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- Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashes in Kazakhstan leaving 32 survivors
- Imran demands meeting with party team ahead of negotiations with Pakistan govt
- Delhi Congress brings out 'white paper' targeting AAP, BJP
- 'Cong didn't want anyone to grow bigger than Nehru-Gandhi family'

## Two terror suspects arrested in Kokrajhar

Another success of Operation Praghat ● Arrested duo 'sleeper cell' members B'desh-based terror network

GUWAHATI, Dec 25: Two suspected members of a 'sleeper cell' of a terror network have been arrested along with a huge cache of arms and ammunition in Assam's Kokrajhar district, police said on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference here, special director general of police Harmeet Singh said, "The Special Task Force (STF), along with Kokrajhar district police, carried out an operation in the district's Namapara area on Tuesday night and arrested the duo."

"The team, led by STF inspector general Parthasarathi Mahanta, achieved a huge success in averting a possible terror act by jihadi elements of a global terrorist organisation. We seized war-like stores from them," he added.

The duo were 'sleeper cell' members of a network, having links with the Bangladesh-based



Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), which is an affiliate of the Al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Singh said.

He said the operation was part of the ongoing multi-state exercise - Operation Praghat.

set up 'sleeper cells' to carry out subversive activities across the country," Singh said the terror network had "big plans" to carry out subversive activities in other states of Northeast and the rest of the country.

"They were in the process of creating a big terror network, but their first attempt failed after our successful operations. We are working with multiple states and central agencies to investigate the case. More details will emerge in the coming days," he added.

Asked if the network got activated after political turmoil hit Bangladesh earlier this year, the SDGP said, "A citizen of the foreign country entered India in November to activate the 'sleeper cell' network before he was caught in Kerala." "This is going to be a long operation to unearth the entire module. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Congress 'shameless' party, using Ambedkar for 'political gains': Himanta

GUWAHATI, Dec 25: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday termed the Congress a "shameless" party, which is using Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's name for "political gains" only.

He claimed that Congress had launched innumerable schemes and established many institutions in the name of leaders from Jawaharlal Nehru's family, but there was no such establishment after Ambedkar.

"Congress does not have any shame. The party which imposed emergency, suspended the Constitution, killed democracy, that Congress is doing processions in the name of the Constitution, and it shows that they don't have any shame. It will not be an exaggeration if they are termed as shameless," Sarma told reporters here.

He said that the Congress rolled out Indira Gandhi Awas Yojana, launched many schemes in the name of Rajiv Gandhi and named many big universities in the country after Jawaharlal Nehru.

"...but have you dedicated even one scheme in the name of Babasaheb Ambedkar? Forget university, but have you even named a school after him?"

"Can anyone tell me if there was a photograph of Ambedkar in any Rajiv Bhawan before yesterday? I was in Congress for 22 years and never saw a picture of him in Rajiv Bhawan," Sarma said after visiting BJP headquarters to pay tribute to former Prime Min-

ister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

He said that Ambedkar's Jayanti was celebrated at AICC on Tuesday but wondered since when did Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi started garlanding the statue or portrait of Ambedkar.

"When Ambedkar resigned from the ministry, it was told that the country would not suffer. You gave Bharat Ratna to everyone in the world, but not to Ambedkar.

"Today to avail political advantage, Ambedkar's memory, ideology, and sacrifice has been made a weapon for political gains only. This is such a notorious and shameful act that has never taken place in India," the CM said.

He asked when did Rahul Gandhi visit the statue of Ambedkar or did ever Indira Gandhi visit the same?

"Did they ever tell the nation what role Ambedkar played in drafting the Constitution? Don't you (Congress) have any shame today? If you had little shame, you would not have held Ambedkar's picture," Sarma said. He advised the Congress party that they will "do well in drama and nautanki" if anyone gives them a role. "Your job will be in the Mumbai film industry for doing drama, but you will never be in the minds and hearts of the people. The people know very well how you ignored Ambedkar for 75 years," he added.

When asked about (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Murmu, Modi pay tributes to Vajpayee

NEW DELHI, Dec 25: President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were among the dignitaries who joined a prayer ceremony at 'Sadaiv Atal', the memorial of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, on Wednesday to pay tributes to him on his birth centenary.

Union ministers, including Amit Shah and J P Nadda, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge besides BJP allies such as Andhra Pradesh chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Union ministers Lalan Singh of the JD(U) and Jitan Ram (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## NIELIT director meets Himanta to discuss institute's campus in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, Dec 25: Dr Madan Mohan Tripathi, director general of the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), met with chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, where he discussed skilled development in the semiconductor sector.

The meeting which took place at Lok Seva Bhawan in Dispur also witnessed discussion on the allotment of land for NIELIT's permanent campus in Guwahati.

"Dr. Madan Mohan Tripathi, Hon'ble Director General of the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology, met Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma at Public Service Bhawan, Dispur, today. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## Delhiites dissatisfied with AAP, will vote for BJP: Tiwari

NEW DELHI, Dec 25: BJP MP Manoj Tiwari has claimed that the people of Delhi are dissatisfied with the AAP's governance and will vote for the BJP in the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls.

In an interview with PTI Videos, Tiwari accused the AAP of failing to address the problems of Delhiites and blamed it for the capital's "decline".

"Every person in Delhi is troubled by the AAP's governance and issues like polluted water, toxic air, Yamuna's state, pending pensions for senior citizens, false promises

and broken ration card system," he alleged. "Over the last 10 years, 21,000 people have died due to polluted water in the city. Instead of solving issues, Kejriwal has driven Delhi into debt. People are now evaluating his government rather than trusting his new promises," he said.

The BJP MP also criticised Kejriwal for failing to address basic issues like providing clean drinking water to people. "After ruling for 10 years, he still talks about providing clean water. Delhi residents can no longer be misled," the BJP MP said. Tiwari also (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Unity needed for Vikshit Bharat goal: Manoj Sinha

GHAZIPUR, Dec 25: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Wednesday said "invaders and divisive forces have historically weakened India's economy", and called on people to thwart the plans of "disruptive forces".

A united India is essential for realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a developed nation by 2047, Sinha said and underlined the crucial role of farmers in achieving the goal. Speaking at the inauguration of the District Co-operative (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



অসম চৰকাৰ



# ই-খাজনা

## ভূমি ৰাজহ আদায় ব্যৱস্থাৰ সৰলীকৰণ

ভূমি ৰাজহ সংগ্ৰহ ব্যৱস্থা অধিক স্বচ্ছ, কাৰ্যকৰী তথা সুগম কৰাৰ লক্ষ্যৰে ৰাজহ আৰু দুৰ্যোগ ব্যৱস্থাপনা বিভাগ, অসম চৰকাৰে জনসাধাৰণৰ বাবে লৈ আহিছে অনলাইন আৰু অফলাইন মাধ্যমেৰে খাজনা পৰিশোধ ব্যৱস্থা

- পট্টাদাৰে অনলাইন আৰু অফলাইন দুয়োটা মাধ্যমেৰে খাজনা পৰিশোধ কৰিব পাৰিব
- পট্টাদাৰসকলে অনলাইন e-Khazna যোগে বা অফলাইন CFR যোগে আদায় দিব পাৰিব ভূমি ৰাজহ
- অনলাইন e-Khazna যোগে খাজনা পৰিশোধ কৰিব নোৱাৰা পট্টাদাৰৰ বাবে কৰা হৈছে এই ব্যৱস্থা
- কৰ্মসূত্ৰে বা আন কাৰণত বাহিৰত বসবাস কৰা পট্টাদাৰে অনলাইনযোগে e-Khazna জৰিয়তে ভূমি ৰাজহ আদায় দিব পাৰিব
- সকলো জিলাৰ সমূহ মৌজাদাৰ/ তহচিলদাৰৰ কাৰ্যালয়ত এই ব্যৱস্থা কৰা হৈছে



ভূমি ৰাজহ  
অনলাইন পৰিশোধ কৰিবলৈ  
QR ক'ড স্কেন কৰক

আজিয়েই  
আপোনাৰ ভূমি ৰাজহ  
আদায় দিয়ক



মোবাইলৰ সহায়ত  
QR ক'ড স্কেন



ই-খাজনা প'ৰ্টেল



পে' (যদি ইতিমধ্যে পঞ্জীয়ন কৰা হৈছে)  
বা খাজনা আদায় দিবলৈ পঞ্জীয়ন কৰক

ৰাজহ আৰু দুৰ্যোগ ব্যৱস্থাপনা বিভাগ, অসম চৰকাৰ

তথ্য আৰু জনসংযোগ সঞ্চালকালয়, অসমৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত

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## India - the world's third largest oil consuming and importing nation BPCL picks Andhra Pradesh for India's last greenfield refinery project

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** State-owned Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) has picked Andhra Pradesh for setting up a new oil refinery-cum-petrochemical complex, which may be the last greenfield project in India which has detailed a very ambitious energy transition plan to net zero emissions.

In a stock exchange filing, BPCL said its board at a meeting on Tuesday "accorded its approval to commence pre project activities for setting up of a greenfield refinery cum petrochemical complex in east coast at Andhra Pradesh at an estimated cost of ₹ 6,100 crore".

The pre-project activities include initial studies, land identification, and acquisition, preparation of detailed feasibility report, environment impact assessment, basic design engineering package, and front-end engineering design, it said.

While the firm did not reveal the capacity or the timelines for completing the project, the refinery could be at least 9 million tonnes (180,000 barrels per day) capacity.

BPCL is India's third largest oil refiner behind state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Reliance Industries Ltd. It currently owns refineries at Mumbai (12 million tonnes a year capacity), Kochi in Kerala (15.5 million tonnes) and Bina in Madhya Pradesh (7.8 million tonnes). It had lost a fourth oil refinery to Oil India Ltd in the aborted privatisation plan.

BPCL had to give up its Numaligarh refinery in Assam to Oil India Ltd when the government



was attempting to privatise the company. The transfer was to keep the Numaligarh unit within the public sector to honour the Assam Accord. But BPCL privatisation was aborted due to lack of interest by bidders.

The planned unit in Andhra Pradesh is being touted as India's last greenfield refinery project. BPCL is part of a consortium that is pursuing a 60 million tonnes a year refinery-cum-petrochemical complex on west coast in Maharashtra that was conceived six years back but is yet to get off the drawing board due to land acquisition woes.

India -- the world's third largest oil consuming and importing nation -- has a refining capacity of 256.8 million tonnes and publicly announced plans for expanding current units and a near complete 9 million tonnes facility at Barmer in Rajasthan of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) will

take it to 300 million tonnes by the end of the decade.

Its oil demand is growing at 4.5 per cent annually and the new refinery shows the country's confidence in fuel demand growth even as electric vehicles are eroding sales of oil consumption in China. India's nearly two dozen refineries produced 276.1 million tonnes of fuel in 2023-24 fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) while domestic consumption was 234.3 million tonnes. The rest of the products were exported.

It is being said that the planned expansion as well as the new unit at Barmer (likely to be commissioned next year) and the one BPCL is now looking at building on Andhra coast will be sufficient to meet India's fuel demand till at least 2040.

During this period, the country is also aggressively pursuing clean energy projects including green hydrogen which will shift a bulk of

energy demand especially in the transport sector to electricity (EVs) or gas (CNG/LNG) or green hydrogen.

India has set 2070 as the target date to achieve net zero carbon emissions.

BPCL has lined up ₹ 1.7 lakh crore of investment for expanding its core oil refining and fuel retailing business as well as in new energy ventures.

"To meet the anticipated demand beyond our planned expansions in Bina and Kochi (refineries), we are actively evaluating options for setting up additional integrated refining and petrochemical capacities in the next 5-7 years," Chairman G Krishnakumar had stated at the company's annual shareholder meeting on August 30.

Building on a strong Indian energy presence, BPCL aspires to meet 7-10 per cent of the nation's primary energy demand by 2047.

BPCL is targeting net-zero carbon emissions by 2040 by investing ₹ 1 lakh crore in renewable power, green hydrogen, compressed biogas, carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS), energy efficiency improvements, and carbon offsets.

The company has set aggressive targets to build 2 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2025 and 10 GW by 2035.

It is investing nearly ₹ 1,000 crore to establish two 50 MW captive wind power plants in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and is also investing about ₹ 300 crore in 72 MWp of solar projects in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. (PTI)

## EPFO adds 13.41 lakh net members in Oct

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Retirement fund body EPFO has registered 13.41 lakh net new members addition in October 2024, according to showed latest payroll data.

This signifies increased employment opportunities and heightened awareness of employee benefits, bolstered by EPFO's effective outreach initiatives, a labour ministry statement said on Wednesday.

According to the statement, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has released provisional payroll data for October 2024, revealing a net addition of 13.41 lakh members.

As per the data, EPFO enrolled around 7.50 lakh new members in October 2024.

This addition in new memberships can be attributed to growing employment opportunities, increased awareness of employee benefits, and EPFO's successful outreach programmes, the ministry stated.

A noticeable aspect of the data is the dominance of the 18-25 age group, constituting a significant 58.49 per cent of the total new members added in October 2024.

The net payroll data for the age group 18-25 for October 2024 is 5.43 lakhs.

This is in consonance with the earlier trend, which indicates that most individuals joining the organised workforce are youth, primarily first-time job seekers. The payroll data highlights that approximately 12.90 lakh members exited and subsequently re-joined EPFO. This figure depicts year-on-year growth of 16.23 per cent compared to October 2023.

These members switched their jobs and rejoined the establishments covered under the ambit of EPFO and opted to transfer their accumulations instead of applying for final settlement, thus, safeguarding long-term financial well-being and extending their social security protection.

Gender-wise analysis of payroll data unveils that out of the new members added during the month, around 2.09 lakhs are new female members.

This figure exhibits year-on-year growth of 2.12 per cent compared to October 2023.

Also, the net female member addition during the month stood at around 2.79 lakh.

The increase in female member additions is indicative of a broader shift towards a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

State-wise analysis of payroll data denotes that net member addition in the top five states/UTs constitutes around 61.32 per cent of net member addition, adding a total of around 8.22 lakh net members during the month.

Of all the states, Maharashtra is leading by adding 22.18 per cent of net members during the month.

The states/UTs of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Haryana, Telangana and Gujarat individually added more than 5 per cent of the total net members during the month.

Month-on-month comparison of industry-wise data displays significant growth in the members working in establishments engaged in the industries -- Road motor transport, Electronic media companies in the private sector, and banks other than nationalised banks, among others.

Of the total net membership, around 42.29 per cent addition is from expert services (consisting of manpower suppliers, normal contractors, security services, miscellaneous activities etc).

The payroll data is provisional since data generation is a continuous exercise, as updating employee records is a continuous process.

The previous data gets updated every month. From the month of April 2018, EPFO has been releasing payroll data covering the period from September 2017 onwards.

In monthly payroll data, the count of members joining EPFO for the first time through Aadhaar validated Universal Account Number (UAN), existing members exiting from coverage of EPFO and those who exited but rejoined as members, is taken to arrive at net monthly payroll. (PTI)

## N Srinivasan resigns as CEO, MD of India Cements post

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Leading cement maker UltraTech has completed the acquisition of promoters a 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements Ltd, following which N Srinivasan and other promoters of the South-based cement maker have stepped down.

The Aditya Birla Group firm has completed the acquisition of 10.13 crore equity shares of India Cements Ltd (ICL), representing 32.72 per cent of the equity share capital of the company.

"This, together with the existing shareholding of 7.05 crore equity shares (22.77 per cent) of the equity share capital of ICL, has resulted in the Company's shareholding increasing to 17.19 crore equity shares representing 55.49 per cent of ICL's equity share capital," UltraTech had informed in a late-night regulatory filing on Tuesday.

Consequently, ICL "has become a subsidiary of the Company" with effect from December 24, 2024, it added. On Wednesday, ICL informed that pursuant to the completion of the transaction and due to the consequent cessation of control by the existing promoters over the company, N Srinivasan has stepped down as Vice Chairman and Managing Director.

Besides, his daughter Rupa Gurunath, wife Chitra Srinivasan and V M Mohan have also stepped down from the board of the company, according to a regulatory filing by ICL.

Moreover, "pursuant to the consummation of the Transaction on December 24 2024, UltraTech has acquired sole control of the company and has become the promoter of the company in accordance with the LODR Regulations", informed ICL.

Further, the board also recorded the resignation of certain independent directors - S Balasubramanian Adityan, Krishna Srivastava, Lakshmi Aparna Sreekrumar and Sandhya Rajan with effect from the end of business hours on December 25, 2024, it added. (PTI)

## Swan ties up with AG&P for India FSRU

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Business tycoon Nikhil Merchant-run Swan Energy has lined up a floating LNG receipt and regasification unit for its proposed liquefied natural gas import project at Jafrabad in Gujarat, the firm said in a regulatory filing.

Swan signed a Heads of Agreement with Singapore's AG&P Terminals and Logistics to form joint venture companies to provide a floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) and a floating storage unit to operate the Jafrabad terminal as well as for supplying LNG. A joint venture company (LNG supply company) will be incorporated "for the purpose of supplying LNG in India or any other jurisdiction", Swan said in the filing, adding it will hold 51 per cent equity stake and the balance 49 per cent equity stake shall be held by AG&P LNG.

Another joint venture company (vessel company) will be incorporated "for the purpose of providing floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) and floating storage unit (FSU) to operate Swan LNG Pvt Ltd's LNG Terminal. (PTI)

## Airtel tops subscriber additions in NE region: TRAI report

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Dec 25:** Airtel emerged as the leading telecom provider in wireless subscriber additions in the North Eastern region for the month of October 2024, according to an official statement.

According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), Airtel added 136,382 wireless subscribers in Assam and 47,625 wireless subscribers in the North East, bringing its total subscriber base to 11,890,497 in Assam and 6,267,645 in the North East.

Airtel emerged as the leading telecom operator in Assam, adding the maximum number of wireless subscribers, followed by state-run BSNL with 21,348 subscribers.

Other private operators, Reliance Jio and VIL, recorded wireless subscriber losses of 86,145 and 6,089 subscribers, respectively, during the same period, the statement claimed.

"Nationally, Airtel has added 1.93 million (1,928,263) wireless subscribers across all telecom circles in October 2024", it further said.

This growth has raised its total wireless subscriber base to 385.41 million (38,541,074) as of October 31.

TRAI also reported Airtel's peak Visitor Location Register (VLR) at 98.88 percent in Assam and 103.97 percent in the North East, while its overall VLR percentage stood at 99.48 percent, the highest in the industry, it claimed.

"The telecom industry witnessed a decline in total wireless subscribers in India—from 1,153.72 million at the end of September 2024 to 1,150.42 million at the end of October 2024—Airtel's market share stood at 33.50 percent, reflecting its ability to retain and attract customers amidst challenging conditions", the statement concluded.

## FPI inflows into Indian equities drop in 2024, rebound anticipated in 2025

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** After a robust 2023, foreign investors significantly scaled back their investments in Indian equities in 2024, with net inflows amounting to over ₹ 5,000 crore, as elevated domestic valuations, coupled with geopolitical uncertainties prompted investors to adopt a more cautious stance.

Looking ahead to 2025, FPI flows into Indian equities could see a recovery, supported by a cyclical upswing in corporate earnings, particularly in domestic-oriented sectors like capital goods, manufacturing, and infrastructure, Vinit Bolinjkar, Head of Research, Ventura Securities, said.

However, elevated valuations and cheaper alternatives in other emerging markets, such as ASEAN and Latin America, could constrain these inflows.

Additionally, lingering concerns over a prolonged global recession may weigh on investor sentiment and appetite for risk assets, he added. On the other hand, Feroze Azeez, Deputy CEO at Anand Rathi Wealth Ltd, believes geopolitical escalations, central bank interest rate cuts, and potential US tariff sanctions could act as tailwinds for FPI inflows into Indian markets.

As of now, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have made a net investment of over ₹ 5,052 crore in the Indian equity markets and Rs 1.12 lakh crore in the debt market (till December 24), as per data available with the depositories.

This follows the extraordinary ₹ 1.71 lakh crore net investment in equities in 2023, driven by optimism surrounding India's resilient economic fundamentals. In contrast, 2022 witnessed the worst net outflow of ₹ 1.21 lakh crore due to aggressive rate hikes by global central banks. Prior to the outflow, FPIs invested money in the last three years (2019, 2020 and 2021). In 2024, FPI outflows were



recorded during the months of January, April, May, October, and November.

The drastic decline in FPIs flow in 2024 stems from a combination of global and domestic factors.

The reduced inflow into Indian equities was primarily driven by elevated valuations, prompting investors to redirect their investment to attractively valued Chinese equities, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director of Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

This shift was further fuelled by a series of stimulus measures introduced by China to bolster economic growth, making its equities increasingly appealing.

In addition, heightened geopolitical tensions, particularly the Israel-Iran conflict, increased risk aversion, pushing investors toward safer assets. Caution ahead of the US Presidential election and concerns over fewer US Fed rate cuts next year, despite this year's 100 bps cuts, further dampened sentiment, he added.

On the domestic front, factors like high valuations, weak corporate earnings for the September quarter, expectations of subdued results for December, rising inflation, slower GDP growth, and a de-

preciating rupee have weighed on investor confidence, Narendar Singh, smallcase Manager and Founder at Growth Investing, said.

In contrast to equities, FPIs have shown a marked preference for Indian debt markets, investing ₹ 1.12 lakh crore in 2024, up from ₹ 68,663 crore in 2023.

This trend has been significantly influenced by India's inclusion in JP Morgan's Government Bond Index, with expectations of further inclusion in other major global bond indices along with anticipated interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve led to enhanced flow from foreign investors into the Indian bond markets, Morningstar's Srivastava said.

Apart from the index inclusion, other key drivers include India's improving fiscal position where deficit reduced from 5.1 per cent to 4.9 per cent further expected to decline to 4.5 per cent next year plus a healthy forex reserves, Singh said.

Moreover, FPIs inflow into the debt market are anticipated to grow as Bloomberg is including Indian government bonds to its emerging market index by January 2025. Additionally, interest from various foreign pension funds in Indian government bonds is likely

to create more inflows into the Indian debt market, Anand Rathi Wealth's Azeez said.

Prior to 2023, FPIs had consistently pulled out funds, withdrawing ₹ 15,910 crore in 2022, ₹ 10,359 crore in 2021, and a record ₹ 1.05 lakh crore in 2020.

On the equity front, the financial services sector experienced the largest outflows, totalling ₹ 54,500 crore, followed by the oil & gas sector with ₹ 50,000 crore, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) with ₹ 20,000 crore.

FPIs began 2024 on a weak footing, withdrawing ₹ 25,700 crore in January amid a spike in US bond yields and uncertainty surrounding the global and domestic interest rate environment.

However, this trend reversed in February and March, as FPIs invested ₹ 36,600 crore, encouraged by India's strong economic growth, market resilience, and easing US bond yields.

The recovery was short-lived, as FPIs turned net sellers in April, a trend that persisted into May, driven by political uncertainty during the general elections.

Despite this, FPIs returned to equities in June and sustained their buying momentum until September, culminating in a net investment of ₹ 57,359 crore in September alone, buoyed by a rate cut from the US Federal Reserve.

October and November, however, marked a sharp reversal, with FPIs pulling out a massive ₹ 1.16 lakh crore collectively. October saw an unprecedented outflow of ₹ 94,017 crore -- the largest monthly withdrawal on record -- amid increased allocations to China, concerns over muted corporate earnings, and the high valuation of Indian equities. Despite the volatility, FPIs have shown signs of revival in December, with net inflows exceeding ₹ 20,071 crore so far, signaling renewed interest in Indian equities. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Two terror suspects arrested

It is being studied, analysed and investigated. I don't see it ending anytime soon," he added. Singh said that from Kokrajhar, the STF team recovered four handmade rifles that are made to look like AKs, 34 rounds of live ammunition, and 24 rounds of blank cartridges signalling that they were practicing firing.

"We also seized a pair of live un-primed IED with cortex, one handmade grenade with explosives, one circuit of detonators made out of agricultural equipment, 14 electronic switches, three iron cases used for making IEDs with 20 iron pieces and plates for causing maximum damage," he added.

Besides, a huge number of switches and wires with explosives used in firecrackers along with other incriminating items have been recovered from the two arrested persons, Singh said. (PTI)

## Congress 'shameless' party,

infiltration of Bangladeshis in the state after political turmoil started in the neighbouring nation, the CM said it is a matter of concern for all Northeastern states, especially those sharing borders with the country.

"The sad part is that with the downsliding of Bangladesh's economy and closure of its textile industry, the influx of Bangladeshis has increased unprecedentedly. Tripura CM recently said 1,500 Bangladeshis were detained, while BSF and our state police are also capturing them. "I feel that we need to be cautious in Assam because we are apprehending 20-25 Bangladeshis everyday and we don't have any idea how many have already entered without being caught," he added.

Sarma further said that Union Home Minister Amit Shah has asked the NE states, especially the Border States, to be vigilant after all the CMs mentioned about the issue during the recently held Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Agartala. (PTI)

## Murmu, Modi pay tributes

Manjhi of HAM(S) also paid homage to the BJP stalwart. Kharge, Nadda, who is also the BJP president, besides many parliamentarians, including ministers, visited the Central Hall of the old parliament building, now called Samvidhan Sadan, to offer floral tributes to Vajpayee's portrait.

Ruling alliance members were also present in the prayer ceremony at Sadaiv Atal where vice president Jagdeep Dhankhar and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla besides the members of Vajpayee's adopted family joined as well. Modi said in a post on X that the impact of how Vajpayee preserved constitutional values and gave a new direction and momentum to the country will remain forever. (PTI)

## NIELIT director meets Himanta

The discussion centered on initiatives for skill development in the semiconductor sector and the allocation of land for the permanent campus of NIELIT in Guwahati," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) posted on the microblogging platform X on Wednesday.

"This collaboration will enhance IT infrastructure and create new opportunities for our youth," the CMO added.

## Delhiites dissatisfied with

targeted Kejriwal over the issue of illegal Bangladeshi and Rohingya immigrants. "Kejriwal helped the illegal immigrants become voters. This is why people wonder how the AAP won despite public dissatisfaction," he said. Tiwari said announcing the names of candidates early for the elections does not guarantee victory. "The AAP has exposed its flaws by announcing its candidates early, sidelining its sitting MLAs and showing a lack of trust in them. Instead, it has handed tickets to many outsiders," he said.

The AAP released its first list of 11 candidates for the Delhi polls on November 21, dropping three sitting MLAs and fielding six leaders who recently switched over from the BJP and the Congress.

Earlier this month, the AAP released its final list of candidates, becoming the first major party to declare all 70 candidates. Responding to a question about the BJP not declaring a chief ministerial face in Delhi, Tiwari said, "In the BJP, commitment matters and any worker can become the CM face. Our focus is to bring Delhi under the BJP's governance and align it with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's double-engine model."

On the AAP recently announcing various schemes to woo voters, he said BJP-ruled states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra already provide similar benefits to people, especially women. The Delhi elections are slated for February next year. (PTI)

## Unity needed for Vikshit Bharat

Bank ATM at the District Panchayat Auditorium, Sinha said, "Cooperation is a mantra that can bring prosperity to our farmers. Only when farmers thrive will the nation reach economic heights." Noting that India has been affected by invaders and "disruptive forces, he called on people "to thwart the plans of disruptive forces, emphasising that a united India is essential for realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a developed nation by 2047."

However, with the formation of Narendra Modi's government in 2014, the country has been on a fast track to economic growth, he said. Referring to a recent report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Sinha remarked, "The latest IMF report reaffirms the strength and forward momentum of India's economy.

Praising India's Cooperation minister Amit Shah, Sinha highlighted the ongoing revival of primary committees and institutions like PACS (Primary Agricultural Credit Societies).

"New cooperative societies are being formed. By embracing the cooperative model, our farmers can achieve remarkable development. When farmers prosper, the nation prospers," he said. He also expressed satisfaction over the turnaround of cooperative banks. "I am delighted to note that a cooperative bank, which had long been running at a loss, is now generating profits. We must continue this progress to build a developed India," he added. Sinha emphasised the importance of adopting digital tools like e-banking and net banking to strengthen cooperative banks. He also pointed out that stronger financial institutions could better support farmers.

"We need to create a system where farmers have ample access to funds for agriculture. This will accelerate the development of farmers in Ghazipur and eastern Uttar Pradesh," he said. (PTI)



# 'Atal Ji's commitment to the principles of good governance won the hearts of the masses'

## Sarbananda Sonowal pays tribute to the former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Dec 25:** On the occasion of the 100th birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal paid tribute to the late leader in Dibrugarh on Wednesday.

Addressing the gathering, Sarbananda Sonowal said "Atal Ji was a great leader who taught us the values of unity, service, dedication and humanity. His exemplary leadership paved the way for us to serve the nation with unwavering commitment. His ideals continue to inspire us as we work to strengthen India's future."

"Atal Ji's commitment to the principles of good governance won the hearts of the masses. His leadership inspired the creation of a peaceful and prosperous India. It is in his footsteps that we must move forward, ensuring that the welfare of the people remains at the core of our efforts," Sonowal added recalling Vajpayee's unwavering dedication to good governance and the welfare of the people.

The minister also drew a comparison between Vajpayee's leadership and that of the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Following Vajpayee Ji's legacy, Prime Minister Modi has created an environment of good governance in India. Under his leadership, India's global stature has grown, with the world

now looking to us for guidance on important international issues," Sonowal said.

He further emphasised the importance of building a self-reliant and developed India, with a call for collective effort to achieve this vision by 2047.

"As citizens of the world's largest democracy, we have a responsibility to carry forward the ideals of Vajpayee Ji—peace, prosperity and the principle of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,' where the world is one family," he added.

Sonowal also spoke about Vajpayee's belief that true happiness in politics comes from serving the people selflessly.

"Vajpayee Ji believed that through good deeds in politics, one could bring joy and happiness to the people. His life was a testament to this philosophy, and we must all embrace this simplicity and dedication to public service," he continued.

In closing, Sonowal urged the youth of India to uphold Vajpayee's values of simplicity, service, and sacrifice in their pursuit of a prosperous nation.

The event was attended by several dignitaries, including Rituparna Baruah, chairman of Assam Tourism Development Corporation, Bikul Deka, chairman of Assam Petro-Chemicals Limited, Dib Mayor Chaikat Patra, deputy mayor Ujjwal Phukan and other prominent figures from the state.

## DPC submits memorandum to chief minister for evening flights from Dibrugarh Airport

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Dec 25:** Dibrugarh Press Club (DPC) recently submitted a memorandum to Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma seeking his intervention to commence regular evening flights from Dibrugarh Airport. The memorandum was handed over at the CM Secretariat in Dibrugarh with the chief minister assuring necessary action on the matter.

The memorandum highlighted the significance of evening flight operations, pointing out that Dibrugarh Airport has been equipped with night landing facilities since 2010.

However, these facilities remain underutilised with only delayed flights occasionally operating during night hours.

For 14 years, passengers have been deprived of regular evening or night flights, despite repeated appeals by the Press Club to Union Civil Aviation Ministers and other authorities.

Dibrugarh, known as the "Tea City of India," is a crucial industrial hub for Assam and the Northeast, hosting major industries like tea, oil, coal, polymer and tourism.

The absence of evening flights has been a longstanding issue with airlines reportedly express-

ing interest but unable to proceed due to a lack of operational readiness.

"Expedite the commencement of regular evening flights from Dibrugarh Airport and establish night connections to major domestic destinations such as Guwahati, Kolkata, Delhi, Bangalore, and Mumbai," the memorandum stated.

Additionally, the Dibrugarh Press Club underscored the airport's potential to operate international flights to Southeast Asian destinations like Singapore and Bangkok which could significantly enhance regional trade and tourism.

## 'NFR taking measures to prevent unauthorised trespassing on railway tracks'

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 25:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is taking proactive measures for barricading and trenching of unauthorised trespassing locations on Railway tracks, an official statement said on Wednesday. Many lives are lost every year while trying to cross the railway tracks at unauthorised locations.

As a part of its drive to ensure further safety, NFR has already eliminated all unmaned level crossing gates, the statement further said.

"NFR has identified the vulnerable locations where run-over is taking place repeatedly and has taken measures to minimise accidents. Out of a total of 950 identified unauthorised trespassing locations over NFR, 809 have already been barricaded, 235 in Tinsukia, 221 in Lumding, 88 in



Rangiya, 171 in Alipurduar and 94 in Katihar," the statement claimed.

"Awareness programmes are being conducted by NFR at schools, colleges, panchayats to educate general public about avoiding crossing of railway tracks at unauthorised locations so as to avert fatal incidents," it added.

It further said that NFR discourages the unauthorised crossing and

trespassing of railway premises (including railway tracks) and advice the public to follow railway safety rules.

"Trespassing of railway premises at unauthorised places is a punishable offence and these measures are adopted as the Railway is concerned about the safety and well-being of the general public," the statement concluded.

## MOU signed between Sibsagar Girls' College and Resource Centre for UN-NER

**HT Correspondent**  
**SIVASAGAR, Dec 25:** Sibsagar Girls' College and Resource Centre for United Nations-North Eastern Region (UN-NER) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here on Tuesday, at Sibsagar Girls' College in Sivasagar.

As per the agreement, the college will promote knowledge and create awareness about the ideals and activities of UN and UNESCO in campus, and also help in implementation of the initiatives taken by UN, particularly the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the college and the society at large.

The MOU will enable the college to apply for Minor Research Projects for its faculty, execute the

RCUN-Mission Knowledge Programmes and hold seminars/workshops in the field of education, science, culture, health, environment and SDGs with the support from the UN Resource Centre.

"The life members of UNESCO Association, Guwahati, will get an opportunity to participate in the global UN/UNESCO conferences which are held across the globe. The faculty members will also have access to the six-month course on United Nations (UN) and International Understanding (IU)," the agreement said.

Dr Aswini Kumar Sarma, executive director for Resource Centre of UN-NER and secretary-general of UNESCO Association Guwahati, spoke on the vital importance

of the UNESCO and the significant work it has been doing in promoting international cooperation in education, arts, science and culture.

The MOU signing ceremony was followed by a seminar on UN SDGs where Tanuj Goswami, a retired civil servant, discussed the UN Sustainable Development Goals for the solution of the most fundamental human problems plaguing the society at this date - poverty, inequality, climate change, health and education and many others.

President of the governing body of Sibsagar Girls' College, Dr Jogesh Borah, principal Dr Protim Sharma and the faculty members of the college were also present on the occasion.

## Morigaon MLA pays tribute to the former PM

**HT Correspondent**  
**MORIGAON, Dec 25:** Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Ramakanta Deuri paid tribute to the former Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Bajpayee on his birth anniversary, in Morigaon on Wednesday.

The day is observed to guarantee that the nation's citizens are treated equitably by the government and that they get a chance to avail themselves of the benefits of a diverse government.

Adding to the event, MLA Ramakanta Deuri lit the ceremonial lamp at the portrait of the Atal Bihari Bajpayee at Padum Pukhuri in Morigaon.

The president of Morigaon BJP Prabin Medhi, secretary Anjan Sarma, Nitu Bora accompanied the MLA in the programme.

## Drug peddler apprehended



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 25:** The Special Task Force of Assam (STF) has apprehended a drug peddler on Wednesday.

The alleged drug peddler was identified as Mustafa Rahman S/o Late Abdul Salam.

According to the officials, Mustafa Rahman had arrived from Manipur in the morning hours along with narcotics and would carry the same to a lower Assam district.

The officials stated that the accused would switch buses frequently to evade detection and arrest.

The arrested person was traced near the PWD, IB, Amingaon where he was found carrying 20,000 Yaba tablets inside his bag.

Furthermore, the officials said that necessary legal proceedings are being initiated against the person.

The alleged person originally hails from village Mayang, Imphal in Manipur.

## Christmas Day celebrated in Margherita

**HT Correspondent**  
**MARGHERITA, Dec 25:** The people of Margherita celebrated the most awaited "Christmas day" here on Wednesday with great fervor.

The Christians from the Margherita co-district gathered in the churches in large numbers to celebrate the spirit of the festive season. Prayer meetings were also held at more than 70 churches under Margherita co-district of different faiths such as Catholic, Baptist, CNI, Lutheran, Believers and Pentecostal devotees.

Father Liju, of Divine Renewal Retreat Centre, Margherita emphasised the sanctity of Christmas and its importance of unity in our society with love, peace and brotherhood all over the world.

## Lemongrass oil Extraction unit inaugurated in Diphu

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, Dec 25:** District Commissioner (DC) of Karbi Anglong, Nirola Phangchopi, on Wednesday inaugurated Lemongrass oil Extraction unit at Manja in Diphu.

The said unit was build under the Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation project (AWP 2022-23).

Speaking on the occasion, the district agriculture officer, Nabajyoti Dutta highlighted the importance of Lemongrass cultivation and its market value.

On the other hand, Phangchopi encouraged the farmers to pursue lemongrass oil.

To enhance agricultural processing capabilities and promote economic growth of lemongrass among the farmers of the region the Department of Agriculture under the leadership of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) has established a Lemongrass Oil Extraction Unit at Manja in collaboration with the Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project (APART) and the Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agricultural Services (ARIAS) Society. The operation, maintenance and utilisation services of the Lemongrass Oil Extraction Unit will be managed by the Karbi Anglong Agri-Horti Farmer's Producer Company (FPC) Ltd.

It may be mentioned that lemongrass oil is rich in minerals like copper, magnesium, potassium, zinc, iron, and calcium. It also contains vitamins like B-1, B-5, and B-6, and small amounts of antioxidants like Vitamin A and C.

The essence of Lemongrass oil is proven to be beneficial in various fields of our lives. Lemongrass oil can help cure acne, redness, and dandruff. It can also strengthen hair roots and promote hair growth among others.

## Notorious drug peddler apprehended

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Dec 25:** A notorious drugs peddler was arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) of Assam on a raid at 2 No railway gate under Panbazar Police Station Jurisdiction, an official statement said on Wednesday.

The alleged person was identified as Suresh Prasad (21yrs), S/o Late Sarma Prasad. According to the officials, the arrested person was carrying 1.19 nos of vials containing suspected heroin having total weight of 25.4 grams and cash ₹ 190.

The apprehended person originally hails from village Ghorialdubi, Bokajan under the district Karbi Anglong.

Furthermore, he detailed about

the success of the workshops conducted by the society on Brajwali language and preparation of Sanchipatya manuscripts.

The meeting was dissolved by the old committee and elected Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti as president, Mridu Moucham Bora as secretary, Pradeep Hazarika as co-ordinator, Jon Rajkhowa as treasurer, Dr Buljit Buragohain as publicity secretary, Raju Barua as assistant publicity secretary and Papu Das as assistant general secretary. Many dignitaries attended the event including, Dr Sangita Bora, Indranil Gayan, Dr Madhusanda Chaliha, Amitabh Bora and several other prominent educationists, writers and social workers.

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## AAA held a free Acupuncture camp

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Dec 25:** The Assam Acupuncture Association (AAA) held a free Acupuncture camp in Sivasagar's Lakwa district recently to popularise Acupuncture treatment.

Patients who were treated at the camp mostly suffered from joint pain and neurological problems.

The patients receiving treatment at the camp and the Assam Acupuncture Society appreciated the initiative and expressed their hope to provide such assistance in the future.

The camp was conducted by Lakwa Rajbihar president Kamal Rajkonwar and professor Chandraditya Gogoi along with women of the locality, Dr Naznin Arbani, Upasana Gogoi, Mumtaz Begum, Chandan Bezbarua and others assisted in the care of the patients.

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## Celebrated author Durjoy Datta captivate audiences on 2<sup>nd</sup> day of Tezpur Literature Festival

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, Dec 25:** The much-anticipated second day of the Tezpur Literature Festival is underway at Neriwalm, with the session 'Walking the Aisle of Forever Love' graced by celebrated author, screenwriter, and young achiever Durjoy Datta.

The session, attended by a full house, also featured Datta sharing insights from his journey as an author.

Datta's engaging interaction with the audience explored various aspects of his creative world, leading listeners to enthusiastically delve into his works.

In the programme named 'Fueling the Josh: From Classrooms to Combat - A Power Encounter with Colonel Kaushal Kashyap', retired NSG Commando Colonel Kaushal Kashyap captivated the audience with stories of courage, determination, and resilience from his career.

Colonel Kashyap began by attributing his values and sense of patriotism to his parents, particularly his father, who had dreamed of him joining the army. Fulfilling that dream, his journey through the National Defence Academy (NDA) became a testament to the discipline, teamwork, and leadership instilled during his training.



In a deeply personal and moving account, Kashyap also shared the painful loss of a close friend in the line of duty—a loss that profoundly impacted him.

Addressing the audience, Colonel Kashyap emphasized that life's challenges are inevitable, but must be met with unwavering resolve.

"Problems are a part of life, but we must never give up. No one else can fight our battles—it is up to us to keep going until

our last breath," he said, earning thunderous applause.

His anecdotes, often laced with humor, made the session both motivational and highly engaging. Attendees led the session feeling empowered, with Kashyap's words resonating deeply: "Never lose hope; resilience is the key to victory."

Following this, a panel discussion on 'The Development of Axomiya Writing: Trends and Techniques in Literature and

According to sources, Kheroni Police have recovered the body and initiated an investigation and the body was sent for a post-mortem at Diphu Medical College and Hospital.

The incident highlights the increasing human-elephant conflict in Kheroni. Over the past few days, a herd of wild elephants has been

causing destruction across the region, exacerbating tensions between humans and wildlife.

Local residents have criticised the forest department for its failure to take effective action, with many urging the district commissioner, West Karbi Anglong to implement immediate measures to resolve the crisis.

Language, with Special Reference to Dhrupadi Status" was moderated by noted writer Dr Charu Saharia Nath.

Speakers included Dr Pori Hiloidari, a noted author, critic, and translator; Dr Juri Dutta, author, critic, and Sahitya Akademi Award-winning translator; Dr Anuradha Sarma, author, linguist, and critic; Prashanta Boro, HoD of the Boro Department at Rangpara College; and Dr Arup Nath, author and Assistant Professor at Tezpur University.

The panelists thoroughly discussed the challenges, prospects, and future of Assamese language, highlighting issues such as the lack of sufficient terms for better translations, limited online resources (such as musical books and Assamese cartoon channels), and the need for a proper government language policy to protect the language.

The second day also featured a panel discussion on 'From Text to Screen: Interpreting Literature in Visual Media', with participation from noted author, critic, and filmmaker Utpal Datta; National Award-winning actress Dr. Jahanara Begum; and state award-winning filmmaker Prodyut Deka. The discussion was moderated by Dr Hemjyoti Medhi, Associate Professor

at Tezpur University.

A fascinating poetry session titled 'Poetry: A Poetical Journey' was also held, moderated by Dr Namrata Pathak, associate professor at NEHU. Noted Indian poet and translator Robin Gnanong, and poet and Associate Professor at Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology Dr Hari Priya Soibam were featured speakers.

Prominent storyteller Lekha Rai enchanted young minds with captivating tales in an interactive session designed to inspire and educate schoolchildren. This session was held outdoors at Neriwalm, under the open sky.

As part of the day's programme, 'The Takeoff: Book Launch' featured the launch of almost nine books in English and Assamese. These were authored by prominent figures such as Dhruva Hazarika, the late Satya Ranjan Kalita, Desh Kripakar, Gyan Bahadur Chetry, Priyanka Kashyap, Kalpana Kalita, Siuli Barua, Sudipta Kalita, and Usha Tibrewala. The book launch was moderated by Dr Swapanee Kakoty, writer and Associate Professor at Darrang College.

The varied programmes of the day concluded with a book signing session by celebrated author Durjoy Datta.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin  
- William Shakespeare

## Forest cover goal yet to be met

India is still struggling to meet the target of the National Forest Policy set 35 years ago in 1988. In 2023, it could attain a forest and tree cover of only 25.17 percent against the target of a minimum one-third (33.3 percent) of the total land area of the country to maintain environmental stability, restore ecological balance and conserve natural heritage. Since then the climate change induced environmental crisis has aggravated and it is frustrating. India's State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023 released on December 21 by Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Yadav shows that the total forest and tree cover is 8,27,357 sq km, which is 25.17 percent of the geographical area of the country. Forest cover spans an area of 7,15,343 sq km (21.76 percent) whereas tree cover spans an area of 1,12,014 sq km (3.41 percent). The total forest and tree cover of the country as per 2013 assessment was 789,164 sq km which was only 24.01 per cent of the geographical area of the country. If it rose to only 25.17 percent in a decade, it was a dismal performance, especially when the climate crisis has aggravated to a serious level.

Forest cover in 2013 in India was 697,898 sq km which was 21.23 percent of total geographical area of the country with increased to only 715,343 sq km (21.76 percent) whereas the tree cover rose from 91,266 sq km, which was 2.78 percent, to 1,12,014 sq km (3.41 percent), it clearly shows the increase in forest cover was far worse than the increase in tree cover. Forest is under the government while ownership of trees also includes private individuals or public in general, indicating that people are more serious than the government as far as forest and tree cover are concerned. How hard has been India's struggle for increasing forest and tree cover can be just imagined in the background that numerous schemes are being implemented by the government but with limited success, as the ISFR 2023 data shows which contains information on forest cover, tree cover, mangrove cover, growing stock, carbon stock in India's forests, instances of forest fire, agroforestry, etc to present a detailed picture of the forest heat at country level, special thematic information on forest cover and important characteristics of forests.

It should be noted that to increase forest cover the Union Ministry of Forest and Environment provides technical and financial assistance to States/UTs under various Centrally Sponsored Schemes, namely Green India Mission (GIM), Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme, CAMPA, Nagar Van Yojana and other schemes such as National Afforestation programme as per the mandate of National Forest Policy 1988. Green India Mission (GIM) activities were started in the Financial Year 2015-16 and its total cost is estimated to be around ₹ 46,000 crore. Nevertheless, the present assessment also reveals that 19 states/UTs have above 33 percent of the geographical area under forest cover. Out of these, eight states/UTs namely Mizoram, Lakshadweep, A & N Island, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Manipur have forest cover above 75 percent.

## India's decent job creation flagship programme goes off-track

India's only decent job creation flagship programme announced in the Union Budget 2024-25 has gone out of track. Though supposed to be launched on August 1, it is now likely to be launched in January 2025, since details of the programmes are not yet ready. One of the reasons for the inordinate delay is, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has told the Department related Parliamentary Committee, was pendency of Union Cabinet's approval.

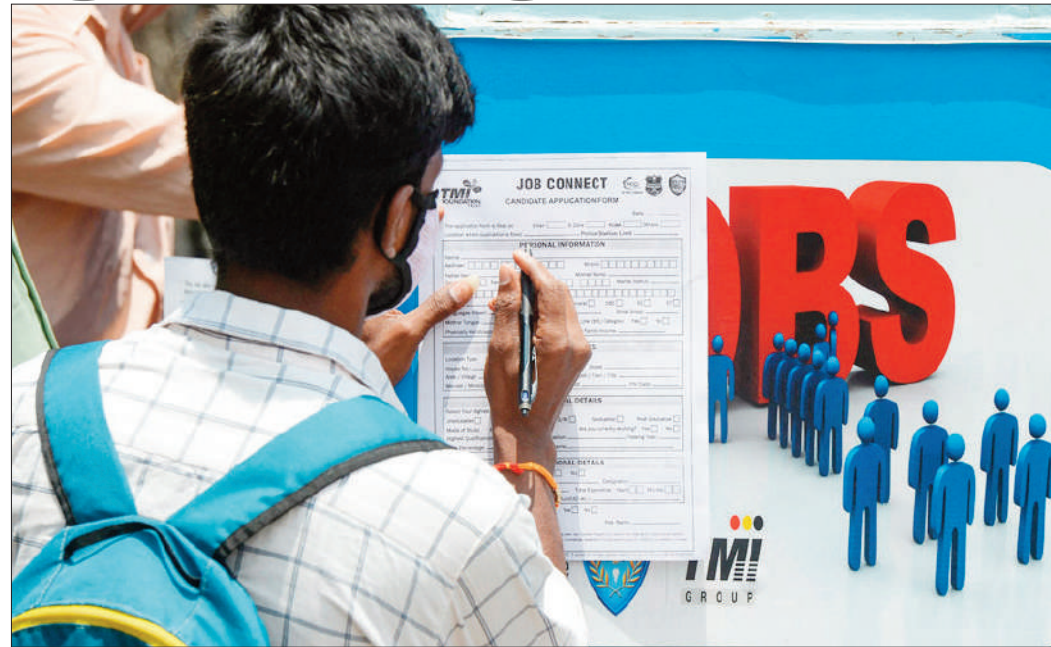
Now, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment is unable to properly implement this programme in the current financial year, and hence it has requested the Union Ministry of Finance to cut its allocation by almost a third.

"We have a limited amount of time this year. Therefore, in Revised Estimate, we have requested for a cut on that amount," the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has informed the department related Parliamentary Committee on November 19, as per the parliamentary panel's report.

The decent job creation flagship programme contains three Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Schemes for which the Union Budget had allocated Rs10,000 crore. The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has now urged the Union Ministry of Finance to reduce the budget for the ELI Schemes for the current financial year to ₹ 6,852 crore, the House panel was informed in response to a query.

Apart from citing limited time available in the current financial year, which will end on March 31, 2025, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has cited eligibility conditions as major roadblocks to the successful implementation of the scheme in the stipulated time-frame.

The three ELI schemes are yet to get approval from the Union Cabinet and have faced considerable delays with only a quarter to go before the end of the current financial year.



However, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has said to the House panel, "The Cabinet note has been submitted. We are expecting to start shortly. The total budgetary allocation for this scheme in the next six-and-a-half years will be ₹ 1.07 trillion. This year, ₹ 10,000 crore has been given and we expect to spend above ₹ 6,000 crore."

As for the finances and physical targets, the Union Ministry of Labour has said that they expect to spend ₹ 3,576 crore on Scheme A, ₹ 1,534 crore on Scheme B, and ₹ 1,651 crore on Scheme C. The ministry expected 93 lakh workers to get benefit under the three schemes in the current financial year.

Scheme A of ELI is for first-timers, Scheme B is to promote decent job creation in the manufacturing sector, and Scheme C is to incentivise employers across all sectors to create additional employment over and above the prescribed threshold.

Subsidies would be given to the employers and employees both, through membership of the Employment Provident Fund Organ-

isation (EPFO). It was claimed in the Union Budget 2024-25 that the programme would generate 8 million decent jobs, apart from skilling 10 million youth over the next five years.

As per the proposal of the Union government, the proposed amount to be spent under ELI Scheme A from FY25 to FY28 is Rs 22,333 crore, under Scheme B from FY25 to FY31 is ₹ 48,326 crore, and under Scheme C from FY25 to FY31 is ₹ 36,040 crore.

However, after the announcement of the scheme until now, progress remained totally unsatisfactory, despite over two dozen meetings being held between the officials of the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment and other stakeholders from other ministries and departments, and representatives of states, employers' and labour organisations. Employers were particularly hesitant about joining the schemes.

There were many hurdles in the way. EPFO was to be revamped to implement the ELI schemes the process of which remained very

slow. The Parliamentary panel has also noted that the EPFO was still preparing a dedicated IT infrastructure in consultation with the Union Ministry for Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for implementation of the scheme that involves preparation of software system/apps for

smooth operation of application registration, disbursement of incentive/subsidy details etc. The parliamentary panel desired that "the process involved be completed at the earliest in a time-bound manner."

Another hurdle was the payments system framework. Though the Centre had already issued directions to all ministries and departments to ensure payments of subsidies and incentives to beneficiaries of all schemes through Aadhaar Payment Bridge, the progress remained very slow at EPFO level.

EPFO was given direction to ensure that employers complete the first stage of Universal Account Number (UAN) activation through Aadhaar-based OTP by

November 30, 2024, starting with the latest joinee employees in the current financial year 2024-25. The second stage of the process was to be included in the Biometric authentication, through face recognition technology, after which employers would be required to complete the process for all employees working with them.

However, the November 30 deadline failed, which was extended on December 4 with the next deadline of December 15. Along with the extension of the deadline to activate UAN, the government has also extended the date for the Aadhaar seeding of bank accounts. On December 11, Union labour secretary Ms Sumita Dawra urged the hesitant India Inc at CII Global Economic Forum to take advantage of the ELI scheme to make themselves more competitive.

One of the chief reasons for delays in implementation of the scheme is that the Union government is yet to announce the details of the ELI scheme which made the employers apprehensive and hesitant about the scheme. Now, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has informed the House panel that the schemes do not have cabinet approval yet, which they may get shortly. Officials in the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment expect the details of the schemes will be ready for notification and implementation by January 2025, only weeks before February 1, 2025, when the next Union Budget 2025-26 will be tabled in the Parliament.

It is very bad news for the workforce in the country, since over 90 per cent of them are working in informal jobs both in informal and formal sectors. They are engaged in low quality and low waged jobs without any social security. Most of them have precarious employment arrangements and nearly 20 percent of the employed as per PLFS government data are not in paid employment. (IPA Service)

## Centre's 'One Nation One Poll' bill may not pass the Opposition test

By: Kalyani Shankar

The introduction of the controversial bill, 'One Nation One Poll,' has created more hullabaloo than acceptance. The BJP has been talking about it, but now after introducing it has sent it to the joint select committee of the Parliament.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in a hurry to fulfil the BJP's unfinished agenda. He had already opened the Ayodhya temple and abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

This long-awaited bill aims to streamline the electoral process for 28 states and eight Union territories, with an electorate of nearly a billion voters. The bill has triggered widespread debate, significant interest, and opposition from various parties.

Though momentum is building for simultaneous elections, some questions need answers, including whether Modi has the required two-thirds majority to pass the bill in Parliament. Is there a political consensus? Will the Opposition come on board? Is the timing of the bill right?

Most Opposition parties reject the idea of simultaneous polls. They include the Congress, the Left parties, the Trinamool Congress, and regional and smaller parties. They reject it mainly to settle political scores and apprehension that the bill may benefit the BJP.

Former President Ram Nath Kovind chaired a nine-member committee recommending simultaneous polls last year, labelling it a 'game changer.' Thirty-two parties supported the concept, and 15 rejected it. The panel also advised that the Centre form a panel to oversee the implementation of this proposal. Also, there should be a joint electoral roll for all elections so that voters will use the same list for national, state, and local polls.

Over the years, elections have become a standard feature, but the 'One Nation, One Poll' bill has the potential to reshape our election process. Proponents of the bill argue that it could significantly reduce campaign costs, alleviate the strain on administrative resources, and streamline governance. This could ultimately benefit the public by reducing the frequency of elections, a prospect that should inspire optimism.

Elections in India are held at different levels. The first is panchayat, followed by the district level, the state assembly level, and finally, the national level. They happen at different times, and the government wants to streamline the system.

Interestingly, the idea of simultaneous polls is not new. Historically, it was a synchronised poll from 1952 to 1967. The premature dismissal of various governments and the consequential dissolution of Assemblies led to staggered polls. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi dismissed many Opposition-ruled state governments.

The most important thing is that the BJP needs the support of the allies and friendly parties. In the recent 2024 polls, the BJP was 40 short of a majority in the house and could



form the government only with the help of J.D. (U) and Telugu Desam.

Most opposing parties reject simultaneous polls, including Congress, the Left parties, the Trinamool Congress, and regional and smaller parties. Even in the BJP, 20 MPs were absent while the bill was introduced.

The Kovind panel also suggested having the votes in two parts. The first will be for Lok Sabha and Assembly votes, and the second for local groups.

The bill faces significant constitutional, legal, and political challenges. The Kovind panel suggests amending Articles 83 and 172 to allow simultaneous elections. However, the BJP lacks the two-thirds majority for this amendment, and the Constitution needs clarification on concurrent polls. The potential impact on the federal structure of the country and the logistical challenges of conducting simultaneous elections for a billion voters are crucial factors to consider.

Prime Minister Modi's main challenge is to gather enough support in Parliament. At the same time, the government must build political consensus and persuade the Opposition to agree.

The Opposition has rejected simultaneous polls, fearing it might benefit the BJP. The 15 opposing parties hold 205 MPs, while Modi needs 362 votes to proceed.

A legal framework for simultaneous elections is essential to address mid-term government collapses and central political manoeuvring. The one nation, one poll approach reduces waste and election frequency, so the Opposition should consider it carefully and present any alternative proposals for public discussion.

'One Nation One Poll' has been one of the poll promises of the BJP. In his third term, Modi wants to finish the unfinished agenda. Modi presents this legislation with a clear strategy: Whether he succeeds or not, he benefits. If the bill gets passed, it will be an advantage for the BJP government. If it fails, he can claim that he tried to enact the reform but faced Opposition obstruction. Despite potential delays, it's important to debate the bill, as election spending ultimately comes from taxpayers' money. Now that the bill has been sent to a joint select committee, we must wait for its report. (IPA Service)

## Cultivating prosperity: A strategic vision for Indian agriculture in the Union Budget FY26

By: Dipak Kurmi

India's agricultural landscape is at a critical juncture. As pre-budget consultations gain momentum, it is imperative to address the growing complexities of the agrarian sector with policies that foster productivity, competitiveness, and sustainability. Agriculture must not only secure the livelihoods of millions of peasants but also align with the imperatives of environmental stewardship. The Union Budget for FY26 provides an opportunity to recalibrate priorities and address structural issues that hinder the sector's growth.

**The Climate Crisis and Resilient Agriculture**  
India's agricultural sector faces unprecedented challenges from climate change. Average temperatures have risen by 0.7°C since 1951, and monsoon precipitation has decreased by 6%, exposing the fragility of the nation's agri-production systems. This underscores the urgent need for climate-resilient agriculture supported by robust research and development (R&D).

Currently, agri-R&D in India accounts for less than 0.5% of the agricultural GDP, a figure that must be doubled to at least 1% to drive innovations that can withstand climate disruptions. Investments should focus on sustainable practices such as increasing soil organic carbon and enhancing moisture retention. The National Mission on Natural Farming, while well-intentioned, lacks the capacity to meet the food needs of India's projected 1.67 billion population by 2050. Ensuring the right balance of bio-fertilisers and chemical fertilisers is crucial for nourishing soils and sustaining high productivity.

**Reforming Fertiliser Subsidy Policies**  
India's current fertiliser subsidy framework exacerbates imbalances in nutrient application. The over-subsidisation of urea distorts the use of nitrogen (N) relative to phosphate (P) and potash (K), while micronutrients like iron and zinc are often neglected. This not only depletes soil health but also leads to inefficiencies in agricultural output.

Innovative fertiliser products, such as nano-urea and single superphosphates, have limited adoption due to skewed subsidy structures. Reforming this system to promote balanced fertilisation is imperative. One potential solution lies in replacing subsidies with direct income transfers to farmers on a per-hectare basis. Leveraging existing databases, such as soil health cards and PM-KISAN, can facilitate targeted transfers. This approach would liberate fertiliser prices from state controls, restoring nutrient balance, reducing environmental degradation, and curbing urea leakages. Political will and effective communication with farmers will be critical to the success of such reforms.

**Building Value Chains Beyond Production**  
Indian agriculture must transition from a narrow focus on production to an integrated food system encompassing production, marketing, and consumption. This transformation should aim to ensure food and nutritional security while boosting farmers' incomes.



India's milk sector offers a compelling blueprint. Through cooperative and private initiatives, milk production has surged to 239 million tonnes, surpassing the combined value of major staples like rice, wheat, and pulses. Farmers in this sector receive 75-80% of the consumer price, showcasing the potential of equitable value chains.

However, fruits and vegetables, despite their economic importance, have not witnessed similar progress. Farmers typically receive only a third of the consumer price, due to fragmented supply chains and market inefficiencies. Establishing a dedicated board akin to the National Dairy Development Board, led by visionary leadership, could revolutionize the fruits and vegetables sector. Building robust value chains would ensure that farmers receive a fair share while stabilizing consumer prices.

**Addressing Anti-Market Policies**  
India's food policies often reflect a pro-consumer bias, with measures like export bans, stock limits, and subsidized domestic dumping harming farmer incomes. For instance, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) incurs an economic cost of over ₹39/kg for rice but sells it domestically at ₹29/kg, effectively undercutting market prices. Similar practices with wheat further distort the market.

Such interventions not only suppress farm-gate prices but also impose an implicit tax on the agricultural sector. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), India's producer support estimate (PSE) is negative 15.5%, contrasting sharply with China's 14% and the OECD average of 13.8%. This highlights the regressive nature of India's agricultural policies, which undermine the very farmers they seek to support.

To rectify this, the government must priori-

tize market-friendly policies that facilitate fair pricing and transparent trade mechanisms. Allowing markets to function efficiently will incentivize farmers and attract private investments, driving long-term growth in the sector.

**Reimagining Agriculture in the Union Budget**

The Union Budget for FY26 must adopt a holistic approach to agriculture, addressing the sector's challenges while leveraging its untapped potential. Key priorities should include:

1. Enhancing Agri-R&D: Doubling the allocation for agricultural research to drive climate resilience and innovation.
2. Reforming Subsidy Frameworks: Shifting from indirect subsidies to direct income transfers for balanced fertilisation.
3. Strengthening Value Chains: Establishing dedicated institutions for fruits and vegetables to replicate the success of the dairy sector.
4. Market Liberalization: Eliminating anti-market policies that depress farm-gate prices and hinder private investment.

**A Call to Action**

India stands at a crossroads in its agricultural journey. The challenges of climate change, market inefficiencies, and policy distortions demand bold and visionary action. The FY26 Union Budget provides a unique opportunity to reshape the agrarian landscape, ensuring prosperity for farmers while safeguarding the planet's natural resources.

By fostering a balanced, equitable, and sustainable agricultural framework, India can unlock the full potential of its farming community and secure its place as a global leader in food production. The time to act is now, with conviction and clarity of purpose, to pave the way for a brighter future for Indian agriculture. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)



# Climate change and neglect put butterflies on the brink of extinction in South Asia

By: Hailey Smalley

In the dark undergrowth of mangrove forests, an anthology of color stirs. Flickers of turquoise rise like exhalations from the brackish marshlands, and flashes of sunset orange spark alive in the shadows.

The Sundarbans mangrove forest in Bangladesh and India is largely known as one of the last remaining habitats for the Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), but the coastal groves also thrum with a wealth of smaller animals, including 37 known species of butterfly. The small stature of these butterflies belies their importance; they pollinate flowering plants and nourish the birds that flit through the canopy, ultimately supporting the health of the entire forest ecosystem.

But butterflies in the Sundarbans and throughout South Asia are at increasing risk of extinction, mimicking a global trend that some experts have nicknamed "the insect apocalypse". By some estimates, 250,000-500,000 insect species have gone extinct in the past 150 years, and many more are now on the brink of survival. Climate change and urban development form the largest risks, along with the minimal legal protections and large-scale conservation initiatives focused on butterflies and other insects.

"If my government is not aware, [butterfly species] will be lost. It will be coming in probably 10 years because climate change is thriving," said Monwar Hossain, a professor and lepidopterist at Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh.

The unique beauty and vibrancy of Bangladesh's butterflies first attracted Hossain's

attention nearly three decades ago. Over his career, Hossain has observed the climate crisis unfold through record-breaking heat waves, severe cyclones and accelerating sea level rise, and his research often focuses on the unique ways these changes impact Bangladesh's 400+ endemic butterfly species.

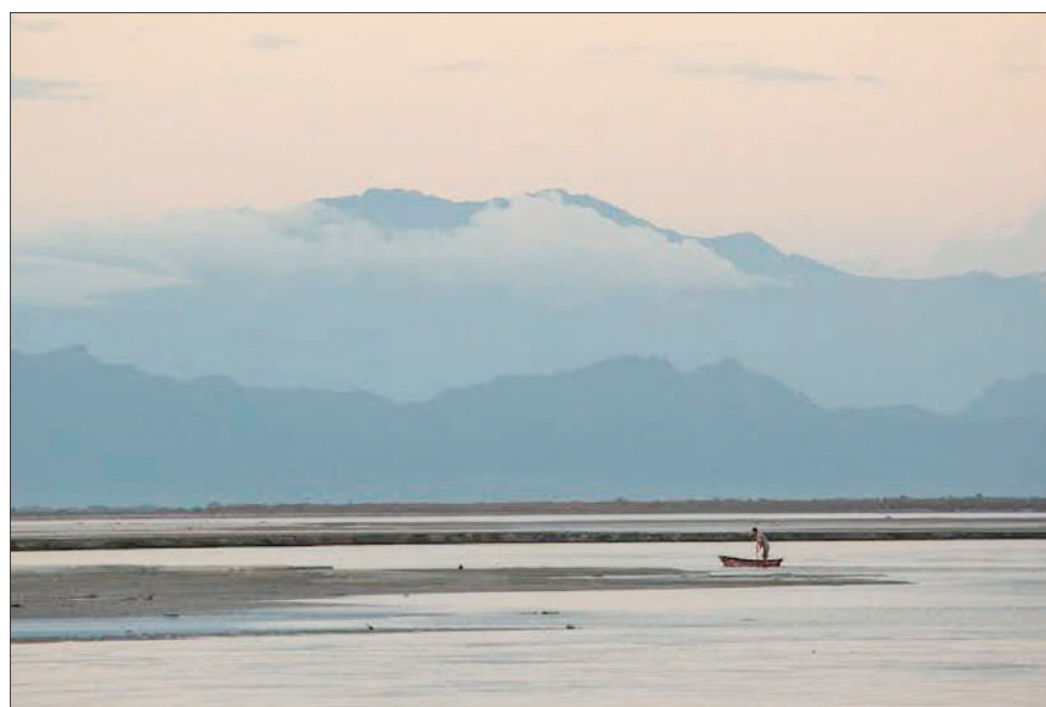
Insects, including butterflies, are cold-blooded, so they are unable to adjust to changes in temperature as easily as mammals and birds. This puts them at special risk during short-term weather events like heat waves as well as from changes to long-term temperature trends.

Many insects are also unable to migrate long distances to escape changing climate patterns or storms. The reliance of pollinators like butterflies on flowering plants adds an extra dimension to their vulnerability, as even small changes in the flowering season can spell starvation for the unlucky nectar gatherers.

Despite these risks, Bangladesh currently has few protections for butterflies, such as protected areas or bans on collecting and trading specimens. Hossain contrasted this deficit with the international attention and surplus of funding dedicated to large mammals, such as tigers.

"Every animal has its own right to survive, so I don't want to compare the butterfly, but in my country's context, millions and millions of dollars [are used] for the tiger," Hossain said. "Sometimes we say to the government, why not include the butterfly?"

A 2021 study determined less than 2% of the ranges of Bangladeshi butterflies were included in protected areas. The study's author, Shawan Chowdhury,



was far from surprised by the results. A Bangladeshi native, Chowdhury has witnessed the entomological oversights of conservation and development decisions in South Asia firsthand.

"Nothing is actually happening with insect conservation in Bangladesh," Chowdhury said.

Part of the issue, according to Chowdhury, is a lack of prior research. Animal conservation is typically predicated by years, if not decades, of careful documentation and monitoring. Before politicians write laws to protect animals, scientists are tasked with providing evidence that shows if and what kinds of protections the animals need.

Recent years have seen a few promising additions to South Asia's collection of entomological research. The International

Union for Conservation of Nature included butterflies for the first time in its most recent Bangladesh report, thanks in large part to Hossain, who authored the butterfly section of the report. Chowdhury has also contributed several scientific articles, including a four-year observational study on butterflies in Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka. But the entomology community is still playing catch-up.

Chowdhury pointed out that naturalists have surveyed birds for centuries; scientists can now use these historical accounts to estimate how populations have changed over time. For insects, particularly those in South Asia, "there is no account". Making an accurate account from scratch takes years of consistent observation, which can be both time- and labor-intensive.

Nitin Ravikanthachari observed a similar problem in his home city of Bengaluru, India. "You can literally count the number of people [in India] studying butterflies on one hand," he said.

Ravikanthachari spent much of his adolescence prowling the gardens and parks of Bengaluru, camera in hand, and even after beginning a university degree in biology, he often met up with fellow photographers to walk the city and photograph butterflies. As his interest in lepidoptery grew, Ravikanthachari realised how little scientific attention had been dedicated to the subject, and he decided he wanted "to do something more concrete" to address this gap and call attention to the importance of butterflies.

In 2012, Ravikanthachari and

three other amateur lepidopterists founded the Bangalore Butterfly Club (BBC). Rather than relying on large institutions and universities to generate information about their city's butterflies, the BBC started conducting their own research walks to count the number and species of butterflies in the city. Over time, they could use this data to establish trends and gauge the health of butterfly populations.

The initiative was massively successful.

To date, the BBC has catalogued more than 170 species of butterflies in Bengaluru, including 14 formerly unknown species. More than 400 members attend research walks, educational events and an annual butterfly festival hosted by the group. Ravikanthachari even rediscovered a species thought to be extinct after a 120-year absence from scientific records.

Ravikanthachari said they are now trying to export the BBC's success to other cities in India, and Chowdhury is hopeful a similar model could prove useful in Bangladesh, especially in heavily urbanised areas where development pressures catalyze existing risks related to climate change.

"Population is actually a power, but we are not using that," Chowdhury said.

He pointed to apps like iNaturalist as a way to not only provide more opportunities for sightings to be recorded and to build a species database, but also to educate the public on the importance of butterflies and other insects.

Hossain has also integrated community education and citizen science into his research. His library of scientific studies

is supplemented by brochures and children's books, and his lab began hosting an annual butterfly fair with performances, competitions and educational activities in 2010. The Butterfly Park and Research Centre, opened in 2015, not only breeds butterflies for research purposes, but also functions as a public garden on the Jahangirnagar University campus.

Through these opportunities to interact with and learn about butterflies, Hossain said he sees more and more young people becoming interested in the environment and conservation.

"Once they see the butterfly, the climate change, the forest, they get it," Hossain said.

Ultimately, he hopes the growing community of citizen scientists, environmental advocates and butterfly enthusiasts will translate into more scientific research and legislation about butterflies. The more people who become interested in butterflies, he explained, the more opportunities there are to continue the work he started 28 years ago.

"I'm just a worker. I'm a worker," Hossain said. "I think that life is very short, so every [person] does some significant work in the world, for the nature, for his life or other things."

Whether it be the students in his lab, lawmakers in Bangladesh's Parliament or young children visiting the Butterfly Park and Research Centre for the first time, Hossain is hopeful that the next generation will learn from his own experiences and choose to dedicate some of their life and work to researching and protecting South Asia's butterflies. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

## Brahmaputra at risk: The need for immediate action

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The Brahmaputra River, one of the world's mightiest and most ecologically significant rivers, is facing an existential crisis. Originating from Tibet and flowing through India and Bangladesh, it is not only a lifeline for millions of people but also a vital force that sustains biodiversity, agriculture, and culture across the region. However, the river's future is uncertain, threatened by an unprecedented combination of climate change, pollution, and anthropogenic pressures. The need for immediate, concerted action to save this vital watercourse has never been more urgent.

The Brahmaputra's ecosystem is uniquely rich and diverse, supporting a variety of flora and fauna that depend on the river's health for survival. It serves as a critical water source for the densely populated region it flows through, providing drinking water, irrigation for crops, and sustaining livelihoods for millions of people, including farmers, fishermen, and indigenous communities. The river also plays a major role in transportation, commerce, and even religious practices in the areas surrounding it. The river's significance cannot be overstated; it is an essential part of the economic and social fabric of the regions it touches.

Yet, the river is at significant risk due to the intensifying impacts of climate change and the unchecked pollution that continues to degrade its waters. The effects of climate change, especially the accelerated melting of glaciers in the Tibetan Plateau and the changing monsoon patterns, are altering the hydrology of the Brahmaputra. As the glaciers retreat, the river's flow is becoming more erratic, leading to both extreme flooding during the monsoon season and reduced water availability in the dry months. These variations in water levels put communities at risk, often leading to disastrous floods or severe droughts that threaten food security, destroy homes, and disrupt the local economy.

The problem is compounded by the rising levels of pollution in the Brahmaputra. Industrial waste, untreated sewage, plastic, and other forms of waste have been dumped into the river for decades. The burgeoning population along the river's banks has only exacerbated this issue, with rapid urbanization and a lack of effective waste management systems. In cities like Guwahati, one of the largest urban centers along the Brahmaputra, the river is increasingly becoming a dumping ground for all manner of pollutants. The water quality has deteriorated significantly, affecting both the river's aquatic life and the people who depend on it for drinking water and sustenance. In addition to the health risks posed by contaminated water, the pollution also hampers the river's ability to function as a natural purifier of the surrounding environment.

Moreover, the construction of dams and other hydropower projects on the Brahmaputra in both India and China is further endangering the river. These developments disrupt the natural flow of the river, threaten fish populations, and alter the delicate balance of the river's ecosystem. The damming of tributaries that feed into the Brahmaputra also reduces the river's ability to flush out pollutants, making the situation even more dire. The lack of regional cooperation regarding the management of the river's resources is also a significant hurdle, as countries along its course struggle with competing interests and fail to implement a unified approach to protecting this shared natural resource.

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

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

Despite the growing threats, there is still hope for the Brahmaputra, but only if immediate and coordinated action is taken. The first and most important step is to address the root causes of pollution. Comprehensive waste management systems need to be established in the cities along the river, with a strong focus on reducing industrial effluent and treating sewage before it reaches the water. Governments and industries must be held accountable for the pollution they contribute to, and stricter environmental regulations must be enforced to curb harmful practices. Public awareness campaigns, aimed at educating citizens about the importance of the river and the role they can play in protecting it, are also essential to drive change at the grassroots level.

Another crucial step is the establishment of regional cooperation for the sustainable management of the river. India, China, and Bangladesh must come together to formulate a shared strategy for the Brahmaputra's protection. This could involve establishing joint monitoring systems to assess the river's health, coordinating flood control efforts, and ensuring the equitable distribution of the river's resources. International bodies, such as the United Nations, could play a significant role in facilitating this cooperation, ensuring that all stakeholders have a seat at the table and that the needs of the communities along the river are met.

The impact of climate change must also be addressed through adaptive measures that account for the changing dynamics of the river's flow. This could include the construction of more resilient infrastructure, better flood management systems, and policies that promote water conservation. At the same time, efforts should be made to protect the river's ecosystems, including reforestation projects and initiatives to restore wetlands, which act as natural filters for the water and provide essential habitats for wildlife.

Additionally, sustainable development practices must replace the traditional focus on economic growth at the expense of the environment. Large-scale hydropower projects on the Brahmaputra should undergo rigorous environmental impact assessments, with alternatives considered that would not disrupt the river's natural flow or biodiversity. The focus should shift to low-impact renewable energy sources that can meet the region's growing energy demands without further endangering the river.

Saving the Brahmaputra is not just about protecting a river; it is about safeguarding the future of the people who rely on it. A healthy river is vital to ensuring the economic, social, and environmental well-being of millions. The task ahead is formidable, but it is not impossible. It requires the collective will of governments, industries, local communities, and international organizations to come together and prioritize the long-term health of the river over short-term gains.

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

## Does global warming really exist?



By: Satvabrat Borah

Global warming is a topic that has been discussed for many years. It refers to the gradual increase in the Earth's average temperature. Scientists have studied this phenomenon closely and have gathered evidence to show that it is happening. The Earth is getting warmer because of certain activities, especially those done by humans. Burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas releases gases into the air, such as carbon dioxide. These gases trap heat in the atmosphere, causing the planet to warm up. This process is known as the greenhouse effect.

Over the years, global temperatures have risen noticeably. Many scientists believe this is not a natural change but something caused by human actions. Industries, vehicles, and power plants all contribute to the problem. When we burn fuel for energy, the byproducts go into the air, creating a layer around the planet that holds heat. This makes the Earth warmer than it should be. While the planet has always experienced natural changes in temperature, the current rate of warming is faster than usual. This speed is why people are concerned about global warming.

The effects of global warming can be seen in many parts of the world. Ice in the polar regions, like Antarctica and the Arctic, is melting at an alarming rate. This melting ice causes sea levels to rise, which threatens coastal areas. People living near the sea may have to move as water levels continue to increase. Rising sea levels can also lead to flooding, destroying homes, farms, and natural habitats. Many animals that depend on icy environments are struggling to survive. For example, polar bears rely on sea ice to hunt, and as the ice disappears, their food sources become harder to find.

Weather patterns are also changing due to global warming. Many areas are experiencing more extreme weather events, such as stronger storms, longer droughts, and more intense heatwaves. These changes affect agriculture, making it harder for farmers to grow crops. In some regions, the lack of rain dries up the soil, while in others, heavy rains wash away fields. This impacts food production and can lead to shortages, making life harder

for people everywhere. Wildlife is also affected by these changes, as many species find it difficult to adapt to the rapidly changing climate.

Forests are another area where the effects of global warming can be seen. Higher temperatures and dry conditions make forests more vulnerable to wildfires. These fires destroy trees, which are important for absorbing carbon dioxide from the air. Without enough trees, the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere increases, making global warming worse. Additionally, forests are home to countless plants and animals. When fires destroy these habitats, many species lose their homes and may struggle to survive.

Oceans are also feeling the impact of global warming. As the planet warms, ocean water becomes warmer, too. This affects marine life, especially coral reefs. Corals are sensitive to temperature changes, and when the water gets too warm, they can die in a process called coral bleaching. This is a big problem because coral reefs support a wide variety of marine species. Warmer oceans also contribute to stronger hurricanes and typhoons, which can cause significant damage to coastal communities.

While the evidence for global warming is strong, some people still question whether it exists. They argue that the Earth's climate has always changed and that current warming might be a natural cycle. However, most scientists agree that the speed and scale of the current warming are not natural. Human activities, especially since the industrial revolution, have released large amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The connection between these activities and rising temperatures is well-documented.

To address global warming, people and governments around the world are working on solutions. One way to slow down global warming is to use cleaner energy sources. Renewable energy, such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, does not produce greenhouse gases. Using these energy sources can help reduce our impact on the environment. Another solution is to plant more trees, as they absorb carbon dioxide from the air. Protecting forests and reforesting areas can play a big role in

slowing global warming.

Reducing waste and recycling can also help. When we recycle materials like paper, metal, and plastic, we use less energy compared to producing new items from raw materials. This reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Simple actions like using energy-efficient appliances, turning off lights when not in use, and using public transportation can also make a difference. Every small step adds up and can help reduce the effects of global warming.

Education is another important part of the solution. When people understand the causes and effects of global warming, they are more likely to take action. Schools, communities, and governments can work together to raise awareness about the importance of protecting the environment. By teaching people about the impact of their actions, we can encourage more sustainable habits.

While global warming is a serious issue, there is still hope. People around the world are coming together to find solutions and make changes. Many countries have signed agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the Paris Agreement is a global effort to limit temperature increases and reduce the effects of climate change. Such initiatives show that progress is possible when people work together.

It is important to remember that global warming affects everyone. The changes in our climate impact people, animals, and ecosystems all over the planet. By taking action now, we can help protect the Earth for future generations. Whether through small daily habits or larger community projects, everyone can play a role in addressing this challenge.

The question of whether global warming really exists has been answered by countless studies and observations. The evidence is clear, and the effects are visible around the world. Rising temperatures, melting ice, changing weather patterns, and other signs all point to the reality of global warming. It is a problem that requires attention and action, but it is not too late to make a difference. By working together and making changes, we can help reduce the impact of global warming and create a more sustainable future for all.



# China 2024: Military standoff with India ends in Ladakh, long freeze over

**BELJING, Dec 25:** It was a breakthrough year in India-China ties after a near freeze in their ties for over four years — the longest since the 1962 war — with an agreement to end the eastern Ladakh military standoff.

After "amassing of a large number of troops by China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh" in April-May 2020, as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in a recent statement in Lok Sabha, resulting in the Galwan valley clash in June 2020, there had been a breakdown in the relations between the two Asian giants.

The post-1962 war chill lasted till the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in 1988.

This time, the two countries held periodic talks between the top commanders and through the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC), resulting in disengagement in stages from four points — the Galwan Valley,

the Pangong Lake, Hot Springs, and Gogra — in eastern Ladakh by creating buffer zones.

Finally, on October 21, India and China firmed up an agreement on patrolling and disengagement of troops along the LAC in eastern Ladakh at the remaining friction points of Depsang and Demchok.

The agreement led to the first structured meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS summit at Kazan in Russia soon after, their first in five years.

Subsequently, Jaishankar met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Brazil in November where they reached an understanding that the Special Representatives (SRs) and the Foreign Secretary-level mechanisms will be convened soon.

Constituted in 2003 to comprehensively address the vexed dispute of the India-China border spanning to 3,488 kms, the Special

Representatives mechanism is headed by NSA Doval and Foreign Minister Wang.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh too met his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun at the ASEAN Defence Ministers' meeting in Vientiane in Laos in November.

After the 23rd SR dialogue between Doval and Wang in December, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the extensive talks focussed on a "positive" direction for cross-border cooperation, including resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and border trade, while the Chinese side said a six-point consensus, including continuing to take measures to maintain peace at borders and promote healthy and stable development of relations, was reached between the two sides.

While there was no clarity from China on why it moved its troops near the LAC in 2020, equally puzzling is the timing for the agreement to bring down the border

tensions with India, months ahead of the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relationship.

But Beijing, in recent months, appeared to be mellowing down after its economy struggled to reverse its slowdown, weighed down by issues such as property crisis and rising unemployment.

Throughout the over four-year crisis, bilateral trade was not impacted. In fact, it continued to boom.

The bilateral trade, according to Chinese official figures, totalled USD 138.2 billion in 2023, with Chinese exports climbing to USD 122 billion and Indian exports to China standing at USD 16.2 billion. India's trade deficit with China amounted to USD 105.8 billion last year.

The trade deficit in the first six months of this year climbed to USD 41.89 billion, with Chinese exports totalling USD 50.35 billion against India's exports to China USD 8.46 billion, according to data

from the Indian Embassy in Beijing.

In 2025, amid stubborn attempts by the US and EU to restrict Chinese exports with heavy tariffs, China looks to push its exports as well as investments in India, especially electric vehicles.

Experts here see the trade expansion with India, currently the fastest growing economy in the world, also as a new avenue to partly offset its likely damages in the Trump 2.0 era.

China also recalibrated its foreign, trade and military policies ahead of this year's US Presidential elections, especially after President-elect Donald Trump vowed to enhance tariffs over and above what he imposed against China in his first tenure.

Officials here say there is considerable concern in Beijing that India-US relations under Trump's Presidency will pick up further momentum, especially the Quad grouping comprising the US, India,

Australia and Japan, which China perceives as an alliance aimed at containing it.

Besides India, China also sought to recalibrate frayed ties with Australia and Japan.

Meanwhile, as China marked 75 years of communist party rule, a crucial meeting of the ruling Communist Party in July adopted a resolution for comprehensive reforms to lift the sluggish growth by achieving socialist modernisation by 2035.

President Xi, who continued to crack the corruption whip on the ruling Communist Party and the military officials, asked them in January to turn the knife inwards and carry the anti-graft campaign without any mercy.

Xi's anti-graft campaign in the military has drawn global attention, which his critics say enabled him to consolidate his hold on power.

China also announced to raise its retirement age from January 2025 after its population dipped for a

second consecutive year. The demographic crisis was further highlighted as China's marriage registrations in the first half of 2024 fell to a record low since 1980, not to mention the reduced number of kindergartens and drop in the number of children enrolled in them.

In June, Chinese spacecraft Chang'e-6 successfully touched down in the South Pole-Aitken Basin - the far side of the Moon, in the first endeavour of its kind in human history to collect samples from the rarely explored terrain and brought back the soil. Meanwhile, Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh continued to be contentious issues as China celebrated the 65th year of its takeover of Tibet.

In March, the Joe Biden administration recognised Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory. Biden also signed into law the 'Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act' in July, triggering a sharp response from Beijing. (PTI)

## Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashes in Kazakhstan leaving 32 survivors

**MOSCOW, Dec 25:** An Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashed Wednesday in the Kazakhstani city of Aktau, leaving at least 32 survivors, according to officials. More than 30 people are likely dead.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry said in a Telegram statement that those on board included five crew. At least 29 have been hospitalized, the ministry told Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti.

Russian news agency Interfax quoted medical workers as saying that four bodies have been recovered and emergency workers at the scene as saying that both pilots, according to a preliminary assessment, died in the crash.

The Embraer 190 aircraft made an emergency landing 3 km from the city, Azerbaijan Airlines said earlier.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry initially said 25 people survived the crash, later revising that number to 27, 28, and then 29 as the search and rescue operation continued at the site of the crash, bringing the supposed death toll down.

Prosecutor General's Office in Azerbaijan later reported that at least 32 people survived the crash, adding that the number wasn't final.

The number of survivors could mean that over 30 people may be



dead.

The plane was originally scheduled to travel from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus. According to Azerbaijan Airlines, 37 passengers were Azerbaijani citizens. There were also 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhstani and three Kyrgyzstani citizens, it said.

RIA Novosti quoted Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, as saying that preliminary information showed that the pilot had chosen to divert to Aktau after a bird strike on the aircraft led to "an emergency situation on board".

Mobile phone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground in a fireball. Other footage showed part

of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft, lying upside in the grass. The footage corresponded to the plane's colors and its registration number.

Some of the videos posted on social media showed survivors dragging fellow passengers away from the wreckage of the plane.

Flight-tracking data from FlightRadar24.com showed the aircraft making what appeared to be a figure-eight once near the airport in Aktau, its altitude moving up and down substantially over the last minutes of the flight before impacting the ground.

FlightRadar24 separately said in an online post that the aircraft had faced "strong GPS jamming" which "made the aircraft transmit bad ADS-B data", referring to the information that allows flight-

tracking websites to follow planes in flight. Russia has been blamed in the past for jamming GPS transmissions in the wider region.

Embraer did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Wednesday morning. In a statement, Azerbaijan Airlines said it would keep members of the public updated and changed its social media banners to solid black.

Azerbaijan's state news agency, Azertac, said that an official delegation consisting of Azerbaijan's emergency situations minister, the country's deputy general prosecutor, and the vice president of Azerbaijan Airlines had been dispatched to Aktau to conduct an "on-site investigation".

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, who had been traveling to St Petersburg, returned to Azerbaijan on hearing news of the crash, the president's press service said. Aliyev was due to attend an informal meeting of leaders of Commonwealth of Independent States, a bloc of former Soviet countries founded after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Aliyev expressed his condolences to the families of the victims in a statement on social media. "It is with deep sadness that I express my condolences to the families of the victims and wish a speedy recovery to those injured," he wrote. (AP)

## Imran Khan demands meeting with party team ahead of negotiations with Pakistan govt

**ISLAMABAD, Dec 25:** Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has sought a meeting with his negotiating team that is in talks with the Pakistan government saying it will make the process "meaningful."

Khan, 72, founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), also put forth the demands of his party and said if the government agrees, he will postpone the civil disobedience movement announced earlier.

He nominated Sahibzada Mohammad Hamid Raza, chairman of PTI alliance partner Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), as the spokesperson for his party's negotiation committee. A member of the National Assembly, Raza is also a chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights.

The PTI leader's announcement came during a meeting with his lawyers' team on Tuesday in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, where he has been incarcerated since last year.

"The efforts of the party's negotiation committee are a good thing. To make the negotiation process meaningful, it is important that I meet with my nominated negotiation team so that I can have a proper understanding of the issues," Khan said in a post on X after that meeting.

Earlier on Monday, the Pakistan government and Khan's party, in their maiden meeting, agreed to continue talks to address contentious issues, including Khan's release from jail.

The long-anticipated talks between the committees representing the government and the PTI were chaired by the National Assembly (NA) Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, who had last week announced to facilitate the two sides in their effort to defuse the prevailing political tension.

The Monday's meeting took place a day after the Shehbaz Sharif-led Pakistan government was prompted to form a negotiation committee to start formal talks with Khan's PTI after it threatened



to give a call for civil disobedience.

After nominating Raza as the spokesperson for the PTI's negotiation process, Khan also forwarded demands of his party for the success of negotiations with the government.

These include the release of all under-trial political prisoners of his party and the formation of a judicial commission to probe the events on May 9, 2023 and November 26 this year.

"If these demands are implemented, we will postpone the civil disobedience movement. But I fear that the government will try to sideline our demands for investigations of May 9 last year and November 26, but we will not allow that to happen," he said.

Khan also rejected the military court as "unconstitutional" and added that the decision by these courts were tarnishing Pakistan's reputation in the international world, and such inhumane actions may even lead to economic sanctions for the country.

He also said that by the decision of the military court, the constitutional bench set up after an amendment in the constitution in October this year became irrelevant and by allowing the army led courts to announce judgment of trial of civilian, the judiciary indirectly acknowledged the political engineering being done to harm his PTI party.

"After the 26th Constitutional Amendment, the judiciary has

been completely crippled. The establishment of the Constitutional Bench and its decisions are tantamount to embarrassing the Supreme Court," he added.

Khan had announced yet another round of protest in the form of a civil disobedience movement this time, asking the Pakistani diaspora to boycott remittances if his demands are not met by Sunday (December 22).

"We will appeal to Pakistanis living abroad that the situation in Pakistan is evident to you, democracy, the judiciary, and the media has been stifled, and a period of oppression and fascism is ongoing. Therefore, we urge you to start the boycott of remittances," Khan had announced on December 19.

After Khan was arrested in an accountability case in 2023, hundreds and thousands of his followers and workers of his party vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Jinnah House (Lahore Corps Commander House), Mianwali Air Base and the ISI building in Faisalabad on May 9.

The Army headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi too was attacked by the mob, for the first time, last year.

Khan's party had launched a protest march earlier in the year and the latest was on November 26 when police had arrested hundreds of PTI supporters participating in the protest march to the capital, Islamabad, and a planned sit-in demonstration. (PTI)

## Spice tins honour role of Indian soldiers in Christmas truce during First World War

**LONDON, Dec 25:** A UK historian has highlighted further evidence of the widespread contributions made by Indian soldiers to the First World War effort as part of the British empire army with the discovery of spice tins that were used during the Christmas truce in 1914. Professor Peter Doyle, a military historian at Goldsmiths, University of London, is quoted in 'The Times' on Wednesday to showcase how new research has found that these spice tins ended up in the hands of German soldiers when the Western Front fell silent as soldiers walked across no man's land to exchange handshakes, gifts and a game of football 110 years ago.

Doyle organised an exhibition about the truce, including details around these spice tins, at the Great War Huts Museum in Bury St Edmunds, eastern England. "The truce was not just a case of 'Anglo-Saxon' to 'Saxon' fraternisation," Doyle is quoted as saying. "Up until recently, people didn't really believe or expect Indian soldiers took part in the truce, though they may have been observers," he said.

The spice tins were part of morale boosting Christmas gifts to soldiers in the war by Princess Mary, the daughter of Britain's King George V. For British soldiers, her gift was made up of a smoking kit, which was deemed inappropriate as

many members of the Indian army were non-smokers. Instead, their tins were filled with spice along with a picture of Princess Mary in place of a cigarette card for their UK counterparts. Doyle, the author of 'For Every Sailor Afloat, Every Soldier at the Front: Princess Mary's Christmas Gift 1914', documents how Princess Mary aged just 17 set out to send a Christmas gift to all those on active service.

His book is set against the backdrop of an unofficial "Truce in No Man's Land" during the war and his research led him to the discovery of one of the spice tins — only the second one known to still be in existence. (PTI)

## Hasina's son claims Yunus govt weaponising judiciary for carrying out 'political witch hunt'

**WASHINGTON, Dec 25:** Sanjeeb Wazed, son of deposed Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina, has accused the Muhammad Yunus led interim government of "weaponising the judiciary" for carrying out a "political witch hunt" against the Awami League leadership.

Wazed's allegations, as a long post on X, came two days after the interim government on Monday said it has sent a diplomatic note to New Delhi seeking Hasina's extradition from India.

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 when she fled Bangladesh following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's (AL) 16-year regime.

Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide." "The judges and prosecutors appointed by the un-elected Yunus led regime to conduct farcical trial process through International Crimes Tribunal makes it a political witch hunt that forsakes justice and marks another ongoing onslaught to persecute Awami League leadership," Wazed said in his post on Tuesday.

An IT entrepreneur, Wazed is based in the US and has been an ICT adviser in Hasina's government. "The kangaroo tribunal and subsequent request for extradition

comes while hundreds of leaders and activists are extrajudicially killed, framing of outrageous murder charges, illegal incarceration of thousands by law enforcement and violent attacks including looting vandalism and arson going on with impunity everyday fuelled by denial of the regime," he added.

On Monday, India confirmed receiving the 'note verbale' or diplomatic communication from the Bangladesh high commission in New Delhi but refrained from commenting on it.

Under the provisions of the India-Bangladesh extradition treaty, extradition may be refused if the offence is one of a "political character." Bangladesh's de facto foreign minister Touhid Hossain said Dhaka wants Hasina back to face the judicial process.

Wazed further accused that the chief prosecutor of ICT Tribunal Tajul Islam appointed by Yunus regime on December 22, despite proven records of defending war criminals, "reportedly spread deliberate disinformation campaign" against Hasina by claiming that Interpol issued red notice against her, and termed it as "a desperate bid to extradite her and hold farcical trial to serve the interest of Dr Yunus."

"But the very prosecutor later altered his statement following media exposure of the outright lie and now officially sent a request to India for the extradition," Hasina's son said. (PTI)

## Cities worldwide hold subdued Christmas Eve celebrations amid conflicts

**BETHLEHEM (WEST BANK), Dec 25:** Bethlehem marked another somber Christmas Eve on Tuesday in the traditional birthplace of Jesus under the shadow of war in Gaza.

The cheer that typically descends on the West Bank during Christmas week were nowhere to be found. The festive lights and giant tree that normally decorate Manger Square were missing, as were the throngs of foreign tourists.

Palestinian scouts marched silently through the streets, a departure from their usual raucous brass marching band. Security forces arranged barriers near the Church of the Nativity, built atop the spot where Jesus is believed to have been born. A young boy stood holding a pile of balloons for sale, but gave up because there were no customers to buy them.

The cancellation of Christmas festivities is a severe blow to the town's economy. Tourism accounts for an estimated 70 per cent of Bethlehem's income — almost all from the Christmas season. The number of visitors to Bethlehem plunged from a pre-COVID high of around 2 million per year in 2019 to fewer than 1,00,000 in 2024, said Jiries Qumsiyeh, the spokesperson for the Palestinian Tourism Ministry.

A surge of violence in the West Bank, where more than 800 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli



fire and dozens of Israelis have been killed in militant attacks, has greatly stalled tourism. Palestinian officials do not provide a breakdown of how many of the deceased are civilians and how many are fighters.

Since the deadly October 7, 2023, Hamas attack that sparked the war, access to and from Bethlehem and other towns in the West Bank has been limited, with long lines of motorists waiting to pass through Israeli military checkpoints. The restrictions have prevented some 1,50,000 Palestinians from leaving the territory to work in Israel, causing the Israeli economy to contract by 25 per cent.

In the October 7 assault on southern Israel, Hamas-led militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took more than 250 Israeli hostages. Israeli officials

believe that around 100 hostages remain in captivity in the Gaza Strip.

Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the top Roman Catholic cleric in the Holy Land, noted the shuttered shops and empty streets and expressed hope that next year would be better.

"This has to be the last Christmas that is so sad," he told hundreds of people gathered in Manger Square, where normally tens of thousands would congregate.

Pizzaballa held a special pre-Christmas Mass in the Church of the Holy Family in Gaza City. Several Palestinian Christians told the Associated Press that they had been displaced in the church since the war began in October of last year with barely enough food and water.

"We hope by next year at the same day we'd be able to celebrate

Christmas at our homes and go to Bethlehem," said Najla Tarazi, a displaced woman who prayed for the war to end. "We don't feel happy."

Bethlehem is an important centre in the history of Christianity, but Christians make up only a small percentage of the roughly 14 million residents spread across the Holy Land. There are about 1.82,000 in Israel, 50,000 in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 1,300 in Gaza, according to the US State Department.

Elsewhere, worshippers found connection despite difficult times.

**Tourists flock to reopened Notre Dame Cathedral**  
Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris celebrated its first Christmas Eve Masses since a devastating fire ravaged the medieval landmark in 2019.

About 2,000 people joined an afternoon Mass — one of four held on Tuesday — including worshippers and other visitors marveling at the restoration of the recently reopened cathedral. Some American tourists in Paris crafted their trip to ensure they could attend Christmas Eve services at Notre Dame.

"They did such an amazing job," said visitor Aly Beinert. "It looks beautiful. It blew us away."

The Paris Archbishop symbolically reopened Notre Dame's grand wooden doors on December 7 with

three resounding knocks, with guests including President-elect Donald Trump, US first lady Jill Biden, Britain's Prince William and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

**Syrians come together for rare moment of joy**

In Saydnaya, Syria, a large crowd gathered near a historic monastery on Christmas Eve to witness the lighting of a towering tree adorned with glowing green lights.

The celebration offered a rare moment of joy in a city scarred by over a decade of war and its infamous prison, where tens of thousands were held. Families and friends stood by the illuminated tree — some wearing Santa hats, others watching from rooftops — while a band played festive music and fireworks lit up the sky.

"This year is different — there's happiness, victory and a new birth for Syria and a new birth for Christ," said Houssam Saadeh, one attendee. Another, Joseph Khabbaz, expressed hope for unity across all sects and religions in Syria, dismissing recent Christmas tree vandalism as "isolated incidents."

**US families honour victims of church school shooting**

At City Church in Madison, Wisconsin, lead pastor Tom Flaherty urged congregants at a candlelit Christmas Eve service to open their hearts to God's grace. (AP)



## Nagaland: Congress returns to spotlight after two decades, civic polls held after 20 years

**KOHIMA, Dec 25:** Nagaland witnessed a significant political shift this year as the Congress made a comeback by winning the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state after decades of political marginalisation and elections to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) were held for the first time in 20 years with 33 per cent reservation for women, marking a pivotal moment in its political landscape.

In the parliamentary elections held earlier this year, Congress candidate S Supongmeren Jamir clinched the state's only Lok Sabha seat, delivering a win that many political analysts termed as a historic resurgence for the party in a state where it had long been absent from the political limelight.

Jamir's victory marked the end of a 20-year hiatus for Congress in the state's Lok Sabha elections. The last Congress candidate to win the seat was K Asungba Sangtam, who served from 1999 to 2004.

For the state's people, Jamir's triumph carries a deep, symbolic significance, marking a shift in the state's political dynamics, which had been dominated by the ruling alliance of the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Jamir, a former member of the Assembly and the incumbent president of Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC), won decisively, securing 4,01,951 votes. He defeated his nearest rival, Dr Chumben Murry of the NDPP, by a margin of 50,984 votes.

The victory was not just a political win for Jamir but represented the broader revival of the Congress, which had been nearly wiped out in the state assembly since 2014, with no representation in the state Assembly.

For the people of Nagaland, Congress' victory was not unexpected.

Many voters were motivated by the desire to stand against BJP's alleged violence against minority communities in India.

In a state where the population is predominantly Christian, there is a deep-rooted sense of solidarity against what is perceived as growing religious intolerance.

"Religious sentiments played a major role in this Lok Sabha election while some churches also played anti-BJP propaganda," observed H Chishi, a veteran journalist and political analyst.

"The victory of our president, Supongmeren Jamir, in the Lok Sabha election has really strength-

ened the party in Nagaland," NPCC working president Khriedi Theunuo said.

"The win was a resurgence of the party in Nagaland, with people now looking upon the Congress with greater responsibility and hope for betterment," he said.

"Our party had been sidelined since the 2003 state elections and had no representation in the House since 2014. But now, with this win, people are looking at us with renewed hope, ready to bring about the change they desire."

Theunuo added that following the win, the party's membership, which is a continuous process aimed toward the 2028 state elections, has increased and many are joining positively.

"Jamir's election to the Lok Sabha gives Nagaland a strong voice at the national level. He will have a critical role to play in addressing key issues affecting the Nagas, including the long-standing Naga Political Issue and the demand for a Frontier Nagaland Territory, which has been a significant concern for the people of Eastern Nagaland," said a local political analyst who wished to remain anonymous.

Entering Parliament, Jamir, in his maiden speech, stressed the importance of an early resolution of the Naga political problem and the ENPO issue, while also calling for improvements to the facilities at the only airport and railway station at Dimapur.

With an energised base and the promise of greater representation, Jamir's win may be just the beginning of a new chapter for Congress in the state, as they look toward the 2028 state elections with growing momentum.

Nonetheless, the ruling NDPP made up the Lok Sabha defeat by sweeping the civic body polls, winning all three municipal councils — Kohima, Mokochung and Dimapur — and most of the town councils.

Altogether 523 candidates from 11 political parties were in the fray. NDPP fielded the highest number of candidates at 178, followed by BJP at 44, Congress at 37, NPP at 22, NPF at 21 and NCP at 15. JD(U) contested nine seats, RPI (Athawale) and LJP seven each, and Rising Peoples' Party one. Also, there were 182 Independent candidates.

Congress winning just seven civic seats of the 37 it contested while not being able to find candidates for maximum seats has raised doubts about the party regaining its hold in the state. (PTI)

## Tripura renewable energy agency to supply purified water to 50 remote tribal hamlets

**AGARTALA, Dec 25:** Tripura Renewable Energy Development Agency (TREDA), a state government undertaking, has set a target to install community-based purified water plants through solar energy in 50 most inaccessible tribal hamlets, an official said on Wednesday.

The target has been envisaged after successful implementation of the first phase of community-based purified water plants through solar energy in 14 tribal hamlets at a cost of ₹ 2.24 crore where electricity is not economically viable on account of hilly terrain and very low population density.

"The villagers can't afford to pay high running and maintenance costs of power bills which lead to non-functional rural water supply in some tribal habitations. To address the problem, 14 inaccessible tribal habitations had been identified and extended purified drinking water by using solar energy", TREDA's joint director Debarata Sulka said.

TREDA's joint director Debarata Sulka said PTI. He said the Centre after observing the success of first phase work, has sanctioned ₹ 8 crore to undertake another project to cover as

# Bangladesh turmoil casts shadow on Tripura's key projects

Hundreds continue to grapple with their losses as the Centre is yet to release special funds

**AGARTALA, Dec 25:** The sudden collapse of the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh has cast a shadow on key connectivity and trade projects in Tripura, which is likely to have far-reaching implications on the northeastern state's growth engine in the year ahead.

Dark clouds of uncertainty loom large on the fate of 'Maitri Setu' (friendship bridge), built over River Feni in South Tripura's Sabroom sub-division, despite its joint inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his then Bangladeshi counterpart, Sheikh Hasina, in March 2021.

The 1.9-km-long bridge, constructed at a cost of ₹ 133 crore, promises a shorter and more economical alternate connectivity between the Northeast and Kolkata via Chittagong and Mongla ports in Bangladesh with Sabroom as a gateway to the Southeast Asian nations.

However, barely days before passenger movement between India and Bangladesh through the bridge was scheduled to be flagged off, a deadly student uprising in August threw the country into disarray and forced Prime Minister Hasina to flee, leaving the fate of the key infrastructure project in limbo.

And not just the Maitri Setu, the ₹ 230-crore Integrated Check Post (ICP) strategically located at Sabroom in the southernmost tip of the border state is yet to be made functional due to the political turbulence on the other side of the fence.



Another strategic connectivity project, the Agartala-Akhaura rail link, which was inaugurated by Modi and Hasina in November 2023, remains a non-starter in the wake of the current political instability in Bangladesh.

The 15-km critical rail link, built at a cost of ₹ 972 crore and is supposed to connect Agartala with Kolkata via Bangladesh, is yet to be made operational. If the link is established, the distance between Agartala and Kolkata will be reduced from 1,559 km (via Guwahati) to 500 km (via Bangladesh), curtailing travel time from the current 31 hours to 10-12 hours.

The viability of the first-ever Special Economic Zone (SEZ), which is coming up in Sabroom at a cost of ₹ 635, also remains doubtful due to the forceful regime change in Dhaka.

"Things have changed in Tripura post August 5 (when Hasina resigned and fled Bangladesh). Local economies have been badly affected. Limited trade, minimal truckloads of exchange,

downsizing of the hospitality sector, etc. are visible in the short run," noted economist Indranil Bhowmik told PTI.

"Nonetheless, optimism stands in the long run, particularly on the upcoming Matarbari Deep Sea Port in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar which is being promoted through Japanese cooperation. The multiplier linkages of this project will necessitate Bangladesh to keep good relations with India for ensuring economic sustainability," he added.

Tripura also experienced a major tragedy in the worst-ever floods in decades that claimed 38 lives and caused extensive damage to physical infrastructure as well as properties and crops in August.

The loss suffered by the state on account of the floods stood at an estimated ₹ 15,000 crore. Hundreds continue to grapple with their losses as the Centre is yet to release special funds for the rehabilitation of the affected people. However, the state declared a special package of ₹ 564 crore in aid of the flood victims.

Tripura's long tradition of communal harmony suffered a dent when it witnessed two major incidents of violence in which two people were killed and over a hundred were rendered homeless.

On July 12 and 13, some 70 shops and houses were set ablaze by a group of people at Gandatwisa in Dhalai district following the death of a tribal youth.

Even before the dust of the Gandatwisa incident had settled, another clash broke out at Kadamtala in North Tripura district just ahead of the Durga Puja on October 6. A Muslim trader was shot dead by the police, triggering communal tension in the northeastern state.

Tripura hogged national headlines yet again in early December after an unruly group of Hindu right-wing activists breached the security cordon and barged into the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala vandalising property and removing the country's national flag, to protest alleged atrocities on minorities in the neighbouring nation.

While Tripura Police arrested seven people in connection with the incident and suspended three police officers, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) issued an apology for 'the premises breach' at the Bangladesh mission, terming it "deeply regrettable".

In order to address the issues faced by indigenous people, the Centre and the state government signed an accord with newly emerged influential tribal party, Tipra Motha, just ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

The northeastern state, which had experienced bloody insurgency for several decades, also witnessed the mass surrender of hundreds of militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), prompting Chief Minister Manik Saha to proclaim the state as "insurgent-free". (PTI)

## Manipur was on right trajectory of development before May 3, 2023: CM Biren Singh

**IMPHAL, Dec 25:** Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday said the state was on the right trajectory of development and good governance before violence broke out on May 3, 2023, and had hosted multiple international and national events, including G-20 meetings, Miss India competition, and the tri-nation football tournament.

Speaking as the chief guest on the occasion of Good Governance Day held at the chief minister's secretariat, Singh lauded government officials, including the chief secretary, for working towards achieving the government's objective of good governance. Former PM Atal Behari Vajpayee's birthday was declared as 'Good Governance Day' in 2014 under the first Modi government.

"The law-and-order situation in the state was not so good when my government came to power in 2017, and my priority was to deliver good governance," he added, citing several schemes and missions initiated under his government for the welfare of the people. Singh said 'Meeyangmi Nunit (People's Day)' was launched with



the basic aim of providing people-oriented governance. He remarked that the COVID pandemic was very unfortunate and that "Manipur would have achieved much more if not for it." He also spoke on the 'Go to Hills' mission, stating that it was launched during a crucial time when there was a gap between the hills and valley. He stressed the importance of acting on promises, saying "trust is lost when leaders can't deliver on their commitments."

Applauding the officials for their hard work, Singh said, "The pandemic could have been a lot worse without the efforts of all stakeholders, including ministers, MLAs, and officials." He appreciated doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers for fearlessly fighting the pandemic.

Singh reiterated, "Manipur was on the right trajectory of development and good governance before May 3, 2023," and mentioned that the state had hosted G-20 events, the Miss India competition, and the Tri-Nation Football Tournament.

He spoke at length about the School Phagathansi Mission (Let's make schools better), which provided facilities like those of private institutes in government schools. "Today, the admission rate in government schools has increased by 40-50 per cent," he said, adding that people have started believing in the government education system.

Singh also highlighted the College Phagathansi Mission and Chief Minister's Artistesinggi Tengbang (CMAT) schemes and said, "These are examples of good governance."

As part of the observation, the CM, in the presence of other dignitaries, released a book titled 'A Tribute to Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bharat Ratna on Centenary Birth Anniversary', published by the state's department of administrative reforms division. (PTI)

## Manipur CM pays tributes to former PM

**IMPHAL, Dec 25:** Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday paid tributes to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary. He said the former PM's principles and teachings have inspired the building of a robust economy for this nation.

In a post on X, Singh said "Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji has been a pivotal figure in shaping India's diplomacy and national security, while continuing to serve as a source of guidance and wisdom to all of us."

"His principles and teachings have inspired the building of a robust economy for this nation, serving as an enduring source of motivation for the generations to come" Singh added. Singh in another post also extended his greetings on the occasion of Good Governance Day.

Singh said "This day, observed in honour of the birth anniversary of former PM and Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji, reminds us of the importance of transparent, accountable, and people-centric governance. Let us reaffirm our dedication to building a state where governance empowers every citizen and paves the way for a brighter future." (PTI)

## Yuletide spirit grips Arunachal; Guv, CM wish people on Christmas

Guv Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) and CM Khandu also extended their greetings to the people on the occasion



**ITANAGAR, Dec 25:** The Yuletide spirit gripped Arunachal Pradesh on Wednesday with prayers for peace and prosperity held in churches across the state on the occasion of Christmas. Churches in the state capital Itanagar were decorated with lights and scenes depicting the birth of Jesus.

People thronged various churches in the state capital on Tuesday midnight for special prayers.

The Town Baptist Church wore a festive look with people in colourful attire making a beeline outside it.

The fathers of different churches along with devotees also prayed for the prosperous future of the northeastern state. Carols, hymns and prayers marked the celebration in churches, which were decorated with colourful lights and artefacts.

People from other religions also joined their Christian friends to celebrate the occasion.

Governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) and Chief Minister Pema Khandu also extended their greetings to the people on the occasion.

The governor in his message expressed hope that the festive season will bring peace, love, and serenity to the state, nation, and the world at large.

The governor said that the true spirit of Christmas lies in extending compassion to those in need, offering hope to the despairing, and providing support to the displaced.

"This festive season rekindles our commitment to work together in unity toward a brighter future for all. I am confident that this joyous occasion will inspire a sense of brotherhood in every individual and community," he said. May this Christmas guide and inspire us to lead a life of compassion, empathy, and peace, Parnaik added in his message. Khandu also extended his Christmas greetings to the people of the state.

"I extend warm greetings and wishes to the people of Arunachal Pradesh on the pious occasion of Christmas, a moment of alacrity, generosity, and reflection. Today as we commemorate the birth of Lord Jesus Christ, let us reaffirm our resolve to preserve and promote love, hope, and unity that transcend religious boundaries and help us build a better and more inclusive social order," Khandu said in a post on X.

Let the spirit of gratitude and compassion flourish and guide the people around the world to the path of serenity and humanity! Happy Christmas, the chief minister added. (PTI)

## Gunfight between armed groups in Imphal

**IMPHAL, Dec 25:** Gunfight broke out between two armed groups in Manipur's Imphal East district on Wednesday morning, police said.

Armed men fired from the hilltops of Kangpokpi district, targeting the Sinam Kom village. Armed 'village volunteers' deployed at the foothills retaliated, leading to the gunfight, they said.

Additional security forces were deployed in the area following the incident, they added.

No injuries have been reported so far, police said.

On Tuesday night, a gunfight broke out between armed men and security forces at Thamnappokpi and nearby Uyok Ching in Imphal East, police said.

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

## Security forces seize 3.6 kg explosives

**IMPHAL, Dec 25:** Security forces seized 3.6 kg of explosives from under a bridge in Manipur's Churachandpur district, an army statement said on Wednesday.

In a joint operation, the Assam Rifles and Manipur police seized the explosives from Leisang village along the Imphal-Churachandpur route, it said.

Spear Corps in a post on X said, "Acting on specific intelligence on presence of IEDs in general area Leisang village, Churachandpur district, #Manipur, #AssamRifles formation under #SpearCorps and @manipur\_police launched a joint search operation and recovered 3.6 kgs of explosives, detonators, cordtex and other accessories under a bridge on the Imphal-Churachandpur route. The bomb squad was deployed to defuse the explosives, it said.

The security forces on Tuesday seized seven firearms including one M-16 with magazine, four SBBL country-made guns, one revolver and ammunition from Moljoi village in Churachandpur district, a police statement said. (PTI)

## Nagaland celebrates Christmas with religious fervour

**KOHIMA, Dec 25:** Christian-majority Nagaland on Wednesday celebrated Christmas with religious fervour, as people took part in special prayer services and feasts.

Decorative lights and Christmas stars lit homes, streets, government offices and commercial buildings while revelers moved around in groups on Christmas eve on Tuesday night singing carols and wishing people "Merry Christmas".

At the stroke of midnight, fireworks lit the sky and the air was filled with tolling of church bells.

On Wednesday morning, people thronged churches in their finest dresses and attended prayer services in which sermons were delivered on the purpose of the birth of Jesus Christ. People were asked to for-



give one another and proceed to the next year with love and compassion for all as taught by Jesus Christ. People also enjoyed the Christmas feast, which was also extended to non-Christians.

Nagaland Governor La Ganesan, Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and Deputy

Chief Minister and BJP Legislature Party leader Y Patton extended Christmas greetings to all on the joyous occasion.

"As we celebrate this joyous Christmas season, may it bring peace, hope, and light into your life. This time of reflection and togetherness reminds us of the importance

of love, kindness and gratitude," Governor Ganesan said in a message.

He also hoped that everyone's home be filled with warmth, heart with contentment, and days with abundant blessings.

"May the message of Christmas, which is peace, love, joy, and hope, fill our hearts. Let us embrace the values of tolerance, forgiveness, and goodwill in true Christian spirit. I wish you all a merry and a blessed Christmas," Chief Minister Rio said in a social media post.

BJP Legislature Party leader Patton said that Christmas is a time to reflect upon the manifold blessings God has given to mankind.

Government holiday started on December 22 and will continue till January 2. (PTI)

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9	Specialist - Early Childhood Care and Education	1
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## SP MLA terms Maha election results as 'Vote Jihad'



**THANE, Dec 25:** Samajwadi Party legislator Rais Shaikh on Wednesday said the results of assembly constituencies in Maharashtra with a sizable Muslim presence disprove the claim that the minority community votes en masse against the BJP.

The MLA from Bhiwandi (East) cited voting figures to claim that the BJP-led Mahayuti coalition won 21 out of 38 seats in the November 20 elections where the Muslim population ranges from 20 percent to 52 percent. Most of the winning candidates were Hindus, Shaikh said in a statement here.

"If 'vote Jihad' existed, this would not have been the case. Some Mahayuti candidates won by a margin of as little as 1,500 votes. But the claim of 'vote Jihad' has been used to malign the Muslim community," he alleged.

He himself won in a Muslim-majority constituency by a margin of 52,000 votes, including 18,000 votes from Hindus, the SP MLA said, adding that the BJP's "divisive slogans" such as "Batnege to Katnege" and "Ek Hai Toh Safe Hai" did not have any impact on voters.

On the other hand, Muslim candidates Hasan Mushrif and Abdul Sattar were elected from Hindu-majority Kagal and Sillod seats, respectively, he pointed out.

Shaikh also said that while Muslims are 11.56 percent of Maharashtra's population, their representation in the new assembly is only 3.47 percent. During the election campaign, BJP leader and then deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had accused the Opposition of trying to polarize voters and said if there was 'vote Jihad', it would have to be countered by 'dharma yudh' of votes. (PTI)

## Delhi govt departments distance themselves from AAP's promised schemes

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** The Delhi government's Women and Child Development and Health departments issued public notices on Wednesday distancing themselves from the ruling AAP's promised schemes of providing ₹2,100 to women and free treatment for the elderly, triggering a fresh row ahead of assembly polls.

The two departments also cautioned the people against providing personal details to anyone on the pretext of registration for "non-existent" schemes, saying any private individual or political party collecting such physical forms or information is "fraudulent and without any authority".

The development, which came days after AAP leaders launched the exercise of registering people for the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana and Sanjeevani Yojana with much fanfare, left the AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal furious.

Kejriwal, who is leading the registration drive, alleged that the BJP was rattled by the two schemes and claimed that Chief Minister Atishi could be arrested in a "fake" case in the coming days.

"They are completely rattled with Mahila Samman Yojana and Sanjeevani Yojana. They have hatched a plan to come up with a fake case and arrest Chief Minister Atishi in the next few days," he said on X.

He also claimed that before Atishi's arrest, raids would be conducted against senior AAP leaders.

BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj had on Tuesday claimed that she spoke to the health secretary of the Delhi government and was informed that there was no "Sanjeevani Yojana" in existence.

Both the schemes were announced by Kejriwal ahead of Assembly polls in February

## Maken says alliance was a 'mistake' Delhi Cong brings out 'white paper' targeting AAP, BJP

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Delhi Congress on Wednesday released a 12-point "white paper" targeting the Aam Aadmi Party and the BJP over their alleged unkept promises and mismanagement on various issues like pollution, civic facilities and law and order.

Addressing a press conference, AICC treasurer Ajay Maken lashed out at AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, saying his party came to power riding on the Janlokal agitation but has failed to set up the anti-corruption ombudsman.

"If there is one word to describe former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal here then it would be Farziwal," he said while releasing the white paper titled "Mauka Mauka, Har Baar Dhoka".

"If anyone is the king of fraud in the entire country then it is Kejriwal and that is why we have come here with a white paper on



the Kejriwal government and also on the BJP government at the Centre," Maken said.

There was no immediate reaction from AAP and BJP.

Maken questioned why the Janlokal had not been formed even in Punjab.

"If LG is not allowing you here,

then make it in Punjab. Who is stopping you? You have a full-fledged government there, why don't you make it there? This is just an excuse. The party (AAP) was formed 10 years ago in the name of Janlokal, now they have forgotten it," he said.

They also used to say that they

would make Delhi like London. "They have made the national capital number 1 in pollution," he said.

Maken also said that forming an alliance with AAP was a "mistake" that should be rectified, and went on to add that it was his personal opinion.

"I feel that today the plight of Delhi and that the Congress got weakened here is only because of the fact that we supported AAP for 40 days in 2013.

"Today, this is one of the biggest reasons for the plight of Delhi. And I believe that perhaps a mistake has been made again in Delhi by making the alliance, which needs to be rectified," he said.

Along with Maken, and AICC Delhi in-charge Qazi Mohd Nizamuddin, Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav, co-incharges Danish Abrar and Sukhwinder Singh Danny were also present. (PTI)

## Cong insulted Ambedkar on various occasions: Union Minister Kishan Reddy

**HYDERABAD, Dec 25:** Taking exception to Congress attacking BJP for allegedly hurting Constitutional principles and insulting B R Ambedkar, Union Coal Minister G Kishan Reddy on Wednesday said it was the grand old party which had insulted the chief architect of the Constitution on various occasions.

Congress talks big about democracy, but it trampled upon the spirit of democracy and the Constitution during the Emergency by putting several political leaders and journalists in jail, he said, while speaking at the birth centenary celebrations of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee here. "BJP does not need their (Congress) certificate on democracy, Constitution and Ambedkar. Congress had insulted Babasaheb Ambedkar on every occasion. Congress defeated him (Ambedkar) when he contested elec-

tions. The credit for making him resign as minister goes to Jawaharlal Nehru," he said.

Congress, when in power, did not honour Ambedkar with Bharat Ratna, neither did the grand old party install his portrait in the central hall of parliament, he said.

The Narendra Modi government announced five iconic places associated with Ambedkar as 'Panchteerth', said Kishan Reddy, who is also Telangana BJP president.

Congress has always behaved as if only the Nehru family members had the right to rule the country and it insulted leaders from Ambedkar to Modi, he said.

The "true colours of Congress and its anti-democratic, dictatorial, family and corrupt politics" should be conveyed to people during the centenary celebrations of Vajpayee, he said. (PTI)

## Atishi accuses BJP of distributing cash to voters in Kejriwal's New Delhi constituency

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Wednesday alleged that the BJP was distributing cash to women in AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal's New Delhi constituency ahead of Assembly polls in the city. In a press conference, senior AAP leader Atishi said ₹1,100 each was given to women from slum clusters at former BJP MP Parvesh Verma's residence at Windsor Place, and their voter ID details were noted down.

Verma, however, denied the charges and said the money was distributed as part of a campaign by "Rashtriya Swabhimani", an NGO formed by his late father and former Delhi Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma. "I ask the Delhi Police, CBI, ED to conduct raids at the bungalow where cores of rupees are kept," she said, adding that the AAP will make formal complaints to the police and the election commission and demanded Verma's arrest.

Kejriwal has also alleged that cash was being distributed to people in his constituency.

Verma, a former West Delhi BJP MP, had earlier claimed that he was asked by senior party leaders to start preparations for contesting from the New Delhi Assembly segment.

In a statement, Verma said the 'Rashtriya Swabhimani' was behind the scheme to provide monthly financial assistance of ₹1,100 to women from poor sections of society.

"I am seeing the pain of women which Arvind Kejriwal could not see for 11 years. They were harassed... I decided that we would give them ₹1,100 per month. At least I am not distributing liquor like Arvind Kejriwal. I am happy that I am helping people," Verma said. Verma said the Rashtriya Swabhimani has been involved in helping people and has redeveloped two villages devastated by an earthquake in Gujarat, and four villages in Odisha that were destroyed in a cyclone. The organisation also spent crores of rupees in saving the lives of people during the Covid pandemic, providing oxygen concentrators and opening a care centre in West Delhi.

He said Kejriwal and Atishi could make all the noise but he would continue to help women and none of them would return empty-handed from his residence.

The election for the 70-member Delhi Assembly is due to be held in February next year. (PTI)

## CPI(M) in Kerala criticises Governor Khan for engaging in 'unconstitutional actions'

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Dec 25:** The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala on Wednesday expressed hope that the newly appointed Governor of the state, Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, would work constitutionally and collaborate with the government, unlike Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, who was transferred to Bihar.

Sharply criticising Khan, who had been at loggerheads with the Left government over various issues, CPI(M) State Secretary M V Govindan accused him of engaging in "unconstitutional ac-

tions to implement the agenda of the Sangh Parivar."

His statement comes a day after President Draupadi Murmu issued orders appointing new Governors for states, including Manipur, Mizoram, Kerala, and Bihar.

Talking to reporters, Govindan criticised the media for portraying Governor Khan as a highly respected figure with wide public approval.

He said that some newspapers even hailed Khan as a greater opposition figure than the opposition party itself. The

CPI(M) leader attributed this perception of the media to Khan's efforts to implement the Sangh Parivar agenda while clashing with the Left government. "This approach is considered highly anti-people," he said.

According to Govindan, Governors should act constitutionally, regardless of their political affiliations, whether they are associated with the Communist or Congress parties. However, instead of adhering to constitutional norms, Governor Khan took unconstitutional positions, the CPI(M) leader claimed. (PTI)

## Cong didn't want anyone to grow bigger than Nehru-Gandhi family: Fadnavis



**NAGPUR, Dec 25:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday demanded that Congress apologise to the nation for insulting Dr B R Ambedkar repeatedly.

The Opposition party distorted Union home minister Amit Shah's speech in Parliament, he said, speaking at a 'meet-the-press' program here.

"Congress should apologise to the nation for always insulting Ambedkar. Its anxiety was that no one should grow in stature above the Nehru-Gandhi family. Congress distorted Amit Shah's comments on Ambedkar to mislead the people. BJP and Shah can not insult Ambedkar even in their dreams," Fadnavis said.

Even his own speech in the Maharashtra assembly where he said that Naxalites do not believe in the country's Constitution was distorted in such a way that it appeared he did not believe in the Constitution, the chief minister said.

"We now have the technology to get the entire digital footprint for identifying those who are circulating such messages," said Fadnavis who also holds the home portfolio.

Congress also knows that EVMs are tamper-proof, but "one can not wake up someone who pre-

tends to be sleeping," he said.

The Mahayuti received a massive mandate in the assembly elections as it could debunk the fake narrative used by the Opposition during the Lok Sabha polls, he said. The mandate brings a lot of expectations and challenges, he added.

"As a Nagpur-kar (native of Nagpur), I want to assure you that power doesn't go to my head. I will never let you down. I believe power is a means for service," Fadnavis said.

Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule will discuss the issue of appointment of guardian ministers of districts with allies NCP and Shiv Sena, he said, adding, "Whatever decision he takes, will be binding on me. I would like to be the guardian ministers of Gadchiroli, if permitted."

Gadchiroli in eastern Maharashtra is affected by Naxal violence.

Fadnavis said Naxalism was now at an all-time low, and a lot of development is taking place in Gadchiroli district.

Referring to the brutal murder of a sarpanch in Beed district, Fadnavis said his government had taken the incident seriously.

"We will not tolerate lawlessness. But it is wrong to defame the Beed district," he added. (PTI)

## Maharashtra local bodies polls likely by April 2025 if SC decides on OBC quota: Bawankule

**NAGPUR, Dec 25:** Maharashtra minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule on Wednesday said the pending elections to local bodies in the state will be held in March-April 2025 if the Supreme Court gives its decision on the OBC reservation in the first week of January.

Addressing a press conference here, he said a hearing on the quota for the Other Backward Classes (OBC) is listed in the apex court in the first week of January.

"The State Election Commission will conduct the polls and the state government will provide all the support," the Revenue Minister said.

The five-year term of most of the municipal corporations, including the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), and other local bodies in the state expired in 2022.

In December 2021, the Supreme Court had ruled that reservation for OBCs in local bodies will not be allowed unless the government fulfils the triple test laid down in the apex court's 2010 order. It had ruled that until the triple test criteria is fulfilled, the OBC seats will be re-notified as general category seats.

The triple test required the state government to set up a dedicated commission to gather data on the backwardness of OBCs in every local body, to specify the proportion of reservation in each local body in light of commission's recommendations, and ensure that such reservation does not exceed 50 per cent of the total seats reserved for SC/ST/OBC together.

Bawankule further said there were complaints that several properties owned by private charitable trusts and educational institutions were forcibly taken over by the Waqf Board in Maharashtra. (PTI)

## Proposal to name Mysuru road after Siddaramaiah evokes strong objections

**MYSURU, Dec 25:** A proposal by the Mysuru City Corporation council to name a stretch of road in the city after Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has evoked strong objections.

According to official sources, the proposal calls for naming a stretch of KRS Road from the Lakshmi Venkataramanaswamy temple to the Outer Ring Road junction as 'Siddaramaiah Arogya Marg'. Based on a suggestion by Chamara Congress MLA Harish Gowda, the Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) took the decision at its meeting on November 22.

The matter was first placed before the Mysuru deputy commissioner prior to being tabled in the council meeting. The MCC then issued a newspaper notice inviting views from the public on the proposal within 30 days on December 13, the sources said.

Mysuru is the home district of Siddaramaiah, who is serving his second term as the chief minister.

The JD(S) called the move to

name the KRS Road in the historic city of Mysuru as 'Siddaramaiah Arogya Marg' condemnable.

Pointing out that Siddaramaiah is an accused in the MUDA site allotment case and is facing probe by the Lokayukta police, the opposition party said in a post on 'X': "There is no elected board in the Mysuru City Corporation. The officials appointed by the Congress government have decided to name the road after Siddaramaiah as they are indebted to him."

Naming a road after the "corrupt" chief minister, who is involved in the MUDA scam, is a "betrayal and insult" not only to the historic city of Mysuru, but also to the entire state, the JD(S) alleged.

RTI activist Snehamayi Krishna, on whose complaint a case was registered in the alleged MUDA site allotment scam, said the road for which Siddaramaiah's name is proposed is "historic", as Maharaja Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar donated a vast swathe of land and established a tuberculosis hospital

there in memory of his sister Princess Krishnammanni and her children who succumbed to TB.

Speaking to reporters, Krishna said, "The officials have decided to name a road after Siddaramaiah, who is an accused in the MUDA case, despite not having any power to do so. Several citizens have expressed their objections to the proposal. I'm also fighting against it legally. If the proposal is not dropped, we will challenge it in the high court and seek action against the concerned officials."

Siddaramaiah is facing allegations of illegalities in the allotment of 14 sites to his wife Parvathi BM by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA).

Siddaramaiah, his wife, brother-in-law Mallikarjuna Swamy and Devaraju -- from whom Swamy had purchased a land and gifted it to Parvathi -- and others have been named in an FIR registered by the Mysuru-located Lokayukta police on September 27, following a special court order. (PTI)

## Governance reforms must begin at grassroots level: Jitendra Singh

'Governance reforms must begin at the grassroots to bring meaningful change'

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said that the governance reforms must begin at the grassroots level to bring about long-lasting and meaningful change.

In a significant step towards strengthening grassroots governance, he launched the 'Viksit Panchayat Karmayogi' initiative on Good Governance Day, celebrated every year to mark birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The initiative, which is part of the broader 'Prashasan Gaon Ki Aar' campaign, aims to enhance the capacity and competence of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by equipping elected representatives and officials with the tools and knowledge required for effective governance and participatory planning, said Singh, the minister of State for Personnel.

He emphasised "that governance reforms must begin at the grassroots to bring about long-lasting and meaningful change as well as to fill up the capacity gaps".



Piloted in Odisha, Assam, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh, the initiative leverages e-learning platforms, AI-powered chatbots, and mobile apps to bridge knowledge gaps and enhance service delivery, Singh said.

He said that this program aligns with the government's broader mission to decentralise governance and foster participatory decision-making at the grassroots level.

The initiative is expected to create scalable models of citizen-centric governance, enabling PRIs to drive equitable and sustainable de-

partments, and state administrators with advanced tools to monitor user registrations, course completions, and overall progress in capacity-building efforts. With customisable views and robust data filtration capabilities, the dashboard provides detailed insights to improve decision-making and optimize training initiatives, the statement said.

Additionally, the introduction of the 1600th course on the platform underscores the government's commitment to fostering a diverse and comprehensive learning ecosystem, it said.

The minister also launched CPGRAMS (Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System) Annual Report 2024.

As the world's largest citizen interface platform, CPGRAMS has redefined grievance redressal by integrating advanced technologies, multilingual support, and comprehensive tracking mechanisms. The CPGRAMS allows citizens to raise grievances against government departments online. (PTI)

development across rural India, according to a Personnel Ministry statement.

The minister also launched a series of transformative initiatives on the occasion of the Good Governance Day.

The first initiative unveiled by Singh was the launch of a new dashboard on the iGOT (integrated government online training) Karmayogi platform, along with the milestone introduction of the 1600th e-learning course.

The enhanced dashboard is designed to empower ministries, de-



# Vajpayee architect of India's transition into 21<sup>st</sup> century: PM

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the architect of India's transition into the 21st century and said the BJP stalwart ushered in reforms that set the stage for India's economic surge, abandoning an economic philosophy which encouraged cronyism and stagnation.

In an article which appeared in several newspapers on the 100th birth anniversary of Vajpayee, Modi said he spent his long parliamentary tenure largely in the opposition benches but never carried any trace of bitterness even though the Congress stooped to new lows by going to the extent of calling him a "traitor".

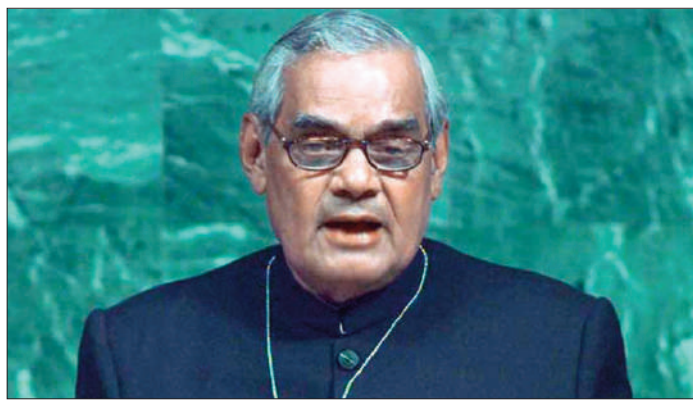
Modi said, "He stands tall as a statesman who continues to inspire countless people."

The prime minister said Vajpayee provided stable and effective governance at a time when people were getting impatient and sceptical about the government's ability to deliver due to the political instability of the 90s when four Lok Sabha polls were held in about nine years.

Coming from humble roots, Vajpayee realised the struggles of the common citizen and the transformative power of effective governance, Modi said, adding that the long-term impact of his leadership is visible in several sectors.

His era marked a gigantic leap in the world of information technology, telecom and communications, he said.

"The NDA government under Atal ji made the first serious attempt to make technology accessible to citizens. At the same time, there was foresight in connecting India. Even today, most people recall the Golden Quadrilateral Proj-



ect which connected the length and breadth of India," he said.

He also cited initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and the push for Metro connectivity by doing extensive work for the Delhi Metro, which stands out as a world-class infrastructure project. He said, "The Vajpayee government not only boosted economic growth but also brought distant regions closer, fostering unity and integration."

An initiative like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan highlights how Vajpayee dreamt of building an India where modern education is accessible to people across the nation, particularly the poor and marginalised sections, he added.

His government's decision to carry out nuclear tests and its handling of the aftermath provide a wonderful example of his leadership, Modi said.

He said, "The world was stunned that India had done the tests and expressed their anger in no uncertain terms. Any ordinary leader would have buckled, but Atal ji was made differently. And what happened? India stood firm, with the government calling for another set of tests two days later,

on May 13."

If the tests of May 11, 1998, showed scientific skill, the ones on May 13 showed true leadership, he said. It was a message to the world that gone were the days when India would buckle under threats or pressure, he said.

Despite facing international sanctions, Modi said, the NDA government stood firm, articulating India's right to safeguard its sovereignty while simultaneously being the strongest proponent of world peace.

Modi said Vajpayee understood Indian democracy and also the need to make it stronger. He presided over the creation of the NDA, which redefined coalitions in Indian politics and became a force for development, national progress and regional ambitions.

"His parliamentary brilliance was seen throughout his political journey. He belonged to a party with a handful of MPs but his words were enough to rattle the might of the all-powerful Congress Party that time. As Prime Minister, he blunted the criticisms of the Opposition with style and substance," Modi said.

Vajpayee was not one to cling to

power through opportunistic means. He preferred to resign in 1996 instead of following the path of horse-trading and dirty politics, the prime minister said, adding that his government fell by one vote in 1999. Eventually, he came back with another resounding mandate from the people.

Modi said, "When it comes to commitment to protecting our Constitution too, Atal ji stands tall. He was deeply impacted by the martyrdom of Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Years later, he was a pillar of the anti-Emergency movement."

In the run-up to the 1977 elections, he agreed to the merger of his own party (Jana Sangh) into the Janata Party as safeguarding the Constitution was all that mattered to him, he said.

Modi noted that as external affairs minister, Vajpayee became the first Indian leader to speak in Hindi at the United Nations, noting that this shows how deeply rooted he was in the Indian culture.

His persona was magnetic and his life was enriched by his love for literature and expression, he said.

Modi said for so many Bharatiya Janata Party members like him, it is their privilege that they were able to learn and interact with a person like Vajpayee.

Whenever the choice between ideology and power, Vajpayee always chose the former, Modi said.

"He was able to convince the nation that an alternative world view from the Congress was possible and such a world view could deliver," he said, asking people to rededicate themselves to realising his ideals and fulfilling his vision for India. (PTI)

## J&K: 72-hour shutdown in Katra begins against ropeway project; protesters detained

**REASI/JAMMU, Dec 25:** Several people were detained by police during a protest in Katra, the base camp of the Mata Vaishno Devi temple in Jammu and Kashmir, as demands to shelve the proposed ropeway project intensified with the town observing a 72-hour shutdown from Wednesday.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangarsh Samiti called for the bandh and said that all activities in Katra would remain suspended during the protest.

Scores of people led by Samiti leaders Bhupinder Singh and Sohan Chand took out a protest march in the town, raising slogans against the Shrine Board and the administration, accusing them of adopting a stubborn attitude.

However, when police personnel stopped the protesters from advancing, clashes broke out between the two sides.

Several protesters, including Singh and Chand, were detained by the police and taken away in a police vehicle from the protest site, officials said. Singh alleged that the government was derailing the issue and forcing the people of Katra to come on the roads.

"We are demanding the shelving of this project to save the jobs of thousands of people. Instead of holding talks with us, as promised by the administration, they are using police to detain us. This is unfortunate," he said.

Former minister Jugal Kishore criticised the "use of force" against the protesters. "We strongly condemn the administration's move to use force against peaceful demonstrators. Their actions are aimed at disturbing the situation in Katra, which is unacceptable," Kishore told reporters.

He accused the administration of avoiding dialogue. "Instead of holding discussions, they are aggravating the situation," he said.

In response to the protest call, all business establishments remained closed, and traffic was off the roads in the holy town.

"A 72-hour shutdown by pony owners, shopkeepers, and other local stakeholders began on Wednesday to protest the proposed ropeway project," a Samiti spokesperson said.

The spokesperson added that the administration had initially scheduled a meeting for December 23

but postponed it to 3 PM today.

"We met the Deputy Commissioner today, who requested more time to consult higher authorities. Therefore, we have decided to continue with the strike," he said.

Last month, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board announced plans to install the ropeway to facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children, and others who find it challenging to trek the 13-km-long path to the cave shrine.

The proposed Rs 250-crore project aims to connect Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat, which leads to the shrine.

Meanwhile, pilgrims expressed frustration over the shutdown, citing the closure of eateries and the suspension of local transport, which caused significant inconvenience.

"We are facing a lot of difficulties. Where will pilgrims eat or rest during this three-day bandh? This is not the right way to protest," a pilgrim told reporters.

"We humbly request those leading the protests to call off the strike, as thousands of pilgrims are facing hardships," he added. (PTI)



## Special arrangements for dignitaries visiting Maha Kumbh 2025

**MAHAKUMBH NAGAR (UP), Dec 25:** As Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 is set to witness a massive influx of pilgrims, tourists, VIP and VVIP dignitaries from across the globe, the Prayagraj Mela Authority has made extensive preparations, including accommodation and protocol arrangements, to ensure a seamless experience, officials said here on Wednesday.

The grand event will span 45 days, from Paush Purnima on January 13 to Mahashivratri on February 26.

It will feature special measures for dignitaries. A 24x7 control room has been established, with dedicated officers and personnel.

For protocol management, the government has deployed three additional district magistrates (ADMs), as

many sub-district magistrates (SDMs) and naib tehsildars, and four revenue officials, they said.

Deputy collector-level officers will serve as sector magistrates across 25 sectors to oversee arrangements. These efforts aim to provide a smooth and enriching experience for all dignitaries attending this iconic event.

To ensure seamless protocol arrangements for distinguished and very distinguished dignitaries at Maha Kumbh 2025, 50 tourist guides and supporting staff are being deployed.

For accommodation, circuit houses with a capacity of 250 tents have been prepared at five sites within the fair area, they said. (PTI)

## ED probing role of Canadian colleges, Indian entities in human trafficking

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** The Enforcement Directorate is investigating the alleged involvement of some Canadian colleges and a few Indian entities in a money laundering case linked to the trafficking of Indians into the US from the Canada border.

The investigation is linked to the death of a four-member Indian family, hailing from Dingucha village in Gujarat. The four died of extreme cold while trying to cross the Canada-US border illegally on January 19, 2022.

The ED said it took cognisance of an Ahmedabad Police FIR against Bhavesh Ashokhbhai Patel, who emerged as the main accused in the matter, and a few others, to file a complaint under the criminal sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Patel and others are alleged to have "hatched a well-planned conspiracy to send people (Indians) to the USA through Canada via illegal channels thereby committing the offence of human trafficking," it said.

The agency had earlier found that as part of the racket, the accused "arranged" admission for people, desirous to go to the US illegally, in colleges and universities based in Canada.

A Canadian student visa was applied for such people and once they reached that country, instead of joining the college, they "illegally" crossed the US-Canada border, the agency said in a statement on Tuesday.

"In view of this, the fee received by colleges based in Canada was remitted back to the individuals' account," the ED alleged.

Indians were "lured" into the racket and charged

between ₹ 55 and ₹ 60 lakh per person, according to the ED.

The agency said it undertook fresh searches in this case on December 10 and December 19 at eight locations in Mumbai, Nagpur, Gandhinagar and Vadodara.

It was found, the ED said, two "entities", one based in Mumbai and the other in Nagpur, entered into an "agreement" for admission of Indians in universities based in foreign countries on a commission basis.

The agency said the latest searches found that about 25,000 students are being referred by one entity and more than 10,000 students by the other to various colleges based outside India every year.

"Further, it is gathered that there are around 1,700 agents/partners based in Gujarat and around 3,500 agents/partners of other entities all over India out of which around 800 are active.

"It is further revealed that around 112 colleges based in Canada have entered into an agreement with one entity and more than 150 with another entity. Their involvement in the instant case is under investigation," the ED said.

The agency suspects that out of the total 262 such colleges in Canada, a few, which are geographically located near the Canada-US border, are involved in the trafficking of Indian nationals.

The ED said it froze ₹ 19 lakh in bank deposits, some "incriminating" documents and digital devices, and seized two vehicles in connection with its probe. (PTI)

## Defence secretary launches CRPF doing commendable job in tackling Naxals, restoring peace in J-K, northeast: Shah

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** A website that will facilitate access to information related to the organisation of events such as Republic Day and Independence Day, host their live streaming and provide details related to tickets and seating arrangements was launched on Wednesday.

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh launched the Rashtraparv website along with its mobile app on the occasion of 'Good Governance Day' that commemorates the birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the defence ministry said.

"The website will facilitate access to information related to organisation of national events such as Republic Day, Beating Retreat ceremony, Independence Day, live streaming, purchase of tickets, provide information related to seating arrangements and route-maps of events," it said in a statement. The defence secretary said the website and mobile app, developed by the ministry, "also has a system for managing the tableaux proposals and historic data regarding events". (PTI)

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said the CRPF has done a commendable job in tackling Naxalism and restoring peace and stability in the Northeastern states and Jammu and Kashmir.

Shah also said that the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is playing an important role in ensuring internal security and peace in the country, according to an official statement. The home minister said this while visiting the CRPF headquarters where he met senior officers of the force, including its Director General Anish Dayal Singh, it said.

During the visit, Shah had a comprehensive review of the operations and administrative efficiency of the world's largest paramilitary force.

The CRPF has done a commendable job

in tackling Naxalism and restoring peace and stability in the Northeastern states and Jammu and Kashmir, he said.

The CRPF chief apprised the home minister about the various welfare schemes being implemented for the families of martyred jawans of the force, including compassionate appointments in the CRPF.

Shah emphasised the importance of promoting Hindi in the daily functioning of the force to strengthen linguistic unity.

Along with emphasising the use of more and more 'Shri Ann' (Millets) for better health of the soldiers, the home minister also called upon the soldiers to extract the benefits of Ayurveda and participate in 'Prakriti Parikshan Abhiyan' to get health insights as per individual's Prakriti, fostering wellbeing and better health. (PTI)

## SC restrains ED from accessing seized electronic devices of 'lottery king' Santiago Martin

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** In a significant order, the Supreme Court has restrained the Enforcement Directorate from accessing and copying content from electronic devices seized during searches against Santiago Martin, also known as the "lottery king", his relatives, and employees.

The apex court order of December 13 was passed on a petition of Future Gaming and Hotels Services Pvt Ltd (FGHSPL) and Martin and it may lead to re-think by investigative agencies

before they decide to confiscate mobile phones or laptops of accused. The order may come to aid other similarly placed accused.

"Issue notice, in the meanwhile, there will be ad-interim relief in terms of prayer clauses (i) and (ii) of the application for interim relief. The prayer clauses (i) and (ii) read thus: (i) Issue an ex-parte ad-interim order directing the Respondents (ED and its officers) not to access and copy the contents of Mobile phone of the Applicant

No.2 (Martin) and the electronic devices belonging to the Applicant No 1's employees," a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Pankaj Mithal said.

The bench issued notices to the Centre, the ED and its officers on the petition and fixed it for hearing along with pending ones on February 17, 2025. Other matters include Amazon India employees and the 2023 Newsclick case, where petitioners have sought guidelines for the seizure of digital devices by investigative agencies. (PTI)

## Intense cold wave conditions in Kashmir, Srinagar records minus 7.3 degrees Celsius

**SRINAGAR, Dec 25:** Minimum temperatures decreased at most places in Kashmir as the valley continued to reel under intense cold conditions, leading to the freezing of several water bodies and water supply lines in many areas.

Srinagar recorded a low of minus 7.3 degrees Celsius on Tuesday night -- down from the previous night's minus 6.6 degrees Celsius, the meteorological department said on Wednesday.

It has predicted a dip of two to three degrees in the minimum temperatures in Kashmir over the next two days.

Except in Gulmarg, the night temperatures plummeted across all other weather stations in the Kashmir valley.

Currently under the grip of 'Chillai-Kalan', the harshest winter period of 40 days that started on December 21, the Kashmir valley is experiencing below-normal maximum as well as minimum temperatures for this time of the season, the officials said.

The fall in the mercury has led to the freezing of water supply lines even as a thin layer of ice covered the surface of several water bodies, including the Dal Lake.

The city was colder than Gulmarg, a tourist resort town known for skiing activities in north Kashmir, where the mercury settled at a low of minus 6.6 degrees Celsius, up from minus 7.4 degrees Celsius the previous night, the department added.

Pahalgam, the base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, registered a minimum temperature of minus 8.4 degrees Celsius, down from the previous night's minus 7.8 degrees Celsius, it said.

Qazigund, the gateway town to Kashmir, logged a minimum temperature of minus 6.6 degrees Celsius, while Konibal, a hamlet in the Pampore area, was the coldest recorded place in the valley at minus 9.5 degrees Celsius, it said.

Kupwara, in north Kashmir, registered a low of minus 6.4 degrees Celsius, while Kokernag, in south Kashmir, was at minus 5.4 degrees Celsius.

There is a possibility of light snowfall over the higher reaches towards the later afternoon on December 27 till the forenoon the next day, the Met Office said.

While the weather would stay mainly dry on December 29, 30, and 31, light snowfall is possible in the isolated higher reaches on New Year's Eve, and light snowfall could take place at isolated to scattered places in Kashmir from January 1-4.

During the 40 days of Chillai-Kalan, the chances of snowfall are most frequent and maximum and the temperature drops considerably.

It ends on January 30 next year, but the cold wave continues even after that in the valley. The 40 days are followed by a 20-day 'Chillai-Khurud' (small cold) and a 10-day 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold). (PTI)

## Haryana 2024: Election hustle, farmers' struggle bookend sporting glory

**CHANDIGARH, Dec 25:** For a state that witnessed two elections of great significance this year and accounted for more than 20 per cent of athletes in India's Paris Olympics contingent, it is only fitting that the year's top newsmakers came from two fields: politics and sports.

Add to the mix, the issues of farmers and farming -- farmers' protest remained a constant under-running theme in the state's sociopolitical discourse through the year -- and Haryana's 2024 round-up is almost complete.

As Haryana seemed to be settling into the regular humdrum of daily politics after high-pitched election season came the unsettling news of the passing of its five-time chief minister and political stalwart Om Prakash Chautala. He died on December 20 at the age of 89.

The state entered 2024 with a great deal to look forward to for everybody: a BJP looking to repeat the 2019 feat of winning all 10 LS seats and also retaining power in assembly, a Congress emboldened by projections it would wrest back a large number of parliamentary seats from the BJP and also dethrone it in the state, an AAP hopeful of making inroads in a new territory; and a population in anticipation.

What nobody saw coming though was a change of guard in the government just months before the



assembly polls.

So, when the BJP replaced its chief minister of more than nine years Manohar Lal Khattar with

low-profile OBC leader Nayab Singh Saini (54) in March not only the BJP's rivals, but many in the party too were caught off-guard. And some were left angry too, like senior BJP leader Anil Vij whose chief ministerial ambition was all too known.

While the BJP gamble did not pay off in the Lok Sabha polls, losing five of the 10 seats to the Congress, it certainly reaped the rewards in the October assembly polls as it staved off a resurgent Congress to win a third consecutive term.

The AAP was decimated, drawing a blank.

AAP could not win from Kurukshetra, the lone LS seat it contested in partnership with the Congress.

Ajay Singh Chautala-led Janayak Janta Party, whose alliance with the BJP broke down in March, was also routed in the Assembly polls. The party faced a series of desertions after the alliance ended.

But the BJP was not the only party to face desertions. The BJP and the Congress also saw many of their leaders switch sides to pursue their ambitions in the election year.

In the BJP, Anil Vij voiced his displeasure publicly for not being kept in the loop while replacing Khattar with Saini. Congress leader and Sira MP Kumari Selja was apparently miffed with the party for giving a free hand to her bete noire Bhupinder Singh Hooda in ticket

distribution for the assembly polls.

She stayed away from the poll campaign for days, giving the BJP ammunition to attack the Congress with "anti-Dalit" jibes as the October 5 polling neared.

The Congress infighting saw the departure of senior leader Kiran Choudhry, who joined the BJP with her daughter Shruti Choudhry, ahead of the Assembly election.

Kiran Choudhry, daughter-in-law of former chief minister late Bansilal, was made a Rajya Sabha member. Shruti won the Assembly poll and is now a minister in the Saini government.

The Congress too got a boost with the return of senior leader and former Union minister Birender Singh after a decade with the BJP.

But all these pre-poll churning didn't end in favour of the Congress in the assembly poll. The party ended with 37 seats in the House of 90, while the BJP got 48.

Experts believe the Congress was in ascendance but it failed to get the final push due to infighting, over-reliance on sitting MLAs and rebellion at some places.

Hooda later said the assembly poll outcome was opposite to what the atmosphere in the state was.

On the BJP's poll win, Chief Minister Saini said the people "put a stamp" on the government's policies under the leadership of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi.

After he demitted the chief minister's office in March, Khattar fought the Lok Sabha poll from Karnal and won. He is now a Union Minister.

The Assembly poll results announced on October 8 brought not-so-good news for many top leaders including Haryana Congress chief Uday Bhan, former assembly speaker Gian Chand Gupta and former deputy CM and JJP leader Dushyant Chautala.

Other prominent leaders who lost included Indian National Lok Dal leader Abhay Singh Chautala, BJP's O P Dhankar, Bhavya Bishnoi and Capt Abhimanyu.

But one new entrant who emerged victorious was Olympian Vinesh Phogat who joined the Congress weeks after heartbreak at the Paris Olympics where she was declared overweight and disqualified from the gold medal match the night before the final bout.

The Congress fielded her from the Julana constituency. Fellow wrestler Bajrang Punia also joined the Congress with her, but he did not fight the polls.

Punia and Phogat had been the face of fierce protests against former Wrestling Federation of India head Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who has been accused of sexual harassment by women grapplers. (PTI)



# SHYAM BENEAL: A LOOK AT 10 PATHBREAKING MOVIES BY THE FILMMAKER

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Filmmaker Shyam Benegal, who passed away in Mumbai at the age of 90, heralded a parallel cinema movement in the 1970s and 1980s with his realistic portrayal of societal issues.

Here's a look at some of the most iconic movies of the legendary director.

**Ankur** - Benegal made a powerful debut in 1974 with "Ankur", a searing and impactful portrayal of class, caste, power and exploitation in rural India. It also marked the first feature film of Shabana Azmi, who went on to become Benegal's frequent collaborator.

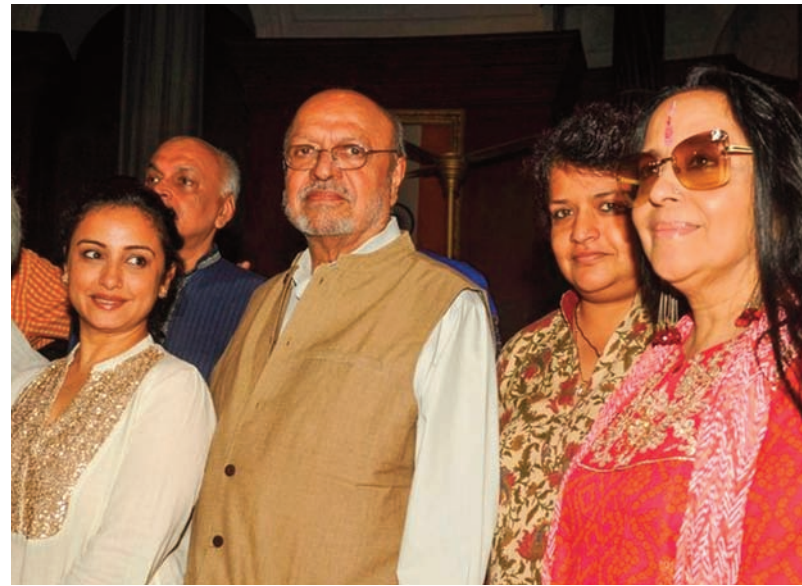
The film follows the story of an upper caste son of the village landlord, played by Anant Nag, who becomes involved with his lower caste servant's wife (Azmi). It explores themes of oppression, infidelity, and retaliation by the oppressed.

**Nishant** (1975) - Once again set in a village, "Nishant" revolves around a group of powerless villagers who are unable to take a stand against the corrupt feudal system.

This movie reunited Benegal with Azmi and introduced another stalwart of Indian cinema, Naseeruddin Shah, who went on to work with the director in many of his later films.

How women were the main victims of village politics and patriarchy was a theme Benegal touched upon in the movie. Also starring Girish Karnad, Amrith Puri, Mohan Agashe, Nag and Smita Patil, the film was selected to compete for the Palme d'Or at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival.

**Manthan** (1976) - It was inspired by the groundbreaking milk cooperative movement by Dr Verghese Kurien that transformed India into one of the largest milk producers in the



world. "Manthan", or "Churning" in English, was financed by 5 lakh farmers of Gujarat 48 years ago

who contributed Rs 2 each. The opening credits of the movie read: "500,000 Farmers of Gujarat presents." The film tells the inspiring story of how a young veterinary doctor (Girish Karnad) fights against oppressive forces to establish a milk cooperative that empowers rural farmers.

It also starred Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, and Amrith Puri. A restored version of the film was showcased under the Cannes Classics segment at the Cannes Film Festival in May.

**Bhumika** (1977) - Benegal reunited with Patil, Shah and Nag for the movie which was based on the autobiography of the doyenne of Marathi theatre and cinema Hansa Wadkar.

Also starring Amol Palekar and Amrith Puri, "Bhumika" is considered one of the best biopics on an Indian movie star.

**Junoon** (1978) - Adapted from author Ruskin Bond's novella "A Flight of Pigeons", the period film marked Benegal's first association with Bollywood star Shashi Kapoor, who also turned producer with the project.

Set around the Rebellion of 1857, the movie featured Kapoor's wife Jennifer Kendal as well as Azmi, Shah, Nafisa Ali, Tom Alter, Kulbhushan Kharbanda and Deepthi Naval.

The film narrated a story of a rebel, possessed by his desire for a teenage British girl. He shelters her and her family, stretching the limits of what is permissible in traditional Indian culture.

**Kalyug** (1981) - The film was a modern day retelling of the mythical epic Mahabharata, set in a contemporary corporate milieu. Benegal directed the movie from a screenplay co-written by him and eminent actor-playwright Girish Karnad.

It featured Shashi Kapoor alongside Rekha, Anant Nag, Raj Babbar, Supriya Pathak, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Victor Banerjee, Reema Lagoo, and AK Hangal. The film was praised for the way it explored themes of power, greed and familial conflict, with critics particularly taking note of Benegal's ability to weave a complex narrative.

**Mandi** (1983) - Considered one of the best films of Benegal's career, the film was a poignant exploration of the lives of women working in the sex trade. Based on Urdu short story "Anandi" by Ghulam Abbas, the movie stood out for its dark humour and layered commentary on gender, class and double standards of the society.

Patil, Shah and Azmi were universally praised for their performances in the movie, which also featured actors Neena

Gupta, Om Puri, Saeed Jaffrey, Annu Kapoor, Satish Kaushik, Pankaj Kapur, Amrith Puri and Ila Arun.

\*Mammo (1994) - The movie started a trilogy with Muslim women as protagonists. Starring Farida Jalal and late Surekha Sikri in lead roles, the movie was a tender drama about an elderly woman who spent the bulk of her adult life in Pakistan, while her sisters live in India.

After her husband dies and she is ill-treated by his relatives, she lands up in Mumbai, upturning the lives of her sister Fayyazi and Fayyazi's orphaned grandson Riyaz.

The movie won Sikri a National Award for best supporting actress and also starred Rajit Kapur. It was followed by "Sardari Begum" in 1996, which is considered the second part of the trilogy.

\*Zubeidaa (2001) - The third part of the trilogy focussed on the life story of Zubeida Begum, whose son, former journalist Khalid Mohamed, wrote the screenplay of the film.

In the film, Benegal beautifully captured the inner turmoil of a woman torn between societal expectations and personal freedom. It featured Karisma Kapoor as Zubeida, an aspiring Muslim actress, who marries a Hindu prince (Manoj Bajpayee) and becomes the second wife. The critically-acclaimed movie also starred Manoj Bajpayee, Rekha, Surekha Sikri, Lillette Dubey and Rajit Kapur.

**Mujib: The Making of a Nation** (2023) - The final film of Benegal's life chronicled the story of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father and first president of Bangladesh. A co-production between Bangladesh and India, the film featured a virtually Bangladeshi cast led by Arifin Shuvoo as Rahman. (PTI)

## JANHVI KAPOOR, SIDHARTH MALHOTRA TO STAR IN MADDOCK FILMS' 'PARAM SUNDARI'



**MUMBAI, Dec 25:** Actors Janhvi Kapoor and Sidharth Malhotra are set to feature in "Param Sundari", an upcoming romantic movie from Maddock Films.

To be directed by Tushar Jalota of "Dasvi" fame, the film will feature Malhotra as Param and Kapoor as Sundari, the studio said on its official social media handles.

"North ka swag, South ki grace - two worlds collide and sparks fly. Dinesh Vijan presents #ParamSundari, a love story directed by Tushar Jalota, coming to cinemas on 25th July 2025," Maddock Films posted on Instagram.

Set against the backwaters of Kerala, "Param Sundari" is described as a "rollercoaster of laughter, chaos, and unexpected twists".

The film will be produced by Maddock Films' head Dinesh Vijan. (PTI)

## Boney Kapoor submits master plan for Noida Film City

**NOIDA, Dec 25:** Filmmaker Boney Kapoor and Bhutani Infra-backed firm Bayview Projects has submitted the master plan for the development of the first phase of the much-anticipated Noida International Film City and hopes to complete the work within three years post approval, officials have said.

For Bayview Projects, Kapoor submitted the master plan to the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) on Tuesday. YEIDA CEO Arun Vir Singh confirmed receiving the master plan and told reporters, "It will be our endeavour to ensure that the plan is approved at the earliest if it conforms to all norms and guidelines."

The ambitious project of the Uttar Pradesh government is to be built on a 1,000-acre land in a public-private partnership in Sector 21 of YEIDA along the Yamuna Expressway near Delhi. About 230 acre will be developed in the first phase.

Bayview Projects won the bid on January 31 with the offering of 18 per cent re-

venue share to the Uttar Pradesh government - the highest among four bidders.

Addressing the media alongside Singh, Kapoor detailed his vision for the film city's development, emphasising its potential to revolutionise filmmaking in India and attract global talent.

Kapoor said the first phase of the project would include the completion of sound stages and a dedicated film university.

"The university is being built to train talent from across the country, particularly Uttar Pradesh, enabling individuals to come with a script and leave with a complete film," Kapoor said.

Facilities will encompass all aspects of production, including post-production, he added.

"Filmmakers won't need to go elsewhere for resources. Everything, including equipment and infrastructure, will be available right here," he said.

The first phase, targeted for completion within three years, will serve as a foundation for expanding the film city, he said.

Kapoor plans to invite filmmakers from around the world to utilise the infrastructure. "Our aim is to make this a one-stop destination for filmmaking," he added.

Kapoor outlined several standout features of the film city like Virtual Studios, underwater filming facilities, etc.

Additionally, there will be a designated floor equipped with advanced technology to replace traditional green screens, enabling actors to visualise scenes on LED screens in real-time, he said.

There will also be large water tanks for shooting complex underwater scenes and ship-based sequences, he added.

Kapoor envisions a setup similar to Parliament's visitor galleries, where the public can witness live shooting and interact with directors or actors during breaks, depending on their convenience.

Drawing parallels to international filmmaking hubs, Kapoor expressed confidence in positioning Noida International Film City as a global destination. (PTI)

## 'Housefull 5' wraps filming, movie to release in June 2025

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** "Housefull 5", starring Akshay Kumar, Riteish Deshmukh and Abhishek Bachchan, has concluded filming, the makers have announced.

The fifth part of the popular comedy franchise is helmed by Tarun Mansukhani of "Dostana" fame and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala's production banner Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment.

In an Instagram post, the studio shared the news of shooting wrap along with a picture of the ensemble cast.

"That's a wrap for Housefull 5! A rollercoaster of emotions, filled with laughter, hard work, and unforgettable memories," Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment posted on Tuesday evening.

The film also features Fardeen Khan, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonam Bajwa, Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Nana Patekar, Chunky Pandey, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Dino Morea, Chitrangada Singh, Ranjeet, Soundarya Sharma and Nikitin Dheer.

The franchise started with 2010's "Housefull", which was followed by three sequels -- "Housefull 2" (2012), "Housefull 3" (2016) and "Housefull 4" (2019).

"Housefull 5" is scheduled to be released on June 6, 2025. (PTI)



## 'Abhi Na Jao Chhodkar': Biggest names in music unite for Mohd Rafi tribute

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Celebrated music personalities, including Amjad Ali Khan, Shubha Mudgal and Shankar Mahadevan from across the classical and pop traditions, have joined hands to celebrate the musical legacy of the great Mohammed Rafi with a performance on his timeless song "Abhi Na Jao Chhodkar".

Rafi, one of the greatest playback singers who lent his voice to several melodies in Indian films, would have turned 100 on December 24.

The pre-recorded stage performance on "Abhi Na Jao Chhodkar" is produced by pianist Sourendro Mullick and vocalist Soumyojit Das, who also make an appearance in the 5.44-minute video shared on their official YouTube page on Tuesday.

"Presenting our first song from the World Music Day 24 Concert, 'Abhi Na Jao Chhodkar', originally sung by the evergreen Md. Rafi. His music lives in our hearts and here is a tribute to him from us," Sourendro-Soumyojit said.

"Celebrating 100 years of Rafi Sahab," read the closing credits.

Other artists who were part of the performance were Rekha Bhardwaj, Vishal Bhardwaj, and Lesle Lewis, Papon, Shweta Mohan, Usha Uthup, Mame Khan, Omob, Lopamudra Mitra, Aninda Chatterjee, and Aruna Sairam.

Till around 4 pm on Wednesday, the video garnered over 43,000 views on



YouTube and more than 3,000 likes. Amjad Ali Khan, Mudgal, Mame

Khan, and Mohan shared a clip from the stage performance on their Instagram pages.

Several fans commented on the clip thanking the producers, who have around 2.8 lakh subscribers on YouTube, for their initiative.

"Love this arrangement.... Got very emotional and also goosebumps ahead..... Thank you so much sir for this beautiful rendition," said a fan. "Love from Nepal.... Happy birthday Mohammad Rafi saheb."

Another observed that the video felt like a tribute to many industry stalwarts who passed away this year, including tabla maestro Zakir Hussain.

A fan said he missed the voice of Ustad Rashid Khan, who died in January after a prolonged battle with cancer at the age of 55. Khan previously collaborated with Sourendro-Soumyojit on a rendition of the song "Mere Naina Sawan Bhadon" in 2022.

"The entire production is musically enriching. Absolute Masterpiece. quite literally," wrote another.

Sourendro-Soumyojit also have social media presence on Instagram and Facebook with 55 lakh followers and 2.4 lakh followers, respectively.

Picturised on Dev Anand and Sadhana, "Abhi Na Jao Chhodkar" originally featured in the 1961 film "Hum Dono". Penned by Sahir Ludhianvi and composed by Jaidev, this song is a duet sung by Rafi and Asha Bhosle. (PTI)



# Ready to spar on Boxing Day: India fret on Rohit's batting position

**MELBOURNE, Dec 25:** Divine intervention and a wagging tail might have lifted India's sagging spirits in Brisbane but an out-of-form skipper Rohit Sharma's batting position will be in focus against a dangerous Australia bracing to deliver the knockout punch in the 'Boxing Day' Test starting here on Thursday.

The Indian skipper was the last to hit the nets on Christmas eve and there is speculation doing rounds that he could replace the team's most assured opener, KL Rahul, at the top of the order.

If that happens, Rahul will come in at No. 3 while Shubman Gill could either play in the middle order or make way for a Dhruv Jurel in the playing eleven. The series is currently locked 1-1.

The Indian skipper stopped batting in the middle order after being elevated to the opening slot back in 2019. But he chose to come down in Adelaide and Brisbane to accommodate an in-form Rahul and first-Test centurion Yashasvi Jaiswal.

The move was a spectacular failure and it remains to be seen how the team adjusts in case Rohit opens and Gill is either dropped or bats at number five.

Asked about his batting position during the pre-match press conference, he was borderline irritated.

"Let's not worry about that. I think who bats where, we should be discussing that within ourselves and I shouldn't be answering this question in every press conference," the skipper just about held his composure.

Both captains feel that 1-1 after three games is a fair reflection of the competition between the sides but things can quickly change at the MCG.

The rain-affected draw at the Gabba was like a soothing balm for India after Pink Test debacle in Adelaide.

But now, India are back at one of their favourite Australian venues where they have remained undefeated in Tests since the 2014 series.

The last two (2018-19 and 2020-21) of the three Tests (other being 2014-15) resulted in Indian wins where solid batting played its part.

But this line-up, with three young mavericks (Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill), one confident opener (KL Rahul) and a couple of ageing stalwarts (Virat Kohli and Rohit) hasn't looked very assured.

They will have to put up their best show against a home team which isn't exactly a runaway favourite either but has shown tremendous resilience.

For under-fire Rohit, it is his own reputation as a Test batter that is at stake



while Kohli will need to channelise the inner champion in him which lit up the MCG skyline with the most talked about sixes in his T20 career.

Those sixes required flair, the situation now will warrant loads of patience when Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc tease him with that probing line outside the off

stump. For Rohit, the equation is as simple as it gets. Win the next two Tests and likely head into a potentially memorable swansong at the Lord's in June.

A captain has to score and even without an injured Josh Hazlewood, Australia would be a handful with local hero Scott Boland ready to bowl those uncompro-

mising hard lengths.

Jaiswal, Gill and Pant would like to live up to their own expectations and go into the game with an uncluttered mindset as expected by their skipper.

For the hosts, all eyes will be on teenage sensation Sam Konstas, billed as one for the future with an attacking game to match Jasprit Bumrah.

Konstas would do well to know that Bumrah has already put brakes on his predecessor Nathan McSweeney's career. The other good news for Australia is that the marauding Travis Head is fully fit and raring to go at Melbourne which is certain to increase the creases on Rohit's forehead.

Head had an extended session on Wednesday where he appeared for a fitness test and then looked in good touch at the nets.

With scores of 89, 140 and 152, the Indian bowlers need some special plans to counter their main threat.

Temperature is predicted to be close to 40 degrees followed by an equally hot second day, which is why the role of an extra spinner is being seriously looked into by the team management.

But if one looks at teams in recent Tests at MCG, the option for second specialist spinner has never looked viable.

The pitches at MCG, over the years,

don't have too many cracks but could offer variable bounce which Nathan Lyon has used to the fullest in the past.

But then Lyon, as a finger spinner, is in a different league compared to a relatively inexperienced Washington Sundar.

The question is where does one fit in Washington? Dropping Nitish Reddy could just be a very poor move.

Will they trade a seamer like Akash Deep specifically looking at conditions? Looks unlikely unless it's a like-for-like fast bowler taking that slot.

Rohit will have a lot on his plate as skipper and more as batter if he goes back to the top.

**Teams:**

**India:** Rohit Sharma (captain), KL Rahul, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Nitish Reddy, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Akash Deep, Washington Sundar, Prasidh Krishna, Harshit Rana, Tanush Kotian, Sarfaraz Khan, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Dhruv Jurel, Devdutt Padikkal.

**Australia (XI):** Pat Cummins (captain), Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Marcus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh, Alex Carey (wk), Mitchell Starc and Scott Boland.

Match Starts at 5 am. (PTT)

## Valencia hires West Brom manager Carlos Corberan as its new head coach

**VALENCIA (SPAIN), Dec 25:** Relegation-threatened Valencia has hired West Bromwich Albion manager Carlos Corberan as its new head coach through June 2027.

Valencia fired Rubén Baraja on Monday after another setback in La Liga left the Spanish club stuck in the relegation zone and sparked renewed protests against Singaporean owner Peter Lim.

"Carlos Corberan has been appointed as coach of Valencia CF, signing a contract through to 2027," a statement on Valencia's website said early Wednesday. "A buy-out option in his contract with West Bromwich Albion was taken up to allow him to leave."

No official figure was given but the compensation for the former Valencia youth player was reported to be in the region of \$3 million.

The Spaniard led West Brom to its current seventh place in England's second-tier Championship.

West Brom earlier said in a statement that the 41-year-old Corberan "is set to return to his homeland with the club's gratitude and best wishes following a two-year tenure at The Hawthorns." Chris Brunt, Damia Abella and Boaz Myhill "will oversee first-team duties until further notice." Valencia's next Spanish league match will be against Real Madrid at home on Jan. 3 in a game postponed from October because of the deadly floods that hit Valencia. Valencia is winless in its last four matches. (AP)

## Mohun Bagan's set-piece proficiency gives them edge against Punjab FC



**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Armed with a strong all-round team most proficient at set-pieces, Mohun Bagan Super Giant will fancy their chances when they face Punjab FC in the Indian Super League here on Thursday.

The Mariners have won both their previous ISL matches against

Punjab FC. However, Punjab FC have already beaten two sides, Mumbai City FC and Odisha FC, who managed the double over them last season, showing their ability to bounce back.

Mohun Bagan enter this match after an eight-game unbeaten run that was ended with a defeat to FC

Goa in their last fixture. Head coach Jose Molina has never lost consecutive games in ISL history, and the Mariners themselves have not suffered back-to-back away defeats in a single season.

Punjab FC, on the other hand, have lost their last two matches on the road, conceding six goals

across these outings, as many as they conceded in their previous five games combined.

However, their home record has been solid, with four wins in five games, including a 2-0 victory against Mohammedan SC in their last home outing. Right now, Mohun Bagan lead the points table with 26 points from 12 games, whereas Punjab FC are positioned seventh, having garnered 18 points from 11 matches.

Punjab FC have conceded only one goal in the opening 15 minutes of matches this season, the joint lowest in the league alongside Odisha FC. This defensive strength could give them an early foothold against the Mariners.

Punjab FC's Nikhil Prabhu (33) and Tekcham Singh (28) rank first and second, respectively, in interceptions this season. Their defensive awareness will be key in countering Mohun Bagan's attacking threats.

Mohun Bagan have scored six goals from corners this season, the most by any team in the ISL. Contrastingly, Punjab are the only side yet to score from a corner this campaign.

Mohun Bagan's goal difference of +11 after 12 games is their best-ever in ISL history at this stage, underscoring their balanced performance across attack and defence. (PTT)

## Anupati, Raju emerge winners at Junior National Equestrian Championship



**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** Young riders Anupati Navyashree Sai and Raju Singh emerged the best performers in the show jumping and dressage categories respectively on the concluding day of the first half of Junior National Equestrian Championships.

In the young rider category, Anupati, who was astride Abra Ka Dabra, secured 32.60 marks without conceding any penalty in the showjumping two-phase event on Tuesday. She finished ahead of Avik Bhatia, Geetika Tikishetty, and Monu Kumar to be adjudged the best in her event.

In dressage freestyle, Raju, who rode Louk, did extremely well in his event, securing 65.18 marks. It was a very competitive event in which Javeer Verma, Geetika and Navyasree ran him close.

"It was extremely satisfying to see in this junior championship the talent India has. It gives EFI hope and confidence that the game will grow fast in the country. Almost all the categories saw very close competition. The margin that separated the winners and other participants was very thin." Equestrian Federation of India secretary general Javeer Singh said.

"I am sure that the second half of the championship will also produce high-octane competitions that will conclude on December 29," he said.

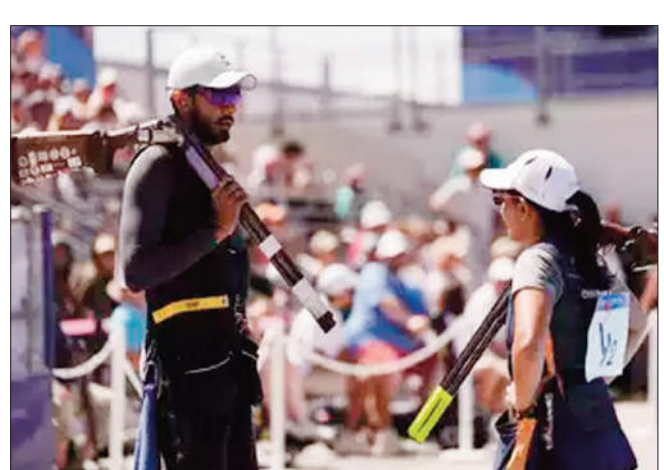
In the children dressage category, Subh Chowdhri, astride Furstentanz, trumped the challenge of Pranav Deepak, Punnet Jakhar and Jaiwant Nawle while in the children show jumping event, Mogil Anbu pipped Divyaraj Singh Rathore, Sresh Raju Mantena and Eera Shree Harsha to emerge winner.

Adding to the accolades in the children I category, Jaiveer Singh Nagra was awarded the best rider title for his exceptional performance throughout the competition, cementing his place as one of the brightest young talents in Indian equestrian sports.

Sahil, astride Candy, logged 93.5 points to emerge winner in the overall individual tent pegging event, finishing ahead of Mohammad Alhamad Chishty (80), Shahrukh Khan (79) and Adeel Akhter (76).

The action will next resume on December 27 with junior (age group 14-18) and children II (age group 10-12) category events. (PTT)

## Paris Olympic pairing of Maheshwari and Anantjeet win skeet mixed team national title



**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** The duo of Maheshwari Chauhan and Anantjeet Singh Naruka rounded off a good year by winning the skeet mixed team title for their home state Rajasthan in the National Shooting Championship here on Wednesday.

In the final played at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range, the pair pulled off a tight 44-43 victory over Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Areeba Khan of Uttar Pradesh. Punjab's Ganemat Sekhon and Abhay Singh Sekhon won bronze.

Earlier in the day, three 25-shot round totals of 72 and 71 by Maheshwari and Anantjeet respectively, ensured their path to the gold medal match as toppers of the seven-team qualification round.

Three teams -- Ganemat and Abhay and Haryana's Ishaan Libra and Raiza Dhillon, besides Mairaj and Areeba, finished on the same tally of 141 after which

the UP duo won a three-way shoot-off by blasting eight targets on the trot, to earn a right to shoot for gold.

Maheshwari and Anantjeet shot a confident final and were leading throughout the six series of eight birds per team decider, but lapses in concentration and a caution to Maheshwari for overshooting her shot time, made it more closer in the end than it actually was.

In the junior skeet mixed team event, Madhya Pradesh stunned Haryana to bag gold as their pairing of Jyotiraditya Singh and Mansi Raghuvanshi outgunned Ishaan and Sanjana Sood 4-2 in a shoot-off after both teams had tied at 40 hits out of the regulation 48 targets.

Telangana's Muneek Battula and Zahra Deesawala won bronze, getting the better of Rajasthan's Yaduraj Singh and Yashasvi Rathore 42-36 in the bronze medal match. (PTT)

## Former Chelsea player Oscar returns to Brazil's Sao Paulo from China

**SAO PAULO, Dec 25:** Former Chelsea midfielder Oscar is returning to his Brazilian boyhood club Sao Paulo after 14 years, which included a long spell in Chinese soccer. Sao Paulo president Julio Casares posted photos Tuesday on his social media channels which showed him with the 33-year-old former Brazil international. Casares described the move as "a super transfer." Minutes later, Oscar thanked China's Shanghai Port, where he played for eight seasons, for his time at the Chinese Super League club.

"Today I finish a cycle that marked my life forever,"

he said. "I leave with my heart full of gratitude and pride for everything we achieved together."

Oscar joined Sao Paulo on a free transfer. Neither the Brazilian club nor the player disclosed the duration of their deal, but local media reports said he signed a three-year contract.

Oscar is returning to a club he sued to leave for another Brazilian team, Internacional, in 2010.

In 2012, Oscar joined Chelsea and won one Europa League title and two Premier League trophies at the English club. (AP)

## Head best batter in world, his performances against Bumrah exemplify fearless approach: Chappell

**MELBOURNE, Dec 25:** Travis Head is the "best batter in the world" whose performances against Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy exemplify his fearless approach and "Australian way of batting", feels legendary cricketer Greg Chappell.

Head has dominated the batting chart with 409 runs in the first three Tests with two hundreds and a fifty, and former Australia captain Chappell believes his simplicity and aggression are behind his success as a Test batter.

"Head's performances against Jasprit Bumrah in this series exemplify his fearless approach. While most batsmen struggle to survive Bumrah's unorthodox action, sharp pace, and relentless accuracy, Head has treated him like any other bowler," Chappell wrote in Sydney Morning Herald.

"By playing with intent and looking to score off Bumrah, Head has not only nullified his threat but disrupted his rhythm. His ability to dispatch short deliveries with authority and drive fuller ones with precision has been remarkable, underscoring the strides he has made," he added.

Chappell said Head's flourish in

the recent years across formats is due to an uncluttered mindset.

"From a raw, unpredictable talent to one of the most dominant male batters in world cricket, Travis Head has soared into his prime with an almost ethereal elegance," Chappell wrote.

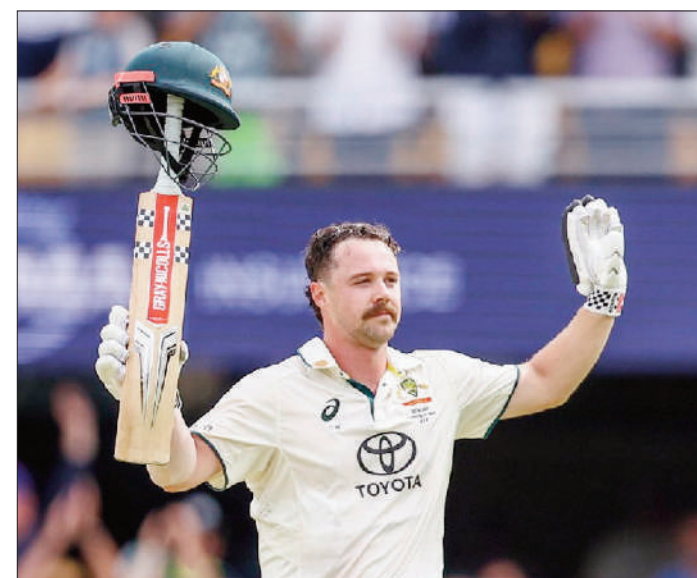
"His story is not just about overcoming challenges but about embracing a simplicity of style that has become his hallmark — one that allows his mind to remain uncluttered and his game devastatingly effective," he added.

Chappell termed Head's 152 against England in the 2021-22 series as the "turning point".

"The turning point came during the 2021 Ashes. Head's counterattacking 152 in Brisbane was a revelation. Walking in at 5-195, he transformed the game with a whirlwind innings, taking the opposition bowlers apart and shifting the momentum firmly in Australia's favour," he wrote.

"That innings wasn't just about runs, it was a statement of intent, a declaration that he would play his way."

Chappell believes Head is one of the most feared batters in the world who can dictate terms against the best bowlers.



"Since that series, Head has gone from strength to strength, evolving into one of the most feared batsmen in the world.

"His numbers since 2022 underline his dominance: 1800 runs at an average of 36.25, with six centuries at a strike rate of 75.6. These are not just impressive figures, they are a testament to his ability to thrive under pressure and dictate terms against the best bowlers in

the world," Chappell added. Chappell praised the 30-year-old left-handed batter for prioritising intent over caution.

"The essence of Travis Head's batting lies in his uncluttered mind. He has chosen a path that prioritises intent over caution, a mindset that allows him to approach every ball with the aim of scoring runs," he wrote.

"This doesn't mean recklessness

— it's a calculated, efficient approach that keeps bowlers and captains under pressure. By getting into good positions to score, Head simultaneously positions himself to defend against the better deliveries. It's a virtuous cycle that rewards his positive intent," he added.

Chappell said Head's ability to strike balance between aggression and elegance are the qualities which also make him a captaincy candidate in future.

"What sets Head apart is his ability to blend aggression with elegance. He has always been a powerful player of cross-bat shots, but his recent improvement in driving full deliveries down the ground has elevated his game," he wrote.

"I believe Travis to be the most improved batter in world cricket in the past three years and in becoming so, has firmed in favouritism to be the next Australian captain.

"In his current form, Travis exemplifies the Australian way of batting, and I agree with Ricky Ponting and Ian Healy when they praise the way he is playing.

"Today, as the butterfly of his transformation soars, it's clear: Travis Head is the best batsman in the world." (PTT)



### Konstas has talent and attitude to go with it, reckons Ponting

DUBAI, Dec 25: Young Sam Konstas has certainly got talent for international cricket and a "bit of an attitude to go with it" but it won't be an easy debut for the teenager against a world class bowling attack, reckons legendary Ricky Ponting.

Australia's newest batting sensation Konstas, 19, is set to make his debut in Boxing Day Test against India.

With only 11 First-Class matches under his belt, Konstas will take the opening slot alongside the experienced Usman Khawaja in the fourth Test starting here Thursday with Australia desperate to find the right combination at the top.

Konstas had previously failed to win favour from the Australian selectors who picked Nathan McSweeney for the first three Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, but the latter's ordinary returns forced them to give the New South Wales' opener a crack at Test cricket.

"I've seen a lot, there's a lot of talent there, no doubt about it," Ponting told the ICC Review while talking about Konstas.

"The way he played in the PM's XI game (he scored 107 against the Indians), the way that he was able to approach his first BBL game the other night ... I know it's different formats, but you can see that the talent is there and there's also a bit of an attitude to go with it."

"And not a bad attitude, (but) an attitude that he knows that he's good and he wants to show the world that he's good," added Ponting. Konstas is the youngest batter since Ponting in 1993 in Australia's Sheffield Shield to have scored two hundreds in a match.

Ponting, however, said the situation will be a challenging one for the right-hander who has shown having a knack for getting big runs.

"There's still a challenge there. It's a Test match. It's your first Test match. You're playing against some of the best bowlers in the world," Ponting said. (PTI)

## South Africa aims to seal its place in WTC final in test series against Pakistan



**CENTURION (SOUTH AFRICA), Dec 25:** South Africa will be eyeing a place in the World Test Championship final with an all-seam attack against Pakistan in the first test, starting Thursday.

The Proteas need to win one of its remaining two test matches in this WTC cycle to guarantee a place at the Lord's final next year and captain Temba Bavuma believes expectations have risen in his team to do well in the two-test series.

"There'll be pressure that comes with that," Bavuma said. "But to be honest with you, we're coming into the series to win the

series 2-0. We understand that for us to do that, there's certain things that we need to do as a team: keep things simple, keep doing the small things right, and allow the results to take care of itself."

South Africa has included four fast bowlers in the lineup with Corbin Bosch, who consistently bowls above 140 kph, set to play his first test at his hometown.

Seasoned fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen will team up with Dane Paterson and Bosch to challenge Pakistan's batters on an expected pacey Centurion pitch where fast bowlers have a clear advantage over the last six years, picking up 227 wickets

with spinners dismissing only 16 batters.

Heading into the tests, South Africa's top-order batters did struggle against Pakistan in a rare 3-0 ODI whitewash with Tony de Zorzi, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs all failing to read the off-spin bowling of Salman Ali Agha in the opening game of the series.

"Whether it's easy, whether it's hard, we've got to find a way to do it," Bavuma said. "Whatever, I don't know, trauma that was there ... guys will have to deal with it."

Pakistan has long been struggling in test matches in South Africa, losing 12 and winning just two of the 15 test matches since it

first toured the country in 1995. Pakistan's below-par show in South Africa includes its lowest test score of 49 at the Wanderers in 2013.

Pakistan is lying at No. 7 in the WTC points table and Aaqib Javed is its fourth head coach in this WTC cycle with Mickey Arthur and Mohammad Hafeez quitting after one series. Jason Gillespie resigned just two weeks before Thursday's test.

Gillespie, who was hired by the Pakistan Cricket Board in April, had a horror start to his two-year contract when Bangladesh swept Pakistan in Pakistan 2-0 in the test series before England won the first test at Multan.

Gillespie was removed from the selection panel and Javed masterminded Pakistan's back-to-back wins against England on two engineered spinning pitches where Noman Ali and Sajid Khan bagged 39 wickets.

But Pakistan has brought in only Noman Ali for the two-test series in South Africa and is still contemplating whether to follow South Africa and go with an all-out pace attack.

Shaheen Shah Afridi, who played in the preceding white-ball series in South Africa, has been surprisingly left out for the test matches.

Naseem Shah and Babar Azam return to the test fold after missing the last two home tests against England while selectors have recalled seamer Mohammad Abbas after three years with the left-arm seam option of Mir Hamza in the squad.

Abbas took 90 wickets in 25 test matches from 2017 to 21 before he ran out of selectors' favor despite his consistent performances for Hampshire in England and in domestic first-class cricket. (AP)

## India have their 'nose ahead', they have exploited Australia's 'brittle' top order, says Shastri



**MELBOURNE, Dec 25:** Former coach Ravi Shastri has backed India to win the Boxing Day Test, saying the visitors have exploited Australia's "brittle" top order to have their "nose ahead" in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Shastri added that Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is "almost single-handedly" responsible for the visitors keeping the series levelled at 1-1.

"I think India would take this, the way the series is poised. Any overseas team being 1-1, especially with the games being in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, they would take this."

"Going 1-1 into Boxing Day is the best case scenario. I would say India have their nose ahead," Shastri told news.com.au.

Australia's top order comprising Usman Khawaja, Nathan McSweeney and Marnus Labuschagne have been unable to score against Bumrah.

It has forced them to hand a debut to teenage sensation Sam Konstas while dropping rookie opener Nathan McSweeney.

"It's been pretty brittle. When you look at this Australian lineup, it's been a long time since I've seen an Australian line-up where the top order is that brittle. India have exploited that and continue to exploit it," Shastri said.

All-rounder Mitchell Marsh has also largely struggled for runs. In the last year, Labuschagne, Marsh, Khawaja and Steve Smith all had average less than 30 in Test cricket.

"India is 1-1 in the series and that man (Bumrah) has almost single-handedly got India into that position," Shastri said.

"As far as Konstas goes, I think he's very refreshing. He's got flair, he's got flamboyance. But Test cricket is Test cricket. His technique will tighten up and he will be the future for Australia."

Shastri feels McSweeney was

unfortunate to have been axed after just three Tests.

"McSweeney was very unfortunate. He did the hard yards but he's a middle order batsman. I see him travelling to Sri Lanka when the Australian team go there and rebuild his career from there."

"But I think it's a good move getting Konstas in because you need someone who can take the attack to the Indian team, because the punches were coming from nowhere."

India have won the last two series in Australia and now have the opportunity to become only the third touring side to win three consecutive series Down Under, joining the West Indies (1984/85, 1988/89, 1992/93) and South Africa (2008/09, 2012/13, 2016/17).

"Massive. No team has done that in a long time. Australia hammers sides when they come here. For India to pull off three on the trot will be something special."

"But they'll have to play good cricket. I see Australia coming hard in this Test match, especially with the bowlers. It's the batting that'll be the challenge for Australia more than anything else." Shastri feels India has come to Australia with a strong intent to win.

"India have come here to win, they haven't come here to fill in the numbers. Even when I was the coach, our mantra was to play extremely hard, fair and to win."

"You have to think of a method to beat Australia and not just compete. You've got to plan properly, how to take your 20 wickets. India have done that and been very aggressive."

"They've been in the face of Australia and give as good as they get. It's been entertaining and feisty stuff. The first day of the Boxing Day Test will determine which way the series will go," he added. (PTI)

## Cummins' message for Konstas: Have fun and don't overthink

**MELBOURNE, Dec 25:** Australia skipper Pat Cummins understands what a teenager goes through on a high-profile Test debut and knows what he needs to tell a young Sam Konstas: "Have fun and don't overthink."

Konstas, 19, is all set to make his debut against India in the Boxing Day Test, starting Thursday. Konstas has created a lot of buzz in Australian domestic cricket and his Test debut at the expense of Nathan McSweeney has become quite an event.

When the skipper was asked about his feelings during his Test debut at 18, Cummins spoke about an element of naivety that can stop a kid from overthinking about how big a deal it is.

"I spent a bit of the time wondering why or how I was there, how it happened so quick. I just remember being really excited and I think it's similar to Sammy (Konstas) this week."

"There's a level of naivety that you just want to go out and play like you do when you're a kid in the backyard," Cummins said during the pre-match press interaction.

"You just want to take the game on, have fun and not overthink. So that's the message to Sam. That's definitely how I felt as an 18-year-old, I was just really excited," Cummins fondly recollected.



Cummins shared with Konstas, how he, as a teenager, handled his debut back in 2011.

"I was saying this to Sam the other day, I remember as an 18 year old I was thinking if I didn't have a great game it wasn't my fault, it was the selector's fault for picking me."

"I was like, well they're the idiots that picked an 18 year old. You're so young starting out your career it's just it's boxing day doesn't get any better than this so just enjoy the moment," he laughed.

For Cummins, having 38-year-old opener Usman Khawaja, who is exactly double Konstas'

age is a boon for the youngster as he will have calming influence at the other end even as youngsters with uncluttered mind always have an edge.

"There's so much value in having experience and you've seen everything before. But there's almost just as many positives in having that freedom and naivety just to go out and see the ball and hit the ball."

Even in a slump, Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant are players whom this Australian team really respects. There are two Test matches and there could be a pushback round the corner.

"I really hope not but you know they're good players so no doubt they'll throw some challenges at us at some point."

Asked if his opposite number Rohit Sharma's poor form is an advantage, Cummins reminded Rahane's century as a stand-in skipper at Melbourne.

"Look, hard to say. It was a good Test match here a few years ago. I think Rahane got 100 from memory. So yeah, it always seems like a boxing day every year is a cracking test match. Last year was a great Test match against Pakistan as well."

The Indian team is in transition but Cummins wants to keep focus intact on his set of players. (PTI)

## Ronaldo takes family to Lapland

**HELSINKI, Dec 25:** Soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo said it was "just a little cold" as he posed bare-chested in the snow before taking an icy dip in a pool during a Christmas vacation in Finland's Lapland region.

The 39-year-old Portuguese international traveled with partner Georgina Rodriguez and their children, who met Santa Claus in a 10-minute video posted online by Ronaldo on Tuesday.

The former Real Madrid and Manchester United great appeared to decline to ski with his family. He wished his followers — including 645 million on Instagram — a "Merry Christmas" in Spanish.

The Al-Nassr striker is on a winter break from the Saudi Pro League until Jan 9. (AP)

## INDIAN CRICKET IN 2024

### Painful trophy wait ends before rare loss at home triggers transition talk

**NEW DELHI, Dec 25:** The monkey was finally off India's back in a roller-coaster 2024 when the financial giants of international cricket ended a 13-year wait for a world title, lost a rare Test series at home and dealt with transition triggered by both expected and unexpected retirements by the stalwarts of the game. There was plenty of action over the last 12 months that kept the loyal Indian fan interested.

The Indian cricket team and its unparalleled fan base were desperate for an ICC trophy after repeatedly faltering in the knock-out stages over the past decade, most recently in the ODI World Cup final at home last year.

The trophy finally came home after Rohit Sharma and Co. played a near perfect tournament to become the T20 World Cup champions in the USA and the Caribbean.

India's clarity of thought throughout the one-month long event was remarkable and with a little bit of luck on their side, especially in the final at Barbados, they were able to go the distance. On undercooked pitches in New York, they were pace heavy before unleashing their trump card Kuldeep Yadav from the Super 8 stage of the tournament.

India picked as many as four spinners in the squad but played three in Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Kuldeep.

With Jadeja not getting to do much with both bat and ball, Axar came of age in the competition producing match-winning performances with both and ball.

The pace duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Arshdeep Singh also played their part to perfection, collecting 15 and 17 wickets respectively.

In the batting department, Rohit led from the front with a fearless approach that demoralised opposition attacks. His approach was best summed up in the Super 8 game against Australia where he tore into the likes of Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins to make all the difference in the game. (PTI)



কৃষি আৰু কৃষক কল্যাণ মহাগণায়  
ভাৰত চৰকাৰ



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

- নবেন্দ্র মৌদী, 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



প্রধানমন্ত্রী ফচল  
বীমা যোজনা



আপোনাৰ ফচলৰ বীমা কৰোৱাৰ বাবে আজিয়েই যোগাযোগ কৰক

জনসেৱা কেন্দ্ৰ | শস্য বীমা এপ <https://play.google.com> | পোষ্ট অফিচ | বেঞ্চৰ শাখা | [f](#) [i](#) [x](#) [t](#) [y](#) [u](#) [t](#) [@PMFBY](#)

মোকনা সলুকে অধিক জানিবৰ বাবে QR ক'ড স্কেন কৰক