

**6 WORLD**

**8 NATION**

- Prez Yoon's impeachment fails as his ruling party boycotts vote
- 'India's inclusive growth applauded by international community'
- Govts before 2014 didn't work wholeheartedly to create welfare state: Shah
- 'Travesty of justice that secularism not given its due in Ayodhya verdict'

## US denies BJP's allegations of backing anti-India agenda

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** The US on Saturday rejected the BJP's allegations that organisations funded by the US State Department and elements in the American "deep state" were behind attempts to destabilise India through targeted attacks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and business tycoon Gautam Adani.

A spokesperson at the US embassy described the allegations as "disappointing" and asserted that the US government has been a champion of media freedom around the world.

The BJP alleged on Thursday that the US deep state colluded with the media portal OCCRP (Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project) and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to "damage" India's image. The BJP had cited Gandhi's use

of reports by OCCRP to attack the Adani Group and to accuse it of having closeness with the government. "It's disappointing that the ruling party in India would make these kinds of accusations," the US embassy spokesperson said.

"The US government works with independent organisations on programming that supports professional development and capacity building training for journalists. This programming does not influence the editorial decisions or direction of these organisations," the official said.

The OCCRP, headquartered in Amsterdam, is a media platform that largely focuses on stories relating to crime and corruption. The BJP had referred to a French media report and said it revealed that OCCRP is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## Assam cabinet expanded, 4 ministers take oath Reshuffle of ministers' portfolios on the cards

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday expanded his cabinet with four BJP MLAs sworn in as ministers.

Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office to the four new ministers - Prasanta Phookan, Kaushik Rai, Krishnendu Paul, and Rupesh Goala at the Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra here.

The chief minister and members of his cabinet were present on the occasion.

"Congratulations to all my colleagues who have taken oath today. Looking forward to working with them to fulfil Adamiya Shri @narendramodi ji's vision of a Viksit Assam," Sarma posted on X.

He now heads a 19-member council of ministers.

The induction of the four new ministers emphasises the government's commitment to strengthening the administration and ensuring



effective governance, Sarma later told reporters.

"There was a requirement of more hands in the ministry and with their induction, the Council of Ministers will be strengthened and we will be able to dedicate ourselves more for the development of Assam," he said.

The chief minister said that due to the number of ministers being less earlier, "we were not able to give guardian ministers to all the districts but now with the induction of the new ministers, we can do justice to all the departments and

serve all sections of people".

In 2021, Sarma appointed 'guardian ministers' for districts, who will look after various government schemes and resolve the issues related to them.

Of the new ministers, Phukan is a four-time MLA from Dibrugarh, Paul is a two-time legislator from Patharkandi, while Rai and Goala are first-time MLAs from Lakhimpur and Doom Dooma respectively.

Phukan and Goala represent the Upper Assam tea districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia respectively while Paul and Rai are from the two Barak Valley districts of Sribhumii (formerly Karimganj) and Cachar.

Tea Welfare and Labour minister Sanjay Kishan, who represents the Tinsukia constituency, resigned from office on Thursday, to pave the way for Goala with both representing the tea tribe community. Kishan has since been appointed as the chairman of the Assam Food and Civil Supplies department.

Parimal Suklabaidya had resigned from the Himanta Biswa Sarma cabinet after he was elected to the Lok Sabha from Silchar (SC) constituency earlier this year.

All the new ministers thanked the chief minister for including them in his ministry.

They also pledged to serve the people and work for the development of the state.

The ministers are yet to be allocated their portfolios with the chief minister likely to reshuffle and redistribute the departments among the 19 ministers.

Seventy-year-old Phookan is a BJP veteran and has represented Dibrugarh constituency for four consecutive terms since 2006.

Goala, a former student leader, joined the BJP prior to the 2021 assembly elections. The 46-year-old contested and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**HT BRIEFS**

**TB campaign**

**DIPHU:** With the nationwide launched of 100 Days Intensified TB Elimination Campaign, Karbi Anglong has also launched the campaign at the Joint director of Health Services premises here on Saturday, through a joint effort by Karbi Anglong district Health Society National TB Elimination program (NTEP), which aims to eliminate Tuberculosis by significantly reducing both its incidence and mortality rates, aligning with our commitment to improving public health across the country.

Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) Johnny Timung launched the campaign which was attended by under secretary, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Dipanjit Borua; joint director of Health Services Dr Borsing Rongpi and other officials. Launching the campaign the MAC Timung said it is a flagship programme initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with an aim to eliminate TB from the country.

**One killed**

**DIPHU:** In a man - elephant conflict one Albano Teron age 27, of Chanmari village on the outskirts of Diphu town, was trampled to death by a wild elephant that has entered the area from adjoining Dhanisiri reserve forest on Saturday. As per sources, the incident occurred at around 12 noon, when villagers were trying to chase away the elephant that has entered in their area. The aunt of the deceased said last night (December 6) a wild elephant from nearby Dhanisiri reserve forest in search of food has entered the village. The elephant ate and damaged the ripen paddy from village paddy fields. This morning some forest staffs reach the place and they advised the villagers to burst crackers to make the elephant move away. While making the elephant to move away from the area through various means like bursting of crackers, the elephant turned back chasing the villagers and killed Albano Teron. The deceased is son of Pitor Teron of Chanmari Mongalsing Timung village under Diphu police station. The aunt of the deceased said Teron by profession is an auto-rickshaw driver driving auto-rickshaw in Diphu town in order to maintain his family.

## Mayawati slams Cong for silence on atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh

**LUCKNOW, Dec 7:** The Congress party is "silent" over the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh, most of whom are Dalits and from weaker sections, and is raising a hue and cry over Sambhal to woo Muslim voters, Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati said on Saturday.

She alleged the Dalits are suffering in the neighbouring country due to the Congress "mistake" at the time of Partition and urged the Centre to take steps to bring them back to India.

Lashing out at the principal opposition party for "not raising" the issue of atrocities on Dalits in Parliament, the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh said the Congress, Samajwadi Party and their allies are cut from the same cloth.

At a press conference at the party office in Lucknow on Saturday, Mayawati said that a large number of Hindus who are suffering atrocities in neighbouring Bangladesh are Dalits.

She claimed that these people were mostly from a Hindu-majority area which was forcibly handed over to Pakistan during Partition -- and is now in Bangladesh



-- as a "punishment" for electing Dr B R Ambedkar to the Constituent Assembly.

They suffered due to casteist games of the Congress, the BSP chief alleged and urged the Centre to take steps to ensure their safety and security including their possible return to India.

"Now when they are being exploited, the Congress, despite being the main opposition party, is silent on their plight and is shouting 'Sambhal-Sambhal' only for Muslim votes. In this matter, Congress, SP and their supporting parties are two sides of the same coin.

"The BJP-led central government should proactively fulfil its responsibility towards the Dalits facing atrocities

there... In light of this mistake by the Congress, it (the Centre) should talk to the government there to bring the Dalits back to India. Our party will be grateful to the BJP-led central government for this. Otherwise, we will understand that there is no difference between the Congress and the BJP on the issue of Dalits," she said.

Instead of raising issues of national and public interest in Parliament, the opposition parties, especially the SP and the Congress party, driven by selfish political motives are trying to woo Muslim votes on the pretext of the violence in Sambhal, she alleged.

"Not only this, but these parties are also making the Muslim community, Turks and non-Turks, fight among themselves, for which the Muslim community also has to be cautious," Mayawati said.

The BSP chief said, "What is even more saddening is that Dalit MPs are also mostly silent on the issues of Dalit oppression to please the bosses of their respective parties... whether it is the issue of Dalit oppression (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Innovative, participative diplomacy can help solving conflicts: Jaishankar

**DOHA (QATAR), Dec 7:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday called for "more innovative and participative diplomacy" and said the needle is moving towards the reality of negotiations rather than the continuation of the war between Russia and Ukraine.

Jaishankar highlighted the increasing cost of oil, fertilisers and shipping etc. for several countries, including India, due to conflicts in the Gulf and the Mediterranean region.

He is visiting Doha to participate in the Doha Forum at the invitation of Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of State of Qatar Mohammed bin Abdulrahman. He was addressing a panel along with the Qatari prime minister and Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide.

Jaishankar said that diplomats have to tell themselves, it's a messy world. "It's terrible. There are conflicts, but therefore there's all the more reason for diplomats of the world to step forward," he said.

He also said the era of the 60s and the 70s when the UN Security Council or a few Western powers managed conflicts is "behind us,"



said that all countries need to step forward.

"I think this, there is a greater case for more vigorous diplomacy, for more innovative diplomacy, and, I think more countries need to have the boldness to bypass the West," the former diplomat turned minister said.

When the anchor asked about India's role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Jaishankar said, "The needle is moving more towards the reality of negotiation than the continuation of the war." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**Hotels in Barak Valley not to host B'desh nationals till attacks on Hindus stop**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** Hotels in Barak Valley of Assam have announced they would not host any Bangladesh national till attacks on Hindus and other minorities in the neighbouring country stop.

Barak Valley, which comprises three districts of Cachar, Sribhumii (formerly Karimganj) and Hailakandi, shares a 129-km-long border with Bangladesh's Sylhet region.

"The situation of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh is concerning. We cannot accept this in any way. We have, therefore, decided to stop hosting any national from that country in all the three districts of Barak Valley until the situation improves and atrocities on the Hindus stop. This is our form of protest," Barak Valley Hotel and Restaurant Association president Babul Rai told reporters on Friday.

## Hotels in Barak Valley not to host B'desh nationals till attacks on Hindus stop

"The people of Bangladesh must ensure that stability returns to the country. Only if the situation improves, we can reconsider our decision," he said.

A few days ago, Bajrang Dal had asked organisers of an ongoing global expo in Silchar to close down two stalls selling Bangladeshi products as a protest against atrocities on Hindus in the neighbouring country. Their demand was accepted.

Bajrang Dal protesters had also gone to the Bangladesh Visa Centre in Silchar and demanded that the name 'Bangladesh' be removed from the signboard.

There have been widespread protests in all the three districts of Barak Valley against the alleged atrocities on minorities in Bangladesh and arrest of Hindu monk Chinmaya Krishna Das. (PTI)

## 6 Bangladeshi infiltrators apprehended

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** Six infiltrators, including two women, from Bangladesh, have been apprehended by Assam police and handed over to authorities of the neighbouring country, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday.

"6 Illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators nabbed and sent back in an alert move, personnel of @assam-police tracked and apprehended 6 Bangladeshi nationals near the international border", the chief minister posted on X.

The apprehended have been identified as Md Didarul Islam, Santu Khan, Ismile Hussain Rahat, Sakib Hussain, Shati Akhter and Mim Seikh. "All of them have been pushed back across the border", Sarma added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Govt hiking tax rates for common man, giving concessions to billionaires: Rahul

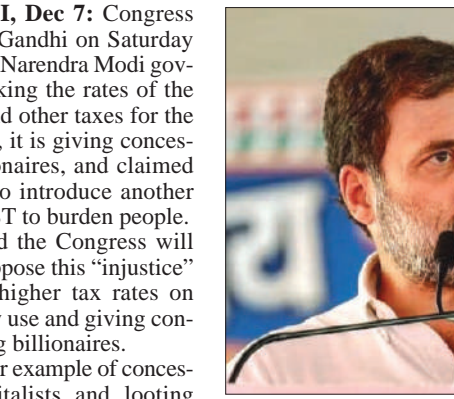
**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said while the Narendra Modi government is hiking the rates of the income tax and other taxes for the common man, it is giving concessions to billionaires, and claimed that it is set to introduce another slab of the GST to burden people.

Gandhi said the Congress will continue to oppose this "injustice" of imposing higher tax rates on things of daily use and giving concessions to big billionaires.

"See another example of concessions to capitalists and looting common people.

"On one hand, the income tax is increasing constantly in comparison to the corporate tax. On the other hand, the Modi government is preparing to collect more money through Gabbar Singh Tax," he

## Govt hiking tax rates for common man, giving concessions to billionaires: Rahul



said in a post in Hindi on X.

"It is heard that amidst the ever-increasing collection from the GST, the government is going to introduce a new tax slab -- there is a plan to increase the GST on things of daily need. "Just think --

## Govt hiking tax rates for common man, giving concessions to billionaires: Rahul

the wedding season is going on, people must have been saving every penny of their money and in the meantime, the government is going to increase the GST on clothes priced above ₹ 1,500 from (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Differences among partners coming to fore; INDIA bloc's future in question

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** Questions are being raised on the future of the INDIA opposition bloc as differences among several of its constituents are now coming to the fore and voices emerging for serious introspection by the Congress.

The latest point of friction has

come from Maharashtra, where the Samajwadi Party (SP) has announced quitting the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) after a Shiv Sena (UBT) leader hailed the Babri masjid's demolition.

The SP and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) were also not seen

with their other INDIA bloc partners during protests on the Adani issue. There are differences among the partners on other issues both inside and outside Parliament.

Parties are now flexing their muscles within the bloc, especially after the shocking defeat of the Congress in the Haryana and Maharashtra elections. With a "weak" Congress after a poor poll show, some opposition parties feel that it should introspect and be accommodative towards others.

They are also speaking out against the "dominance" of the Congress in the opposition alliance. Amid the disagreements on issues among the partners, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has expressed dissatisfaction with the functioning (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Borgohain's contribution in enriching Assamese literature unparalleled' CM awards Literary Awards on 93rd Jayanti of Homen Borgohain

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** On the occasion of the 93rd Jayanti of Homen Borgohain, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday presented the Literary Pension to three litterateurs and Literary Awards to 28 litterateurs at a function held at Gauhati University.

Under the Literary Awards, a one-time financial grant of ₹ 50,000 will be given to the awardees and under the Literary Pension, a monthly pension of ₹ 8000 will be given to the litterateurs.

Speaking on the occasion, chief minister Sarma said, "In a true tribute to the late Homen Borgohain who enriched the Assamese literature, on his birth anniversary State government has decided to confer Literary Pension and Literary Awards."

"Among the 20th-century personalities who contributed immensely to the forward march of the Assamese literature, Homen Borgohain was very prominent. Borgohain's contribution in enriching Assamese literature through the introduction of encyclopaedia is unparalleled," Sarma reiterated.



Sarma also said that when Assamese society was confronted with a complex situation, Borgohain gave the way out with his literary creations. "With his editorials in different newspapers and magazines, Late Borgohain brought the element of pragmatism to literature," Sarma

remembered.

Stating that at present, instructions through the mother tongue have increased throughout the globe, the chief minister said that his govt accords top reverence to all the languages and dialects spoken as the mother tongue. He said, "The languages and dialects of the ethnic people represent the ancient culture of the state. If a language or dialect faces extinction, the associated culture also experiences disappearance. Therefore, the government of Assam is taking steps for the promotion of all languages."

Speaking on granting the classical status to the Assamese language, Sarma said that all the sahitya sabhas representing different languages and dialects welcome the decision. He also said that the conferment of the classical language status to the Assamese (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Rajasthan may well be the first state in India to take such a visionary step' RRGS has potential to set new benchmark for state's development: Prem Bhandari

**NEW YORK, Dec 7:** Ahead of a global summit in Rajasthan that will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a prominent member of the diaspora community has welcomed the initiative, underscoring the state's potential to emerge as a leader in tourism, solar energy, mining and textile sectors for global investors.

PM Modi will inaugurate the 'Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit (RRGS)' from December 9 to 11 at the Jaipur Exhibition Convention Centre (JECC) in Sitapura.

"This summit has the potential to set a new benchmark for Rajasthan's development," Rajasthan Association of North America (RANA) President and New York-based social activist Prem Bhandari told PTI on Friday.

Bhandari described the summit as a "remarkable initiative" that would pave the way for a brighter future for the state, saying Rajasthan may well be the first state in India to take such a visionary step.

Bhandari highlighted Rajasthan's potential to emerge as a leader in tourism, solar energy and mining industries where the state already has a strong foothold. He further pointed to an opportunity in the textile sector, particularly in



light of shifting dynamics in Bangladesh. "With established textile hubs like Bhilwara, Pali and Jodhpur, Rajasthan is well-positioned to seize the moment and become a national leader in textiles," Bhandari said.

He underscored the importance of Rajasthan's role in realising Modi's vision of making India a developed nation by 2047. "For this dream to come true, states like Rajasthan must harness their full potential," he said.

He said the summit would be a new dawn for investment and

rily due to Modi's involvement and support.

"With Modi's unparalleled global stature and personal interest, there's no doubt this summit will be a resounding success. His leadership inspires global trust, and international investors see his vision as a foundation for stability and growth," Bhandari said. He added that Modi's third term in office ensures stability, a critical factor for attracting global investments.

Bhandari also urged the Rajasthan government to align its efforts with Modi's vision by appointing capable officials to engage with investors and cultivate a pro-business atmosphere.

"This summit has the potential to set a new benchmark for Rajasthan's development," Bhandari said.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma has said that there are immense possibilities of investment in Rajasthan and the summit will prove to be a milestone in accelerating the industrial direction of the state.

Sharma added that the summit will play an important role in bringing Rajasthan forward in various fields including mining, stone, education, medicine and automobile. (PTI)

## Kohira Diamonds expands presence in NE, unveils new showroom in Bhangagarh

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** Kohira Diamonds announced the opening of its fifth showroom in India at Bhangagarh on Saturday. The leading name in sustainable and ethical lab-grown diamond jewellery set the 500 sq. ft. showroom to offer an exquisite range of jewellery and experience to its customers.

Speaking on the occasion, Hiren Kotak, founder of Kohira Diamonds said, "We are thrilled to launch our new showroom in Guwahati, a city known for its rich culture and appreciation for beauty and craftsmanship. At Kohira, our mission is to make luxury sustainable and accessible. With our lab-grown diamonds, we are not just redefining jewellery but also contributing to a greener and more responsible future."

"This showroom is a step closer to bringing our eco-friendly jewellery to the people of Northeast India, and we are confident that Kohira will become a beloved name here," he added. The grand inauguration was marked by a traditional lamp-lighting ceremony performed by esteemed guests Nathmal Kaseria, Pushpa Devi Bajaj, actress Deeplina Deka, and Hiren Kotak.

The event also highlighted the significant contributions of Sushmita Bajaj and Shalini Kaseria, proud owners of Kohira Diamonds. Deka, gracing the event,



stated "It is an honour to be part of Kohira's Guwahati launch. Kohira is not just about beautiful jewellery but also about making a positive impact on the environment. Their dedication to sustainability and their 100% exchange and buyback guarantee truly set them apart in the industry."

## UltraTech receives CCI notice over proposed acquisition of India Cements

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** Leading cement maker UltraTech Cement has received a notice from the fair trade regulator CCI over its proposed acquisition of the South-based India Cements Ltd.

UltraTech Cement, in a regulatory filing, said it has received notice from the Competition Commission of India (CCI), and the Aditya Birla group flagship firm is confident in the merits of its case.

"The Company has received a communication from the Competition Commission of India under Section 29 (1) of the Competition Act, 2002, regarding the proposed acquisition of The India Cements Ltd. The Company will be responding to the same," said UltraTech.

The southern market for grey cement, where India Cements primarily operates, is highly competitive and fragmented, with the presence

of over 35 grey cement manufacturers.

"We are confident of the merits of our case," the Aditya Birla Group firm said. Under the CCI Act, where the fair trade regulator is of the opinion that a combination is "likely to cause, or has caused an appreciable adverse effect on competition within the relevant market in India", it shall issue a notice to show cause to the parties to combination calling upon them to respond within 15 days. After the receipt of the response of the parties to the combination, CCI may also call for a report from its probe unit -- Director General of Investigations.

Earlier in July this year, UltraTech Cement had announced the acquisition of a 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements from promoters and their associates in a ₹ 3,954

deal in a move to expand its footprint in the highly competitive and fast-growing southern cement market, particularly Tamil Nadu.

Besides, it had also announced a ₹ 3,142.35 crore open offer to acquire 26 per cent share of ICL from its shareholders. UltraTech leads the Indian cement market with a consolidated capacity of 156.66 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of grey cement. It is followed by billionaire Gautam Adani-led Adani Group, which is rapidly pacing up its capacity through acquisitions and capacity expansions.

Adani Cement recently announced to acquisition of CK Birla group firm Orient Cement, through which it will achieve a capacity of 100 MT (million tonnes) per annum by the end of FY25 and a gain of 2 per cent in the overall market share in the country. (PTI)

## Ather Energy announces launch of gold service centres



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** The CEO of Ather Energy, an Indian electric two-wheeler manufacturer based in Bangalore, announced the launch of the new Ather Gold service centres, with the first centre opened at Nashik, Maharashtra.

Taking to X, Tarun Mehta, the co-founder of Ather Energy wrote, "We've always focused a great deal on our service. And today we're upgrading the experience even further. Announcing our highest tier service experience with our new service centres: Ather Gold!"

In his tweet, Mehta mentioned that these centres will feature upgraded and streamlined service processes, guided by a detailed service playbook. ExpressCare, a 60-minute service designed to have the vehicle ready in just an hour, will also be available.

Additionally, the centres will have well-trained staff, personally interviewed by Ather's Bengaluru team and extensively trained in both soft and technical skills.

The Ather Gold Service Centres will also include a comfortable lounge for customers to wait in while their vehicles are being serviced, along with infrastructure that reflects the same immersive experience as Ather's Experience Centres.

Talking about maintaining the quality of the centres, Mehta wrote, "Basically, we're bringing the same level of quality and immersive environment from our Experience Centres to our Service Centres."

## Farmers seek low taxes, doubling PM-KISAN amount in pre-budget meet with FM

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** Farmer representatives and agricultural stakeholders urged the government to provide cheaper long-term credit, implement lower taxes, and double the PM-KISAN income support during a comprehensive pre-budget consultation with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday.

The two-hour meeting saw a detailed discussion of proposals, aimed at addressing multiple challenges in the agricultural sector, with key demands focusing on financial relief, market reforms, and strategic investments.

Bharat Krishak Samaj Chairman Ajay Vir Jakhhar emphasised the need for targeted interventions to boost agricultural productivity and farmer welfare.

Primary demands included reducing interest rates on agricultural loans to as low as 1 per cent and increasing the annual PM-KISAN instalment from ₹ 6,000 to ₹ 12,000. Farmers' bodies also strongly advocated for zero-premium crop insurance for small farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.



Taxation reforms were a critical component of the proposals, with stakeholders calling for GST exemptions on agricultural machinery, fertilisers, seeds, and medicines. PHD Chambers of Commerce and Industry requested a reduction of pesticide GST from 18 per cent to 5 per cent.

Jakhhar proposed a targeted investment strategy of ₹ 1,000 crore annually for eight years, focusing on specific crops like chickpeas,

soybean, and mustard to enhance national agricultural productivity. This approach aims to strategically enhance crop yields, reduce import dependence, and improve national nutritional security, he told PTI after the meeting.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) Speaker Dharmendra Malik demanded a comprehensive review of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism, seeking calculations that include land rent, farm

wages, and post-harvest expenses.

He also demanded the display of agricultural machinery prices on company websites, improvement in mandi infrastructure, widening MSP coverage beyond 23 commodities, disallowing imports below MSP levels and fixing minimum export prices only in emergencies. PHD Chambers of Commerce and Industry Chairman (Agribusiness committee) RG Agarwal called for a reduction in GST on pesticides from 18 per cent to five per cent, while highlighting the need to curb the sale of smuggled and fake pesticides while ensuring data protection for new molecular developments.

More ambitious proposals included constitutional reforms, such as adding agriculture to the Concurrent List and establishing a central Indian Agricultural Service.

Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and senior officials from finance and agriculture ministries attended the meeting, which included representatives from farmer producer companies, agricultural associations, and corporate sectors. (PTI)

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## US denies BJP's allegations

funded by the US State Department's USAID, along with other "deep state figures" like George Soros and the Rockefeller Foundation. "The United States has long been a champion of media freedom around the world. A free and independent press is an essential component of any democracy, enabling informed and constructive debate and holding those in power accountable," the US embassy official said.

Last month, US prosecutors charged Gautam Adani, 62, his nephew Sagar and other defendants for paying over USD 250 million in bribes between 2020 and 2024 to Indian government officials to win solar energy contracts on terms that could potentially bring in more than USD 2 billion in profit. The Adani Group has dismissed the charges as "baseless".

The opposition Congress demanded a thorough investigation into the allegations and accused the government of shielding the businessman. In an unprecedented criticism of the US State Department, the BJP said on Thursday, "French investigative media group Mediapart revealed that OCCRP is funded by the U.S. State Department's USAID, as well as other deep state figures like George Soros and the Rockefeller Foundation."

"In fact, 50% of OCCRP's funding comes directly from the U.S. State Department. OCCRP, therefore, functions as a media tool for carrying out deep state agendas," the party said in a series of posts on X. "A French investigative journalist has revealed that the US gov controls the media organization OCCRP, dictating that any story it ran was influenced & lacked genuine backing. But what is its connection with Congress?" one of the posts said. (PTI)

## Reshuffle of ministers' portfolios

won from Doom Dooma constituency in Tinsukia district in his maiden outing at the hustings. From Barak Valley, 50-year-old first-time MLA Kaushik Rai and his party colleague 51-year-old Krishnendu Paul have become ministers. Sarma heads the NDA alliance government in the state with two Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) ministers Atul Bora and Keshav Mahanta and United Peoples' Party, Liberal (UPPL) U G Brahma members of his cabinet. The ruling NDA has 84 members in the 126-member state assembly. The chief minister and 14 other ministers were sworn in on May 10, 2021. Sarma expanded his ministry on June 9, 2022, with the induction of two BJP legislators Nandita Garlosa and Jayanta Malla Baruah as ministers.

## Mayawati slams Cong for

in the country or in Bangladesh." There have allegedly been over 200 attacks on Hindus in 50-odd districts of Bangladesh since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5. A political slugfest erupted after violence in Sambhal on November 24 during protests against a survey of a Mughal-era mosque ordered by a court following a plea that a Hindu temple previously stood at the site.

The Congress and the SP have accused the ruling BJP of trying to create communal strife by raising temple-mosque issues. The BJP, in turn, has maintained that the opposition parties were trying to vitiate the atmosphere and those unhappy with the court order should take legal recourse. (PTI)

## Innovative, participative diplomacy

Describing how India is walking the talk, by going to Moscow, talking to President Vladimir Putin, going to Kyiv, engaging, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, transparently carrying messages to each others, Jaishankar said India is trying to find "common threads" which can be picked up at some time.

He also said that India is articulating the sentiments and the interest of the Global South comprising 125 other countries who have found their fuel cost, their food cost, their inflation, their fertiliser costs impacted by this war. "And, in the last few weeks and months, I've even seen this sentiment expressed by major European leaders, who are actually telling us, please keep engaging Russia and engaging Ukraine. So we do think that things are moving somewhere in that direction," he added.

Jaishankar also spoke about Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US president-elect Donald Trump. Referring to Trump's recent threats to BRICS about imposing 100 per cent tariff if those countries went ahead with BRICS currency, Jaishankar said, "I am not exactly sure what was the trigger for it but we've always said that India has never been for de-dollarisation. Right now, there is no proposal to have a BRICS currency."

He also explained how countries in BRICS don't have an identical position on the issue. Answering a question if India has a role to play in Russia, China, North Korea and Iran forming an anti-American, anti-westernism axis, Jaishankar said: "Every country has its interests. They agree on some, they disagree on some. Sometimes the same countries work in different combinations in different issues." "The reality is much more complicated, much more granular," he said at the panel discussions as part of the 22nd edition of the Doha Forum on the theme 'The Innovation Imperative.' As per its website, Doha Forum is a global platform for dialogue, bringing together leaders in policy to discuss critical challenges facing the world, and to build innovative and action-driven networks.

Under the banner 'Diplomacy, Dialogue, Diversity', Doha Forum promotes the interchange of ideas and discourse towards policy making and action-oriented recommendations. "In a world where borders are porous, our challenges and solutions are also interlinked," it says on the home page. (PTI)

## 6 Bangladeshi infiltrators

The chief minister, however, did not mention from which sector of the Indo-Bangladesh border they were intercepted. Around 167 people have been so far apprehended for illegally entering the country and pushed back to Bangladesh since the turmoil broke out in the neighbouring country in August this year. BSF has intensified its vigil along the 1,885 km long Indo-Bangladesh border in the North East since the disturbances began in Bangladesh.

Assam Police is also maintaining a high alert along the Indo-Bangladesh border to ensure that no person can enter the state illegally, director general of Police G P Singh had earlier said. (PTI)

## Govt hiking tax rates for common

12 per cent to 18 per cent," the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha said. "This is a grave injustice -- taxing the hard-earned money of poor and middle-class families in order to give tax breaks to billionaires and waive their massive debts," he claimed. "Our fight is against this injustice. We will raise our voice strongly against the burden of taxes on the common people and put pressure on the government to stop this 'loot'," the Congress leader added. He also shared a graphic that showed that the government's collection from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has gone up from ₹ 5.98 lakh crore to ₹ 10.61 lakh crore from 2019 to 2024, while that from the income tax has increased from ₹ 4.92 lakh crore in 2019 to ₹ 11.87 lakh crore in 2024 and from the corporate tax from ₹ 5.56 lakh crore to ₹ 10.2 lakh crore in the last five years.

Congress general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh also hit out at the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre over the state of the country's economy and cited the comments of a senior Reserve Bank of India (RBI) official. He said RBI's deputy governor Michael Patra has summarised the current economic situation very well in an interview. "Dr Patra says the economy is not moving ahead as fast as it should because -- private investment is not picking up; manufacturing growth is sluggish. "Both are being caused by lack of demand from consumers who are being hit by inflation," the Congress leader said in a post on X. (PTI)

## Differences among partners coming

of the INDIA bloc while signalling her intent to take charge of the alliance if given the opportunity. The TMC supremo has said she can manage the dual responsibility of running the opposition front while continuing on her role as the chief minister of West Bengal. All eyes are now on the Congress over its next move as the principal opposition party increasingly finds itself singled out in Parliament on several issues -- protests on Adani and farmers' issues, with many of its partners staying away.

The opposition alliance was formed in June 2023 with the motto of "BJP hatao, desh bachao" ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. But one of its founders, Janata Dal (United) chief Nitish Kumar, has since switched sides and joined hands with the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). SP's Rajya Sabha MP Javed Ali Khan said his party is still in the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), but admitted that "differences of opinion" exist within the bloc. "We are still a part of the INDIA bloc as we were among the founders. But differences of opinion on some issues among the alliance partners are there," he told PTI. On recent developments within the opposition alliance, Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary D Raja said Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge is the chairperson of the bloc and he should respond to the issues.

He, however, admitted that the Congress has to be more accommodative towards its partners and should do some "serious introspection". "The Congress will have to do some serious introspection and ponder on why seat sharing was not done properly for Assembly polls, where it lost badly," Raja told PTI. He said all parties have to remain united as the INDIA bloc was formed with the "BJP hatao, desh bachao" slogan and that everyone should work towards that goal. "That is why the Congress must be accommodative to the other parties and should listen to them," the Left leader said, pointing to the poor performance of the grand old party in recent Assembly polls.

JD(U) leader Rajiv Ranjan said, "The INDIA bloc has always been prone to disintegration. Now, it is just a formality so that the effects of its disintegration could be transformed into reality." He said during the Assembly polls in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the SP expressed its surprise at the Congress's stand. "This alliance was visible on only papers but now, it will not even exist there," the JD(U) leader said after the SP announced that it is walking out of the MVA. BJP leader C R Kesavan termed the INDIA bloc "opportunistic" and said, "The INDI bloc is a divided house of hypocrisy. The bitter bickering among them, which is now in the open, is because the INDI bloc feels that Rahul Gandhi's failed leadership is the reason for its repeated failure in elections." On Banerjee's "ready to lead the INDIA bloc" remark, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) spokesperson Mrityunjay Tiwari said the leaders of all the constituents of the opposition alliance will decide who would lead them. "Mamata Banerjee is a strong pillar in the fight against the BJP-led NDA government. Various leaders are leading from the front in their respective states," he said.

SP leader Abu Asim Azmi said, "The MVA never respected us... Uddhav Thackeray and his party had said they will leave communalism and join hands with secular forces. However, he and his party have once again hailed those who demolished the Babri masjid. The Samajwadi Party can never stay with those who want to divide people on the basis of religion." "We were never called for the coordination meeting of the MVA. We wanted coordination like it was during the Lok Sabha polls. But the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) kept fighting with each other over seat sharing. That is why we (MVA) lost (the Maharashtra election)," Azmi, who heads the SP's Maharashtra unit, added. The INDIA bloc's first meeting in Patna was hosted by Nitish Kumar. (PTI)

## CM awards Literary Awards

language is the achievement of all. "During Bhaxa Gaurav Saptah, around 1.5 lakh meetings were held across the state where litterateurs from different ethnic communities took part," he added. Thanking the Prime Minister for his initiative in granting the classical language status to the Assamese language, the chief minister said that "everybody belonging to Assam feels proud of this achievement."

It may be noted that altogether 31 litterateurs have been selected for Literary Pension and Literary Awards for the year 2024, among them three have been conferred with Literary Pension and the rest are Literary Awards. Shila Mohanta of Cachar, Dilip Kumar Phukan of Sonitpur, and Khagendra Nath Bora of Lakhimpur have been honoured with Literary Pension. Education minister Ranaj Pegu; VC of Gauhati University Prof. Nani Gopal Mahanta; adviser to education department Prof. Debabrata Das; son of late Homen Borgohain, Pradipta Borgohain, and a host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

## Expresses confidence to eliminate TB from Assam with active participation of public

# Governor launches statewide 100-Day TB elimination campaign

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** Reaffirming Assam's commitment to eradicating TB by 2025 in alignment with Prime Minister's vision, Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, launched the 100-day intensified campaign on TB elimination at the GMCH auditorium on Saturday.

It may be noted that to tackle TB with an aim to completely eliminate it from the country, a special 100 day campaign has started on Saturday with a focus on the high burden TB districts. Along with better drugs and diagnosis, patient support amount has also been doubled under the programme.

The 100-day campaign will target 17 high-priority districts in Assam and includes activities such as high burden area mapping, identification of vulnerable populations in tea gardens, slums, and mining areas, extensive screening campaigns (Nikshay Shibir), and promoting Jan Bhagidari (public participation) to mobilize resources and raise awareness.



Speaking on the occasion, Governor Acharya highlighted the socio economic burden of TB, which predominantly affects the poorer sections of society. He stressed on the importance of community driven efforts in making the implementation of the National Tuberculosis Elimination Pro-

gramme (NTEP) an unprecedented success in Assam.

Stating the state's achievements with regard to TB treatment, the Governor said that the patients who have been treated successfully with TB germs will act as TB Champions during this campaign. He also highlighted Assam's inno-

vative measures, including integration of TB services at Health and Wellness Centres under the Ayushman Bharat program, specialised initiatives like free TB treatment in tea garden areas and TB detection through boat clinics in char areas, early identification and management of TB among pregnant women.

The Governor also hailed the efforts of Ni-kshay Mitra campaign under the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan, which has seen widespread participation from corporate and public sector entities, with over 8,200 Ni-kshay Mitras already registered. Contributions from organisations such as OIL India, ONGC, GAIL India, and Power Grid Corporation of India have provided critical nutritional and treatment support to TB patients.

Acharya expressed confidence in Assam's ability to lead TB elimination efforts in the Northeast, stating, "Together, we can and will end TB. Assam will set an example in this fight against tuberculosis", the Governor added.

## Saikhong Basumatary and Sajal Kumar Singh take oath as BTC executive members

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Dec 7:** Saikhong Basumatary and Sajal Kumar Singha were officially sworn in as executive members of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) during a ceremony held at the BTC Legislative Assembly Auditorium, Bodofa Nwgrw in Kokrajhar on Saturday.

The oath of office and secrecy was administered by BTC Principal Secretary, Akash Deep in the presence of Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, Katiram Boro speaker of BTCLCA, Deputy Speaker Abhiram Mohanayak.

The ceremony was witnessed by the presence of several prominent dignitaries, including Lok Sabha MP Joyanta Basumatary, and BTC Executive Members, Ranjit Basumatary and Dr Nilut Swargiary, among other distinguished personalities.

Sajal Kumar Singha, who is representing the Srirampur constituency, was initially elected as a member of the Indian National Congress (INC) during the 2020 BTC elections. However, he switched over to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) before the formation of the BTC government in 2020.

Saikhong Basumatary, who was elected from the Chirang constituency, was originally a member of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF). He later joined the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), aligning with the present BTC Govt.

Notably, the two berths of the EMs were vacant for few months due to removal of former EMs of BTC, namely Ghanashyam Das and Reoreoa Narziary from the Executive Council of the Bodoland Territorial Council.

With the induction of two EMs in the BTC, the



strength of the EMs of the executive council has gone 17 including the CEM, deputy CEM of the Bodoland Territorial Council.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Council, has extended his hearty congratulations to Singha and Basumatary, on the induction of two more new EMs of the executive council of the Bodoland Territorial Council, and hopeful that more developmental aspects will be ushered in days to come ahead. He said that the government of BTC is fully committed to work for all round development and welfare of the common masses across the region.

"A warm welcome to Shri Saikhong Basumatary (B Saoraigwra) and Shri Sajal Kumar Singha, MCLA, BTC, our newly nominated honourable executive members, to the BTR Cabinet. I'm looking forward to working together to build a peaceful, smart and green BTR. Heartiest congratulations and best wishes to both of newly inducted EMs of the BTR," Boro added.

## Assam Yoga Mahotsav 2024 to be held from Dec 12

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Dec 7:** The 18th Assam Yoga Mahotsav 2024 will be held from December 12 to January 12, 2025, in various districts of Assam.

The inaugural ceremony will take place on December 12, 2024 at the Jugal Kishore Kedia Bhavan in Hojai district.

Pijush Hazarika, Minister of Water Resources, Parliamentary Affairs, Information and Public Relations, Printing, and Social Justice, Government of Assam will attend the event as the chief guest while Subhashish Kor, yogacharya and founder president of Bharatiya Yoga Sanskrit and Yoga Chikitsa Kendra, Guwahati will share the event.

Many other dignitaries attending the event include Ravindra Nath Tagore University vice-chancellor professor Manabendra Dutta Choudhury, member secretary of the Assam Government's Student and Youth Welfare Department - Geetartha Goswami, Hojai MLA Ramkrishna Ghosh, Lumding MLA Shibu Misra, and Swami Bhaveshananda Maharaj, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Jharkhand.

The event will also honor 17 distinguished individuals from various districts of Assam for their outstanding contributions to yoga.

Additionally, various social programmes will be organised in different districts of Assam during the month-long celebration, culminating in a closing ceremony on January 12, 2025 at the Yog Tirtha Pratishthan in Guwahati Maligaon.

The organisers have sought the cooperation and participation of all in making the 18th Assam Yoga Mahotsav 2024 a grand success. The Swami Shivananda Saraswati Yoga Inspiration Award will be conferred upon Swami Bhaveshananda Maharaj, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram, a press note added here.

## Armed Forces Flag Day celebrated at Raj Bhavan

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** In a move to pay tributes to the valour and sacrifices of Indian armed forces, Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Saturday paid rich tributes to the members of Indian Armed Forces who safeguarded the nation's honour at the cost of their lives at a function held at Raj Bhavan.

It may be noted that Armed Forces Flag Day is an annual event observed on December 7 to honour the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the country.

Addressing the occasion, Governor Acharya said, "I extend my heartfelt homage to the valiant martyrs of the Indian Armed Forces who made supreme sacrifices to the nation. My heartfelt congratulations to those brave soldiers who have displayed exemplary courage in the combat and counter-terrorism operations. I also salute the serving soldiers who vigilantly and devotedly protect our motherland under all circumstances."

The Governor moreover reiterated that Armed Forces Flag Day should not merely a day to honour the sacrifices of soldiers but a solemn reminder of society's responsibility towards their welfare, including the rehabilitation of injured personnel and the family members of martyrs. He highlighted the importance of supporting the armed forces' families as a genuine expression of gratitude for their unmatched service to the nation.

The Governor said, "The courage and selflessness of our armed forces are beyond words. Whether facing combat challenges, managing internal insurgencies, or countering cross-border terrorism, their contributions ensure our security. Their service inspires us to cherish and uphold the values of loyalty, bravery, and devotion to duty," the Governor said.

Highlighting the initiatives undertaken by the government, the Governor appreciated the historic implementation of the 'One Rank, One Pension', which he said was a transformative step in benefitting servicemen and their families. The scheme, which is now completing 10 years, stands as a testament to the government's unwavering commitment to the welfare of the armed forces, the Governor added.

Acharya also acknowledged Assam's exemplary efforts in soldier welfare, stating that around 41,656 retired soldiers, 9,954 war widows, and 103 disabled soldiers have been supported by the Directorate of Sainik Welfare.

## Celebrations in Margherita as Gowala sworn-in as cabinet Minister

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Dec 7:** Jubilant scenes unfolded in Margherita on Saturday as Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) Margherita branch celebrated the inclusion of Rupesh Gowala, general secretary of the ACMS central executive committee as a cabinet minister in the BJP-led Assam government under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The celebrations saw members of the ACMS Margherita branch bursting crackers, performing the traditional Jhumur dance, and distributing sweets.

The air was filled with slogans of "ACMS Zindabad," "Himanta Biswa Sarma Zindabad," and "Rupesh Gowala Zindabad," echoing their enthusiasm and pride.

Gautam Dhanowar president of ACMS Margherita branch, expressed his delight, calling it a moment of immense joy as he highlighted the significance of Gowala's appointment, stating, "It is a proud moment for the tea tribe and Adivasi communities of Assam and as the MLA of Doomdooma LAC and a cabinet minister Rupesh Gowala leadership will usher in more development initiatives for our communities."

The event not only marked Gowala's political achievement but also underscored the hopes pinned on his leadership for advancing the welfare of the tea tribe and Adivasi communities across Assam.

## ABSU delegation meets Amit Shah, discusses key Bodo issues

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Dec 7:** A delegation from the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), led by its president Dipen Boro, along with the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro and MPs Rungwra Narzary and Joyanta Basumatary, met Union home minister, Amit Shah in New Delhi on Friday.

During the meeting, the delegation submitted a proposal to name a road in the national capital after Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, a revered leader and visionary of the Bodo community. The proposal aims to honor his contributions to the socio-cultural development and empowerment of the Bodo people.

The meeting highlighted the significance of Bodofa's legacy and the Bodo community's ongoing efforts to preserve and promote their identity at a national level.

The meeting also focused on several key issues concerning the Bodo community and the implementation of the Bodo Territorial Region (BTR) Peace Accord signed on January 27, 2020 with detail on the progress and challenges in implementing the BTR Accord were discussed in detail. The leaders emphasised the need for expedited action on agreed commitments.

ABSU leaders demanded the enactment of



the 125th Constitutional Amendment to strengthen provisions under the Sixth Schedule for Bodo-dominated areas.

The delegation urged the central government to expedite the ₹1,500 crore infrastructure development projects promised under the Bodo Accord.

The delegation also called for recognising Bodo communities living in the hills as Scheduled Tribes (Hills) to ensure their social and

economic upliftment.

The ABSU has put demand the withdrawal of all cases against National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) cadres and the release of those still imprisoned.

The ABSU delegation extended a formal invitation to Amit Shah to attend the 57th ABSU session as chief guest, scheduled to take place in Kokrajhar on second week of February, 2024.

## Tezpur committee observes 92nd birth anniversary of literary icon

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Dec 7:** Besides several literary organisations of the district of Sonitpur 'Karnadadhara' Tezpur committee also observed the 92nd birth anniversary of literary icon and founder of Karunadhara Homen Borgohain here on Saturday.

To commemorate the birth anniversary of the literary legend Karunadhara organised a day-long programme at the conference hall of the Sishu Vikash Academy here. To mark the day a tribute paying programme was held at the very outset of the day where the executive president of the Sonitpur District committee Dr Bhubaneswar Sahariah paid homage to the portrait of Homen Borgohain by lighting a lamp. Secretary of the committee Dr Krishna Sarma, Principal of the Academy Mandakini Bora, noted citizen of the city Lipika Saharia, teachers and students also joined the programme and paid rich tribute to the literary icon.

## NABARD observes 'World Environment Day' in Hojai



**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Dec 7:** In order to spread the awareness about the health of soil and its impact on production or productivity of various agriculture commodities, NABARD organised an event to observe the World Soil Day.

The event was organised along with the members of its FPO Dakhin Hojai Milk Producer Company Ltd at Bhimarali in Dhalpukhuri Block, Hojai on Thursday.

Adding to the event, the theme 'Caring for Soils: Measure, Monitor, Manage' which was attended

by DDM-NABARD Rajendar Perma, district agriculture officer Ranjith Mishra Bhagawati, the secretary of Gramya Unnayan Santha - Mukut Deka and the Board of Directors & farmer members of the FPO.

Speaking on the occasion, the DDM - NABARD, Rajendar Perma informed the participants that being an Apex Development Organisation, NABARD has been formulating and supporting various projects for sustainable development of rural areas and the agriculture and allied sectors, since its inception.

During the event, he cited the importance of the top soil and its health in enhancing the production or productivity of various agricultural commodities. He also stressed on reducing the use of harmful chemicals by proportionately replacing them with natural ingredients like vermicompost, cow dung, jivamrut, bheejamrut etc.

DAO - Hojai, R M Bhagawati highlighted that soil is the foundation of life on earth, as it supports the growth of the crops that feed us, the plants that provide us with oxygen, and the biodiversity that sustains our ecosystems and stressed on the need for conservation of soil health for the plantation and cultivation activities.

The participants were also guided by other invited dignitaries and after replying to the queries of the participants, the event concluded with planting the saplings of Agarwood in the fields of selected participants, an official release added here.

## UP Minister of Agriculture extends invitation for Mahakumbh 2025

### 'Eternal and collective proclamation of unity in India'

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** The Minister of Agriculture, Agricultural Education, and Agricultural Research Surya Pratap Shahi on Saturday participated in a grand roadshow in Dispur, extending an invitation to the people of the state to participate in the Prayagraj Mahakumbh-2025.

Speaking on the occasion, Shahi said, "The state government is extending invitations for Mahakumbh-2025, the grand festival of Sanatan Indians, to all states across India and the entire world."

"The Mahakumbh embodies the spirit of India's cultural and spiritual consciousness and is a divine and vibrant representation of 'Ek Bharat - Shreshth Bharat-Samaveshi Bharat' (One India, Great India, Inclusive India)," he further stated while addressing the media after the roadshow.

During the press conference, the agriculture minister reminded, "Many of you may have witnessed the 'divine and grand' experience of the Prayagraj Kumbh in 2019, which became an indelible symbol of India's cultural pride on the global stage. The world widely acknowledged the special management of the event."

He highlighted that special emphasis has



been placed on making Mahakumbh Mela 2025 clean and green. Approximately three lakh plants have been cultivated across Prayagraj, with the Uttar Pradesh government pledging to ensure their care and maintenance even after the conclusion of the Mela.

Shahi informed that the preparations for the Mahakumbh Mela are being made with a focus on health and hygiene. He said, "A large number of specialist doctors have been deployed. A 100-bed hospital has been set up at the Parade Ground. In total, there will be 291 MBBS doctors and specialists, 90

Ayurvedic and Unani specialists, and 182 nursing staff."

The preparations include the launch of a dedicated website and app, an AI-powered chatbot in 11 languages, QR-based passes for people and vehicles, a multilingual digital lost-and-found centre, and integration of all locations on Google Maps.

Further to streamline the traffic flow during the event, 101 smart parking facilities have been created, capable of accommodating up to five lakh vehicles daily. The parking area spans 1,867.04 hectares, which is 763.75 hectares larger compared to the 1,103.29 hectares allocated for parking in 2019.

During the press conference, Shahi provided details about the arrangements for the Mahakumbh. He informed, "35 existing permanent ghats and 9 new ghats have been constructed in the Mahakumbh city to facilitate bathing for devotees."

He further mentioned that a riverfront, modelled after Mumbai's Marine Drive, has been developed along a 15.25-kilometer stretch on the banks of the Ganges, extending from the Sangam to Nagvasuki Temple, Surdas to Chhatnag, and near Curzon Bridge to Mahavir Puri.

## Editor's pick

## ATACMS: A little too late for Ukraine?

By: Kartik Bommakanti, Vivek Mishra

The Biden administration has finally relented to Kyiv's long-pending demand from its Western allies to use the long-range Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS). Washington's permission to use the ATACMS by Kyiv comes against the backdrop of North Korea deploying 10,000 troops in support of Russia to fight Ukrainian forces. The latest ATACMS are long-range guided missiles with a range of 300 kilometres (km) that can strike deep inside Russian territory. These missiles were already delivered in April this year, but approval for their use was only given over the last few days. A medium-range variant of the ATACMS was delivered at the end of 2023. The Biden administration's decision to lift restrictions on the supply of these missiles comes alongside several other restrictions on Kyiv's use of weapons systems being lifted. These weapons systems or platforms include the F-16s, M1-Abrams, High Mobility Rocket Systems (HIMARS), and Patriot missiles. The employment of ATACMS was earlier confined to Ukrainian territory. The United States (US) under the Biden administration consistently opposed supplying weapons systems because it deemed their battlefield use too escalatory. Indeed, the US's fear of escalation has been the prime reason for Ukrainians fighting this war with one hand tied behind their backs. The outcome has left the Ukrainians suffering setbacks, enabling Russian advances and incremental territorial gains inside Ukraine. It has also left the Ukrainian cities and infrastructure reeling from incessant Russian bombardment.

The ATACMS, however, are very versatile and can be launched from an equally versatile platform, the HIMAR launch platform, which is also a distinct missile launch system that was already in use prior to the latest decision by the Biden administration. The HIMAR launch platform is manoeuvrable just like the ATACMS projectile is. The speed and manoeuvrability of the ATACMS as well as the manoeuvrability of the HIMAR platform from which they will be launched makes it very difficult for Russian air defence missiles to intercept and target them. The ATACMS will bring great benefits to the Ukrainians if used effectively, by helping Kyiv destroy Russian command and control centres, air defence systems, air bases, weapons depots or storage facilities, communication facilities and large military installations. The Black Sea area in southern Russia adjoining Ukraine would be subject to considerable bombardment by the ATACMS. Consequently, the ATACMS are intended ultimately to improve and strengthen the bargaining position of the Ukrainians when negotiations begin between Kyiv and Moscow. Despite the Biden administration giving a go-ahead for the use of ATACMS by Kyiv, their use is restricted to the Kursk region where there is a large combined and concentrated deployment of Russian and North Korean troops. Still, the Ukrainians will also benefit from cruise missile capabilities developed as part of an Anglo-French collaboration called the Storm Shadows (British) and SCALP (French). As opposed to the ATACMS, these cruise missiles have a shorter range of 155 miles and are launched from an airborne platform. Despite being developed by America's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, their use was permitted only after Washington lifted its own restrictions on the use of the ATACMS. Washington's veto as the largest funder has meant that even its trans-Atlantic allies are prohibited from supplying weapon systems and missiles to Kyiv that were not built by the US. Nevertheless, despite their delayed delivery and approval for use, these missile systems and their platforms can inflict great damage and strike Russian targets at extended ranges, forcing Moscow to relocate its assets such as planes, ammunition storage facilities, and command centres deep inside Russian territory. Compelling Moscow to come to the negotiation table for a peace settlement is a vital goal, which the incoming President, Donald Trump, has alluded to.

Russia has predictably reacted with menacing threats that it will not tolerate Western long-range weapons being used by the Ukrainians. However, these threats from Moscow have not prevented the US-led NATO states from supplying and permitting Kyiv's limited use to strike Russia over the course of nearly three years. In fact, Ukraine used ATACMS to strike the Bryansk region of Russia immediately after the go-ahead by the US, suggesting that training and deployment were already underway. Russia has downplayed its significance.

At the tactical level, the decision may not impact the immediate military balance in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and is unlikely to deter Russia from its coming offensive in the Kursk region to oust the Ukrainian forces. The decision may also be a little too late, given some concerns in the US that the ATACMS stockpile may be low. The Biden administration's decision to allow Ukraine to use ATACMS coincided with Russia's announcement of a new nuclear doctrine, lowering the threshold for nuclear weapons use and signalling that it will not retreat. (Courtesy: ORF)

## Cities grappling with vehicle parking problems

By: Dr. Satvawan Saurabh

Vehicle parking problems in India are significant urban challenges that affect not only traffic flow but also the very fabric of urban life. The problem arises from a combination of rapid urbanization, rising vehicle ownership, and outdated urban planning, creating a complex dilemma for traffic management, urban planning, and quality of life in metropolitan areas. As cities expand and car ownership becomes more accessible, Indian urban centers are struggling to accommodate the growing number of vehicles. Lack of adequate parking infrastructure and cities not designed for the number of vehicles today lead to rampant illegal parking. This not only leads to road congestion but also to a shortage of pedestrian space. Many Indian cities were founded in ancient or colonial times but were not planned with modern traffic demands in mind. Narrow streets and mixed land use put pressure on the load of parked and moving vehicles. Additionally, lax enforcement of parking rules and a cultural tendency towards non-compliance further aggravate the situation, leaving urban spaces cluttered.

A direct consequence of parking problems is severe traffic congestion, which increases travel time, increases pollution levels, and degrades the quality of urban life. Pedestrians are particularly inconvenienced, as parked vehicles often encroach on pedestrian paths, forcing them onto the streets and compromising their safety. Economically, lack of parking affects local businesses, as congested streets do not attract customers. The high demand for parking spaces also increases the cost of real estate, which in turn promotes urban sprawl and environmental degradation by promoting the development of parking infrastructure at the expense of green spaces. Motor vehi-

cle matters in India fall under both the central and state jurisdictions. Although vehicle congestion is an emerging problem for Indian cities, the automobile industry is unlikely to be banned, as it has considerable economic and employment potential and is vital to India. The parking policies of all five cities seem to agree on some important aspects. They are unanimous in their view that parking cannot be free, and wherever public space is used, a fee must be levied, as the concept of 'free parking' is not sustainable.

Addressing the parking problem requires a comprehensive strategy that includes the development of adequate parking infrastructure, the adoption of smart parking technologies, and the enforcement of parking regulations. For example, defining parking areas and using technology such as vehicle identification sensors and automatic license plate recognition can streamline parking management. In addition, adjusting parking fees based on land value and congestion can discourage unnecessary vehicle use in congested areas. In addition to infrastructure solutions, promoting public transport and sustainable urban mobility practices can reduce parking pressure. Encouraging the use of public transport, cycling, and walking can reduce reliance on private vehicles, thereby reducing demand for parking spaces.

Vehicle parking problems in India are a complex issue that requires a multi-pronged approach, including urban planning, policy reforms, technological innovations, and cultural change. By tackling this challenge head-on, India can enhance its urban mobility, improve the quality of life of its citizens, and set an example for sustainable urban development. The way forward lies in collaborative efforts between the government, the private sector, and the public to reimagine and rebuild better urban spaces.

## Good days for NE tourism industry on cards

'Ashtalakshmi' (eight NE states) will become the tourism hub soon: PM

Yes, good days are in the offing for the Northeast tourism industry. The reason is not far to seek. The Central Government is currently pumping funds for boosting the NE tourism sector. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has echoed that 'Ashtalakshmi' (eight NE states) will become the tourism hub soon.

Discussing the second form of Goddess Lakshmi - Dhan Lakshmi, Modiji said that the Northeast was blessed with abundant natural resources with a great confluence of minerals, oil, tea gardens and biodiversity.

To him, there is a huge potential of renewable energy and this blessing of "Dhan Lakshmi" was a boon for the entire Northeast. He was speaking at the first Ashtalakshmi Festival in New Delhi on December 6, 2024.

Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav is a three-day cultural festival, being celebrated for the first time from 6th to 8th December at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi. It highlights the vast cultural tapestry of Northeast India, bringing together an array of traditional arts, crafts, and cultural practices.

Geographically, Northeast India (NEI) is regarded as the cradle of many castes, communities, cultural ethos and faiths. Tucked away in a 'strategic region', linked with the national mainstream by a narrow corridor called the "Chicken's Neck" via Siliguri in West Bengal, those who once visited the region can never forget this paradise on the planet Earth. The region is home to 3.8% of the national population and occupies about 8% of India's total geographical area. Siliguri corridor, a narrow strip of land in West Bengal, popularly known as "chicken's neck" connects this region to the rest of mainland India.

Good news. In a significant development, the Centre has approved ₹ 800 crore for the development of eight iconic tourist sites across six Northeastern states recently. The projects spread across Meghalaya, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Sikkim, and Tripura, were sanctioned by the Department of Expenditure (DoE), Government of India in the last week of November, 2024. The DoE has released 66 per cent of the approved funds as the first instalment directly to the respective states, with the Ministry of Tourism tasked with monitoring progress. The states have been given a two-year timeline for project completion, with the full funds set to be disbursed by March 2026.

Among the approved projects are the Nathula Border in Sikkim (₹ 97.37 crore), 51 Shakti Peethas Park in Tripura's Gomati district (₹ 97.7 crore), Loktak Lake in Manipur (₹ 89.48 crore), Umiam Lake Development in Meghalaya's Shillong (₹ 99.27 crore), Assam State Zoo in Guwahati (₹ 97.12 crore), and the Siang Eco-Retreat in Arunachal Pradesh's Pasighat (₹ 46.48 crore). These initiatives are part of a broader scheme under which the Centre has approved 40 projects worth ₹ 3,295 crore across 23 states to ensure a more balanced distribution of tourists nationwide.

It may be recalled here that as many as 15 destinations in the Northeast were



selected for development under the central government's Swadesh Darshan 2.0 Scheme on November 24, 2023. These include one from Manipur and two each from the seven other states in the northeast. The move aims to not only boost tourism in the eight states but also help in further development in the region. NE states, some of which share borders with other countries, are known for their pristine beauty, blessed with majestic hills, scenic waterfalls, criss-crossing rivers and adventurous treks, and many of these sites have not been explored by domestic tourists.

Union Minister of Tourism and Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat inaugurated 12th Edition of International Tourism Mart at Kaziranga, Assam on November 26, 2024. He highlighted the rich cultural legacy and tourism potential of the Northeast. The tourism mart is organised annually to showcase Northeast's potential with a focus on promoting Sustainable Tourism. This ITM is a remarkable opportunity for Northeast India to showcase its rich culture and diversity to the world and also offers a platform for people from across the globe to witness the extraordinary heritage of this region.

A coffee table book on Assam "Guwahati and Around" published by Assam Tourism Development Corporation Limited was also launched. The book takes a comprehensive look at the rich heritage, culture and diversity of Guwahati and its picturesque surroundings. The book is a visual tapestry in words capturing the true essence of the region.

This ITM celebrated multiple achievements of Northeast India's tourism & cultural prowess. In July this year, 'Moidams of Charaideo' were declared as the 43rd UNESCO World Heritage Site from India. As cultural heritage from the times of the great Ahom dynasty, their declaration as World Heritage is a testament to the immense tourism & cultural significance of Assam and Northeast India. Celebrations are also

held for the 50 years of Kaziranga being declared as a National Park.

Sad to say, there is a general lack of awareness about the states of Northeast India among the people, those living in other parts of the country, in particular, and the world, in general. This hinders the inclusion of the children and people of the region in mainstream India and integration with the country.

This can be better understood with a suitable example. In October 2020, the E-commerce giant Flipkart was slammed on social media for calling Nagaland not a part of India. The Flipkart was trolled after it had told a customer in Dimapur (Nagaland) that it did not deliver goods outside India. So, the Flipkart customer

support on Facebook was scathingly criticised after it had told the customer that 'it doesn't deliver outside India'. However, later on, the company realised the mistake and apologised.

More precisely, sufficient efforts may be made to focus on the statements and ideas which are being supported by appropriate evidence. These will definitely demonstrate how conclusions have been drawn as well as acknowledging the work of others. This can be done with the help of media campaigns. All the national and regional media houses may disseminate these destinations by properly framing them as major tourist destinations. Though there are many opportunities in the tourism industry, there are many key constraints in Northeast India. M.P. Bezbaruah, Secretary General, Hotel Association of India stressed the importance of the tourism industry in a media report in February 2024.

He opined, "Government's announcement to provide industry status to the tourism sector is a very encouraging initiative. To harness the true potential of the sector, the Government must focus on professional development of lesser-known destinations in the State. The Buddhist, Ramayana and pilgrimage circuits need investments to provide better connectivity by road, rail and civil aviation; besides better accommodation infrastructure."

According to a recent report of Republic TV news channel, about 60 per cent tourists generally visit religious spots in India. So, the Centre may formulate a goal-driven comprehensive plan to promote religious sites of NEI in the International Tourism Mart for Northeast in 2025. This move will not only generate employment avenues alone, it will also boost the national economy as a whole. (The author is a Guwahati-based writer and analyst on Current Affairs. He may be contacted at amarkrishnaghy@gmail.com.)



## Bangladesh's turning point: Secularism to Islamic Nationalism and the regional implications

By: Dipak Kurmi

The political upheaval that led to the ouster of Sheikh Hasina Wazed Awami League government in Bangladesh on August 5 this year has sparked a significant transformation, but the nature of this change remains a matter of intense debate. The first few months following the government's fall left many observers in India and the West uncertain about the direction the country would take. At first glance, it appeared to be a familiar, military-driven change of government, one that would result in superficial shifts within the upper echelons of power without altering the fundamental political landscape. This interpretation was particularly popular among sections of Dhaka elite, who sought to downplay the significance of the upheaval and framed it as a reaction to the excesses of the Wazed administration. They suggested that the new government would prioritize stabilizing the country and restoring the status quo, but with more authoritarian undertones.

However, this initial reading of events overlooked deeper currents in Bangladesh's political history. The alternative, more widely accepted by retired diplomats and political analysts, is that what unfolded was a genuine regime change—a dramatic shift in the ideological direction of the country. This argument is rooted in the complex and often tumultuous political trajectory of Bangladesh since its independence in 1971. For much of the country's history, two ideological strands have dominated: one centered around the legacy of the Liberation War and its secular ideals, championed by

the Awami League and its founding leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; the other, a counter-revolutionary narrative, which emerged after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and the rise of military dictatorships. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), formed by Ziaur Rahman, became the main proponent of this counter-revolutionary ideology, aligning itself with Islamist parties, some of which had opposed Bangladesh's secession from Pakistan.

The fall of the Awami League government in August 2024 cannot be fully understood without considering the historical context of these ideological divisions. Throughout her tenure, Sheikh Hasina Wazed maintained a fierce commitment to secularism and the legacy of the 1971 Liberation War. Her governments' prosecution of war criminals, particularly leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami, and its focus on eradicating the influence of Islamists in politics, reinforced the secular vision of Bangladesh. The Awami League's approach was also marked by a determination to uphold the memory of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the father of the nation, a legacy that sharply contradicted the narrative pushed by Islamist factions.

However, in the wake of the August 2024 upheaval, the dominant political forces in Bangladesh seem to be shifting away from this secular, Liberation War-inspired vision. The new government, backed by the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, has unleashed a brutal political cleansing targeting the Awami League and its supporters. Criminal cases have been filed against nearly 194,000 members of the Awami League, and the prop-

erties of its leaders have been destroyed. The most symbolic target of this political purge has been the monuments to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which have been defaced or demolished, signaling a direct challenge to the secular nationalism that once defined the nation.

While the student movement has been at the forefront of this political upheaval, it is clear that the regime change has the full support of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, which have long been associated with the counter-revolutionary forces in Bangladesh. The questions surrounding which political faction—whether the Razakar lobby or the softer Islamists within the BNP—has gained the upper hand remain unresolved. However, it is evident that the forces aligned with the legacy of the 1971 Liberation War have been decisively defeated. The counter-revolution has triumphed, and with it, the revival of a vision of Bangladesh as an Islamic Republic.

This revival of Islamic nationalism has also had serious implications for Bangladesh's minority communities, particularly Hindus. Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, there has been a systematic attempt to marginalize and push out the Hindu population from East Pakistan, and later Bangladesh, as part of an ongoing effort to solidify the country's Islamic identity. The 1971 war, which saw a massive exodus of Hindus to India, only exacerbated the situation. Though the formation of Bangladesh brought some relief to the Hindu community, the 1990s saw another wave of migration to India due to continued persecution. Today, Hindus make up just 7.95% of the population, a dramatic decline from their share at

the time of independence.

Under the new government, attacks on Hindu religious institutions have become more frequent, and the persecution of Hindus is being framed as a response to the perceived over-assertion of the Hindu community in the 15 years of Awami League rule. The assault on Hindu religious sites, including the ISKCON temples, is seen as a proxy attack on India, which supporters of the regime accuse of exploiting Bangladesh's resources. This targeting of Hindus has led to protests from Hindu organizations across the globe, with many voicing their condemnation of the new regimes' actions. Despite the Modi governments' strong response to these attacks, India's policy toward Bangladesh remains cautious. The closure of the border and the halt on visa issuance have effectively stopped the flow of Hindu refugees into India, leaving them trapped in Bangladesh's increasingly hostile political environment.

For India, the situation in Bangladesh presents a strategic conundrum. The growing influence of radical Islamism in its eastern neighbour poses a direct threat to the security and stability of India's own Muslim-majority states, particularly West Bengal. A radicalized Bangladesh could embolden extremist elements within India, exacerbating existing communal tensions. The rise of radical Islamism in Bangladesh could also complicate India's long-standing efforts to maintain a peaceful and cooperative relationship with its neighbor. The reality of a hostile regime on India's eastern border is one that New Delhi cannot afford

to ignore. The longer the situation persists, the more it will tilt the strategic balance in favor of Bangladesh's Islamist factions, further complicating India's security outlook.

India's response to this crisis will need to be measured but firm. While economic sanctions or an economic blockade may not be politically viable, New Delhi must explore other avenues to counter the growing influence of radical Islam in Bangladesh. This could involve diplomatic pressure, closer cooperation with international organizations, and support for Bangladesh's secular forces, including the Hindu minority community. However, the geopolitical realities of the situation suggest that India will need to be more proactive in addressing the ideological shift in Bangladesh and its implications for regional security.

The regime change in Bangladesh marks a pivotal moment in the country's history. The rise of radical Islamism and the revival of an Islamic Republic in Bangladesh represent a dramatic departure from the secular ideals that shaped the nation's independence and identity. This shift has profound implications not only for Bangladesh but also for its neighbors, particularly India. The growing influence of Islamists in Bangladesh presents a significant challenge to regional stability, and India must tread carefully as it navigates this increasingly complex geopolitical landscape. The situation in Bangladesh will undoubtedly remain a key area of focus for India's foreign policy in the years to come. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiptd@gmail.com)

# Adapting to the digital battlefield of the 'caliphate' warriors

By: Soumya Awasthi

In a world where digital landscapes have become the new battlegrounds, the forces of terrorism are constantly evolving, finding ways to adapt and persevere against tightening restrictions. While traditional battlefields may have been replaced with keyboards and screens, the ideologies and motivations of extremist groups remain as potent as ever. The internet is no longer merely a tool; it has become a powerful weapon for rapidly disseminating ideas, recruitment, and covert communication. As long as technology advances, the war on terror may never truly be "over," with new methods of resilience and adaptability continually forged by those on the fringes of society.

This shift is exemplified by the Voice of Khurasan, an English-language magazine from Al-Azaim Media Foundation, linked to the Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP). The 39th issue of the magazine offers an alarming strategic guide to its followers, providing detailed advice on concealing identities across the internet and avoiding detection on social media platforms. Drawing historical comparisons, the publication frames these modern tactics through the lens of early Islamic history. It likens the digital struggles of ISKP supporters to the challenges faced by early Muslims who, under severe opposition from the Quraysh in Mecca, migrated to Medina to establish a resilient community under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad. By invoking this narrative, the article seeks to inspire resilience in today's digital landscape, stating, "We encounter formidable challenges in the digital realm today."

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battlegrounds, the forces of terrorism are constantly evolving, finding ways to adapt and persevere against tightening restrictions. While traditional battlefields may have been replaced with keyboards and screens, the ideologies and motivations of extremist groups remain as potent as ever. The internet is no longer merely a tool; it has become a powerful weapon for rapidly disseminating ideas, recruitment, and covert communication. As long as technology advances, the war on terror may never truly be "over," with new methods of resilience and adaptability continually forged by those on the fringes of society.

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The ability of groups like ISKP to adapt and leverage advanced technologies highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to counter these threats effectively.

This narrative underscores

the evolving nature of extremism in the digital age, where the battlefield has shifted from physical territories to the vast and often unregulated expanse of cyberspace. The ability of groups like ISKP to adapt and leverage advanced technologies highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to counter these threats effectively.

Technological innovations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and deepfake technology have revolutionised information dissemination. However, these tools have also been weaponised to spread disinformation, incite violence, and manipulate public perception. Cybercriminals exploit vulnerabilities in digital infrastructures, causing financial, political, and social disruptions. In response, nation-states are compelled to reassess traditional security protocols to confront the growing sophistication of cyber threats.

Recognising the vulnerabilities inherent in digital operations, IS has taken proactive measures to safeguard its communications and enhance its digital resilience. This is evident in the 39th issue of Voice of Khurasan, published in September 2024 by Al-Azaim Media Foundation, which provides strategic guidance to members and sympathisers. The magazine outlines methods to avoid surveillance, maintain anonymity, and protect communications, demonstrating Islamic States (IS)'s adaptability in navigating the digital realm.

The publication serves multiple purposes, notably:

- **Operational Security (OpSec):** Instructions on employing encryption, anonymising tools like VPNs, and secure messaging platforms to evade detection by intelligence agencies.

- **Propaganda dissemination:** Strategies to spread extremist narratives effectively while

minimising exposure, such as reach of extremist content, such as that found in Voice of Khurasan, highlight the persistent threat posed by digital extremism. It is assessed that the presence of a virtual caliphate has given wider reach to individuals towards groups like IS, especially through platforms like Rocket.Chat and Telegram.

Awareness programmes educating members on intelligence operations, pre-emptively countering infiltration attempts.

The challenges articulated in Voice of Khurasan reflect the increasing efforts by social media platforms to curb extremist content. Platforms now employ sophisticated algorithmic detection, enforce stringent community guidelines, and respond swiftly to government pressure. ISKP counters these measures by employing evasive tactics such as anonymous browsing, metadata sanitisation, and avoiding flagged keywords.

A particularly striking parallel is drawn with early Islamic history, where Muslims faced persecution in Mecca before finding refuge in Medina. This historical framing aims to inspire digital resilience among ISKP's supporters, portraying modern challenges as ideological and existential battles akin to those faced by the early Muslim community.

Issue 39 of Voice of Khurasan showcases ISKP's ability to adapt to the digital economy by soliciting donations through Monero. A poster in the magazine encourages supporters to donate with cryptocurrency Monero (XMR) for waging jihad with wealth and to finance those who are waging the same with their lives.

This highlights ISKP's use of privacy-centric financial technologies to fund its operations. The magazine also details how AI tools are leveraged to create counter-narratives and generate automated propaganda content, demonstrating the group's technological sophistication. These advancements pose considerable challenges to counterterrorism efforts, enabling the rapid and targeted dissemination of extremist ideologies.

The enduring appeal and reach of extremist content, such as that found in Voice of Khurasan, highlight the persistent threat posed by digital extremism. It is assessed that the presence of a virtual caliphate has given wider reach to individuals towards groups like IS, especially through platforms like Rocket.Chat and Telegram. Such assessment underscores the effectiveness of ISKP's digital strategies, which continue to resonate globally despite monitoring and enforcement efforts. The ability of such content to circulate widely demonstrates the adaptability of extremist groups in leveraging technology to maintain relevance and evade detection.

The problem, however, is not just the scale of dissemination but the technological sophistication underpinning it. Magazines like Voice of Khurasan demonstrate the seamless integration of emerging technologies such as AI and cryptocurrency to further extremist agendas. These tools enable the creation of highly targeted propaganda, automated counter-narratives, and financial anonymity, making traditional counterterrorism measures increasingly insufficient.

Experts in counterterrorism and cybersecurity emphasise the need for innovative and collaborative approaches to counter these threats. Dr Hany Farid, a leading digital forensics expert, points out that integrating cryptocurrency and AI into propaganda systems underscores the need for real-time interventions and collaboration between governments and tech companies. This observation underscores the dual need for rapid detection mechanisms and public-private partnerships to disrupt the flow of extremist content and funding.

Dr Gabriel Weimann, a professor at the University of Haifa, echoes the sentiment, framing the internet as "the vir-

tual training camp for terror groups." He warns that the complexity of the digital domain demands technological innovation and international cooperation. As extremist groups transcend borders, so must the strategies to combat them.

Similarly, Lisa Monaco, United States deputy attorney general, stresses the importance of preventive rather than merely reactive measures. "Countering digital extremism requires not just detection but preventive strategies—algorithmic transparency, robust moderation, and empowering communities with counter-narratives," she asserts. This call for a multi-layered approach highlights the importance of understanding the socio-technical interplay of extremism, where technology and ideology feed into each other in challenging ways.

Furthermore, governments must invest in digital literacy and promote credible content to dilute the appeal of extremist propaganda. This perspective highlights the need for educational initiatives and the promotion of authentic information to counteract the influence of extremist ideologies.

These expert opinions collectively suggest that tackling digital extremism is a multi-dimensional challenge requiring a blend of technological, collaborative, and community-driven approaches. While algorithms and artificial intelligence can identify and remove harmful content, human-centred interventions, such as promoting credible counter-narratives and fostering digital literacy, are equally essential. Despite enforcement, the enduring engagement with extremist content demonstrates that technology alone cannot resolve this issue—it requires a comprehensive, globally coordinated effort that integrates technical solutions with socio-

political strategies.

Ironically, while terror groups like IS adapt swiftly to the digital landscape, State actors and global organisations often lag behind. The lessons to be drawn from IS's digital survival guide are sobering:

- **Awareness and education:** Public awareness initiatives and digital literacy programmes are vital to combat misinformation and reduce susceptibility to extremist narratives.

- **Global collaboration:** A unified coalition of nations, tech companies, and civil society must address the borderless nature of digital threats.

- **Technological investments:** It is imperative to develop advanced AI tools to detect deepfakes, track suspicious transactions, and enhance platform security.

The war on terror has transitioned from the physical to the digital, with extremist groups continually evolving to overcome constraints. Their ability to navigate restrictions, employ algorithmic workarounds, and exploit modern technologies like cryptocurrencies and AI highlights the persistent complexity of counterterrorism efforts.

The digital battlefield is no longer a distant frontier—it is the immediate reality. Reclaiming this realm requires governments, corporations, and civil society to act with ingenuity, urgency, and collaboration. By understanding and pre-empting the strategies employed by groups like ISKP, stakeholders can better anticipate risks and devise effective countermeasures.

The question remains: Can global efforts evolve swiftly enough to neutralise these emerging threats, or will extremist groups continue to dominate the cyberspace arms race? The answer lies in whether we can adapt as rapidly and effectively as those who seek to exploit the digital age for violence and division. (Courtesy: ORF)

## Hyperlinks made the internet what it is today but AI and megaplatforms could spell its extinction

By: Dana McKay & George Buchanan

The original idea for the world wide web emerged in a flurry of scientific thought around the end of World War II. It began with a hypothetical machine called the "memex", proposed by US Office of Scientific Research and Development head Vannevar Bush in an article entitled "As We May Think", published in the Atlantic Monthly in 1945.

The memex would help us access all knowledge, instantaneously and from our desks. It had a searchable index, and documents were linked together by the "trails" made by users when they associated one document with another. Bush imagined the memex using microfiche and photography, but conceptually it was almost the modern internet.

The true value in this early idea was the links: if you wanted to explore more, there was an easy, built-in way to do that. Anyone who has spent hours following random links on Wikipedia and learning about things they never knew interested them will recognise this value. (There is of course a Wikipedia page about this phenomenon.)

Links have made the web what it is. But as social media platforms, generative AI tools and even search engines are trying harder to keep users on their site or app, the humble link is starting to look like an endangered species.

The laws of links

Modern search engines were developed in the shadow of the memex, but at first they faced unexpected legal issues. In the early days of the internet, it was not clear whether "crawling" web pages to ingest them into a search engine index was a violation of copyright.

It was also not clear whether, in linking to information that might help someone build a bomb, defraud someone, or carry out some other nefarious activity, search engines or website hosts were "publishers". Being publishers would make them legally liable for content they hosted or linked to.

The issue of web crawling has been dealt with by a combination of fair use, country-specific exemptions for crawling, and the "safe harbour" provisions of the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act. These permit web crawling as long as the search engines do not alter the original work, link to it, only use it for a relatively short term, and don't profit from the original content.

The issue of problematic content was addressed (at least in the very influential US jurisdiction) via legislation called Section 230. This offers immunity to "providers or users of interactive computer services" who deliver information "provided by another content provider".

Without this law, the internet as we know it couldn't exist, because it is impossible to manually check every page linked to or every social media post for illegal content.

This doesn't mean the internet is a complete Wild West, though. Section 230 has been successfully challenged on the basis of illegal discrimination, when a mandatory questionnaire about housing asked for race. More recently, a case brought against TikTok has suggested platforms are not immune when their algorithms recommend specific videos.

Social contract of the web

All of the laws that have created the internet, though, have relied on links. The social contract is that a search engine can scrape your site, or a social media company can host your words or pictures, as long as they give you, the person who created it, credit (or discredit if you're giving bad advice). The link isn't just the thing you follow down a Wikipedia rabbit hole, it's a way of

be monetised by selling personalised ads.

Another problem with AI is that it typically relearns infrequently and holds onto dated content. While the latest AI-powered search tools claim to do better on this front, it is unclear how good they are.

And, as with news snippets, large corporates are reluctant to give credit and views to others. There are good people-centred reasons for social media companies and search engines to want you to not have to leave. A key value of ChatGPT is providing information in a single, condensed form so you never have to click a link – even if one is available.

Copyright and creativity

Is the sidelining of links a good thing, though? Many experts argue not. Using content without credit is arguably copyright infringement. Replacing artists and writers with AI reduces creativity in society.

Summarising information, without linking out to original sources, reduces people's ability to fact check, is prone to bias, and may reduce the learning, thought and creativity supported by browsing many documents. After all, Wikipedia would be no fun without the rabbit hole, and the internet without links is just an online book written by a robot.



giving credit, and allowing content creators to profit from their content.

Large platforms, including Google, Microsoft and OpenAI, have used these laws, and the social contract they imply, to keep ingesting content at industrial scale.

The provision of links, eyeballs and credit, though, is falling as AI does not link to its sources. To take one example, news snippets provided in search engines and social media have displaced the original articles so much that tech platforms now have to pay for these snippets in Australia and Canada.

Large tech companies value keeping people on their sites as clicks can

AI backlash looms

So what does the future hold? Ironically, the same AI systems that have made the link problem worse have also increased the likelihood that things will change.

The copyright exemptions that apply for crawling and linking are being challenged by creatives whose work has been incorporated into AI models. Proposed changes to Section 230 law may mean that digital platforms are safer to link to material than replicate it.

We have power for change, too: where links exist, click on them. You never know where following a trail might take you. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

## From ARPANET to the World Wide Web

By: Satvabrat Borah

The internet is one of the most transformative inventions in human history, an innovation that has reshaped how we communicate, work, learn, and live. Its story is one of collaboration, discovery, and remarkable foresight, starting with humble beginnings in the 1960s and evolving into the intricate global network we rely on today. At its core, the history of the internet is a testament to humanity's desire to connect and share information.

The seeds of the internet were planted long before it became a household term. In the early 1960s, a group of visionary scientists imagined a world where computers could talk to one another. One of these pioneers, J.C.R. Licklider, dreamed of an "Intergalactic Computer Network," a system where users could access data and programs from any site, regardless of location. While this idea seemed like science fiction at the time, it inspired a generation of computer scientists to think beyond the limitations of individual machines.

The first concrete step toward this vision came with ARPANET, developed in 1969 by the U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). Designed to connect researchers and share computing resources, ARPANET was a groundbreaking experiment in networked communication. The first message sent over ARPANET, from UCLA to Stanford, was a simple word: "LOGIN." However, as often happens with new technology, things didn't go entirely as planned. The system crashed after just the first two letters, sending only "LO." Despite this hiccup, it was a historic moment—the birth of networked computing.

As ARPANET grew, so did the possibilities for communication. Email, one of the earliest and most transformative applications of the network, was invented in 1971 by Ray Tomlinson. While it may seem unremarkable today, the idea of sending messages instantly between computers was revolutionary at the time. Tomlinson's choice to use the "@" symbol to separate usernames from computer names created a standard format that has endured for decades. Email quickly became ARPANET's most popular feature, hinting at the internet's future as a communication powerhouse.

Meanwhile, the network continued to evolve. Throughout the 1970s, researchers developed the protocols that would form the backbone of the internet. Vinton Cerf and Robert Kahn, often called the "fathers of the internet," introduced TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet

Protocol), a set of rules for how data should be transmitted across networks. This innovation allowed different networks to connect and communicate with one another, laying the groundwork for a truly global system.

The 1980s saw the internet begin to take shape in ways that are recognizable today. One milestone was the creation of the Domain Name System (DNS) in 1983, which replaced the cumbersome system of numerical IP addresses with human-readable names like ".com" and ".org." This change made it easier for people to navigate the growing network. Around the same time, the first domain name, Symbolics.com, was registered in 1985, marking the start of the internet's commercial era.

While the internet was becoming more sophisticated, it was still primarily used by researchers and government agencies. That changed dramatically in 1989 when a British computer scientist named Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web. Working at CERN, the European physics research center, Berners-Lee developed a system for linking documents using hypertext, enabling users to navigate between pages with a simple click. His creation, the web, was introduced to the public in 1991. The first website, hosted on Berners-Lee's computer, was a guide explaining how the web worked. While modest by today's standards, this was the beginning of a revolution.

The web's simplicity and accessibility fueled its rapid adoption. By the mid-1990s, the internet was no longer just for academics or government agencies; it was becoming a tool for everyday people. The launch of user-friendly web browsers like Mosaic and later Netscape made it easy for anyone with a computer and a modem to explore this new frontier. Businesses began to recognize the internet's potential, and the dot-com boom of the late 1990s saw a surge of investment in internet-based companies. While many of these startups failed during the dot-com bust in 2000, the era solidified the internet's role as an essential part of the global economy.

The internet wasn't just about browsing websites and shopping online. It was also a platform for creativity, community, and innovation. Social media, which began with simple platforms like Friendster and MySpace in the early 2000s, evolved into global phenomena like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms changed how people connect, share ideas, and build relationships. At the same time, the rise of user-generated content transformed the web from a passive experience into an interactive one. Sites like YouTube,

launched in 2005, empowered anyone to create and share videos, democratizing entertainment and education.

One of the internet's most transformative features has been its ability to adapt and grow. Technologies like Wi-Fi, developed in the 1990s and based on research into detecting black holes, freed users from the constraints of physical connections. Mobile internet, powered by smartphones, brought the web into people's pockets, making it accessible anytime, anywhere. By 2005, just 16 years after the web became public, the internet had reached one billion users—a testament to its rapid growth and universal appeal.

Of course, the internet's history hasn't been without challenges. Issues like cybersecurity, privacy, and misinformation have emerged as critical concerns in the digital age. Spam, for example, dates back to 1978, when a marketer sent an unsolicited email to 393 ARPANET users. This nuisance has evolved into a global problem, with billions of spam messages sent daily. Similarly, the spread of misinformation and the rise of cybercrime have highlighted the need for vigilance and regulation in the digital space.

Despite these challenges, the internet continues to be a force for good. It has democratized access to information, enabled global collaboration, and given a voice to the voiceless. From online education platforms to telemedicine, the internet has opened doors that were once unimaginable. It has also become a canvas for human creativity, from viral phenomena like the "Dancing Baby" of the 1990s to the memes and trends that shape today's digital culture.

As we look to the future, the internet's potential seems limitless. Technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT) promise to take connectivity to new heights. Yet, the internet's history reminds us that its true power lies in its ability to bring people together. From the early days of ARPANET to the global web we know today, the internet has always been about connection—about sharing ideas, solving problems, and building a better world.

In many ways, the story of the internet is a reflection of human ingenuity. It began as an ambitious experiment, driven by curiosity and the desire to push boundaries. Over decades, it has grown into a dynamic, ever-evolving ecosystem that touches nearly every aspect of our lives. Its history is a reminder of what we can achieve when we work together, dream big, and embrace the unknown. The internet is more than just technology; it's a testament to our shared humanity and our endless capacity for innovation.

The declaration of martial law was the first of its kind in more than 40 years in South Korea

# Prez Yoon's impeachment fails as his ruling party boycotts vote

**SEOUL, Dec 7:** A South Korean legislative push to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol over his short-lived imposition of martial law fell through on Saturday after most lawmakers from his conservative governing party boycotted the vote.

The defeat of the motion is expected to intensify public protests calling for Yoon's ouster and deepen political chaos in South Korea, with a survey suggesting a majority of South Koreans support the president's impeachment.

Yoon's martial law declaration drew criticism from his own ruling conservative party, but it is also determined to oppose Yoon's impeachment apparently because it fears losing the presidency to liberals.

Impeaching Yoon required support from two-thirds of the National Assembly, or 200 of its 300 members. The opposition parties who brought the impeachment motion had 192 seats, but only three lawmakers from PPP participated in the vote. The motion was scrapped without ballot counting because the number of votes didn't reach 200.

National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik called the result very regrettable and an embarrassing moment for the country's

democracy that has been closely watched by the world.

The failure to hold a qualified vote on this matter means we were not even able to exercise the democratic procedure of deciding on a critical national issue, he said.

Opposition parties could submit a new impeachment motion after a new parliamentary session opens next Wednesday.

There are worries that Yoon won't be able to serve out his remaining 2 years in office because his leadership took a huge hit. Many experts say some ruling party lawmakers could eventually join opposition parties' efforts to impeach Yoon if public demands for it grow further.

If Yoon is impeached, his powers will be suspended until the Constitutional Court decides whether to remove him from office. If he is removed, an election to replace him must take place within 60 days.

Woo repeatedly urged ruling party members to return to the chamber to participate in the vote, waiting several hours for them to come.

At one point, Democratic Party leaders visited a hall on the floor below the main chamber where PPP lawmakers were gathered, attempting to persuade them to vote.



After being blocked from entering, they angrily accused the conservatives' leadership of preventing its lawmakers from voting freely.

Earlier Saturday, Yoon issued a public apology over the martial law decree, saying he won't shirk legal or political responsibility for the declaration and promising not to make another attempt to impose martial law. He said would leave it to his party to chart a course through the country's political turmoil, including matters related to his term in office.

The declaration of this martial law was made out of my desperation. But in the course of its implementation, it caused anxiety and

inconveniences to the public. I feel very sorry over that and truly apologise to the people who must have been shocked a lot, Yoon said.

Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has struggled to push his agenda through an opposition-controlled parliament and grappled with low approval ratings amid scandals involving himself and his wife.

In his martial law announcement on Tuesday night, Yoon called parliament a den of criminals bogging down state affairs and vowed to eliminate shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces.

The turmoil resulting from

Yoon's bizarre and poorly-thought-out stunt has paralysed South Korean politics and sparked alarm among key diplomatic partners like the US and Japan.

Tuesday night saw special forces troops encircling the parliament building and army helicopters hovering over it, but the military withdrew after the National Assembly unanimously voted to overturn the decree, forcing Yoon to lift it before daybreak Wednesday.

The declaration of martial law was the first of its kind in more than 40 years in South Korea. Eighteen lawmakers from the ruling party voted to reject Yoon's martial law decree along with opposition lawmakers.

Yoon's speech fuelled speculation that he and his party may push for a constitutional amendment to shorten his term, instead of accepting impeachment, as a way to ease public anger over the martial law and facilitate Yoon's early exit from office.

Lee Jae-myung, the leader of the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, told reporters that Yoon's speech was greatly disappointing and that the only way forward is his immediate resignation or impeachment. His party called Yoon's martial law unconstitu-

tional, illegal rebellion or coup.

The passage of Yoon's impeachment motion appeared more likely Friday when the chair of Yoon's party called for his removal on Friday, but the party remained formally opposed to impeachment.

On Saturday, tens of thousands of people densely packed several blocks of roads leading up to the National Assembly, waving banners, shouting slogans and dancing and singing along to K-pop songs with lyrics changed to call for Yoon's ouster. Protesters also gathered in front of PPP's headquarters near the Assembly, angrily shouting for its lawmakers to vote to impeach Yoon.

A smaller crowd of Yoon's supporters, which still seemed to be in the thousands, rallied in separate streets in Seoul, decrying the impeachment attempt they saw as unconstitutional.

Lawmakers on Saturday first voted on a bill appointing a special prosecutor to investigate stock price manipulation allegations surrounding Yoon's wife. Some lawmakers from Yoon's party were seen leaving the hall after that vote, triggering angry shouts from opposition lawmakers.

On Friday, PPP chair Han Dong-hun, who criticised Yoon's martial law declaration, said he had re-

ceived intelligence that during the brief period of martial law Yoon ordered the country's defence counterintelligence commander to arrest and detain unspecified key politicians based on accusations of anti-state activities.

Hong Jang-won, first deputy director of South Korea's National Intelligence Service, told lawmakers in a closed-door briefing Friday that Yoon had ordered him to help the defence counterintelligence unit to detain key politicians. The targeted politicians included Han, Lee and Woo, according to Kim Byung-kee, one of the lawmakers who attended the meeting.

The Defence Ministry said Friday it suspended three military commanders including the head of the defence counterintelligence unit over their involvement in enforcing martial law.

Vice Defence Minister Kim Seon Ho has told parliament that Defence Minister Kim Yong Hyun ordered the deployment of troops to the National Assembly after Yoon imposed martial law. Opposition parties accused Kim of recommending to Yoon to enforce martial law.

Kim resigned Thursday, and prosecutors imposed an overseas travel ban on him. (AP)

## India's inclusive growth applauded by international community: K Subramanian

**WASHINGTON, Dec 7:** The world is bullish on India, the country's top economist, currently executive director of the International Monetary Fund has said, noting that India's public digital infrastructure and inclusive growth is not only being talked about but also applauded by the international community.

"I think the Indian economy has been growing overall very well. Post-Covid, the growth rate has consistently been seven per cent. Of course, there's been a little bit of a dip this quarter. Partly it is because of the slowdown in capital expenditures. That itself is because of some of the election cycles. Also, there's been some impact on exports. But I expect this dip to be temporary," Krishnamurthy V Subramanian, Executive Director at IMF.

"From the vantage point that I've been sitting on the IMF board, I have no hesitation in saying the world is bullish on India. The kind of public digital infrastructure that India has enacted, is something that almost every of my board colleagues often finds a mention. They mention it with sincere appreciation. Apart from that, the kind of inclusive growth that India has pursued over the last decade is also something that comes up for appreciation," Subramanian, the former Indian Chief Economic Advisor and author of the latest book "India@100" told PTI in an interview.

Responding to a question, Subramanian said India during Covid chose to implement economic policy that was different from the rest of the world. While the rest of the world identified Covid as purely a demand-side shock, India was the only large economy to diagnose Covid as both a demand-side and a supply-side shock, he said. Therefore, India implemented a judicious mix of demand and supply-side policies, spent judiciously but making sure that it reached those that were generally impacted by the pandemic, he said.

As a result, when the war in Europe started and the supply side problems that resulted, which led to substantial inflation in the rest of the world, it did not have as much of an impact on India, he explained.

"This is something that is very clearly revealed. If you see, while in the rest of the world, during the last couple of years, these countries, especially advanced economies have faced anywhere between two and a half to four times the historical average inflation, India had less than its historical average," he said.



"Because you have to keep in mind you know India's average inflation has been more than seven per cent and even though there were periods where inflation was slightly higher than the band of two per cent to six per cent you know which is basically what the inflation targeting regime requires, but still it's been less than the historical average primarily because the very responsible fiscal policy that was pursued during Covid. The contrast with the rest of the world is palpable in this case," Subramanian said. From 2002 to 2013, the total factor productivity growth, rate of that was 1.3 per cent per annum on average. From 2014 onwards, it has been 2.7 per cent per annum. In other words, productivity has grown at more than double that compared to the previous period, he said.

"If you look at one of the telling indicators of the vibrancy of an economy, which is new firm creation... from 2004 to 2014 using World Bank data, the new firm creation was only 3.2 per cent, it was a trickle. That was because of a combination of a lot of factors. The economy itself was there weren't enough reforms done which was reflected in this. In contrast, if you look from 2014 onwards, new firm creation has been orders of magnitude higher using the same World Bank data. As a result, today, India has the third largest entrepreneurial ecosystem in the world," Subramanian said.

"Similarly, if you look at the innovation rankings in 2015 using global innovation rankings, India was ranked 85th. Today in the 2024 ranking, India is ranked 39th. I actually would want India to be even better, get into the top 20 and then 15." (AP)

## Biden considering preemptive pardons for officials, allies before Trump takes office

**WASHINGTON, Dec 7:** President Joe Biden is weighing whether to issue sweeping pardons for officials and allies who the White House fears could be unjustly targeted by President-elect Donald Trump's administration, a preemptive move that would be a novel and risky use of the president's extraordinary constitutional power.

The deliberations so far are largely at the level of White House lawyers. But Biden himself has discussed the topic with some senior aides, according to two people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity Thursday to discuss the sensitive subject. No decisions have been made, the people said, and it is possible Biden opts to do nothing at all.

Pardons are historically afforded to those accused of specific crimes — and usually those who have already been convicted of an offense — but Biden's team is considering issuing them for those who have not even been investigated, let alone charged.

They fear that Trump and his allies, who have boasted of enemies lists and exacting "retribution", could launch investigations that would be reputationally and financially costly for their targets even if they don't result in prosecutions.

While the president's pardon power is absolute, Biden's use in this fashion would mark a significant expansion of how they are deployed, and some Biden aides fear it could lay the groundwork for an

even more drastic usage by Trump. They also worry that issuing pardons would feed into claims by Trump and his allies that the individuals committed acts that necessitated immunity. Recipients could include infectious-disease specialist Dr. Anthony Fauci, who was instrumental in combating the coronavirus pandemic and who has become a pariah to conservatives angry about mask mandates and vaccines. Others include witnesses in Trump's criminal or civil trials and Biden administration officials who have drawn the ire of the incoming president and his allies.

Some fearful former officials have reached out to the Biden White House preemptively seeking some sort of protection from the future Trump administration, one of the people said. It follows Biden's decision to pardon his son Hunter — not just for his convictions on federal gun and tax violations, but for any potential federal offense committed over an 11-year period, as the president feared that Trump allies would seek to prosecute his son for other offenses. That could serve as a model for other pardons Biden might issue to those who could find themselves in legal jeopardy under Trump. Biden is not the first to consider such pardons - Trump aides considered them for him and his supporters involved in his failed efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election that culminated in a violent riot at the Capitol on January 6, 2021. (AP)

## Saudi Arabia calls for an end to Gaza war and attacks Israel's actions

**MANAMA, BAHRAIN, Dec 7:** Saudi Arabia's foreign minister has reiterated the kingdom's call for an end to the war in the Gaza Strip.

Prince Faisal bin Farhan described Israel as acting with "impunity and is getting away without punishment" in its war on Hamas there.

The prince said that any permanent solution requires a two-state solution, with the Palestinians having east Jerusalem as their capital.

After the speech, Prince Turki al-Faisal, a prominent royal in the kingdom who led Saudi intelligence for more than two decades and served

as ambassador to the US and Britain, took the stage. He harshly criticized Israel's conduct in the wars.

"Israel has become an apartheid, colonial and genocidal state," Prince Turki said. "It is about time for the world to address that issue and take the necessary steps to bring those who are charged by the International Criminal Court to justice." Israeli officials could not be immediately reached for comment on Prince Turki's remarks. The Saudis spoke at the International Institute for Security Studies' Manama Dialogue in Bahrain. (AP)

## Israeli strikes kill at least 29 people at Gaza hospital

**JERUSALEM, Dec 7:** Palestinian officials say at least 29 people were killed, including four medical staff, when Israeli strikes pummeled the area around one of the last remaining hospitals in northern Gaza. The situation in and around the Kamal Adwan hospital is "catastrophic," according to Dr. Hussam Abu Safia, the director of the hospital. Elsewhere in the region, Lebanon said it is closing all its land border crossings with Syria except for a main one that links Beirut with the Syrian capital, Damascus. Friday's decision came hours after an Israeli airstrike damaged a border crossing in northern Lebanon just days after it was reopened. Jordan also closed a border crossing with Syria because of the security situation on the Syrian side. Syrian insurgents have entered the central towns of Rastan and Talbiseh, just north of the central city of Homs, bringing them closer to Syria's third largest city. (AP)

Declares December 21 as 'World Meditation Day'

## UNGA unanimously adopts resolution co-sponsored by India

**UNITED NATIONS, Dec 7:** India co-sponsored a UN General Assembly draft resolution that was unanimously adopted to proclaim December 21 as World Meditation Day.

India, including Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mexico and Andorra, was a member of the core group of countries that guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution titled 'World Meditation Day' in the 193-member UN General Assembly on Friday.

"A day for comprehensive well-being and inner transformation! Glad that India along with other nations of the core group guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution on the declaration of December 21 as World Meditation Day @UN General Assembly today (Friday)," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said in a post on X.

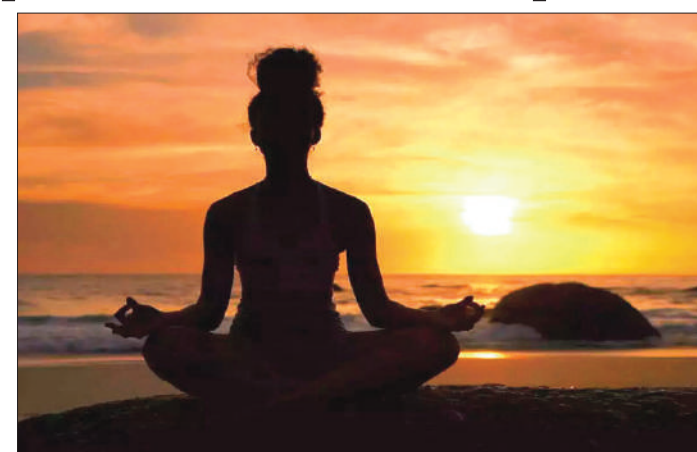
He said India's leadership in overall human wellbeing stems from "our civilisational dictum of #VasudhaivaKutumbakam - the whole world is one family".

Harish noted that December 21 marks the Winter Solstice, which in Indian tradition is the beginning of 'Uttarayana - an auspicious time of the year, especially for inner reflection' and meditation.

It also falls exactly six months after the International Day of Yoga commemorated on June 21, which is the Summer Solstice.

Recalling that India had in 2014 taken the lead in declaring June 21 as International Day of Yoga, Harish said that in a decade, it has become a global movement which has led to common people across the globe practising yoga and making it part of their daily lives.

A press release by the Permanent Mission of India to the UN said India's instrumental role in the



adoption of the resolution on World Meditation Day was a "testimony to its firm commitment to overall human wellness and global leadership on this front in tune with our civilisational dictum of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam".

The declaration of World Meditation Day comes at a time when various regions of the globe witness conflicts and growing tensions, the mission said.

It underlined that meditation is rooted in ancient practices and is an effective tool to achieve inner transformation and peace in the

modern day.

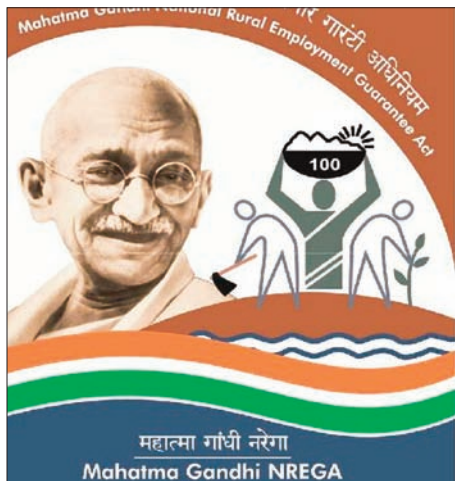
It is aimed at comprehensive human well-being, including mental, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions. It prepares human beings to cope with several modern-day issues such as heightened anxiety and stress and brings about harmony between mind and body, humans and nature.

"Modern science attests to the numerous benefits of meditation and its profound impact on our lives. It has been scientifically proven that regular meditation significantly reduces stress, and enhances cognitive and physical functions," the Indian mission added.

The resolution, introduced by Liechtenstein, was also cosponsored by Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burundi, the Dominican Republic, Iceland, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Portugal and Slovenia. (PTI)

# 100 mandays for MGNREGA job card holders demanded in Tripura

'Mandays generation has been reducing with every passing day'



AGARTALA, Dec 7: Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) on Saturday demanded that the state government provide at least 100 mandays to all MGNREGA job card holders during the remaining months of the current fiscal year (2024-25).

TPCC president Asish Kumar Saha claimed that an average 44 mandays have been generated in the northeastern state so far during the current financial year and the average mandays stood at 55 days in the previous fiscal year.

"The MGNREGA was formulated to provide 100 mandays to people engaged in the unorganised sector during the UPA regime. The BJP in its vision document had promised to give 200 mandays to rural poor with an increase of wage of ₹ 340. Now, we are witnessing that the mandays' generation has been reducing with every passing day leaving the poor in an alarming situation," Saha told PTI.

"The situation in tribal areas is worrisome with the poor people running pillar to post to get jobs under the MGNREGA. The devastating floods, untimely rainfall, skyrocketing price rise and unemployment have been affecting the lives of poor people," he said.

Saha claimed that the state government had set a target to generate 3 crore mandays in the current financial year but it appears the achievement is far from the target as 1.30 lakh job card holders did not get mandays out of 6.83 lakh job card holders. "Since the unprecedented flood has severely affected the economy of 20 lakh people, we demand to ensure the allocation of 100 mandays for the remaining months of the ongoing financial year. The Congress will not hesitate to launch a statewide agitation if the demand is not met", he added. (PTI)

## HT Correspondent

DIMPUR, Dec 7: As Dimapur town witnesses heavy traffic congestion owing to the festive season and due to the rehabilitation work of the road overbridge near hotel Senti on NH 29, the Dimapur commissioner of police on Saturday said the odd-even system of plying of vehicles will be reintroduced under the Dimapur Municipal Council jurisdiction with effect from December 10.

In an order, Dimapur commissioner of police Kevithuto Sophie said the system would be in force for one month or till the completion of the rehabilitation of the road overbridge, whichever is earlier.

The order said only vehicles ending with odd registration numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 will be allowed to ply on dates such as 11, 13, 15, 17 and so on.

On even dates such as 10, 12, 14 and so on, vehicles ending with



even registration numbers such as 0, 2, 4, 6 and 8 will be allowed to ply.

The restriction will not be enforced on December 25 (Christmas day), and on January 1 (New Year day).

However, government registered vehicles, emergency service vehicles, school buses and public transport, including 4 and 2-

wheeler taxis, except autorickshaws, will be exempted from the restriction.

Sophie said violators of the order would be penalised.

He urged the public to cooperate for successful implementation of the odd-even exercise and avoid unnecessary travels.

The order also recommended carpooling to avoid inconvenience.

## Armed Forces Flag Day celebrated in Nagaland

### HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 7: The Nagaland Ex-Servicemen Community commemorated the Armed Forces Flag Day with special ceremonies.

In a gesture of respect and solidarity, the community led by Director Sainik Welfare and Resettlement, pinned the Armed Forces Flag to the Governor Ganesan at the Raj Bhavan on Dec 7 and chief minister Neiphu Rio at the State Secretariat on Dec 5.

The ceremony serves as a symbolic acknowledgment of the sacrifices made by all ranks of the Indian Armed Forces in safeguarding the nation's sovereignty and integrity. Speaking on the occasion, the Governor expressed heartfelt gratitude to the servicemen and their families, acknowledging their selfless contributions.

Flags were pinned to the all the officers and staff at the state secre-

tariat including the chief secretary J Alam, and Vysan R, home secretary among others.

The Armed Forces Flag Day, observed annually on December 7, is dedicated to honouring the courage and dedication of the armed forces personnel. It also serves as an opportunity for citizens to contribute generously towards the welfare of war veterans, ex-servicemen, and their families, emphasizing upon the importance of collective efforts to uplift and support the heroes who have served the nation, a PR stated.

The ex-servicemen community urged the public to participate in this noble cause by donating to the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund.

The ceremony concluded with the distribution of flags and an appeal for contributions, setting a strong tone for the observance of Armed Forces Flag Day across the state.

## MoU signed to boost turmeric production

SHILLONG, Dec 7: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) took place between Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) and National Institute of Plant Health Management (NIPHM), department of agriculture & Ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare, Government of India, to enhance turmeric production in Meghalaya.

The collaboration aims to bridge the existing gaps in the horticulture sector, particularly in plant health, and good agricultural practices.

The MoU was signed between Dr Vijay Kumar D, commissioner

and secretary and CEO of MBMA and Dr Sagar Hanuman Singh, director general, NIPHM.

The assistance provided by NIPHM will allow the MBMA to cultivate in line with the latest international guidelines, boost quality of produce, and create a stronger brand for the crop. The partnership will provide technical services to MBMA, including interventions and training programs at concessional rates. This will help turmeric farmers in the West Jaintia Hills region achieve better yields and improve the quality of their produce. (NNN)

## Sikkim University allows one day menstrual leave for female students

GANGTOK, Dec 7: Sikkim University has allowed one day menstrual leave per month for female students, according to a notification.

The Sikkim University Registrar Laxman Sharma issued the notification to this effect on December 4 following a representation by the Sikkim University Students' Association (SUSA) last month.

"The Vice-Chancellor has been pleased to allow one-day menstrual leave in a month for girl/women student of Sikkim University except during university examinations," said the registrar of the central university. The leave so availed shall be adjusted with the mandatory 75 per cent attendance criteria of the classes held in a semester for examination purposes, he said. (PTI)

## Captain Williamson Sangma Technical University gets UGC recognition

SHILLONG, Dec 7: Captain Williamson Sangma Technical University has received recognition from the University Grants Commission, making it the first state-owned varsity in Meghalaya to be empowered to award degrees to students, an official said.

It also empowers the university to award degrees as specified by UGC requiring it to follow the UGC notifications issued from time to time and was permitted to operate its campus within Meghalaya, the official said.

"The name of the university has been included in the list of universities established as per Section 2(f) of UGC Act, 1956. The University may note and adhere to the following - the university is empowered to award degrees as specified by the UGC under section 22 of the UGC Act 1956 by conducting courses through its own departments, its constituent colleges and/or through its affiliated colleges in regular mode only," the UGC said in a letter to the registrar of the university. Chief minister Conrad K Sangma posted on X, "With the Captain Williamson Sangma State University getting recognition from UGC, our colleges have the option to affiliate to the

## RPP raises concern on pastor's deportation in Nagaland



DIMPUR, Dec 7: The Rising Peoples Party (RPP) said recently that it was deeply concerned by the recent deportation of Pastor John Roughton of the Spirit of Faith Church, Dimapur, also an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI), despite no prior issues with his stay or activities over the past 30 years.

"Pastor Roughton is a deeply entrenched member of our community, and there has never been any indication that he posed a threat to the integrity of India nor was he in viola-

tion of any regulations as an OCI. To send him back to the United States without clear justification is both unfair and disheartening," the Nagaland based political party said in a statement. It also said this "unexpected and distressing event" has left the Christians in the state devastated, "and perhaps the only line of conclusion is that Pastor Roughton was deported only because of his pastoral activities".

The RPP then strongly urged the Government of Nagaland to quickly inter-

vene with the relevant authorities considering Pastor Roughton and his wife Zhepitoli Zhimomi's standing as "good citizens and their invaluable contributions" to the Christian community over the decades.

"We believe that this act of deportation by the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) in New Delhi is not only a grave oversight but it also undermines the secular underpinnings of this country," it added.

The RPP then called upon the people of Nagaland to show solidarity with the persecuted Roughtons. "Today the Roughtons are facing the brunt of a majoritarian policy, tomorrow the same policy may cast a long shadow over the entire state," the RPP cautioned. (NNN)

## NFR unloads 1032 freight rakes during November



### HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 7: NF Railway (NFR) under its jurisdiction had unloaded 1032 freight carrying rakes during the month of November.

NFR has transported goods like FCI

rice, sugar, salt, edible oil, food grains, fertilizer, cement, coal, vegetables, auto, tank and other items during the month and unloaded them in different goods sheds within its jurisdiction.

During the month of November, 2024, a total of 583 rakes of freight carrying trains were unloaded in Assam out of which 286 were loaded with essential commodities, 55 rakes in Tripura, 10 rakes in Nagaland, 10 rakes in Arunachal Pradesh and 7 rakes in Mizoram were unloaded during the month. Moreover, 197 freight rakes in West Bengal and 170 freight rakes in Bihar were also unloaded during the month of November, 2024 within the jurisdiction of NF Railway.

## Organisations to protest in Delhi seeking PM's intervention in Manipur crisis

IMPHAL, Dec 7: In light of the "grave silence and inaction", various civil society organisations in Manipur have unanimously resolved to stage a protest rally in New Delhi on December 22, 2024, under the theme "Peace and Mutual Coexistence". These organisations also said that this rally, being organised with the cooperation of the Manipuri Diaspora in Delhi, is a call to awaken the conscience of the nation and urge the Prime Minister to break his silence on Manipur.

It can be mentioned that, in light of the ongoing unrest and communal tensions in Manipur, representatives from various civil society organizations came together for a meeting on the theme "Peace and Mutual Coexistence" on December 5, 2024 at Sangai Hotel, Imphal, Manipur and sought to address the current crisis and chart a path toward lasting peace and reconciliation.

"Manipur, a historically independent kingdom until its merger with India in 1949, has long been a land of diverse ethnic communities living in relative harmony. However, post-independence political tensions, ethnic divisions, and armed conflicts have marred the state's social fabric. In recent years, the situation has worsened, leading to internal displacement, loss of lives, and growing distrust among communities following the outbreak of engineered conflict since May 3, 2023. With the intent to restore peace and rebuild a spirit of mutual coexistence, the meetings have been convened to build up a collective leadership of Manipur's civil society," a joint statement from the civil society organisations said. The joint press statement was released to the press by Committee of Peaceful Coexistence, Manipur (CPCM) Meitei Meitei Tribe Union (MMTU) Federal Students' Organisation, Kangleipak (FESOK), United Meitei Pangal Committee (UMPC), Manipuri Students' Federation (MSF), Committee on Relief & Rehabilitation (CRR), Kanglei Panas (KP), Yelhoumee Phurup (YP), Apunba Awonba Manipur Amagidamak (AAMA), All Manipur Women's Voluntary Association (AMAWOVA), All India Tazeeze Insaf (AITI), Women Association for Socio-Economic Development (WASEDEV), Struggling Women Association (SWA), All Manipur Student Guardian Organisation (AMSGO), Imagi Meira (IM), All Manipur Meitei Pangal Clubs' Organisation (AMMPACO), Meipak Ningthou Committee (MNC), Youth Collective Manipur (YCM), Nupi Union For Peace and Integrity (NUPI), and Manipur International Youth Centre (MIYC).

The silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding the ongoing crisis in Manipur since May 3, 2023, has left the people of this war-torn state deeply anguished and disillusioned, it said, adding that for over 18 months, Manipur has been engulfed in ethnic strife, leading to untold suffering, displacement, and a breakdown of social harmony.

"Yet, the Prime Minister of India, who has the constitutional and moral responsibility to address the grievances of the citizens, has chosen to remain silent. This indifference raises serious questions about his commitment to the unity and well-being of the Manipur State. It is deeply ironic and disappointing that Prime Minister Modi, on his numerous foreign tours, consistently speaks about world peace and calls for an end to the Russia-Ukraine war, yet he has not uttered a single word about the turmoil and violence in Manipur. While advocating for global reconciliation, his silence on a domestic crisis of such magnitude betrays the trust and hope of the people of Manipur. The burning question that we, the citizens of Manipur, ask today is: How can the Prime Minister of India seek peace abroad while ignoring the cries of his own people at home?" the joint press statement said.

In light of this grave silence and inaction, the civil society organisations have convened twice and unanimously resolved to stage a protest rally in New Delhi on December 22, 2024, under the theme "Peace and Mutual Coexistence," it informed and said that this rally, being organised with the cooperation of the Manipuri Diaspora in Delhi, is a call to awaken the conscience of the nation and urge the Prime Minister to break his silence on Manipur.

It is a call to remind him of his duty to protect the lives and dignity of every Manipur People, the statement said. Furthermore, a 50-member delegation will seek an audience with the Prime Minister between December 22-26, 2024, to discuss pathways for peace and reconciliation, it said.

"As a preparatory step, a two-member team will visit the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on December 16, 2024, to formally submit a request for this crucial meeting. We hope that the Prime Minister, recognising the plight of the people of Manipur, will grant this appointment and take concrete steps to resolve the crisis. The people of Manipur cannot and will not remain silent while their state continues to burn. The Prime Minister's silence only intensifies the pain and suffering of those affected by this humanitarian crisis," the statement said. (NNN)

## Rare Black Panther rescued in Arunachal

### HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 7: Forest department rescued an injured rare black panther from the Roing-Tezu Trans Arunachal Highway, near Paya area in Arunachal Pradesh on Friday.

According to official, the animal is receiving treatment at the Roing mini-zoo in Lower Dibang valley.

It has been learned that animal has serious head injuries after a high-speed vehicle hit the rare species when the animal was crossing the road.

Roing DFO (Wildlife) Mito

Rumi said, "We got the information that a black panther was injured. Our team went and immediately brought the animal to Roing mini-zoo for treatment. It had to be taken to the veterinary hospital, and after a successful clinical procedure it is back in the mini-zoo, where it will be monitored to recovery. The animal is stable for now."

Black panthers—or melanistic leopards—have a condition that causes their body to produce an excess of black pigment, making their fur darker.

The big cat is mostly found in the equatorial rainforests of Malaya and in the tropical rainforests of Mount Kenya, Java, Southwestern China, Myanmar, and Nepal. In India, it is mainly found in Kerala and Assam.

have excess black pigments, their typical rosettes are still present.

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## Nagaland State Export Summit lays stress on state's export potential

KOHIMA, Dec 7: The Nagaland State Export Summit 2024 organised by the department of industries & commerce was convened at the Bamboo Hall, Naga Heritage Village, Kisama, Kohima on Saturday.

P Tokugha Sema, director of industries & commerce, emphasised the summit's significance for entrepreneurs, particularly during the Hornbill Festival. Sema asserted that attendees would glean valuable insights from industry experts during technical sessions, especially regarding product exportation.

He noted that while Nagaland currently exports goods like coffee and fruits, greater efforts are needed to expand the global market presence. Sema acknowledged the potential of Nagaland's entrepre-



neurs but stressed the need to overcome procedural obstacles.

The summit, he added, would provide guidance on navigating these challenges and connecting with international customers. Sema also highlighted the numerous schemes available to entrepreneurs through the central and state governments, encourag-

ing attendees to leverage these opportunities.

Shanavas C, secretary of industries & commerce, characterized Nagaland's export sector as nascent and largely focused on local markets. He noted that few entrepreneurs currently export to national or international markets.

The government, Shanavas emphasized, aims to facilitate

the global reach of products with export potential.

He stressed the paramount importance of maintaining high product quality. Shanavas acknowledged the passion driving entrepreneurial ventures, underscoring the need for consistent effort and a focus on branding and packaging to establish a distinct "Brand Nagaland."

He urged entrepreneurs to prioritize market understanding, cater to customer needs and wants, and implement effective product promotion strategies. Shanavas concluded by emphasizing that a 100% government workforce will not drive Nagaland's development. He asserted that entrepreneurs must be the driving force of economic progress and encouraged attendees to capitalize on the

expertise offered during the technical sessions.

The Nagaland State Export Summit was held with special focus on One District One Product, Boosting the economy of each district, with focus on product enhancement support, e-commerce on-boarding, boosting domestic trade, Export promotion, B2B facilitation. The participants attending the summit were entrepreneurs of Hornbill Festival 2024.

The technical session focused on state export plan, export procedures and documentation, postharvest management and marketing of spices, experience sharing, Dal Ghar Niryat Kendra, support schemes and assistance to entrepreneurs, credit linkage for farmers, producers and entrepreneurs. (NNN)

No. e. DME/B.Sc. (N)/22/2024/522155/17

### EDUCATIONAL NOTICE

#### COUNSELING & SPOT ADMISSION FOR SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR ADMISSION INTO THE VACANT SEATS OF 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR B. SC NURSING COURSE IN THE GOVERNMENT NURSING COLLEGES OF ASSAM, SESSION 2024

This is for general information of all candidates who appeared the Common Entrance Examination, 2024 conducted by the Srimanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences for admission into 1<sup>st</sup> year B. Sc Nursing course in the 5 Government Nursing Colleges of Assam for the session 2024, that a counseling & spot admission for selection of candidates for admission into the vacant B. Sc Nursing seats is scheduled to be held on **10<sup>th</sup> December/2024 at 12.00 Noon at the O/o the DME, Assam, Sixmile, Khanapara, Guwahati-22**. The following are the latest B. Sc (N) vacant seats in the Government Nursing Colleges of Assam.

Category	RCN, Guwahati	B. Sc (N) College, Dibrugarh	B. Sc (N) College, Silchar	B. Sc (N) College, Jorhat	B. Sc (N) College, Kokrajhar	Total
UR	-	-	3	-	-	3
OBC/MOBC-NCL	-	-	-	1	-	1
ST(P)	-	-	1	-	-	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

As per the above available vacancies all interested candidates who appeared the Common Entrance Examination, 2024 and who have full filled all the eligibility criteria for admission into B. Sc Nursing course are hereby directed to appear in the offline counselling of B. Sc Nursing course session 2024 on **10<sup>th</sup> December/2024 at 11.00 AM at the O/o the DME, Assam, Sixmile, Khanapara, Guwahati-22**.

Candidates must also bring with them a duly filled in 'Counseling Form' which is available in this Directorate official website [www.dme.assam.gov.in](http://www.dme.assam.gov.in). Candidates are directed to visit the official website of this Directorate, [www.dme.assam.gov.in](http://www.dme.assam.gov.in) regularly for updates.

Sd/-

Director of Medical Education, Assam

Janasanyog /D/ 10007/24/ 8-Dec-24

# Governments before 2014 didn't work wholeheartedly to create welfare state: Shah

*'However, a government can never do such a big work alone'*

**AHMEDABAD, Dec 7:** Governments before 2014 worked piecemeal while trying to achieve the Constitutional objective of a welfare state but this concept was turned into reality by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union minister Amit Shah said on Saturday.

Shah said Modi understood the mantra that "development of India cannot happen until its 60 crore population remains poor", and worked to lift 25 crore people from poverty in the last 10 years.

"However, a government can never do such a big work alone. If trusts, individuals, and service organisations come together, we will soon come out of this problem," the Union Home Minister said while addressing a gathering at the annual Gujarat Lok Seva Trust event in Ahmedabad.

Following a very learned debate, Constituent Assembly president Rajendra Prasad had concluded that establishing a welfare state should be the basic purpose of the Constitution, Shah said.

The basic objective of creating a State by ensuring the welfare of every person, equal development, and the life of dignity for every family was subsequently decided, he said.

"Every government (before 2014) had done as much as it can in its tenure



(to achieve the welfare state goal), but my analysis as a student of statistics says that before 2014, everyone worked piecemeal," Shah said.

Shah, who also holds the Cooperation portfolio, said governments in the past brought schemes to build houses for the poor and talked about providing drinking water, gas cylinders, health facilities, and free ration piecemeal. Still, it was Narendra Modi who made the welfare state concept a reality.

"After he was elected as Narendra Modi by the people in 2014, Modi resolved that there would not be a single house without a toilet and that not a sin-

gle person would be without a home and a gas cylinder.

"He resolved that nobody is forced to sleep empty stomach and distributed 5 kg grains to 65 crore people free every month. This is unprecedented anywhere in the world," Shah said.

Modi ensured that the concept of a welfare state envisioned by the makers of the Constitution became a reality by facilitating the provision of basic facilities to 60 crore people since 2014, he added.

"The result is that today 25 crore out of 60 crore people have come out of the UN definition of poverty in 10 years.

Still, I believe that the government can never do such a big work alone," Shah said.

He said if various trusts, individuals, and service organisations come together, India will soon come out of this problem (of poverty).

He said Gujarat led the country with several educational institutions and gurukuls collaborating in their own way to work in this direction (of poverty eradication).

"Gujarat leads with a maximum number of beds in charitable hospitals, organises the highest number of blood donation camps in proportion to its population, and has many people registered for organ donation," Shah said.

He praised the Gujarat Lok Seva Trust, which is celebrating the 35th year of its foundation.

He congratulated Rohan Gupta, who had quit the Congress after he was fielded in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and joined the BJP. Gupta's family runs the Lok Seva Trust.

Shah quoted Swami Vivekanand on the virtue of selfless service for society and true wisdom.

He also mentioned his meeting with cricketer Vinod Kambli, who told him that teaching kids how to play cricket gives him the greatest joy. (PTI)

# Travesty of justice that secularism not given its due in Ayodhya verdict: Ex-SC judge Nariman

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** Former Supreme Court judge Justice R F Nariman has criticised the top court's 2019 judgement in the Ramjanmabhooni-Babri Masjid case, describing it as a "great travesty of justice" that did not do justice to the principle of secularism.

Speaking at the First Justice A M Ahmadi Memorial Lecture on 'Secularism and the Indian Constitution', Justice Nariman, however, said the judgment had a "silver lining" as it upheld the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991.

He said the Places of Worship Act should be strictly implemented to put an end to disputes over religious places which are popping up every day across the country like "hydra heads".

"In my opinion, a great travesty of justice was that secularism was not given its due by these judgements," Justice Nariman said.

Justice Nariman also disagreed with the reasoning given by the court to grant the disputed land despite holding that the demolition of the mosque was illegal.

"Today we find hydra heads popping all over the Country. We find suits after suits not only against mosques but also against dargahs. All this, according to me could



lead to communal disharmony.

The only way to scorch and cauterise all this is by applying these five pages in this very judgement and having it read out in every district court and high court. Because these five pages are a declaration by the Supreme Court which binds each of them," he said.

The former apex court judge also pointed out how a special CBI judge -- Surendra Yadav -- who acquitted all the accused in the mosque demolition case, got a post-retirement job as deputy Lokayukta in Uttar Pradesh.

"This is the state of affairs in this country," he said. (PTI)

# Kejriwal slams BJP over Delhi's law and order, asks it not to politicise issue

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** With assembly elections around the corner, AAP supreme Arvind Kejriwal Saturday slammed the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre over Delhi's law-and-order situation and said instead of politicising the issue, they should focus on ensuring people's safety.

The Delhi Police is controlled by the Union Home Ministry.

The former Delhi chief minister expressed alarm over a series of violent incidents, including a busman being shot during a morning walk, a senior citizen's murder in Panchsheel Enclave, and a surge in extortion calls.

"People are panicked and law and order has been crippled. Senior citizens are frightened, women feel unsafe and gang wars are happening. Drugs are being sold in all corners of Delhi. Where is the Delhi Police? Where is the home minister? Kejriwal told PTI Videos.

Over the BJP's claims that Rohingyas are behind some of the crimes, he said, "If they are Rohingyas, why hasn't the home minister stopped them at the Myanmar and Bangladesh borders? And if they've entered Delhi, why hasn't Delhi Police arrested them? Instead of politicising the issue, they should focus on ensuring the safety of Delhi's people."

The BJP has countered the allegations in the past by accusing AAP of shielding criminal elements for political gains. However,



Kejriwal argued that such claims were an attempt to distract people's attention from the pressing issue of public safety.

With an eye on the Delhi assembly polls slated early next year, the ruling and opposition parties have intensified trading charges against each other. While the AAP is vying for a third consecutive term, the BJP is determined to break its 25-year streak of failing to secure power in the city. (PTI)

Union minister receives ransom threat message, says informed Delhi police, J'khand DGP

RANCHI, Dec 7: Union Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth on Saturday said that he has received a ransom threat message and informed the Delhi Police and Jharkhand DGP in this regard.

Seth said he received the threat message demanding a ransom of Rs 50 lakh from an unknown number on his mobile phone on Friday.

The sender allegedly also gave a life threat to him.

"I have already informed

Delhi Police and Jharkhand DGP on Friday in this regard. Senior officials of Delhi Police including a DCP visited me and I have informed them," the Ranchi Lok Sabha MP said here.

Seth said he was not worried about such things.

Ranchi MLA CP Singh said, "I came to know this morning that the Union Minister of State for Defence was given a threat message and demanded Rs 50 lakh extortion. Administration should take it seriously and expose such elements."

He also demanded a probe into the matter from the state government.

"I also demand proper security to the Union minister from the state government," Singh said.

Jharkhand Congress spokesperson Rakesh Sinha termed it a serious matter and urged the Union Home Ministry to look into it.

"The Union Home Ministry should act promptly on the issue. It should activate its agencies and find out who is behind such an incident," Sinha said. (PTI)

# HP Cong govt most incompetent, corrupt: BJP's Anurag Thakur



**UNA (HP), Dec 7:** BJP MP from Hamirpur Anurag Thakur Saturday termed Himachal Pradesh's Congress dispensation one of the "most incompetent and corrupt governments" in the state since Independence. He accused it of "making false promises" to gain power.

Addressing the BJP's 'Akrosh rally' here, the former Union minister alleged the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu government closed projects started by the previous BJP regime and lashed out at the Congress for "cheating" people

by "making false promises" in the run-up to the assembly polls in 2022.

"Forget about the ₹ 1,500 promised to women in the age group of 18 to 59 and five lakh jobs as even those in government jobs are not being paid salaries and pensions on time," Thakur said.

He alleged that medical staff recruited during the Covid period was also shown the way out and those doing internships had to wait for four months for their salaries.

Himachal Pradesh is getting embarrassed due to

the Congress government, the BJP MP alleged, adding that cess was imposed on electricity, surcharge was imposed on water and the prices of ration have increased manifold.

Thakur said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's "Khata khat-Khata khat" model was declared junk in Maharashtra and Haryana and people voted for the BJP.

Rajya Sabha MP and BJP leader Sikandar Kumar said people had high hopes when Congress was voted to power but today even the ruling party's MLAs are unhappy. Every section of the society is upset with this government, he claimed.

Una Sadar MLA Satpal Satti, former legislator Rajesh Sharma, Chaitanya Sharma, Devendra Bhutto, Balbir Chaudhary, former minister Virendra Kanwar and other BJP leaders were also present. (PTI)

# TMC names Ritabrata Banerjee as candidate for Rajya Sabha bypolls

**KOLKATA, Dec 7:** The Trinamool Congress on Saturday named party leader Ritabrata Banerjee as its candidate for the upcoming Rajya Sabha by-elections.

The bypoll was necessitated following the resignation of Jawhar Sircar as the TMC's Rajya Sabha MP in September following the RG Kar rape-murder incident and subsequent protests. "... We are pleased to announce the candidature of Ritabrata Banerjee for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha by-elections," the party said in post on X. By-elections will be

held on December 20 in the sole vacant Rajya Sabha seat from West Bengal, apart from seats in three other states.

Ritabrata Banerjee was with the CPI(M) till 2017 and was its Rajya Sabha MP, before joining the TMC. Hailing the decision, TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee wrote on X, "This recognition is truly well-deserved, reflecting the tireless effort @RitabrataBanerj has invested in strengthening the organization and advocating for trade union workers across WB. (PTI)

# Water supply will not be snapped to Rohingyas living in Jammu: J&K minister



**JAMMU, Dec 7:** Amid an ongoing drive against Rohingya Muslims here, Jammu and Kashmir Jal Shakti minister Javed Ahmed Rana on Saturday said the water supply will not be snapped to the slums housing the illegal immigrants, pending a call from the Centre on their deportation.

Rana's statement came after Rohingyas living on three plots of land in Narwal area of Jammu claimed that their power and water supply was snapped recently by the administration.

"The government is duty-bound to ensure water supply to all human beings. We will ensure water supply to them (Rohingyas) on humanitarian grounds till the government of India takes a call on their issue," Rana, who is also minister for forest, ecology and environment, and tribal affairs, told PTI. The minister said he will take up the disconnection issue with the officials.

"Water cannot be stopped to anyone, it is the requirement of all living beings," the minister said, expressing surprise over the alleged snapping of water supply to a few plots housing Rohingyas by the department.

According to government data, more than 13,700 foreigners, most of them Rohingyas (illegal immigrants from Myanmar) and Bangladeshi nationals, are settled in Jammu and other

districts of Jammu and Kashmir, where their population increased by over 6,000 between 2008 and 2016.

In March 2021, police found over 270 Rohingyas, including women and children, living illegally in Jammu city during a verification drive and lodged them in a holding centre inside the Kathua sub-jail.

On November 25, senior superintendent of Police, South Jammu, Ajay Sharma said a total of 18 FIRs were registered in a major drive against the landlords renting out their properties to Rohingyas and other illegal immigrants without providing information to police as per the order of district magistrate.

"The civil administration has also launched a drive to identify the people who facilitated electricity and water connections to the plots housing Rohingyas," Sharma had said.

Amir Hussain, a Rohingya living in one of the slums in Narwal, alleged that the government has snapped the water and power supply to three plots over the past week.

"We are registered with UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and have nowhere to go. We are living in a pathetic condition and request the government to allow us to stay here for the time being till the security situation in our country improves," he said. (PTI)

# Nadda inaugurates campaign to reduce TB, says rate of decline of disease doubled since 2015

*'Under this programme, we have accelerated detection and tests'*

**CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** The rate of decline of tuberculosis incidence in India has doubled since 2015 and is ahead of the global average, Union health minister J P Nadda said on Saturday while inaugurating a nationwide campaign in Haryana's Panchkula to reduce such cases and mortality due to it.

The 100-day TB elimination campaign will be implemented in 347 districts of 33 states where the prevalence of the disease is higher. The campaign is focused on enhancing detection, reducing diagnostic delays and improving treatment outcomes.

"Under this programme, we have taken detection, tests, treatment and supportive strategies forward in an accelerated way. I feel this 100-day programme will prove to be a milestone in making a 'TB-mukt Bharat' and it will have a far-reaching impact," Nadda said.

The Union health minister highlighted the country's long struggle in its fight against tuberculosis, saying that at one time TB meant a 'slow death'.

"Even family members suffering from TB were isolated to pre-



vent its spread. Since 1962, there have been many campaigns against tuberculosis, but in 2018 the prime minister put forth a vision to end TB much before the 2030 deadline of the Sustainable Development Goals."

"We changed strategies to achieve the aim. Services have been decentralised and now, 1,73,000 AAMs (Ayushman Arogya Mandirs) will have the facilities to detect and treat tuberculosis," the Union health

minister said.

He also informed the gathering that molecular technologies have been introduced for TB detection. Also, a new and shorter regimen of tuberculosis treatment has been started which will help increase compliance and fight TB, he said.

In 2014, there were 120 laboratories for TB detection and their number has now reached 8,293, said Nadda.

He highlighted that the rate of tuberculosis incidence decline in

India has doubled from 8.3 per cent in 2015 to 17.7 per cent now, which is much ahead of the global average. Deaths due to tuberculosis have also reduced significantly in India by 21.4 per cent in the last 10 years, he said.

"Ni-kshay support worth ₹ 3,338 crore has been provided through direct benefit transfer to over 1.17 crore tuberculosis patients," the minister said and underscored the government has increased Ni-kshay poshan amount recently from ₹ 500 to ₹ 1,000 and added energy boosters for the nourishment support for TB patients.

Ni-kshay Poshan is not only a policy decision, this is a financial commitment for people in the health sector to eliminate TB, he said.

Nadda said the government has now made it mandatory for even private practitioners to notify any new tuberculosis patient so that their treatment can be followed up immediately.

"This might look like a small step but it has led to an eight-fold increase in the rate of TB notifications in the private sector," Nadda said.

The 100-day campaign underscores the Union government's commitment to achieving the goal of end-TB by addressing the challenges of tuberculosis notification and mortality in India under the National TB Elimination Programme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Some of the key focus areas of the campaign are increasing access to advanced diagnostics, targeted screening among vulnerable groups, specialised care for high-risk individuals, and provision of expanded nutritional support.

Speaking about Haryana, he said earlier, there were only six medical colleges and now the number has grown to 15. The Haryana chief minister has announced to opening a medical college in each district, he said.

Nadda further said the number of undergraduate seats for doctors has increased from 650 in 2014 to 2,185 in Haryana. Similarly, the number of post-graduate seats increased from 243 to 889 now, he added.

On this occasion, Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini and state Health Minister Arti Singh Rao were also present. (PTI)

# No power-sharing pact or formula in Karnataka: Shivakumar

**BENGALURU, Dec 7:** Karnataka deputy chief minister D K Shivakumar on Saturday said that no one in the party should talk about any power-sharing "agreement or formula" involving him and CM Siddaramaiah, as he clarified that there was no such a thing.

He, however, said that they were working with some "political understanding". This statement from Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress chief, came days after Siddaramaiah rejected his claim that they have a power-sharing pact.

"No one should talk about any oppanda (agreement). There is no formula (power-sharing formula) or anything. We are both working with some political understanding. I have never spoken about any formula, there is nothing. What I told the national channel is we have come to some understanding.

"The CM has been entrusted with some responsibility and I'm entrusted with some. I'm functioning accordingly," Shivakumar said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "There is no need or there is no situation for anyone to speak about any formula. I have already said that whatever CM has said is final, and it (matter) is now closed or finished."

Shivakumar had reportedly told a news channel recently that there was an agreement between them, before coming to power, to which Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said there was no such agreement, and that he



would abide by the high command's decision. Reacting to Siddaramaiah's comments, Shivakumar said whatever the chief minister says is final, there is no objection to it.

Rejecting the possibility of any power-sharing agreement involving CM and Deputy CM, before Congress formed a government, home minister G Parameshwara on Thursday said, ultimately, the high command will take a decision, and everyone will abide by it.

There was stiff competition between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar for the chief minister's post after the declaration of Assembly election results in May last year, and the Congress had managed to convince the latter and made him the deputy chief minister. There were some reports at the time that a compromise had been reached based on a "rotational chief minister formula," according to which Shivakumar will become CM after two-and-half years, but they have not been officially confirmed by the party. (PTI)



# Tribunal upholds extension of five-year ban on LTTE

The tribunal was constituted by the MHA under the UAPA

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** A Delhi High Court tribunal has upheld the government's decision to extend a five-year ban imposed on the LTTE, saying the group continues to be a threat to India's sovereignty and territorial integrity and it is still indulging in activities prejudicial to integrity and security of the country.

The tribunal comprising Delhi High Court Judge Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora observed that the objective of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for a separate homeland (Tamil Eelam) for all Tamils threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India.

It amounts to the cession and secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union and thus falls within the ambit of unlawful activities, the tribunal observed.

In the final conclusion, the tribunal observed that "it is of the opinion that there is sufficient and cogent material on record for declaring LTTE as an Unlawful Association within the mandate of the Act (UAPA)".

The tribunal was constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act after the ban on LTTE was extended for five years on May 14, 2024.

According to a notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on Friday, the government has submitted before the tribunal that even after its military defeat in May 2009 in Sri Lanka, the LTTE has not abandoned the concept of 'Eelam' and has been clandestinely working towards the cause by undertaking fundraising and propaganda activities.

The remaining LTTE leaders or cadres have also initiated efforts to regroup the scattered activists and resurrect the outfit locally and in-



ternationally.

The home ministry said LTTE groups and elements continue to foster a separatist tendency amongst the masses and enhance the support base for LTTE in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, which will ultimately have a strong disintegrating influence over the country's territorial integrity.

LTTE sympathisers living abroad continue to spread anti-India propaganda among Tamils holding the Government of India responsible for the defeat of the LTTE, which, if not checked, is likely to develop a sense of hate among the Tamil populace towards the government of India and the Constitution, it said.

Abhijit Sinha, a joint secretary in the counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation division in the MHA, had filed an affidavit before the tribunal mentioning the reasons and grounds under which the ban on LTTE has been extended.

Sinha stated that as per the information and material received from the central intelligence and probe agencies pertaining to the unlawful activities of the LTTE, it has been found that the group's cadres and sympathisers are still active and

continue to look at Tamil Nadu as a base for carrying out anti-India activities.

He submitted that despite the elimination of its top leadership, including V Prabhakaran, by the security forces of Sri Lanka, several LTTE cadres and sympathisers are being arrested and prosecuted.

The joint secretary in the MHA stated that the LTTE's objective for a separate homeland for the Tamils is still the forefront agenda which threatens the sovereignty and integrity of India and amounts to an attempt of secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union and thus falls within the ambit of unlawful activities.

Vaiko, the general secretary of Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), had sought implementation before the tribunal over the issue.

His application was rejected but the tribunal allowed him to place his arguments and documents in a "limited extent" as he himself contended that he "sympathises" with the LTTE's "aspirations and deprecates its ban, which impacts various innocent boys and girls".

However, Vaiko has categorically denied that he is a member of the LTTE.

Appearing for him, advocate R Murali stated that the main bone of contention by the Government of India in declaring the LTTE as an unlawful association is the group's object for a separate homeland for all Tamils that threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India and amounts to cession and secession of a part from the Union, which is ascribed by India as unlawful activity.

He stated the said object of the LTTE for a separate homeland for Tamil Eelam is restricted only to the Tamils living in the northern and eastern part of Sri Lanka and the word 'Eelam' itself connotes 'Territorial Land within Sri Lanka'.

"The object of LTTE is not to have a separate homeland for Tamils in all the places of the world where Tamils are living, but instead it is only limited and restricted to Tamils living in Sri Lanka."

"The object of establishment of Tamil Eelam is not intended to take even an inch of land belonging to Indian territory. There is no material whatsoever placed before this tribunal to support the apprehension exhibited by the Government of India that the concept of Tamil Eelam includes annexation of any part of Indian territory," he submitted.

Another application was filed on behalf of Visuvanathan Rudrakumar seeking implementation. It stated that the applicant is an Eelam Tamil, born in Sri Lanka and is presently a permanent resident of the United States.

It was stated that the applicant was a legal advisor to the LTTE and had participated in the peace process between the group and the Government of Sri Lanka in and before 2009. (PTI)

# Eight-fold rise in per capita income needed to realise 'Vikshit Bharat' goal: Dhankhar

**MOTIHARI (BIHAR), Dec 7:** Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday asserted that an eight-fold rise in per capita income needs to be achieved to realise the goal of "Viksit Bharat" (developed India) by the year 2047.

Addressing the second convocation ceremony of Mahatma Gandhi Central University in Bihar's Motihari, he also expressed hope that the country, which was currently the "fifth largest economy" in the world, would "soon leave Germany and Japan behind".

Lavishing praise on the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, without taking any names, Dhankhar said, "The last 10 years have been marked by eradication of a culture of corruption and middlemen seem to have been eliminated".

"The world looks at us with surprise as we keep marching towards getting our due place on the global stage. We are the fifth largest economy as of now but things are looking up and soon we will leave Germany and Japan behind," said the Vice President.

He was speaking in presence of Bihar Governor Rajendra Arlekar and local MP and former union minister Radha Mohan Singh.

Dhankhar also pointed out that the nation needs to cover a lot of



ground if the goal of "Viksit Bharat" is realised by the time 100 years of Independence is celebrated in 2047.

"I am not likely to live to see that day," said the 74-year-old Vice President, adding: "The onus is on young people like the students present here. We must strive to raise the per capita income to eight times of what it is today. This would require our youth to make sacrifices." Dhankhar also spoke of the progress made in Bihar under the chief ministership of Nitish Kumar, who was not present on the occasion.

Without mentioning the JD(U) supreme by name, the Vice President said, "I was an MP when your current CM was a Union minister. So much has been achieved in the state under his stewardship. He has drawn lessons from our past in

which we saw grim episodes like the country's gold reserves being pledged".

The allusion was to the Prime Ministership of late Chandra Shekhar in 1990 when, in the wake of a severe financial crisis, the Reserve Bank of India had to pledge several tonnes of gold with foreign banks to raise loans.

Earlier, the Vice President planted a sapling in memory of his deceased mother as part of "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam (One tree for mother)" drive.

At the convocation ceremony, he said, "People must not be sceptical of the impact their individual efforts could have. Consider this Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign and imagine how much difference it could make to our environment if all 140 crore people plant just one sapling each". (PTI)

# Fresh report on maintenance of water bodies sought



**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has sought a fresh report from the district magistrate of Gautam Buddha Nagar in Uttar Pradesh on the preservation, rejuvenation and maintenance of ponds, wetlands and other water bodies.

A bench of NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava said that according to a report dated November 23 filed by the district magistrate (DM), there were 1,018 ponds in the district, spread across Sadar, Dadri and Jewar tehsils.

In an order dated November 26, the bench, also comprising judicial member Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and expert member A Senthil Vel, noted the report including the details of removal of encroachments from the water bodies across the tehsils,

the area recovered, measures taken to remove the illegal occupation and the existing encroachments.

"To ascertain the current status and further details of the encroachments that have been removed and the existing condition of the wetlands in the district, we direct the DM to file a fresh report disclosing the names and details along with geo-coordinate of each of the 1,018 wetlands existing in three tehsils," the tribunal said.

"The report will also disclose the extent of the area of the wetland, which is filled with water sources of any waste discharges and the water quality," it added.

The tribunal asked the DM to file a fresh report within eight weeks and posted the matter for further hearing on March 18. (PTI)

# 3 suspected peddlers arrested, drugs worth ₹ 7 lakh seized

**ADITYAPUR, Dec 7:** Three suspected peddlers were arrested with drugs worth ₹ 7 lakh in Jharkhand's Seraikela-Kharswan district, police said on Saturday.

Acting on a tip-off, a raid was conducted in Muslim Basti in Adityapur on Friday and the arrests were made, they said.

Those arrested were identified as Rahima Khatun alias Motiki, Nazmun Nisha alias Tazmun and Sahida Khatun alias Munnu, they added. Altogether 35.44 gram of



brown sugar, worth ₹ 7 lakh, was seized from them, police said.

Rahima and Nazmun were wanted in previous drugs-related cases, they said. (PTI)

# 73 complaints against vulgar ads on TV channels: govt tells Parliament

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** Seventy-three complaints have been received against obscene and vulgar advertisements on private television channels by the regulatory bodies over the past three years, the government has told parliament.

In a written reply in the Rajya Sabha, minister of State for Information and Broadcasting L Murugan said the complaints were "suitably" addressed by a three-level grievance redress system.

Murugan said the mechanism, established under the Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules, includes self-regulation by broadcasters, self-regulation by self-regulating bodies of the broadcasters, and an oversight mechanism of the central government.

The minister said appropriate action is taken wherever violation of the Advertising Code is found by issuance of "Advisories, Warnings,

'Apology Scroll' Orders and Off-air orders."

In reply to a separate question, Murugan said OTT platforms are required to adhere to the Code of Ethics under Part-III of the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

"These codes are self-regulatory in nature," the minister said.

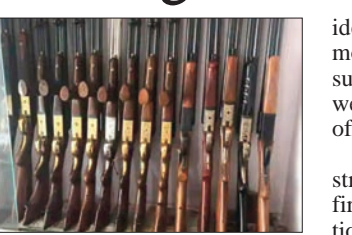
Murugan said these Code of Ethics require the publishers not to transmit any content which is prohibited by law and to undertake age-based self-classification of content into five categories, based on general guidelines provided in the Rules. The guidelines provide that while undertaking such self classification, the context of the period depicted in such content and the contemporary standards of the country and people to which such content relate, are to be kept in mind, he said. (PTI)

# Gun shop sealed in Jammu; deadline set for surrendering excess firearms

**JAMMU, Dec 7:** A shop selling guns was sealed for not renewing its trade license here on Saturday while authorities set a deadline for all firearms license holders to surrender their excess weapons within a week, officials said.

The owner of the gun shop in the Shiv Nagar area, Amarnath Bhargava, claimed that the district administration did not issue any notice to him before taking action.

"I have timely applied for the renewal of the license and completed all requisite formalities several months ago but they came and sealed the shop without a notice," Bhargava said, demanding an inquiry into the delay in renewing the license.



He said that he has been running the shop for the last 45 years.

Meanwhile, District Magistrate of Jammu, Sachin Kumar Vaishya, issued an order directing all firearm license holders of the district to comply with the provisions of the Arms (Amendment) Act 2019.

According to the Act, no individual is permitted to possess more than two firearms. The

identified license holders with more than two firearms must surrender their additional weapons within one week, the official said.

"These license holders are instructed to deposit their other firearm at the nearest police station or authorised unit armoury, in case of Armed Forces members of the Union," the order said.

"Upon surrender, they must also ensure proper endorsement on their licenses, to avoid cancellation and further legal action under the Arms Act," it said.

It said non-compliance with the order will lead to immediate cancellation of licenses, with stringent action initiated against defaulters. (PTI)

# Javadekar visits Ernakulam market complex built under Centre's SCM

**KOCHI, Dec 7:** Senior BJP leader and former union minister Prakash Javadekar on Saturday visited the newly inaugurated New Ernakulam Market Complex here, an initiative of the union government's Smart City Mission (SCM).

The pioneering project aimed at revitalising a century-old city market, is initiated under the Smart City Mission envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Javadekar said in a social media post.

"Today, I visited the newly inaugurated New Ernakulam Market Complex in Kochi, a pioneering project aimed at revitalising a century-old city market, initiated under the Smart City Mission envisioned by PM @narendradramodi," he posted on social media platform X.

Detailing the features of the three-

storied modern market complex, he said it comprises 273 stalls, a comprehensive air circulation system, dedicated spaces for unloading and loading goods, solar-powered lighting, 40 kw solar panels, fire and safety equipment, CCTV cameras, rainwater harvesting plant and so on.

The complex also comprises a 30,000-liter water storage tank, multi-level car parking, ramps, a garbage treatment plant, lifts, two diesel generators, and 82 toilets, including those for differently-abled individuals.

The solid waste management system has the capacity to process up to one ton of waste daily, he said.

"This project is one of the 71 initiatives sanctioned under the Kochi Smart City project, for which the central government has allocated ₹ 600 crore," Javadekar added. (PTI)

# Youth should strive to become job creators: Rajasthan Governor

**JAIPUR, Dec 7:** Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagde on Saturday urged the youth to become job creators rather than job seekers, while addressing the convocation of a university here.

He emphasised that students graduating from universities should aim to create employment opportunities instead of merely seeking jobs.

Universities are centres of knowledge where students should not only learn from textbooks but also focus on enhancing their intellectual capacity and developing entrepreneurial skills, he said.

Highlighting the importance of continuous learning, Bagde said that true education is one



that helps people live a better life.

Recalling the contributions of social reformer Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, the governor lauded his efforts in promoting women's education during an era when society largely ignored it.

He said that at a time when society was far away from women's education, Phule established a school for girls and educated his making her the country's first woman teacher.

He urged people to adopt Phule's ideals and contribute to the spread of education.

According to the official statement, Bagde also stressed on the joint responsibility of the government and private sector in advancing education.

Morality and ideal life values are very important in education, the governor said, adding that biographies of great personalities always inspire us.

Discussing India's New Education Policy, he said that it aims to provide quality education of global standard to every section of the society without any discrimination.

He also highlighted the need to enhance the intellectual capacity of students with the thought of "nation first". (PTI)

No.DDB-24/15th FC/2023-24/923

Date 03/12/2024

## 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 for the year 2023-24.

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 Mowamari New Market.	Rs. 11,00,000.00	1% for reserve category & 2% for unreserve.	Rs. 350.00	07/12/2024 10:30 A.M.	26/12/2024 02:00 P.M.	26/12/2024 02:30 P.M.
2	Const. of Crematorium Ground at Khuksi village.	Rs. 10,00,000.00	1% for reserve category & 2% for unreserve.	Rs. 300.00	07/12/2024 10:30 A.M.	26/12/2024 02:00 P.M.	26/12/2024 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)-2023-24/1032

# Allu Arjun's 'Pushpa 2' earns ₹ 449 crore gross at global box office in two days



**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** Allu Arjun's "Pushpa 2: The Rule" continues to spread like wildfire at the global box office, earning ₹ 449 crore gross in just two days. The second part of the "Pushpa" franchise, which released across the globe on Friday with dubbed versions in Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, and Malayalam, debuted with a historic box office score of ₹ 294 crore gross on day one.

Production banner Mythri Movie Makers, which has bankrolled "Pushpa 2", shared the movie's latest box office figures on social media. "WILDFIRE at the box-office #Pushpa2TheRule grosses 449 crores worldwide in 2 days... The fastest Indian film to hit the milestone," the studio said on X.

The Sukumar-directed movie is a sequel to 2021's Telugu blockbuster "Pushpa: The Rise". The film's day one collection of ₹ 294 crore broke the record for the highest opening in the history of Indian cinema, which earlier belonged to SS Rajamouli's "RRR" (₹ 223.5 crore), followed by "Baahubali 2" (₹ 217 crore) and "Kalki 2898 AD" (₹ 175 crore). The Hindi version of "Pushpa 2", whose trailer was launched by Arjun and Rashmika Mandanna in Patna last month, also smashed records as it earned ₹ 72 crore net on day one, surpassing the opening day figure of Shah Rukh Khan's 2023 hit "Jawan", whose Hindi version had earned around ₹ 65 crore on day one. In the sequel, Arjun returns as labourer-turned-sandalwood smuggler Pushpa Raj, alongside Mandanna as Srivalli and Fahadh Faasil as SP Bhanwar Singh Shekhawat. The original film, directed by Sukumar and produced by Mythri Movie Makers, was not only a commercial success, amassing over ₹ 300 crore in India, but also established a strong fan base beyond the traditional Telugu base and it has only grown since then. (PTI)

# Want directors to see me in a different light: Sai Tamhankar



**MUMBAI, Dec 7:** Actor Sai Tamhankar says she wants filmmakers to look beyond her Marathi identity and offer roles that tap into diverse facets of her talent.

The 38-year-old actor is a well-known face in Marathi cinema with critically-acclaimed performances in movies such as "Sanai Choughade", "Rita", "Duniyadari", "Kulkarni Chaukatla Deshpande" and "Sridevi Prasanna".

Tamhankar, who currently stars in Rahul Dholakia's "Agni", said as a Marathi, she has been able to spread her culture through her Hindi films but now wants to move beyond that identity.

"It's a pleasure to spread my culture and make people aware of how we live our lives, and what are the traditions. For example, in this film ('Agni'), I remove nazar and this is a huge part of a Marathi household," Tamhankar told PTI in an interview.

"These small things are a huge part of your culture and tradition, and it's nice to spread that. Having said that, I want directors to see me in a different light and for that my responsibility is to do different kinds of work and choose varied roles and I'm trying my best," the actor added.

She credited filmmaker Laxman Utekar for roping her to play a non-Maharashtrian girl in his 2022 movie "Mimi".

"A Maharashtra girl was given the role of a Rajasthani Muslim. I'll be forever grateful to Laxman sir for that," said Tamhankar, who has also starred in Hindi films such as "Love Sonia", "Hunterm" and "Bhaskar".

"Agni", which started streaming on Prime Video on Friday, focuses on the sacrifices of firefighters as they grapple with a mysterious surge in fire incidents.

Tamhankar plays the wife of Vithal, a fireman portrayed by Pratik Gandhi. To portray her character authentically, the actor said she interacted with the families of firefighters, collecting insights about their emotional struggles.

"Some things we have thought and collectively created, there are some inputs that we got from the families. Talking to their families was of great help to build my character.

"I asked them, 'How and where do they let their frustration out?' and they said, 'It comes out usually on the kids'. So, I used that and every little input helped in building the character."

Udit Arora, Tamhankar's co-star from the film, said it is nothing short of a blessing that he got to collaborate with directors like Rahul Dholakia and Homi Adajania on "Agni" and OTT series "Saas Bahu Aur Flamingo", respectively.

"Working with great directors is that you don't have to do much, you've to come on the sets, and everything is set. In this film, the writing was good, the co-actors were amazing, and most of my scenes are with Pratik, I just had to look at him and (react).

"It becomes very easy when you've got this kind of collaboration, things naturally flow, and you are not consciously doing much. That's the magic and beauty of working with such directors," Arora said.

Produced by Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akhtar through Excel Entertainment, "Agni" also stars Divyendu, Jitendra Joshi and Saiyami Kher. (PTI)

# I have been intelligently stubborn: Manoj Bajpayee on chasing dreams, staying relevant

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** How does a farmer's son from a Bihar village reach the pinnacle of his dreams in starry Mumbai where a million hopes are dashed and met every day. Manoj Bajpayee has the answer -- just be "intelligently stubborn".

The actor, who has successfully owned both commercial and arthouse cinema as well as the big screen and the small with roles as diverse as Bhiku Mhatre in "Satya" and Srikanth Tiwari in "The Family Man", says he soon understood that circumstances can break those not committed to their dreams.

The boy from Belwa, who in many ways embodies the fairytale success story that could well be the plot of one of his films, figured it out early.

"You have to be intelligently stubborn and audacious. I say stubborn because otherwise circumstances and situations challenge you at every moment and make you doubt yourself,"

Bajpayee told PTI in an interview during a visit to the news agency's headquarters.

"There is a saying, 'you take four steps back before you take a leap'. I have not been too much in love with myself. I understood the circumstances."

After the breakout role in the 1998 underworld drama "Satya", directed by Ram Gopal Varma and still remembered for Bajpayee's portrayal of gangster Bhiku Mhatre, the offers came rolling in. All in the same mould. And Bajpayee wanted none of it. "I was very stubborn about not getting typecast... The industry didn't know what to offer me and thought if he is refusing, then offer a lot of money... but I knew I would not be a villain because if I do it then they will not let me come out of it ever," the 55-year-old said.

"I knew this even at that age," he added citing the legendary actors

Pran and Ajeet who found it near impossible to come out of the villain bracket. Bajpayee, who will next be seen in the role of investigative journalist Joy Bag in director Kanu Behl's "Despatch", slated for release on ZEE5 on December 13, said he understands that people have different destinies and destinations.

"If Manoj Bajpayee reached a certain point in his career, the same can be said about Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Irrfan Khan or Kay Kay Menon. You don't need to emulate anyone."

Growing up with showbiz dreams as one of six siblings, Bajpayee said his farmer father didn't have the resources to support his ambitions. Bajpayee travelled to Delhi when he was just 17, pursued a college education as his mother wanted, did theatre and then landed up in Mumbai.

He debuted with a small role in Govind Nihalani's "Drohkaal" in 1994 and was first noticed in

Shekhar Kapur's "Bandit Queen" the same year. The big break was "Satya" where everyone sat up and noticed the youngster.

It propelled him into the big league, launching a three-decade career that is going as strong as ever. Along the way have been films such as "Shool", "Zubeida", "Rajneeti", "Gangs of Wasseypur", "Aligarh" and "Sonchiriyaa". He did an easy segue into the small screen with "Gulmohar", "Sirf Ek Banda Kaafi Hai" and the web show "The Family Man" now ready for its third season.

The success of "Satya" was "humongous", said Bajpayee. It changed not just his trajectory and the way cinema was viewed but also the lives of many young people back home. The journey from a small village to the silver screen gave others the courage to explore vistas beyond home, achieve success and not just in the movies. (PTI)

# 'Anora' actor Mark Eydelshteyn to star in 'Mr. & Mrs. Smith' season two

**LOS ANGELES, Dec 7:** "Anora" actor Mark Eydelshteyn will feature in the second season of Prime Video's spy series "Mr. & Mrs. Smith".

The show, which debuted on the streaming service with its first season in February this year, is a reimagining of the 2005 film starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

Actors Donald Glover and Maya Erskine, who played the titular spy couple, are not returning for the sophomore chapter.

According to entertainment news outlet The Hollywood Reporter, Eydelshteyn will play Mr Smith in the new season. However, further details about the role and plot

have been kept under wraps.

Glover will continue to be credited as a co-creator and executive producer on the series alongside Francesca Sloane, who will return as showrunner.

The first season of "Mr & Mrs Smith" followed two lonely strangers who land jobs working for a mysterious spy agency that offers them a life of espionage, wealth, world travels, and a dream brownstone house in Manhattan, New York.

"The catch? New identities in an arranged marriage as Mr. and Mrs. John and Jane Smith. Now hitched, John and Jane navigate a high-risk mission every

week while also facing a new relationship milestone. Their complex cover story becomes even more complicated when they catch real feelings for each other. What's riskier: espionage or marriage?" as per the official logline.

"Mr & Mrs Smith" is produced by New Regency and Amazon MGM Studios.

Eydelshteyn has acted in a number of films and TV series in Russia but found global attention after he featured in American filmmaker Sean Baker's "Anora", which won the coveted Palme d'Or trophy at the 77th Cannes Film Festival in May. (PTI)

# My relationship with NSD like Dronacharya and Eklavya: Manoj Bajpayee

**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** After being rejected four times by the National School of Drama, Manoj Bajpayee says he developed a Dronacharya-Eklavya relationship with the premier acting institute because he considered it an absentee mentor that shaped his success.

A monthly stipend of ₹ 2,500, a roof over his head, free food from canteen and being surrounded by the best in the world of acting. As a 22-year-old, there was no better place than NSD, the "Satya" actor said.

But it was not to be despite four attempts. "My relationship with NSD is very much like what Eklavya had with Guru Dronacharya. That they didn't ask for my thumb is a different matter. They have rather welcomed me. They call me to hold workshops with the students. There is mutual respect. The National School of Drama is among

the best institutions in the world," Bajpayee told PTI in an interview during a visit to the news agency's headquarters.

According to the actor, who started in theatre before going on to become a big name in arthouse and mainstream movies, institutes such as NSD, Pune's Film and Television Institute of India and Kolkata's Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute are world class institutes. "I don't understand why they don't get their due," he said.

He said he never complained about NSD's rejection even when it happened the first time.

"On the contrary, I thought I wasn't good enough and had many flaws, because NSD can never go wrong," he said. But the first time he failed, it really broke him. Bajpayee, who was then studying in Delhi University, said he shut himself in his rented room in

Mukherjee Nagar. His friends intervened and helped him come out of his shock.

"It was a bad time in my life where I was absolutely clueless about what to do next. My first aim was to enter NSD. That I'll work with the best of the best in India for three years, I'll be in the campus all of 24 hours. Where I didn't have to think about food, lodgings. I'll get a scholarship, I think at the time it used to be around ₹ 2,500. I've heard it is ₹ 15,000 today."

The actor, known for hits such as "Satya", "Shool", "Zubeida", "Gangs of Wasseypur", "Aligarh" and the OTT series "The Family Man", said the other three attempts he made to enter the institute "didn't shake him up" the way it did the first time.

He had gradually found a "foothold" through plays held at Mandi House, the nerve centre of Delhi's theatre

scene at the time, over the years.

"I only did theatre all day long for three years. I can confidently say I used to work 18 hours a day. I remember I had malaria, I was so belligerent and passionate to learn this craft that I went to the rehearsal despite being down with malaria. I fainted near a tea store outside Hindu College.

"I woke up after some students there sprinkled some water on my face... I was working so hard, there was a drive to learn, there was a lot of passion for this work. I didn't lose any time," he said.

The dream to get into the premier Delhi institute of performing arts probably took shape when he was in high school and read about the many stalwarts who had studied at NSD, Bajpayee said, recalling how this dream inspired him to leave his village and land in Delhi. (PTI)



# FIFA gives Club World Cup new opening day for Messi, Inter Miami



**ZURICH, Dec 7:** The 2025 Club World Cup will now kick off one day earlier with Lionel Messi's Inter Miami opening the monthlong tournament on June 14, and ending with a week of games at MetLife Stadium near New York.

FIFA published the 63-game schedule Saturday for the first

32-team edition, two days after making the draw in Miami. The draw ceremony involved Ivanka Trump on stage after President-elect Donald Trump sent a pre-recorded video message to congratulate FIFA and its president Gianni Infantino.

FIFA has now brought forward the opening game to a Sat-

urday, at an 8 p.m. local time start at Hard Rock Stadium for Messi and the hometown team to play Al Ahly of Egypt.

The kickoff time is 3 a.m. in Cairo.

MetLife Stadium was already announced as hosting the final on Sunday, July 13 — at 3 p.m. local time (9 p.m. in central Eu-

ropean prime time) — and FIFA said Saturday the venue also will stage the two semifinals on July 8-9 and the fourth quarterfinal on July 5.

A four-game Sunday for day two of the tournament starts at midday in Cincinnati for Bayern Munich vs. Auckland City and continues at midday in

Pasadena for Paris Saint-Germain vs. Atletico Madrid at the Rose Bowl.

The other two games that Sunday are Palmeiras vs. Porto, at 6 p.m. local time at MetLife, and Seattle Sounders hosting Botafogo at 7 p.m. local time.

Real Madrid starts on June 18 with a 3 p.m. local time start in Miami against Al Hilal and Manchester City starts earlier that day, at midday in Philadelphia against Wydad Casablanca.

Two of the biggest Europe vs. South America pairings have been given kickoff times that are 3 a.m. in central Europe: Bayern Munich vs. Boca Juniors in Miami on June 20 and Inter Milan vs River Plate in Seattle on June 25.

FIFA said its match schedule aimed to maximize rest and minimize travel for players and took forecast heat and weather into account.

The two West Coast locations — Pasadena and Seattle — stage only group-stage games with all round of 16 games being played in Atlanta, Charlotte, Miami, Orlando and Philadelphia. Quarterfinals also are in Atlanta, Orlando and Philadelphia.

Teams qualified for the Club World Cup by winning a continental title from 2021 through 2024, or being high ranked with consistent results over those four editions.

FIFA gifted Inter Miami a place in October for finishing top of the MLS regular season standings. The MLS Cup final is played Saturday with Los Angeles Galaxy hosting New York Red Bulls. (AP)

## Scheffler grabs 2-shot lead at Hero World Challenge; Bhatia, Thomas stay close



**ALBANY (BAHAMAS), Dec 7:** Defending champion Scottie Scheffler regained his swing and putting powers to card a marvellous 8-under 64 and grab the sole lead on the second day of the Hero World Challenge here.

Scheffler, who had a middling 5-under 67 on the opening day, changed the script dramatically with seven birdies on the front nine that helped him close the day with a commanding 36-hole total of 131 (-13), the best on this course after becoming the host of this event in 2014.

Rickie Fowler had posted a tournament record of 61 (-11) in the final round in 2017 while scoring a front-nine 28.

"Me shooting 8-under on the golf course is not something I hang my head about. A lot of good things out there, clean card, bogey free, eight birdies," said Scheffler.

Starting at 5-under on Friday, his new putting grip seemed to work like magic as he birdied everything except two of the three Par-3s on the front nine.

He was seven-under for the first nine and 12-under for the 27 holes and was four ahead of the field at one stage. Then his putting cooled down with just one more birdie for the rest of the holes.

"I felt like my swing was in a good spot. I was hitting it close to the hole and I was knocking in the putts. So I'm just going to try to continue to do it as best as I can," he added.

The world No. 1 is aiming to

become the first player since Tiger Woods (2006, 2007) and Viktor Hovland (2021, 2022) to win back-to-back titles here.

The American can also join Woods (5), Davis Love III (2), Graeme McDowell (2) and Hovland (2) as multiple winners of the event.

But Scheffler could face some serious challenge from compatriots Akshay Bhatia (6-under 66) and Justin Thomas (5-under 67) who are tied second with a total of 11-under.

The 22-year-old left-hander Akshay, who has a Kom Ferry Tour win here in 2022, made 14 birdies through 36 holes in his tournament debut, and is tied with leader Scheffler for most birdies through two rounds.

"I made some putts. It's not too difficult to hit fairways out here, but I feel like I just played solid," said Akshay.

While Akshay, who shot 5-under 67 on the opening day, improved his tally by a stroke on the day, Thomas, who made 6-under 66 the previous day, settled for five-under at the Albany Golf Course.

Thomas constructed a very solid round with four birdies on the front nine and then made up for a bogey on the 13th with back-to-back gains on the 14th and the 15th.

Sahith Theegala got hit by a triple bogey and two other bogeys but managed to stay afloat with six birdies for a 71, that placed him tied-eighth with Patrick Cantlay, who was held back by back-to-back bogeys on the 16th and the 17th. (AP)

## Indian motorsports great Indu Chandhok dies

**CHENNAI, Dec 7:** Indu Chandhok, the founder-member of the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) who transformed motorsports scene in the country with his foresight and dedication, died here on Saturday.

He was 93 and is survived by two sons and one daughter.

Born in Kolkata, Chandhok moved to the erstwhile Madras and co-founded the Madras Motor Sports Club (MMSC) in 1953. Later, he co-founded FMSCI in 1971, of which he was the president from 1978 to 1979.

He was also an integral part of the trust that purchased and developed the Madras International Circuit (erstwhile Madras Motor Race Track), near Sriperumbudur, on the outskirts of Chennai, which became a motorsports hub in the years to come. Chandhok's involvement with motorsports spanned six decades, first as a competitor and later as an organiser, which earned him the sobriquet of "Godfather of Motor Sports in India". "The patriarch of the Chandhok family passed away in his sleep this morning. Total legend he was. 'BIC' (Indu Chandhok) lived his life filled with a great sense of humour until the end. He was a fantastic father and protector," Chandhok's son and MMSC vice-president Vicky said.

"In a way, he was also the patriarch of Indian motorsports who saw the big picture with a clear vision for the growth of the sport. The family and the motorsports fraternity will miss him," added Vicky, a former racing driver.

MMSC president Ajit Thomas called Chandhok an "institutional figure" who gave Indian motorsports a definitive direction.

"In Indu Chandhok's demise, the MMSC and Indian motorsports have lost a giant and an institutional figure. He was instrumental in providing definitive direction to motorsports in India and we are now enjoying the fruits of his untiring efforts. He also shaped MMSC to what it is today," said Thomas in a statement. Chandhok's grandson, Karun, went on to compete in the biggest motorsport event in the world, Formula One, taking part in 11 races in 2010-11. Former FMSCI president Shramik Masturial said Chandhok took Indian motorsports to great heights. "Indu was an institution in himself. His co-founding of the FMSCI, his huge efforts in making Sholavaram races what it became, the creation of the new track from scratch, the birth of the MMST etc, all bore the stamp of Indu's efforts in furthering motorsports to unimaginable levels. (PTI)

## Pujara slams Indian bowlers for failing to exploit Head's weakness

**MUMBAI, Dec 7:** Veteran India batter Cheteshwar Pujara on Saturday slammed the Indian bowling attack for failing to bowl short-pitched deliveries to Travis Head and giving him too much room on his favourite offside, as the left-hander hit a blistering 140 off 141 balls to put Australia firmly in the driver's seat in the pink ball Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

After taking a commanding 157-run first-innings lead, Australia reduced India to 128/5 in their second essay on day two, with Rishabh Pant and rookie all-rounder Nitish Reddy at the crease as India trailed by 29 runs.

"Head's weakness is short-pitched deliveries, which is well known to the opposition," Pujara said on Star Sports in his second day's analysis.

"But we only saw two-three short-pitched deliveries to him... They could have been used more effectively.

"He dominates the offside, so we could have curbed his



offside stroke-making and instead of a 6-3 (offside-on-side) a 5-4 field placement would have been a good play against Head." Pujara also pointed out the inexperience of the Indian batters against the pink ball, highlighting how they played too late, leading to a string of dis-

missals.

"The batters played too late, with most of them getting out because of their inexperience with the pink ball.

"They should have discussed in the team meeting when to score runs and when to play defensively. If 2-3 wickets had fallen today,

there could have been a comeback chance, but now it's very difficult." Shubman Gill was looking good for his 30-ball 28 before Mitchell Starc angled one in to clean him up.

"The ball comes very quickly. Most deliveries were angled away, and one angled in, which led to Gill's dismissal." While India were reeling at 128/5 in their second innings, Pant played a typical counterattacking knock to race to an unbeaten 28 from 25 balls.

Pujara hailed Pant's counterattacking approach.

"Pant's counterattack was necessary and unsettled (Scott) Boland with his range of shots. He picked the length well, a good strategy.

"However, he will have a big responsibility. If this partnership reaches 100 or more, India will have a chance. This is the last pair for India, as the lower order is unlikely to contribute much against the pink ball," Pujara added. (PTI)

## Mohun Bagan look to extend dominance against NorthEast United, consolidate lead

**GUWAHATI, Dec 7:** Unbeaten in six matches, Mohun Bagan will aim to extend their dominant run when they face NorthEast United FC in their away fixture of the Indian Super League here on Sunday.

Mohun Bagan's last loss had come against Bengaluru FC on September 28. Another victory on Sunday will see the Mariners move three points clear of Bengaluru FC at the top of the table.

Smarting from their loss to East Bengal in Kolkata, NorthEast United FC, on the other hand, will look to return to winning ways and capitalise on their strong home form.

They have won four of their last six games at home with eight goals in their last two matches here and they will aim to continue their strong attacking run.

The Highlanders have been lethal in open play. They have registered a league-high 18 goals from open play this season. Striker Alaeddine Ajaraja has been central to their attack, attempting the most shots (five or more) in multiple matches.

But it remains to be seen if

they can breach the Mariners' defence and snap their unbeaten run.

The green and maroon brigade have been in formidable form, ticking all the boxes with their powerful counter-attacks, cohesive offensive play, and pressing intensity.

The Mariners also have been prolific against NorthEast United FC, scoring at least three goals in each of their last three meetings with the Highlanders.

Liston Colaco, with eight goals against them, has been their nemesis as the India player will be key in continuing their dominance.

Mohun Bagan also enjoy a strong record against NorthEast United FC, winning eight of their 11 ISL encounters, scoring 24 goals compared to the Highlanders' 14.

NEUFC head coach Juan Pedro Benali heaped praise on the strength of the Mariners and expressed that his side is well acquainted with the same.

"We know Mohun Bagan very well. We even played them in the Durand Cup final. They are a very good team, with a strong



defence and always ready to counter-attack," Benali said.

His Mohun Bagan counterpart Jose Molina said he doesn't make plans for individual players of the opposition and is instead focusing on them as a collective.

"We are playing a team

against whom we will have to be competitive. Sure, they have some key players who can impact the game more than others, but when we make plans, we make plans for the whole team. We make plans to win the game," Molina said.

Kick-off: 7.30pm. (PTI)

## Everton vs. Liverpool postponed because of Storm Darragh's high winds and rain

**LIVERPOOL, Dec 7:** The Merseyside derby between Everton and Liverpool was postponed on Saturday because of Storm Darragh, which brought dangerous winds and rain to the west coast.

The Premier League match was due to kick off at 12.30 p.m. U.K. time, but Everton issued a statement in the morning to say it would not go ahead.

The Met office said parts of Wales had experienced wind gusts of over 90 mph.

"Storm Darragh continues to bring strong winds across the UK, with red, amber and yellow wind warnings in force," the office said on social media.

Aston Villa will host Southampton in a 3 p.m. kick-off. The team urged fans to use extra time to get to Villa Park in Birmingham.

"We want to advise all supporters to allow extra time for travel to today's game due to poor weather conditions across the country. Please take extra care and stay safe. We look forward to seeing you at the game," the team said in a statement. Three other games were scheduled in the Premier League on Saturday.

Manchester United was hosting Nottingham Forest at 5:30 p.m. local time. United has not commented on the storm.

In London, Brentford was hosting Newcastle, and Crystal Palace was hosting Manchester City. Both games are at 3 p.m. Brentford and Palace both

said their games will be played. "Today's match is still scheduled to go ahead despite the bad weather," Brentford said. "Please travel safely, plan ahead, and allow extra time for your journey."

Storm Darragh was expected to "gradually ease from late morning as it crosses the UK, so the strongest winds in the west will start to reduce through Saturday," Met Office chief meteorologist Steve Willington said. Everton and league leader Liverpool issued nearly identical statements about the postponement.

"Following a Safety Advisory Group meeting at Goodison Park, attended by officials from both clubs, as well as representatives from Merseyside Police and Liverpool City Council this morning, it was decided that, due to the risk to safety in the local area due to strong wind gusts, and an amber severe wind warning that remains in place until 6 a.m. on Sunday, today's fixture should be postponed on safety grounds," Everton's statement read.

"We apologize for the inconvenience caused and thank supporters for their understanding. Whilst we appreciate this will be deeply disappointing for supporters, the safety of fans, staff and players is of paramount importance."

The Premier League said "the rearrangement of the fixture will be announced in due course." (PTI)

# Travis' ton helps Australia take control as visiting top-order crumbles

**ADELAIDE, Dec 7:** Australia tightened their grip on the pink ball Test as their formidable pacers scythed through India's top-order after nemesis Travis Head's counterattacking century handed his team a substantial first-innings lead on a riveting second day here on Saturday.

The Adelaide Oval was throbbing with life through the three sessions of play as Head dominated India with his wide range of strokes on way to a 140 off 141 balls before the trio of Scott Boland (2/39), Mitchell Starc (1/49) and Pat Cummins (2/33) left the visitors in a spot of bother at 128 for five in their second innings and trailing by 29 runs.

At stumps, Rishabh Pant was living dangerously on a 25-ball 28 and Nitish Reddy was batting on 15 off 14.

Thanks to Head's eighth Test century, which he reached in 111 balls after toying with the Indian bowling attack, Australia ended with 337 all out, and more importantly, a 157-run first-innings lead.

The hosts are looking to restore parity in the five-match series after the 295-run hammering in the opener at Perth.

Head's hundred, the fastest in a pink ball Test, reduced Marnus Labuschagne's (64) composed half-century, coming after a lean run of form, to a mere footnote.

India lost KL Rahul (7) early in their second innings and Yashasvi Jaiswal (24) was done in by a peach of a delivery from Boland, who again struck with his first delivery that had a hint of late movement.

Boland then had Virat Kohli (11) caught behind after he got one to land right in the channel which has been troubling the Indian batting mainstay for a while now.



To make matters worse for the visitors, Starc knocked down Shubman Gill's (28) middle stump with his late in-swing doing the damage to leave India at 86 for four in front of a record crowd of over 50,000.

However, unperturbed by the Australian inroads, Pant looked to be batting in a universe of his own and played some outrageous shots against the fast bowlers, leaving everyone stunned.

Least bothered by the fact that India were three down with not enough on the board, Pant danced down the track first ball and smashed Boland over mid-off for a boundary, and he maintained that audacious approach until the umpires called stumps.

Earlier, Head continued to be a thorn in India's flesh with yet another magnificent knock that powered Australia's response after bowling out India for 180.

Head, who got off the mark with a cracking boundary off Jasprit Bumrah (4/61), got a reprieve on 76 as Mohammed Siraj failed to complete the catch despite getting both hands to it after the batter tried to slog-sweep R Ashwin, having just smashed his third six against the off-spinner.

Amid the rejoicing around Head's century, Siraj (4/98) was rewarded for his discipline as he had Alex Carey caught (15) behind following a faint outside edge with Australia's lead crossing 100.

Desperate to prevent Australia from adding to that advantage, India took the second new ball the moment it was made available to them, and their lead pacer Bumrah too was brought back into the attack.

Bumrah, however, pulled his adductor muscle as the physio attended to him. Fortunately for India, Bumrah was up on his feet quickly and ready to bowl again, even as Head flicked him for two boundaries in between.

During his knock, Head played some incredible shots, including a pick-up six over Siraj over deep square leg, but the pacer had the last laugh as he brought his innings to an end when he cleaned him up with a yorker.

In all, Head struck 17 fours and four sixes. Earlier, Rohit Sharma giving his strike bowler Bumrah only four overs in the first session seemed odd, and so were some of his field placements.

Then, in another surprising move, he started the proceedings after tea with Ashwin instead of the fast bowlers.

Luck, though, was with Ashwin as Mitchell Marsh decided to walk off despite a half-baked appeal by the Indian team.

Seeing Marsh heading in the direction of the dressing room, Richard Illingworth raised his finger too, but replays clearly showed there was a gap between bat and pad.

Head, though, went about his task in the manner he does best -- dictating the terms to the bowlers with his free-flowing strokes.

None of the Indian bowlers, including Bumrah, looked like they could cause problems for Head. (PTI)

## Shami to play last 2 tests of Australia tour; to leave after SMAT campaign



**NEW DELHI, Dec 7:** Senior India speedster Mohammed Shami is set to compete in the last two Tests of the ongoing series against Australia with his playing kit already headed Down Under and the fitness clearance from the NCA's medical team being a "matter of formality".

While the Brisbane Test (from December 14) could be touch and go for the Bengal veteran, it is a foregone conclusion that he will be seen in Melbourne on Boxing Day (December 26) in the fourth Test.

A source close to the cricketer said that the NCA "fitness certificate" will come very soon.

"Shami's India kit has already been dispatched to Australia. He will complete Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 assignment and then leave," the source told PTI.

The 34-year-old Shami, who last played for India in the ODI World Cup final in November 2023, was forced into the long layoff due to an ankle surgery that needed surgery.

Just before his much-anticipated comeback against New Zealand, Shami developed swelling in the knee delaying his return.

Since the knockout round of Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy is taking place in Bengaluru, it is expected that the NCA (National Cricket Academy) medical team head Dr Nitin Patel and Strength

and Conditioning trainer Nishant Bordoloi would be assessing him after Bengal finishes its campaign in the National T20 championship.

"Shami will be playing the pre-quarter final for us against Chandigarh. He will join us in Bengaluru by tomorrow. However, I am not sure if he will be available if we qualify for quarters or go the distance. Guess he will be fit and available for last two Australia Tests," Bengal head coach Laxmi Ratan Shukla, who has had a good look at his premier bowler, told PTI.

Shukla echoed sentiments of former India head Ravi Shastri, who feels that Shami is needed as early as possible in Brisbane. Shukla said Shami had done the right thing by deciding to play SMAT after bowling 43 overs in a Ranji Trophy game in Indore against Madhya Pradesh.

"He has already shed around six kilograms of body weight. He has played seven T20 games in 13 days. If he plays pre-quarters it will be eight games in 16 days.

"Shami himself wanted to play fair amount of domestic cricket and inform NCA how his body reacts," Shukla, a former ODI player, said.

India won the first Test in Perth, while the second game, a day-nighter, is currently in progress in Adelaide. (PTI)

## India's batting might face Bangladesh bowling firepower in U19 Asia Cup final

**DUBAI, Dec 7:** It will be a battle of India's formidable batting against Bangladesh's incisive bowling when the two teams clash for the ACC U19 Men's Asia Cup title at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium here on Sunday.

India, the most successful team in the tournament's history with eight titles, will be keen to reclaim their crown after a three-year gap. Defending champions Bangladesh, who eliminated India in the last edition, are determined to retain their title in what will be a rematch of the 2023 semi-final.

India's batting has been spearheaded by opener Ayush Mhatre, who has amassed 175 runs, and 13-year-old sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who has scored 167 runs in the tournament.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, have relied on their bowlers, with Md. Al Fahad and Md. Iqbal Hasan Emon leading the charts, bagging 10 wickets each.

India's campaign has been one of resurgence. After a shaky start with a loss to Pakistan, the team bounced back in style and ousted Sri Lanka in the semifinal, wrapping up the win with 28 overs to spare.

Bangladesh, too, have been consistent throughout the tournament. Their only group-stage loss came against Sri Lanka, but they secured their final spot with a dominant seven-wicket win over Pakistan in the semi-final. With Bangladesh having the upper hand in last year's edition, Indian skipper Mohamed Amaan and his team will be eager to set the record straight and reassert their dominance. Match starts: 10:15 am (IST). (PTI)

## Milestones galore as England leads New Zealand by 533 runs in the 2<sup>nd</sup> test after 2 days

**WELLINGTON, Dec 7:** England led New Zealand by 533 runs with five second-innings wickets in hand Saturday after another day of extraordinary incidents and milestones, including a hat-trick on the second day of the second test at the Basin Reserve.

At stumps, England was 378-5 in its second innings with Joe Root 73 not out and captain Ben Stokes unbeaten on 35.

Root was among the history-makers Saturday, reaching his 100th score of 50 or more in tests. When he reached his 65th half century, which goes along with his 35 centuries, he became the fourth player after Sachin Tendulkar, Jacques Kallis and Ricky Ponting to achieve that feat.

When Stokes declares, possibly overnight, New Zealand will have to achieve the fourth-innings run chase in test history to win the match and level the three-match series. England won the first test by eight wickets in Christchurch.

The record successful fourth innings total currently sits at 418, achieved by the West Indies against Australia at St. John's in the Caribbean 21 years ago.

Under any normal circumstances, Stokes probably would have been happy to declare by now, confident in his bowlers' ability to defend such a mammoth lead.

But the match has progressed so fast and so far with 783 runs being scored and 25 wickets falling on the first two days, that three full days are still available to New Zealand reach its winning target. Most other winning fourth-in-



nings totals in tests have had some element of a time constraint.

The pitch at the Basin Reserve which has been bathed in sunshine on the first two days also is becoming more docile.

Stokes came to the crease 30 minutes before stumps Saturday and immediately hit a four and a six in the first over he faced from Matt Henry, then another six in what seemed a tacit announcement of an impending declaration.

By declaring overnight, Stokes will allow the England bowlers to rest and start fresh on the third day.

The England second innings also saw two batters fall in the 90s, Jacob Bethell on 96, just short of his maiden test century, and Ben Duckett on 92. Harry Brook made 55 to go with his 123 in the first innings and his 171 in

the first innings of the first test.

All of those innings would which on any normal day of cricket have notable on their own. But they came one after the other and in quick succession so that Gus Atkinson's historic achievement of the morning session seemed somehow distant.

Atkinson became the 15th English bowler and the first since Moeen Ali in 2017 to take a test hat-trick.

The Surrey pacer claimed the last three wickets of New Zealand's first innings, dismissing Nathan Smith, Matt Henry and Tim Southee with consecutive deliveries as England bowled out New Zealand for 125 to take a 155-run first-innings lead.

"It feels good," Atkinson said. "I've never really thought about getting a hat-trick until I was at

the end of my run and I was on a hat-trick. (It) ends the year nicely."

Atkinson bowled Smith (14) with the third ball of the 35th over of the innings. Smith dangled his bat at a delivery wide of off stump, tried too late to leave the ball but managed only to deflect it onto his stumps.

That brought out Henry, a competent batter with an average of almost 20 in tests, who received a ball which bounced sharply from just short of a length and reached chest high. Henry tried to fend the ball away but it skewed from the splice to Duckett in the gully.

That left Southee to face the hat-trick ball. The veteran seamer in his last test series averages 15.6 and has hit 95 sixes in an illustrious career.

Southee clearly was expecting another short ball, the field was set for it. But the delivery from Atkinson was full and straight, struck the batter on the front pad and clearly was going on to hit middle stump.

Atkinson is a statistical marvel who, in just his 10th test, has taken 12 wickets in an innings (12-106 against the West Indies at Lord's in July) and scored a century (118 against Sri Lanka at Lord's in August). He now adds a hat-trick to that already impressive resume.

Atkinson was not privy to Stokes' thoughts about a declaration.

"I'm not really sure what the plans are to be honest," he said. "We'll see tomorrow, assess what the conditions are and see from there." (AP)

## Ding Liren might have odds favouring him in World Chess C'ship playoffs, feels GM Tania Sachdev

**MUMBAI, Dec 7:** Title defender Ding Liren can draw from his experience and have the odds favouring him if the World Chess Championship match against India's D Gukesh heads into playoffs, feels Grand Master Tania Sachdev. With both players tied on 4.5 points after nine rounds Sachdev hopes that Gukesh should be able to make the most of the chances that come his way.

"Definitely, the odds were a lot higher for Gukesh at the start. But the way that the match has turned out, I think those odds have come down," Sachdev told PTI Videos in an exclusive interaction.

"If it goes into a tie-break, a play-off, Ding with his experience in speed chess, perhaps the odds might start favouring him."

"So, I'm hoping that Gukesh finds some big chances and is finally able to capitalise on them in the classical portion of the match."

Sachdev said the contest between the Indian Grand Master and his Chinese rival has turned out against the expectations.

"When the World Championship match started, players and chess fans across the world had a very different idea of how this would go. Many thought that Gukesh was a big favourite, as he comes from a fantastic year and the performances that he's had. He had set the bar so high."

She continued, "Ding came from a very challenging, very difficult professional year himself. A lot of conversation was around, in the classical, will this match even reach game 14?"

Sachdev said Ding has shown "exceptional resilience" in the contest so far.

"Ding has shown exceptional resilience and resourcefulness, while Gukesh has had many chances. It feels that he's so close, he's knocking on the door, but every time Ding holds the line."

Sachdev backed Gukesh to find his way through the pressure situations in the ongoing contest.

"There is going to be pressure. This is the biggest stage in the world. It's the World Championship. Nerves and pressure are a part of it," she said. (PTI)

## Focus on batting as demoralised India look to avoid series defeat against Australia

**BRISBANE, Dec 7:** A desperate India will need their under-fire batters to step up in the second Women's ODI against Australia here on Sunday, as the visitors aim to avoid yet another series loss Down Under.

India's batting woes continued as the tourists were bundled out for 100 in the series opener, leading to a demoralising five-wicket defeat, their heaviest in terms of balls remaining since ODIs were reduced to 50 overs a side.

India have never won a series Down Under and they will have their task cut out against a quality Australian side, which showed no signs of rust despite playing in the format after a gap of nine months.

On the other hand, it was the Indians who appeared under-prepared as the squad was unable to train together as some of the players were competing in domestic T20 tournaments while others played in the Women's Big Bash League.

Additionally, one of their two practice sessions here was washed out due to rain.

After opting to bat, the Indian batters were unable to capitalise on good batting conditions. They lost wickets at regular intervals, were unable to stitch partnerships, and were done in by Megan Schutt's brilliant spell with the new ball.

"We were expecting a good score if our batters had applied themselves better. If we had more runs on the scoreboard, anything could have happened," India coach Amol



Muzumdar conceded after the match.

With the batting inconsistencies continuing from the New Zealand series, time is running out for India, who will host the ODI World Cup next year.

The Indian think tank will be keen to sta-

bilise their batting and bowling line-up ahead of the marquee event.

Even though the bowlers had a small target to defend, they did well to pick five wickets. The only silver lining in an otherwise forgettable outing for India was pacer

Renuka Thakur and young leg-spinner Priya Mishra.

Meanwhile, Australia produced an almost flawless performance despite missing regular skipper Alyssa Healy.

Veteran pacer Schutt registered career-best figures of 5/19 before young opener Georgia Voll impressed on debut.

Australia will be keen on putting up a similar display to seal another series win against India but the hosts are unlikely to take Harmanpreet Kaur and Co lightly.

"India cannot be underestimated and we will not make the mistake of being complacent. I think the Indian batsmen will come back strongly in the next match but I have worked a lot on my bowling and I hope to maintain this rhythm," she had said after the first match. "Schutt had said after the opener.

**Teams:**

**India:** Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Priya Punia, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Uma Chetry, Richa Ghosh (wk), Tejal Hasabnis, Deepti Sharma, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Radha Yadav, Titas Sadhu, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Singh Thakur, Saima Thakor

**Australia:** Tahlia McGrath (c), Ashleigh Gardner (vc), Darcie Brown, Kim Garth, Alana King, Phoebe Litchfield, Sophie Moloney, Beth Mooney, Ellyse Perry, Megan Schutt, Annabel Sutherland, Georgia Voll, Georgia Wareham

Match starts 5.15 am IST. (PTI)