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- Israeli strikes on Gaza kill at least 29, Palestinian medics say
- Taiwan demands China end its military activity in nearby waters
- No possibility of alliance with Congress for Delhi polls: Kejriwal
- 'RS chairman's partisan behaviour led us to move notice for his removal as VP'

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CBI files chargesheets against AJRS Marketing duo

Assam Ponzi scheme scam: ₹ 5.14 crore swindled from around 2,600 victims



NEW DELHI, Dec 11: The CBI on Wednesday filed a chargesheet against Biswanath Roy and Mrindul Dutta in one of the Assam Ponzi Scam cases related to AJRS Marketing Pvt. Ltd which allegedly swindled ₹ 5.14 crore from around 2,600 victims by promising to double the invested money in 200 days, officials said.

It is alleged that the accused were part of a multi-level deposit scheme collecting deposits under the trade names "Ayurvedlife" and "AJRS Trading".

Investors were allegedly lured with promises of substantial returns and incentives such as bikes, cars, and foreign trips upon reach-

ing specific investment thresholds, the officials said.

Roy and Dutta marketed and promoted the unregulated deposit scheme of AJRS by participating in various meetings with potential depositors, it is alleged.

The duo allegedly promoted a non-existing business model through brochures of Ayurvedlife, AJRS Trading, and AJRS Group circulated to depositors through WhatsApp groups and chats to lure potential depositors to invest a large sum in their schemes.

Roy and Dutta allegedly falsely promised to double the depositors' money in 200 days through the unregulated deposit schemes.

They allegedly solicited members to the multi-level marketing (MLM) structure of the schemes where each participant had to recruit others to earn commission on the deposits of other members.

Both recruited members under them and made them deposit a large sum of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta launches 12-day prog to distribute grants, assistance and scholarships

One med college, one varsity in every dist soon

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday announced that every district of Assam will have one university and one medical college.

The Chief Minister said this while launching a 12-day programme on Wednesday to distribute grants, assistance and scholarships under various schemes across the state, benefiting nearly 12 lakh families.

Sarma said, "Assam has been progressing very rapidly in the path of development. At least 80 lakh people were uplifted from poverty in recent years which is a great achievement. The state government has given emphasis on education and health. Under the current dispensation, many colleges were upgraded to universities."



The chief minister said that the government is working to construct 23 medical colleges, and within a year, the work of another three medical colleges will commence.

Sarma said that if anyone traverses the length and breadth of Assam, at least one university will be found to come up in every district.

The chief minister also stated that the ruling dispensation is also working to construct one bridge

over the Brahmaputra River in every district.

Meanwhile, Sarma announced that various grants and assistance will be distributed under different government schemes in the next 12 days across the state.

Under the microfinance incentive and relief scheme, more than 78,000 borrowers will benefit from the state government's relief package which will restore their creditworthiness and provide them financial stability.

Moreover, the state government will distribute ₹ 353.67 crore to the 6.86 lakh disaster-affected families for the reconstruction of their houses, meeting their necessary requirements along with essential supplies. Sarma stated, "6,490 Self Help Groups (SHG) are set to get a support of ₹ 21.90 crore for setting up food processing units."

Gauhati HC permits abortion of minor

GUWAHATI, Dec 11: The Gauhati High Court has permitted the abortion of a 15-year-old gangrape victim, currently 26-weeks pregnant, from Assam's Tinsukia district in her "best interest".

Taking a suo motu cognisance of a media report, a division bench of Justice Kalyan Rai Surana and Justice Susmita Phukan Khaund on Monday asked the state government to carry out a "medical termination of pregnancy" of the unwanted foetus and submit a status report by December 19.

According to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, (MTPA) termination of pregnancy of over 24 weeks is not allowed.

The order said that according to a news article on November 29, the victim was 14 years old when she was gang-raped by seven persons, including four minors in Tinsukia.

Hearing the case (WP(C)(Suo Moto)/1/2024) on December 5, the court (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bhupen Borah takes jibe at Akhil

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 11: Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah on Wednesday took an indirect jibe at Akhil Gogoi and said that the Sivasagar MLA is set to face a tough challenge in ticket distribution during upcoming Panchayat polls.

Gogoi has been critical of Congress since the grand old party broke the opposition alliance and fielded a candidate in the recently concluded by-election.

Borah, on Wednesday, addressed the reporters here, "Distribution of tickets to aspirants is a big challenge before every political party. Akhil Gogoi does not have an idea about this (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)"

Five years of CAA passage marked by protests in Assam

GUWAHATI, Dec 11: Marking five years of the passage of the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act, opposition Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and influential students' body AASU on Wednesday held protests against the legislation and termed it a "black law".

While AJP organised a protest at Chahal in Guwahati and said the law has become "illegal" after the Supreme Court verdict on the cut-off date of granting citizenship in

Assam, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) held an agitation in front of its headquarters in the Uzanbazar area.

"Today is a dark day for Assam. On this day in 2019, the struggling people of Assam took to the streets despite the threat of the state forces and started their protest against the CAB, which later became CAA," AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi said, holding a black flag.

The painful memories of the CAA movement are still alive in

the hearts of every proud Assamese and they still haunt the people like a nightmare, he added.

"The Assamese community knows how to respond to traitors. We have not accepted the CAA and will never accept it. We will continue our struggle till the law is repealed," Gogoi said.

In a majority verdict, the Supreme Court on October 17 upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act which grants (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Woman ostracised by kangaroo court for wearing salwar-kameez

MANGALDAI, Dec 11: In a case of moral policing, a woman was socially ostracised and fined ₹ 5,000 for wearing salwar-kameez in the Darrang district of Assam, officials said on Wednesday.

According to an official of the district commissioner's office, the incident took place in the Gongajani Kuwori village in the Sipajhar revenue circle area recently.

The woman, identified as Meghali Das, on Wednesday filed complaints with the police and civil administration, and officials are likely to visit the village on Thursday to look into the matter.

"I have been ostracised and asked to pay a fine of ₹ 5,000 for wearing salwar-kameez... I run a small shop

and since I need to bring commodities from the market, I prefer wearing salwar to a mekhela-sador (traditional Assamese dress) or saree," she told reporters here. Das said that the villagers objected to her wearing salwar-kameez and took the decision in a kangaroo court held at a local temple premises on Sunday.

"We are not being allowed to visit the houses of other people in the village. My three children have also been told not to go to shops, let alone visit other villagers. Villagers have also asked their children to not speak to my children at school," she added.

Despite the decision of the villagers, the affected woman vowed to continue wearing salwar-kameez as it is convenient for her work. (PTI)

কৃষি আৰু কৃষক কল্যাণ মন্ত্ৰণালয়
ভাৰত চৰকাৰ

“প্রধানমন্ত্রী ফচল বীমা যোজানাই বতৰৰ অনিশ্চয়তাৰ সৈতে জড়িত ক্ষতিৰ শংকা কম কৰি পৰিশ্ৰমী কৃষক ভাই-ভনীৰ আৰ্থিক হিত ৰক্ষা কৰাত একেবাহে গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা পালন কৰি আহিছে। এই কৃষক হিতৈষী বীমাৰ লাভ কোটি কোটি কৃষকে পাব ধৰিছে।”

- নৰেন্দ্ৰ মোদী, প্রধানমন্ত্রী

ফচল বীমা কৰাওক সুৰক্ষা কৰাওক

সকলো কৃষক ভাই-ভনীকো কথাটো জনাওক

প্রধানমন্ত্রী ফচল বীমা যোজনাৰ সাফল্যসমূহ

- 19.67 কোটি কৃষক ভাই-ভনীয়ে এতিয়ালৈকে পালে ফচল বীমাৰ লাভ
- ₹1.65 লাখ কোটি দাবীৰ ধন কৃষকক পৰিশোধ কৰা হ'ল
- 70 কোটিৰো অধিক কৃষক আবেদনপত্ৰ প্ৰাপ্ত কৰা হ'ল

সমগ্ৰ দেশ জোৰা হেল্পলাইন **14447**

পঞ্জীকৰণৰ শেষ দিন 15 ফেব্ৰুৱাৰী, 2025

আপোনাৰ ফচলৰ বীমা কৰোৱাৰ বাবে আজিয়েই যোগাযোগ কৰক

জনসেৱা কেন্দ্ৰ | শস্য বীমা এপ <https://play.google.com> | পোষ্ট অফি | ৰেফৰ শাখা

যোগা সন্মুখে অধিক জানিবৰ বাবে QR ক'ড স্কেন কৰক

Not knowing anything is the sweetest life.
- Sophocles

Impeachment notice against VP

In an unprecedented move in the parliamentary history of India, the opposition INDIA bloc submitted a notice on December 10 at the Rajya Sabha Secretary General P.C. Modi's office sought removal of the Chairperson of the Upper House, the Vice-President of India Jagdeep Dhankhar, alleging him of conducting proceedings of the House in an "extremely biased" manner. Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Kiren Rijiju on December 11, during his address in the House, said, "We will not allow this." Amidst uproar in the House during Centre-Opposition faceoff, Rajya Sabha was adjourned for the day. Given the adamant attitudes of both the ruling establishment and the opposition, one can't but think that the issue may overshoot to a hazardous level having far reaching legal and political implications for the country. Since the NDA has a majority in the Rajya Sabha, it can defeat the impeachment motion, if taken in the House for consideration, but the debate can impact politics in the country in a way that can impact the political fortune of the ruling establishment. The immediate background of the joint move of the opposition INDIA bloc has enough indication of that. The opposition has been demanding discussion on the Adani issue alleging that the Union Government is protecting the friend of PM Narendra Modi at the cost of public money and the interest of the people.

The Opposition's six-point chargesheet notice was signed by not only the Congress but other opposition political parties too. Therefore, Kiren Rijiju's attack on only Congress over the impeachment notice, calling the allegations against the Chairperson is not enough. Whatever may be the outcome of the impeachment notice, most likely to be defeated on account of the majority of NDA in the House, if taken for consideration, Kiren Rijiju's statements suggest that it would not be taken for consideration at all, and in that case when the winter session of the Parliament will end on December 20, the notice for removal would expire automatically. Nevertheless, it will have serious implications on National politics, since the move would exert great pressure on the Vice-President who holds a significant role in the national political hierarchy, being only second in line to the presidency, and as Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

There six-point chargesheet puts the narrative straightforward: Leaving aside Mr Dhankhar's constant interruptions whenever opposition MPs attempt to speak, the Chairperson had also repeatedly denied legitimate requests made by the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge to "intervene and rebut falsehoods propagated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the Leader of the House and BJP President J P Nadda. A serious charge against Dhankhar is that he had taken it upon himself to be an "impassioned spokesperson" of the Union government's policies while criticising the opposition MPs' viewpoints if "contrary to oppose the position of the ruling government." The Executive's influence through Vice-President over the legislative process in the Rajya Sabha has come under question, especially when Vice-President aligned himself with the ruling RSS family. India can't compromise with the neutrality of legislative processes and the chairman of the House. Procedural change in such cases is imperative.

Government data given in Rajya Sabha conceals frightening unemployment

The data given by the Union Ministry of State for Labour and Employment Shobha Karandlaje in a written reply in Rajya Sabha on December 5, 2024 conceals the frightening ground level reality of unemployment in India. The pattern is simple – first various government agencies produce data portraying rosy picture on employment front, and the Centre goes on repeating this, and the propaganda is so loud that it drowns the desperate voices of the unemployed.

Centre highlighted that worker population ratio rose, unemployment rate dropped, and formalization of jobs that is quality jobs had risen. The data were taken from the annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24, Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) (2022-23), and the KLEMS (Capital, Labour, Energy, Materials, and Services) database by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). All the databases were already convincingly suspicious, and were sufficiently refuted in the past by many analysts.

The reply further mentioned the government announcement in the Budget 2024-25, referring the Prime Minister's package of 5 schemes and initiatives to facilitate employment, skilling and other opportunities for 4.1 crore youth over a 5-year period with a central outlay of Rs. 2 lakh crores, without mentioning how much progress has already been achieved since there is little progress in these schemes, even though the budget exercises have already begun for the next financial year 2025-26, which will be tabled within less than two months on February 1, 2025.

The propaganda machine of the government is busy in protecting the image of the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi especially regarding his promises fulfilled. Everybody knows his promise of 'work for every hand' made during election campaigns in 2014, which was later interpreted 2 crore jobs every year, since that much number of people were estimated joining in India's workforce every year. The data now given in the Rajya Sabha refers to RBI's KLEMS provisional data 2023-24, which said employment in the country increased to 64.33 crore in 2023-24 compared to 47.15 crore in 2014-15. Total increase in employment during 2014-15 to 2023-24 was about 17.18 crore, the Union Ministry of Labour said.

It was during 2024 Lok Sabha election, the Labour Secretary of Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has said that the RBI data to be published soon showed such

an increase in employment. PM Modi had also claimed the same, and the reality came to light when the RBI data was released on July 8. RBI's data was found to be questionable. In the year 2014-15 we had 471.46 million employed persons, which rose to 472.04 million in 2015-16. For the year 2016-17, when millions of MSMEs were closed and most of them reduced their operation up to 75 per cent after the demonetization in November 2016, and millions of workers lost their jobs, the RBI data showed 1.2 per cent increase in employment which increased to 473.2 million.

For the year, 2017-18, when even NSSO data showed 45 years high unemployment rate at 6.1 per cent, the RBI data showed that employment increased by 1.8 per cent to 475 million. For the year 2018-19, RBI data on employment showed a jump of 17.6 per cent to 492.6 million. In 2019-20, RBI data showed a jump in employment be 41.8 per cent that rose to 534.4 million. The more mysterious RBI data came for 2020-21, the year of the lockdown and COVID-19 crisis when the entire economy came to a halt. RBI data said that employment jumped to 31.2 per cent for that year and it reached to 565.6 million. The next COVID-19 crisis year was 2021-22, and the RBI data showed 11.9 per cent jump in employment which reached to 577.5 million. For 2022-23 the data showed 19.2 per cent jump to 596.7 million, and for 2023-24 the jump was 46.7 per cent to 643.3 million. This obviously suspicious RBI data has again been given in the Rajya Sabha to show a rosy picture on employment front.

It is also a well-known fact that by 2017-18, unemployment rate rose to 6.1 per cent which was 45 years high, which was leaked followed by resignation of officials of National Statistics Office alleging suppression of the data. The data was finally released by the government after 2019 election. The Centre had changed the labour data collection method and launched new PLFS in 2017-18,

facing severe criticism on rise of unemployment. PLFS produces two sets of data – one is on usual status basis, and the other is on Current Weekly Status (CWS) basis.

The data on usual status basis is largely used by government propaganda machinery since it is always much lower than the unemployment rate calculated on the CWS basis. The data given in the Rajya Sabha referring Worker

Population Ratio (WPR) also said, "employment during the last 7 years including COVID period has increased from 46.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 58.2 per cent in 2023-24. During the same period, Unemployment Rate (UR) on usual status for persons of age 15 years and above has decreased from 6.0% to 3.2%."

The fact is PLFS 2023-24 wraps up disturbing level of India's labour market distortion. For the year 2023-24 the unemployment rate on CWS basis was 4.9 per cent and the proportion of unemployed in population was 2.1 per cent. Government's propaganda machine does not talk this higher level of unemployment but they always use usual status lower level of employment.

Further, PLFS 2023-24 shows that 19.4 per cent people were counted as employed who were actually helping in the household enterprises and were not getting wages at all. Number of such people had risen from 18.3 per cent in 2022-23, and 17.5 per cent in 2021-22. Then there are own account workers, which are about 39 per cent, and most of them are employed in very low earning jobs which are actually unemployment in disguise.

A total of 58.4 per cent of the total employed people in 2023-24 were self-employed. The percentage of self-employed has risen from 55.8 per cent in 2021-22 and 57.3 per cent in 2022-23. It is indicative of the declining job opportunities in the labour market which enforcing people to become either helping hand in household enterprises or own account worker so that they can survive

amidst lack of social security coverage. Regular wage and salaried jobs have been almost stagnant, the PLFS 2023-24 shows. It was 21.5 per cent in 2021-22, declined to 20.9 per cent in 2022-23, and reached 21.7 per cent in 2023-24. Share of casual labour in the work force was also declining which was 19.8 per cent in 2023-24, but was 21.8 per cent in 2022-23 and 22.7 per cent in 2021-22.

It should also be noted that those who get one hour of paid work in a week are also counted as employed, and also those who out of frustration after not finding job in the market has left searching for jobs. Such is the calibration in producing an inflated employment data and reduced unemployment data.

The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has also stated in its reply in the Rajya Sabha that as per the available Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) report, the estimated number of workers has increased to 10.96 crores in 2022-23 from 7.79 crore in 2021-22. It is a sharp increase in low quality jobs. Nevertheless, the reply said that 7 crore net subscribers have joined Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) between September 2017 and September 2024 indicating increase in formalisation of the job market.

It is also well known fact that there has been severe shortage of decent jobs in India that prompted Union Government to bring three Employment Linked Schemes in the Budget 2024-25, and very little progress has yet been achieved. EPFO is being in the process of being revamped.

The Union government is therefore in urgent need to take concrete steps for employment generation in the forthcoming budget 2024-25. The promise of providing 'work for all hands' in 2014 must be implemented in right earnest from at least 2025, 11 years after the promise was initially made. Calibration of only data on paper to show rosy picture and image building of the government does not serve the real purpose of the ground.

Union Budget 2025-26 must reassess the various programmes intended for employment generation to find out the gaps and take steps including increase in capital expenditure, MGNREGS fund for the rural areas, introducing similar employment guarantee schemes for urban areas, and recognising the service workers and others on honourarium as workers to provide more decent works. (IPA Service)

Impact of Syrian developments on oil could extend beyond short term price trends

By: K Raveendran

Syria, a relatively minor player in terms of oil production, has emerged as a key player in regional geopolitics. The country's strategic position in the heart of the Middle East, combined with its deepening ties with Russia and Iran, places it at the centre of ongoing tensions. These dynamics are not only significant in terms of regional power struggles but are also influencing the global oil market.

While Syria does not contribute substantially to global oil supply, its role in the broader geopolitical scene, particularly concerning neighbouring Iraq, holds significant implications for oil prices and market stability. As instability in Syria reverberates throughout the region, the potential for spillover into Iraq could drive up geopolitical risk premiums, leading to higher oil prices in the near term.

The latest developments in Syria have already begun to alter the balance of power in the region. Syria's alliance with Iran, in particular, has exacerbated tensions with Western powers and regional players, drawing attention to its potential to influence oil market dynamics. Iran, which faces significant economic and political pressure due to ongoing sanctions, is heavily invested in maintaining its influence in Syria. The axis of cooperation between Russia, Iran, and Syria has created a volatile environment that is influencing broader regional stability, particularly in neighbouring countries such as Iraq.

Iraq, a country that plays a critical role in global oil supply, is deeply affected by the situation in Syria. Iraq produces approximately 4.1 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil, making it one of the top producers in the world. The country's northern and western regions, close to Syria, have been particularly vulnerable to instability in Syria. Sectarian tensions, ongoing militia activity, and the presence of various armed groups have created a volatile environment in Iraq that is increasingly influenced by events in Syria. As the situation in Syria continues to evolve, the risk of further destabilization in Iraq remains high. This could have serious consequences for oil production and supply from Iraq, particularly if the northern oil fields or export routes through the Kurdish region are disrupted.

The potential for spillover from Syria into Iraq is a key factor that could drive up the geopolitical risk premium in the global oil market. Any significant disruption to oil



production in Iraq, whether through direct conflict or instability in the region, would have a ripple effect on global oil prices. With oil prices already subject to fluctuations based on geopolitical developments, further tensions in Iraq could push prices higher, as markets price in the risk of supply disruptions. The impact on the oil market could be felt on multiple fronts, from the immediate effects on production and exports to longer-term shifts in market sentiment.

However, there is an argument to be made that the geopolitical risks associated with the ongoing conflict in Syria might, in the longer term, reduce the geopolitical risk premium in the oil markets. If the power equations in Syria were to become further weakened, there could be a shift in the region's balance of power. A weakened Iranian regime, under significant pressure from both domestic unrest and external sanctions, might seek to de-escalate tensions with the United States and other Western powers. Such a shift could lead to a reduction in the broader geopolitical risks that have fuelled oil price volatility in recent years. In this scenario, a more stable geopolitical environment in the Middle East could help to ease tensions in oil markets, reducing the risk of further supply disruptions and potentially lowering prices in the medium to long term.

Despite the possibility of a long-term reduction in geopolitical risk, the short-term outlook for the oil market remains uncertain. The immediate impact of Syria's ongoing conflict is likely to push up geopolitical premiums, as investors price in the potential for further instability in the region. As oil prices are often highly sensitive to perceived risks in key production regions, the uncertainty surrounding Syria's future trajectory could weigh heavily on market sentiment. The market's ability to absorb shocks from

Syria's instability will depend on several factors, including the resilience of Iraq's oil production, the willingness of Iran to engage in negotiations with Western powers, and the broader strategic calculus of regional players like Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United States. Any disruption to Iraq's oil production could have significant implications for global oil supply, especially as countries like the United States, China, and India continue to rely on Iraqi oil. Iraq's southern oil fields, which account for the majority of the country's production, have generally been more secure than the northern regions. However, the risk of militia activity and sectarian violence in the north, particularly near the Kurdish region, remains high. The possibility of renewed conflict along Iraq's border with Syria, particularly if Kurdish forces are drawn into the conflict, poses a serious risk to the stability of Iraq's oil production. Additionally, any disruptions to Iraq's oil exports through the Turkish Ceyhan pipeline or through the Persian Gulf could send shockwaves through global markets.

The broader implications of Syria's instability extend beyond Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf producers are closely watching developments in Syria, as the conflict has direct implications for the broader security of the region. The Saudi-led coalition's involvement in the war in Yemen and the country's ongoing rivalry with Iran have compounded the regional uncertainty. Should Syria's conflict escalate further, it could trigger a broader regional conflict, further destabilizing the global oil supply chain. Saudi Arabia, as the world's largest oil exporter, is well positioned to adjust its production in response to any significant supply disruptions, but it cannot fully mitigate the effects of a prolonged regional conflict on oil prices. (IPA Service)

Supreme Court hearing on Places of Worship Act 1991 on December 12 is crucial for the country

By: Arun Srivastava

At the first glance it does not appear to be ethically legitimate, complying to the judicial practices, that a three-judge bench would have a relook at the verdict of a five-judge bench which while pronouncing the Ayodhya verdict, had approved the law and held that Places of Worship Act is a legislative instrument designed to protect secular features of Indian polity.

It would have been appropriate to have it examined by a larger bench. Article 145(3) of the Constitution requires a minimum of five judges for cases involving a substantial question of law or the interpretation of the Constitution. Instead of agreeing to hear the petitions, CJI could well have refused to entertain the requests.

The order of Justice Chandrachud to reopen the Gyanvapi mosque case has forced the CJI Sanjay Khanna to have a look at the P W Act. Chandrachud's action is certainly questionable as he ordered for opening of the case disregarding the protection of Religious Places of Worship Act, 1991, which prohibits reopening of such cases on the dubious ground that Hindus were not seeking to change the character of Gyanvapi mosque only to determine its religious character.

Chandrachud should have realized the possibility of his order being misused, as is happening now. True enough his order has come handy for the Hindu bigots to create social and religious animosity. They have been using his order to rake up the disputes in Varanasi, Mathura and many other places.

They have virtually been empowered to stake claim on any mosque of being built on mandirs. On an earlier occasion, Chandrachud had told a gathering of lawyers after visiting the Dwarka temple in Gujarat that the saffron dhvaj (flag) on the temple stands for the flag of justice. It is beyond comprehension how could he make such remark. Modi's ten year rule has seen spread of Hindutva in the higher judiciary and the legal fraternity. A judge of the Calcutta High Court, on the day of his retirement, revealed his lifelong association with the RSS. Another judge of Calcutta High Court, Abhijit Gangopadhyay, resigned a few weeks before the Lok Sabha election, within a few days became a BJP candidate and was elected to the Lok Sabha.

Only on last Sunday, December 1, Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of Allahabad High attended a meeting of the legal cell of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and delivered a lecture on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). He said: "The UCC defines the laws in the context of marriage, inheritance, divorce and adoption in any religious community". At the meet the VHP leader went up to alleging that Bangladesh had become a "second Kashmir". The meet called upon Hindus to unite for pro-



tecting identity. He is known in the legal fraternity for his communal leaning.

Obviously, what could a victim from the minority community, who approaches the higher judiciary for justice, expect from him. In yet another case, a two-member bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court in July had come out with the suggestion that to serve the country one must join the RSS. Modi is for appointing lawyers who are close to RSS as the judges of High Courts.

Months after the Ayodhya verdict, petitions were filed in SC challenging validity of the law on grounds of being "arbitrary and unreasonable and infringing the fundamental right to practice religion". The petitioners included BJP's Ashwini Upadhyay, Subramanian Swamy and other Hindu organisations seeking to open litigation routes for ownership claims over disputed sites like those at Kashi and Mathura. In all fairness the judges should have rejected the pleas. But ironically instead of refusing to entertain them they accepted them, which has been primarily responsible for the present situation.

Coming out with the demand to demolish the masjids is unstoppable. This will go on. The hardcore Hindutva forces would continue to file petitions before the police and court and they in turn would order demolition of these mosques, to resurrect the Hindu gods who were buried by the Mughal rulers. This action is part of a well designed conspiracy to terrorise Muslims and be subservient to them. The modus operandi is quite simple. A VHP or Bajrang Dal cadre or a person claiming to be Hindu will file a complaint. Next day the babus of ASI would confirm the existence of Hindu idol and on the third day the court order for demolition by the police.

It was a court order for survey of Sambhal's Jama Masjid to ascertain whether it was built over a demolished temple that triggered violence in which five persons were shot dead by the police. A mob accompanying the survey

commission was chanting "Jai Shri Ram" at the gate of the Jama Masjid in the presence of the district magistrate and the superintendent of police. Recently, a local court issued notices on a petition from a Delhi-based activist claiming that the 13th-century Ajmer Sharif dargah, a shrine to Sufi saint Khwaja Moin-ud-din Chishti, stands over the ruins of a Shiva temple.

In Sambhal, the local court had ordered the survey on the day the petition was moved, November 19, and the court-appointed surveyors visited the mosque the same afternoon accompanied by district magistrate Rajendra Pensiya and superintendent of police Krishna Kumar. It is indeed mysterious that a local court ordered a survey on the 12th-century dargah of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti -- one of the most sacred Sufi sites in Asia not just for Muslims but for all Indians who are proud of our pluralist traditions. The most astonishing has been the petition was based on the research carried out by the petitioner. The court instead of seeking to know his research credentials accepted his submission as truth. The judicial quotient of the judge could be understood from the simple fact that he did not want to confirm the authenticity of the so called research.

Justice B.G. Kolse Patil, a retired judge of Bombay High Court accused justice Chandrachud of intellectual dishonesty; "I had opposed the Babri judgment because although people thought the matter was finished, that had indeed opened a Pandora's box.... Justice D.Y. Chandrachud's intellectual dishonesty was seen in his judgment (in the Gyanvapi) case against the 1991 law." If Chandrachud had stuck to the Supreme Court's judgment in relation to the Places of Worship Act, 1991 this nature of political uncertainty and threat of communal backlash should not have arisen.

In this connection observation of senior advocate Sanjay Hedge is quite significant: "The suits in Sambhal and Ajmer ought to have been dismissed at the threshold as being barred under the (1991) Act. However, because of an oral observation by Justice (retired) D.Y. Chandrachud in the Gyanvapi matter, it is thought that the Act, while preventing change of character, does not preclude an inquiry into the nature of that character on August 15, 1947. I think it is frivolous and vexatious to entertain litigation where no ultimate relief can be given." (IPA Service)

The threat of mega dams on Assam's ecology

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The northeastern state of Assam, located in the biodiversity-rich Eastern Himalayas, is an ecologically fragile region that has been facing severe environmental challenges. One of the most significant threats to its ecology today is the construction of mega dams. While dams are often promoted as engines of development, providing hydroelectric power, irrigation, and flood control, the reality is more complex. In Assam, the environmental, social, and economic consequences of building large dams have sparked intense debate, with growing concern over the irreversible damage they may cause to the state's ecosystems and communities.

Assam's geographic position makes it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of mega dams. The Brahmaputra River, one of the world's largest and most dynamic river systems, flows through the state, supporting a rich diversity of life and providing livelihoods for millions of people. This river, along with its tributaries, forms the lifeblood of Assam's agricultural economy and natural ecosystems. However, the river is also notorious for its annual flooding, which can be both destructive and beneficial. The delicate balance of this natural system is threatened by the construction of large dams, which alter water flow, sediment transport, and the overall hydrology of the region.

The primary argument in favor of constructing mega dams in Assam and its neighboring states is their potential to generate vast amounts of hydroelectric power. With India's growing energy demands, the government has prioritized hydroelectric projects as part of its strategy for meeting the country's renewable energy goals. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries offer significant hydroelectric potential due to their fast-flowing nature, steep gradients, and consistent water supply from the Himalayan snowmelt and monsoons. Proponents of dams argue that they can provide a clean and renewable energy source, reducing India's dependence on fossil fuels and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

However, the ecological costs of these dams are immense. The construction of large dams requires the submergence of vast areas of land, leading to the destruction of forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats. The Brahmaputra River basin, where many of these dams are proposed, is home to a variety of endemic and endangered species, including the Indian rhinoceros, Bengal tiger, Gangetic dolphin, and various migratory bird species. The loss of habitat due to dam construction threatens the survival of these species, many of which are already under pressure from habitat fragmentation, poaching, and other human activities.

Wetlands, which act as critical biodiversity hotspots and natural buffers against floods, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of dams. When wetlands are submerged or their water supply is altered, the delicate ecosystems they support can collapse, leading to the loss of plant and animal species.

The effects of mega dams on aquatic ecosystems are perhaps the most concerning. Dams disrupt the natural flow of rivers, which has far-reaching consequences for the species that depend on free-flowing water. Fish, in particular, are severely affected by the presence of dams, which block their migratory routes and alter the timing and quantity of water flow. The Brahmaputra River is home to a variety of fish species, many of which undertake long-distance migrations to spawn. These migrations are essential for maintaining healthy fish populations and sustaining the livelihoods of communities that rely on fishing. The construction of dams can prevent fish from reaching their spawning grounds, leading to a decline in fish populations and, ultimately, the collapse of fisheries. This has significant implications not only for biodiversity but also for the food security and economic well-being of local communities.

In addition to disrupting fish migration, dams can also alter the physical characteristics of rivers, such as water temperature, oxygen levels, and sediment transport. The Brahmaputra River carries a large amount of sediment from the Himalayas, which is essential for maintaining the fertility of the floodplains and deltas in Assam. This sediment is deposited during the monsoon season, enriching the soil and supporting agriculture. Dams trap sediment behind their walls, preventing it from reaching downstream areas. Over time, this can lead to a reduction in soil fertility, affecting agricultural productivity and leading to the degradation of ecosystems that depend on nutrient-rich sediments. The reduction in sediment transport also has geomorphological consequences, as the river's ability to shape the landscape is diminished. This can result in increased riverbank erosion downstream, altering the natural flow patterns of the river and causing the displacement of communities living along its banks.

The potential for increased flooding is another significant concern associated with mega dams in Assam. While dams are often touted as a solution to flooding, their actual effectiveness in this regard is debated. Large reservoirs behind dams can store water during periods of heavy rainfall, theoretically reducing the risk of downstream flooding. However, the unpredictability of the monsoon season, combined with the siltation of reservoirs, can limit the effectiveness of dams in controlling floods. In some cases, dam releases during extreme rainfall events can exacerbate flooding downstream, as the sudden release of water adds to already swollen rivers. This has been a concern for many communities living in flood-prone areas of Assam, who fear that the construction of dams will make flooding more unpredictable and severe.

The social impacts of mega dams in Assam are as significant as the ecological ones. The construction of large dams often involves the displacement of thousands of people, many of whom belong to indigenous and marginalized communities. These communities have a deep connection to their land, which is not only a source of livelihood but also of cultural and spiritual significance. When dams are built, vast areas of land are submerged, forcing people to relocate. The process of displacement is often fraught with difficulties, as resettlement programs are rarely able to provide adequate compensation or alternative livelihoods. Displaced communities face the loss of their homes, agricultural land, and access to natural resources, leading to social and economic marginalization.

Moreover, the disruption of traditional ways of life can have profound cultural impacts, as displaced communities are often unable to maintain their cultural practices and social structures in new environments. The construction of dams also raises concerns about the violation of indigenous rights. Many of the areas targeted for dam construction are inhabited by indigenous communities who have lived in these regions for centuries. These communities have developed sustainable ways of managing natural resources, and their knowledge of the local environment is invaluable for biodiversity conservation. However, the voices of these communities are often marginalized in the decision-making process surrounding dam construction. The lack of meaningful consultation and participation in these processes has led to widespread protests and resistance from indigenous groups, who see the construction of dams as a violation of their rights to land, resources, and self-determination.

The economic benefits of mega dams are also called into question when considering the long-term costs of environmental degradation and social disruption. While hydroelectric power can provide a source of revenue and electricity, the economic costs of environmental damage, displacement, and the loss of biodiversity are often overlooked. For example, the decline in fisheries due to dams can have significant economic repercussions for communities that rely on fishing for their livelihoods. Similarly, the loss of agricultural productivity due to reduced sediment transport and altered water flow can affect food security and rural economies. The costs of managing increased riverbank erosion, flooding, and other environmental impacts can also place a burden on local governments and communi-



ties. In many cases, the economic benefits of dams are concentrated among a small group of stakeholders, while the environmental and social costs are borne by the most vulnerable communities.

In recent years, the construction of mega dams in Assam has sparked widespread protests and opposition from civil society groups, environmentalists, and indigenous communities. One of the most controversial projects is the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project, which has been the subject of protests for over a decade. The dam, located on the Subansiri River, a major tributary of the Brahmaputra, has faced opposition due to concerns about its environmental and social impacts. Environmentalists have raised alarm over the potential for the dam to disrupt the river's ecology, affect fish migration, and increase the risk of downstream flooding. Indigenous groups, meanwhile, have protested against the lack of consultation and the potential displacement of communities.

The resistance to mega dams in Assam has also been fueled by concerns about the region's seismic vulnerability. The Eastern Himalayas, where many of these dams are being constructed, is a seismically active region, prone to earthquakes. The construction of large dams in this area increases the risk of dam failures in the event of an earthquake. A dam failure could have catastrophic consequences for communities living downstream, leading to loss of life, property, and environmental damage. The seismic risks associated with dam construction have been a key argument for those opposing these projects, as the

potential for disaster outweighs the perceived benefits of hydroelectric power.

In light of these concerns, there is growing recognition that alternative approaches to water and energy management are needed in Assam. Rather than relying on large-scale infrastructure projects like mega dams, there is increasing interest in exploring decentralized and community-based solutions. Small-scale, run-of-the-river hydroelectric projects, for example, have been proposed as a more sustainable alternative to mega dams. These projects generate electricity without requiring large reservoirs or significant alterations to river flow, minimizing the environmental and social impacts. Community-managed water systems, which prioritize local knowledge and participation, have also been successful in managing water resources sustainably and equitably.

In essence, the construction of mega dams in Assam poses a significant threat to the state's ecology, biodiversity, and communities. While hydroelectric power offers the promise of renewable energy, the environmental and social costs of these projects are immense. Dams disrupt natural ecosystems, displace vulnerable communities, and increase the risk of environmental disasters. In a region as ecologically and culturally rich as Assam, the consequences of these projects could be devastating. As the debate over mega dams continues, it is essential to prioritize sustainable, community-based solutions that protect both the environment and the people who depend on it. (The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK, he can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

Warming waters could endanger all fish in tropical & subtropical regions, warns UNESCO

By: Himanshu Nitnaware

Rising global temperatures could have devastating consequences for marine ecosystems, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions, a UNESCO report has warned. Researchers predict that up to all fish species in these areas may surpass their thermal tolerance limits under the most severe climate change scenario.

This scenario, known as SSP 8.5 or the 'business as usual' pathway, projects a global temperature rise of 4.4°C by the end of the century if greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase at the present rate unchecked.

The findings are part of Engaging Communities to Safeguard Ocean Life report, which underscores the vulnerability of marine species as oceans warm, pushing them beyond their known thermal ranges.

Given the current scenario, many species will experience temperatures exceeding their tolerance limits, the report said. It could potentially endanger 10 per cent to 50 per cent of fish species in temperate oceans, which could exceed their thermal thresholds. For example, species in the Tubataha Reefs and Belize Barrier Reef are already nearing or exceeding their upper thermal limits.

In June this year, UNESCO's State of the Ocean report revealed that ocean temperatures are now rising at twice the rate observed 20 years ago, with 2023 recording one of the sharpest increases since the 1950s. Even species with some capacity to adapt are likely to experience increased stress, affecting their survival and reproductive success, the report said.

eDNA mapping for monitoring marine biodiversity

The findings were presented alongside UNESCO's marine biodiversity mapping initiative, which used environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling to identify nearly 4,500 species across 21 World Heritage sites.

The mapping was done over a period of three years considering that climate disruption and ocean warming are shifting marine species into cooler and deeper waters from their natural habitats, said Fanny Douvère, head of world heritage marine programme, addressing a press conference. Only eight per cent of the oceans are protected, Douvère said, emphasising the urgency of protecting the remaining 20 per cent of oceans not yet under protection under the 30x30 initiative. She also called for better understanding and monitoring of species distribution to build resilience, adding that the data would help to protect the marine species being forced away from their natural habitats.

UNESCO has developed a standardised, non-invasive eDNA sampling method to create an inventory of marine biodiversity at 21 of its 51 World Heritage marine sites. These sites are home to over a third of the world's vulnerable and endangered marine species and harbour 20 per cent of the planet's blue carbon, including 15 per cent of the global coral reef area.

While eDNA technology has been used before, this marks the first time it has been standardised for monitoring marine biodiversity, Douvère ex-

plained. Volunteers collected 1.5-litre water samples to trace genetic information from an average of 100 marine species per sample.

Marine organisms leave traces of DNA in their environment through skin cells, excrement and saliva. By filtering the water samples, researchers were able to extract genetic information about marine species.

As many as 250 volunteers from 19 countries identified 4,406 species, including 2,078 fish species, 86 shark species, 28 mammals and three turtles. Of these, 120 were classified as vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. The Ningaloo Coast in Australia yielded the highest number of species identified, with 787 species recorded, including 340 fish and 24 threatened species.

The report also highlighted the detection of rare species, such as the white-spotted guitarfish (*Rhynchobatus australis*) in Australia's Ningaloo and Shark Bay and the giant guitarfish (*Rhynchobatus djiddensis*) in South Africa's iSimangaliso Wetland Park. Commerson's dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus commersonii*) was found in France's French Austral Lands and Seas World Heritage site.

Early warnings and challenges
In addition to biodiversity, the eDNA method also provided early warnings of invasive species. For example, the presence of invasive lionfish at the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System was confirmed, enabling local management teams to take preventive action before irreversible damage to the local ecosystems.

"As an example, UNESCO eDNA Expeditions sampling in Belize successfully confirmed the presence of invasive lionfish at the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System World Heritage site. Although lionfish are already well established in the Caribbean Sea, this documented sensitivity of eDNA monitoring makes it a promising tool for tracking their spread. Indeed, this potential was recognised by local management at the Brazilian Atlantic Islands: Fernando de Noronha and Atol das Rocas World Heritage site," the report noted.

However, the method has limitations, including biases and variations across taxonomic groups. The report noted failures in detecting species of Requiem sharks of the family Carcharhinidae, such as the oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*), the Pondicherry shark (*Carcharhinus hemiodon*) and the Ganges shark (*Glyptocheilus gangeticus*).

Success in identifying species depended heavily on water quality as well. Tropical sites with clearer waters generally yielded more species than non-tropical locations. "Turbid waters posed additional issues, resulting in the need to repeat the sampling at some locations, such as the Wadden Sea World Heritage site (Denmark, Germany, Kingdom of the Netherlands)," the findings observed.

The report concluded that it remains unclear how well marine species can adapt to warming oceans. "As ocean temperatures rise, species that cannot adapt or migrate face the risk of extinction, leading to a potential loss of marine biodiversity, or shifts in biodiversity, in affected areas," it said. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

The rise of green businesses

By: Satyabrata Borah

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards the rise of green businesses. This change is happening as people and companies are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental challenges the world faces. From pollution to climate change, the impacts of human activity on the planet are becoming impossible to ignore. As a result, more and more businesses are adopting sustainable practices and focusing on reducing their carbon footprint. These green businesses are not just concerned with profits but are also dedicated to preserving the environment, and in doing so, they are helping to create a more sustainable future for all.

The concept of green businesses is not entirely new, but it has gained much more attention in recent years. With growing concerns about global warming, deforestation, and waste accumulation, there is a clear need for businesses to change the way they operate. Traditional businesses often prioritize profit over sustainability, which can lead to practices that harm the environment. However, green businesses are built on the idea that it is possible to make money while still being environmentally responsible. These companies focus on sustainability by using renewable resources, reducing waste, and minimizing their carbon emissions. Their goal is to create products and services that are not only beneficial to consumers but also to the planet. One of the key factors behind the rise of green businesses is the increasing consumer demand for environmentally friendly products and services. People today are more aware of the impact their purchasing decisions have on the planet, and many are choosing to support companies that share their values. Consumers are becoming more conscious of the environmental footprint of the products they buy, whether it's the materials used, the energy required for production, or the waste generated during the process. As a result, businesses are responding by shifting towards greener, more sustainable practices. This shift is not just happening in the consumer goods sector; it is also occurring in industries such as transportation, energy, and construction, where businesses are seeking ways to reduce their environmental impact.

In the transportation industry, for example, the rise of electric vehicles (EVs) is a clear sign of the growing demand for green businesses. Companies like Tesla have played a major role in popularizing EVs, and now traditional automakers like Ford and General Motors are following suit by investing heavily in electric cars. These vehicles are seen as an alternative to traditional gasoline-powered cars, which contribute to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The shift to electric vehicles is not just about providing consumers with a greener option; it is also about creating a sustainable future for transportation. Electric vehicles produce fewer emissions and can be powered by renewable energy sources, making them an essential part of the solution to climate change. In the energy sector, green businesses are focused

on renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power. As concerns about the environmental impact of fossil fuels continue to grow, there is an increasing demand for cleaner, more sustainable energy options. Many companies are investing in renewable energy projects to reduce their reliance on coal, oil, and natural gas. Solar energy companies, for example, are helping homeowners and businesses reduce their energy consumption and lower their carbon footprint by providing affordable and efficient solar panels. Wind energy companies are harnessing the power of the wind to generate electricity, and hydroelectric power is being used to create clean energy from water. The rise of green energy businesses is transforming the way the world produces and consumes energy, and it is a critical part of the fight against climate change.

Another industry where green businesses are making an impact is construction. Traditional construction practices often involve the use of harmful materials, high energy consumption, and wasteful processes. However, green construction businesses are changing the way buildings are designed, constructed, and operated. These companies focus on using sustainable materials, reducing energy usage, and minimizing waste. Green building practices often include the use of energy-efficient technologies, such as solar panels, energy-efficient appliances, and smart building systems that optimize energy usage. Additionally, sustainable construction methods such as using recycled materials, reducing water consumption, and reducing carbon emissions during the construction process are becoming more common. This focus on sustainability not only helps protect the environment but also reduces long-term costs for building owners and occupants.

The rise of green businesses is also being fueled by government policies and regulations that promote sustainability. Many governments around the world are implementing policies that encourage companies to adopt environmentally friendly practices. These policies include financial incentives such as tax breaks or grants for businesses that invest in renewable energy or reduce their carbon emissions. In some countries, governments are introducing regulations that require businesses to meet specific sustainability standards, such as reducing waste or using environmentally friendly materials. These policies create a supportive environment for green businesses to thrive and encourage more companies to adopt sustainable practices. As governments continue to prioritize environmental protection, green businesses will continue to play an important role in driving positive change.

For entrepreneurs and small business owners, starting a green business is becoming more accessible than ever before. With the rise of online platforms and the growing demand for sustainable products, entrepreneurs can easily reach a global audience. Additionally, there are now more resources and support systems in place to help green startups succeed. Many organizations and networks are dedicated to supporting green

businesses by providing advice, funding, and resources. This has led to a growing number of innovative green startups that are developing new technologies, products, and services to address environmental challenges. From sustainable fashion brands to eco-friendly packaging companies, green businesses are emerging across a wide range of industries. One of the key benefits of green businesses is that they often have a positive impact on local communities. By focusing on sustainability, green businesses create jobs that support both the economy and the environment. For example, renewable energy companies often hire workers to install solar panels or maintain wind farms, which creates local employment opportunities. Green construction companies also create jobs in areas such as building design, project management, and construction labor. Additionally, many green businesses are committed to supporting local communities by sourcing materials locally, reducing transportation emissions, and supporting local economies.

Despite the many benefits of green businesses, there are also challenges that these companies face. One of the biggest challenges is the initial cost of implementing sustainable practices. For some businesses, transitioning to greener practices may require significant upfront investment in renewable energy, sustainable materials, or eco-friendly technologies. While these investments can lead to long-term cost savings, the initial financial burden can be a barrier for some companies. However, as the demand for sustainable products and services continues to grow, the cost of implementing green practices is expected to decrease, making it more accessible for businesses of all sizes.

Another challenge is the need for innovation and constant adaptation. The field of sustainability is rapidly evolving, and businesses must stay up to date with the latest technologies and practices in order to remain competitive. This requires ongoing investment in research and development, as well as a commitment to continuous improvement. However, the pace of innovation in the green business sector is accelerating, and companies that stay ahead of the curve will be well-positioned to succeed in the future.

The rise of green businesses is a positive trend that shows how companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of sustainability. As consumers become more environmentally conscious, businesses are responding by adopting green practices that reduce their environmental impact and contribute to a more sustainable future. Green businesses are not only helping to protect the environment but also creating new opportunities for innovation, economic growth, and job creation. While there are challenges to overcome, the future of green businesses looks bright, and they will undoubtedly play a key role in shaping the future of the global economy. As the world continues to face environmental challenges, the rise of green businesses will be crucial in driving the change needed to create a more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

US defence chief observes drills with Japan, Australia

CAMPASAKA (JAPAN), Dec 11: US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin expressed confidence about enhanced military capabilities among the United States, Australia and Japan as he observed joint exercises Wednesday showcasing their closer cooperation as tensions grow in the region. Austin is in Japan to reaffirm the importance of their alliance and Washington's commitment to regional security.

Austin noted as he observed the trilateral Yama Sakura 87 exercises held at the Japanese army's Camp Asaka on the outskirts of Tokyo that the necessary equipment, munitions and people are in place and "these are the things that will guarantee success if we ever get challenged on the battlefield." Japan, under a security strategy introduced in 2022, is pursuing a rapid military buildup to increase its deterrence against growing threats from China, North Korea and Russia, and has bolstered defense cooperation, especially with the United States and Australia. On Tuesday, during talks with Japanese officials, Austin praised the strength of the Japan-US alliance at a time of rapid global political change, including unrest in South Korea and Syria. (AP)

South Korea's top 2 police chiefs detained over enforcement of martial law

SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA), Dec 11: South Korea's two highest police officers have been detained to be investigated for their roles in enforcing President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived martial law decree last week, police said Wednesday.

The development comes hours before the main liberal opposition Democratic Party submits a new motion to impeach Yoon as the country's main law enforcement institutions expand their investigation into whether the president's declaration amounted to rebellion. The first impeachment attempt failed last Saturday when the ruling party boycotted the vote. The Democratic Party said it aims to put the new motion to a vote on Saturday.

Yoon's ill-conceived power grab has paralyzed South Korean politics, frozen its foreign policy, and rattled financial markets, greatly reducing his chances of completing his five-year term and casting a turbulent shadow over one of Asia's most robust democracies.

After last week's impeachment motion fell through, the leader of Yoon's conservative party pledged to arrange his stable exit from power, saying the party will coordinate with Cabinet members over state affairs and that Yoon will be sidelined from duties during a transition to an early election.

However, the plans have been widely criticized as unrealistic and unconstitutional. The constitution explicitly states that impeachment is the sole method for suspending presidential powers and that the authority to command the military rests solely with the president. The Defense Ministry said this week that Yoon remains in charge of the country's military forces.

Earlier Wednesday, Yoon's former defense minister, Kim Yong Hyun, was arrested after a Seoul court approved a warrant for him on allegations of playing a key role in a rebellion and committing abuse of power. Kim became the first person arrested over the December 3 martial law decree.

Police said National Police Agency Commissioner General Cho Ji Ho and Kim Bong-sik, head of the metropolitan police agency of the capital, Seoul, were being held at Seoul's Namsdamun police station.

They have been investigated for their roles in deploying police forces to the National Assembly in an attempt to

Israeli strikes on Gaza kill at least 29, Palestinian medics say

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), Dec 11: Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 29 people overnight and into Wednesday, including one that hit a home where displaced people were sheltering in the isolated north, killing 19, according to Palestinian medical officials.

The Israel-Hamas war has raged on with no end in sight, even after Israel reached a ceasefire with Lebanon's Hezbollah and attention shifted to the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Both the outgoing and incoming US administrations have said they hope to end the war before the inauguration but months of ceasefire talks have repeatedly stalled.

The strike that killed 19 occurred in the northern town of Beit Lahiya near the border with Israel, according to the nearby Kamal Adwan Hospital, which received the bodies. Hospital records show that a family of eight was among those killed, including four children, their parents and two grandparents.

The hospital said another strike near its entrance on Wednesday killed a woman and her two children.

Another strike in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza killed at least seven people,



according to the Awdia Hospital. The dead included two children, their parents and three relatives, it said.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. The military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and accuses militants of hiding among them, putting their lives in danger.

Militants in central Gaza meanwhile fired four projectiles into Israel on Wednesday, two of which were intercepted, the military said. The other two fell in open areas, and there were no reports of casualties.

The military ordered the evacuation of a five-block area of the built-up Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza, saying the rockets had been fired from there. The or-

ders indicated that Israel would soon carry out strikes in the area.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people, including children and older adults. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 44,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to local health officials. They say women and children make up more than half the dead but do not distinguish between fighters and civilians in their count. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Thousands more Palestinians

have gone missing during the war, some after encounters with Israeli troops.

Israel has been waging a renewed offensive against Hamas in Gaza's isolated and heavily destroyed north since early October. Troops have surrounded Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun and the urban Jabalya refugee camp, allowing in almost no humanitarian aid and ordering tens of thousands to flee to nearby Gaza City.

Israeli officials have said the three communities are mostly deserted, but the United Nations humanitarian office said Tuesday that it believes around 65,000 to 75,000 people are still there, with little access to food, water, electricity or health care. Experts have warned that the north may be experiencing famine.

Sigrud Kaag, the senior UN humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, told reporters at the UN on Tuesday that civilians trying to survive all across Gaza face an utterly devastating situation.

She pointed to the breakdown in law and order and looting that has left the UN and many aid organizations unable to deliver food and other humanitarian essentials to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in need. (AP)

22 arrested, 150 booked for propagating against Pakistan Army on social media



LAHORE, Dec 11: Pakistani authorities have booked 150 suspects and arrested 22 of them, mostly belonging to Imran Khan's party, for allegedly propagating against the army on social media on the killings of the party workers in Islamabad on November 26, an official said on Wednesday.

According to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), at least 12 party workers were killed and hundreds wounded when law enforcers opened fire on the protesters in Islamabad on November 26. It also claims that around 105 party workers have been missing since then.

Following the incident, Khan's supporters started blaming the Pakistan Army for opening fire on the peaceful protesters.

The Shehbaz Sharif-led government denied that the law enforcers opened fire on the protesters and pledged to take strict action against those propagating on social media.

The government formed a special task force headed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) chief to NAB such elements.

"Subsequently, the FIA cyber-crime wing booked some 150 suspects and arrested 22 social media activists across the country," an FIA officer said.

He said that the FIA made 117 raids, mostly in Punjab, to arrest the suspects involved in the propaganda against the state institu-

tions.

The suspects (social media activists) have been booked under different sections of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA).

Earlier, Amnesty International had demanded a transparent investigation of the state's deadly crackdown to disperse PTI supporters from Islamabad's D-Chowk where they had gathered for the release of their incarcerated leader and former prime minister.

More than 10,000 protesters surged into Islamabad on Nov 26, defying a ban on public gatherings and a lockdown to skirmish with 20,000 security forces enlisted to turn them back. As Khan supporters inched towards the heavily barricaded D-Chowk, the police and security forces used intense teargas shelling to disperse the protesters.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi had said the law enforcers had bravely repulsed the protesters without using firearms. Khan's party harshly criticised the interior minister for his statements and blamed him for the alleged violence against its supporters, claiming multiple deaths.

Condemning the violence, Amnesty demanded a "prompt, thorough, impartial, effective and transparent investigation" into the deaths and injuries of protesters as well as the unlawful use of force, including lethal and less-lethal weapons, by security personnel. (PTI)

Ex-defense chief in South Korea tried to kill himself after being arrested over martial law

SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA), Dec 11: South Korea's previous defence minister was stopped from attempting suicide while in detention over last week's martial law declaration, officials said Wednesday, as President Yoon Suk Yeol's office resisted a police attempt to search the compound.

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party plans to introduce a new motion to impeach Yoon for his December 3 declaration that imposed martial law in South Korea for the first time in more than four decades.

Its first impeachment attempt against Yoon last Saturday failed after ruling party lawmakers boycotted the vote. The party said it plans to submit the new motion on Thursday to set up a vote on Saturday.

Yoon's ill-conceived power grab has paralyzed South Korean politics, frozen its foreign policy and rattled financial markets. On Wednesday, rival North Korea's state media for the first time reported about the turmoil across the border, but the country hasn't showed any suspicious activities.

Shin Yong Hae, commissioner general of the Korea Correctional Service, told lawmakers that former Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun tried to kill himself the previous night at a detention centre in Seoul. He said correctional officers stopped him and that he was in stable condition.

Kim was arrested early Wednesday after a Seoul court approved a warrant for him on allegations of playing a key role in a rebellion and committing abuse of power. Kim became the first person formally arrested over the martial law decree.

Kim, one of Yoon's close associates, has been accused of recommending martial law to Yoon and sending troops to the National Assembly to block lawmakers from voting on it. Enough lawmakers eventually managed to enter a parliament

chamber and they unanimously rejected Yoon's decree, forcing the Cabinet to lift it before daybreak on December 4.

Kim said in a statement on Tuesday that he deeply apologises for causing significant anxiety to the public. He said all responsibility for the martial law imposition rests with him and pleaded for leniency for soldiers deployed to enforce it.

Prosecutors have up to 20 days to determine whether to indict Kim.

Yoon's office hampers search of presidential compound

Later Wednesday, police detained National Police Agency Commissioner General Cho Ji Ho and Kim Bong-sik, head of Seoul's metropolitan police. They were accused of deploying police forces to parliament to block lawmakers from voting.

The main focus of investigators is finding whether Yoon, Kim and others involved in imposing martial law committed rebellion. A conviction on the charge of rebellion carries a maximum death sentence.

South Korean police said they sent officers to search Yoon's office on Wednesday to look for any evidence related to the martial law introduction. But investigators failed to enter the office as of Wednesday evening, about six hours after their arrival, senior police officer Lee Ho-young said in parliament. Some observers earlier said that the presidential security service won't likely permit searches of Yoon's office, citing a law that prohibits searches of sites with state secrets without approval from those in charge of those areas.

Yoon on Saturday apologised over the martial law decree, saying that he won't avoid legal or political responsibility for it. He said he would leave it to his party to chart a course through the country's political turmoil, including matters related to my term in office. (AP)

Pakistan blocks 80k SIM cards for spreading fake news

ISLAMABAD, Dec 11: Pakistan authorities have blocked approximately 80,000 SIM cards for spreading fake news amid concerns regarding the social media propelled misinformation, the government said on Wednesday.

Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Division Sajid Mehdi told the National Assembly, in response to a calling attention notice regarding the spread of false news on digital platforms, also pointed out the need for reforms in the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016 to better tackle

the issue of fake news.

The amendments to this law would expedite the trial of cases related to the dissemination of false information, he added.

The issue of fake news has already grabbed international attention as a major threat to domestic and global peace and stability and authorities claimed that Pakistan has faced the challenge in the wake of protests by the jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party extensively uses social media to drive home its messages, which the govern-

ment claims is fake news.

Meanwhile, Pakistani authorities have booked 150 suspects and arrested 22 of them, mostly belonging to Khan's party, for allegedly propagating messages against the army on social media about the killings of the party workers in Islamabad on November 26, an official said on Wednesday.

Mehdi said the government's proactive steps, including blocking SIM cards, revising laws, and establishment of a joint task force, are aimed at mitigating the harmful effects of fake news. (PTI)

S Africa to use G20 Presidency to further push shared goals: Minister

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 11: South Africa will use the G20 Presidency that it assumed at the beginning of this month to further push the shared goals of member countries, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola has said.

Lamola delivered the opening remarks at the first G20 Sherpas meeting on Monday where he said that South Africa's presidency will be held under the theme Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability, which seeks to harness global will and capabilities to confront the enormous challenges the world is facing.

"South Africa will use its G20 Presidency to secure urgent progress on shared goals through several priority actions. These include strengthening disaster resilience and response; ensuring debt sustainability for low-income countries; mobilising finance for a just energy transition; and harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth and development," Lamola said.

"In the spirit of Ubuntu, our shared humanity, we will address these challenges through our high-level deliverables and priorities, which lie at the core of the original G20 mandate of promoting strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth and by building partnerships across all sectors of society to find collective solutions," he added.

The minister said three temporary task forces, an initiative and a commission will be established during South Africa's G20 Presidency. These would include the priorities of inclusive economic growth,

industrialisation, employment and reduced inequality; food security; and artificial intelligence, data governance and innovation for sustainable development.

"A review of the work of the G20. 'The G20 at 20 years: A Reflection on Key Achievements and the Way Forward', will also feature as one of South Africa's deliverables through a Sherpa Track Initiative. South Africa also proposes the establishment of a Cost of Capital Commission during its G20 Presidency," Lamola said.

The minister said that the South African government would continue the significant strides made by the Brazilian G20 Presidency in enhancing the G20 as a site of democratic global engagement through a comprehensive dialogue with civil society and other state and non-state institutions.

He said that in the same way that Brazil had done, a G20 Social Forum will be convened ahead of the Leaders' Summit in November 2025, to bring together representatives of the existing engagement groups and other segments of civil society that may offer meaningful contributions to the G20.

"As we build on the past and set the tone for the future, we must accentuate the need to adhere to universal values, shared norms, and strong multilateral institutions. Now more than ever, multilateral institutions must be strengthened and reformed to deliver broad global consensus and serve as platforms to resolve disputes. (PTI)

Biden approves national security memo aimed at helping Trump on China, Iran, North Korea, Russia

WASHINGTON, Dec 11: President Joe Biden has approved a new national security memorandum that is meant to serve as a roadmap for the incoming Trump administration as it looks to counter growing cooperation among China, Iran, North Korea and Russia, the White House said Wednesday.

Biden administration officials began developing the guidance this summer. It was shaped to be a document that could help the next administration build its approach from day one on how it will go about dealing with the tightening relationships between the United States' most prominent adversaries and competitors, according to two senior administration officials.

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House, said the classified memorandum would not be made public because of the sensitivity of some of its findings.

The document includes four broad recommendations: improv-



ing US government interagency cooperation, speeding up the sharing of information with allies about the four adversaries, calibrating the US government's use of sanctions and other economic tools for maximum effectiveness, and bolstering preparation to manage simultaneous crises involving the adversaries.

The US for many years has been concerned about cooperation among the four countries. Coordi-

nation has accelerated between the countries in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The officials noted that as Russia has become more isolated by much of the world, Moscow has turned to Iran for drones and missiles. From North Korea, the Russians have received artillery, missiles and even thousands of troops that have travelled to help the Russians try to repel Ukrainian forces from the Kursk region.

In return, Russia has sent fighter jets to Iran and assisted Tehran as it looks to bolster its missile defence and space technology.

North Korea has received from Russia much-needed fuel and funding to help build out its manufacturing and military capabilities. The officials added that Russia has de facto accepted North Korea as a nuclear weapon state.

China, meanwhile, is benefiting from Russian know-how, with the two countries working together to deepen their military technical cooperation. The two nations are also conducting joint patrols in the Arctic region.

Biden and President-elect Donald Trump have sharply different worldviews, but officials in both the incoming and outgoing administrations said they have sought to coordinate on national security issues during the transition. (AP)

China, meanwhile, has supported Russia with dual use components that help keep its military industrial base afloat.

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Biden and President-elect Donald Trump have sharply different worldviews, but officials in both the incoming and outgoing administrations said they have sought to coordinate on national security issues during the transition. (AP)



Alia Bhatt congratulates Payal Kapadia for twin Golden Globe nominations

The official Instagram page of "All We Imagine..." re-shared Bhatt's post on the platform.

The film, an official India-French co-production, charted history by becoming the first Indian title from India to win the Grand Prix Award at the Cannes Film Festival in May.

It follows two nurses Prabha (Kani Kusruti) and Anu (Divya Prabha) from Kerala navigating life and

love in Mumbai along with their friend and cook Parvati (Chhaya Kadam).

"All We Imagine...", which released in November in India after releasing in Kerala a month ago, is set to re-release in select cinemas on December 13.

"Coming back this Friday in select cinemas!" wrote Kapadia after an X user urged her to re-release the movie in theatres.

Rana Daggubati's production banner Spirit Media has distributed "All We Imagine..." across Indian theatres. (PTI)



NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Bollywood star Alia Bhatt has applauded Payal Kapadia after her acclaimed film "All We Imagine As Light" was nominated for two Golden Globe Awards.

The Malayalam-Hindi film, which marks Kapadia's feature directorial debut, is nominated for Best Motion Picture

English Language and the Best Direction - Motion Picture at the upcoming awards.

Bhatt shared a video clip of Hollywood star Mindy Kaling announcing "All We Imagine..." as one of the nominees in the Best Direction - Motion Picture category.

"History is yours! @payalkapadiafilm @allweimagineaslightfilm," she captioned the announcement video on her Instagram Story on Tuesday.

Ranveer Singh on 14 years of Band Baaja Baaraat:

'WHEN MY DREAMS BECAME A REALITY'



NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Bollywood star Ranveer Singh has marked the 14-year release anniversary of "Band Baaja Baaraat", his debut feature film which he said made his acting dreams a "reality".

The hit Hindi film, which released in theatres on December 10, 2010, is directed by Maneesh Sharma and produced by Yash Raj Films. It also starred Anushka Sharma.

"Band Baaja Baaraat" featured the actor in the role of Bittu, an unambitious, lazy Delhi man who teams up with a focused, driven woman Shruti (Anushka) to start a wedding planning company called "Shaadi Mubarak".

Ranveer, who has since then went on to become one of the most versatile performers in Hindi cinema, shared a video montage from the film on his Instagram Stories on Wednesday.

He captioned the post as: "14 years since Band Baaja Baaraat. When my dreams became a reality. #dreams #manifestations #blessings #gratitude." Ranveer is also known for films such as "Ram-Leela", "Dil Dhadakne Do", "Gully Boy", "Bajirao Mastani", "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani", and "Singham Again".

He is currently working on an untitled film with director Aditya Dhar. (PTI)

Honoured to have been invited by PM to commemorate Raj Kapoor's legacy: Kareena



NEW DELHI, Dec 11: A day after the members of Raj Kapoor's family met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor Khan thanked him for invit-

ing them to "commemorate the extraordinary life and legacy" of their grandfather ahead of the cinema icon's birth centenary.

The Kapoor family, including

actors Ranbir Kapoor, Riddhima Kapoor Sahni, and Neetu Kapoor, met the prime minister on Tuesday and invited him to the Raj Kapoor Film Festival to be held to celebrate the occasion.

December 14, 2024 marks the 100th birth anniversary of Raj Kapoor, an actor, editor, a director, and a producer, known for classics such as "Aag", "Awara", "Barsaat", "Shree 420", and "Bobby".

According to Kareena's Instagram post, the PM invited the Kapoor clan to New Delhi ahead of the milestone anniversary.

"We are deeply humbled and honored to have been invited by the Honourable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, to commemorate the extraordinary life and legacy of our grandfather, the legendary Raj Kapoor.

"Thank you Shri Modi ji for such a special afternoon. Your warmth, attention, and support in celebrating this milestone meant the world to us," she captioned a series of pictures of the family with the prime minister.

The Kapoor kin, including Rima Jain, Karisma Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Saif Ali Khan, Aadar Jain, Aarman Jain and Anissa Malhotra, met Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday to invite the prime minister for the Raj Kapoor Film Festival, a source earlier told PTI. (PTI)

Tension at actor Mohan Babu's Hyderabad home over son's entry attempt

HYDERABAD, Dec 11: A case was registered against veteran Telugu actor Mohan Babu for allegedly assaulting a video journalist here, police said on Wednesday.

In his complaint, the journalist stated that when he visited Mohan Babu's Jalpally residence on December 10 to cover the ongoing "dispute" between the actor and his younger son Manoj, the senior actor confronted him and other journalists aggressively.

He allegedly grabbed the microphone, used "abusive and foul language," and attacked him with it, causing a head injury. Based on the complaint filed by the 35-year-old journalist, the case was registered under Section 118 (1) (voluntarily causing hurt using dangerous weapons or substances) of the BNS at the Padishareef police station, a police official said.

Chaos erupted at Mohan Babu's residence on Tuesday night when Manoj, an actor, attempted to enter the house but was denied entry.

During the commotion, the video journalist covering the incident was allegedly attacked.

TV visuals showed Mohan Babu trying to hit the journalist with a microphone.

Condemning the "attack," media personnel protested on Wednesday, demanding an apology from Mohan Babu. (PTI)

Raj Kapoor@100: His films, portrayal of women and the wrinkles of time

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: He started with "Aag" in 1948 and ended with "Ram Teri Ganga Maili" in 1985, one praised for its portrayal of a man in search for the woman of his dreams and the other panned by some for its male gaze. In the 37 years in between, Raj Kapoor directed 10 films and produced many, each in its own way burnishing the showman image.

As filmfod, fans and family celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of Raj Kapoor, amongst the most impactful in the history of Indian cinema, it was also time to wonder - have his films wrinkled with time or stood the test of the decades in an ever changing India?

Yes, they have. Just like fine wine, said film historian SMM Ausaja, who sees 100 years of Raj Kapoor as a "momentous" occasion for the Hindi film industry.

"His films had a message and got the social issues right. That is the reason why they were also popular outside India, especially in the Russian republic. Those were the days of socialism and Nehruvian socialism. And his father Prithviraj Kapoor was close to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru," Ausaja told PTI.

Raj Kapoor, who would have been 100 on December 14, made his first film "Aag" when he was just 24.

It was the year after Independence and the young filmmaker mirrored many of the preoccupations of a young nation in the films that followed.

The burning passion of the Hindi cinema pioneer, inspired by his father Prithviraj Kapoor, led to the birth of RK Studios that year.

The banner's films, starting with "Aag" and going on to "Awara",

"Barsaat", "Jagte Raho", "Mera Naam Joker", "Bobby" and "Ram Teri Ganga Maili", chronicled the different phases of a filmmaker in tune with an India on the move. All his films are remembered for their music.

There has been a dramatic change in the times, socialism is no longer considered a viable option and consumerism is considered a valuable activity, said sociologist Sanjay Srivastava.

"Hindi films since the 1990s reflect these themes. It is not that Raj Kapoor's films are aged badly but that Indian society has aged differently," Srivastava told PTI.

"Most of his films were heroine oriented. Look at the bravery of this man that he launched his son Rishi Kapoor in a film called 'Bobby'. Which producer in the world will do this?" Ausaja asked.

The 1973 teen romance, which catapulted newcomers Rishi Kapoor and Dimple Kapadia, playing the titular role in "Bobby" into stardom, was a runaway hit.

Despite suffering a "colossal disaster" in the ambitious, pensive "Mera Naam Joker" (1970), Raj Kapoor bounced back three years later with "Bobby", which the veteran filmmaker helmed when he was 50, said his grandson Ranbir Kapoor.

"He had the courage to make a film with newcomers, a 50-year-old man making a film for the youth. That means that he really kept up with the times. He was not somebody who was high up in his ivory tower. He was constantly in touch with the common man," Ranbir said at a retrospective of the showman at the recent International Film Festival of India (IFFI). (PTI)





Government of Assam

Department of Sports & Youth Welfare

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maharan



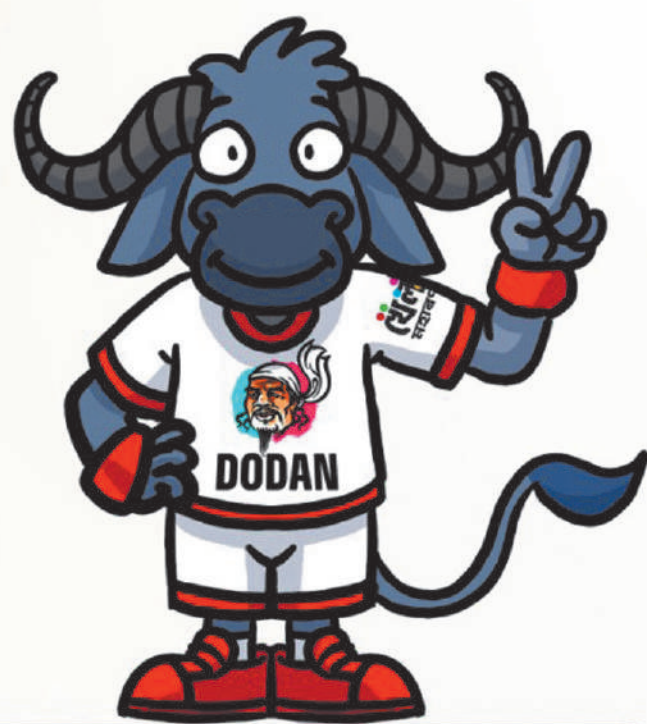
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