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Ex-PM Manmohan Singh, architect of India's economic reforms, dies at 92

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Former prime minister Manmohan Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died here on Thursday night. He was 92.

Singh's death was announced by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, where he was admitted in the Emergency ward around 8.30 PM in a critical condition.

An AIIMS bulletin said "he was treated for age related medical conditions and had sudden loss of consciousness at home" on December 26.

"Resuscitative measures were started immediately at home. He was brought to medical emergency at AIIMS Delhi at 8.06 pm. Despite all efforts, he could not be revived and was declared dead at 9.51 pm," said the bulletin.

Singh, who was prime minister for two terms in the Congress-led UPA government from 2004 to 2014, had been in poor health for the last few months.

He is survived by wife Gurcharan Singh and three daughters.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and her mother Sonia Gandhi reached the hospital



as soon as the news of his hospitalisation became known.

Singh, who was finance minister under the then prime minister P V Narasimha Rao, was the architect and the brainchild of economic reforms in 1991 that pulled India from the brink of bankruptcy and ushered in an era of economic liberalisation that is widely believed to have changed the course of India's economic trajectory.

Singh died as the Congress party concluded its Congress Working Committee meeting at Belagavi in Karnataka, where all top party leaders were present.

It is believed that party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi are on their way to Delhi from Belagavi. (PTI)

Beijing to build world's largest dam over Brahmaputra

Chinese govt issues green signal to over \$137 billion hydropower project
 ● Move creates concerns in India, Bangladesh

BELJING, Dec 26: China has approved the construction of the world's largest dam, stated to be the planet's biggest infra project costing USD 137 billion, on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to the Indian border, raising concerns in riparian states - India and Bangladesh.

The Chinese government has approved the construction of a hydropower project in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra, according to an official statement quoted by state-run Xinhua news agency on Wednesday.

The dam is to be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra river makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh.

The total investment in the dam could exceed one trillion yuan (USD 137 billion), which would dwarf any other single infrastructure project on the planet including

China's own Three Gorges Dam, regarded as the largest in the world, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Thursday.

China has already operationalised the USD 1.5 billion Zam Hydropower Station, the largest in Tibet in 2015.

The Brahmaputra dam was part of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 adopted by Plenum, a key policy body of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2020.

Concerns arose in India as the dam besides empowering China to control the water flow, the size and scale of it could also enable Beijing to release large amounts of water flooding border areas in times of hostilities.

India too is building a dam over Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh.

India and China established the



Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) in 2006 to discuss various issues related to trans-border rivers under which China provides India with hydrological information on the Brahmaputra river and Sutlej river during the flood seasons.

Data sharing of trans-border rivers figured in the talks between India, China Special Representatives (SRs) for border question, NSA Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, held here

on December 18.

The SRs "provided positive directions for cross-border cooperation and exchanges" including data sharing on trans-border rivers, a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs said.

The Brahmaputra Dam presents enormous engineering challenges as the project site is located along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur.

The Tibetan plateau, regarded as

the roof of the world, frequently experiences earthquakes as it is located over the tectonic plates.

The official statement on Wednesday sought to allay concerns about earthquakes, saying that the hydropower project is safe and prioritises ecological protection.

Through extensive geological explorations and technical advancements, a solid foundation has been laid for the science-based, secure, and high-quality development of the project, it said.

The Brahmaputra flows across the Tibetan Plateau, carving out the deepest canyon on Earth and covering a staggering vertical difference of 25,154 feet before reaching India, the Post report said. The dam will be built in one of the rainiest parts of mainland China bringing bountiful flows of water.

According to a 2023 report, the hydropower station is expected to generate more than 300 billion kWh of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS Drug Peddler

GUWAHATI: In a significant breakthrough against drug trafficking, an East Guwahati Police District (EGPD) team from Dispur Police Station intercepted a truck carrying contraband on GS Road at Khanapara, the city police officials informed on Thursday. Acting on specific intelligence, the team stopped the vehicle bearing registration number AS01RC9841 and conducted a thorough search. Subsequently, two individuals traveling in the truck, identified as Raj Kumar Thakur (25) from Madhubani and Sanjeet Kamat (21) from Samastipur, both hailing from Bihar, were arrested on the spot.

Hemodialysis centers

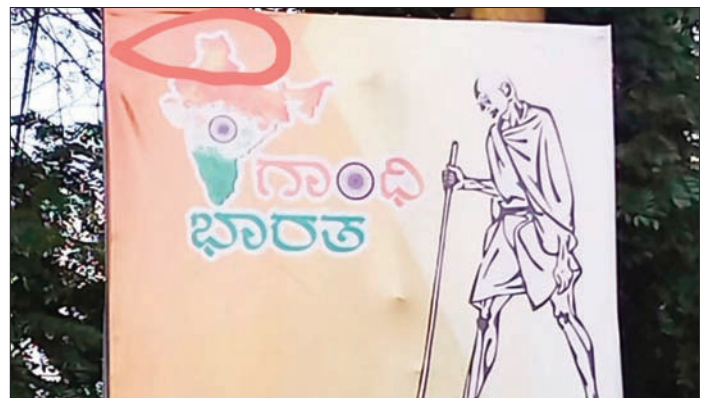
GUWAHATI: In a major healthcare initiative, the Government of Assam has announced the expansion of its free dialysis network with the addition of 37 new hemodialysis centers, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma informed on Thursday. The move is set to revolutionize kidney care in the state, providing much-needed support to patients suffering from chronic kidney diseases. The new centers will be equipped with 150 state-of-the-art dialysis machines, implemented through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model and supported by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) partners. These centers will also enhance accessibility to free dialysis services, particularly in underserved regions, ensuring that no patient is left without vital care. Currently, Assam operates 41 dialysis centers across the state, equipped with 277 dialysis machines. Meanwhile, in the financial year 2023-24 alone, these centers delivered a record-breaking 2.21.116 free dialysis sessions, an increase of 50,000 sessions compared to the previous year.

BJP accuses Congress of putting up banners with 'distorted' map of India

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: The BJP alleged on Thursday that the Congress, ahead of the CWC meeting in Karnataka's Belagavi, put up welcome banners with a distorted map of India, and asked the party whether it is following a "signal" from anti-India forces like US-based billionaire investor George Soros.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) charge came after its Karnataka unit posted on X pictures of a banner and a welcome flex allegedly put up by the Congress in Karnataka ahead of its working committee meeting.

"@INCKarnataka has shown utter disrespect for India's sovereignty by displaying a distorted map at their Belagavi event, portraying Kashmir as part of Pakistan.



All this just to appease their vote bank. This is shameful!" the Karnataka BJP posted on X, along with pictures.

There was no immediate reaction from the Congress on the BJP's

charge. "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Aksai Chin appear to be missing from the map used by the Congress. The important thing is that it (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sewa Setu App giving 800 services: Himanta

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 26: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that the Sewa Setu application launched by the state government three years ago has been giving around 800 services to bring the administration to the doorstep of people.

The chief minister said that when Sewa Setu was launched three years ago in 2021, only 47 services were available on this platform. Over the period of time, the Sewa Setu application has evolved. "800 Services now live on Sewa Setu! To provide seamless services at the click of a button, we launched the Sewa Setu platform on 2021

with 47 services. In 3 years, the platform has evolved to now have 800 citizen centric services with an assured delivery timeline," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

According to Sarma, in 2022, the reach of this platform was increased and 125 services were provided by Sewa Setu application.

In 2023, the administration was successful to provide 541 services through Sewa Setu application which is further increased to 800 this year, the chief minister mentioned.

Besides this, Sarma also commented on taking efforts to ensure that roads are safe so that accident related fatalities can be reduced.

"As the holiday season fast approaches, we (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



AAP lodges complaint with ED against BJP leaders for distributing money ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Thursday lodged a complaint with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against two BJP leaders for allegedly distributing cash to people ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls. Singh also lashed out at the ED after he failed to meet officials of the agency to lodge the complaint against former BJP MP Parvish Verma and former MLA Manjinder Singh Sirsa.

He said he sought an appointment through email to meet the ED officials at 4 pm in order to lodge a complaint on the behalf of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The complaint of AAP was received by the agency but its officials did not meet the party delegation, he said. "In the constituency of AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, ₹ 1,100 each were openly given to the voters as bribe (on Wednesday). Crores

of rupees would be recovered if the ED conducts raid at former MP Verma's residence," the AAP leaders told reporters.

Former Delhi chief minister Kejriwal, representing the New Delhi seat since 2013 in the Assembly, is the AAP candidate from the constituency for the upcoming polls due in February. Singh rued that the ED officials refused to meet him. "The ED, which is so active in everything, has no time to meet the AAP leaders. It means, it functions as an agency to act only at the command of the ruling party to topple governments and arrest opposition leaders including chief ministers," he alleged.

The AAP MP said he will also try to meet the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Income Tax department and Election Commission (EC) to lodge complaint against the BJP leaders.

On the other hand, Verma maintained that the money was given to women by social organisation Rashtriya Swabhiman, founded by his father and former chief minister Sahib Singh Verma. The defiant BJP leader said he will continue to help the needy women till model code of conduct is imposed for the polls.

Singh also charged that another BJP leader Sirsa is also distributing cash in his area.

Sirsa said the AAP leaders were baffled after the Delhi government warned people through public notices that 'Mahila Samman Yojna' and 'Sanjeevani Yojna' were non-existent. "I have been helping the needy people with all kinds of help for long and will continue to do so. Kejriwal should also start doing it since he has stashed a lot of money from the liquor scam," said the former MLA from Rajouri Garden area. (PTI)

'The law commission should examine the legality of the TDS system' PIL in SC seeks abolition of TDS system, cites constitutional violations

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: A PIL filed in the Supreme Court on Thursday sought to scrap the TDS system calling it "arbitrary and irrational" and violative of various fundamental rights, including equality.

The PIL challenged the tax deducted at source or TDS framework under the Income Tax Act, which mandates the deduction of tax at the time of payment by the payer and its deposit with the income tax department. The deducted amount is adjusted against the payee's tax liability.

The plea filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay through advocate Ashwani Dubey, made the Centre, ministry of law and justice, law commission, and NITI Aayog as parties.

It sought a direction to "declare



the TDS system manifestly arbitrary, irrational and against Articles 14 (right to equality), 19 (right to practice profession) and 21 (right to life and personal liberty) of the Constitution, hence void and inoperative".

The plea further sought directions to the NITI Aayog to consider contentions raised in the plea and suggest necessary changes in TDS system.

It said the law commission should examine the legality of the

TDS system and prepare a report within three months.

The TDS system imposes significant administrative and financial burdens on taxpayers tasked with compliance which include managing complex rules, issuing TDS certificates, filing returns, and defending against penalties for inadvertent errors, argued the plea.

Assessees often incur substantial expenses, ranging from salaries of compliance staff to professional fees for tax consultants, without receiving compensation, it said.

The plea said the system violated Article 14 (equality before the law) by disproportionately burdening economically weaker sections and small earners who lack the capacity to navigate its technical requirements. Referring to Article 23, it (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Incidents in Bangladesh, Pakistan remind us of sacrifices by Sikh gurus: Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Dec 26: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday highlighted the rich legacy of the Sikh tradition, emphasising their resilience in adverse circumstances.

He praised the community for not only preserving their traditions but also inspiring others through their sacrifices for the nation and their faith.

Addressing the main event of Veer Bal Diwas (Sahibzade Diwas) held at the chief minister's residence, he remarked, "The Sikh community has a glorious history, yet we hear that only a handful of Sikh families remain in Kabul. Incidents in Bangladesh and atrocities in Pakistan remind us of the sacrifices of the Sikh gurus."

"The ideals of the Sikh Gurus provide us with the energy to move



forward. Their blessings serve as our inspiration. By carrying forward their legacy, we can prevent situations like those in Kabul and Bangladesh. Places like Nankana Sahib will come to us naturally, without the need for agitation or struggle," the chief minister added,

according to a statement.

The event also saw a historical gathering and the commencement of 11,000 'sahaj paths'. Additionally, the chief minister released a book based on the teachings of Guru Teg Bahadur. Chief Minister Adityanath (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Banks can charge over 30% interest on credit card dues: SC

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Banks can charge over 30 per cent on credit card dues from customers after the Supreme Court set aside a sixteen-year-old National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission verdict, which held charging excessive interest rates amounted to an unfair trade practice.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma said NCDRC's observations that the rate of interest in excess of 30 per cent per annum was an unfair trade practice was "illegal" and an interference with the clear, unambiguous delegation of Reserve Bank of India's powers.

The court said the ruling was contrary to the legislative intent of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

In the opinion of the apex court, banks had in no manner made any misrepresentation to deceive the credit card holders and the pre-conditions of "deceptive practice" and unfair method were manifestly absent.

The court said NCDRC had no jurisdiction to rewrite the terms of the contract entered between the banks and the credit card holders, which the parties had mutually agreed upon.

"We agree with the submissions

Rupee plunges 12 paise to close at new all-time low

MUMBAI, Dec 26: The rupee stayed weak for the third straight session and fell 12 paise to settle at a fresh all-time low of 85.27 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, amid a strong greenback and rising crude oil prices.

Forex traders said, increased month-end as well as year-end dollar demand from importers and fear of an aggressive import tariff by the Donald Trump administration lifted the American currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 85.23 and touched the lowest-ever level of 85.28 against the greenback during intraday trade.

The unit finally ended the session at its lifetime low closing level of 85.27 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 12 paise from its previous close.

The rupee fell 4 paise to settle at 85.15 against the US dollar on Tuesday, a day after losing 9 paise on Monday. The forex market was closed on Wednesday for Christmas. According to Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, the rupee fell to a fresh all-time low on strong dollar and rising US treasury yields that are at the highest levels in seven months.

Also, he said the surge in crude oil prices, month-end/year-end dollar demand and FII outflows may also weigh on the rupee.

"However, any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from weekly unemployment claims data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.10 to 85.45," Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally lower by 0.09 per cent but remained elevated at 107.93, amid soaring US Treasury yields (4.61 per cent) and the fear of delayed interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve. (PTI)

Banking frauds rise in H1FY25, amount involved jumps 8-time: RBI report

MUMBAI, Dec 26: The number of bank frauds witnessed a significant on-year increase in the first half of the current fiscal to 18,461 cases and the amount involved jumped more than eight-fold to ₹ 21,367 crore, according to RBI data released on Thursday.

The Reserve Bank of India has released the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24 which presents the performance of the banking sector, including commercial banks, co-operative banks and non-banking financial institutions, during 2023-24 and 2024-25 so far.

The report said the number of frauds during April-September stood at 18,461 involving ₹ 21,367 crore compared to 14,480 cases involving ₹ 2,623 crore in the comparative period of the last financial year, based on the date of fraud reporting.

It further said frauds present multiple challenges for the financial system in the form of reputational risk, operational risk, business risk and erosion of customer confidence with financial stability implications.

Regarding 2023-24 fiscal as a whole, the RBI said that based on date of reporting by banks, the amount involved in frauds was the



made by the Reserve Bank of India, that the question of directing the RBI to act against any bank does not arise, in the facts and circumstances of the present case and that there is no question of the RBI being directed to impose any cap on the rate of interest, either on the banking sector as a whole, or in respect of any one particular bank, contrary to the provisions contained in the Banking Regulation Act, and the circulars/directions issued thereunder," the bench said in its December 20 judgement.

The top court said while the national consumer commission was duly empowered to set aside unfair contracts that were unilaterally

dominant or incorporated unfair and unconscionable terms, the rate of interest charged by the banks, determined by the financial wisdom and RBI directives that were duly communicated to the credit card holders from time to time, couldn't be unconscionable or unilateral.

"The credit card holders are duly educated and made aware of their privileges and obligations, including timely payment and levying of penalty on delay," the bench said.

The apex court said at the time of availing the credit card facility, customers were made aware of the most important terms and conditions, including the rate of interest

and they agreed to be bound by the express stipulation by the terms issued by the respective banks.

The verdict said once the terms of the credit card operations were known to the complainants and disclosed by the banking institutions before the issuance of the credit cards, the national commission could not have scrutinised the terms or conditions, including the rate of interest.

"Even on merits, the Reserve Bank of India, has made it clear that there exists no material on record, to establish that any bank has acted contrary to the policy directives issued by the RBI," it said.

It came on record that the aggrieved party in the case did not approach the statutory authority, the Reserve Bank of India, for any objection against the rate of interest, or the high benchmark prime lending rate.

The matter pertained to the appeals filed by Citibank, American Express, HSBC and Standard Chartered Bank against the NCDRC's July 7, 2008 order, which held interest rates ranging between 36 per cent and 49 per cent per annum were exorbitant and amounted to the exploitation of borrowers. (PTI)

Stock markets close flat amid lack of global triggers

MUMBAI, Dec 26: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended flat in listless trading on Thursday amid a lack of near-term triggers and unabated foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dipped 0.39 points to settle at 78,472.48 in a muted trade. During the morning trade, it had jumped 425.5 points or 0.54 per cent to 78,898.37.

The NSE Nifty eked out gains of 22.55 points or 0.1 per cent to 23,750.20 on the monthly expiry day.

From the 30 blue-chip stocks, Titan, Asian Paints, Nestle, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Zomato, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finserv were among the laggards. Adani Ports, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti, Sun Pharma, Bharti Airtel and Tata Motors were among the gainers.

"On the last expiry day of the year, the domestic market remained flat throughout the day amidst holidays in peer markets and a lack of major domestic or global triggers. Auto shares saw gains from recent corrections.

"However, concerns over FII outflows and the depreciating rupee persist, given the strengthening US dollar index and worries about potential adverse tariffs and concerns over rate cuts in 2025, held the muted market trend," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit

Financial Services, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge dipped 0.24 per cent while midcap index went up marginally by 0.11 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, the BSE services jumped 1.80 per cent, auto climbed 0.81 per cent, power (0.45 per cent), healthcare (0.45 per cent), realty (0.39 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.23 per cent).

BSE commodities dipped 0.30 per cent, industrials (0.12 per cent), telecommunication (0.16 per cent), metal (0.14 per cent), BSE Focused IT (0.04 per cent) and bankex (0.04 per cent).

In Asian markets, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Seoul ended lower. US markets were closed on Wednesday for Christmas.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 2,454.21 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The Indian stock markets were closed on Wednesday because of Christmas.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.53 per cent to USD 73.97 a barrel.

After gyrating between highs and lows, the 30-share BSE index declined 67.30 points to 78,472.87 on Tuesday. Nifty dipped 25.80 points or 0.11 per cent to 23,727.65. (PTI)

Gold rises ₹ 250 to ₹ 78,850/10g; silver climbs ₹ 300

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Gold prices increased ₹ 250 to ₹ 78,850 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a firm global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The yellow metal had settled at ₹ 78,600 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Silver extended its rally for the third straight session by climbing ₹ 300 to ₹ 90,800 per kg on Thursday. The metal had ended at ₹ 90,500 per kg in the previous close. The commodities market was closed on Wednesday on the occasion of Christmas.

The price of 99.5 per cent purity advanced ₹ 250 to ₹ 78,450 per 10 grams from the previous close of ₹ 78,200 per 10 grams.

Traders attributed the climb in gold prices to firm trends in the

overseas markets which aided in bullion prices.

In futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February delivery advanced ₹ 442 or 0.58 per cent to ₹ 76,712 per 10 grams.

"Gold prices edged higher on Thursday, supported by a slightly weaker dollar as markets resumed trading post-Christmas.

"However, gains were capped as investors remained cautious following the US Federal Reserve's hawkish stance, signalling a less aggressive rate-cutting outlook," Jaateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

Silver contracts for March delivery bounced ₹ 343 or 0.38 per cent to ₹ 89,669 per 10 grams on the ex-

change. With the holiday-shortened week, thin trade volumes reflected traders' hesitation to make significant moves, Trivedi said.

Globally, Comex gold futures rose USD 9.10 per ounce or 0.35 per cent to USD 2,644.60 per ounce. "Gold moved higher on Thursday as traders showed an interest in safe-haven buying following escalating tensions due to Russia-Ukraine war.

"Market participants will await the US macroeconomic data -- weekly unemployment claims data -- due to release later on Thursday which will provide more insights on the course of direction for bullion prices," Gandhi said. Comex silver futures traded 0.19 per cent higher in the Asian trading session at USD 30.34 per ounce. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Beijing to build world's

electricity each year – enough to meet the annual needs of over 300 million people. In 2020, Yan Zhiyong, then chairman of the state-owned Power Construction Corporation of China, was quoted in the media as saying the location on the Yarlung Tsangpo was one of the most hydropower-rich areas in the world.

"The lower reaches area features a vertical drop of 2,000 metres over a 50km distance, representing nearly 70 million kilowatts of resources that could be developed – that is more than three Three Gorges Dams with an installed capacity of 22.5 million kilowatts," the Post quoted him as saying.

To harness the hydropower potential of the river, four to six 20km-long tunnels must be drilled through the Namcha Barwa mountain to divert half of the river's flow at about 2,000 cubic metres per second, according to the report.

Yan said that the hydropower exploitation of the Yarlung Zangbo River downstream is more than a hydropower project.

It is also meaningful for the environment, national security, living standards, energy and international cooperation.

"It is a project for national security, including water resources and domestic security," he said, noting that the project will also smooth cooperation with South Asia.

The hydropower station could generate income of 20 billion yuan (USD three billion) annually for the Tibet Autonomous Region, he said.

An official statement on Wednesday defended the project, saying it will play a positive role in accelerating the country's efforts to create a new development pattern and pursue high-quality development.

It is also of great importance to advancing the country's strategy for carbon peaking and carbon neutrality and to coping with global climate change, it said.

The hydropower project is a green project aimed at promoting low-carbon development. By harnessing the abundant hydropower resources of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the project will also spur the development of solar and wind energy resources in surrounding areas, thus creating a clean energy base featuring a complementary mix of hydro, wind and solar power, it said.

It will directly stimulate the rapid growth of such industries as engineering, logistics and trade services, and create new jobs, it said.

Once completed, the project will further improve infrastructures of electricity, water conservancy and transportation. It will strengthen the synergy of development between Tibet and other regions, it said. (PTI)

BJP accuses Congress

(the map) has been used with Mahatma Gandhi's picture," BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi told a press conference at the party headquarters here.

He alleged that this is not the first time that the Congress has used a distorted map of India. It has done so several times in the past, he charged.

"Why is India's map being shown after removing different parts of the country? Is it just a coincidence or part of a systematic anti-India experiment? At whose behest is this happening?" Trivedi asked, adding, "Is there a signal coming from some Soros secret service or from other anti-India forces based abroad with whom you always get along well?"

The BJP leader alleged that the Congress's "nexus" with such forces that dream of disintegrating India has become "absolutely clear", with the party using a "distorted" map of the country.

"I want to assure everyone that the government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is alert about all such forces. We are fully confident that the people of the country are equally alert and keeping an eye on such forces," Trivedi said, adding that such elements will never succeed in achieving their goal.

No anti-India force can halt the country's progress and growing strength, he asserted.

A meeting of the extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) is scheduled to be held in Belagavi on Thursday. (PTI)

Jilted lover kills

relationship," he said. After being rejected, the accused decided to kill her, the police officer said.

Meanwhile, Assam DGP G P Singh in a post on social media said: "Reference stabbing incident of a young girl at Nahorni Path Guwahati - The assailant has been detained. He has self-stabbed himself and is being admitted to the hospital." (PTI)

North India remains under

night, slightly up from the previous night's minus 7.3 degrees C, the meteorological department said. Gulmarg, a tourist resort town known for skiing activities in north Kashmir, recorded a minimum temperature of minus 6 degrees C, up from minus 6.6 degrees C the previous night.

Pahalgam, the base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, registered a minimum temperature of minus 8.6 degrees C, slightly down from the previous night's minus 8.4 degrees C, it said.

Qazigund, the gateway town to Kashmir, logged a minimum temperature of minus 7 degrees C, while Konibal, a hamlet in the Pampore area, was the coldest recorded place in the valley at minus 9 degrees C, it said.

The meteorological department has said an active western disturbance is set to impact Jammu and Kashmir from Friday afternoon to Saturday afternoon.

Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said people in the valley were facing difficulties due to intense cold conditions but the government would be able to provide uninterrupted electricity only after 100 per cent metering is achieved.

"As far as winter preparedness is concerned, there is an intense cold and there has been a dry spell. I pray to God for snowfall so that this dry spell ends.

"Our endeavour is to minimise the power cuts and ensure water supply even as pipes freeze due to the low temperature. Despite difficulties, our endeavour is that the government functions smoothly," Abdullah told reporters in Srinagar.

The chief minister said the complaints of unscheduled power cuts would continue "because there is pressure on the system".

"The problem is that some people have a (load) agreement of four bulbs, but they use four heaters instead... Meter is the best way to address this, the more metering we have, the less power cuts there will be.

"I hope we take J&K to 100 per cent metering so that we supply 24 hours electricity. God willing, we will achieve that very soon," he added.

In Himachal Pradesh, the higher and middle hills will be receiving fresh snowfall from December 27 onwards, officials said. (PTI)

Assamese filmmaker Bhaskar

the jury of the 2nd Guwahati International Film Festival and 2nd NEFVTA, and was working on the post-production of a feature film when he had to be hospitalised. Prominent film personalities offered their deep condolences to the bereaved family of Das. (PTI)

Sewa Setu App giving

are taking every effort to ensure that our roads are safe and we can reduce accidents & fatalities by at least 20%. Instructions have been issued for strict monitoring of vehicles and prevention of drink & drive cases."

The chief minister recently held a video conference with District Commissioners, Police Superintendents, and officials from the Transport and Excise Departments focusing on reviewing road accidents in the state, enforcing road safety regulations, and assessing measures taken by the Transport and Police Departments to mitigate such incidents.

Incidents in Bangladesh, Pakistan

praised the Sikh community as a resilient and prosperous segment of the nation, setting exemplary standards through their strength, dedication and hard work. "At one time, Sikhs safeguarded India by joining the Army in significant numbers. Yet, there are forces conspiring to undermine their efforts, attempting to entrap the youth in drug abuse," he said.

He emphasised the need to identify and remain vigilant against such adversaries. "Sikhs and Hindus complement each other. We must steer clear of those who seek to create discord between us. May Guru Maharaj grant us the wisdom to distinguish between friends and foes," he said, stressing unity.

Reflecting on past events, the chief minister noted that in 2019, during the 550th Prakash Parv of Guru Nanak Dev, a 'shabad-kirtan' programme was held at his residence. Since 2020, the annual observance of Veer Bal Diwas has become a tradition at the chief minister's residence, he said.

"Today, this event has grown into a national observance. On this day, two 'sahibzaades' (sons) of Guru Gobind Singh -- Baba Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh -- were walled up alive by Wazir Khan," he added.

The chief minister also recounted the sacrifices made during the Battle of Chamkaur, where Guru Gobind Singh's elder sons, Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh, attained martyrdom.

"Maa Gujri could not endure the immense pain of these losses. The suffering they endured is beyond imagination.

"Yet, their unwavering commitment to protecting the country and religion remained steadfast. By sacrificing their lives, the four Sahibzaades laid a solid foundation for safeguarding the nation and its values. Their bravery continues to be a source of pride, not just for the Sikh community but also for the entire nation," he said.

Highlighting Sikhism's origins rooted in service to the nation and religion, chief minister Adityanath remarked, "Guru Nanak Dev was the first to stand against Babar's atrocities. Guru Arjun Dev's martyrdom in Lahore was to protect India from Jahangir's tyranny.

"Guru Teg Bahadur sacrificed his life but upheld India's honour, ensuring that Kashmir remained an integral part of India. Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj witnessed the ultimate sacrifice of his sons and father for the nation," Adityanath said.

The chief minister also noted that this year marks the 350th martyrdom anniversary of Guru Teg Bahadur. Recalling the historical significance of the UP capital, he said, "Lucknow is fortunate that Guru Teg Bahadur ji had come here with Guru Gobind Singh ji. To honour this heritage, a comprehensive plan for the beautification of associated gurdwaras should be prepared in collaboration with the municipal corporation." (PTI)

PIL in SC seeks abolition

said the imposition of tax collection duties on private citizens amounted to forced labour. The TDS system was stated to adversely affect individuals below the taxable income threshold, as tax was deducted at source irrespective of their liability.

"The regulatory and procedural framework surrounding TDS is excessively technical, often requiring specialised legal and financial expertise, which most assesses lack. The result is an unjust shifting of sovereign responsibilities from the government to private citizens without adequate compensation, resources, or legal safeguards," it said. (PTI)

MoU covers electrification upkeep in key divisions NFR signs MoU with IRCON for maintenance of electrification infrastructure

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 26: Northeast frontier Railway (NFR) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Railway Construction International Limited (IRCON) for maintenance of electrification infrastructure, an official statement said on Thursday.

For the first time in Indian Railways, NFR has embarked upon a novel initiative for maintenance of electrification infrastructure including Overhead Equipment's (OHE) and Power Supply Installation (PSI) by tying up with IRCON through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

This MoU was signed between general manager, NFR Chetan Kumar Shrivastava and chief managing director, IRCON H M Gupta.

IRCON is a reputed organisation well known for undertaking challenging infrastructure projects, especially in difficult terrains in India and abroad since 1976. "MoU will provide maintenance of Overhead Equipment's (OHE) and Power Supply Installation (PSI) in Lumding and Tinsukia divisions," the statement said.

Electrification works of



Lumding and Tinsukia Division are progressing at a rapid pace with most of the sections already electrified and balance 425 RKM is targeted to be commissioned by June 25.

"Due to rapid commissioning of the sections, maintenance of electrification works have grown manifold which needs trained and

experienced railway personnel for scheduled maintenance and breakdown attention as Electric Traction is directly related to Train operations," the statement added.

"Electrification work in NFR is at a new stage and railway authorities have decided to rope in IRCON for the maintenance and breakdown attention of the sec-

tions for a period of 02 years as a contract addition which marks an exemplary step towards systemic maintenance," it concluded.

The MoU will serve as a platform for NFR to engage in knowledge exchange and access latest technologies and expertise in the management of electrification infrastructure.

MBBS from student Dibrugarh dies by suicide at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 26: A 21-year-old MBBS student from Dibrugarh allegedly died by suicide at All India Institute for Medical Science (AIIMS) in Bhubaneswar.

As per, Mishra was found hanging from the ceiling fan in his hostel room on Wednesday. Prior to taking this tragic step, he reportedly sent an audio message to his younger brother, asking his father not to sell their land.

In the audio message, he also urged his brother to become a doctor and stay in Assam.

Meanwhile, a note recovered from his room stated that no one was responsible for his death.

Mishra had returned to the AIIMS-Bhubaneswar campus on Tuesday after a 10-day vacation at home along with his father Baidyanath Mishra.

He was scheduled to appear for his second-year examinations starting Thursday.

Describing him as a bright and promising student, a neighbour said, "Ratnes was doing well in his studies. The news of his death has left the entire family shattered. We are deeply disturbed by this tragedy."

Meanwhile, Bhubaneswar police have launched an



investigation into the incident to ascertain the circumstances behind his death.

Later, his body was brought to his hometown on Thursday and the cremation took place the same evening.

Results of Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha declared

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 26: The results of election conducted recently for new office bearers of Nagaon Zila Sahitya for the session 2025-2027 were declared in Nagaon on Thursday.

As per results, Dr Sarat Barkatoki, a noted Assamese poet, essayist, academician and former journalist elected as the president of Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha while Mrinal Kumar Hazarika, former assistant secretary of the Asom Sahitya Sabha elected as vice president.

As per results, Dr Sarat

Borkatoki bagged 35 votes while his opponent Benu Laskar secured only 4 votes.

Similarly, Mrinal Kumar Hazarika won the vice president post with 21 votes, defeating Pradipta Saikia, who secured 16 votes.

Rajiv Kumar Hazarika emerged as the secretary with 28 votes, while his opponent Mintu Das, managed only 9 votes.

The results were officially announced at a meeting of the Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha and presided over by Thagit Mahanta, the president of Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha at its office Kamladevi Todi Bhavan.

Drug peddler apprehended

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 26: Special Task Force (STF) on Thursday apprehended an alleged drug peddler from 8th Mile in Jorabat area Basistha Police Station Jurisdiction, an official statement said.

The drug peddler was identified was 19-year-old Rahul Chetry.

As per the statement, the arrested person was carrying 1.26 nos of vials containing suspected heroin having total weight of 34.40 grams, cash ₹ 1750 and a mobile phone.

Woman found dead in Dima Hasao

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, Dec 26: A woman from Langmeklu Sarthe Inti village under Umrangso police station in Dima Hasao was found hanging from a tree in Hamren's remote forest. The woman was identified as Kania Terang (22).

The victim's family alleged that she was physically tortured before being hanged and urged for a thorough investigation and justice.

Preliminary reports suggest that Kania was abducted from her village on December 22 between 10 and 11 pm. The body has been sent to Haflong for a post-mortem examination. Authorities are investigating the case, while the family and locals demand swift action to uncover the truth.

Second biennial session of KA concludes

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Dec 26: The second biennial session of the Karbi Anglong District Poets' Association concluded successfully at Ransina Bhawan in Diphu's Howraghat.

The session was held on Wednesday which was followed by an open meeting and a poet's conference conducted by Sar-et Hanse.

More than 30 prominent poets from different parts of Karbi Anglong district participated in the event.

The old committee was dissolved and a new Karbi Anglong district Poets Association was formed with Sar-et Hanse as the president and Kaustav Khaund as the secretary.

Two books on poetry "Aranya and Dhulir bator khuj" were also inaugurated on the occasion.

Sar-et Hanse was felicitated by the Karbi Anglong District Poets' Association for getting the Assam Government Literature Award and the Kavya Pran Award of the All Assam Poets' Conference.

AABYCP forms new Golaghat Town Committee



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 26: The Akhil Assam Bhojpuri Yuva-Chhatra Parishad (AABYCP) took a significant step in strengthening its organisational base with the formation of the Go-

laghat Town Committee on Thursday.

A robust 15-member committee was established during a meeting attended by key leaders and members at Bhojpuri Vivah Bhavan in

Golaghat. Ravi Kalwar from Golaghat Town was appointed as the president, while Karmveer Thakur assumed the role of general secretary.

The meeting witnessed the presence of dignitaries, including the Central Committee general secretary, Arjun Mahato, and organisational secretary, Sunil Gupta, district advisors Ganesh Gupta and Bhagirath Jaiswal, along with district vice-president Guddu Prasad Verma and member Sanjeev Prajapati, were also present to support the newly formed committee.

The event was attended by district committee members Saroj Kumar Gupta, Brijmani Pandey, and other notable figures from Golaghat, marking a significant move to bolster the representation and activities of the Bhojpuri Yuva-Chhatra Parishad in the region.

Veer Bal Diwas is a living stream of Inspiration: Sarbananda Sonowal

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 26: On the solemn occasion of Veer Bal Diwas, Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal paid heartfelt tributes on Thursday to the unparalleled courage and sacrifice of Sahibzada Zorawar Singh ji, Sahibzada Fateh Singh ji and the sons of Guru Gobind Singh ji.

Attending the event in Dibrugarh, Sonowal expressed his gratitude for being part of the celebrations alongside the Sikh community.

On this significant occasion, Sonowal offered deep respects to the two valiant sons and also bowed in reverence to Mata Gujri and Shri Guru Gobind Singh.

"Every generation must draw inspiration from the indomitable courage and sacrifices of these martyrs to serve the motherland with devotion and patriotism," Sonowal said during his address.

Sonowal further remarked, "At a tender age, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh endured the brutal atrocities of the Mughal aggressors with unparalleled resilience. Their supreme sacrifice for the honor of their faith and homeland is not just a chapter in India's history but a beacon of inspiration for humanity. Through Veer Bal Diwas, we aim to spread awareness about their great sacrifice and inspire generations to uphold justice and righteousness. This observance reinforces our commitment to the ideals of service and patriotism," Sonowal urged.

"Veer Bal Diwas is not merely a day of remembrance; it is a living stream of inspiration," Sonowal added.

It embodies the essence of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' and reflects the legacy of Shri Guru Gobind Singh's vision of placing the nation first. In New India, we are committed to correcting past missteps and reviving our rich heritage. Honouring the supreme sacrifice of the Sahibzadas through this initiative is a matter of great pride.

Christmas celebrated with gaiety in Sivasagar



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 26: The Christian community in Sivasagar celebrated Christmas with devotion and joy across various churches in

the district, including Sivasagar, Nazira, Sonari, Geleki, Demow and Moran.

Churches were adorned with radiant lights and symbolic images

depicting Jesus Christ's sacrifices, creating a serene yet festive atmosphere on Wednesday.

At the historic 178-year-old Central Baptist Church near Sivasagar Borphukhuri, hundreds of devotees, offered prayers from the morning and lit candles to mark the occasion. The celebrations extended into the evening with a cultural programme at the Gaduhla Brown Memorial English School premises.

In Sonari and Moran, the Catholic community observed Christmas with fervour at St Joseph Churches, hosting a variety of programmes filled with both solemnity and festivity.

Veer Bal Diwas will remind us of the immense contribution of ten Sikh Gurus: PM Modi Veer Bal Diwas observed in Haflong and Dima Hasao

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Dec 26: The Sikh community of Haflong and Dima Hasao commemorated Veer Bal Diwas with reverence on Thursday, remembering the unparalleled sacrifices of Sahibzada Fateh Singh, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh Ji along with honouring Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji.

The event was graced by BJP Dima Hasao president Golojho Thaosan, MAC Liton Chakraborty and other dignitaries who highlighted the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the need to preserve the values of equality and humanity.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often highlighted the significance of this observance.

"Veer Bal Diwas will remind us of the immense contribution of ten Sikh Gurus and the sacrifice of the Sikh tradition for protecting the honor of the nation," PM Modi said.

Representatives of the Sikh community, Gyani Kuljeet Singh and Nirmal Singh, secretary of Sri Guru Singh Sabha spoke about the



sacrifices of all ten Sikh Gurus. They extended their best wishes to the people of Dima Hasao, advocating for peace, prosperity and happiness while urging adherence to the values of righteousness and service to humanity.

Veer Bal Diwas is observed annually on December 26 as a tribute to the immense bravery of the Sahibzadas and the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. It serves as a profound reminder of their resilience and commitment to justice and equality.

The day particularly honors the

martyrdom of Sahibzada Zorawar Singh Ji and Sahibzada Fateh Singh Ji, who were imprisoned and pressured to renounce their faith. Despite their young age, they stood firm in their beliefs and were ultimately martyred, being bricked alive for refusing to compromise on their principles.

The event concluded with heartfelt prayers, Veer Bal Diwas served as a profound reminder of the resilience and spiritual legacy of the Sikh Gurus, inspiring all to uphold the principles of justice, equality, and faith.

CLM issues essential advisory for vendors and consumers

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 26: The Controller of Legal Metrology (CLM) in Assam has issued an essential advisory to ensure accurate measurement practices across businesses and safeguard the interests of both vendors and consumers, an official statement said on Thursday.

Awareness and adherence to the prescribed guidelines are pivotal to fostering transparency in trade and protecting consumer rights, the statement said.

As per the statement, the use of weighing and measuring instruments in businesses, such as spring balances, platform machines, weighing bridges, measuring tapes and meter counters, must comply with mandatory verification rules.

It further said that the instruments like spring balances and platform machines require annual calibration, while weights, scales and counter machines must undergo biennial verification under legal provisions.

"This ensures accuracy in measurement and prevents any unintentional discrepancies in trade transactions," the statement further read.

"For imported packaged goods, it is legally required that all declarations are clearly stated on the package. These include the name and address of the importer, the actual weight of the

item and its maximum retail price (MRP). Any violation of these norms, such as selling goods at prices exceeding the MRP, is a punishable offense under the law," the statement said.

The CLM also urged consumers to remain vigilant and report discrepancies if any are found.

"Packagers of goods must register with the Legal Metrology Department to conduct their activities lawfully. It is also imperative that items like footwear and ready-made garments display essential details, including size and price, on their packaging. Failing to do so constitutes a breach of the law, and violators may face legal consequences," it added.

"Selling it by the bag without specifying weight is illegal. Consumers are advised to purchase cement based on weight to ensure they get the correct quantity. Similarly, businesses dealing with materials like wood, sand, or stones must use metric units such as cubic meters for transactions, adhering to the law's requirements," it continued.

Meanwhile, in the trade of precious metals like gold and silver, transactions should strictly follow the metric system to ensure transparency and fair pricing.

Furthermore, when purchasing LPG cylinders, consumers must verify the cylinder's seal

and weight to avoid potential malpractice. These measures are designed to ensure safety and fairness for all stakeholders involved.

For land purchases or surveys, adopting metric measurements such as square meters and hectares is mandatory.

This simplifies transactions and aligns with modern practices, ensuring precision and fairness. In the case of bricks, sellers must specify the number, size, and dimensions of the bricks on cash memos to maintain transparency in the trade, it said.

Consumers are encouraged to remain alert and report any suspected malpractice regarding weights and measures to local inspectors of the Legal Metrology Department.

Additionally, for imported packaged items, all declarations must comply with Indian legal standards to protect consumer interests. Vendors found violating these regulations will face penalties under the law.

"The Department of Legal Metrology in Assam has urged the consumers and businesses alike to embrace these guidelines to create a marketplace built on trust, accuracy, and fairness. Let us work together to uphold these values and ensure an equitable trading environment for all," the statement concluded.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams - Eleanor Roosevelt

Uncrowned king of parallel cinema

Filmmaker Shyam Benegal, who passed away recently, was in a class of his own. A path-breaker, he took his audience to places where they had never been before. And this is no sweetener to enhance the reputation of a man who is no more. Arguably, he wasn't the first. However, unlike a Bimal Roy or Satyen Bose, he strove to place his path very distinctly differently. His cinema initially or even substantially was unapologetically political, politics not even like, Mein Azaad Hoon or Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro. Who else but Benegal could crowd-fund a film like 'Manthan', themed on the milk cooperative movement in Gujarat, and make a film like 'Mandi' based on the trials and tribulations of the inmates of a house of ill-fame? Benegal focussed his lens, a critical one on power structures in the rural landscape. His films were on the lives of marginalised people, which mainstream Hindi films did not dare touch. Shyam Benegal was a storyteller whose script was enlivened by a touch of social realism. And it so happened, many of his celebrated films and documentaries were game-changers.

His directorial style brought out an advertising man's gift of being economical, yet impactful. The audience's reception to 'Ankur' in 1974, depicting the sexual exploitation of a lower-caste woman, is a case in point. Released a year before 'Zanjeer', giving Amitabh Bachchan his first hit, was not at all in competition with 'Ankur'. The audience most of whom had little idea about the distinction between a commercial and an art-house film, flocked to see both at the theatres, only vaguely aware that both the films portrayed protest in their unique ways. Of late, the filmmaker had not been keeping well, but his admirers hoped he would recover and direct one more film that would take a dig at the Establishment, making the audience think and chuckle on their way home from the theatres. It was not to be. But before Benegal journeyed to the arena of shadows, he left an impressive body of work, which stands out from the song and dance and action of the average Hindi film genre, and whose makers crowd about the fact that they are hits. One of the propellers of parallel cinema in India, there came a time in Benegal's filmmaking career when he effortlessly crossed over the boundaries separating potboilers from art-house films.

Box office acceptance was very much a part of Benegal's films. Be it a documentary like 'Bose: the forgotten Hero', one of the best cinematic works on the life of Subhas Chandra Bose or a modern-day tale of a family of industrialists 'Kalyug' based on Mahabharata or 'Junoon', which was based on a Ruskin Bond short story 'A Flight of Pigeons', a take on the Great Indian Uprising of 1857. Vanraj Bhatia with his incomparable music and Govind Nihalani, with his magnificent cinematography, were the twin attractions of Benegal's films. And the protagonists of the movies were in a class by themselves. For Benegal was the uncrowned King of his times. It was a symbolic photograph. In his time Benegal was the uncrowned king of parallel cinema.

India's pragmatic shift: Navigating realpolitik in a changing world

India's foreign policy in 2024 is marked by a significant shift toward pragmatic realism, as exemplified by the remarks of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri during his recent visit to Bangladesh. Misri's speech to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs in Delhi captured the essence of India's evolving diplomatic stance, notably its approach to Bangladesh, a neighbouring country with which it shares deep historical, cultural, and geopolitical ties. Misri's remarks, while measured and diplomatic, also hinted at a profound change in how India perceives and engages with its neighbors, especially in the context of the ongoing political turmoil in Bangladesh following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina.

Misri's candid comments on Hasina and her ongoing political battle in Bangladesh were particularly noteworthy. He acknowledged the complex and often contentious relationship between India and Hasina's government, noting that India's ties with Bangladesh were not based solely on the leadership of one individual or one political party. Rather, the focus was on fostering a broader, more stable relationship with the people of Bangladesh. This subtle yet powerful statement reflects India's desire to distance itself from being overly attached to one particular regime, especially as Hasina's grip on power has become increasingly precarious. Misri's carefully worded response to Hasina's critical remarks about Bangladesh's interim government, and particularly its chief adviser, Mohammad Yunus, illustrated India's diplomatic balancing act. While India did not explicitly endorse Hasina's criticisms, Misri's remarks suggested a pragmatic ap-

proach — one that aims to maintain constructive ties with Bangladesh, irrespective of its internal political developments.

This nuanced position marks a departure from the previous years when India's foreign policy towards Bangladesh was often shaped by a closer relationship with Sheikh Hasina, whose leadership was seen as a stabilizing force in the region. However, Hasina's political dominance has been accompanied by growing dissatisfaction and opposition within Bangladesh, especially from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and other factions, which have been critical of her leadership style. India's support for Hasina in the past, particularly during the elections of 2019 and 2024, was not without reservations. Delhi had repeatedly urged Hasina to engage in dialogue with opposition parties and create a more inclusive political environment, but these calls were largely ignored. Misri's recent statements reflect India's frustration with Hasina's refusal to heed such advice, yet also demonstrate a pragmatic recognition that India must work with whatever government is in power in Bangladesh, even if it is not its preferred choice.

India's approach to Bangladesh mirrors its broader shift in foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term. This period has seen a calculated distancing from traditional alliances and an embrace of a more flexible, realist approach. India's foreign policy is now characterized by an apparent lack of ideological commitments or permanent friends and enemies, with the notable exception of Pakistan. This pragmatism is evident in India's recent dealings with

other regional and global powers, including its complex relationship with the Afghan Taliban. A few weeks ago, senior Indian diplomat JP Singh met with Taliban Defence Minister Mullah Yaqoob, a move that raised eyebrows across the region, particularly in Pakistan. India's engagement with the Taliban, despite its deeply troubling human rights record, highlights New Delhi's willingness to engage with regimes that may serve its strategic interests. In this case, India's growing ties with the Taliban are motivated by the broader geopolitical considerations, particularly its desire to counter Pakistan's influence in the region and protect its own security interests on its northern frontier.

This shift in India's foreign policy is not without its critics, both domestically and internationally.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

The decision to engage with regimes such as the Taliban, known for their repressive policies, raises ethical questions. However, the pragmatism behind these engagements is undeniable. India has learned from the experiences of other great powers, who have repeatedly engaged with authoritarian regimes or uncomfortable allies when it served their national interests. For India, the Taliban's control over Afghanistan provides a unique opportunity to exert influence over its volatile northern border, especially with regard to the ongoing conflict in Kashmir and the broader dynamics of South Asian security. India's cautious optimism is that a friendly relationship with the Taliban may one day

help facilitate a more stable environment along its border with Pakistan, even if such a relationship is far from ideal on moral or human rights grounds.

This pragmatic approach is also evident in India's handling of its relationship with China. The military standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) had the potential to escalate into a full-blown conflict, but India's decision to de-escalate tensions and strike a deal with China was driven by both strategic necessity and economic considerations. The burgeoning imbalance in trade between the two countries, combined with the realization that a protracted military standoff would be costly, led to India's decision to recalibrate its approach to China. This decision highlights a broader trend in Indian foreign policy — the ability to engage with adversarial powers when necessary, without allowing ideological or historical animosities to overshadow the pursuit of pragmatic national interests.

The same pragmatism is reflected in India's dealings with the United States. The Modi government has been keen to maintain strong ties with Washington, but it has also learned to navigate the complexities of this relationship. During the previous U.S. administration, trade disputes over issues like tariffs on American chicken imports and medical equipment threatened to derail relations. This time around, India has taken a more measured approach, focusing on areas of mutual interest rather than getting bogged down by smaller issues. This shift is part of a broader trend of India adopting a more flexible, strategic approach to its foreign relations, one that emphasizes

power projection and national security over ideological purity or historical grievances.

As 2024 draws to a close, it is clear that India's foreign policy under the Modi government is evolving in response to a rapidly changing global landscape. The country's growing power on the world stage has given it the ability to engage with a diverse array of actors, from authoritarian regimes like the Taliban to regional neighbors like Bangladesh, without being constrained by traditional alliances or ideological commitments. The message from Delhi is clear: India is no longer content with simply being a passive player in global politics. Instead, it is learning to exercise its power strategically, balancing its ideals with its national interests, and positioning itself as a key player in the shifting geopolitics of the 21st century.

This new phase of Indian foreign policy underscores a fundamental truth: power alone is not enough; it is the ability to exercise that power effectively that matters. As India navigates its complex relations with neighbors like Bangladesh, the Taliban, and China, it must remain adaptable and strategic. Whether it is addressing the internal political upheavals in Bangladesh or recalibrating its approach to long-standing adversaries, India's diplomatic maneuvers will likely set the tone for the country's future role on the global stage. The changing dynamics of Indian foreign policy, coupled with the growing influence of the Modi government, signal that India is ready to engage with the world on its own terms, leveraging both its soft power and hard power to achieve its objectives in an increasingly complex international environment. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

Death of Zakir: We have lost a gem

By: R.K. Sinha

In death of Zakir Hussain we have not only lost an individual but a tabla musician. Not only in this country but also in his fans across the world are saddened by his demise. It was not long ago only yesterday when his body was buried in a cemetery in San Francisco (USA).

Hundreds of fans from across the world had reached the place with heavy hearts to say final goodbye. The tabla maestro has created a void which is difficult to fill. He is no more but he will live in memory for long. He will be especially remembered for jugalbandis (duets) with Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma and Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia.

I am fortunate to be one of the organizers of concerts of these great artists on the occasion of Durga Puja every year for decades at the Gardani Bagh ground in Patna and watch him closely during struggle days.

Will there never be a tabla player like him again? It would not be right to say that there will never be anyone like him because music is such a field which keeps evolving. Maybe in future, there will be another tabla player who will keep reminding us of Zakir Hussain with his talent and hard work. But, for now, it would be right to say that it will be difficult for a tabla player like Zakir Hussain to be born again. He was really unique.

For the present, the jugalbandi of Zakir Hussain and Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma and Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia will be certainly missed. They were amazing. The coming together of these legends on stage was a wonderful experience. Ustad Zakir Hussain was a master of tabla. His performance was unmatched. Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma played santoor, which is a string instrument. Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia is a flute magician. When they came on stage, there was always loud applause. They had a wonderful combination. They respected each other and created magic while communicating with each other. Their jugalbandi was always a talk of the town.

They could easily connect with the large crowd present the venue. Music lovers would applaud every raag produced by a flute and reproduced by a tabla or vice-versa. There would always be at the meeting of the three a perfect match between the sur and taal and a connect with listeners. Emotions like happiness and sorrow will be at play.

The concert of these three are unforgettable. They will be remembered for ever. They have left behind a legacy and enriched the Indian classical music. They played an important role in popularizing Indian music in different parts of the world.

Hussain's tabla and the melodious sounds of Shivkumar Sharma's santoor created something extremely pleasant to listeners. Both the artists understood each other well, taking the music to a new height. Their jugalbandi was not just music, but a soulful dialogue. It seemed as if both the artists were talking to each other through their respective instruments.

Sometimes the fast pace of the tabla talked with the melodious tune of the santoor, and sometimes the slow tune of the santoor communicated with the strong beats of the tabla. There was a depth of emotions in their jugalbandi. Through music they took the listeners to a different emotional or say spiritual world.

Both the artists were masters of their respective instruments and their artistry was unmatched. While Zakir Hussain's fingers danced on the tabla, Shivkumar Sharma produced such sweet notes from his santoor that they touched the heart directly. Zakir Hussain had a great grip and beat. He could play even the most difficult taal with ease. He used to experiment while playing the tabla which made him different. He was always innovative. Zahir Hussain gave international recognition to tabla playing. He worked with many artists from all over the world and made the tabla a global musical instrument.

Zakir Hussain belonged to Punjab Gharana. He was known for his intricate laay and taal. He would play even the most difficult rhythms with ease. There was a wonderful flow which was immensely pleasing.

He would move his fingers on the tabla in a way that looked magical. Zakir Hussain always used to experiment with laay and taal. I have closely watched Zakir Hussain's programs many times in Delhi and Patna. He used to dominate every time. Every sound coming from his tabla was clear. He was an expert in producing different types of sounds from different parts of the tabla. His fingers used to move so fast on tabla that the onlookers used to be amazed. He used to play different types of rhythms with his fingers.

He seemed to be communicating with the Tabla. It seemed as if his fingers were telling a story. Zakir Hussain reached the pinnacle of glory through his hard work. He practiced every day till the end so that could do better. His life was music. His passion was clearly visible in his performance. Zakir Hussain was always ready to learn and experiment.

Zakir Hussain worked with many famous musicians from all over the world. He gave a new form to the music by mixing the music of different cultures. He was an ambassador of Indian music. He played an important role in popularizing Indian music all over the world.

Despite being such a great artist, Zakir Hussain was always humble and down to earth. He always respected others. Undoubtedly, he is an inspiration for young musicians, particularly, young tabla players. The maestro is great source of learning. *(The writer is a senior editor, columnist and former MP)*

Assam Accord's relevance in today's Assam

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan

The Assam Accord, signed on August 15, 1985, remains a significant chapter in the history of Assam and modern India. It marked the culmination of the Assam Agitation, a six-year-long movement driven by concerns over unchecked immigration into the state. The Accord was a landmark agreement aimed at addressing the socio-political and cultural anxieties of the indigenous Assamese population while attempting to find a solution to the complex issue of illegal immigration. Decades later, its relevance continues to resonate, as Assam grapples with unresolved challenges surrounding identity, migration, and governance.

The genesis of the Assam Accord lies in the demographic changes witnessed in Assam, especially during the mid-20th century. The partition of India in 1947 and the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 triggered waves of migration, with a substantial number of refugees settling in Assam. This influx disrupted the delicate demographic balance of the region, creating fears of cultural erosion, economic displacement, and political marginalization among the indigenous Assamese people. The agitation, spearheaded by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and other organizations, was a direct response to these concerns. Protesters demanded the detection, deletion from electoral rolls, and deportation of illegal immigrants, framing the movement as a fight to preserve Assam's identity.

The Accord, signed between the leaders of the Assam Movement and the central government, sought to address these demands while maintaining humanitarian considerations. It set March 25, 1971, as the cut-off date for identifying and deporting illegal immigrants. Those who entered Assam before this date were to be regularized as citizens, while those arriving afterward were to be expelled. The Accord also promised safeguards to protect Assam's cultural identity, including provisions for economic development and the promotion of Assamese language and culture.

While the Assam Accord was hailed as a victory for the Assamese people, its implementation has been fraught with challenges. The most contentious aspect has been the identification of illegal immigrants, a process that remains incomplete



even after decades. The National Register of Citizens (NRC), a key provision of the Accord, was intended to provide a definitive list of citizens and non-citizens. However, the NRC update, finalized in 2019, excluded over 1.9 million people, many of whom claimed long-standing residence in Assam. This exclusion has sparked widespread criticism, with allegations of procedural errors, bias, and humanitarian neglect. For those left out of the NRC, the specter of statelessness looms large, creating uncertainty and anxiety.

The demographic impact of migration continues to be a deeply polarizing issue in Assam. Over the decades, the state has witnessed significant changes in its population composition, particularly with the rise of Bengali-speaking Muslims and Hindus. Many indigenous Assamese feel that this demographic shift has diluted their cultural heritage, undermined their linguistic identity, and altered the political dynamics of the state. The perception that illegal immigrants have gained undue influence, particularly in electoral politics, has only heightened these fears, creating a sense of alienation and resentment.

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 has further complicated matters. By providing a pathway to citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from neighboring countries, the CAA directly contravenes the Assam Accord's principle of detecting and deporting all illegal immigrants, irrespective of religion. For many in Assam, the Act represents a be-

trayal of the Accord and an existential threat to their cultural and political identity. The massive protests against the CAA in Assam underscored the enduring relevance of the Accord and the deep-seated grievances of its people.

Economically, the unresolved issue of illegal immigration has exacerbated tensions. Competition for land, jobs, and resources has often pitted the indigenous Assamese against migrant communities. This economic strain, coupled with fears of losing traditional livelihoods, has fueled demands for stricter enforcement of the Accord's provisions. The challenge lies in addressing these economic grievances without undermining social cohesion or fostering division.

The Assam Accord also highlights the limitations of governance and administrative capacity in dealing with complex migration-related challenges. The process of identifying and deporting illegal immigrants requires robust documentation, efficient administration, and political will—all of which have been lacking. The failure to effectively implement the Accord has eroded public trust in both state and central governments, reinforcing perceptions of neglect and marginalization. This erosion of trust has significant political implications, influencing electoral outcomes and fueling demands for greater autonomy.

Despite these challenges, the Assam Accord remains a critical framework for addressing the issues of migration and identity in the state. Its relevance lies not only in its historical significance but also

in its potential to guide contemporary policy decisions. To realize this potential, a more inclusive and transparent approach is necessary. This includes revisiting the process of updating the NRC to address errors and ensure fairness, providing legal recourse for those excluded, and preventing the creation of a stateless population. Diplomatic engagement with Bangladesh is also essential to explore collaborative solutions for managing migration and deportation.

The Accord also offers valuable lessons for fostering social harmony in Assam. The state's history of cultural resilience and coexistence provides a foundation for building mutual respect among its diverse communities. Investments in education, economic development, and social integration can help bridge divides and promote a sense of shared identity. Efforts to preserve and promote Assam's rich cultural heritage, including its language, art, and traditions, are equally important in addressing the anxieties of the indigenous population.

Moreover, the Assam Accord serves as a lens to examine broader issues of migration, identity, and citizenship in India and beyond. It underscores the complexities of balancing humanitarian concerns with the need to preserve cultural heritage and national security. As global migration continues to reshape societies, the experiences of Assam offer valuable insights into managing these challenges in a way that promotes justice and inclusion.

In conclusion, the Assam Accord remains as relevant today as it was in 1985, symbolizing the aspirations and struggles of the Assamese people. While its incomplete implementation has left many issues unresolved, the Accord's principles offer a roadmap for addressing the intertwined challenges of migration, identity, and governance. The task ahead requires a delicate balance between preserving the cultural and political rights of the indigenous Assamese and addressing the humanitarian realities of migration. As Assam navigates its future, the legacy of the Assam Accord will continue to shape its path, offering both a reminder of past struggles and a guide for building a more inclusive and harmonious society. *(The writer is the Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK who can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

POST BAG

Masterstroke or death of democracy : One Nation One Election

Sir/Ma'am

The One Nation One Bill is a proposal to synchronize all elections in India. If we look at the election system right now, we have multiple elections happening every single year. The BJP argues that the first problem is governance disruption, the model code of conduct halts policy making and affects the pace of developmental programmes. Thus, the government proposed the one nation one election bill, various committee reports state how this will boost

Indias GDP by 1.5 % or add about 4.5 Lakh crores to our GDP. Several studies also shows that during simultaneous elections inflation decreases by 1.1%, government expenditure shoots up by 18% and investments in the economy increases by 0.5%. Hence, the government will function for more number of days, politicians will be more focused on governance and the administration will do its core job rather than election duties, this along with thousands of crores in savings makes this bill perfect to be passed. Here, comes the scenario of the Opposition.

The first challenge to the provisions of this bill is the constitutional and legal hurdle. Implementing the proposal will require at least five constitutional amendments involving Articles 83, 85, 172, 174 and 356 and 50% of the states will have to approve to it. In a deeply divided political system in India,

can this ever happen smoothly? Second problem is the overlapping national and state issues, under One Nation One Election, national narratives might overshadow regional voices. Thirdly, frequent elections even though costly ensures that the governments remain accountable to the people throughout their term. The BJP has a plan: synchronising Lok Sabha and State Assembly Elections, bring local body elections into the system. So, whether a government running on borrowed time prioritise long term reforms that benefit the people or will they simply scramble for political survival.

Anannya Senapati
Lawyer, BALLB(H)
Tinsukia, Assam
anannysenapati63@gmail.com

Pushing Indian Democracy around: 2025 calls for people connect

By: Anand K. Sahay

Is democracy fading in India as the year 2024 fades? Or, are we merely seeing a state of accelerated backsliding which can be arrested if a few turns of the key click right, or if the opposition – with its contours slippery and hazy – can do a reset, or better still if the government itself – uncharacteristically – can turn more respectful of constitutional sensibilities, by force of circumstance, if nothing else?

But what if what we see turns out in reality to be something worse than just a quickened backslide of the democracy path? Then what do we call it and what will it be, exactly? And will democracy be prone to recovery after such a churn? These questions come to mind in looking at the present year and seeing it as a part of the broader package of policies, ideas and actions seen in the time of Prime Minister N.D. Modi in the last ten years.

What should we as a nation make of the recent happenings in parliament when recently the 'One Nation One Election' (ONOE) bills were introduced (among other egregious developments), and of the crucial change in the election law effected late last year, as well as the change made in election-related rules only a few days ago? These render the machinery of state and national polls captive in the hands of the Union government – the Modi regime – arguably the most regressive and the most repressive India has known. In the backdrop of changes to the election law and rules, the ONOE mantra, pushed by the PM for several years, becomes a death sentence for parliamentary democracy as we know it, no less.

Its import is likely to be felt way beyond just hurting the federal structure of the constitution that many non-BJP parties fear. The ONOE scheme has now grown well beyond the embryo stage and has been sent to a joint parliamentary committee for discussion before it is brought to the House for discussion and passing, if the government sees fit.

Since late last year, when the selection of the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners was left solely in the government's hand under the changed law, in disregard of the hallowed principle that the election authority must be an independent entity to ensure fair play in a democracy, the government – or the ruling party – openly controls the play area at election time, subordinating the voting public to its will.

In the event, the government's opponents may win only when permitted to do so. Sometimes for tactical reasons, in order not to arouse widespread disbelief with the results or suspicion of wrong-doing, this becomes a necessity. In fact, this permits the government to claim that the opposition has an equal chance since it does win seats and sometimes even state majorities.

This is what we have seen in the various state elections in the past year. In the Lok Sabha polls earlier this year, the ruling party could not prevail as extensively as it may

have liked because of the angry mood of the voters on the ground in several states. Thus, official intervention to favour the ruling party couldn't succeed wholesale, causing the Modi-commanded BJP to lose its majority in parliament. Uttar Pradesh was a striking example in this regard. But people's will is unlikely to be exercised with such vehemence, generally.

New gimmicks, new rules
To the already skewed picture in favour of the government on the law side, a new rule was added last week. The amended rule does not permit citizens (voters) to examine video footage of the polling station and the EVM machine at work even when corruption and foul play are alleged or suspected.

Most recently, this played out after the recent Haryana assembly election, although the new rule on disallowing access to video footage had not been passed then and is likely to have been in the works. When the poll results in many areas appeared illogical, even outlandish, and citizens asked to be shown the video documentation, the poll authorities stonewalled with cryptic answers.

Now the option of asking to see the video footage has been barred. This means, in effect, voters must accept with grace the meal the EC serves them; they must not complain it was unfit for human consumption.

It is appropriate to recall that earlier this year, weeks before the Lok Sabha election, the regime had frozen all bank accounts of the Congress, the main opposition party, doubtless with a view to being the only national player in the field by unfairly removing the main rival from the arena.

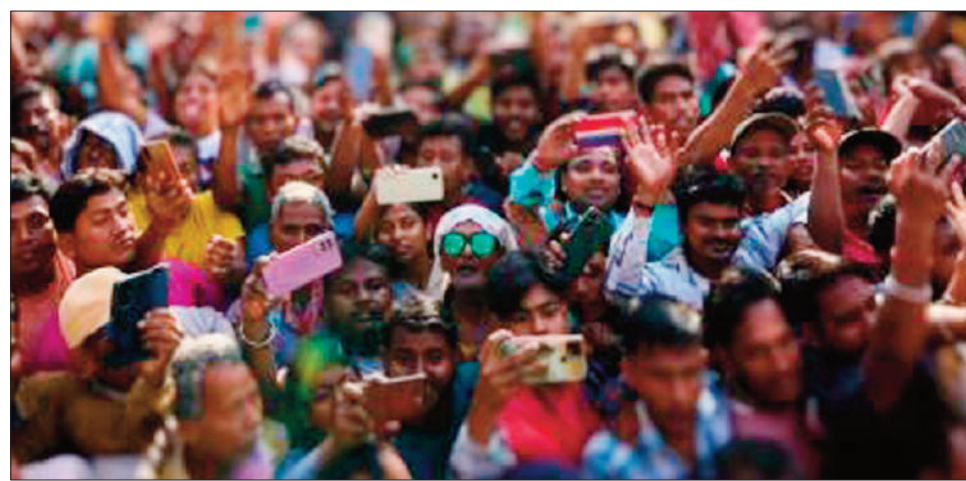
With the election process being brought comprehensively in the grip of the government through change of legislation and rules, the implementation of the ONOE scheme, if it goes through in parliament, would facilitate an easy capture of state power in its entirety by a rogue party through the election process at the national level and in the states. And this would be legitimate!

Is India still a republic?

This is startling, coming 75 years after the inauguration of the republic in India following a non-violent, decades-long, peaceful, mass struggle and insurrection led by a prophet-like fakir. And the one who means to upend the republic is already being recognised, even in sympathetic circles, as the master of legerdemain and worshipper at the altar of the big capital.

In some recent discussion in the West in relation to the burgeoning of right-wing regimes or the enhanced acceptability of right-wing parties in Europe, and the return of President Donald Trump in America, the expression "neo-authoritarianism" is heard, and the same tends to get extended to the current regimes in Türkiye and India.

In general, what this probably suggests is that demagogues have got to the centre of things by making tall, undeliverable promises on the economic side or exploiting worsening



economic conditions to divert political agendas in atavistic directions – religion, race and the like – and concocting the hateful "other" to attack without remorse. Behind the backs of people is conducted the drive toward a hard right market agenda dominated by big capital – although this is couched in populist vocabulary – easily understood by the hard-worked citizen who is looking for a short-cut relief from everyday misery.

For something similar, the leading Indian Marxist political economist Prabhat Patnaik prefers the term "neo-fascist". This is partly based on the patterns seen in the German experience but also relies on his understanding of the evils of "neo-liberal" market agendas being pursued internationally and dutifully emulated in India – leading to the acceleration of "nutritional poverty", to take an example that is close to the bone.

Is that the appropriate vocabulary for India? The question appears fair, but until we hit upon the appropriate linguistic paradigm for Bharat that takes into account her diversities and geographical spread and contested but syncretic past, "neo-authoritarianism" and "neo-fascism" could be inexact substitute expressions but reasonable working guides, nevertheless.

Call for a reckoning

Looking at history, the first thing to remember is that false messiahs do not deliver. They usually lead their people to destruction, as Hitler did. Trump in his first term didn't do much to relieve economic anxieties but has still bounced back after a gap. This suggests that the state of society, based on atavism primarily, permits failed gods to return. Patnaik notes this but this flexibility phenomenon may not have a theoretical underpinning.

Modi is not dissimilar to Trump. This populist demagogue has indeed led the ordinary Indian to pauperisation step by step but finds a way to return to power riding on the back of religion-based propaganda – and also on account of the absence of a viable opposition. The invocations to imaginary religious angst helps.

The fraudulent promises to build the stairway to heaven still fetch votes though people

are slowly catching on. But because he can see the hurdles rising, Modi thinks up schemes that may lead to dictatorship but appear to be within the bounds of permissible constitutional change. This keeps the intellectual class gabbing and splitting hairs.

The Modi dispensation has worsened economic hardships. The national economy has shrunk. Private investment is badly down because there is a falling effective demand from people getting poorer, joblessness has never been higher, and the prices of essentials remain stubbornly high over stretched periods. Average nutritional levels have contracted.

The government has dropped collecting poverty-related data. While wages have stagnated even for the professional classes, to say nothing of those down the ladder, big business profits have soared as if on a cryogenic charge. This is because the wage component of production costs is drastically down. But how is such precarity to be politically managed and exploited for votes?

The question is obvious and in Modi's India, so is the answer – by digging up every mosque in sight to look for a temple in order to raise the communal temperature which is a kind of preparation for religious war. Anyone who differs is dubbed "anti-national" or "anti-Hindu".

The politics in parliament and the state legislatures controlled by Modi's party is characterised by metaphorically beating up the opposition through wild mis-readings of past or present events, or just plain lies. The by-and-large controlled media dutifully magnifies the government's message, always seeking to put the opposition on trial and finding virtues in the government's vilest acts.

The just ended session of parliament, which notionally marked 75 years of the adoption of India's constitution, with a discussion in both Houses, was converted by the prime minister himself into a sorry spectacle as he launched an unprovoked, partisan, low-grade and un-informed attack on the main opposition party, the Congress, as if he is frightened by its very shadow.

A lurking ghost of the Congress' most prominent leaders, starting with the first

Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, seems always around to haunt Modi and ready to ambush him, so often that he seeks to berate India's stalwart first leader, practically every single day. It is not clear why, though one guess is that Nehru's undisputed great stature as an anti-colonial fighter, and the part he played on the world stage, gives Modi a dreadful complex.

Perhaps, more importantly, Modi's strong aversion to Nehru is rooted in the fact that in the aftermath of the Partition riots and the communal bloodletting which accompanied it, the first prime minister took a forceful stand and beat back the gathering forces of religious fanaticism and crypto-fascism which had attempted to overwhelm the nascent democratic order by force. He did so practically single-handed as Mahatma Gandhi was gone, assassinated by the same forces.

Seven decades on, the memory of that ideological defeat and failure to mount an ideological counter-narrative to the freedom struggle, evidently continues to rankle and torment the likes of Modi to such a degree that the prime minister was not done, during the recently concluded session of parliament, until he had denounced on Twitter (now X) "the rotten Congress ecosystem" to his heart's content.

Clearly, it is the all-embracing credo of the Congress – of not promoting the cause of any one section of society – which makes Modi nervous. The party itself is now a pale shadow of what it was in its glory days. Even so, Modi's ire is now invariably turned on Nehru's great-grandson, Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha.

This is because Gandhi appears to carry the genetic chip – to borrow from electronics – of his famous ancestor in his passion to stand up to religio-nationalist mischief and bullying that is attempting to take over the system, seemingly through chopping and changing the constitution (which is permitted) but in a way that nullifies the republic's founding document itself. That appears to be the game currently underfoot as we seek to pass into the new year.

But what of politics in the year 2025? It needs to be thought of anew, based on going back to the people, and not on cookie-cutter consultations or to advance leaders' ambitions. The INDIA bloc had a purpose. Time may have come to look beyond it in a new way.

Such is the repression, or at the very least, expressed antagonism against those who are not outright regime supporters, that nothing less than a united front of social forces – and not merely of opposition parties – may need to be on the active agenda.

Opposition parties as well as social and professional organisations and voluntary agencies have a role in this effort. The mobilisation needs to be for people's livelihood demands, against repression, and against the communal fire, not necessarily against specific politicians or parties. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Improving nuclear security: The risk of counterfeits

By: Shrivishtha Ajavkumar

India's nuclear establishment has always preferred to function behind a thick veil. While its network of associations is well-known, the establishment's inner workings are often less transparent. The opaqueness is attributed to protecting national security. However, the same opaqueness does have a major drawback. The lack of transparency in supply chains, vendor processes, and certifications can lead to an increase in counterfeit goods that may hamper the function of such facilities. Often dubbed Counterfeit or Fraudulent Substitution Items (CFSIs), these goods pose a significant threat to the safety of nuclear systems, structures, components and devices. Whether their presence is due to negligence from archaic certification systems or malicious infiltration, the consequences can be catastrophic.

So far, India has not experienced any case attributed to CFSIs in the nuclear supply chain. However, there have been other cases from which India has learnt. In 2020, India witnessed a blast in the Boiling Water Reactors (BWRs) of its oldest nuclear power plant, the Tarapur Atomic Power Station (TAPS). This blast was attributed to cracks in the BWR that were installed in 1969. The age of the reactors, alongside the lack of upkeep, contributed to the incident. The new materials, which are to be sourced from Italy, have still not been received, so the TAPS functioning is still on hold. This incident has highlighted not only the need for better maintenance but also the need to increase indigenous reliance and ensure the longevity of materials in the nuclear supply chain.

Globally, too, there have been cases highlighting a need for greater stringency in monitoring and deterring CFSIs, many of which have been listed by Hobbs et al. in their report on CFSIs. Between 2006 and 2007, the United States (US) government recalled counterfeit switch breakers in their nuclear supply chain on three occasions. While nothing happened, many counterfeit goods being produced highlighted the need to upgrade policies addressing CFSIs.

Indian regulation and room for improvement
India's approach to monitoring and regulating the nuclear supply chain is well-woven. One of the central bodies here is the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB). The AERB, by employing safety codes on nuclear power plants, ensures quality and safety from manufacturing to installation. The AERB also interacts with other government bodies, like the Bureau of Industry Standards (BIS), to ensure quality assurance. Another essential government body is the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), which plays a crucial role in overseeing the prevention of CFSIs. Its main power in overseeing and monitoring nuclear power plants and facilities is to ensure that they adhere to safety standards, supported by rules, guidelines, and standards to ensure that nuclear materials, systems, and components meet the highest quality requirements.

Despite the impact made by these government organisations, the policies overseeing nuclear supply chain governance still have some gaps and challenges. One such challenge is the dependence on international trade. While India is interested in becoming indigenous for its manufacturing and production of critical goods, the reliance on global supply chains cannot be disconnected overnight. Components and materials sourced from overseas could be vulnerable to substandard manufacturing or counterfeit practices. Ensuring the authenticity of imported parts is difficult, especially when they pass through multiple vendors and intermediaries. This highlights the second significant gap, the lack of certifications and regular audits. While the above government bodies offer contracts to reliable bidders, the lack of supplier audits, third-party audits, and regular certification processes decreases the reliability of materials sourced and assurances of the material's longevity. Further,



dependence on imports, and ensuring that defence acquisitions are made cost-effectively and promptly, so such a shift is difficult to make in the short term. The NPCIL can include the certification of imported materials that require regular audits and recertifications. Detection and

**** Databasing:** Employing non-destructive testing (NDT) methods such as X-ray inspection, ultrasonic testing, and advanced chemical analysis, as already recommended by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), can help identify compromised parts before they are integrated into critical systems. It may also help to establish a minimum threat level required to report an incident to collaborating organisations.

**** Cybersecurity:** Finally, cybersecurity is imperative not only for supply chain management but also for nuclear facilities' security. Post the Kudankulam incident, India has established measures to certify different suppliers and localise the supply chain, especially through the National Critical Infrastructure Information Protection Centre (NCIIP) and guidelines under the AERB. However, to make such guidelines under the NPCIL policies, it is important to make them independent as well. Thus, a third-party certified security organisation may be included to ensure that the vendor's data, storage information, and material databases are kept secure.

**** Information Transparency:** Global collaboration, while being something India shies away from in areas of national security, is critical in nuclear supply chains. India must establish a minimum threat and risk level that will require communicating with the IAEA and allied countries in case of the injection of CFSIs in nuclear facilities. India has already shown an inkling in this direction by collaborating with the US under the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA).

**** Public-Private Interactions:** The nuclear establishment must work closely with not only regulatory agencies but also private sector suppliers and industry stakeholders to share information on known counterfeit parts or malicious actors. Further, the focus on indigenous production by the DAP could help encourage co-operation between the Indian government, defence contractors, and industry bodies, which the government has opened up through programs like the Innovation for Defence Excellence (iDEX).

The global defence industry is not immune to the risks of counterfeit products, and India's defence procurement system must evolve to address this vulnerability. While the DAP has been vital for ensuring fair and transparent procurement practices, it lacks specific provisions to prevent counterfeit items from entering the nuclear supply chain. India would benefit from expanding its approach to CFSIs and adopting guidelines akin to the DAP, including enforceable guidelines on certification, reporting methods, and collaboration, to ease counterfeit detection and attribution. (Courtesy: ORF)

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ONOP: A bold reform or a political gamble?

By: Kalyani Shankar

The introduction of a controversial bill, 'One Nation One Poll,' has created more controversy than acceptance. The BJP has been talking about it but introduced it, which has been sent 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 got the revocation of 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. They include 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 they 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 JD (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. The One Nation One poll has been one of the poll promises of the BJP. Some core issues have already been addressed, such as the revocation of Article 370 and the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

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 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. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Russia arrests 4 suspects accused of plotting to kill top military officers on Ukraine's orders

MOSCOW, Dec 26: Russia's top security agency said Thursday that it has arrested several suspects accused of involvement in an alleged Ukrainian plot to assassinate senior military officers, an announcement that follows the killing of a top Russian general last week.

The Federal Security Service, a top KGB successor known under its Russian acronym FSB, said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies that it had arrested four Russians accused of making preparations to kill senior Defence Ministry officials.

The FSB said that the suspected organisers of the attacks were planning to kill one of the senior officers using a remotely controlled car bomb. It added that another top military official was to be assassinated by an explosive device hidden in an envelope. The agency didn't name the military officers



who were targeted in the alleged plot.

The FSB released a video showing the arrest and interrogation of the suspects, who weren't named.

The statement follows the death

of Lt Gen Igor Kirillov who was killed on December 17 by a bomb hidden on an electric scooter parked outside his apartment building as he left for his office. Kirillov's assistant also died in the

brazen attack that was claimed by Ukraine and brought the conflict once again to the streets of the Russian capital.

The FSB has arrested a suspect, a citizen of the Central Asian nation of Uzbekistan, and claimed that he had been recruited by Ukrainian special services.

Kirillov, 54, was the chief of Russia's Radiation, Biological and Chemical Protection Forces. These special troops are tasked with protecting the military from the enemy's use of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and ensuring operations in a contaminated environment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin described Kirillov's killing as a "major blunder" by Russia's security agencies, noting they should learn from it and improve their efficiency. (AP)

Israeli strike kills 5 Palestinian journalists in Gaza, officials say

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), Dec 26: An Israeli strike killed five Palestinian journalists outside a hospital in the Gaza Strip overnight, the Health Ministry said early Thursday. The Israeli military said it had targeted a group of militants.

The strike hit a car outside the Al-Awda Hospital in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in the central part of the territory. The journalists were working for the local Quds News Network, which also reported the strike. The military said it targeted a group of fighters from Islamic Jihad, a militant group allied with Hamas, whose October 7, 2023 attack into southern Israel ignited the war.

The Committee to Protect Journalists says over 130 Palestinian reporters have been killed since the start of the war. Israel has not allowed foreign reporters to enter Gaza except on military embeds.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed across the border in a surprise attack on nearby army bases and farming communities. They killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. (AP)

Author Bapsi Sidhwa passes away at 86 in US

HOUSTON/ISLAMABAD, Dec 26: Celebrated Pakistan-born novelist and pioneer of South Asian literature Bapsi Sidhwa, best known for her iconic novel *Ice Candy Man*, passed away on Wednesday at the age of 86 in Houston, US, her family confirmed.

Her brother, Feroze Bhandara, announced that memorial ceremonies would be held over three days, followed by her last rites in Houston.

She is survived by her books and her three children: Mohur, Koko, and Parizad.

Known for her poignant writings, she made an impact on global literature. Her works are rich in historical and cultural context, which earned her a place among the most celebrated authors of her time.

According to Pakistani newspaper Dawn, her death marks a profound loss for the world of literature in Pakistan, neighbouring India and the world Zoroastrian community.

Born on August 11, 1938, in Karachi to a prominent Parsi family, Sidhwa moved to Lahore shortly after her birth, where she spent much of her life. She contracted polio at the age of two, a challenge that shaped her resilience and outlook on life. Dawn added.

Sidhwa graduated from Lahore's Kinnaird College in 1957 and began her career as a writer after her marriage and subsequent return to Pakistan.

She is regarded as one of Pakistan's most influential writers, with her works gaining global acclaim for their evocative depictions of history and culture.

Her novels, including *The Crow Eaters* (1978), *The Bride* (1982), *An American Brat* (1993), and *City of Sin and Splendour: Writings on Lahore* (2006), vividly portray the cultural and historical fabric of South Asia.

Sidhwa's literary debut, *The Crow Eaters*, also

earned her widespread recognition for its portrayal of Parsi life and history.

Her novel *Ice Candy Man* — later adapted into the critically acclaimed film *Earth* by Indian-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta — captured the horrors of the 1947 partition, a period Sidhwa personally witnessed as a child.

The story, featuring a polio-stricken young girl observing the chaos, mirrors Sidhwa's own childhood experiences. The novel was included in the BBC's list of 100 most influential novels.

She also penned *Water: A Novel* (2006), which served as the foundation for Mehta's Academy Award-nominated film *Water* (2005).

Her contributions to literature were recognised with Pakistan's prestigious Sitara-e-Imtiaz.

A documentary about her life, *Bapsi: Silences of My Life*, was released in October 2022 by the Citizens Archive of Pakistan. It offers a glimpse into her journey as a writer and her experiences during the partition of India, which profoundly shaped her literary vision.

The Bapsi Sidhwa Literary Prize, under the sponsorship of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston and Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) Information Research Education System, was also set up to honour her legacy as the first recognized Zoroastrian writer with an international reputation. Tributes poured in for the author from across the world.

The FEZANA announced on Instagram the "passing away of one of the greatest authors of our times Bapsi Sidhwa" and said, "Her literary work spanning decades, captured a time and space and made it come alive across generations." (PTI)



South Korean opposition submits motion to impeach the country's acting president as strife deepens

SEOUL, Dec 26: South Korea's main opposition party submitted a motion on Thursday to impeach the country's acting leader over his reluctance to fill three Constitutional Court vacancies ahead of the court's review of rebellion charges against impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol stemming from his short-lived martial law decree on Dec 3.

The court appointments have stalled amid an intensifying dispute between the liberal opposition and Yoon's conservative party, and the potential impeachment of Prime Minister Han Duck-soo may deepen the political paralysis that has halted high-level diplomacy and rattled financial markets.

The opposition-controlled National Assembly also passed motions calling for the appointment of three Constitutional Court justices as the court prepares to start deliberations on whether to dismiss or reinstate Yoon. The vote came shortly after Han reiterated in a televised statement that he wouldn't appoint the justices without bipartisan consent.

National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik urged Han to swiftly appoint the justices, saying that his calls for bipartisan consent essentially amounted to a refusal and "infringes on the National Assembly's right to select Constitutional Court justices."

Yoon's People Power Party, whose members mostly boycotted the National Assembly vote, argued that Han shouldn't exercise presidential authority to appoint the proposed justices while Yoon has yet to be formally removed from office.

The main opposition Democratic Party has accused the conservatives of undermining the court process to save Yoon's presidency, and its motion to impeach Han could go to a floor vote as early as Friday. The Democrats' floor leader, Park Chan-dae, said Han's comments showed "he lacks both the qualifications to serve as the acting leader and the will to uphold the Constitution."

Yoon's presidential powers were suspended after the National Assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14 over an attempted power grab that lasted only hours but has triggered weeks of political turmoil that has shaken one of Asia's most robust democracies.

To formally end Yoon's presidency, at least six justices on the nine-member Constitutional Court must vote in favour. Three seats remain vacant following retirements and a full bench could make conviction more likely.

The court, which is to hold a pretrial hearing in



Yoon's case on Friday, has said it believes the acting president can exercise the right to appoint justices.

Three of the court's nine justices are directly appointed by the president. Three are nominated by the head of the Supreme Court and three by the National Assembly, and they are then formally appointed by the president in what is widely considered a procedural matter.

The three seats that are currently open are to be nominated by lawmakers. South Korea's Constitution states that the National Assembly "selects" three spots on the court rather than recommends, suggesting that the presidential appointments for these spots are a formality rather than a substantive authority, according to some legal experts.

"The consistent spirit reflected in our Constitution and laws is that an acting president should focus on maintaining stability in governance to help the country overcome crisis while refraining from exercising significant powers exclusive to the president, including appointments to constitutional institutions," Han said. "I will withhold the appointment of Constitutional Court justices until the ruling and opposition parties submit an agreed-upon proposal."

Han has also clashed with the Democrats over his vetoes of bills calling for independent investigations of Yoon and corruption allegations involving his wife, Kim Keon Hee.

If Han is impeached, Choi Sang-mok, the country's deputy prime minister and finance minister, is next in line. (AP)

Sri Lanka marks two decades of Tsunami with national day of remembrance

COLOMBO, Dec 26: With a two minutes silence observed nationally, Sri Lanka on Thursday marked the 20th anniversary of the South Asian Tsunami that had killed over 30,000 in the island nation.

Sri Lanka marks December 26 as the 'National Safety Day' and the main memorial ceremony was held at Peraliyee, about 90 km from Colombo in the southern province, where over 3,000 people died in the world's worst train tragedy caused due to Tsunami. The 9.1 magnitude earthquake induced Tsunami was first felt in the island's eastern coast before moving south resulting in devastation beyond belief.

At 9.25 am on December 26, 2004, the train from Colombo to the southern town of Matara was hit by the raging Tsunami waves and within no time, the train and its tracks became a mangled heap killing all on board. Some villagers who had got onto the train thinking they would be safe too perished.

"This was the world's biggest train tragedy with over 3,000 dying," said Paraliye Wimala, who heads the local Buddhist temple and is now in-charge of the board that maintains the monument to commemorate the victims.

The Reverend Wimala said over 3,000 Tsunami victims from the village had been buried in the three mass graves located on either side of the monument.



He said the need to preserve the grave site was important as two of the graves have already been covered with mangroves and shrubs.

At 9.25 am on Thursday, the train came to a halt at the same place where it was hit with the Tsunami waves 20 years ago. Relatives of some of the victims were seen carrying flowers to pay tribute at the nearby monument.

Twenty years on, Peraliyee is a site for many museums and abandoned plots of land as their owners disappeared without a trace.

"I don't want to talk about it - it hurts so much even after 20 years," Thushanthi Jayani, who lost her father-in-law and her six year old niece in the tragedy, said.

The powerful undersea megathrust earthquake, which registered a magnitude of 9.1, struck off the coast of Sumatra Island, Indonesia on December 26, 2004 prompting a series of turbulent Tsunami waves that ravaged the coasts of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, including Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Thailand, Maldives, and Myanmar. (PTI)

May 9 riots: Pak military courts sentenced another 60 civilians to prison terms ranging from 2 to 10 years

ISLAMABAD, Dec 26: Pakistan's military courts have convicted and sentenced another 60 civilians to prison terms ranging from two to 10 years for their involvement in attacks on army installations during violence on May 9 last year, the army said on Thursday.

The announcement by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) - the media wing of the military - came a week after the army announced the conviction of 25 individuals for involvement in attacks on military facilities on May 9, 2023, when supporters of Imran Khan resorted to vandalism and violence during a protest against his arrest.

"Sequel to the announcement of the May 9 punishments in light of the Supreme Court's decision, the Field General Court Martial has promulgated the pun-

ishments to the following remaining 60 culprits after examining all evidence, ensuring the provision of all legal rights to the convicts, completion of due process and the appropriate legal proceedings," the army said.

Top on the list of new convicts is Imran Khan's nephew Hassan Khan Niazi, who was awarded 10 years of rigorous imprisonment for his involvement in the attack on the Jinnah House residence of Lahore Corps commander.

The army also said that with the latest verdict, the trial of May 9 accused under military custody, "has hereby been concluded under the relevant laws".

"All convicts retain the right to appeal and other legal recourses, as guaranteed by the Constitution and law," it said. (PTI)

Massive fire breaks out at Bangladesh Secretariat, official documents damaged

DHAKA, Dec 26: A massive fire broke out at a major building of the Bangladesh Secretariat in Dhaka on Thursday, damaging official documents that prompted authorities to form a high-powered investigation committee amid suspicions that it could be an act of sabotage.

The fire broke out in Building 7 of the Bangladesh Secretariat and it was brought under control after nearly six hours of firefighting efforts. (PTI)

Azerbaijan observes day of mourning for air crash victims as speculation mount about its cause

BAKU, Dec 26: Azerbaijan on Thursday observed a nationwide day of mourning for the victims of the air crash that killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured as speculation mounted about a possible cause of the crash that remained unknown.

Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 was en route from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus on Wednesday when it was diverted for reasons yet unclear and crashed while making an attempt to land in Aktau in Kazakhstan after flying east across the Caspian Sea.

The plane went down about 3 kilometers (around 2 miles) from Aktau. Cellphone 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.

On Thursday, national flags were lowered across Azerbaijan, traffic across the country stopped at noon, and signals were sounded from ships and trains as the country observed a nationwide moment of silence.

Speaking at a news conference Wednesday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that it was too soon to speculate on the reasons behind the crash, but said that the weather had forced the plane to change from its planned course.

"The information provided to me is that the plane changed its course between Baku and Grozny due to worsening weather conditions and headed to Aktau airport, where it crashed upon landing," he said.

Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said that preliminary information indicated that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board.

According to Kazakh officials, those aboard the plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhs and three Kyrgyzstan nationals.



As the official crash investigation started, theories abounded about a possible cause, with some commentators alleging that holes seen in the plane's tail section possibly indicate that it could have come under fire from Russian air defense systems fending off a Ukrainian drone attack.

Ukrainian drones had previously attacked Grozny, the provincial capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, and other regions in the country's North Caucasus. Some Russian media claimed that another drone attack on Chechnya happened on Wednesday, although it wasn't officially confirmed.

Osprey Flight Solutions, an aviation security firm based in the United Kingdom, warned its clients that the "Azerbaijan Airlines flight was likely shot down by a Russian military air-defense system." Osprey provides analysis for carriers still flying into Russia after Western airlines halted their flights during the war.

Osprey CEO Andrew Nicholson said that the company had issued more than 200 alerts regarding drone attacks and air defense systems in Russia during the war.

"This incident is a stark reminder of why we do what we do," Nicholson wrote online. "It is painful to know that despite our efforts, lives were lost in a way that could have been avoided." (AP)

Clashes between Islamists now in power in Syria and Assad's supporters kill 6 fighters

DAMASCUS, Dec 26: Clashes between Islamists who took over Syria and supporters of ousted President Bashar Assad's government killed six Islamic fighters on Wednesday and wounded others, according to a British-based war monitor.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the fighters were killed while trying to arrest a former official in Assad's government, accused of issuing execution orders and arbitrary rulings against thousands of prisoners. The fighters were from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, which led the stunning offensive that toppled Assad earlier this month.

Syria's transition has been surprisingly smooth but it's only been a few weeks since Assad fled the country and his administration and forces melted away. The insurgents who ousted Assad are rooted in fundamentalist Islamist ideology, and though they have vowed to create a pluralist system, it isn't clear how or whether they plan to share power.

Since Assad's fall, dozens of Syrians have been killed in acts of revenge, according to activists and monitors, the vast majority of them from the minority Alawite community, an offshoot of Shiite Islam that Assad belongs to.



In the capital, Damascus, Alawite protesters scuffled with Sunni counter-protesters and gunshots were heard. The Associated Press could not confirm details of the shooting.

Alawite protests also took place along the coast of Syria, in the city of Homs and the Hama countryside. Some called for the release of soldiers from the former Syrian army now imprisoned by the HTS. At least one protestor was killed and five were wounded in Homs by HTS forces suppressing the demonstration, said the Syrian Observatory. In response to the protests, HTS imposed a curfew from 6 pm until 8 am.

The Alawite protests were ap-

parently in part sparked by an on-line video showing the burning of an Alawite shrine. The interim authorities insisted the video was old and not a recent incident.

Sectarian violence has erupted in bursts since Assad's ouster but nothing close to the level feared after nearly 14 years of civil war that killed an estimated half-million people. The war fractured Syria, creating millions of refugees and displacing tens of thousands throughout the country.

This week, some Syrians who were forcibly displaced, started trickling home, trying to rebuild their lives. Shocked by the devastation, many found that little remains of their houses.

Survivor of worst gang attack on Haitian journalists says colleagues were cut down by bullets

PORT-AU-PRINCE (HAITI), Dec 26: A survivor of the worst gang attack on Haitian journalists in recent memory described Wednesday seeing colleagues cut down by bullets and reporters with head and chest wounds going an hour or more without help.

Two reporters and one police officer died in Tuesday's attack at the reopening of Port-au-Prince's biggest public hospital. Seven journalists covering the event were wounded.

"Some were hit in the chest," photographer Jean Fregens Regala recalled. "Some of the journalists had part of their face destroyed, some were shot in the mouth, or the head."

Members of the Viv Ansanm coalition of street gangs, which has taken control of much of Port-au-Prince, had surrounded the hospital and opened fire through a metal gate. The gangs later said they were angry the government had announced the re-opening of the hospital without their permission.

Video from inside at the time of the attack shows a metal gate outside the hospital buckling under a hail of gunfire, as reporters scrambled to try to get inside the building. (AP)

In the northwestern Idlib region, residents were repairing shops and sealing damaged windows on Tuesday, trying to bring back a sense of normalcy.

The city of Idlib and much of the surrounding province has for years been under control of the HTS, led by Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, once aligned with al-Qaida, but has been the scene of relentless attacks by the government forces.

Hajjah Zakia Daemessaid, who was forcibly displaced during the war, said coming back to her house in the Idlib countryside was bitter-sweet.

"My husband and I spent 43 years of hard work saving money to build our home, only to find that all of it has gone to waste," said the 62-year-old. In the dusty neighborhoods, cars drove by with luggage strapped on top. People stood idly on the streets or sat in empty coffee shops.

In Damascus, Syria's new authorities raided warehouses on Wednesday, confiscating drugs such as Captagon and cannabis, used by Assad's forces. A million Captagon pills and hundreds of kilograms (pounds) of cannabis were set ablaze, the interim authorities said. (AP)

Asked Centre to allow maximum use of state machinery for border area management: CM Biren



IMPHAL, Dec 26: The Manipur government has requested the Centre to allow maximum use of state machinery in the management of border areas, state chief minister N Biren Singh said during a visit to Manipur Police Training Centre at Pangei in Imphal East district on Thursday.

Asked about reports that the Centre has allowed entry of Myanmar within 10 km of the state as an interim arrangement, Singh said, "Right now there is no communication from the Centre."

Singh further added, "I can assure you that entry will be done through international norms of issuing visa and passport after going through formalities with the neighbouring country. The state government is asking the Centre to employ state machinery for the management of border areas." (PTI)

New police recruits will undergo specialised training to handle law and order situation: Manipur CM

'Requested recruits' parents not to approach ministers and MLAs for transfers'

IMPHAL, Dec 26: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Thursday said the newly recruited personnel of the 10th and 11th India Reserve Battalion (IRB), who recently concluded training in Assam, would undergo specialised exercise so that they can be deployed for highway protection and handling the law and order situation.

During a visit to Manipur Police Training Centre at Pangei in Imphal East district, the CM said the recruits would undergo specialised training at this centre before being deployed across the state.

"They will undergo specialised training at Pangei where they will be taught how to handle law and order situation. If the personnel are deployed in various police stations now, their morale may be down. So, we decided to keep them at one place and use their services wherever and whenever needed," the CM said.

"Some of them will be used for highway protection, while others



will be used to tackle law and order situation," Singh added.

Singh also said many of the police personnel will undergo refresher courses, and arrangements for procuring new gear for mob control have been made.

The CM said construction and

maintenance work at the battalion headquarters of 10th and 11th IRB at Nungba and Saivom are also going on currently, he said.

"Police are the backbone of society and cannot be demoralised. Many of them will undergo refresher courses to improve their

physical fitness and mob control with full gear. Their identity needs to be protected also," Singh added.

Singh also requested recruits' parents not to approach ministers and MLAs for transfers and allow them to serve the state and nation.

"Today, I visited the Manipur Police Training Centre at Pangei to inspect the newly constructed barracks, which will soon be utilised for training purposes. Given the current law and order situation in the state, the newly recruited constables will undergo specialised training. This step is essential to enhance the strength and readiness of our police force to ensure safety and security across Manipur," he posted on X.

"We are committed to equipping our police personnel with the best facilities and training to meet any challenges," Singh said.

He also said houses are being made for internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are staying in schools and colleges. (PTI)

Two NSCN(IM) cadres nabbed in joint operation in Arunachal Pradesh



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Dec 26: In a joint operation, two NSCN (IM) cadres were apprehended from Rima area in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang district on Thursday.

The cadres have been identified as SS Lt. Roney Rai alias Tutu (31), resident of Jairampur, Changlang and SS Sgt Major Anong Singpho (30), resident of Pengri, Tinsukia.

One .32 pistol with six rounds and one Nagamese sickle (Dah), one wallet, PAN card, tecno mobile and SIM card seized from their possession. Following specific intelligence inputs about the presence of NSCN (IM) cadres involved in extortion activities targeting local

businessmen and shopkeepers, a joint operation was launched nabbing two NSCN(IM) cadres.

The joint operation was launched by 11 PARA (SF), 10 Assam Rifles and Changlang police after getting specific information regarding the presence of the NSCN(IM) cadres.

Sources said NSCN has been carrying extortion activities in the Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

"Most of the businessmen in the TLC region of Arunachal Pradesh have to pay taxes to the insurgent groups in fear of their lives they have to pay the money to the groups," said a source.

Education and purity of thought vital for society: Tripura CM

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 26: Chief Minister Manik Saha today emphasized the importance of working for the welfare of people by removing mental impurities and fostering purity through education.

"The benefit of practicing human religion lies in adopting a social way of thinking while refraining from unrighteous deeds and anti-social thoughts. We must work for people by eliminating the impurities of the mind through true education and filling the mind with purity," he said.

Saha said at a winter clothes distribution program organized at Sri Sri Mahanang Angan Ashram in Banamalipur, Agartala, on Thursday.

Speaking at the event, the Chief Minister said, "I have visited Mahanang Angan Ashram before. We have been aware of this ashram for a long time. The various social works initiated by the ashram serve as an example for society. Our identity is defined by our work. The benefit of practicing human religion comes only when we adopt a social mindset while staying away from unrighteous and anti-social thoughts. We need to work for the people by purifying our minds through education.

Today, winter clothes are being distributed here. The ashram is also involved in various social activities, including blood donation. The thoughts, ideas, and ideals of Mahanambhat Brahmachari should be propagated in society."

The chief minister highlighted that Mahanambhat Brahmachari was the second Indian after

Swami Vivekananda to deliver a remarkable speech at the World Religions Congress.

He was invited to various forums for his extraordinary perspective on Sanatan Dharma.

Agartala Municipal Corporation Mayor and MLA Dipak Majumdar, Ward No. 20 Corporator Ratna Dutta, and other distinguished guests attended the event.

On this occasion, the chief minister and other guests distributed winter clothes to more than a hundred needy individuals.

Later the same day, chief minister Manik Saha, accompanied by Agartala Municipal Corporation Mayor Deepak Majumdar, inspected the ongoing renovation work at the Sundari Kali Mandir in the capital's Kansaripati area.

He also provided necessary instructions to the concerned authorities regarding the progress of the work.

Haobam's first book came in 1976 as a collection of Manipuri short stories titled 'Malaba Diary'

No restriction on freedom of expression in Manipur except some parts: Writer Haobam Satyabati Devi

NEW DELHI, Dec 26:

Manipuri writer Haobam Satyabati Devi has said that there is no restriction on freedom of expression except in some parts of the state due to the Meitei-Kuki conflict.

The author, who was recently selected for the Sahitya Akademi Award for her work "Myru Bora Nungshi Shirol", said that the state is facing "a challenging time" with the ongoing conflict between the two communities.

"This is a very unfortunate and challenging time for the local people and especially the writers, the internet is banned every now and then. People are forced to stay locked in their homes. We cannot go to other areas except the valley," Haobam told PTI Bhasha in a phone interaction.

More than 250 people have been killed in ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities in the state since May last year.

Haobam noted that the central and the state governments are working to restore peace and hoped that "normalcy will be restored in the state very soon".



Born on April 11, 1952, Haobam's first book came in 1976 as a collection of Manipuri short stories titled "Malaba Diary". Her first novel "Sakhangdabi" was published in 1984. Haobam's works include "Pokanapham", "Igi Nungapi Macha", "Mahakutubu", and "Waromgadara".

The writer, who has been associated with a

number of creative forums including Manipur Sahitya Parishad, The Cultural Forum Manipur, Writers Forum Imphal as a member, said that there is "almost no translation of Hindi literature into Manipuri".

"Manipuri society is not very familiar with Hindi literature or literature of other Indian languages. There is still a lot of work to be done in this field and said that to connect different parts of the country with each other, special focus will have to be given on the translation of literary works in regional languages," the 72-year-old said. Haobam, a teacher and founder member of Manipur's first women's organisation 'Manipuri Chhanura Lyceum M a r u p' (MACHALEIMA), has earlier been awarded the 'Rajkumar Sheetaljit Singh Lifetime Achievement Award' in 2021. (PTI)

Additional assistance granted to Arunachal beyond central scheme allocations: Oram to Guv

ITANAGAR, Dec 26: Union Minister Jugal Oram on Thursday apprised Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parinaik of additional assistance granted to the state beyond the allocation under the central schemes.

During a meeting with the governor at Raj Bhawan here, Oram, the tribal affairs minister, said the central assistance is being sponsored by 17 ministries, including housing, health, education, telecommunication and sports.

The minister and the governor discussed welfare measures for the tribal communities of the state, a Raj Bhawan communiqué said.

During the meeting, Parinaik stressed the need for a more targeted approach to achieve integrated socio-economic development in the state.

The governor also advocated special central assistance to address critical gaps in key sectors such as education, health, agriculture, skill development, employment, and income generation.

Parinaik requested the minister for the establishment of additional Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) in the state to provide quality education in re-

mote areas. He said that these schools would equip students with the foundation to pursue higher and professional education, opening pathways to diverse employment opportunities.

Highlighting the achievements of tribal children from Arunachal Pradesh in various sports disciplines, the governor urged the minister for the establishment of a centre of excellence for sports in the state.

He said that with state-of-the-art facilities, advanced equipment, scientific support, specialised training, and comprehensive provisions, the youth of Arunachal Pradesh could achieve greater success and bring sporting recognition to the country. Parinaik also discussed schemes for the promotion of tribal livelihood and entrepreneurship. The governor stressed livelihood opportunities for tribal artisans of northeastern states through increased efficiency in procurement, logistics and marketing of tribal products, according to the Raj Bhawan statement.

Oram appreciated the suggestions and assured the governor of addressing the requirements of Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

WALLET LOST

I, Sanjib Nath, son of Nipen Nath, resident of Birla gate, Diphu lost my wallet on December 25, 2024 in Diphu Town, Wallet Documents inside Original -Voter ID, Aadhar Card, Pan Card, Driving Licence, SBI ATM Card, Post Office Account Card, Atal Smart Card, Vehicle RC. If anybody finds the lost wallet, kindly inform this phone no. 8638862121/8471821884.

DECLARATION

I, KAUSHIK GHOSH DASTIDAR, S/O GAUTAM GHOSH DASTIDAR, Resident of Hojai Town, Ward No: 06, Bidhumukhi Road, Gobinda Pally. PO & PS: Hojai, Dist Hojai, Assam, PIN: 782435, declare that my actual and correct name is KAUSHIK GHOSH DASTIDAR which is recorded in my Adhaar card bearing No. 4350 3239 8006, Pan Card and other relevant documents. But, in my all educational documents and PRC certificate and some other documents my name has been wrongly recorded as KAUSHIK GHOSH DOSTIDER instead of my actual and correct name KAUSHIK GHOSH DASTIDAR, which is recorded in other relevant documents like Adhaar card, Pan Card. KAUSHIK GHOSH DOSTIDER and KAUSHIK GHOSH DASTIDAR are the names of one and same person ie myself vide affidavit before Executive Magistrate, Lumding, Hojai on December 20, 2024.

No.DDB-24/15th FC/Tied/2024/950

Dtd-19/12/2024

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed Tenders are invited with affixing non refundable court fee of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and twenty-five paise) only by the undersigned, BTC, Kokrajhar from the intending Contractors/Suppliers/Firms for the works mentioned below under 15th FC (Tied) for the year 2024-25.

Sl. No.	Name of Activity	Estimated value (in. Rs.)	EMD/Bid Security. (in Rs. 1% ST, SC & 2% Oth)	Tender fees (in Rs.)	Pre-bid Date & Time	Last Date & Time of Bid submission	Date & Time of Bid Opening
1	Const. of Community Toilet at Dotma Block Quarter	Rs. 11,00,000.00	1% for reserve category & 2% for unreserved	Rs. 350.00	24/12/2024 10:30 A.M.	10/01/2025 02:00 P.M.	10/01/2025 02:30 P.M.

* The Tender document can be seen/obtained from the undersigned during Office hours a pre-bid meeting will be held as mentioned above.

* The address for the meeting is BDO's Chamber Dotma Dev. Block Dotma. The bid will be opened in the Office of the undersigned as per the schedule mentioned above.

* The TIA reserves the right to accept or reject any bid/tender and to cancel/annual the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award.

Sd/- Block Development Officer, Dotma Dev. Block, Dotma

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1187

GOVT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER PWD (R&B), ASSAM, DIPHU

No.ACEH/CS/Spl.G.KAAC/03/2024-25/20

Date: 26.12.2024

CORRIGENDUM

This is for general information to all concerned that the work under "Special Grant To Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council" for the year 2024-25 in Karbi Anglong District. Published vide Press Notice Inviting Re Bid No.ACEH/CS/Spl.G.KAAC/03/2024-25/18.dtd. 21/12/2024 and Tender ID 2024_KAAC_40618_2 is cancelled due to unavoidable circumstance.

Sd/-
Additional Chief Engineer,
PWD(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu
Date: 26.12.2024.

Memo No ACEH/CS/Spl.G.KAAC/03/2024-25/20-(A)

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

No.ACEH/CS/Spl.G.KAAC/03/2024-25/21

Date: 26.12.2024

PRESS NOTICE INVITING BID

The Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam Diphu, on behalf of Governor of Assam invites Item Rates bids from registered contractors of Class-(A&B) category for the work under "Special Grant To Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council" for the year 2024-25 in Karbi Anglong District. Details may be seen at e-procurement portal website www.assamtenders.gov.in, and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours form 27/11/2024 to 06/01/2025. The Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam.

Sd/-
Additional Chief Engineer, PWD(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu
Dated 26/12/2024.

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

THRC orders probe into minor's gang rape, seeks report by Jan 13

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 26: The Tripura Human Rights Commission (THRC) has directed the Director General of Police (DGP) to investigate the gang rape of a minor girl and submit a detailed report by January 13, 2024. The report must also be shared with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

The directive came after the THRC received a complaint from a Tamil Nadu resident addressed to the NHRC.

The complaint requested the NHRC to take suo motu cognizance of the case, citing the abduction and gang rape of a minor girl in Shantibazar, South Tripura District, on December 13. According to the THRC report, the victim was abducted near her home by two individuals and taken to a rubber plantation, where three

others joined them in assaulting her.

The perpetrators, identified as Shaktiya Reang (18), Nivas Tripura (19), Subhash Reang (19), Lakshmidhan Tripura (18), and Jiban Tripura (21), reportedly dropped the victim at her home late at night.

The victim's mother lodged a formal complaint at the Manpathor police outpost, which falls under the jurisdiction of Shantibazar Police Station in South Tripura District.

Acknowledging the severe violation of human rights, the THRC has instructed the DGP to conduct a thorough investigation and submit the findings within three weeks, no later than January 13, 2024.

"A copy of this directive has also been forwarded to the NHRC Secretary for further action", the report reads.

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

No.P.O(ICDS)KA/37/Esstt/2024-25/1649 Dated: 26.12.2024

CORRIGENDUM

In reference to the advertisement vide letter No.PO(ICDS)KA/37/Esstt/2024- 25/1647, Dated Diphu the 24th Dec, 2024 published recently in the local daily news paper in the paragraph "last date of Submission (ii) completed applications alongwith all required documents/enclosures in a sealed envelope clearly mentioning the name of post applied for on the top of the envelope should be submitted by hand or by post to the Programme Officer, Divisional ICDS Cell, Shivbari Road, Diphu so as to reach on or before 4 P.M. on 10/01/2025"

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

CWC meeting: Cong begins deliberations on 2025 roadmap, vows to protect Gandhi's legacy

BELAGAVI, Dec 26: The Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting named "Nav Satyagraha Baithak" began here on Thursday as the party marks the 100th anniversary of its Belgaum session that was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi and chalks out a plan for the political and electoral challenges in 2025.

Top Congress leaders, including party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi, marched to the venue of the extended CWC meeting here.

The meeting, steeped in historical contexts, began at the same venue where Mahatma Gandhi had assumed the presidency of the party 100 years ago.

Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah, deputy chief Minister D K Shivakumar, Congress general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal, among others, are attending the "historic" meeting.

A controversy has erupted over the alleged misrepresentation of India's map on the posters displayed by the party to commemorate the centenary of the 1924 Congress session, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dubbing it as "vote bank" politics.

The Congress has said the BJP



is severely unnerved and peeved by events to celebrate 100 years of Mahatma Gandhi taking the reins of the grand old party and asked the ruling party at the Centre to stop making petty excuses.

Earlier, the Congress said it will re-dedicate itself to protect, preserve and promote Mahatma Gandhi's legacy, which is facing a "systematic assault by the ideological brotherhood that fought him bitterly".

In a bid to get battle-ready for the challenges ahead, the Congress will decide on an action plan for the next year at the CWC meeting.

The opposition party has as-

serted that the "insult" to B R Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah will be taken up for deliberations at Belagavi and that there will be a "strong follow-up" on the issue.

In a post on X, party general secretary in-charge communications Ramesh said, "Mahatma Gandhi took over as President of @INCIndia on Dec 26th, 1924 -- 100 years ago at what was then called Belgaum, now Belgavi. It was a historic session."

"Today the Extended Working Committee is holding its Nava Satyagraha Baithak at that very same place. It will rededicate itself

to protect, preserve, and promote Mahatma Gandhi's legacy -- which is under systematic assault by the ideological brotherhood that fought him bitterly, and that attacked the Constitution when it was adopted," he said.

In another post later, Ramesh said the 39th session of the Indian National Congress began 100 years ago on this day at Belagavi with the singing of Vande Mataram by a group of girls from the National School at Dharwad.

"An 11-year-old girl then sang the song Udayavagali Namma Cheluvu Kannada Nadu (Rise, our lovely Kannada land). This song was specially prepared for the Congress and this occasion marked the first time it was used as the state anthem. This 11-year-old girl went on to become a legend of Hindustani classical music -- the melodiously incomparable Gangubai Hangal," Ramesh informed.

Earlier, All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary Venugopal said the extended CWC meeting will discuss current political developments in the country and the BJP's alleged attack on the Constitution and its architect, Ambedkar.

After deliberating on several is-

ssues being faced by the country, the Congress will come out with "clear-cut" ideas to address those and counter the BJP's alleged attack on the Constitution, Venugopal said.

"Today marks the 100th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's presidency of the Indian National Congress. It is a proud moment for all Congressmen across the country to commemorate this occasion," he told reporters.

Addressing a press conference on Tuesday along with Venugopal and AICC media and publicity department head Pawan Khara, Ramesh said the extended CWC meeting has been named "Nav Satyagraha Baithak", which would see two resolutions being passed.

On December 27, a "Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan" rally will be held in Belagavi, Ramesh said.

About 200 leaders, including CWC members, permanent invitees, special invitees, the party's central election committee members, Pradesh Congress Committee members, CLP leaders of the state, parliamentary party office-bearers and former party chief ministers are attending the "historic session". (PTI)

Ready for another innings with JD(U) if they snap ties with BJP: RJD



PATNA, Dec 26: The opposition RJD in Bihar on Thursday said it was ready for yet another realignment with chief minister Nitish Kumar if the JD(U) president showed willingness to snap ties with the BJP which represented "communal forces."

RJD president Lalu Prasad's close aide and MLA Bhai Virendra made this remark in response to queries from journalists in Khagaria district.

"Bihar has been witness to many political games and more such games could be played in future", the MLA remarked, when asked whether he saw the possibility of a "khela" in the wake of perceived tensions between the JD(U) and the BJP.

Probed further, Bhai Virendra said, "Politics is all about possibilities. If Nitish Kumar grows fed up with communal forces and decides he has had enough of the BJP, we will decide (on aligning with JD(U))."

In the state capital, RJD spokesman Mrityunay Tiwari echoed similar views.

He said "What is the big deal? The BJP realigned with Nitish Kumar a year ago, not long after Amit Shah had declared that the doors were shut on him. At least, our leaders have never resorted to such empty rhetoric. Let a situation arise, and a decision will be taken accordingly."

The opposition party's bid to fish in troubled waters comes in the backdrop of a cryptic stance taken by Shah, who recently did not categorically deny that in Bihar the NDA will not repeat the strategy it had adopted in Maharashtra, where the BJP-led alliance went to

polls without a face.

Leaders of the JD(U), which shares power with the BJP at the Centre too, have refrained from directly addressing the issue with their ally, but there have been subtle displays of dissatisfaction. A poster recently released on the party's X handle was captioned "Jab Bihar Ki Baat Ho to Naam Sirf Nitish Kumar Ka Ho".

BJP leaders in Bihar have been, on their part, at pains to allay misgivings, asserting that Kumar will "lead" the NDA in the 2025 assembly polls.

On Wednesday, Union Minister Giriraj Singh, formerly seen as a detractor of Kumar, showered praises on the JD(U) supremo, stating that the latter deserved a "Bharat Ratna".

However, around the same time a slip-up by Vijay Kumar Sinha, one of the two deputy CMs, has added fresh grist to the mill.

Addressing a function held on Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birth anniversary, Sinha said in Bihar "only after the BJP forms its own government" would the dream of the former Prime Minister be realised.

JD(U) leaders have so far refrained from expressing displeasure over the statement.

BJP sources, requesting anonymity, said much should not be read into the utterances of Sinha, "who never said the party wants to form its own government in Bihar in 2025 itself".

Meanwhile, RJD sources also claimed that the choice of a "blatantly pro-BJP" Arif Mohammad Khan as the new governor of Bihar has also not gone down well with a section of JD(U) leaders. (PTI)

'Shameful, condemnable': Rahul slams police action against protesting BPSC candidates in Patna

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi Thursday condemned the police action on protesting Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) candidates in Patna and claimed that the NDA government is "resorting to lathi-charging students" to hide its own failures.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also slammed the BJP over the police action, saying the ruling party's only vision is to save its chair and whoever demands employment is oppressed.

In a post in Hindi on X, Rahul Gandhi said, "I had said in Parliament that in the same way that Eklaya's thumb was cut off, the thumbs of the youth were being chopped off by paper leaks."

"The latest example of this is Bihar. BPSC candidates are raising their voice against the paper leak and demanding cancellation of the exam. But to hide its failure, the NDA government is instead resorting to lathi-charge on the students," the former Congress chief said.

"This is extremely shameful and condemnable. Playing with the future of students will not be tolerated. We are with them and will fight to get them justice," he said. Chaos erupted during a protest in Patna on Wednesday over the alleged leak of a question paper of the December 13 combined preliminary exam conducted by BPSC, prompting the police to baton charge job aspirants.

Job seekers claimed that several protesters were injured during the police action but a senior officer denied the charge.

"Lathi charge on youths who had their hands folded is the height of cruelty. In BJP

Cong MLA among 21 held for attacking policemen during protest in Gujarat

PATAN (GUJ), Dec 26: Gujarat Congress MLA Kirit Patel and 20 others were arrested on Thursday in connection with alleged assault on policemen during a protest at a university in the Patan district on December 16, officials said.

Patel, who represents the Patan constituency, ex-MLA of Siddhpur Chandanji Thakor and nearly 200 Congress workers and members of the party's student wing NSUI had protested at Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University (HNGU) over liquor consumption in the hostel. The next day, the Patan 'B' division police booked Patel and others for allegedly abusing and assaulting cops during the demonstration, officials said.

rule, youths demanding employment are beaten with sticks. Be it UP, Bihar or Madhya Pradesh - if youths raise their voice, they are brutally beaten," Priyanka Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on her WhatsApp channel.

"It is the government's job to think about the future of the youth of the world's youngest country and make policies for it. But the BJP only has the vision of saving its chair," she said.

Whoever demands employment is oppressed, the Congress MP added.

The Congress had condemned the police action on job aspirants, while Independent MP from Purnea Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav called for a Bihar bandh on January 1, 2025, if the December 13 combined preliminary examination is not cancelled.

The police registered a case against protesters in connection with Wednesday's incident. The protesters claimed that several job seekers were injured in the baton charge, which the police denied.

Video clips of the police action against job aspirants went viral on social media with some showing personnel chasing and beating up protesters, including women.

PTI could not verify the authenticity of the video clips.

Protesters were seen raising slogans against the BPSC officials and demanding the cancellation of the December 13 combined preliminary exam.

The job aspirants have been demanding the cancellation of the preliminary examination of the BPSC and have requested the commission to announce a fresh date for the test at the earliest. (PTI)

While some of the accused were arrested, Patel and Thakor had been absconding, said Deputy Superintendent of Police K K Pandya. "We arrested Kirit Patel, Chandanji Thakor and 19 other Congress workers after they surrendered before local police. We had already arrested 12 persons in the past. All these individuals are accused of verbally abusing and attacking on-duty policemen during a protest at the university," Pandya told reporters.

Patel and others have been booked under BNS sections 121-1 (causing hurt to a public servant to prevent them from performing their duties), 132 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) and 224 (threat of injury to public servant). (PTI)

AAP accuses Congress of colluding with BJP for Delhi polls, threatens INDIA alliance split

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: The AAP launched a scathing attack on the Congress on Thursday, accusing it of colluding with the BJP for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls to harm the prospects of the Arvind Kejriwal-led party.

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and Rajya Sabha MP of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Sanjay Singh alleged at a press conference here that the actions of the Congress are damaging the unity of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).

"We had not said a single word against the Congress during the Haryana election. Yet the Congress seems to be reading out from the BJP's script. Its candidates' list looks as if it was finalised at the BJP office," Singh said.

He accused Congress leaders Ajay Maken and Sandeep Dixit of targeting the AAP, instead of focusing on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

J&K: Shutdown in Katra against ropeway project enters second day, protestors launch hunger strike

REASI/JAMMU, Dec 26: A shutdown in Katra, the base camp for the Vaishno Devi pilgrimage in Jammu and Kashmir, against a proposed ropeway project entered its second day on Thursday, with the protestors sitting on a hunger strike to press for the release of those detained by police the day before.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti has called for a 72-hour shutdown, which commenced on Wednesday, announcing that all activities in Katra would remain suspended during the bandh.

"The bandh will continue until the government shelve the ropeway project. It is an assault on the livelihoods of most Katra residents, who are dependent on the pilgrimage economy," a samiti spokesperson said.

Last month, the board decided to install the ropeway to facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children and others who find it difficult to climb the 13-km-long track to the cave shrine.

The samiti which claims to represent shopkeepers, pony operators and palanquin owners, claimed that the ropeway would destroy the livelihoods of local business owners and demanded that the project be scrapped.

For the second consecutive day on Thursday, all shops, restaurants and business establishments remained closed and traffic was off the roads in the holy town.

The bandh has affected normal life in Katra.

A samiti member said that instead of

"Ajay Maken has crossed all limits by calling Arvind Kejriwal anti-national. Despite campaigning for the Congress in past elections, Kejriwal now faces an FIR, while the Congress had never filed a single FIR against any BJP leader," Singh said.

Atishi echoed similar sentiments, claiming that the Congress is actively undermining the AAP.

"It is evident that Congress candidates like Sandeep Dixit and Farhad Suri are receiving support from the BJP. This collusion raises questions about the Congress's commitment to the INDIA alliance," she said.

The AAP demanded disciplinary action against Maken and other Congress leaders within 24 hours and said if no step is taken, it will push for the grand old party's expulsion from the INDIA bloc. (PTI)



holding talks with them, the administration is using force, including detaining their leaders during a peaceful protest. "They are deliberately creating such a situation with their attitude," he said.

Six of the protestors sat on a hunger strike on Wednesday night, demanding the release of 18 samiti members who were detained during a protest march against the ropeway project.

"We demand their release. If the samiti members were demonstrating peacefully, they should not have been detained. We will continue the hunger strike until those detained individuals are released," said one of the protestors participating in the hunger strike.

Several protestors, including two leaders of the Samiti -- Bhupinder Singh and Sohan Chand -- were detained by police and taken away in a police vehicle from the protest site during Wednesday's march.

In Udhampur, some people held protests against the Shrine Board and the govern-

ment, criticising their failure to address the demands of Katra residents and seeking the release of the detained individuals.

The proposed ₹ 250-crore ropeway project will connect Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat, leading to the cave shrine in Reasi district.

Faced with difficulties due to the bandh, the Shrine Board has made arrangements for the boarding and lodging of the pilgrims arriving in the town.

"Over 93 lakh yatis have paid obeisance at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine this year," said Anshul Garg, CEO of the Shrine Board, on X.

He added that special langars set up by the Shrine Board at the Katra railway station, Banganga and Tarakote are offering tea and milk to pilgrims, ensuring the yatra continues smoothly on both tracks.

However, pilgrims undertaking the journey to the cave shrine expressed displeasure over the shutdown of eateries and the lack of local transport, which caused significant inconvenience.

"We want the protestors to call off the bandh as it is affecting our pilgrimage. If this continues, there will be cancellations by pilgrims travelling from outside," said one pilgrim.

Another devotee emphasised that eating points, local transport, and lodges should be kept out of the bandh, as it is causing significant hardship.

"The bandh is causing huge inconvenience to the pilgrims," another devotee added. (PTI)

Prez confers Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar on 17 children for excellence in various fields

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday presented the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children, recognizing their exceptional courage and outstanding achievements across diverse fields, including art, culture, sports and innovation.

The President underlined the importance of nurturing and celebrating young talents.

"Providing opportunities and recognizing children's talents has always been a part of our tradition. This tradition should be further strengthened to ensure that every child realizes their full potential," she said.

The award celebrates extraordinary accomplishments in seven categories: art and culture, bravery, innovation, science and technology, social service, sports and environment.

The honourees -- seven boys and ten girls selected from 14 states and Union territories -- were presented with a medal, certificate and citation



booklet. Among them was Keya Hatkar, a 14-year-old author and disability advocate, recognized for her excellence in art and culture.

Despite living with spinal muscular atrophy, she founded initiatives like "IM POSSIBLE" and "SMA-ART," promoting inclusivity and disability awareness.

President Murmu highlighted the importance of honouring such talents, saying, "The tradition of recognising and nurturing children's potential has always been part of our culture. Their contributions will lead India to the pinnacle of progress."

She further emphasised the Ministry of Women and Child Development's role in sharing these stories

of inspiration with the wider public.

The President also paid homage to the unparalleled sacrifices of Guru Gobind Singh's sons, commemorated as 'Veer Bal Diwas' on December 26, saying, "Their sacrifices for faith and self-respect continue to inspire countless generations. On this day, the nation bows in reverence to their bravery and spirit."

Among the other awardees was Ayaan Sajad, a 12-year-old Sufi singer from Kashmir, honoured for his soulful contributions to Kashmiri music, while 17-year-old Vyas Om Jignesh, who has cerebral palsy, was lauded for his dedication to Sanskrit literature, having memorised over 5,000 shlokas and performed in over 500 shows.

In bravery, Saurav Kumar (9) was recognised for saving three girls from drowning, and 17-year-old Ioanna Thapa was honoured for rescuing 36 residents from a fire.

"Examples of courage and patriotism in children strengthen the na-

tion's confidence in its future. Such acts are truly commendable," President Murmu remarked as she presented the award to the two children.

In the innovation category, 15-year-old Sindhoora Raja was awarded for creating self-stabilizing devices for Parkinson's patients, and cybersecurity entrepreneur Rishkek Kumar (17) was honoured for launching Kashmir's first cybersecurity firm.

"Contributions to science, technology, and innovation by children like these show their unparalleled potential to transform lives," the President observed.

Hembati Nag, a judo player from a Naxal-affected area was awarded in the sports category. She overcame numerous challenges to win a silver medal at the Khelo India National Games.

Mentioning Nag's story, President Murmu said, "Hembati's resilience amidst adversity is an example of unmatched courage and determination." (PTI)

LEASING OF SLR OF VARIOUS TRAINS OVER ALIPURDUAR DIVISION

E-Auction is invited for leasing of SLR of Various trains over Alipurduar division. Auction Catalogue No. C-AP-PCL-LEASE. Description: Parcel Space in SLR Coach (Single Compartment). Rate Unit: Per Trip Licensing Fee. Auction Start Date & Time : 11:00 hrs. on 07-01-2025.

Seq.No.	Lot No./Category	Lot End Date & Time
AA/1	15769-SLR-F2-APDJ-MXN-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	At 11:30 hrs. on 07-01-2025
AA/2	13150-SLR-F1-APDJ-SDAH-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	At 11:40 hrs. on 07-01-2025
AA/3	13148-SLR-F1-BXT-SDAH-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	At 11:50 hrs. on 07-01-2025
AA/4	12378-SLR-F1-NOQ-SDAH-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	At 12:00 hrs. on 07-01-2025
AA/5	15417-SLR-R1-APDJ-SHTT-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	At 12:10 hrs. on 07-01-2025
AA/6	13142-SLR-R1-NOQ-SDAH-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	At 12:20 hrs. on 07-01-2025
AA/7	15769-SLR-R1-APDJ-MXN-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	At 12:30 hrs. on 07-01-2025
AA/8	15769-SLR-F1-APDJ-MXN-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	At 12:40 hrs. on 07-01-2025

Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Successive lots closing interval 10 minutes. Note : Prospective bidder are requested to visit e-Auction leasing module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in for more details.

Sr. DCM, Alipurduar Jn.
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

CARRYING OUT REPAIRS TO SIGNALING ASSETS

E-Tender No. SNT-38-LMG-2024-25; Dated: 23-12-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work. Name of work & its Location: Carrying out repairs to signaling assets for restoration / maintenance in Chandranathpur-Silchar, Badarpur Jn.-Kalkalighat section including Katakhal Jn. & Arunachal branch under the jurisdiction of SSE/Sig/Badarpur Jn. for a period of 12 months. Tender Value: ₹20,68,660.80. Bid Security: ₹41,300.00. E-tender will be Closed at 15:00 hrs. on 16-01-2025 and Opened at 15:30 hrs. on 16-01-2025. For details visit: www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DSTE, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

INTERLOCKING OF MANNED ENGINEERING LC GATES

E-Tender No. SNT-40-LMG-2024-25 Dated: 23-12-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Name of work: Interlocking of 09 nos of manned Engineering LC gates with provision of ELB and emergency Sliding Boom in Guwahati-Furkating Jn. & Chaparmukh Jn.-Senchoa Jn.-Amoni section of Lumding Division. Tender Value: ₹7,35,22,806.91/-, Earnest Money: ₹5,17,600/-. Date & Time of closing of Tender: 15:00 hrs. on 17-01-2025 & will be opened at 15:30 hrs. on 17-01-2025. The complete information of the tender document of above e-tender will be available in the website www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DSTE, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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PM Modi pitches for equipping youngsters with skills in emerging technologies

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday stressed the need for a futuristic approach to equip youngsters with skills in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning, as he highlighted the crucial role they play in the country's progress.

Speaking at an event to mark Veer Bal Diwas, Modi underscored the need to adapt to rapid changes and challenges across various fields, emphasising the government's "youth-centric" policies and efforts to move in that direction with the start of the new education policy.

With his government marking the journey of the Constitution's 75 years in a major way, Modi said the Constitution's principle of equality aligns with the teachings of gurus who advocated the welfare of all.

Modi said his government is committed to supporting young talent and fostering their self-confidence.

"This era has moved beyond machines to machine learning. AI is taking centre stage, and we can see its application replacing conventional software. It is essential to



make our youth future ready to tackle these challenges," he said.

He urged the youth to work towards making their respective sectors, be it railways, semiconductors, travel or astronomy, the best.

Remembering the "unparalleled" sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh's sons, the Sahibzadas, he said they chose "unwavering courage and faith over submission to the Mughal Empire's oppression".

He noted that Veer Bal Diwas teaches an enduring lesson: "No matter how adverse the circum-

stances, nothing is greater than the nation's cause. Every act done in the interest of the nation is an act of valour."

"More than 300 years ago, on December 26, the Sahibzadas, despite their tender age, displayed unparalleled bravery and sacrificed their lives. They rejected every temptation and endured unimaginable torture, showing that for them, the nation's cause was supreme," he said, urging youngsters to draw inspiration from their legacy.

He said India's strong democracy was built on the bravery and sacrifice of the Sahibzadas.

"The Constitution teaches us that no one is small or big in the country", he said, adding that this principle aligns with the teachings of our gurus, who advocated for the welfare of all.

The prime minister also interacted with the winners of the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. Seventeen children from 14 states and Union Territories were honoured for their exceptional contributions in fields like art and culture, bravery, innovation, science and technology, social service, sports, and environment.

Congratulating the awardees, Modi said, "These children have demonstrated what India's youth are capable of achieving. I extend my best wishes to all the winners on behalf of the nation."

He elaborated on the government's focus on empowering the youth through targeted policies.

"From startups to science, sports to entrepreneurship, a new wave of transformation is happening. Our policies prioritise giving strength to the youth. Whether it is the startup ecosystem, the future of the space economy, or sports and fitness, all our initiatives are youth-

centric," he said.

On the occasion, Modi launched the 'Suposhit Gram Panchayat Abhiyan', a programme aimed at improving nutritional outcomes through active community participation.

The initiative aligns with the government's broader goal of ensuring the well-being of every Indian.

Modi also urged young Indians to embrace the values of courage, innovation, and service to propel the nation towards greater unity and progress.

Referring to his call to bring one lakh youth with no political connections into politics, he said this initiative was crucial for the next 25 years and encouraged the youth to be part of this campaign to bring a new generation into politics.

Noting that the 'Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue' would be held at the beginning of next year on Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, he said millions of youth from villages, towns, and cities across the country will participate, discussing the vision and roadmap for a developed India. (PTI)

EC data on LS polls: Women outshine men again in exercising franchise

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: As many as 64.64 crore voters exercised their franchise in the Lok Sabha polls held earlier this year with women voters outnumbering men, according to statistical data released by the Election Commission on Thursday.

The female voter turnout stood at 65.78 per cent as compared to 65.55 per cent for male electors, the EC said.

EC functionaries asserted that such granular data is not shared by any of the election management bodies in democracies across the world.

The data on Lok Sabha polls, 2024 and four assembly elections -- Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh -- held alongside parliamentary polls comes against the backdrop of allegations of non-disclosure by the EC.

"This suo motu initiative is to enhance the public trust that constitutes the underpinning of India's electoral system," the EC said.

Referring to women participation in the polls, EC said the number of female contesting candidates was 800, compared to 726 in 2019.

Maharashtra had the highest number of women contesting candidates with 111 in the fray, followed by 80 in Uttar Pradesh and 77 in Tamil Nadu.

But at the same time, out of the total 543 Lok Sabha constituencies, there were 152 where there were no women candidates.

A total of over 97.97 crore citizens had registered themselves as electors as compared to over 91.19 crore in 2019 -- an increase of 7.43 per cent.

Out of these registered electors, 64.64 crore had cast votes in 2024,

compared to 61.4 crore in 2019, the EC said.

According to the poll panel, any Indian citizen who registers in the electoral roll is defined as an elector. The elector who eventually votes is called voter.

Total votes polled -- using EVM and postal ballot option -- stood at 64,64,20,869. Votes polled on EVMs alone stood at 64,21,39,275, with 32,93,61,948 male voters and 31,27,64,269 female voters.

A little over 13,000 registered third gender voters exercised their franchise (27.09 per cent), according to the data.

Nearly 43 lakh electors used the postal ballot option to vote.

The Dhubri parliamentary constituency in Assam registered the highest turnout of 92.3 per cent while Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir registered the lowest turnout of 38.7 per cent, compared to 14.4 per cent in 2019.

According to the dataset issued by the EC, as many as 11 parliamentary constituencies saw voting percentage of less than 50 per cent.

Repolls, the EC pointed out, were held in 40 polling stations or 0.0038 per cent of the total 10.52 lakh polling stations as compared to 540 in 2019.

Referring to overseas Indian electors, EC said over 1.19 lakh such people were registered in the category, including 1.06 lakh men, 12,950 women and 13 third gender, compared to 99,844 registered overseas electors in 2019.

Overseas Indian electors are those who are Indian citizens residing abroad due to various reasons and eligible to vote here.

They have come to India to vote showing their original passport as a proof of identity. (PTI)

Exhibition showcases sculptures of diverse styles by master artists

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: From Vibhor Sogani's cutting-edge stainless steel sculptures to the narrative depth of Neeraj Gupta's marble creations, an ongoing exhibition, "The Forces of Imagination", promises to be a one-of-its-kind visual and emotional journey for art aficionados.

Organised by Delhi Art Society in association with Calcutta Sculptors, the exhibition at the India Habitat Centre (IHC) features over 100 artworks by 14 sculptors -- both master and budding artists -- redefining the boundaries of creativity and imagination.

It is hosted by Shibani Chawla, director of Chawla Art Gallery, and curated by art critic Nanak Ganguly.

Touted to be a rare event in the art world, dedicated exclusively to the powerful and tactile medium, the collection features transformative works crafted in bronze, marble, stainless steel, wood, and aluminum, offering visitors a visual and sensory experience.

"We have a blend of wonderful

thought-provoking art forms from all the major regions of India and all the artists here have tried to attain peak in three most important materials of sculpting -- marble, bronze and stainless steel -- which are not only important from sculpting point of view but are also the only materials which are of importance for public art," said sculptor Neeraj Gupta, president of Delhi Art Society.

The list of participating artists include names like Tapas Sarkar, Ratan Krishna Saha, Somnath Chakraborty, Debabrata De, Subrata Paul, Barun Pramanik, Saumen Kar, Chandan Roy, Pabitra Ganguly, Narayan Lakshman, Bolla Srinivas Reddy and KR Nariman.

"In my career, this has been the most challenging as it has a huge number of sculptures, all diverse in style and genres. And my challenge was to weave them together in one singular space to bring out a cohesion and some meaning to the space that it has been showcased. (PTI)

DU to introduce PhD in Hindu Studies from new academic session

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Delhi University is planning to introduce a PhD programme in Hindu Studies from the 2025-26 academic session, according to a proposal by a Standing Committee.

The Governing Body of the Centre for Hindu Studies has recommended that the PhD programme be introduced in 2025-26.

The programme was earlier intended to begin in the current academic session but was postponed, as per the proposal.

The initiative to introduce a PhD in Hindu Studies is aimed at creating opportunities for students, the Joint Director of the Centre for Hindu Studies, Prerna Malhotra said. "Our Governing Board has recommended starting a PhD in Hindu Studies, and the matter will be placed before the Academic Council. Students have been approaching the Centre, enquiring about research opportunities, especially those who have already qualified JRF and NET in Hindu Studies. As a premier institution, Delhi University is committed to providing such opportunities and advancing research in diverse areas of Hindu Studies," she told PTI.

Initially, the Centre for Hindu Studies may offer 10 seats, including those under applicable reservation and supernumerary categories. The seats may increase in the future depending on the Centre's infrastructure and academic requirements, the proposal states.

The Academic Council of DU

will review and decide on the recommendation during its meeting on December 27.

Once the Council approves the recommendation, the proposal will be presented for approval to the Executive Council, the university's highest decision-making body.

"In continuation of the decision of the Governing Body of the Centre for Hindu Studies taken on June 21, 2024, it was decided to recommend initiating a PhD in Hindu Studies with effect from the academic session 2025-26," the proposal stated.

The eligibility criteria for the PhD programme will align with Delhi University's guidelines. Applicants must have a Master's degree in Hindu Studies or allied subjects with at least 55 percent marks, along with JRF/NET qualification or success in the university's PhD eligibility test.

Applicable relaxations for reserved categories will be provided as specified in the PhD Information Bulletin.

Until regular appointments are made, research supervision will be handled by faculty from allied departments and colleges of the university who have expertise in Hindu Studies and have expressed interest.

Delhi University currently offers only a two-year Master's programme in Hindu Studies. The Centre for Hindu Studies, established in 2023 with a focus on Brahmanical texts, began its first MA batch in November 2023. (PTI)

Excavation of 'Mrityu Kup' begins in UP's Sambhal

SAMBHAL (UP), Dec 26: The administration in this Uttar Pradesh district on Thursday commenced the renovation and excavation of the ancient "Mrityu Kup" (well of death) at Kot Purvi, located within the Sambhal Kotwali police station area.

The initiative is part of a broader effort to identify and restore wells that are believed to hold great religious and spiritual significance.

According to locals, the well was abandoned several years ago and filled with debris, which will be cleared. The well is not only a historic landmark but also a sacred site where devotees believe they can attain salvation by bathing, the locals claim.

The well is deeply-embedded in the region's spiritual fabric, with locals holding it in high regard for its mythological importance.

"Thursday marks the beginning of the excavation of the Mrityu Kup, a very ancient and revered site. The excavation is being carried out with the cooperation of the Nagar Palika. The well is immensely popular and its renovation will further strengthen our faith. The district administration has been highly supportive in ensuring the development of this important cultural and religious landmark," local councillor Gagan Varshey said.

Sambhal's Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Vandana Mishra said accompanied by a team from the Archaeological Survey of India



(ASI), she visited the Bhadraka Ashram Tirtha and Chaturmukh Kup in Haaz Bhadde Sarai.

"After further study, the team will determine its age and give recommendations for its preservation," the SDM said.

She also highlighted the team's visit to Alam Sarai's Brahma Kup, commonly known as the Chaturmukh Kup, a well constructed with stones. The ASI team has collected samples for analysis and research.

"In addition, the excavation of the Mrityu Kup is currently underway. We are evaluating the best methods to ensure its preservation. So far, we have identified around 15 out of 19 wells that are of great historical significance," Mishra said.

The excavation and renovation of the "Mrityu Kup" is expected to bolster Sambhal's religious tourism prospects, local officials claim.

The structure is located close to the Shahi Jama Masjid, a court-or-

dered survey of which led to violence last month, leaving four people dead.

The violence broke out after protesters clashed with security personnel during the survey of the Mughal-era mosque.

The protesters torched vehicles and pelted stones at police, who used tear gas and batons to disperse the mob. Around 20 security personnel had sustained injuries in the clash and the deputy collector had fractured his leg, officials had said.

Internet services were suspended in the district in the wake of the violence.

Images shared on social media showed protesters pelting stones at the security personnel from atop buildings and in front of the Shahi Jama Masjid. Later, police personnel were reportedly seen cornering and hitting people as they tried to disperse a large crowd from a narrow alleyway. (PTI)

Delhi tutor held for protests by civil service aspirants in Patna, funding under scanner

PATNA, Dec 26: A Delhi-based tutor was held on Thursday on the charge of instigating aspirants who tried to "storm into" the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) office in Patna, demanding cancellation of its December 13 examination, an official said.

Patna's District Magistrate (DM) Chandrasekhar Singh told PTI that preliminary investigations into Wednesday's protests found that one Rohit, a tutor, mobilised and instigated the aspirants.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajeev Mishra said, "Initial investigations have revealed that Rohit had come from Delhi and brought along a number of persons, including girls, posing as disgruntled BPSC aspirants. He is being examined by the investigators." The source of their funding is also being investigated as they seem to be part of a larger conspiracy, he said.

"We are probing the larger conspiracy behind yesterday's incident. What is the source of funding for those who came from outside the state to instigate

BPSC aspirants is also the focus of our probe. Rohit seems to be the mastermind of yesterday's protest. Patna Police will send a preliminary report to the Economic Offences Unit (EOU) to investigate their source of funding," he told PTI.

Alleging irregularities in the 70th Integrated Combined Competitive Examination (CCE), aspirants demonstrated outside the BPSC office and sought re-examination. The police baton-charged the aspirants to bring the situation under control.

The protesters claimed they were treated "like terrorists" and many of them were injured in the police action, a charge which was denied by the authorities. Popular vlogger Motiur Rahman Khan, known as Guru Rahman, also joined the protests at Gardani Bagh.

"Police action against BPSC aspirants was highly condemnable. Protesting BPSC aspirants should not have been treated like this. My support is always with the students," he said. (PTI)

Cow vigilantes booked for culpable homicide bid after clash with civic staff on cow shelter removal

INDORE, Dec 26: A case has been registered against some cow vigilantes for rioting and culpable homicide attempt after three civic employees were injured in a clash in Madhya Pradesh's Indore during the removal of a cow shelter as part of an anti-encroachment drive, police said.

An employee of the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) lodged a complaint, based on which a case was registered against Vijay Kalkhor, Sanjay Mahajan, Tej Singh Rathore and others on Wednesday night, an official said.

Three IMC employees were injured in the brawl while they were removing an illegal cow shelter in Dutt Nagar on Wednesday morning.

Bajrang Dal opposed the civic body's plan to remove the cow shelter.

Some videos of the incident surfaced on social media, in which both sides can be seen arguing while some people are seen breaking the windows of vehicles with sticks in which the

cows from the cow shelter were being taken to the municipal corporation's gaushala.

The accused were booked under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) sections 191(3) (rioting armed with deadly weapons), 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 115(2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 132 (assault to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) and other provisions for abusing IMC employees and beating them with sticks, damaging government property by vandalising civic vehicles, the official said.

After the case was registered against the cow protectors, Bajrang Dal's local unit convener Praveen Darekar claimed that his organisation's workers were not involved in the assault on municipal employees.

While cows from the nearly 30-year-old cow shelter in Dutt Nagar were being taken to the municipal corporation's cowshed, 20-25 cows were put in a vehicle, due to which many of the animals were injured, he alleged.

The Bajrang Dal leader said, "Due to this cruelty towards cows, people of the Hindu community (present at the spot) were enraged."

The cow protectors and a seer operating the cowshed have also lodged a complaint against the civic body staffers against the police on charges of assault and animal cruelty, Darekar said, and demanded that an FIR be registered against them.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Alok Kumar Sharma said an investigation is being conducted into these complaints.

Meanwhile, city mayor Pushyamitra Bhargav visited the private hospital, where the injured municipal employees have been admitted, to enquire about the condition.

Termining the clash during the removal of the cowshed as unfortunate, he said, "We are with the municipal workers. I have spoken to the police and administration officials and asked them to ensure that such incidents do not happen in future." (PTI)

Police intensify security in Delhi's border areas for New Year eve celebrations

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: The Delhi Police has intensified security arrangements and increased deployments in the border areas of the national capital for New Year celebrations, officials said on Thursday.

More than 10,000 police personnel, including traffic police are expected to be on the ground to rein in hooliganism and traffic violations, they said.

"After Christmas, we have made a robust plan for the security arrangements for New Year eve. We want everyone to welcome the new year with great zeal but no one will be allowed to breach the law," a senior police officer said.

According to police, additional pickets, barricades and personnel -- including paramilitary deployment -- will be made at the borders to tackle nuisance by people from the adjoining states, said the offi-



cer. Delhi shares borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and lies close to Rajasthan. A large number of people from these three states arrive in the national capital for New Year celebrations.

The police said they have already deployed police personnel at

more than 10 locations for Christmas, but now they have intensified their security and heavy deployment has already been done on more than 15 locations from where vehicles enter the national capital.

"The traffic police has already chalked out a plan to combat motor-cycle stunts and drink driving.

Additional forces from different police stations will be deployed to help the traffic police," another senior police officer said.

According to the police, there will be shift duties and SHOs have been ordered to be on the road with their teams to maintain law and order on New Year Eve.

Teams will impound two or four wheeler immediately if anyone is found indulging in stunt-like activities. Strict action will be ensured, said the police officer.

"For New Year celebration, our teams are checking bus stands, railway stations, hotels, dharamshalas, night shelters and other locations to verify if anyone is staying without providing proper documents. We have already launched our special drive to identify those who are staying illegally in the national capital," said the officer.

More than 10,000 police person-

nel from traffic and other units of the Delhi Police will maintain vigil.

A senior police officer of the Delhi Traffic Police said traffic personnel will be deployed in adequate strength. The main focus will be at Connaught Place, Hauz Khas, markets and near malls.

At Connaught Place, vehicles having valid sticker will be allowed to enter the Inner Circle area. The Delhi Police will distribute the stickers, the officer said, adding that extra deployed will also be seen at India Gate where people come to celebrate New Year.

Pickets will be placed at several areas across the city specially near the malls and party areas. The drunken driving drive will also be carried out and those found violating the rules will be penalised. The extra staff will be deployed near the hotels, the officer said. (PTI)

SKM seeks meeting with President Murmu to discuss farmer issues, Dallewal's hunger strike

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Amid ongoing farmers' protests and an indefinite hunger strike by farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha has written to President Droupadi Murmu seeking an appointment with her to discuss their issues.

In a statement issued on Thursday, SKM said they wanted to address the situation surrounding Dallewal's hunger strike and other "pressing issues", including the introduction of a National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing.

The farmers have been demanding a legal guarantee on minimum support price for their crops.

Farmers, under the banner of SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been protesting at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between

Punjab and Haryana since February 13, after their march to Delhi was blocked by security forces.

A "jatha" (group) of 101 farmers attempted to march to Delhi on foot three times between December 6 and 14 but were stopped by security personnel in Haryana.

"A delegation of SKM requests an appointment with you at your earliest convenience to share our concerns about the precarious situation and the growing unrest among farmers across the country," the letter, dated December 25, said.

The SKM added that farmers from over 500 districts had submitted memoranda to the President through district magistrates, urging her "urgent intervention" to facilitate discussions between the Union Government and all farmer organisations on the long-standing demands. (PTI)

Year fashion: When Indian designers took big strides by dressing up global stars

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Remember saree-clad Kim and Khloe Kardashian turning heads at the extravagant Ambani wedding? And Jennifer Lopez channelling in her inner Queen Charlotte at her "Bridgerton"-themed birthday party this year?

From sarees to regal gowns, 2024 witnessed Indian fashion designers like Gaurav Gupta, Manish Malhotra, Sabyasachi Mukherjee and Falguni and Shane Peacock, making significant strides by dressing up some of the biggest names not just in Bollywood but also Hollywood.

"It's no secret that India is having a moment globally," Gupta, who has been the toast of the season with his dresses featuring prominently on international red carpet events, told PTI.

His outfits were picked up by Hollywood celebrities Mindy Kaling, Rebel Wilson, and Allison Janney for the 76th Primetime Emmy Awards in September, and "Bridgerton" star Nicola Coughlan for British Fashion Awards 2024 earlier this month.

"The increasing footprint of Indian designers globally reflects a significant shift in the industry's perception of Indian couture. It's no longer just about traditional wear but about blending innovation, craftsmanship,

and cultural heritage with contemporary aesthetics," added Gupta.

Another Indian designer who made headlines this year was Sabyasachi. Bollywood star Deepika Padukone chose his saree for BAFTA Awards where she presented an award and Alia Bhatt rocked another of his unique creations for her Met Gala debut. Bela Bajaria, chief content officer of Netflix, wore his design at the Emmys.

In July, American reality TV stars and sisters Kim and Khloe Kardashian wore Indian saree and lehenga-choli ensembles by Malhotra and Tarun Tahiliani for the grand wedding ceremony of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant in India.

Malhotra was also the go-to designer for Lopez who chose a custom-made gown to celebrate her "Bridgerton"-themed 55th birthday party. Malhotra, who recently dressed supermodel Heidi Klum for "Mufasa: The Lion King" premiere, said each of the moments of creating these designs and seeing them come to life was "filled with creativity and excitement". "It's always an amazing experience to collaborate with figures who have such a profound impact on fashion and pop culture. The process involves understanding their personal style, the event's essence, and crafting ensem-

bles that not only captivate but also resonate with their personalities," he told PTI. Falguni Peacock, the one-half of the fashion label Falguni Shane Peacock, said their brand was a pioneer in designing for global personalities, including Nicki Minaj, Beyonce, and Kim Kardashian.

It's heartening to see colleagues following in their footsteps, added the designer, who recently dressed "Stree 2" star Shraddha Kapoor for her appearance at Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Film Festival 2024.

"We have dressed up Mariah Carey, who is an icon and there's a lot more coming up... It's great that India is on that platform and we have dressed everyone from Beyonce to Lady Gaga. It's good to see that everyone started dressing up (international celebrities) now. It's been 10-15 years since we started dressing them. Now, everyone is on it," Falguni Peacock told PTI.

What was the turning point when it comes to global celebs embracing Indian designers at important events, including the Met Gala, Oscars and Grammys?

For Malhotra, it was a natural progression fuelled by "a growing appreciation for the rich tapestry of Indian fashion and craftsmanship". (PTI)

Kartik Aaryan to star in Karan Johar's production 'Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri'



MUMBAI, Dec 26: Filmmaker Karan Johar on Wednesday announced "Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri", a romantic comedy that will feature Kartik Aaryan in the lead role.

The film will mark the maiden collaboration between Johar and Aaryan. It will be directed by Sameer Vidwans, who earlier helmed Aaryan's 2023 hit "Satyaprem Ki Katha".

Johar took to his Instagram handle and shared a teaser of the project, which will be released in theatres in 2026.

Taking to Instagram on Wednesday, Karan shared a teaser for the film with the caption, "Wrapped in romance, here comes the best Christmas gift ever from us to you! ❤️ Starring Kartik Aaryan - Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri is coming to cinemas in 2026. Directed by Sameer Vidwans."

Kartik delivers a monologue in the 33-second-long teaser, a signature of his previous romantic comedies like Pyaar Ka PUNCHAMA, as the tune of Saat Samundar plays in the background. Kartik is likely to play a mummy's boy in Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri, which leads to complications in his romantic pursuits.

The film will be jointly produced by Karan, Adar Poonawalla, and Apoorva Mehta from Dharma Productions, alongside Shareen Mantri Kedia and Kishore Arora for Namah Pictures.

Karan and Kartik were set to collaborate on Dostana 2, a sequel to the 2008 hit Dostana, announced in 2019. However, the project faced setbacks in 2021, with reports of creative differences leading to a recast. With Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri, the two are set to turn a new page in their partnership.

Kartik was last seen in the 2024 blockbuster Bhooh Bhoelaiyaa 3, directed by Anees Bazmee. Also starring Vidya Balan, Madhuri Dixit and Triptii Dimri, the sequel to Bhooh Bhoelaiyaa 2 (2022), amassed ₹ 421 crore gross worldwide. (AGENCIES)

'BABY JOHN' EARNS ₹ 11 CRORE ON OPENING DAY



NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Varun Dhawan-starrer "Baby John" has raised ₹ 11.25 crore in net box office collections on the first day of its release, the makers said on Thursday.

Directed by Kalees, the Hindi action film stars Dhawan in the dual roles of police inspector Satya Verma and John, his alter ego. It hit the screens on Wednesday.

"Baby John" is presented by Jio Studios in association with Atlee and Cine1 Studios and produced by A for Apple Studios and Murad Khetani's Cine1 Studios.

"Baby John", directed by Kalees, opened to an impressive INR 11.25 crore nett on Day 1 in India, marking it as the biggest opener for a non-franchise film post-pandemic," the makers said in a statement.

The movie is the Hindi remake of the 2016 Tamil film "Theri", directed by Atlee and starring Vijay in the lead.

"Baby John" also holds "the record for the highest opening day collection among remake films" released after the pandemic, the makers further said.

Wamiqa Gabbi, Keerthy Suresh and Jackie Shroff round out the cast of the film. (PTI)

Nani-starrer 'Hit: The Third Case' to release in May

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Crime thriller "Hit: The Third Case", starring Telugu cinema star Nani, is set to be released in theatres on May 1, 2025.

Directed by Sailesh Kolanu, the upcoming film is the sequel to Adivi Sesh's "HIT: The Second Case" which released in 2022.

Nani shared a new still of the film, reportedly set in Kashmir, on his official X page.

"Merry Christmas to each one of you #HTT3," the actor captioned the poster in which he can be seen holding the reins of a black horse set against the backdrop of a snow-capped landscape.

"Hit: The Third Case" is produced by Wall Poster Cinema and Unanimous Productions. It also stars Srinidhi Shetty of "KGF" franchise fame.

The first film in the franchise, "Hit: The First Case" was released in 2020 with Vishwak Sen in the lead.

A Hindi remake of the movie of the same name, directed by Kolanu, was released in 2022 starring Rajkumar Rao. (PTI)



Hollywood star Stephanie Hsu on new series 'Laid': It was fun to tell a love story for our times

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: Hollywood star Stephanie Hsu, best known to international audiences for her role in Oscar-winning "Everything Everywhere All at Once", says her latest comedy series "Laid" is modelled on traditional rom-coms but has a "weird angle" that speaks to today's audiences.

Hsu plays the role of Ruby Yao, a 33-year-old single Seattle-based party planner who is trying to solve why her former partners are dying in the order she slept with them.

For the actor, it was a no-brainer to be a part of the series, which is an adaptation of an Australian show of the same name.

"I love comedy so much. I started in sketch comedy and

it's so fun to be on a set and be silly and make each other laugh. So it was kind of a no-brainer to have a good time and make this show. Obviously this is a very extreme version and twisted version of that but it was really fun to get to tell a love story for our times," Hsu told PTI in an interview.

The actor, who also starred in Prime Video's "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel", said she was craving to be a part of a love story that would "speak to the time that we're in now".

"I do have this theory that we haven't had... we are not in the golden age of rom coms because the way people come to love and the way people find relationships is so different. And I think that maybe we're not as

rosy-eyed as we were in the nineties," she said.

"Our show is a twisted way of thinking about everyone you've ever been with... Like, when we want to watch the feel good rom coms, we like head to Nora Ephron, but for something to feel really new and fresh and appropriate to what it feels like in modern day dating, I think you need like a fun, weird angle, which our show definitely has," Hsu added.

Nahnatchka Khan of "Always Be My Maybe" fame and Sally Bradford McKenna have developed the series, which currently streams on JioCinema Premium in India.

Actor Zosia Mamet, who essays the role of AJ, Ruby's best friend and roommate, said she

had a blast playing the character and finding her story.

"Nahnatchka and Sally did such an amazing job of creating this person who, on the surface, seems to really march to the beat of her own drum, and doesn't necessarily care what other people think, and she maybe has these bizarre fringe interests."

"But as the season progresses, and maybe as Ruby sort of plays with her heart a little bit, this vulnerable person emerges from inside, and I thought that that was a really fun arc to play around with," she said.

"Laid", produced by Universal Television, also stars Michael Angarano, Tommy Martinez and Olivia Holt in pivotal roles. (PTI)



Indian women on course for clean sweep against West Indies



VADODARA, Dec 26: India would aim to push their boundaries in the batting department when they face a down-and-out West Indies in the third and final Women's ODI here on Friday. Following another series loss against the mighty Australia, India have been able to dominate the West Indies in home

conditions. What has stood out is their ability to put scores in excess of 300 consistently in the series, something they must do against the likes of Australia to get themselves out of the doldrums. Pratika Rawal, who has been opening the innings alongside Smriti Mandhana, did not set

the stage on fire in her maiden international appearance but improved her play considerably in the second ODI to raise hopes for the future. The Delhi-based cricketer was able to clear the ropes once, which is expected considering she has replaced Shafali Verma in the team. Harleen Deol has been around

for a long time but it was only in the previous game that she was able to record her maiden ODI hundred. She stuck at a 100 plus strike rate batting at number three and she would like to carry the momentum in the final game of the series. Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur has looked good since regaining

full fitness but is yet to get a big knock. With series in the bag, the skipper will have another reason to play freely and get a substantial knock under her belt.

On the bowling front, Renuka Thakur has once again led the pace attack well with the young Titas Sadhu also chipping in with the wickets.

Leg-spinner Priya Mishra has impressed in her fledgling career and would be eyeing another productive outing.

With the game being a dead rubber, India can also afford to test a few fringe players including Tanuja Kanwar and Tejal Hasabnis. West Indies will need to pull something out of the bag to upset India. Having conceded 300 plus run in both the games, the Hayley Matthews-led side needs to improve on all fronts.

Matthews is the lone West Indies batter who has made an impact. That will need to change on Friday.

Squads:
India: Smriti Mandhana, Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh (wk), Deepti Sharma, Saima Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Renuka Thakur Singh, Priya Mishra, Uma Chetry, Minnu Mani, Tejal Hasabnis, Tanuja Kanwar.

West Indies: Hayley Matthews (c), Qiana Joseph, Rashada Williams, Deandra Dottin, Nerissa Crafton, Shemaine Campbell (wk), Aaliyah Alleyne, Zaida James, Karishma Ramharack, Shamilia Connell, Afy Fletcher, Shabika Gajrani, Chinelle Henry, Mandy Mangru, Ashmini Munisar. Match starts 9.30 am. (PTI)

Greek freak: Konstas says assault on Bumrah was pre-meditated

MELBOURNE, Dec 26: It was just another day for him but not for a filled-to-capacity MCG as 19-year-old Sam Konstas went after a modern-day pace great with the ferocity of a Greek warrior, refused to back down from a confrontation and showed utter disdain for the archaic defence-first approach against India.

It wouldn't be wrong to say that the sensation from Sydney, who is of Greek descent, made a debut to remember at the Boxing Day Test and created the impact that the Australian team management wanted from him.

"I reckon maybe 20-30 years ago, people were probably saying defend a lot, just about all day but I think for new generation, there are new shots," Konstas said after a 65-ball 60, that included a couple of audacious sixes in the peerless Jasprit Bumrah's first spell. "It's exciting for me obviously, I like doing that, putting pressure back on the bowlers and hopefully it pays off in the next innings," not for once he sounded arrogant but the confidence was quite stunning to observe.

At the start of the year, Konstas played against the India U-19 team in the age group World Cup final where he was out for a forgettable nought. Cut to end of this year, he had 87,242 people on their feet to welcome his Baggy Green Cap No. 468.

The right-hander, who has made a name playing for New South Wales, was brought in to replace a rather jittery Nathan McSweeney and present a "different challenge to India". Evidently, he understood the

assignment quite well.

The baby-faced player also had a brief but not-so-friendly chat with one of his childhood heroes and a giant of the game, Virat Kohli. But what stood out was the kind of brazenness he displayed in handling Bumrah that very few have dared to in the last six-seven years.

"Yeah, definitely premeditated especially with the pace but just trying to keep my head still and just watch it as hard on my back. But yeah, got a few away today and changed the field, which was good, and then trying to bolster my zones," Konstas explained.

But there is method to the madness, he insisted, and was quite dismissive of the fear of failure. "I think it probably will look silly if I do get out, but I worked pretty hard on that shot and I feel like it's probably a safe shot for me really," he said of his hits against Bumrah.

"But I think that's the beauty about being young. It may be a bit naive, but I'm just trying to put pressure back on the bowlers, the best way I think is and yeah, good to get a few runs today," he added. Despite his confidence, Konstas is also respectful of what a bowler of Bumrah's calibre is capable of doing.

"He's a legend of the game obviously. So I was trying to put a bit of pressure on him and it paid off today. I think I am always challenging myself, trying to bring the best out of me," said Konstas, who has learnt his cricket under former Bangladesh first-class player Tahmid Islam. (PTI)

Struggling Valencia hires West Brom manager Carlos Corberan as its new head coach

VALENCIA, SPAIN, Dec 26: 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, who also briefly coached Greek side Olympiakos, led West Brom to its current seventh place in England's second-tier Cham-

pionship. He worked in Saudi Arabia with Al-Ittihad and Al-Nassr before making his debut as a first-team manager with Doxa Katokopias of Cyprus.

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.

Corberan wrote on X that "the decision to leave (West Brom) has been the hardest of my life." "There will ALWAYS be a place in my heart for this special club and I hope one day I can return to thank you all for your incredible support," he said. (AP)

Bosch claims wicket of his first ball as Pak reach 88-4 in 1st test against SA

CENTURION (SOUTH AFRICA), Dec 26: Fast bowler Corbin Bosch made a dream test debut with a wicket on his first ball to provide South Africa a perfect start in the Boxing Day test against Pakistan on Thursday.

Bosch lured Pakistan captain Shan Masood (17) to play a loose drive and had him caught in the slips as Pakistan reached 88-4 at lunch on a seamer friendly SuperSport Park pitch, losing four wickets for 20 runs.

Bosch became the fifth South African bowler after Bert Vogler, Dane Piedt, Hardu Viljoen and Tshupo Moreki to claim a wicket with his first ball in test cricket.

Kamran Ghulam was unbeaten on 23, including a top-edged six over the wicketkeeper's head against Bosch, and Mohammad Rizwan was not out on 10 at the break. Masood and opening partner Saim Ayub (14) had thwarted the pace threat of Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen in the first hour after captain Temba Bavuma won the toss under



overcast conditions and elected to field. But Bosch's breakthrough saw Pakistan's top-order crumble against the pace with Dane Paterson finding edges of Ayub and Babar Azam (4). Babar, who was dropped for the last two test matches at home against England, has long

been struggling in red-ball cricket. His struggles continued as he hit Bosch for a boundary of the first ball he faced before playing loosely to Paterson and getting caught in the slips after just 11 balls.

Left-hander Saud Shakeel (14) struck three fours against

Paterson before Bosch had him caught down the leg-side off a sharp short pitch ball after South Africa successfully went for a television review.

Both teams packed their playing XIs with four fast bowlers each and didn't include a specialist spinner at a venue where pace has dominated over the last six years.

South Africa, which leads the World Test Championship points table, needs a win in one of the two test matches against Pakistan to guarantee a place in next June's final at Lord's.

Seventh-place Pakistan included fast bowlers Naseem Shah, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas and Aamer Jamal in its team.

Abbas made a comeback to test cricket after more than three years while Naseem returned after missing out the last two home tests against England in October.

Injury-prone Shahzad also missed out three home test matches against England, but got the nod ahead of left-arm pace bowler Mir Hamza. (AP)

Former Chelsea player Oscar returns to Brazil's Sao Paulo from China



SAO PAULO, Dec 26: 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.

Oscar joined Shanghai in the middle of Chelsea's 2016-17 season for a transfer fee reported to be \$73 million. He won three Super League titles in China and became a fan favorite in Asia.

Oscar played for Brazil at the 2014 World Cup where he scored the only goal in its 7-1 semifinal defeat to Germany, which went on to win the tournament. (AP)

2024 sports administration recap: mess in IOA, contentious Draft Sports Bill, 2036 Olympics bid

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: An ambitious bid to host Olympics was set in motion, a long-pending national sports bill entered the final phase of being shaped into a policy but there was no end to the internal bickering and turf wars that have become the hallmark of Indian sports administration.

Like most other things about Indian sports, even the administrators offered a mixed bag of performances in the year going by. But the country could take pride in some matters, the submission of a letter of intent to host the 2036 Olympic Games being one of them.

The development has kicked-started an exciting but difficult journey to join a select few Asian countries to stage the ultimate sporting spectacle.

The October milestone itself was a roller-coaster ride thanks to the drama within the PT Usha-led Indian Olympic Association (IOA), a body that failed to explain just why India could not touch the double digit mark in its medal count at the Paris Olympics.

Half a dozen fourth place finishes might sound commendable for a nation trying to find its foothold in the Olympics but for a seasoned campaigner like India, they should have been medals that could push the tally past 10 in Paris.

The IOA has been a faction-ridden body for the longest time and the Usha-led current dispensation is no exception.

The sprint legend found herself pitted against 12 members of the 15-strong Executive Council, and an ugly spat over the appointment of a CEO marred the whole of 2024.

It all began early in the year with Raghuram Iyer, a former top official of IPL sides Rajasthan Royals and Pune Supergiants, being handed charge as the IOA CEO. The 12 opposing EC members refused to ratify his appointment, instead accusing Usha of "exerting pressure" on them to accept him as the CEO.

The track legend has termed the allegations as "shameful".

There were allegations and counter-allegations with treasurer



Sahdev Yadav threatening to file a defamation case against Usha for show-causing him to explain his eligibility to hold the post.

An EC meeting in September turned out to be a slanging match, that too in front of an International Olympic Committee (IOC) official who joined the proceedings virtually.

The IOC suspended the Olympic Solidarity grant to the IOA, amounting to Rs 8.50 crore annually and meant for athlete

development programmes. It was meant to be a warning that India needed to put its house in order.

However, the move did not bring the warring IOA officials to their senses and both sides issued notices of a Special General Body Meeting (SGM) on different dates.

One of the agenda items of the SGM called by the reviving 12 EC members mentioned a 'no-confidence motion' against Usha. But just before India formally

submitted its 2036 Olympics bid to the IOC's Future Host Commission on October 1, both sides postponed the meetings, pulling themselves from the brink.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi first made the announcement of India's desire to host the 2036 Olympics and 2030 Youth Olympics during the IOC session held in Mumbai in October 2023.

In February this year, Usha said that the IOA was engaged in active dialogue with the Future Host Commission on India's bid to host the Games even though a city is yet to be finalised.

Usha and new sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who assumed office in June, pledged an athlete-centric approach in their initiatives. As a result, a slew of schemes were unveiled which found support from both the active and retired India campaigners. Medal winners at Khelo India Games -- Youth (above 18), University, Para and Winter -- were made eligible for government jobs as per revised criteria of the sports ministry.

Usha pitched for the inclusion

of yoga in the Asian Games programme and she got support from Mandaviya. The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), led by an Indian president in Randhir Singh, made it a demonstration sport at the 2026 Asian Games to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

With new sponsors coming in for the IOA, Usha proposed a medical insurance and pension scheme for all ex-Olympians.

On the insistence of the IOA, the government made a departure from the usual 3:1 ratio of athletes to support staff in the country's Olympics contingent.

The sports ministry cleared 117 athletes and 140 support staff and officials for the Paris Olympics, which was an unprecedented relaxation allowing most athletes to have their personal coaches by their side.

Sports Ministry also launched RESET (Retired Sportsperson Empowerment Training) programme to make former athletes self-reliant after retirement by making them employable with "necessary skills and knowledge". (PTI)

Bumrah keeps battle alive; Australia score 311/6 after impressive Konstas debut

MELBOURNE, Dec 26: Jasprit Bumrah's knack of coming up with magic deliveries in crunch situations kept India alive after Australia's top-order, headlined by teen debutant Sam Konstas' stroke-filled half-century, guided the hosts to 311 for 6 on the opening day of the fourth Test here on Thursday.

If Konstas' audacious 60 off 65 balls enthralled the near sell-out crowd of over 80,000 at the MCG during a humid morning session, Bumrah's (3/75 in 21 overs) deception of length to dismiss Travis Head (0) also had its takers as chants of 'Boom, Boom, Boooooomraaaaaaaah' reverberated through the stands.

Coming into the Test with back-to-back hundreds, Head couldn't judge the length of a Bumrah delivery that was pitched slightly fuller than what the batter expected. He shouldered his arms trusting the bounce but the 66.2 overs old Kookaburra nipped back to clip the off-ball.

In the next over, he removed an out-of-form Mitchell Marsh (4), having got Usman Khawaja (57 off 121 balls) with the half-tracker in the post-lunch session.

The first two sessions, however, belonged to Australia with senior players Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne (72 off 145 balls) and Steve Smith (68 batting, 111 balls) scoring half-centuries.

The final session was all about Bumrah magic. The Indian spearhead didn't let the hosts completely walk away with the game which they threatened to do at one stage.

He now has 24 wickets in the series. With Mohammed Siraj (0/69 in 15 overs) off-colour, Bumrah didn't have much support save off-spinner Washington Sundar (1/37 in 12 overs), who bowled a containing line.

Akash Deep (1/59 in 19 overs) though got Alex Carey with the second new ball at the fag end of the day.

Even Ravindra Jadeja (1/54 in



14 overs) leaked runs despite getting Konstas out and Nitish Reddy, the batting all-rounder, was only used before the second new ball was taken.

The morning was owned by the precocious 19-year-old from New South Wales.

Konstas didn't show any nerves during his scintillating knock, which comprised of two sixes off Bumrah.

He also didn't mind a good scrap with India's superstar Virat Kohli, whose shoulder brush with the 19-year-old led to a brief confrontation.

In fact, Bumrah was hit for a six for the first time in a Test since Cameron Green hit him for one back in 2021. The gap between Konstas' first six, which was a lap

scoop, and the one that Green hit three years ago was 4000 legal Test match deliveries.

After a conventional lap scoop for maximum, Konstas also hit a reverse lap scoop towards third man for another boundary. The second six was pummelled over mid-on.

The way he attacked the Indian bowling with gusto gave his veteran opening partner Khawaja a chance to get back to form with a patient half-century.

But Khawaja would be really annoyed with himself as he couldn't time a pull shot off a Bumrah half-tracker, which went straight into KL Rahul's hands in the post-lunch session.

The duo added 89 runs in such quick time that Labuschagne and

last match's centurion Smith didn't need to show any urgency.

For Konstas, it all began with a few play and misses off Bumrah's opening over but as soon as the teenager got his first couple of runs, things changed dramatically.

The fearlessness of youth stood out on the big stage as Konstas pulled off the lap-scoop against Bumrah before smashing him over mid-on for another maximum.

The fans and experts alike were forced to think the last time Bumrah (1/50 in 15 overs) was hit for two sixes in his first spell of a Test match. They couldn't because it never happened in a first spell.

The stump mic caught Bumrah saying "Beginner's Luck" but Konstas seemed to have enough wares to answer his probing queries. And it was laced with a lot of spunk as he got into a verbal duel with Kohli after their shoulders brushed while crossing each other.

He often shuffled towards leg-stump to make room and on one occasion, crunched Bumrah past cover.

Mohammed Siraj was welcomed into the attack with a loud round of boos as he sledged the youngster due to his unconventional hitting style.

In all, Konstas hit six fours apart from the two maximums. Only Akash bowled a good channel among the pacers as Siraj was guilty of going too full or too short.

As Australia scored at more than a fair clip, skipper Rohit Sharma had to introduce Ravindra Jadeja (1/33 in 11 overs) in the 16th over to at least stem the flow of runs before it went out of hand.

The decision did pay dividends as the seasoned spinner got an arm ball to skid through with the angle to trap Konstas in front.

Khawaja and Labuschagne then added 65 for the second wicket with the Pakistan-born opener hitting Akash for a couple of boundaries to complete his first fifty of the series. (PTI)

Kohli, Konstas face off at MCG; Indian star fined, handed demerit point

MELBOURNE, Dec 26: Virat Kohli and Australian youngster Sam Konstas were on Thursday involved in a physical altercation because of which the Indian superstar was fined 20 per cent of his match fee and handed a demerit point even though it was played down as an accidental bump by the 19-year-old debutant.

The brief showdown took place after the 10th over of the Australian innings on the opening day of the fourth Test here when the players were crossing over. Kohli and Konstas bumped shoulders while moving across the pitch in the face off that was initiated by the travelling star.

Kohli was eventually charged with breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct by on-field umpires Joel Wilson and Michael Gough, third umpire Sharfud-doula Ibne Shahid and fourth umpire Shawn Craig.

He accepted the sanctions proposed by match referee Andy Pycroft at the end of day's play.

"Virat Kohli has been fined 20 percent of his match fee and awarded one demerit point for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct," the ICC said in a statement.

"No formal hearing was needed as Kohli accepted the sanctions proposed by Match Referee Andy Pycroft," it added.

After the physical contact, both players quickly turned around to glance at each other and engage in a heated exchange of words before Konstas' teammate Usman Khawaja stepped in to separate them. The on-field umpires also had a word with the two and things cooled down rather quickly.

Speaking to reporters after stumps, Konstas said Kohli bumped into him but it wasn't deliberate.

"I was just doing my gloves and I think he accidentally bumped me. I think that's just cricket and can happen with tension," said the teenager.



"I think the emotions got to both of us," Konstas had told 'Channel 7' during the second session.

The ICC's Code of Conduct states that "any form of inappropriate physical contact is prohibited in cricket. Without limitation, players will breach this regulation if they deliberately, recklessly and/or negligently walk or run into or shoulder another player or umpire".

Konstas, who was batting on 27 at the time, went on to hit Jasprit Bumrah for two boundaries and a six in the next over.

The teenager scored a stunning fifty on debut before Ravindra Jadeja trapped him leg before wicket.

India assistant coach Abhishek Nayar, who addressed the media in the end-of-day press conference, also brushed aside the incident as nothing big.

"When you play a game, there will be emotions but it is not as big as it seems. I wasn't aware of what happened and don't know what was said," he said in response to queries.

Konstas might have dismissed it as routine but former Australian skipper Ricky Ponting blamed Kohli for instigating the exchange. He went to the extent of saying that Kohli could face dis-

ciplinary action for it.

"Have a look where Virat walks. Virat's walked one whole pitch over to his right and instigated that confrontation. No doubt in my mind whatsoever," Ponting said on Channel 7 while watching the replay of the incident.

"I have no doubt that the umpires and the referee will have a good look at that. Fielders should be nowhere near the batsman at that stage.

"It looked to me that Konstas looked up really late, wouldn't even know anyone is in front of him. That man on-screen there (Kohli) might have a few questions to answer," Ponting added.

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who was at the helm during Kohli's captaincy, said the run-in was unnecessary.

"There is a line and you don't want to overstep that line. That's unnecessary, totally unnecessary. You don't want to see that. You know Virat is a senior player, he has been captain of the side," he said on 'Fox Sports'.

"He will have his own explanations for this but it's something you don't want to see. One person who would be watching, his eyes locked into the proceedings is Andy Pycroft," he added. (PTI)

Zimbabwe's Andy Pycroft completes 100 Tests as match referee

MELBOURNE, Dec 26: Former Zimbabwe captain Andy Pycroft on Thursday became only the fourth official in the history of men's Test cricket to complete 100 games as a match referee with the Boxing Day contest between India and Australia that began here on Thursday.

The exclusive list is led by former Sri Lanka player Ranjan Madugalle as the most experienced match referee with 225 Tests, followed by New Zealand's Jeff Crowe (125) and England's Chris Broad (123).

The 68-year-old Pycroft played three Tests and 20 ODIs for Zimbabwe from 1983-1992.

"Pycroft, who has also officiated in 238 men's ODIs, 174 men's T20Is and 21 women's T20Is since 2009, said he has enjoyed every minute of the journey to 100 matches as a match referee," the ICC said on its website.

Pycroft said touching the mark is a great honour and he is thankful to have been afforded the opportunity to officiate all over the world, "embracing different cultures."

"It has been a rewarding journey and I have treasured every moment of it," he added. (PTI)

Konstas tore MCC coaching manual to shreds: Ravi Shastri

MELBOURNE, Dec 26: Sam Konstas tore the MCC coaching manual to shreds with his brazen batting approach and flippant treatment of an intimidating Jasprit Bumrah, former India coach Ravi Shastri said on Thursday, adding that the Australian teenager reminded him of legendary Virender Sehwag.

Konstas, 19, grabbed eyeballs with his scintillating batting on Test debut. He had the Indian camp in disbelief with his bold ramp shots off Bumrah, one of the most revered fast bowlers in modern-day cricket.

"I don't think anyone's taken or treated Bumrah like that in any format of the game, let alone red-ball cricket," Shastri told Star Sports.

"For him to go out there with that swag and attempt some outrageous shots was something else. He tore that MCC coaching manual to shreds," Shastri said at one point, it felt like "India had run out of ideas".

"They actually didn't know what hit them. Initially, he missed the first two shots, and there was a smile on the faces of the Indian players. They thought, If he takes chances, we'll get him quickly. But as soon as this started happening, all the smiles disappeared. The ideas disappeared."

Shastri said Konstas is a pure entertainer like former India opener Sehwag and predicted a successful Australia career for the teenager.

"I'd say he'll have his odd failures with the way he plays and the chances he takes. It reminds me a lot of Virender Sehwag when he first burst onto the scene. He'll entertain when he gets going, and he's born to entertain. If he plays for any length of time for Australia, he'll do exactly that."

Former Australia batter Justin Langer said



what Konstas has done is not easy and revealed how the Indian team didn't expect the youngster to bat in the fashion he did.

"He's been given a license to go and attack Bumrah, but that's not easy—that is so hard to do. Even in T20 cricket, I think Bumrah's economy rate is as good as anyone. So it's not easy to do that."

"But the kid was bold, talking a good game, and then he came and put it into action. That's what great players do. Anyone can talk a good game. He came and put it into action, and it was exciting to watch."

"I did speak to KL Rahul before the game. And I said, Have you seen this kid Sam Konstas? And he goes, oh, we only saw him in the Prime Minister's XI game (50 overs). He was playing these ramp shots and all this sort of stuff. Rahul said, But he won't do that today. And I said, Yeah, sure he won't do that today. And straight away, Sam Konstas was doing that." (PTI)

Haven't been disciplined enough to stick in there: Kohli on his outside off-stump troubles

MELBOURNE, Dec 26: Indian superstar Virat Kohli on Thursday admitted he has not been disciplined enough in his last two-three innings of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and plans to take a lot more time before going for his strokes in the remaining two Tests.

Majority of Kohli's dismissals have come via the ball outside the off-stump, reminiscent of his struggles in England back in 2014. His bat has gone quiet following a memorable hundred in Perth.

"Last two three innings have not gone the way I wanted to. I have not been disciplined enough to stick in there and really grind it out. That is the challenge Test cricket brings," Kohli told 'Fox Sports' before the start of the Boxing Day Test.

Kohli went on to say that the pitches have been spicier compared to India's previous tours Down Under.

"Obviously these pitches are much more lively than the last time we played here. There is a different approach that is required and that is something I have taken a lot of pride in, to go out there and

counter different conditions and step up when the team wants me to.

"The idea is to get stuck in, go in there get your eyes set in, play enough number of balls before you start playing your game but respect the conditions foremost," said Kohli.

The 36-year-old has scores of 5, 100 not out, 7, 11 and 3 in the series.

On day one of the Boxing Day Test, Kohli was involved in a physical exchange with Australian debutant Sam Konstas who smashed a sensational 60 off 65 in the opening session.

Kohli was asked about India's performance in the first three Tests with the series locked at 1-1.

"We have played some really good cricket here (at MCG). Last time around we won, the year before we won as well. It is just about understanding where the series is placed and that takes away the pressure on individuals. Now it is all to play for."

"It is 1-1, we want to have a strong Test match here and try to go up in the series heading into Sydney," he added. (PTI)

Sivasagar Sports Association protests shifting of District Sports Office to Demow

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Dec 26: The Sivasagar Sports Association, along with its affiliated regional sports associations and sports enthusiasts, staged a two-hour protest demonstration at Doulmukh Chariali, Sivasagar, on Thursday against the shifting of the District Sports Office from Sivasagar to Demow. Later, they submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma through the District Commissioner.

Addressing the public meeting held on the occasion, president of Sivasagar Sports Association, Punaram Mili urged the government to reconsider the decision and halt any process to shift the District Sports Office from the district headquarters.

The meeting was addressed by several others, including Manoj Bhagawati, secretary; Manoj Kr Borthakur, vice president; Sarat Hazarika, assistant secretary; Mrinanka Saikia, president of Sivasagar Jila Karmachari Parishad; and Momi Gogoi Dutta, Kamakhya Baruah, representing the Gaurisagar unit of the association, condemned the move, stating that it would create disturbances instead of providing better sports facilities for young athletes.

The association has resolved to continue the protest until the government reinstates the office in Sivasagar.

Inter-District Athletics Championship begin in Morigaon

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, Dec 26: The 46th Inter-District Athletics Championship will be held at Khirud Barua Stadium, Morigaon, from December 27 in collaboration with the Morigaon District Sports Association and the Morigaon district administration.

More than 1,500 athletes from different parts of the state have arrived in Morigaon to participate in the championship. In the afternoon, the athletes were registered for the event. On the occasion, Morigaon District Sports Association General Secretary Jitu Bardoloi lit the lantern, and Morigaon District Commissioner Devashish Sharma offered a floral tribute at the martyrs' memorial.

The events will kick off at 6 a.m. on Friday. The flag of the Assam Athletics Association will be hoisted by its president and minister Jayanta Malla Barua, and the

HIL propelled us to greater heights, same can be expected for women's team: Harmanpreet

ROURKELA, Dec 26: India men's team skipper Harmanpreet Singh believes the women's national side will benefit from the Hockey India League like it benefited his set of players, putting them on the path of regaining Olympic glory.

While the men's competition will have eight teams, six sides will feature in women's event which is being held for the first time.

The Indian men's hockey team won back-to-back Olympic medals after a hiatus of 50 years.

"The impact of the HIL can be seen to this day in the Indian Men's Hockey Team. The Team's success in the Olympics is due to the exposure the League provided us, at a young age," Harmanpreet was quoted as saying in a media release.

"Rubbing shoulders with players you look up to and competing with and against them on a daily basis improved us more than we could imagine."

"With the Women's HIL also commencing this time I am certain that it will propel the Indian Women's Hockey Team to greater heights as well in the future," he added. (PTI)

India needed Rohit to open, Washington's variation at MCG: Nayar on axing Gill



Gill, who missed the first Test due to a finger injury, scored 31 and 28 in the Pink Ball Test and looked the most assured among Indian batters. He, however, got out for a duck in Brisbane.

With Rohit Sharma opening the innings and KL Rahul coming at No. 3, Gill had to make way for a third specialist all-rounder in Washington.

"Yes, Rohit will come up in the order and more likely than not, he will open the innings. That was the thought process. Unfortunately for Gill, just how things spanned out, he had to miss out," Nayar said at the end of the day's play.

"I just feel for a young player in a position like that, a big day, he wants to make his mark. He understands it's the team's requirement and it's unfortunate, but I wouldn't say that he's been dropped per se. It's just unfortunate that he couldn't find his place in this game," the former

Mumbai stalwart said but the explanation lacked conviction.

He elaborately explained why playing Washington at the MCG made sense ahead of Gill.

"A lot of the decisions when they are made, and the process of it being made, the communication is always there and transparency is there. It's pretty obvious that we felt in these conditions, looking at the pitch, having Washy in the bowling attack will give us that variation, especially towards the end once the ball gets old," he said.

"Post the 50 overs, we felt that was an area that we wanted to get better at. We felt Washy could give us that solidarity with Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja), especially the way Travis Head and Alex Carey were getting runs lower down. So we felt having an offie in the ranks will provide us with that." (PTI)