull the plug on his coalition government and call an early election.

Counting was delayed in some areas by snowstorms that blocked roads and slowed delivery of ballot boxes to count centres.

Since the 2008 financial crisis devastated the economy and ushered in a new era of political instability, Iceland has been governed by multi-party coalitions of various hues.

Like many Western countries, Iceland has been buffeted by the rising cost of living and immigration pressures, and voters are taking it out on incumbent governments.

Benediktsson's Independence Party and its coalition partners in the outgoing government, the Progressive Party and the Left Greens, all appeared to have lost votes.

Iceland, a volcanic island nation tucked below the Arctic Circle with a population of less than 400,000, is proud of its democratic traditions. The Althingi, founded in 930 by Viking settlers, is arguably the world's oldest legislature. (AP)

Pak's ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi calls for national reconciliation

LAHORE, Dec 1: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party's deputy leader, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, has advocated for national reconciliation and national consensus to achieve political stability in the cash-strapped country amid tensions between his party and the ruling coalition.

Qureshi, the two-time former foreign minister, also demanded a meeting with party founder Imran Khan, who is lodged in Adiala Jail, so that he could present his point of view towards national reconciliation and national consensus, Dawn newspaper reported. Both Khan and Qureshi are currently detained in jail.

Qureshi, 68, was arrested in August last year under the Official Secrets Act for violating the secrecy of the official cable sent by the Pakistani embassy in the US to the foreign office when he was the foreign minister. Pakistan's Supreme Court ordered his release from jail. However, he was re-arrested in December 2023 in another case.

Talking to the media after his appearance in an

anti-terrorism court in Lahore on Saturday, Qureshi hoped that politically astute people in all parties would play a role in a national dialogue since a ban on his party would only complicate the situation.

The remarks by the vice chairman of PTI came amid reports that the government had purportedly been deliberating a ban on the party and a governor's rule in the PTI-run Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province following violent clashes in Islamabad between security personnel and Imran Khan's supporters last week demanding his release.

Khan's party members crossed barricades and attempted to reach high-security D-Chowk in Islamabad, where a midnight crackdown resulted in four deaths and over 50 injuries.

Qureshi cautioned that crushing his party would not be in the interest of Pakistan and that the purported plan to impose the governor's rule in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was sheer absurdity.

He said political leadership had no idea about

Bangladesh HC acquits all accused in 2004 Hasina attack case

DHAKA, Dec 1: The High Court here on Sunday scrapped the lower court's verdict and acquitted all accused, including former Bangladesh prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman and former state minister Lutfozzaman Babar, in a 2004 grenade attack in ousted premier Sheikh Hasina's rally. "The High Court annulled the trial court verdict and acquitted all convicts including Tarique Rahman," a spokesman for the attorney general's office said.

Rahman, 57, is the acting chairman of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Two cases -- one for murder and another under the Explosives Act -- were filed after a grenade attack on an Awami League rally at Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka left 24 people dead and nearly 300 injured. The HC bench of Justice AKM Asaduzzaman and Justice Syed Enayet Hossain acquitted all 49 accused and observed that the trial court's verdict in the cases was "illegal."

The High Court's verdict comes after the bench heard the death references and appeals related to the cases filed over the attack.

The trial court had delivered the judgement based on a confession by Mufti Abdul Hannan, the top leader of the banned Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami

(HuJI) militant outfit who was accused in the case. Hannan has been executed in connection with another case.

The High Court said the confessional statement had no evidential value as it was taken on force and not examined properly by the magistrate concerned.

On November 21, the bench kept the death references (trial court documents for confirmation of death sentences) and the appeals filed by the convicted accused in the cases as curia advisari vult (meaning the verdict will be delivered any day) after it concluded a hearing on those matters.

During the hearing on the death references and appeals, the defence lawyers for the accused requested the High Court to scrap the trial court verdict as there was no specific allegation against them.

Meanwhile, appearing for the State, Deputy Attorney Generals Md Jashim Sarker and Md Russell Ahammed requested the High Court bench to uphold the lower court verdicts in the cases as the allegations against the convicted accused were proved beyond reasonable doubt.

Hasina, then opposition leader, narrowly escaped the attack on August 21, 2004, but 24 people were

killed as several grenades were hurled when she was addressing a "rally against terrorism".

A Dhaka court on October 10, 2018, sentenced 19 people, including Babar, to death in the two cases filed in connection with the attacks.

Nineteen others, including Rahman, now in London, were given life imprisonment and 11 were handed different terms in prison.

Analysts previously said the incident changed Bangladesh's politics forever. In contrast, the Business Standard newspaper at the time said that "it was a premeditated barbaric act designed to wipe out the whole leadership of Awami League, including Hasina".

The FBI was called from the US to investigate the attack in which the assassins used grenades.

A former chief of Bangladesh's spy agency DGGFI testified as a witness later in the trial court and said the perpetrators were protected under directives of the higher authorities.

The High Court decision comes nearly four months after Hasina's Awami League regime was ousted in a student-led mass upsurge and she fled to India on August 5. Three days later Professor Muhammad Yunus took oath as the chief adviser of the interim government. (PTI)

Trump nominates Indian American Kash Patel as FBI Director

WASHINGTON, Dec 1: President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday nominated close confidante Kash Patel for the powerful position of Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, making him the highest ranking Indian American in his incoming administration.

"I am proud to announce that Kashyap 'Kash' Patel will serve as the next Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Kash is a brilliant lawyer, investigator, and 'America First' fighter who has spent his career exposing corruption, defending Justice, and protecting the American People," Trump announced on Truth Social, a social media platform he owns. Trump said Patel played a pivotal role in uncovering "the Russia, Russia, Russia Hoax," standing as an advocate for truth, accountability, and the Constitution. Patel, 44, served as chief of staff to the Acting United States Secretary of Defense in the last few weeks of the Trump Administration in 2017.

"Kash did an incredible job during my First Term, where he served as Chief of Staff at the Department of Defense, Deputy Director of National Intelligence, and Senior Director for Counterterrorism at the National Security Council. Kash has also tried over 60 jury trials," he said.

"This FBI will end the growing crime epidemic in America, dismantle the migrant criminal gangs, and stop the evil scourge of human and drug trafficking across the Border. Kash will work under our great Attorney General, Pam Bondi, to bring back Fidelity, Bravery, and Integrity to the FBI," Trump said.

New York-born Patel has his roots in Gujarat. However, his parents are from East Africa -- mother from Tanzania and father from Uganda. They came to the US from Canada in 1970. "We are Gujarati," he had told PTI in an earlier interview.

The family moved to Queens in New York -- often called as Little India -- in the late 70s. It is here that Patel was born and grew. Patel's parents are retired now and spend their time in both the US and Gujarat. After his schooling in New York and col-

lege in Richmond, Virginia, and law school in New York, Patel went to Florida where he was a state public defender for four years and then federal public defender for another four years.

"So, lots of trials, lots of international investigations, lots of time in court, understanding the federal system and trying cases and learning how to run investigations," he said.

From Florida he moved to Washington DC as a terrorism prosecutor at the Department of Justice. Here he was an international terrorism prosecutor for about three and a half years. During this period, he worked on cases all over the world, in America in East Africa as well as in Uganda and Kenya. While, still employed by the Department of Justice, he went as a civilian to join Special Operations Command at the Department of Defense. At the Pentagon, he sat as the Department of Justice's lawyer with Special Forces people and worked inter-agency collaborative targeting operations around the world.

After a year in the position, Congressman Davin Nunes, Chairman of the House Permanent Select on Intelligence Committee, pulled him as senior counsel on counterterrorism. After April 2017, he spearheaded the House Intelligence investigation of the House Intelligence Committee. It was here where he attracted media attention and played a key role in drafting a GOP memo, which, according to then-President Donald Trump, exposed the role of Democratic party and its leadership in the Russian investigation.

The New York Times described this as a "Kash Memo." Patel said that this was a "great team effort."

Patel is an Ice hockey fan and has been playing the sport since he was six. "I still play and I spend a lot of time volunteering coaching youth hockey in the area."

Landmark climate change case will open at top UN court

THE HAGUE, Dec 1: The top United Nations court will take up the largest case in its history on Monday, when it opens two weeks of hearings into what countries worldwide are legally required to do to combat climate change and help vulnerable nations fight its devastating impact.

After years of lobbying by island nations who fear they could simply disappear under rising sea waters, the UN General Assembly asked the International Court of Justice last year for an opinion on "the obligations of States in respect of climate change."

"We want the court to confirm that the conduct that has wrecked the climate is unlawful," Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh, who is leading the legal team for the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, told The Associated Press.

In the decade up to 2023, sea levels have risen by a global average of around 4.3 centimeters (1.7 inches), with parts of the Pacific rising higher still. The world has also warmed 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times because of the burning of fossil fuels.

Vanuatu is one of a group of small states pushing for international legal intervention in the climate crisis.

"We live on the front lines of climate change impact. We are witnesses to the destruction of our lands, our livelihoods, our culture and our human rights," Vanuatu's climate change envoy Ralph Regenvanu told reporters ahead of the hearing.

Any decision by the court would be non-binding and unable to directly force wealthy nations into action to help struggling countries. Yet it would be more than just a powerful symbol



since it could serve as the basis for other legal actions, including domestic lawsuits.

On Sunday, ahead of the hearing, advocacy groups will bring together environmental organizations from around the world. Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change -- who first developed the idea of requesting an advisory opinion -- together with World Youth for Climate Justice plan an afternoon of speeches, music and discussions.

From Monday, the Hague-based court will hear from 99 countries and more than a dozen intergovernmental organizations over two weeks. It's the largest lineup in the institution's nearly 80-year history.

Last month at the United Nations' annual cli-

mate meeting, countries cobbled together an agreement on how rich countries can support poor countries in the face of climate disasters. Wealthy nations have agreed to pool together at least \$300 billion a year by 2035 but the total is short of the \$1.3 trillion that experts, and threatened nations, said is needed.

"For our generation and for the Pacific Islands, the climate crisis is an existential threat. It is a matter of survival, and the world's biggest economies are not taking this crisis seriously. We need the ICJ to protect the rights of people at the front lines," Vishal Prasad, of Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change, told reporters in a briefing.

Fifteen judges from around the world will seek

Rio reflects on peace, development on Nagaland Statehood Day

Resolving the Naga political issue remains a top priority of the government

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 1: Nagaland commemorated its 62nd Statehood Day at Nagaland civil secretariat plaza in Kohima on Sunday with Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio reflecting on enduring sentiment of peace for development and development for peace.

Extending the statehood day greetings to the people of the state, Rio appealed to every citizen to strive together to take the state to greater heights.

Speaking on the initiatives taken for peace and overall development of the state, Rio said the state government submitted the draft memorandum of settlement-III on November 6 to the ministry of home affairs on the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation's demand for Frontier Nagaland Territory, emphasising a shared economic progress for all citizens and marking the beginning of a new era of partnership and collective growth.



On the Naga political issue, Rio said following decisions taken in the cabinet meeting of November 16, he, along with his cabinet colleagues, met Union home minister Amit Shah on November 21 to discuss various issues, including the recent press statement by NSCN (I-M) chief political negotiator Th. Muivah to end the ceasefire with the Government of India.

He said while resolving the Naga political issue remains a top

priority of the government, the formation of new Naga political groups and their internal divisions pose significant challenges.

Rio said after nearly two decades, elections to urban local bodies in the state were conducted, implementing 33% reservation for women.

He said the power department has finalised a comprehensive transmission plan with the Central Electricity Authority to establish a robust and reliable transmission

system and to meet the projected load demand of 360 mega watt of the state by 2030.

Rio added that the state government has also launched several initiatives to offer viable employment opportunities beyond the government sector.

Rio launched several important initiatives such as SMILE App for teacher and employee attendance management, Hornbill App, inaugurated the stalls and photo exhibition to showcase the activities and achievements and laid foundation stone of lighthouse school complexes during the statehood day celebration.

March past by police contingents, special performances by Rengma Chorale, Tsemnyu and Sangtam cultural group and war dances by Sumi cultural troupe, cultural dance by Khiamniungan cultural troupe, folk dance by Angami cultural troupe and a folk song by Phom cultural troupe marked the day.

Sikkim Democratic Front suspends leader for 'anti-party activities'

GANGTOK, Dec 1: Opposition Sikkim Democratic Front on Saturday suspended its leader J B Darnal for "anti-party activities", days after he withdrew a petition against Sikkim Krantikari Morcha president and Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang from the Supreme Court.

The party has decided to suspend his primary membership with immediate effect till further notice, SDF vice-president (Administrative & Legal Affairs) Dev Gurung said in a statement.

"During preliminary examination, it has been observed that Darnal engaged in anti-party activities by withdrawing the writ petition from the Supreme Court recently," it said.

The petition challenged the reduction of Tamang's disqualification period by the Election Commission from six years to one year in 2019.

The reduction of the disqualification period by almost five years helped Tamang contest the polls that year and become an elected chief minister of the Himalayan state months after his party, the SKM, dethroned the SDF.

Two SDF leaders had filed a

writ petition before the Supreme Court, challenging the EC's decision. The petitioners, however, had recently urged the top court to withdraw the case and the prayer was granted.

One of the petitioners, Bimal Dawari Sharma, has resigned from the party and is no longer an SDF member, while J B Darnal, who is SDF vice-president, filed an application for withdrawal of the petition without consulting the party, Gurung had said earlier.

Gurung said the party had neither passed a resolution for withdrawing the petition nor given any authorisation to Darnal to withdraw the case.

Another petition in this regard, however, is still pending in the apex court.

The EC in September 2019 reduced Tamang's disqualification period by almost five years under a provision of the electoral law, paving the way for him to contest the state assembly elections.

His disqualification period of six years, during which he was barred from contesting polls, began on August 10, 2018 - the day he completed a year's jail term in a corruption case. (PTI)

Rongmei bodies condemn gunfight

IMPHAL, Dec 1: The Rongmei Naga People's Organisation (RNPO-AMN), the Rongmei Naga Students' Organisation Manipur (RNSOM) and the Rongmei Naga Youth Organisation Manipur (RNYOM) strongly condemned the exchange of fire in civilian area at Shangji Rongmei Naga village on November 28, 2024 between the cadres of the NSCN-IM and the ZUF under Noney district, Manipur. "Many innocent villagers, both old and young, have fled the village and taken shelter at neighbouring Dolang, Longjang, Bitiang, Bishnupur and Imphal," a joint statement of the Rongmei organisations said. "It is time for school going children to appear for their final examinations. There is apprehension in the minds of both the parents and children that they may be disturbed," the statement added.

Therefore, the RNPO, the RNSOM and the RNYOM jointly appealed to both the NSCN-IM and the ZUF to respect the sentiment of the general public not to use public places like villages, bazar, towns and institutions as battle fields so as not to disturb public peace and tranquility in "our jurisdiction". Besides, both the NSCN-IM and the ZUF have en-

tered into ceasefire and "Cessation of Operation (CoO)" with Government of India and it is imperative on both sides to protect the life and property of innocent Naga public etc., the joint statement also said. "It is also pertinent to note that 99% Naga public and citizens follow Christianity as a result it is the Christmas season which observes the birth of the Prince of Peace on Lord Jesus Christ. Christmas and New Year are the biggest festivals of the Christians all over the world. Both sides should hold their olive branch in this season. We also appeal to both the Government of India and the Government of Manipur to maintain law and order in the region," the joint statement added.

"These three organisations also jointly condemned the abduction of Laishram Kamal Babu Singh, a construction worker from Leimakhong's 57th Mountain Division (which is in a highly fortified cantonment) by suspected Kuki militants", the Rongmei bodies added. They then appealed to both Government of India, the Government of Manipur and the security agencies to rescue Laishram Kamal Babu Singh at the earliest and hand him over to his aggrieved family. (NNN)

Tripura private hospital halts services for Bangladeshi patients



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 1: ILS Hospital in Agartala has temporarily suspended its services for Bangladeshi patients following protests over recent incidents in Bangladesh, including attacks on Hindu minorities and alleged desecration of the Indian national flag.

The decision was made after a group of protestors staged a demonstration outside the hospital earlier today. ILS Hospital and the Cancer Hospital in Agartala typically treat over 100 Bangladeshi patients each month, but this

move is set to disrupt the medical access for those who cross the border seeking healthcare.

A protestor present at the demonstration stated, "As Indians, we cannot remain silent about the atrocities being reported from Bangladesh. Attacks on the Hindu minority community and acts of disrespect toward our national flag are unacceptable. While the political situation in Bangladesh is an internal matter, such actions affect us deeply, and we must stand in solidarity with our people."

The protestor further alleged that children in Bangladesh were

being indoctrinated to disrespect the Indian flag and condemned the slogans and actions of extremist groups in the neighboring country. "We approached the hospital management, and they agreed to suspend services for Bangladeshi patients as a symbolic protest. This is not about religion or targeting any community; it is about standing up for justice and dignity," the protestor added.

In response to the protest, ILS Hospital CEO Dr Gautam Kundu said, "We understand and support the sentiments expressed by the protestors. After considering their concerns, we have decided to suspend services for Bangladeshi patients until the situation improves. This includes shutting down our dedicated desk for Bangladeshi patients. While the number of such patients had already declined in recent months, this step is being taken to respect the sentiments of the people."

The hospital's decision reflects growing tensions between the two countries amid rising concerns over the safety of minorities in Bangladesh and the reported disrespect shown to Indian national symbols.

Mobile internet ban extended till Dec 3 in nine districts of Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 1: The Manipur government on Sunday extended the suspension of mobile internet for two days in nine districts of the state till December 3.

An order issued by the home department said the suspension was extended in Imphal West, Imphal East, Kakching, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Pherzawl and Jiribam.

"The state government after reviewing the prevailing law and order situation and its correlation with the general operation of internet services has decided to continue suspension of mobile internet and mobile data services including VSATs and VPN services in the territorial jurisdiction of Imphal West, Imphal East, Kakching, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, Pherzawl and Jiribam of Manipur till 5.15 pm of December 3, in public interest,"

₹ 46 crore worth narcotics seized, 675 infiltrators apprehended in 2024 in Tripura



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 1: The Border Security Force (BSF) deployed in Tripura has seized narcotics and other contraband worth over ₹ 46 crore and detained 675 individuals, including Bangladeshi and Rohingya nationals, in various operations conducted throughout 2024.

Marking its 60th Raising Day on Sunday the BSF Tripura Frontier highlighted its pivotal role in ensuring border security and combating cross-border crimes. Over the years, the force has undertaken critical responsibilities such as counter-insurgency operations, maintaining border sanctity, and fostering harmony among border communities, often under harsh conditions in remote and malaria-prone areas.

In a press release, the BSF emphasized its achievements in maintaining vigilance and thwarting illegal activities along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Their efforts in 2024 led to the rescue of 1,383 cattle and the seizure of contraband, including 66,316 bottles of Phensedyl, 9,203.24 kgs of cannabis, 605,334 Yaba tablets, 1,222,894.5 kgs of Sugar, 496.26 grams of gold, 381.01 grams of brown sugar, 1 pistol (7.65 mm) and 210 items (ammunition/tinny arms) and 48,60,735 Taka Bangladeshi currency items worth ₹ 46,00,45,074 Crore.

The BSF also conducted joint operations with state and central agencies, leading to the destruction

of approximately 835,800 ganja saplings, spread across 301.31 acres, through uprooting and burning.

Additionally, they apprehended 55 Rohingya illegal migrants, 620 Bangladeshi nationals, and 260 Indian nationals during various border operations.

To foster goodwill among border populations, the BSF organized multiple Civic Action Programs, such as free medical camps, skill development training, sports tournaments, and cultural events. They held 700 village co-ordination meetings to enhance engagement in the border areas.

The BSF also hosted events like band performances, weapon exhibitions, motorcycle rallies, border visits for students, tree plantation drives, and blood donation camps. Special initiatives included yoga sessions on International Yoga Day and a Swachhta Abhiyan con-

ducted across their sectors, units, and Border Outposts (BOPs).

In a bid to strengthen bilateral ties, the BSF and Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) held a Border Coordination Conference in Shillong, Meghalaya, in July 2024. Discussions focused on improving collaboration between the two forces, addressing key issues, and enhancing the welfare of border communities.

During recent unrest in Bangladesh, the BSF coordinated with the BGB and other agencies to ensure the safe return of Indian students and workers, offering them necessary assistance. Additionally, the BSF extended support to Tripura residents during the recent flood crisis.

The BSF reiterated its commitment to safeguarding India's borders while promoting peace and development in the region.

Fatal accident claims 5 near West Bengal-Sikkim border

GANGTOK, Dec 1: Five people were killed and 15 others injured as a bus plunged into a 150-ft-deep gorge near the West Bengal-Sikkim border on Saturday afternoon, police said.

The accident happened between Andheri and Atal Setu, about 1 km from the Rangpo border, around 3 pm. The bus, heading to Gangtok from Siliguri, veered off the NH-10 and crash-landed on the bank of the Teesta river, they said.

The identities of the deceased and the injured were being ascertained, police said, adding that there was a woman among those dead.

The injured persons were taken to a health centre in Rangpo for treatment, they said.

Police said that the number of deaths is likely to go up as many injured passengers were very critical.

Among the passengers on the bus when the accident happened were some tourists, they said.



The bus, named 'Quality', used to operate daily between Siliguri in northern West Bengal and Gangtok. The cause of the accident is being investigated, police said. (PTI)

Sikkim delegation reaches Nagaland for Hornbill Festival



GANGTOK, Dec 1: A car and bike rally, comprising a 144-strong delegation from Sikkim, has reached Nagaland to take part in Hornbill Festival, a member of the team said recently. Sikkim has been declared as the partner state for Hornbill Festival, 2024.

Press Club of Sikkim general secretary Dilliram Dulal, who is a member of the media team, said the delegation has entered Nagaland, after a night halt in Guwahati, and would reach Kohima in the evening and stay the night there. On Sunday morning, they would go to Kisama, where Hornbill Festival will be organised.

Kisama is around 12 km from Kohima.

The delegation includes government officials, journalists and mem-

bers of self-help groups and social organisations, who would take part in the annual festival in Nagaland from December 1-10.

Flagging off the rally from Ridge Park here on Friday, Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang said, "This collaboration is a testament to our shared cultural legacy and the spirit of unity among the states."

The delegation will highlight the 50 years of statehood of Sikkim.

Tamang urged the delegation to act not as guests but as hosts, as Sikkim is a partner state, and to reduce any burden on the organisers, besides gaining positive insights and experiences which could be implemented in the Himalayan state.

The delegation would return after completion of the event on December 10. (PTI)

Doctors must lead way in shaping healthier future: Tripura CM

Government is undertaking various initiatives to protect children's health and build a healthy society

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 1: Chief Minister Manik Saha said recently emphasised the role of doctors in fulfilling their social responsibilities by supporting government initiatives aimed at protecting children's health and shaping a better future generation.

"Pediatricians play a vital role in safeguarding children's health. It is expected that they will take on social responsibility in implementing various government programs for the well-being of children and significantly contribute to developing a strong future generation," said Saha while addressing the 30th Annual State Conference of TRI-PEDICON at the IMA House, Agartala. At the event, the Indian



Academy of Pediatrics Tripura State Branch honored Dr Alekhya Dasgupta, a senior physician and pediatrician, with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Additionally, Dr Himani Debnath, who secured the highest marks in Pediatrics in

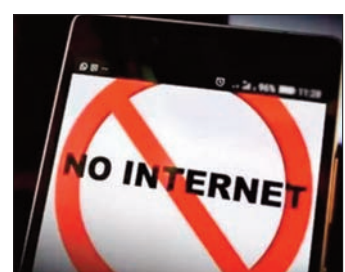
the 2024 MBBS examination, was also felicitated.

The chief minister highlighted the significant improvements in the state's health system. "The government is undertaking various initiatives to protect children's health

and build a healthy society. Pediatricians are committed to enhancing the physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being of children, and their role in fostering these aspects is invaluable," he stated.

Saha, who also serves as the health minister of Tripura, mentioned the launch of the statewide School Health Mission as a pilot project in 125 Vidya Jyoti schools. This program aims to create a healthy school environment by promoting awareness of health issues among students.

He explained that the initiative will focus on six key pillars, with the primary objective of fostering a health-conscious environment within schools.



the order said. Internet services have been temporarily suspended since November 16 after violence broke out in the state following the recovery of dead bodies of three women and three children in Jiri and Barak rivers in Manipur and Assam respectively.

The Manipur government had conditionally lifted the suspension on broadband services (ILL and FTTH) on November 19, considering the hardships faced by common people, healthcare facilities,

educational institutions and other offices.

The order had, however, stated that subscribers should not accept any connection other than the one allowed, and no wifi or hotspots should be allowed.

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

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year. (PTI)

Delay in govt formation 'insult' to Maharashtra: Aaditya Thackeray

Oath-taking ceremony of the new Mahayuti government will take place on December 5

MUMBAI, Dec 1: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Sunday claimed the Mahayuti's inability to decide on a chief minister and form government more than a week after the announcement of assembly poll results was an "insult" to Maharashtra.

In a post on X, Thackeray also asked why President's rule has not yet been enforced in the state.

Targeting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the largest constituent of the Mahayuti, Thackeray claimed that to declare the swearing-in date unilaterally without even staking claim to form government is "pure anarchy".

The Mahayuti alliance of the BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP retained power with a landslide victory in the assembly elections, the results of which were announced on November 23.

The oath-taking ceremony of the new Mahayuti government will take place on December 5 evening and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend it, state BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule said on Saturday.



There has been no announcement yet on who would be the chief minister.

Devendra Fadnis, who has been chief minister twice and was deputy CM in the last Eknath Shinde-led government, was the frontrunner for the post, according to BJP sources.

Maharashtra's caretaker Chief Minister and Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde

headed to his native village Dare in Satara district on Friday, amid speculation that he was not happy with the way the new state government was shaping up.

Hitting out at the Mahayuti, Thackeray in a post on X said, "To not be able to decide on a chief minister, and form government, for more than a week after result day, is not just an insult to Maharashtra

(for taking our state so lightly) but also to the assistance provided by their dearest Election Commission," Thackeray said.

It seems that rules only apply to the opposition parties, and not for some "special ones", the Shiv Sena (UBT) legislature party leader said in his post.

"To declare the swearing in date, unilaterally, without even staking claim to form government and show numbers to the Hon'ble Governor, is pure anarchy," he claimed.

"And in all this, the caretaker cm is on a mini vacation, as per the phase of the moon, as we've regularly observed earlier too," Thackeray said.

In the meanwhile, Maharashtra seems like no priority for those who could form government. They're enjoying their Delhi trips, he said sarcastically.

"Presidential rule? Shouldn't it have been in place by now? Wouldn't it have been, had the opposition had the numbers, with a decision pending?" asked the Sena (UBT) leader, who retained his Worli seat in Mumbai in the recently-concluded assembly polls. (PTI)

Farmer leaders to lead first group of protesters marching towards Delhi on December 6: Pandher



CHANDIGARH, Dec 1: Farmer leader from Punjab Sarwan Singh Pandher on Sunday said a group of farmers, led by their leaders, will march towards Delhi on foot on December 6 even as he lashed out at the Centre for not holding any talks with the protesting farmers for resolving their issues, including a legal guarantee on the MSP.

Farmers under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13, after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces.

Addressing reporters here on Sunday, KMM leader Pandher said farmers have been protesting at Shambhu and Khanauri for 293 days.

Sharing details about their plan to march towards the capital from Shambhu, Pandher said the first "jatha" (group) of farmers will be led by Satnam Singh Pannu, Surinder Singh Chautala, Surjit Singh Phul and Baljinder Singh.

The group that will carry essential items with it will head towards Delhi peacefully, he said.

The first group of farmers, during their march to Delhi, will stop at the Jaggi city centre in Ambala, the Mohra grain market, Khanpur Jattan and Pipli in Haryana, he said.

Pandher said the farmers will walk every day from 9 am to 5 pm and spend the nights on the road.

He added that the number of farmers in the first group will be shared later.

Lashing out at the BJP-led Centre, Pandher said it has not held any talks with the

protesting farmers since February 18.

Accusing the Centre of running away, he said, "They have stopped the talks with us."

"Contract farming is not acceptable to us. We are demanding a legal guarantee on the MSP (minimum support price) for crops," he said.

A panel of three then Union ministers -- Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal and Nityanand Rai -- held talks with the farmer representatives on February 18. The farmers had then rejected the Centre's proposal of buying pulses, maize and cotton at the MSP by government agencies for five years.

Farmer leader Guramneet Singh Mangat said when the first group of farmers starts marching towards Delhi on December 6, farmer bodies in Kerala, Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu will take out marches towards their respective state assemblies.

Meanwhile, SKM (non-political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal continued his fast unto death at the Khanauri border point.

Farmers, who have been seeking a legal guarantee on the MSP, have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points since February 13.

The protesting farmers had attempted to march towards Delhi on February 13 and February 21 but were stopped by the security forces deployed at the capital's borders.

Besides a legal guarantee on the MSP, the protesters are demanding farm loan waiver, pension for farmers and farm labourers, no hike in the electricity tariff, withdrawal of police cases and "justice" for the victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence, reinstatement of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 and compensation to the families of the farmers who died during a previous agitation in 2020-21. (PTI)

Our fight is for the spirit of our country, says Priyanka Gandhi

WAYANAD, Dec 1: Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday launched a scathing attack against the BJP-led Centre, saying that today the fight is against the force that is weakening the rights of the people and handing over them to a few "businessmen friends."

Addressing a meeting in Mananthavady here, she said, "We are fighting against a force that is doing everything in its power to destroy the institutions upon which our country was built."

"Today we are fighting for the spirit of our nation, for the soul of India."

The Congress general secretary further said the fight was for the power and resources of this country to belong rightfully to its people.

Recalling the massive landslides that hit the hill district on July 30, Priyanka said she has seen many tragedies.

"And because of our professions, we go across India when there are tragedies, we meet people."

"But seldom, do I see the kind of pain and suffering that I saw when I came here. Nature's fury is concentrated in a small area. All the houses in that area were washed away, all the families were washed away, and all the livelihoods were washed away. And yet in the middle of this devastation, and the middle of the pain and suffering I saw with my own eyes the humanity of all of you."

You did not ask religion, you did not ask caste, you just did whatever you could do to help those who are suffering," she said.

"The symbol of true values that India stands for lies here in Wayanad," she added.

"I want each one of you to know that you are my responsibility. That I take your love with complete seriousness and it is my duty to fight for you to give you a better future in the next five years and ahead," she said adding that she came two days here to thank them for the love and affection they have given to her. "But after this, my real work will begin and we will work together to resolve all the issues that

you are facing."

Priyanka, who arrived for the first time in the hill district after being elected, said her first task is to start learning Malayalam.

"Yesterday in one of these meetings, somebody from the crowd said that I will come back. So, I promise to come so many times that you will get fed up with me"

"So please get used to seeing me," she added.

Responding to the queries from the crowd about whether she will stay here, Priyanka said, "I will definitely look into it."

She said she would look for a nice place to stay here.

In her address at Sulthan Bathery, the Congress MP alleged that the BJP-led union government politicized the massive landslides that hit Wayanad four months ago. "People who are in power should recognise that a great tragedy has taken place and not play politics with it."

I personally also visited people suffering from very similar circumstances in Himachal Pradesh for about a year and a half... the Centre was not sending funds to rehabilitate those who are suffering.

"Also, the state government and the central government are dragging their feet and not doing what is required to help the victims," she alleged.

According to the schedule, Priyanka will also address a similar gathering at Kalpetta.

Priyanka, who is on a two-day Wayanad visit, accompanied by Rahul Gandhi, participated in public meetings at Mukkam in Thiruvambadi, Kaulai in Nikambur, Wandoor and Edavanna in Kozhikode and Malappuram districts which falls under the Wayanad Lok Sabha segment on Saturday.

Priyanka had scored her maiden electoral victory by winning the Wayanad Lok Sabha bypoll with a huge margin of 4,10,931 votes, which is bigger than the lead her brother Rahul secured when he won from the constituency during the Lok Sabha general elections held early this year. (PTI)

Parl panel seeks details of properties in 'unauthorised' occupation of state govts



NEW DELHI, Dec 1: The parliamentary committee scrutinising the Waqf (Amendment) Bill has sought details from various state governments about the veracity and updated details of Waqf properties which, according to the Sachar committee, they had occupied in an unauthorised manner, sources said.

The parliamentary committee, whose tenure has been extended by Lok Sabha till the last day of the next Budget Session, has also sought from the states details of the properties claimed by Waqf boards exercising Section 40 of the Waqf Act. Section 40, an amendment effected during the Congress-led UPA government's tenure in 2013, is one of the most hotly contested features of the existing law as it has given Waqf boards the power to decide if any property belongs to the Waqf or not.

The proposed law, which has faced flack from opposition parties and various Muslim groups for its alleged attempts to interfere in religious matters, has sought to curb this power while making a slew of other changes in the existing Act.

The sources said the parliamentary panel has decided to get an update on the points made by the Sachar committee on the Waqf properties that are allegedly in unauthorised occupation of state governments or their official agencies.

The Sachar committee was informed by various state Waqf boards during 2005-06 about the alleged unauthorised occupation.

The parliamentary panel has been collecting information from states through the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Sources said the panel headed by BJP MP Jagdambika Pal has noted that there were 316 such properties in Delhi, 60 in Rajasthan and 42 in Karnataka reported to the Sachar committee in 2005-06.

While 53 of them were in Madhya Pradesh,

60 were in Uttar Pradesh and 53 in Odisha.

The committee has sought updates from all these six states, the sources said, adding that the panel has got information from several other states.

"The chief ministers of the above states may kindly investigate in detail into the veracity of this information in the Sachar Committee Report... and update this Committee in detail," a source said, citing the communication. State governments have also been urged to share details of the cases where their agencies are involved in a legal dispute with Waqf boards over ownership or possession of any property, with the panel noting that the Sachar Committee had stated its list was not exhaustive. The UPA government constituted the Sachar Committee in 2005 to study the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India.

It submitted its report in 2006 highlighting the poor status of Muslims on all these indicators as it recommended a host of measures.

Lok Sabha had on November 28 adopted a resolution to extend the tenure of the Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill till the last day of the Budget session of Parliament next year.

The parliamentary panel's meetings have become a political battleground, with the ruling BJP and opposition members vociferously debating the changes proposed by the government.

Opposition members had been calling for extending its tenure, which was to end on November 29, and the committee took a unanimous decision to seek more time despite Pal's earlier assertion that he was ready with the draft report.

He has asserted that he has accommodated the views of every opposition member, rejecting their allegation of "bulldozing" the proceedings of the panel's meetings. (PTI)

PDP chief calls for united fight to counter polarization, repeat of 1947-like situation

JAMMU, Dec 1: Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday asserted that the majority of Hindus in the country are secular and called for a united fight against the forces trying to divide the people on religious lines, warning against a repeat of the 1947-like riots.

"The situation in the country is not good. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Sardar (Vallabhbhai) Patel, (B R) Ambedkar made this country home for Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Gandhi even sacrificed his life for it," she said.

"However, people are being pitted against each other (on the basis of religion) and I am afraid we are being pushed towards the 1947-like situation," Mehbooba, a former chief minister, said addressing a gathering of party workers here.

Attacking BJP, she said the government has failed to provide jobs, education, good hospitals and roads to the people and is diverting the attention of the people by targeting mosques on the pretext of finding temples beneath.

"This is exactly what is happening in the country. Four innocent youth were recently killed in Sambhal (UP) but who will speak for them. Anyone doing so will be put in jail like Umar Khalid who is behind the bars for the last four years. In the prevailing condi-



tions, there is no one to listen," Mehbooba said.

The PDP leader referred to a petition claiming that the Ajmer Sharif Dargah was built over a Shiva temple and said people of different faiths including Hindus and Sikhs visit the 800-year-old shrine which is a glaring example of "Ganga-Jamuni" culture.

"They also want to dig up this shrine in search of a temple... For how long will this continue?" she said.

The PDP president said the people have to stand up to counter this otherwise what is the difference between Bangladesh and our country.

"Our Hindu brothers are facing oppression

in Bangladesh but if we do the same thing with minorities here (in India), then what is the difference? We have such a great country, known by the world over for its secular character," she said.

Mehbooba said it was former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who helped Bangladesh to achieve independence.

"Majority of Hindus in our country are secular and I have no doubt about this. We have to stand up to counter this emerging situation as we have to live together and there is no other way," she said.

She also referred to the recent assembly results in the country and said "there is something wrong somewhere."

Country has transformed under BJP leadership, but oppn has not: Nadda



INDORE, Dec 1: The country has transformed under the leadership of Bharatiya Janata Party but opposition parties have not changed yet, Union Minister JP Nadda said on Sunday.

He was speaking at an event organised in Indore in Madhya Pradesh to mark World AIDS Day.

"I do not want to indulge in politics today, but many

people say nothing has changed in the country. I just tell them that your status has not changed, everything else has changed. You are in opposition and will stay like this in future also," the BJP president said.

He cited India's successful campaign against COVID-19 and asserted that strong medical infrastructure has been developed in

different areas of the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"If someone can see how the country changes, it is a very good thing. I often say that I can improve your eyesight, but I can't give you vision. Now if someone does not have vision, what should I do? Intelligence is required for vision," the Union health and family welfare minister emphasised.

Taking a swipe at previous governments, Nadda said it took 40 years for tetanus medicine to come to India, 20 to 25 years for TB medicine, 20 years for diphtheria medicine and 100 years for Japanese encephalitis medicine. (PTI)

Raised law and order issues hoping for action from Centre, I was attacked instead: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday targeted the BJP-led central government over alleged inaction on law and order issues here, claiming that instead of taking action against criminals, an attack was orchestrated on him during his November 30 padyatra in the city. The BJP is yet to respond to the allegations.

Speaking at a press conference, Kejriwal said, "The liquid thrown on me was harmless, but it could have been dangerous. This is the third attack on me in the last 35 days."

The former chief minister also accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of sending the message that complainants, rather than offenders, will face arrest.

Criticising the arrest of AAP MLA Naresh Balyan, Kejriwal claimed that it sent a message to the people of Delhi and the city's gangsters that those who raise their voices against crimes would face jail while the gangsters themselves would be protected.

"Instead of taking action against the criminals, Amit Shah and the BJP have attacked me and arrested my MLA," Kejriwal said, stressing that his criticisms were about the worsening security situation in

Delhi, not political gamesmanship. The AAP leader also questioned how the people of Delhi could rely on the central government for their safety when their concerns were being dismissed.

"After all, to whom will the people of Delhi go for their safety? Will they be safe by arresting me and attacking my MLA," Kejriwal asked, urging Shah to take responsibility for addressing the city's crime crisis.

The AAP supreme further challenged the Union home minister, saying, "If you have the courage, arrest the gangsters who are terrorising Delhi. Arrest those who are committing murders, rapes and extortion. The people of Delhi want concrete action against the criminals who have taken over the city."

In a security scare on Saturday, a man splashed some liquid on Kejriwal during his 'padyatra' in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar.

Targeting the saffron party, AAP leaders alleged that the BJP was resorting to dishonest means as it fears a third consecutive defeat in the upcoming Delhi assembly polls. With the Delhi assembly elections due in February next year, political tensions between AAP and the BJP over law and order are intensifying. (PTI)

Ex-bureaucrats write to PM on 'ideological assault'

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Days after a local court ordered a survey of the Ajmer Sharif dargah, a group of former bureaucrats and diplomats has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking his intervention to halt all "illegal and pernicious" activities that are an "ideological assault" on India's civilisational heritage and pervert the idea of an inclusive country.

Stating that he alone can halt "all illegal, pernicious activities", the group has reminded Modi that he himself had sent "chadars" on the occasion of the annual Urs of the 12th-century saint, Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, as a homage to his message of peace and harmony.

The group of nearly half-a-dozen former bureaucrats and diplomats, including former Delhi lieutenant governor Najeeb Jung, former chief commissioner of India to the United Kingdom Shiv Mukherjee, former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi, former vice-chief of Army staff Lieutenant General Zamereuddin Shah and former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) deputy governor Ravi Viru Gupta, wrote to the prime minister on November 29 about unknown fringe groups claiming to represent Hindu interests and demanding archaeological surveys of medieval mosques and dargahs to prove the previous existence of temples at these sites.

"Despite the clear provisions of the Places of Worship Act, the courts too seem to respond to such demands with undue alacrity and



AJMER DARGAH SURVEY

haste," they said. The contents of the letter were confirmed by two of the signatories to it.

"It appears unimaginable, for example, that a local court should order a survey on the 12th-century dargah of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti -- one of the most sacred Sufi sites in Asia not just for Muslims but for all Indians who are proud of our syncretic and pluralist traditions.

"The very thought that a mendicant saint, a fakir, who was an integral part of the Sufi/Bhakti movement unique to the Indian sub-continent and a paragon of compassion, tolerance and harmony, could have destroyed any temple to assert his authority is ridiculous," they wrote.

On November 27, a civil court in Ajmer issued notices to the Ajmer

Dargah committee, the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), after a petition was filed by Vishnu Gupta, national president of the Hindu Sena, claiming that the dargah was originally a Shiva temple.

Successive prime ministers, including Modi, have sent "chadars" on the occasion of the annual Urs of the saint.

"An ideological assault on this uniquely syncretic site is an assault on our civilisational heritage and perverts the very idea of an inclusive India that you yourself seek to reinvigorate," the group wrote to the prime minister.

"Society cannot progress nor your dream of a developed Bharat can come to fruition in the face of such disturbances," the letter added.

Calling themselves a group of independent citizens, the former bu-

reaucrats said over the last decade, relations between communities, particularly Hindus and Muslims and to an extent Christians, have strained in India, leaving the minority communities in "extreme anxiety and insecurity".

They went on to recall the gory memories of Partition and the riots in its aftermath, as well as the periodic gruesome communal riots that strained inter-communal relations.

"However, the incidents of the last 10 years are markedly different in as much as they show the clearly partisan role of many of the state governments concerned and their administrative machinery. This, we believe, is unprecedented," they wrote.

What started as incidents of bullying or beating up Muslim men on charges of carrying beef, grew into lynchings of innocent people within their homes, followed by Islamophobic hate speeches with clearly genocidal intent, they said.

In the recent past, there have been calls for boycotting Muslim business establishments and eateries, non-renting of premises to Muslims and unrestrained bulldozing of Muslim houses at the behest of chief ministers themselves, led by a ruthless local administration, the former diplomats added.

About 1.54 lakh establishments have been hit and lakhs rendered homeless or bereft of their places of business, they said, adding that in most cases, the affected parties are Muslims.

"Such activity is truly unprecedented and has shaken the confidence not just of these minorities but indeed of all secular Indians here and abroad," they said. "As if these incidents were not enough, the latest provocation is of unknown fringe groups, claiming to represent Hindu interests, demanding archaeological surveys on medieval mosques and dargahs to prove the existence of ancient Hindu temples on the sites where these have been built," they said.

Stating that he alone can bring "all illegal, pernicious activities" to a halt, they urged the prime minister to ensure that chief ministers and the administrations under them adhere to the letter of law and the Constitution as any "dereliction in their duties will cause untold misery".

"There is immediate need for an interfaith meeting under your chairmanship where you as the prime minister of an inclusive Bharat should give out a message that India remains a land for all, where faiths have existed together and in harmony for centuries and that no sectarian forces will be permitted to disturb this uniquely pluralistic and diverse legacy," the former diplomats said.

"Sir, time is of the essence and we urge you to reassure all Indians, especially the minority communities, that your government will be firm in its resolve to maintain communal amity, harmony and integration," they added. (PTI)

Sambhal mosque ASI files response in court, seeks control, management of Mughal-era structure



SAMBHAL (UP), Dec 1: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has submitted its response in a court -- which had allowed a survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid here -- seeking control and management of the Mughal-era mosque as it is a protected heritage structure.

Representing the ASI, lawyer Vishnu Sharma said the agency submitted its counterargument in the court on Friday, stating that it faced resistance from the mosque's management committee and locals in conducting surveys of the site.

He said the ASI also highlighted an incident from January 19, 2018, when an FIR was filed against the mosque's management committee for installing steel railings on the mosque's steps without proper authorisation.

The mosque, notified as an ASI-protected monument in 1920, is under the purview of the agency and as such, public access to the structure should be permitted, provided it adheres to ASI regulations, Sharma said.

The ASI argued that control and management of the monument, including any structural modifications, must remain with it.

It also raised concerns that unauthorised changes to the mosque's structure by the management committee are unlawful and should be restricted.

The court is expected to deliberate on the matter in the coming days.

Violence erupted in Sambhal on November 24 during a court-or-

dered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid there, killing four people and injuring many others.

A three-member judicial commission has been formed to probe the violence and it is likely to visit Sambhal on Sunday.

Moradabad Divisional Commissioner Aunjaneya Kumar Singh said, "Two members of the commission formed by the Uttar Pradesh government reached here on Saturday. The third member will join them on Sunday as they head to Sambhal."

The survey was linked to a petition claiming that a Harihar temple once stood at the site of the mosque.

The commission formed via a notification on November 28 has been directed to complete its probe within two months. Any extension of this timeline will require government approval.

The commission headed by retired Allahabad High Court judge Devendra Kumar Arora comprises ex-IAS officer Amit Mohan Prasad and Arvind Kumar Jain, a retired IPS officer.

It has been entrusted with the task of examining whether the clashes were spontaneous or part of a well-planned criminal conspiracy, as well as the preparedness of the police and the administration in handling the situation.

The commission will also analyse the circumstances leading to the violence and recommend measures to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future. (PTI)

Patients suffering from rare disease await funds for treatment

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Patients suffering from life-threatening rare genetic 'Lysosomal Storage Disorders, who were receiving treatment at the AIIMS here, are fighting for survival after exhausting the government's one-time funding of ₹ 50 lakh under the National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD) 2021.

Despite the Delhi High Court's intervention on October 4, directing the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) to release immediate funds, no action has been taken, the family members of the patients said.

The Lysosomal Storage Disorders Support Society of India (LSDSS), a support group advocating for rare-disease patients, has appealed to the MoHFW to support sustainable treatment for Gaucher disease patients.

Ashok Kumar (3), Abdul Rehman (10) and Alishba Khan (6) are suffering from a life-threatening rare disease known as Gaucher that requires continuous treatment -- Enzyme Replacement Therapy (ERT). The discontinuation of their treatment by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) due to lack of funds has led to severe health complications, putting their lives at risk.

The situation is particularly dire for Khan. "My child's health was improving but her treatment was stopped in August, due to which her spleen is getting enlarged again. She is in constant pain and I feel powerless," her father said.

He added that when his daughter's treatment was stopped, she suffered from loss of hearing and appealed for immediate release of funds from the ministry to save her

life. Kumar, a resident of Rajasthan, also suffers from Gaucher disease. His father said his treatment was discontinued by the AIIMS in August. "The government funding gave us hope, but now we do not know what needs to be done. The delay is putting my child's life at risk," Kumar's father said.

Similarly, the father of Rehman, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, said, "My son's condition worsens daily due to the discontinuation of his treatment since September. He has been getting episodes of fever and cough as his health conditions have become unpredictable. I urge the government to immediately release funds for my son."

LSDSS president Manjit Singh said the transformative nature of therapy for Gaucher patients has been clearly demonstrated, with ERT achieving a perfect 10/10 in the National Rare Disease Committee's (NRDC) benchmarking report.

"However, despite the proven efficacy, only 25 per cent of eligible Gaucher patients are currently receiving treatment. This stark gap highlights the urgent need for prioritising sustainable funding mechanisms and streamlined treatment protocols to ensure that no patient is left waiting for life-saving care," Singh said.

The NPRD 2021 offers a one-time financial support of ₹ 50 lakh to eligible patients.

However, the lack of provisions for sustainable funding beyond this cap has left many families in limbo.

The Delhi High Court's October directive had called for urgent measures to address these gaps, yet the inaction by the ministry highlights the systemic neglect of rare-disease patients. (PTI)

EC files police complaint against man over claim

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Mumbai Cyber Police has lodged an FIR against a man who claimed he could hack EVMs by isolating machine frequency. Election Commission (EC) officials said.

The complaint in the matter was lodged by the Maharashtra chief electoral officer (CEO), alleging that the claims made by the accused, Syed Shuja, were false, baseless and unsubstantiated, they said.

The FIR was registered under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the IT Act at Cyber Police Station, Dakshin Mumbai on

November 30 "against the person in this video", the CEO said.

The EC action came after some social media users shared a video in which a man is heard claiming that he could hack and tamper with electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the Maharashtra elections by isolating the machine's frequency.

EC officials here identified the man as Syed Shuja.

In 2019, the EC ordered filing of an FIR against Shuja for making similar claims.

"In a similar incident involving false claims, an FIR was lodged on

the direction of the Election Commission against the same person in 2019 in Delhi who is hiding in some another country," the office of the Maharashtra CEO said in a post on X.

Delhi and Mumbai police are actively investigating the case and taking necessary steps to identify and apprehend anyone in India who is in contact with "such individuals" or complicit in these "malicious activities", an EC official said.

Such actions are a serious offence and no one involved will be spared, the official said. (PTI)

BSF deploys 2 more battalions in Jammu to check infiltration from Pakistan

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: The Border Security Force (BSF) has completed the deployment of two fresh battalions, comprising more than 2,000 personnel, in the Jammu region to better plug infiltration from across the Pakistan front and check the recent spurt of terrorist activities in the area.

Officials in the security establishment told PTI that the new troops of these units have been deployed "in depth areas" as the "second line of defence" just behind the BSF border deployment along the international border (IB) with Pakistan. These two BSF battalions were recently withdrawn from the anti-Naxal operations theatre of Odisha and have now been deployed fully in the Jammu region. This was a task to be accomplished before the

onset of winters when securing the IB against infiltration from Pakistan becomes challenging, the sources said.

The personnel of the new units have been deployed around the Samba area, some other vulnerable patches in the Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir and along the Punjab boundary that abuts Jammu, they said.

Multiple deployment points aided by CCTV cameras have also been created, the sources said. The force guards more than 2,289 km of the international boundary that runs along Jammu, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat along India's western flank. The Jammu region accounts for 485 km of this border interspersed with dense forests and mountainous terrain. (PTI)

Pope Francis cites Sree Narayana Guru's teachings to combat global intolerance

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Dec 1: Sree Narayana Guru's message of universal human unity is pertinent today when hate all across is on the rise, Pope Francis has said.

He said the social reformer's message is "pertinent to our world today, where we witness growing instances of intolerance and hatred between peoples and nations."

The Pope made the remarks while addressing the faith leaders and representatives gathered on Saturday in the Vatican to mark the centenary celebrations of the all-religion conference organised by the Sree Narayana Guru in Aluva in Ernakulam district.

The Pope said the troubled state of the world today can partly be attributed to the

failure to uphold the teachings of religions.

The Guru, he said, dedicated his life to promote a social and religious awakening by his message that all human beings, regardless of their ethnicity or their religious and cultural traditions, are members of the single human family.

"He insisted that there should be no discrimination against anyone in any way and at any level," the Pope said.

"Sadly, displays of discrimination and exclusion, tensions and violence-based differences of ethnic or social origin, race, colour, language and religion are a daily experience of many individuals and communities, most especially among the poor, the powerless and those without a voice," he said. (PTI)

Winters of despair: How Delhi's annual pollution curbs affect construction workers

Nearly 3,500 projects completed under PMGSY in J&K

JAMMU, Dec 1: Nearly 3,500 projects, including 217 bridges, have been completed under the centrally sponsored Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) over the past two decades in Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Sunday.

The information was given at a meeting chaired by Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Amit Shukla here to conduct a comprehensive review of the implementation of the PMGSY in the Union territory.

The review focused on expediting project completion, ensuring adherence to quality standards and enhancing rural connectivity across the region, the officials said.

The PMGSY was launched in Jammu and Kashmir during 2001-02 with the aim to provide all-weather connectivity to unconnected habitations in rural areas with a population of more than 250 as per the 2001 Census.

A total of 3,742 projects, including 305 bridges, having a road length of 20,801 kilometres have been sanctioned for J&K since the inception of the PMGSY. Besides this, 2,140 habitations having a population of 250-plus as per the 2001 census have been approved for providing connectivity, the officials said.

Out of the sanctioned programme, 3,429 projects, including 217 bridges, have been completed

so far, they said, adding out of the targeted habitation of 2,140, 2,129 have been connected so far, thereby incurring an expenditure of ₹ 12,650 crore. The officials said the meeting was informed that the implementation of the PMGSY in J&K has been given focused attention during the last five years, thereby giving significant strides in enhancing rural connectivity, particularly in remote and hilly regions, aligning with the vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas".

Shukla emphasized the need for a daily monitoring mechanism to meet project timelines and address challenges effectively. He issued specific instructions to ensure uncompromising quality standards in road construction, underscoring the importance of creating durable and safe infrastructure for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

He issued directions for the completion of all PMGSY projects as per the sunset date fixed by the ministry. Earlier on Saturday, the joint secretary conducted an on-ground review of critical road and bridge infrastructure projects under the PMGSY in the Jammu region.

The Union joint secretary, along with senior government officers, visited Kalas Kullian to Chak Harni Road and also inspected the ongoing work on a bridge over the Jagti Bamyal road. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: "When they stop our work, we don't just lose the wages. It's the food on our plates and the little we try to save for our children's future," says Raju Singh, a mason from Bihar.

He was one of thousands of migrant and local construction workers rendered jobless following the November 11 ban on constructions, prompted by the Delhi-NCR's air quality plunging to hazardous levels. More such bans are likely to follow throughout the winter. While that is good news for the city's residents, the story is different for these construction workers.

"Even though working in the polluted air makes it hard for us to breathe, I would rather work than sit idle," Raju Singh says, describing the crushing blow the restrictions have on his finances. These trysts with work stoppages have become an annual affair for him, and hundreds of others like him.

The Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) -- a statutory body responsible for formulating strategies to combat pollution in the region -- implements anti-pollution measures under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).

Introduced in 2017 and implemented on the basis of Air Quality Index (AQI) readings, GRAP I and II (AQI 201-400) focus on advisories, dust control, and restricting diesel generators. Under GRAP-III (AQI 401-450), all non-essential construction and entry of vehicles into the city are banned. GRAP-IV



(AQI above 450) halts all construction, bans non-essential trucks and BS-IV diesel vehicles, and advises work-from-home.

Dr Sarath Guttikunda, the founder and director of UrbanEmissions, shared a study in which he reviewed Delhi's air pollution from 1990-2022 and found that construction-related work plays a significant part in the dust category, accounting for 10-30 per cent of the pollution. Construction activities were banned for 20 days in 2021 and 35 days in 2022. Last year, non-essential construction work was banned for 26 days, and the outlook for this year appears similarly grim.

Ajay Kumar (34), another mason from Bihar, was also rendered jobless when the GRAP curbs were implemented. To support his family, he started working as a helper at a vegetable shop, earning less than a third of his usual income.

An unskilled labourer, Rina Devi (40) shares a similar story. She switched to stitching clothes for neighbours on an old sewing ma-

chine, earning a fraction of her regular wages. "It was the only way to make money. The income was meagre but it allowed us to pay for food and basic necessities," she says.

Sujit, a labourer from West Bengal describes how such consecutive bans trap them in a vicious debt cycle. "When work stops, we've to borrow money at high interest. When work resumes, most of our earnings go into paying off the debt," he says.

Sujit moved to Delhi to escape climate change-induced flooding in his village, only to run into a form of crisis caused by the activities responsible for the climate change he was escaping from -- construction and industry.

Most of Delhi-NCR's estimated 13 lakh construction workers consists of migrants from Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. Driven by the promise of high wages, they often bring their families, setting up temporary shelters at the construction sites, and inadvertently creating conditions for an-

other major problem -- child labour. Now 12, Kajal has spent her entire life moving from one worksite to another, never been to school and worked in construction from the age of 10.

"We move around the city for work," she says during a break from carrying stones up the floors of a Greater Noida worksite.

Drawn by the promise of high wages, her family relocated from Jharkhand, only to find themselves struggling to make ends meet each winter.

On top of the blanket construction bans, other GRAP measures significantly limit employment opportunities during winters. Skilled workers are prioritised for the few available jobs, leaving unskilled labourers like Shalini Singh, a 35-year-old mother of two, with little to no work. She had been working at a site in Delhi's Haiderpur, trying to save every rupee for these lean months.

Her husband, who struggles with alcoholism, contributes little, leaving her solely responsible for her children's upbringing.

"Every year, I know work will stop. So I save as much as I can," she says.

But with her children growing older, managing expenses on an irregular income is becoming harder. "I dream of giving my daughter a different life," she says. "She wants to be an architect but how can I pay for her studies if I have no regular work for four or five months?"

Women like Shalini Singh, who take on labour-intensive but low-

paying jobs carrying bricks or breaking rocks, are among the worst affected.

"Women in construction are often categorised as unskilled labour and are paid less than men," says Shashi Kaur, a social worker with CFAR, an NGO which assists workers register for job cards.

"When work stops, they have few resources to fall back on," she adds.

As on October 1, Delhi's minimum wage for unskilled workers is Rs 18,066 a month. This is significantly higher than in nearby states and the disparity leads to even more families migrating to the national capital.

However, the higher wage means little when there is no work. When the restrictions are finally lifted, the poor air quality endangers workers' health.

Dr Sajjad Khan, who works in a mohalla clinic, said he got the most patients during winter and they came with pollution-related ailments. He said exposure to such high pollution levels might cause long-term respiratory ailments.

But for many workers, the immediate need for money outweighs the potential health consequences.

Although the Delhi government has welfare schemes for construction workers, accessing these benefits is a challenge for many.

A fund managed by the Delhi Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board provides financial aid to non-migrant workers but registrations dropped from four lakh in 2023 to 81,000 now, a senior official said. (PTI)

Every film is a less travelled world: PRATIK GANDHI ON 'AGNI'

MUMBAI, Dec 1: Actor Pratik Gandhi, who plays the role of a firefighter in "Agni", says when director Rahul Dholakia narrated the film's script to him, he grabbed the offer with both hands as it was a first-of-its-kind project.

Billed as India's first film on firefighters, the upcoming movie revolves around a fireman (Gandhi) and a policeman (Divyendu) who investigate a mysterious surge in fire incidents in the city.

That Excel Entertainment, which backed 2024's buddy comedy film "Madgaon Express" starring Gandhi and Divyendu, was producing "Agni" was another plus.

"Rahul Dholakia narrated the film and I had seen his work

like 'Parzania'... When I met him, it gave me a lot of confidence about his vision and how he is looking at the film. This is a world we've never seen before. "When we talk about cops, there's a certain treatment that we've seen in many films.

Rahul Dholakia was looking at the world of firefighters realistically and I wanted to be part of it. When Excel was backing up, it gave me more confidence. Every film for us is a less travelled world, we don't know what will happen, it's an experiment," Gandhi told PTI in an interview.

The actor said it was fun to reunite with his "Madgaon Express" co-star Divyendu.

"We did this film first and the characters we play in this film

are different from 'Madgaon Express'. It (camaraderie) evolves with time and the more projects we do together, and that's the beauty of this profession and medium.

"Divyendu and I are friends now, every film that we've done or will do together, we can add even more emotions and layers to it. I love to play different characters with the same actors again and again," he added.

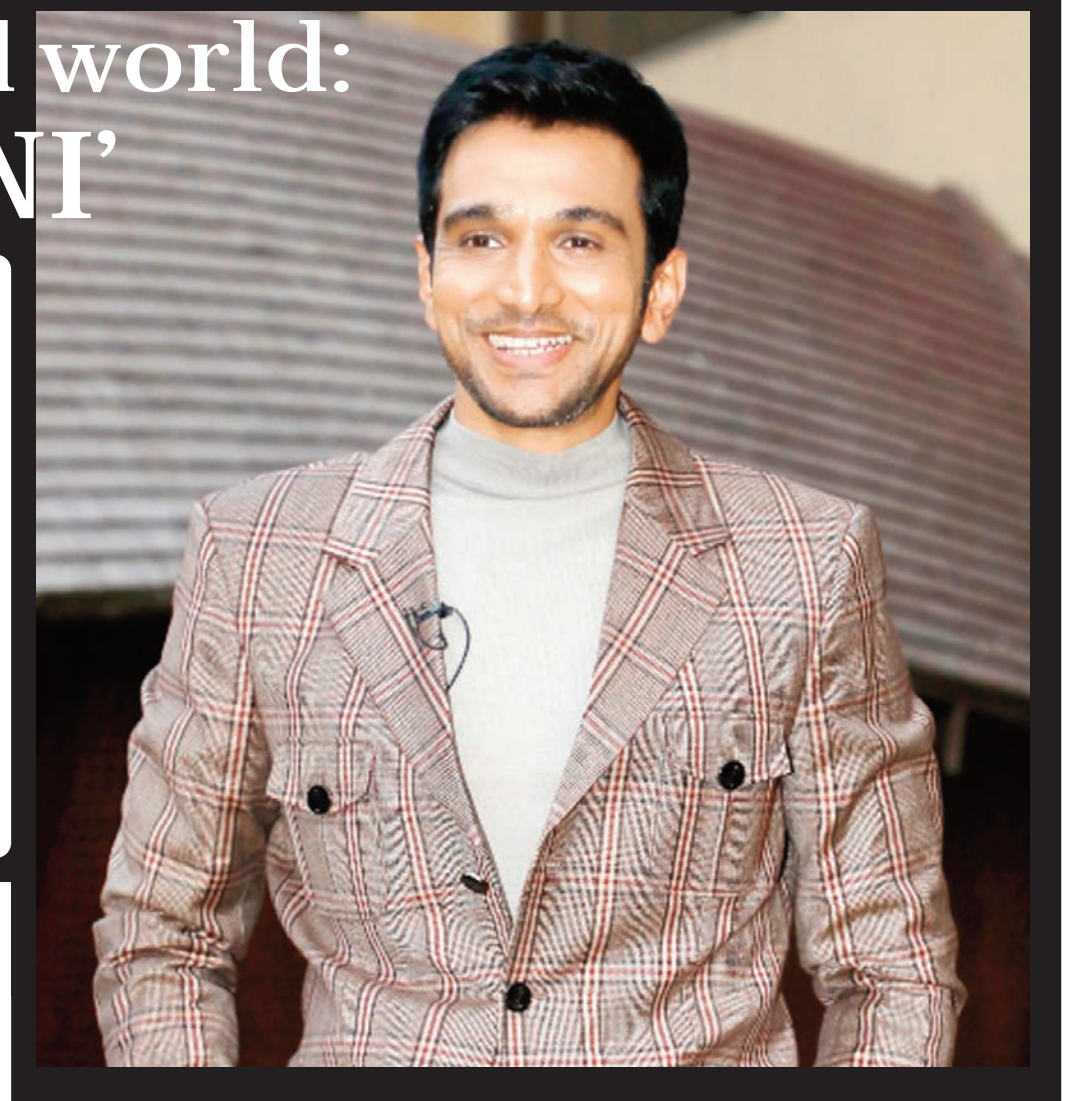
"Agni" also stars Saiyami Kher, Sai Tamhankar, Jitendra Joshi, Udit Arora and Kabir Shah in pivotal roles.

"Let's create a firefighters' world that's believable," was the brief every actor received from Dholakia, said Gandhi.

"I didn't interact with any firefighter with a six-pack and all,

the courage and pride they have is something... They are also humans and it doesn't seem that they are different people. Since we were doing a film of this nature for the first time, it was easy for us to go with a certain perception," he said, adding that wearing a firefighter suit was a physically demanding task as it weighed 5-7 kg. The "Scam 1992" star said he underwent training for around 15 days at South Mumbai's Byculla fire station where he was taught basic firefighting skills, including how to handle a fire hose and a hammer.

Gandhi, who plays a fireman called Vitthal in "Agni", said the film integrates high-stakes action elements with the drama quotient. (PTI)



DUA LIPA PERFORMS MASH-UP OF 'LEVITATING' AND 'WO LADKI JO' FEATURING SHAH RUKH KHAN AT MUMBAI CONCERT

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Pop star Dua Lipa surprised the audience at her Mumbai concert by performing a mash-up of her chartbuster "Levitating" and "Wo Ladki Jo", a song from the 1999 Bollywood film "Baadshah" fronted by Shah Rukh Khan.

Dua, also known for tracks like "Illusion", "Dance The Night", "Houdini" and "One Kiss", took the stage on Saturday as part of the second edition of the Zomato Feeding India Concert. According to videos circulating on social media, the singer can be seen grooving to the fusion

of the two songs, which went viral on social media a few years ago owing to their similar beat pattern.

Shah Rukh's daughter, actor Suhana Khan also shared a reel of the singer's Saturday night performance on her Instagram

Story with a series of emojis. While "Wo Ladki Jo", sung by Abhijeet, is composed by Anu Malik and penned by Sameer for Abbas-

Mustan's hit film "Baadshah", the song "Levitating" is part of Dua's 2020 album "Future Nostalgia".

This was her second performance in India after a 2019 concert at the OnePlus Music Festival in Navi Mumbai.

At the time, the 29-year-old also met Shah Rukh.

Dua has visited India on her personal trips, the last one being around December 2023 when she explored the streets of Rajasthan and Delhi. (PTI)

At the time, the 29-year-old also met Shah Rukh.

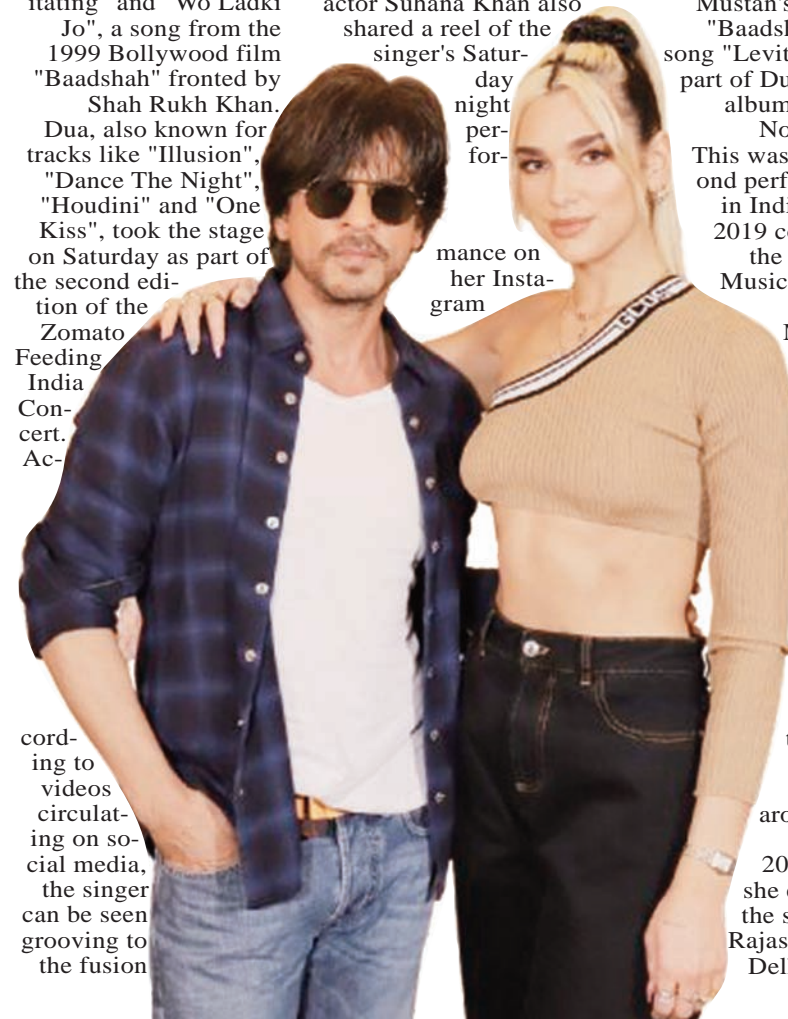
Dua has visited India on her personal trips, the last one being around December 2023 when she explored the streets of Rajasthan and Delhi. (PTI)

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Dua has visited India on her personal trips, the last one being around December 2023 when she explored the streets of Rajasthan and Delhi. (PTI)



Diljit Dosanjh calls himself an SRK fan at Kolkata show

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Punjabi singing sensation Diljit Dosanjh declared himself as a fan of Shah Rukh Khan at his Kolkata concert over the weekend and also won praise from the superstar for bringing joy to the city with his performance. During his show in the West Bengal capital on Saturday as part of his "Dil-Luminati India Tour", the singer gave a shout-out to Shah Rukh's IPL team Kolkata Knight Riders, invoking its popular Bengali theme: "Korbo Lorbo Jeetbo Re (We will act, fight, and win)."

Diljit shared a clip from his speech on X on Sunday. "Korbo Lorbo Jeetbo Re," it's the tagline of Kolkata Knight Riders, it's very good. Since I am a fan of Shah Rukh Khan sir, I anyway would have liked it. "It's a good mantra too. That you work hard, fight with yourself, and winning or losing is a separate matter. It's our duty to give our 100 per cent, and when you do that, you are bound to win," the singer can be heard saying in the video.

Hours later, Shah Rukh responded to the post and went on to wish the singer for his upcoming performances. "Thank you for bringing joy to the City of Joy. @diljitosanjh Paaji. I'm sure all at @KKRiders and their fans love the Korbo Lorbo Jeetbo reference. All the best and have a great tour. Love u (sic)," the actor said.

Diljit's next stop as part of the "Dil-Luminati India Tour" is Bengaluru where he will perform on December 6. (PTI)



Creativity takes centre stage at the 19th Annual Design Awards 2024



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 1: Creativity holds the power to shape the world, and this was on full display at the 19th Annual Design Awards 2024, hosted by JD Institute of Fashion Technology, Guwahati on November 30 at IITa Machkhowa here. This prestigious event redefined the design landscape by spotlighting a new generation of innovators. From dynamic exhibitions to the highly anticipated fashion show, the event was a convergence of bold ideas, cultural influences, and futuristic visions.

For nearly two decades, JD Institute Guwahati has been a cornerstone of creativity in Assam, transforming passionate learners into trailblazing professionals. Established in 2006, it remains the first platform of its kind in the region. The institute's legacy is built on the enduring foundation of the JD Institute of Fashion Technology, founded in 1988 by Chandrakant Dalal and R.C. Dalal, who envisioned an institution fostering exploration, courage, and adaptability.

This year's theme, "Civilization Type 1," encouraged students to envision a future where renewable energy, global consciousness, and sustainable design converge. Each installation and collection reflected a commitment to solving real-world challenges while embracing the unknown possibilities of tomorrow. From fashion collections blending artistic flair with commercial viability to interior spaces addressing environmental concerns, students embodied the spirit of innovation central to JD's ethos.

The event was graced by Rupal Dalal, Managing Director, and Harsh Dalal, Director of JD Institute of Fashion Technology. Esteemed judges, including celebrated designer Shyamant Hazarika and accomplished architect Ar. Ritul Sharma, evaluated the creativity and ingenuity of student presentations. Awards such as Best Collection, Outstanding Collection, Innovative Collection, and Commercially Viable Design celebrated excellence and innovation.

Rupal Dalal commended students for merging design expertise with social responsibility. She stated, "The Annual Design Awards are a testament to the transformative power of creativity when guided by purpose and passion." Sumita Dey Deka, Centre Director, reflected on the institute's journey, emphasizing its transformative role since its inception. Ms. Ushmita Dey, Campus Director, highlighted the event's role in immersing students in practical and conceptual design depths, transcending classroom learning.

As the event concluded on November 30, the air buzzed with excitement. The showcase not only pushed boundaries but redefined them, offering a glimpse into a future shaped by innovation. The groundbreaking concepts and visionary creations unveiled during the day are poised to influence the design world for years to come.

I GET REPRIMANDED FOR NOT BEING ACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA, SAYS SAIYAMI KHER

MUMBAI, Dec 1: Actor Saiyami Kher says she is often asked by people in the film industry to be "out there" on social media, a piece of advice she finds difficult to follow.

Kher, known for work in "Choked", "Ghoomer", and "Breathe: Into The Shadows", said one has to project a curated image of their real life on the Internet.

The actor, who has 1.1 million followers on Instagram and 1.3 lakh followers on X, was speaking ahead of the premiere of her film "Agni". She made her Hindi movie debut in 2016 with "Mirzya".

"I'm not the biggest fan of social media and I get reprimanded for it a lot, saying, 'You need to be out there, you need to wear certain clothes and be on social media'. That's the advice I keep

getting but I do what my heart tells me to do," Kher told PTI in an interview.

"My family makes way more sacrifices for me than I make as an actor because you have to show decorum and you need to show that everything in your life is good because that's what you keep seeing on social media," she added.

It's important to be "thick-skinned" as an actor but everyone has their bad days, she said.

"All the sacrifices my family makes because of all my tantrums and bad moods... It's a bit unfair, you take them for granted, and you snap at them. When you have a bad day, that's (family) the only cushion you have. So, the sacrifices they make are much more than I do."

"Agni", billed as India's first film on firefighters, delves into the

lives of a fireman (Pratik Gandhi), and a policeman (Divyendu), who are drawn into a perplexing surge of fire incidents around the city.

Kher plays Avni, an officer who investigates a massive fire accident that takes place in the movie, directed by Rahul Dholakia ("Parzania", "Raees").

"What resonates with me about 'Agni' was the righteousness of the character. She is somebody who stands or gets angry when people are corrupt or not following the rules. She is an investigative officer and it infuriates her because people around her are so relaxed about not following the rules.

"I feel cinema is a powerful (medium)... it impacts people in good and bad ways. I hope that the work I do impacts people in a good way," she said.

Kher said an actor can't sign a project on the assumption that it will be a hit or not.

"If the film or role excites you, it's about the gut feeling. For me, it is always about trying something new and with 'Agni' it was a different world. The reason I became an actor is that when you grow up, you are often asked, 'What do you want to do?'"

"I used to never have an answer to it but I would be like, 'I want to be a lawyer, an architect, a doctor'. So, as an actor you get to do that. That's the reason I became an actor as I love living different lives. You get to learn about the life of a firefighter and see what they go through. If the project excites you and (helps) you learn something new, for me that is what it is about." "Agni" will start streaming on Prime Video from December 6. (PTI)



FIT-AGAIN GILL GETS QUALITY MATCH TIME, ROHIT KEEPS PEOPLE GUESSING

CANBERRA, Dec 1: Shubman Gill dispelled all doubts about his thumb injury with a stylish fifty even as skipper Rohit Sharma kept cards close to his chest by coming in at No. 4 in India's curtailed pink-ball warm-up game against Prime Minister's XI here on Sunday.

The visitors won the match by six wickets. It, however, remains to be seen if the Indian captain would come out to open in the second Test against Australia, starting Friday in Adelaide.

It was a 46-overs-a-side affair, which India won by chasing down an easy target of 241 in 42.5 overs, but they carried on batting till the end of the final over.

For Australia, Test hopeful Sam Konstas' 107 off 97 balls went in vain.

The Indian team management was tactical in its choices as Virat Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah decided on facing each other at the nets rather than providing data to the Aussie think-tank.

Interestingly, Ravichandran Ashwin, who didn't play the Perth Test, was seen at the nets, mostly bowling to Kohli. Ashwin had a four-wicket haul in the last Pink-ball Test in Adelaide in 2020-21.

Ravindra Jadeja, however, got a few overs and also batted for some time.

Rohit persisted with the opening combination of Yashasvi

Jaiswal and KL Rahul, dropping himself down to number four. However, his own game time was limited to 11 deliveries as he edged one to the slips under the night lights.

The biggest piece of news for India was Gill's batting. A cracking square cut first up off seamer Mahli Beardman indicated that his fractured left thumb has completely healed and he is ready to play the Adelaide game.

He looked pretty comfortable against Scott Boland, whom he faced during his second spell.

Gill punished the pacers and spinners alike with seven boundaries before he retired after facing 62 balls.

Jaiswal (45 off 59 balls) and



Nitish Kumar Reddy (42 off 32 balls), both players with virtually no experience of facing the pink ball at domestic level, threw their bats around and got some runs.

Rishabh Pant also didn't come out to bat, much to the disappointment of the 1000-odd Indian fans present at the Manuka Oval. Harshit Rana has already earned the vote of confidence from the team management with

an impressive Test debut at Perth and picked four wickets here to strengthen his credentials as a wicket-taking bowler.

Still very raw at the international level, Harshit's inexperience became his undoing during the first three overs as he wasn't able to hit the right length with the pink ball.

But then he went round the wicket against a set southpaw Jack Clayton (40) and bowled a quick delivery that came in with the angle as the batter played inside the line.

Within a space of a delivery, he came over the wicket to right-hander Ollie Davis (0) and a fullish ball had him playing all over. In his next over, he bowled

two different types of bouncers - the one to skipper Jack Edwards climbed steeply as he went for a pull while the next one to Sam Harper was aimed at rib cage and forced the batter to go for a swivel pull. Both catches landed safely inside Prasadish Krishna's palms.

Akash Deep (2/58) bowled a few wicket-taking deliveries but didn't look as menacing as Harshit when the latter bowled the 'heavy ball'. In all, India made the best use of the limited practice opportunity.

Brief Scores: Australia PM XI 240 in 43.2 over (Sam Konstas 107, Hanno Jacobs 61, Jack Clayton 40, Harshit Rana 4/44, Akash Deep 2/58). (PTI)

Jamshedpur FC, Mohammedan SC look to resurrect campaigns in ISL

JAMSHEDPUR, Dec 1: Mohammedan SC and Jamshedpur FC will look to resurrect their respective campaigns when they face off in their Indian Super League clash here on Sunday.

With three defeats in a row, Jamshedpur FC are going through a slump in form. They are placed ninth in the league table with 12 points from eight ties, with four wins and as many defeats.

In their three-match losing streak, Jamshedpur FC have conceded three goals at least in each game which is a worrying sign.

The last time the club endured a forgettable run was between October and December 2023 when they lost four games on the trot. Jamshedpur FC need to work on their accuracy they have recorded a passing accuracy of 57.4 per cent in the opposition's half this season. Their overall passing accuracy of 67 per cent also demands more work from the players.

Mohammedan FC, on the other hand, are in the 12th spot in the ISL points table with only one victory and two draws so far in the season.

In their last outing, Mohammedan FC appeared to be turning their fortunes around when they took an early lead against Bengaluru FC.

While an eighth-minute strike



by Cesar Manzoki put them in the driver's seat, it was after the 82nd minute in the contest when Sunil Chhetri scored a brace to break Mohammedan FC's hearts.

Mohammedan FC has scored on four occasions this ISL, which is the joint-lowest tally for any side after as many games in their debut ISL season, tied with Jamshedpur.

While the Black and White Brigade does have a formidable

frontline, the team needs to supplement their strengths unflinchingly to net more goals.

The club has also been at the receiving end of the supreme aerial prowess of their opponents in this season, having conceded five headed goals, which is the most by any side this season.

Jamshedpur head coach Khalid Jamil admitted that the team needs to uplift its performance to get the desired results. "If we

look into the last few games, overall performance has not been up to the mark from everyone, including me. I take responsibility," Jamil said.

"It happens sometimes, but the strikers solely can't be blamed for that, neither could the midfielders and defenders. It's always a team performance so we should think collectively."

Mohammedan FC's Andrey Chernyshov has asserted that his

players have been working hard and are positive heading into this encounter. "We have worked very well in the practice. They have been doing well in matches too, but in football, the result doesn't come (in our favour) sometimes," Chernyshov said.

"Many times, we had so many chances to score, but we couldn't do that. But, we are positive. We want to play well," he added.

Match starts at 7.30 pm. (PTI)

GM Arjun Erigaisi becomes 2nd Indian to breach 2800 ELO rating barrier

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi on Sunday became the second Indian after legendary Viswanathan Anand and 16th worldwide to reach the gold-standard ELO rating of 2800, while also occupying the fourth spot in the latest rankings.

The 21-year-old has been in sensational form this year, having won an individual gold as well as team title in India's recent historic performance in the Chess Olympiad.

"Arjun Erigaisi has become the 16th player in history to break the 2800 Elo barrier in classical chess ratings!" the world governing body of the sport FIDE said on 'X'.

"Arjun Erigaisi joins five-time World Champion Viswanathan Anand as the second Indian to achieve this milestone. In the December 2024 #FIDE Rating list, his rating stands at 2801, and he is currently ranked #4 in the world!"

Earlier this year, this 21-year-old also delivered a stellar performance at the 45th #ChessOlympiad, winning both team gold and individual gold!"

Born in Warangal, Telangana, Erigaisi earned the Grandmaster's title at the age of 14 years, 11 months, 13 days. In September 2024, he became India's top rated player.

Erigaisi now has 2801 rating points for the fourth spot, just below Hikaru Nakamura (2802) of USA. Norwegian Magnus Carlsen continued to be at the top spot with 2831 ratings, followed by Fabiano Caruana (2805) of the USA.

Another Indian chess prodigy, the 18-year-old D Gukesh, who is currently fighting against Ding Liren of China for the World Championships title in Singapore, is one place below Erigaisi at fifth with 2783 ratings. Liren (2728) is at 22nd. (PTI)

HI names 20-member Indian junior women's squad for Asia Cup

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Hockey India on Sunday named a strong 20-member squad, led by Jyoti Singh, for the upcoming women's Junior Asia Cup to be held in Muscat, Oman, from December 7 to 15. As the defending champions, India enter the tournament with high hopes after securing their maiden title last year, defeating South Korea 2-1.

This tournament serves as a qualifier for the FIH Hockey Junior World Cup 2025. The host nation for the event is yet to be determined. The competition will feature 10 teams divided into two pools. India are placed in Pool A alongside China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Bangladesh, while Pool B consists of South Korea, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong China, and Sri Lanka.

Sakshi Rana has been named the vice-captain. Nidhi and Aditi Maheshwari will provide a strong presence in the goal, while the de-

fence will be marshalled by Manisha, Jyoti Singh, Lalthantluangi, Pooja Sahoo, and Mamata Oram. The midfield features a talented lineup comprising Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Sunelita Toppo, Ishika, Rajni Kerketta, Sakshi Rana, and Khaidem Shileima Chanu. India will rely on Deepika, Beauty Ddungdung, Kanika Siwach, Mumtaz Khan, and Lalrinpuoi to lead the attack.

Binima Dhan and Himanshi Sharad Gawande have been named as reserve players.

Deepika, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Sunelita Toppo, Mumtaz Khan and Beauty Ddungdung have represented the Indian women's senior national team and will bring valuable experience. Coach Tushar Khandker said, "We are excited to embark on our title defence at the women's Junior Asia Cup. This is a special group with a great balance of experience and young talent. (PTI)

Hardik to lead UP Rudras in upcoming HIL

LUCKNOW, Dec 1: Star India midfielder Hardik Singh was on Sunday named captain of the UP Rudras for the upcoming season of Hockey India League (HIL).

The Lucknow franchise, owned by Yadu Sports, have assembled a strong squad that also features young sensation Priyobarta Talem, Gurjot Singh along with some of the stalwarts of India and international hockey, including Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Simranjeet Singh, Lars Balk, and Kane Russel.

"A true leader on and off the pitch, on behalf of the entire Yadu Sports family, I would like to congratulate Hardik on being announced as the team captain. I had a chance to meet Paul, Thomas, and Cedric at the auctions," said Mr. Madhavkrishna Singhanian, Co-Founder, Yadu Sports. "I believe that the squad we have assembled is full of leaders, and they have all it takes to play mesmerizing hockey and win the people's hearts," the owner added.

UP Rudras head coach Paul

Van Ass added: "Hardik was our first pick at the auctions and we were sure of him leading the side. Having seen him consistently do well for India and being a part of the Indian team that won two back-to-back Olympic bronze medals is no small feat.

"We are sure that with his ability to understand the nuances and intricacies of the game, he will not only lead the team well but will also bring the best out of those around him."

Hardik expressed his excitement and gratitude towards his new role.

"I am extremely grateful to our management staff for giving me this opportunity. It will be nothing less than a pleasure to lead UP Rudras in this season of the Hockey India League," he said.

"Representing and captaining a team based out of the legendary Dhyanchand Ji's hometown is everything a player can ask for. We have a fantastic squad with strength across every department, and, more importantly," (PTI)

Ryggs Johnston wins Australian Open for first title, Jiyai Shin wins women's event

MELBOURNE (AUSTRALIA), Dec 1: Unheralded American Ryggs Johnston has won his first professional title by claiming the Australian Open by three strokes, while South Korea's Jiyai Shin claimed her second Women's Australian Open which was played concurrently at two courses on the famed Melbourne sand belt.

Johnston shot a 68 on Sunday to finish at 18-under 269 and three clear of Australian Curtis Luck (68), who had briefly taken the lead on the final stretch at

Kingston Heath.

The 24-year-old Montana native, with a world ranking of 953rd, is the first American to win the Stonehaven Cup since PGA Tour star Jordan Spieth won it for a second time in 2016. Marc Leishman (69), who plays on the LIV Tour, and fellow Australian Jasper Stubbs (70) were tied for the third at 14-under 273.

After leading, or having a share of the lead after the first three rounds, Australian Lucas Herbert had a testing day on the greens as he shot a 74 to slide to 12-under

and a tie for fifth.

The day started brightly though for Johnston with an eagle at the first. But, he followed that with two birdies traded with three bogeys as he made the turn with a 35.

The former Arizona State University player showed more composure in the final stretch, making three more birdies, for no bogeys, as he closed out the biggest win of his young career with a par at the final hole at Kingston Heath, which will host the 2028 Presidents Cup.

Defending men's champion

Joaquin Niemann couldn't repeat his 64 from Saturday which saw him storm back into contention and could only manage an even par final round of 72 for a 12-under 275 total and a tie for sixth.

The 2022 British Open champion Cameron Smith shot 71 Sunday to finish at 3-under 285 and in a tie for 39th to end his four-tournament stint back home winless.

In the Women's Australian Open, Shin withstood a late challenge from a fast-finishing Ashleigh Buhai to claim her second Australia Open title. Shin shot a 70 on

Sunday for a 17-under-par 274 total to win by two shots from the twice defending champion Buhai (68).

The former world No.1 had led by as many as seven shots in the final round but Buhai's five birdies, with a bogey, on the final stretch made Shin's victory far less certain.

The 36-year-old South Korean didn't falter and sunk a seven-foot putt at the last to close out her 65th professional title and a second Australian Open since winning in 2013. (AP)

SA20 establishing itself as No 2 league, schedule clashes not expected going ahead: Smith

MUMBAI, Dec 1: SA20 has begun establishing itself as the No 2 league in the world and there will be better schedules drawn up to avoid clashes with international cricket for South African players, says league commissioner Graeme Smith.

In order to avoid any clash in schedule which the league faced in the first two editions, the third iteration of the South African T20 league will start a few days after the conclusion of the New Year's Test.

The third season will also feature Dinesh Karthik, who is the first Indian player in the league. "Our ambition, it doesn't sound right to say (that) you want to be the No 2 league in the world, but being realistic, IPL is just incredible. It's a beast. It's been the driving force for a lot of change in the cricketing landscape," Smith told media on SA20 India Day. "We've been fortunate to attract six franchises from the IPL to work with the BCCI in terms of developing SA20 and learning

from what they've done very well over the years."

"For us, two seasons in, the stats, the viewership, the digital stats, the crowd attendance is all starting to show that we are the No 2 league," he said.

Smith said working closely with Cricket South Africa will avoid situations in the past such as in February this year when seven uncapped players were sent for a Test tour to New Zealand and other frontline players held back for SA20.

"In the beginning, there were some hard choices for Cricket South Africa to make when they were building their league. There's a lot of bilateral cricket that also just comes and goes without context. They needed to make a tough decision to invest in the league and to make the best players available and to make a success of it," he said.

"Now we are going into season 3, we're starting to manage the FTPs better, working with Cricket South Africa in terms of



the structure around, so the New Year's Test match will happen and then SA20 will kick off after that." "Into the new cycle, it gets a little bit easier to manage these, from a scheduling perspective. But the best players are always available for SA20," he said.

Karthik, who will play for Paarl Royals and is also the league's India ambassador, said SA20 came across as the best

competition for him to participate in after he retired from all formats earlier this year.

"When I actually finished playing with IPL, I wanted to play some cricket. I'm not going to lie. I was thinking, what were the options? Now, how do I find out? I've never been part of any (other) league," he said.

"I asked players who've been part of other leagues and the one

ICC: Jay Shah takes over as new chairman with eye on ending CT impasse

DUBAI, Dec 1: Indian cricket administrator Jay Shah on Sunday took charge as the chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC) with an immediate goal of ending the impasse surrounding the Champions Trophy and a broader vision of making cricket a commercially viable Olympic sport.

The 36-year-old Shah, who headlined the BCCI as its secretary for the last five years, is the fifth Indian and the youngest ever to head the global cricket body.

He was the unanimous choice of the ICC's Board of Directors and replaced New Zealand attorney Greg Barclay, who didn't wish to continue for a third consecutive term.

Before Shah, businessman late Jagmohan Dalmiya, politician Sharad Pawar, lawyer Shashank Manohar and industrialist N Srinivasan have all headed the world cricket body.

Shah, the son of India's Home Minister Amit Shah, will have his task cut out as the ICC looks to find an acceptable solution to implement the 'Hybrid Model' for the Champions Trophy originally scheduled in Pakistan.

As of now, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided to accept the 'Hybrid Model' under which India play their matches in Dubai. But the PCB also wants the same courtesy to be accorded to Pakistan in all four ICC tournaments till 2031, which will be co-hosted or singularly hosted by the Indian cricket board.

Now, as the head of the global body and with less than 100 days left for the tournament to begin, Shah will have to co-ordinate with both the PCB and his former colleagues at the BCCI for an "acceptable solution" in order to organise a hassle-free tournament.

India have already refused to travel to Pakistan as it hasn't received clearance from its government.

Shah didn't make any comment on the Champions Trophy while outlining his prior-



ities for his term which included leveraging the sport's inclusion in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games as an opportunity and further accelerate the growth of the women's game.

"This is an exciting time for the sport as we prepare for the LA28 Olympic Games and work to make cricket more inclusive and engaging for fans worldwide," Shah said.

"We are at a critical juncture with the coexistence of multiple formats and the need to accelerate the growth of the women's game.

"Cricket holds immense potential globally, and I look forward to working closely with

the ICC team and Member countries to seize these opportunities and take the sport to new heights."

Shah acknowledged Barclay's contributions to the ICC over the last four years.

"I would also like to thank Greg Barclay for his leadership in the role for the past four years and the milestones achieved during that period," he said.

"I look forward to working closely with the ICC team and the Member countries to expand the game's reach and evolution on the global stage."

Having started as an administrator at the district level in Gujarat Cricket Association when he was still a college student, Shah has worked his way up the ladder from state to national and now global level.

It was during his time that Gujarat became a domestic force by winning the Ranji Trophy for the first time and he has also been the man behind the world's largest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad's Motera.

During his tenure as BCCI secretary, the domestic match fees have increased manifold and he has been instrumental in starting Test cricket incentive bonus for national players with emphasis on white-ball game.

However, the two major milestones for him as BCCI secretary are the starting of Women's Premier League and having equal match fees for men and women's national team players.

His young age has allowed him to be more empathetic to current players but he has also been able to crack the whip when necessary, like making it mandatory for stars to play domestic cricket after Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan lost their central contracts for giving more emphasis to IPL compared to Ranji Trophy. He has overwhelming support in the ICC board room save one country and he wouldn't have a lot of problems in taking policy decisions.

While it is still not clear who will be the next BCCI secretary, India could be represented at the ICC Board by either current president Roger Binny, or vice-president Rajiv Shukla.

In case Binny becomes the director from India, Shukla could be the alternate director. And if Shukla is elevated as India's representative, the co-representative could be Arun Dhumal, who is among the two to three names being discussed for the next secretary post, treasurer Ashish Shelar and joint secretary Devajit Lon Saikia being the others. (PTI)

Sindhu, Lakshya clinch singles titles; Treesa-Gayatri pair shines in doubles



LUCKNOW, Dec 1: Top seeds P V Sindhu and Lakshya Sen produced commanding performances to claim the women's and men's singles titles, respectively, at the Syed Modi International badminton tournament here on Sunday.

Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist, ended her long title drought by outplaying China's world number 119 Wu Luo Yu 21-14, 21-16 to lift the trophy for the third time, having previously triumphed in 2017 and 2022.

In the men's singles final, Lakshya, a 2021 World Championships bronze medallist, was at his dominant best as he demolished Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh 21-6, 21-7 in the title clash, displaying complete command over the match.

Sindhu's victory marks her return to the top of the podium after over two years, with her last title win being at the Singapore Open in July 2022. The world number 18 also reached the finals of the Malaysia Masters Super 500 earlier this year.

Lakshya's win comes as a balm after a disappointing loss in the bronze medal playoff at the Paris Olympics. The victory will

undoubtedly boost his confidence ahead of the new season.

Indian badminton had more to celebrate on the day as the women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand clinched their maiden Super 300 title with a convincing 21-18, 21-11 win over China's Bao Li Jing and Li Qian.

The result made Treesa and Gayatri the first Indian women's doubles team to win the title at this tournament. The Commonwealth Games bronze medallists, who had finished runners-up in 2022, went one step further this year with their solid performance.

In the men's doubles final, Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Sai Pratheek K put up a valiant fight before going down 14-21, 21-19, 17-21 to China's Huang Di and Liu Yang in a marathon 71-minute clash.

Meanwhile, in the mixed doubles final, fifth seeds Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila started strong but couldn't sustain their momentum, losing 21-18, 14-21, 8-21 to Thailand's sixth-seeded pair Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampran. (PTI)

Syed Mushtaq Ali T20: Surya to join Mumbai squad from Andhra game

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: India's T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav will be back in action for Mumbai's next Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy game against Andhra on Tuesday, December 3 after taking a short two-week break to attend a family function.

Just like he has done in some ear-

lier occasions, Surya might not lead the side with Shreyas Iyer in charge till now and will be one of the regular players.

Surya, who led India to an emphatic 3-1 series win over South Africa will link up with the Mumbai squad in Hyderabad on Monday and is expected to turn up for

the next game against Andhra.

He had intimated the Mumbai Cricket Association about his unavailability during the initial few group league games owing to a family function.

It is understood that Surya is absolutely fine with Iyer continuing as the skipper and is ready to bat

any position that the team management feels is suitable for 'SKY'.

Playing for Mumbai across all domestic tournaments whenever he is available has been top priority for Surya and he would continue doing that. He will be playing the remainder of the SMAT for Mumbai and also in the Vijay Haz-

are Trophy starting December 21. The idea is to play for India across formats.

In a recent series against South Africa, the skipper relinquished his own set batting position at number three for Tilak Varma, who had requested his skipper for that particular slot. (PTI)



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